
insightOut
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in STEM Collections and Cultures
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insightOut

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Grafik _ layout: Ursula Emesz
Übersetzung _ translation: Stephen Grynwasser
gender@tmw.at

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Content

Vorwort

Peter Aufreiter
Generaldirektor und wissenschaftlicher Leiter
Martina Griesser-Stermscheg
Leiterin des Forschungsinstituts

Genderbewusstes Handeln, insbesondere eine genderbewusste Forschungs-, Vermittlungs- und Ausstellungspraxis, stellt seit 2019 ein zentrales Wirkungsziel im Leitbild des Technischen Museums Wien mit Österreichischer Mediathek (TMW) dar.[1] Diesem Ziel wird von allen wissenschaftlichen und operativen Abteilungen Rechnung getragen. Grundlage ist die Überzeugung, dass Gender und seine Vielfalt für alle relevant sind. Das TMW nimmt seinen gesellschaftspolitischen Auftrag ernst und nützt seine Möglichkeiten als beliebter außerschulischer Lernort für Wien und ganz Österreich: Museen vermögen althergebrachte Ansichten zu festigen oder aber zu ändern, auch solche zu Gender.

In den letzten Jahren konnten maßgebliche Ausstellungen und Vermittlungsaktivitäten im Zeichen genderbewussten Handelns unter der Mitwirkung aller Abteilungen realisiert werden; darunter – um nur einige zu nennen – eine Sammlungsinstallation mit dem Titel *Wem gehört PINK?*[2], in der die weiblichen Konnotationen dieser Farbe diskutiert und dekonstruiert wurden, oder auch von BMK und BKA geförderte Projekte wie das nextgen*LAB[3] zur gendersensiblen Vermittlung digitaler Technologien im hauseigenen Makerspace und jüngst das exklusiv für Schülerinnen angebotene Vermittlungsprogramm zur Jubiläumsschau und Online-Ausstellung *Women at Work*[4] anlässlich des 150-jährigen Jubiläums des Frauenpavillons auf der Wiener Weltausstellung 1873. Die abteilungsübergreifende Arbeitsgruppe *Fokus Gender* ist eine für diesen Prozess wesentliche Triebfeder und dient als Plattform für den regelmäßigen Informationsaustausch, die lebendige Diskussion und die Reflexion von professionellen Erfahrungen im Museumsalltag. Das hauseigene Forschungsinstitut dokumentiert die Aktivitäten der Arbeitsgruppe.[5]

2019 erschien im wissenschaftlichen Periodikum des TMW, den *Blättern für Technikgeschichte*, als 81. Band erstmals eine Themenausgabe zu „Gender & Technik".[6] Angesichts der zunehmenden Verdichtung und erfreulichen Eigendynamik der genderbewussten Initiativen am TMW ist es jetzt Zeit für eine eigenständige wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift, die im Open-Access-Format die größtmögliche Leser_innenschaft erreichen und zugleich der Queer Community ein weiteres institutionelles Organ für ihre Anliegen zur Verfügung stellen soll. Die erste Nummer von *insightOut. Journal on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections and Cultures* liegt nun, im September 2023, vor. Basis für das neue Journal sind (vorerst) die seit 2020 stattfindenden *Vienna Workshops on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections* und die dafür entstehenden hochkarätigen Beiträge von internationalen Gender-Expert_innen, die sich jährlich am TMW zu einem jeweils anderen Themenschwerpunkt treffen und austauschen.

Unser besonderer Dank gebührt Sophie Gerber für die Gründung und langjährige Steuerung der Arbeitsgruppe *Fokus Gender*, die wissenschaftliche Leitung und Organisation der ersten drei *Vienna Workshops on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections (Outer Edge: Queer[y]ing STEM Collections,* 2020, gemeinsam mit Eleanor S. Armstrong, *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food,* 2022, gemeinsam mit Sophie

[1] Siehe https://www.technischesmuseum.at/museum/aufgabe_des_museums (27. 7. 2023).
[2] Siehe https://www.technischesmuseum.at/presse/wem_gehoert_pink (27. 7. 2023).
[3] Siehe https://www.technischesmuseum.at/tmw-zine/forschungsprojekt_nextgenlab (27. 7. 2023).
[4] Siehe https://www.technischesmuseum.at/ausstellung/women_at_work (27. 7. 2023).
[5] Siehe https://www.technischesmuseum.at/museum/forschungsinstitut/fokus_gender (27. 7. 2023).
[6] Siehe https://www.technischesmuseum.at/produkt/gender_technik (27. 7. 2023).

Kühnlenz, *Diverse Infrastructures? Gender, Queer and the Foundations of Society,* 2023)[7] sowie die Konzeption und Schriftleitung des neuen Open-Access-Journals insightOut. Für das Layout danken wir Ursula Emesz und für die leichte Zugänglichkeit über das Online-Portal des TMW Viktoria Calvo-Tomek.

[7] https://www.technischesmuseum.at/besuchen/kalender/vienna_workshop_on_stem_museums_gender_and_sexuality (27. 7. 2023).

Foreword

Peter Aufreiter
Director General and Scientific Management
Martina Griesser-Stermscheg
Head of the Research Institute

Gender-conscious action, in particular gender-conscious research, mediation and exhibition practice, has been a mainstay of the mission statement of the Technisches Museum Wien mit Österreichischer Mediathek (TMW) since 2019.[1] As a stated aim, it is taken into account by all its scientific and operational departments. It is founded on the conviction that gender and its diversity are relevant to all and sundry. The TMW takes its socio-political remit seriously and makes full use of the opportunities at its disposal as a popular extracurricular place of learning for Vienna and Austria as a whole: specifically, that museums are capable of reinforcing but also of altering traditional views, including those on gender.

Over the past few years, significant exhibitions and educational activities have been put together in the spirit of gender-conscious action involving the collaboration of all TMW departments. Among them, to name but a few: a collection installation entitled *Who owns PINK?*[2], which discussed and deconstructed the feminine connotations of this particular colour. Also, various projects funded by the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK) and the Federal Chancellery (BKA), such as the nextgen*LAB[3] on the gender-sensitive mediation of digital technologies in the TMW's own in-house Makerspace; and, most recently, the mediation programme on offer exclusively to schoolgirls in conjunction with the anniversary show and online exhibition *Women at Work*[4] marking the 150th anniversary of the Women's Pavilion at the Vienna World Exposition of 1873. The cross-departmental *Gender Focus* working group is a key driver of this process and acts as a platform for regular exchanges of information, lively discussions and reflections on professional experiences in the everyday workings of a museum. The working group's activities are documented by the in-house research institute.[5]

2019 saw the publication, for the first time, of a theme-based issue on 'Gender & Technology', the 81st volume in the TMW's academic periodical series, *Blätter für Technikgeschichte* [History of Technology Booklets].[6] In light of the ever increasing number of gender-conscious initiatives at the TMW and the welcome momentum generated as a result, it is now time for a separate, stand-alone academic journal aimed at reaching the widest possible readership in open-access format while providing the queer community with another institutional body to address its concerns. The first issue of *insightOut. Journal on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections and Cultures* is available now, in September 2023. The new journal is based (at least for the time being) on the *Vienna Workshops on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections,* which have been held since 2020, and the resulting high-calibre contributions from international gender experts, who meet at the TMW each year to exchange views on and discuss different topics.

We are much indebted to Sophie Gerber for setting up and steering the *Gender Focus* working group over many years, for her scientific leadership and organisation of the first three *Vienna Workshops on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections (Outer*

[1] See https://www.technischesmuseum.at/museum/aufgabe_des_museums (27.7.2023).
[2] See https://www.technischesmuseum.at/presse/wem_gehoert_pink (27.7.2023).
[3] See https://www.technischesmuseum.at/tmw-zine/forschungsprojekt_nextgenlab (27.7.2023).
[4] See https://www.technischesmuseum.at/ausstellung/women_at_work (27.7.2023).
[5] See https://www.technischesmuseum.at/museum/forschungsinstitut/fokus_gender (27.7.2023).
[6] See https://www.technischesmuseum.at/produkt/gender_technik (27.7.2023).

Edge: Queer[y]ing STEM Collections, 2020, together with Eleanor S. Armstrong, *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food*, 2022, together with Sophie Kühnlenz, *Diverse Infrastructures? Gender, Queer and the Foundations of Society*, 2023)[7] and for the concept and editorial stewardship of the new Open Access journal *insightOut*. We would also like to thank Ursula Emesz for the layout and Viktoria Calvo-Tomek for the easy accessibility via the TMW online portal.

[7] https://www.technischesmuseum.at/besuchen/kalender/vienna_workshop_on_stem_museums_gender_and_sexuality (27.7.2023).

Essen de-konstruieren

Überlegungen zum Workshop *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food*

Sophie Gerber, Sophie Kühnlenz

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Essen de-konstruieren

Überlegungen zum Workshop *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food*

ABSTRACT

Über ein Jahr nach dem Workshop *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food* (5. und 6. Mai 2022) im Technischen Museum Wien erscheint das erste *Journal on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections and Cultures*. Diese Einleitung reflektiert Essen und Ernährung als situierte, kontextabhängige und wandelbare Praxis und gibt erste Einblicke in die Beiträge der Ausgabe. Als roter Faden erweist sich dabei das Dekonstruieren im Sinne einer Hinterfragung von Selbstverständlichkeiten sowie die Vielfalt konstruktiv-gestaltender und ermächtigender Momente in der queer-feministischen Auseinandersetzung mit Ess- und Ernährungspraktiken und ihrer Kommunikation.

CV

Sophie Gerber ist Technikhistorikerin, arbeitet seit 2019 am Technischen Museum Wien und betreut dort die Sammlungsgruppen Haushaltstechnik, Nahrungs- und Genussmittel sowie deren Erweiterung, Erschließung und Dokumentation. Darüber hinaus arbeitet sie an Strategien für diversitätsorientiertes, genderinformiertes Sammeln, Ausstellen, Vermitteln und Forschen in Technik- und Wissenschaftsmuseen. 2014 Promotion im Projekt „Objekte des Energiekonsums“ von Deutschem Museum und TU München. Ihre Forschungsinteressen umfassen Gender und Queer Studies, materielle Kultur und die Verbindung von Technik-, Konsum- und Alltagsgeschichte.

Sophie Kühnlenz ist Zeithistorikerin und erforscht an der Schnittstelle von Public History, Museum und Gender Studies die diskursive Verhandlung von Geschlecht in der musealen Wissensproduktion. Sie ist wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin und Doktorandin am Historischen Seminar der Universität Erfurt. Im Rahmen diverser Praxisaufenthalte an Museen und universitären Forschungseinrichtungen war sie zuletzt Scholar in Residence am Technischen Museum Wien und Visiting Research Fellow am Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C·DH) an der Universität Luxembourg. Ihre Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen im Bereich der empirischen Geschichtskultur- und Museumsforschung, Science and Technology sowie Gender und Queer Studies.

KEYWORDS

Dekonstruktion, Ernährung, Workshop, Museum, Queer(en), Materielle Kultur

Sophie Gerber, Sophie Kühnlenz, „Essen de-konstruieren. Überlegungen zum Workshop *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food*“, insightOut. Journal on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections and Cultures, 1 (2023), 7–12, DOI: 10.60531/insightout.2023.1.12

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Auch Gender ist nicht selbstverständlich, sondern wird konstruiert. Wie bei der Ernährung handelt es sich um ein soziokulturelles Phänomen, das historisch, kulturell und diskursiv bestimmt wird.

Auf unseren Tellern spielt sich mitunter Ungeheuerliches ab: Vor wenigen Jahren wurde es in Restaurants und Küchen zum Trend, die Zutaten von Gerichten zu separieren und neu zusammenzustellen. Durch die andere Interpretation entfalten sich bestenfalls ganz neue Aromen und der Blick auf altbekannte Speisen ändert sich. Dekonstruktion macht auch vor dem Essen nicht halt – und enthält paradoxerweise ein konstruktiv-gestaltendes Element.

Über ein Jahr nach dem Workshop *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food* (5. und 6. Mai 2022) im Technischen Museum Wien erscheint das erste *Journal on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections and Cultures*. Die Aufgabe, dafür einleitende Worte zu finden, lädt dazu ein, nicht nur die Beiträge zusammenzufassen, sondern auch die Erkenntnisse aus den Vorträgen und Diskussionen zu reflektieren. Als roter Faden durch die Artikel erweist sich das Konstruieren und Dekonstruieren im Sinne einer Hinterfragung von Selbstverständlichkeiten.

Doch was hat es mit dem Ansatz der Dekonstruktion auf sich? In den Geisteswissenschaften hat zunächst Jacques Derrida den Begriff geprägt. Auf der Suche nach vielschichtigen und fluiden, mithin nicht stabilen Bedeutungen im Feld von Essen und Ernährung ist sein Ansatz produktiv, um vorgeblich klar definierte und feststehende Praktiken, Gewohnheiten und Identitäten in ihrer Gemachtheit in den Blick zu nehmen. Essen und Ernährung werden so als situierte, kontextabhängige und wandelbare Praxis sicht- und diskutierbar. Wie über sie (kollektive) Identitäten konstruiert und verhandelt werden, wie Ein- und Ausschlüsse (wo, wann, wie, was, warum und mit wem wir essen) produziert werden, wie also Ernährung zum (diskursiv) umkämpften Feld wird, verdeutlichen die Beiträge in dieser Ausgabe.

Auch Gender ist nicht selbstverständlich, sondern wird konstruiert. Wie bei der Ernährung handelt es

Abb. 1: Auftakt des Workshops im Festsaal des Technischen Museums Wien

sich um ein soziokulturelles Phänomen, das historisch, kulturell und diskursiv bestimmt wird.[1] Prägend sind dabei, gerade im westlichen Denken, binäre Kategorien wie Mann/Frau, Rohes/Gekochtes oder Hausarbeit/Lohnarbeit. Diese infrage zu stellen ist der Anspruch der Dekonstruktion. Hierarchisierungen, die innerhalb solcher Begriffspaare angelegt sind, können dabei ebenso analysiert und hinterfragt werden wie vermeintlich eindeutige geschlechtliche Zuschreibungen. Wird Dekonstruktion darüber hinaus als Aufmerksamkeit für Strukturen und Konstruktionen verstanden, die im gleichen Moment wieder infrage gestellt oder demontiert werden, lassen sich Brücken zu queertheoretischen Ansätzen schlagen. „To *queer* facts means to shake their supposed naturalness“[2]: Das Wort „queer“ – eigensinnige Aneignung und positive Neubesetzung eines pejorativen Begriffs für nicht heteronormative Lebensstile und Sexualitäten – verweigert sich per definitionem einer klaren Bestimmung. Queeren als Praxis will verunsichern, hinterfragen, auf vage aufscheinende Zwischenstufen, ausgeblendete oder untergeordnete Bedeutungen und ganz allgemein auf deren Unabgeschlossenheit und Fluidität aufmerksam machen.[3] Queerfeministische Sichtweisen auf Essen und Ernährung – ob im Museum oder anderen Kontexten – stellen selbstverständlich, eindeutig, klar und natürlich erscheinende Praktiken und Konstellationen beim Anbauen, Zubereiten, Anbieten, Verzehren, Ver- und Bewerten von Nahrungsmitteln zur Disposition. Dieses Potenzial der Dekonstruktion von auf den ersten Blick natürlich oder ahistorisch wirkenden Praktiken und (nicht zuletzt gegenderten) Rollenzuschreibungen im Feld der Ernährung loten die Beiträge in ihrem jeweiligen Themenfeld gemeinsam aus.

Einerseits ist das, was wir essen, etwas Gemachtes – Lebensmittel werden unter anderem gezüchtet, angebaut, kultiviert, verarbeitet und gegart. Kulturelle Vorstellungen beeinflussen ebenso, was wir essen, wie eine breite Palette von Technologien vom Feuer bis zur Gentechnik. Wie Lebewesen durch Agrar- und Biotechnologie zu Lebensmitteln oder „Biofakten“[4] werden, zeigt **Naomi Hammett** eindrücklich anhand von Milchkühen als „Milchmaschinen“. Welche Zukünfte für „queer cows“ vorstellbar sind und wie die Grenzen zwischen Natur und Kultur in der modernen Milchproduktion verschwimmen, diskutiert sie mit einem „multispecies“-Ansatz, der auf die Fragilität von vermeintlich eindeutigen Gegensätzen verweist.

Nicht nur, was gegessen wird, ist ausschlaggebend, sondern auch (Auf-)Zucht, Verarbeitung und Vermarktung von Lebensmitteln. Das zeigt **Sahar Tavakoli** in ihrem Beitrag, der sich der Konstruktion von Nationen über das Essen nähert. Regionale Lebensmittel und solche mit Ursprungsbezeichnung oder geografischer Angabe sind ebenso wie die mit ihnen verbundenen Vorstellungen Bestandteil von Konstruktionen soziotechnischer Systeme, wie Nationen es sind. Damit knüpft Tavakoli einerseits an die Idee des „Gastronationalismus“ an und nutzt andererseits das aus der Wissenschafts- und Technikforschung hervorgegangene Konzept von „sociotechnical imaginaries“, um eine Performance des italienischen Fleischers Dario Cecchini zu untersuchen. Die darin geschaffenen imaginären Szenarien einer erstrebenswerten (Essens-)Zukunft betrachtet sie insofern als „Camp“ (im Sinne von Susan Sontag), als sie die Vergangenheit spiegeln: „Where we wish to be is where we have already been“.

[1] Vgl. „Gender“, in: Anna Babka, Gerald Posselt: *Gender und Dekonstruktion. Begriffe und kommentierte Grundlagentexte der Gender- und Queer-Theorie.* Wien 2016, S. 56.

[2] Sophie Gerber: „Labelling Machines and Synthesizers: Collecting Queer Knowledge in Science and Technology Museums“, in: *Museum International 72* (2020), Heft 3–4, S. 116–127, hier S. 127, Anm. 1.

[3] Vgl. Sophie Kühnlenz: „Eindeutig uneindeutig, beständig unbeständig. Museum queer-feministisch: Gedanken zum Weiterdenken“, in: Martina Griesser-Stermscheg, Christine Haupt-Stummer, Renate Höllwart u. a. (Hg.): *Widersprüche. Kuratorisch handeln zwischen Theorie und Praxis* (= curating. ausstellungstheorie & praxis, Band 6). Berlin, Boston 2022, S. 195–198.

[4] Nicole C. Karafyllis (Hg.): *Biofakte. Versuch über den Menschen zwischen Artefakt und Lebewesen.* Paderborn 2003, insb. „Das Wesen der Biofakte“, S. 11–27.

Dass sich ein genauer Blick auf materielle Kulturen als Quelle (insbesondere in alltagsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhängen) lohnt und ein bislang oft übersehenes Potenzial für die Erforschung von **„race", „class" und „gender"** birgt, betont **Psyche Williams-Forson** in ihrem Beitrag. Eine Analyse von Hausarbeit in „settler colonial house and plantation museums", die erst in Ansätzen die dort verrichtete (Haus- und Sklaven-) Arbeit in den Blick nehmen, zeigt, wie die Fokussierung auf einfache Alltagsdinge intersektionale und machtkritische Sichtweisen der von **„race"-, „class"- und „gender"**-Asymmetrien geprägten Geschichte der USA und ihrer Vermittlung in Museen ermöglicht. Anhand verschiedener Haushaltsgegenstände und Kochutensilien in George Washington's Mount Vernon Home Estate House Museum zeigt Williams-Forson, wie die Suche nach dem „absent potential" dieser Dinge in eine intersektional sensibilisierte Aufbereitung und Vermittlung einer von Gewalt und Ungleichheit geprägten Geschichte münden kann.

Essen und Trinken können als Mittel dienen, um Gemeinschaft zu konstruieren. **Holly Porteous** zeigt das am Beispiel eines britischen Museums, das auch Bibliothek, Archiv und Nachbarschaftstreffpunkt ist. Das Anbieten einer Tasse Tee erweist sich als inklusives Element für (neue) Besucher_innen – es erleichtert ihnen nicht nur, die Schwelle zum Museum zu überschreiten und ins Gespräch zu kommen, sondern hilft ihnen auch gegen Einsamkeit. Verwendet wird Porzellanservice – man erweist den Gästen also durch eine bestimmte materielle Kultur eine besondere Wertschätzung. So wird das Museum durch eine feministisch neu gedeutete Praxis der Gastlichkeit zum inklusiven Ort, der Gemeinschaft und Zusammenhalt schafft.

Philipp Hagemann und **Alexander Wagner** verstehen Essen und Ernährung als dezidiert politische Felder und widmen sich in ihrem Beitrag dem Verhältnis von Essen, Klasse und familiären Sorgebeziehungen. Durch den Aufbau eines *Forschungslabors für Interventionen gegen Klassismus* – kurz *FLINK, angeleitet von den Kategorien Geschlecht, Materialität, Macht, Raum, Wissen, ‚Race' und der Reflexion der eigenen Positioniertheit, sollen diversitäts- und klassismussensible Interventionsformate entwickelt und umgesetzt werden. Die eigenen Biografien und Emotionen sind dabei ein ganz grundlegender Bestandteil der intersektionalen Erkundung nicht zuletzt medial vermittelter Diskurse, zum Beispiel in deutschen Lebensmittelwerbungen der 1990er und 2000er Jahre. Ihr Ansatz zeigt, dass die eigenen Erfahrungen und Sensibilisierungen für bestimmte klassistische Diskriminierungsformen situiertes Wissen hervorbringt, das als Ressource für Empowerment und die Thematisierung von Diskriminierungsstrukturen genutzt werden kann. Um den Text möglichst inklusiv lesbar zu machen, erscheint er sowohl in englischer als auch deutscher Sprache.

Ana Daldon erprobt mit einem Kartenspiel, wie Fett ausgestellt werden kann. Dass die Ergebnisse der Gruppenarbeit im Workshop so unterschiedlich waren, zeigt auch die Konstruiertheit von Ausstellungen auf. Zugleich erweist sich der spielerisch-kreative Ansatz als queere Methode, indem die Grenzen zwischen Museumsexpert_innen, potenziellen Besucher_innen, Lehrenden und Lernenden durch eine kollektive kuratorische Praxis aufgelöst werden. Nicht zuletzt weisen queerer und Fettaktivismus deutliche Gemeinsamkeiten und Parallelen auf, unter anderem im sprachlichen Sinne durch die Wiederaneignung abwertender Begriffe und Erfahrungen der Diskriminierung und Pathologisierung.

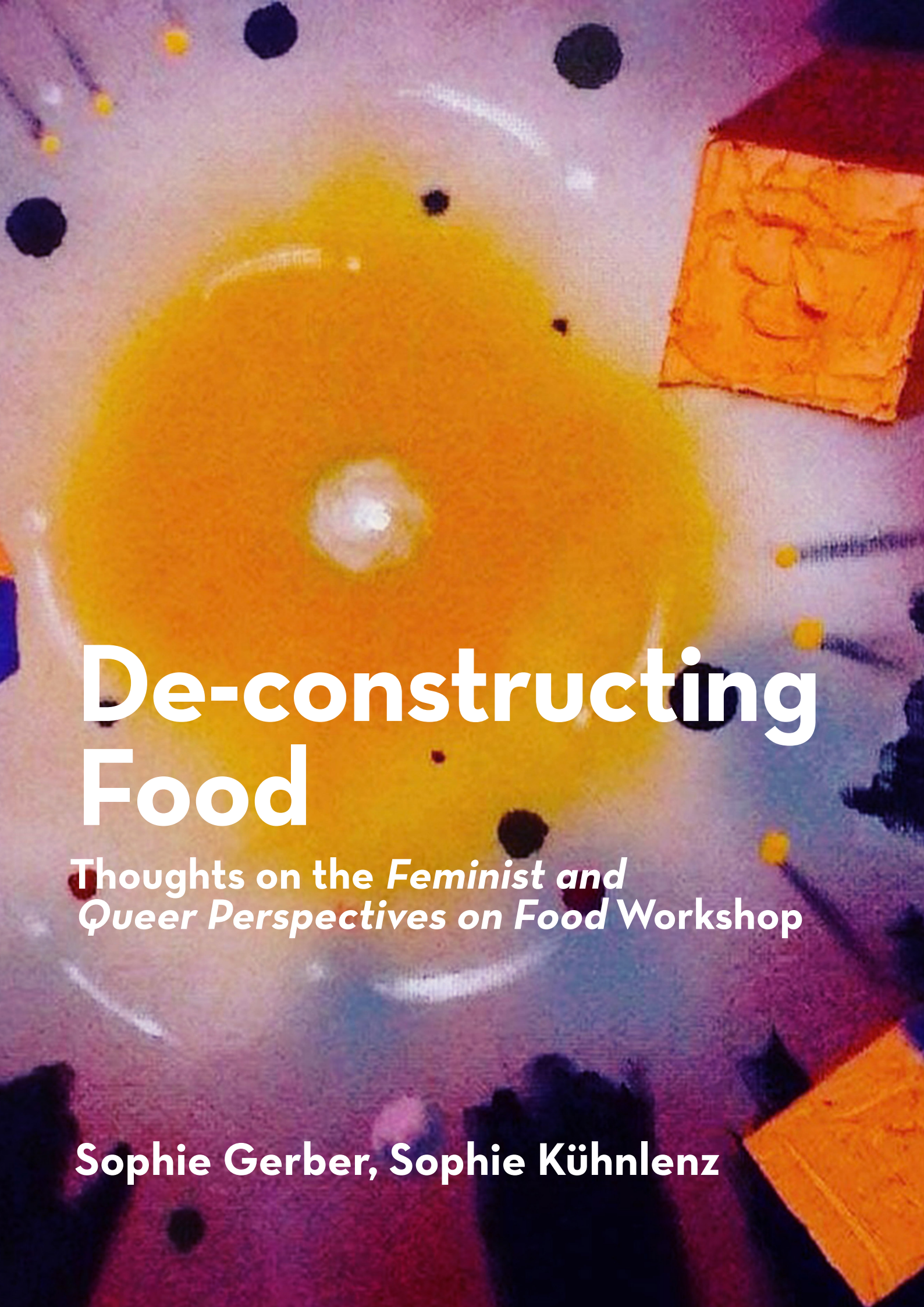
So sehr sich das Dekonstruieren als roter Faden durch den Workshop zog, so konstruktiv ist das Ergebnis. Nicht nur mündeten die Vorträge in diese erste Ausgabe von *insightOut*.

Das gemeinsame Arbeiten und Erkunden, also der Austausch, hat die vermeintliche

Abb. 2: Gemeinsame Reflexion der Vorträge und Diskussionen

Kluft zwischen musealer und universitärer Forschung ebenso in den Hintergrund treten lassen wie die Grenzen zwischen wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen und Objektivität und Emotionalität.

Die kommenden *Vienna Workshops on STEM Collections, Gender and Sexuality*, 2023 unter dem Titel *Diverse Infrastructures? Gender, Queer and the Foundations of Society*, werden hier anschließen und diesen Austausch fortsetzen.



De-constructing Food

Thoughts on the *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food* Workshop

Sophie Gerber, Sophie Kühnlenz

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De-constructing Food

Thoughts on the *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food* Workshop

ABSTRACT

Over a year after the *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food* workshop (5 and 6 May 2022) at Technisches Museum Wien, the first *Journal on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections and Cultures* is published. The introduction reflects on food and eating as a situated, context-dependent and constantly changing practice and gives insights into the contributions of the issue. The common thread is deconstruction in the sense of questioning self-evident facts, as well as the diversity of constructive, formative and empowering moments in queer-feminist engagements with eating and nutrition practices and their communication.

CV

Sophie Gerber is a historian of technology and has been working at Technisches Museum Wien since 2019, where she is in charge of the domestic technology and food, their expansion and documentation. She also works on strategies for diversity-oriented, gender-informed collecting, exhibiting, educating, and research in science and technology museums. 2014 PhD in the project "Objects of Energy Consumption" of Deutsches Museum and TU Munich. Her research interests include gender and queer studies, material culture, and intersections between the history of technology, consumption, and everyday life.

Sophie Kühnlenz is a public historian working at the intersections of museum and gender studies on gender-informed museum discourses. She is a research assistant and doctoral candidate at the Department of History, University of Erfurt, Germany. Among others, she was Scholar-in-Residence at the Technisches Museum Wien and Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C·DH), University of Luxembourg. Her research interests include empirical historical culture and museum research as well as science and technology, gender and queer studies.

KEYWORDS

Deconstruction, Food, Workshop, Museum, Queer(y)ing, Material Culture

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Gender is not self-evident either; rather, it is constructed. Like food, it is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is determined historically, culturally and discursively.

What is going on with the food on our plates? A few years ago, it became a trend in restaurants and kitchens to separate ingredients and re-arrange them in a new way. Ideally, the new interpretation would give rise to completely new flavours and change the way we perceive familiar dishes. It seems that deconstruction does not stop at our food and, paradoxically, it comprises a constructive and formative element.

More than a year after the *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food* workshop (5 and 6 May 2022) at the Technisches Museum Wien, the first *Journal on Gender and Sexuality in STEM Collections and Cultures* has now been published. Drafting its introductory remarks is an opportunity for us not only to summarise the contributions, but also to reflect on the insights gained from the presentations and discussions. The common theme running through the articles is "constructing and deconstructing", in the sense of questioning what is usually taken for granted.

But what is a deconstruction approach all about? In the humanities, the term was first coined by Jacques Derrida. In the search for complex and fluid, i.e. non-stable, levels of meanings in the area of food and nutrition, his approach is productive when it is a matter of taking a look at allegedly clearly defined and fixed practices, habits and identities in their "made state". Food and nutrition therefore become visible and discussable as situated, context-dependent and variable practices. The articles in this issue look at how (collective) identities are constructed and negotiated; how inclusions and exclusions (where we eat and when, how, what, why and with whom) come about; and how food becomes a (discursively) contested field.

Gender is not self-evident either; rather, it is constructed. Like food, it is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is determined historically, culturally and discur-

Fig. 1: Opening of the workshop in the ceremonial hall of the Technisches Museum Wien

sively.[1] Binary categories such as man/woman, raw food/cooked food or housework/wage labour are all-important, especially in Western thinking. The purpose of deconstruction is to question and explore this aspect. Hierarchies, which are part and parcel of such conceptual pairings, can be analysed and questioned as much as supposedly unambiguous gender attributions. If we also take deconstruction to mean paying attention to structures and constructs that are questioned or dismantled at the same time, then it is possible to build bridges to queer-theoretical approaches. "To *queer* facts means to shake their supposed naturalness"[2]: by definition, the word "queer" – a wilful adoption and positive reassignment of a pejorative term for non-heteronormative lifestyles and sexualities – refuses to be clearly defined. As a practice, queering aims to unsettle, question, and draw attention to vaguely emergent intermediate stages, hidden or subordinate meanings and, more generally, their open-endedness and fluidity.[3] Queer-feminist perspectives on food and nutrition – whether in a museum or other context – re-examine practices and constellations that seem self-evident, unambiguous, clearly defined and natural when it comes to growing, preparing, serving, consuming, utilising and rating foodstuffs. In each of their thematic fields, the various contributions explore this potential for deconstructing practices and (not least gendered) role attributions in the food sector that seem natural or ahistorical at first glance.

On the one hand, what we eat is something that has been made: food is farmed, grown, cultivated, processed and cooked, among other things. Cultural ideas influence what we eat just as much as the broad spectrum of technologies used, from an open fire to genetic engineering. **Naomi Hammett** uses the example of dairy cows as 'milk machines' to demonstrate to stunning effect how living creatures are turned into food, or "bio-facts"[4], through agricultural technology and bioengineering. She discusses what sort of futures might be envisaged for "queer cows", and how the boundaries between nature and culture are becoming blurred in modern dairy production, adopting a "multi-species" approach that highlights the precarious nature of supposedly unambiguous opposites.

And it's not just what we eat that's crucial, but also the growing and rearing of the food, and its processing and marketing, as **Sahar Tavakoli** illustrates in her contribution, which looks at nation-building through food. Regional foods and foods with designations of origin or indications of geographical provenance are just as much a part of the construct of socio-technological systems as nations are – and indeed the ideas associated with them. Tavakoli picks up the idea of "gastro-nationalism" on the one hand and, on the other, uses the concept of "socio-technological imaginaries" from the field of science and technology studies to examine a "performance" by Italian butcher Dario Cecchini. She considers the imaginary scenarios of a desirable (food) future that play out in his performance as "camp" (as defined by Susan Sontag) insofar as they mirror the past: "Where we wish to be is where we have already been."

In her contribution, **Psyche Williams-Forson** highlights the fact that a close look at material cultures

[1] cf. "Gender", in: Anna Babka, Gerald Posselt: *Gender und Dekonstruktion. Begriffe und kommentierte Grundlagentexte der Gender- und Queer-Theorie*. Vienna 2016, p. 56.

[2] Sophie Gerber: "Labelling Machines and Synthesizers: Collecting Queer Knowledge in Science and Technology Museums", in: *Museum International* 72 (2020), Issue 3–4, pp. 116–127, here p. 127, Note 1.

[3] cf. Sophie Kühnlenz: "Eindeutig uneindeutig, beständig unbeständig. Museum queer-feministisch: Gedanken zum Weiterdenken", in: Martina Griesser-Stermscheg, Christine Haupt-Stummer, Renate Höllwart et al (eds.): *Widersprüche. Kuratorisch handeln zwischen Theorie und Praxis* (= curating. ausstellungstheorie & praxis, Vol. 6). Berlin, Boston 2022, pp. 195–198.

[4] Nicole C. Karafyllis (ed.): *Biofakte. Versuch über den Menschen zwischen Artefakt und Lebewesen.* Paderborn 2003, particularly "Das Wesen der Biofakte", pp. 11–27.

as a source (especially in everyday historical contexts) is certainly worthwhile and offers a previously often overlooked potential for the study of "race", "class"and "gender". An analysis of domestic work in "settler colonial house and plantation museums", which barely touches on the (domestic and slave) work performed there, shows how focusing on ordinary everyday things enables intersectional and power-critical views of US history that have been shaped by "race", "class" and "gender" asymmetries and the way they are communicated in museums. Williams-Forson uses various household objects and cooking utensils from George Washington's Mount Vernon Home Estate House Museum to show how the search for the "absent potential" of these objects can lead to an intersectionally more aware processing and mediation of a history shaped by violence and inequality.

Food and drink can serve as a means of constructing community. **Holly Porteous** demonstrates this using the example of a British museum that is also a library, archive and neighbourhood meeting point. Offering a cup of tea turns out to be an inclusive element for (new) visitors: not only does it make it easier for them to cross the threshold to the museum and strike up a conversation, but it also helps them to stave off loneliness. A porcelain tea set is used; in other words, a special level of respect is shown to the guests by using a specific material culture. In this way, the museum becomes an inclusive venue that creates a sense of community and cohesion through a feminist reinterpretation of the practice of hospitality.

Philipp Hagemann and **Alexander Wagner** see food and nutrition as decidedly political fields, and their contribution is devoted to the relationship between food, class and family-based care relationships. A *research laboratory for interventions against classism* – *FLINK for short – is set up under the rubrics of gender, materiality, power, space, knowledge, "race" and a reflection of one's own sense of position in order to draw up and implement diversity- and classism-sensitive intervention formats. Personal life stories and emotions are a fundamental element of the intersectional exploration of not least media-mediated discourses, for example through food ads in Germany in the 1990s and 2000s. Their approach shows that one's own experiences and sensitisation to specific classist forms of discrimination gives rise to situated knowledge that can be used as a resource for empowerment and to address discriminatory structures. To make the text as inclusive as possible to its readership, it is published in both English and German.

Ana Daldon uses a card game to test the waters, as it were, for the best way to exhibit the concept of fat. The fact that the results of the group work carried out in the workshop were so different also illustrates the constructed quality of exhibitions. This playful and creative approach also proves to be a queer method in that it dissolves the boundaries between museum experts, potential visitors, teachers and learners through a collective curatorial practice. Last but not least, queer and fat activism have similarities and parallels, also linguistically, through the re-appropriation of pejorative terms and experiences of discrimination and pathologising.

As much as deconstruction was the common thread running through the workshop, the outcome itself was constructive. For one thing, the presentations resulted in the publication of this first edition of insightOut.

Working and exploring collectively, i.e. through exchanges, meant that the supposed gap between museum and university research receded into the background, as did the boundaries between scientific disciplines and between objectivity and emotionality.

Fig. 2: Joint reflection on the presentations and discussions

The forthcoming Vienna Workshops on STEM Collections, Gender and Sexuality, 2023 under the heading *Diverse Infrastructures? Gender, Queer and the Foundations of Society*, are to build on these findings and continue the exchange.

What Future for Queer Cows?

Naomi Hammett

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What Future for Queer Cows?

ABSTRACT

Drawing on queer theory and fat studies, in particular Lee Edelman's No Future and his concept of 'reproductive futurism', I argue that dairy cows can be considered queer because they queer concepts of 'nature' and 'culture'. I argue that cows are caught up in their own 'reproductive futurism' as the prevailing ideology of the dairy industry is that each successive generation of cows should be bigger and produce more milk. Climate change presents a challenge for the dairy industry and one response from milk suppliers has been to require farmers to complete a carbon footprint, which I argue reproduces current and historic ideologies by its focus on productivity. Imaginings of sustainable futures, I argue, also use ideas of productivity – but of plants and soil being productive – cows often having no places in these futures because they are seen as not 'natural'. I use speculative fiction to imagine what good futures for dairy cows could look like.

CV

Naomi Hammett is a fourth year PhD candidate at Lancaster University in the Sociology department. Her research focus is on dairy farms in North West England and their response to climate change and the drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with a particular focus on the narratives and practices relating to the lives and futures of cows. Naomi works predominantly within the field of Science and Technology Studies. She holds an MA in Environment, Society and Culture and a BA in History. She has had a previous career as a primary school teacher. Naomi can be contacted at: naomi.hammett@lancaster.ac.uk

KEYWORDS

Cows, Climate Shange, Multispecies Research, STS, Queer Theory, Fat Studies

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If being fat is to flout normative standards of beauty and health then being a Holstein cow is to flout characteristics associated with the "natural," such as purity, wildness, and beauty.

Introduction

On the wall in my office hangs a painting of a cow, *Rosie the Prize-Winning Cow.* The painting shows a Holstein cow in a side-on view, fat and happy. I think of the farmer who likely commissioned this painting of his cow and proudly displayed it on the wall. These paintings have a long history. In the mid-eighteenth century, at a time of agricultural revolution, farmers were experimenting with livestock breeding. This enabled them to redistribute flesh to desired parts of the body and shorten the time between birth and maturity. At this time, livestock portraiture became quite the thing.[1]

Fig. 1: "Rosie-Champion Cow", painting hanging in my office by M. Wiscombe

The historian Emily Pawley posits that "[t]o skilled eyes, animal portraits were repositories of a code that we are no longer trained to perceive"[2]. Such portraits became central in the implementation of "improved breeds"[3]. Artists were often encouraged to emphasize certain desirable features, so much so that it was noted that owners would not be happy until the likeness of their animals appeared "monstrously fat"[4].

The fascination with bodily excess in animal portraiture has much in common with the media trope known as "the headless fatty". The term refers to images where the heads of fat people are cropped from visual media, leaving untethered bodies that Majida Kargbo describes as "excessively bodied"[5]. All individuating characteristics are stripped away, leaving the fat body as an emblem of laziness and greed. In a similar fashion, side views of cows in ani-

[1] See Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), "Consuming the fat cows", https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/merl/2015/10/25/consuming-the-fat-cows/ (accessed 24 May 2023).
[2] Emily Pawley, "The Point of Perfection: Cattle Portraiture, Bloodlines, and the Meaning of Breeding, 1760–1860", *Journal of the Early Republic*, 36/1 (Spring 2016), 37–72 at 40.
[3] Ibid.
[4] MERL, "Consuming the fat cows" (see n. 1).
[5] See Majida Kargbo, "Toward a New Relationality: Digital Photography, Shame, and the Fat Subject", *Fat Studies*, 2/2 (2013), 160–172.

Fig. 2: Painting of a dairy cow from the MERL collection

mal portraiture emphasise their bodies as well as features—such as a large udder—that indicate superior breeding reflecting the skills of their owner.

In this article, I discuss intersections in the way that the lives and futures of queer and fat people and queer and fat cows are discussed and imagined. Please note that when I talk about cows I will usually be referring to Holstein cows. These are the black and white spotted cows that have become synonymous with dairy farming and were imported into the UK after the Second World War. Since then, there has been an emphasis on productivity within the dairy industry, with the philosophy being that each cow should produce as much milk as possible. Holstein cows, bred for their large udders, have been able to produce huge amounts of milk. In order to keep up milk production, their diet needs to be supplemented with high-protein fodder concentrates such as cereals and soya. Therefore, there are many who see Holstein cows as not natural and as inefficient as they are eating crops that could be fed directly to humans. As debates around climate change have gained ground, Holstein cows have become even more maligned because they produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

I will be exploring cows as queer creatures.

In order to do this, I will draw on literature from fat studies and queer theory, paying particular attention to the queer theorist Lee Edelman.[6] Edelman argues that Western society rests on the notion of "reproductive futurism"; that is, relying on the phrase "think of the children" to impose limits on possible futures. By embracing queerness, though, it is possible to subvert these possibilities.

Francis Ray White, a Gender and Fat Studies scholar, argues that fat people can be incorporated in this notion of queerness, and I extend this to ask if it might also be possible to incorporate cows.[7] In the following sections, I consider how concepts of cows' lives and futures are often approached via the reproductive futures of humans, both in the dairy industry and in sustainability narratives. I will end by speculating on what possibilities this opens for cow futures

[6] See Lee Edelman, No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (Durham, NC, 2004).

[7] See Francis Ray White, "Fat, Queer, Dead: 'Obesity' and the Death Drive", *Somatechnics*, 2/1 (2012), 1-17.

that may exist beyond them being seen as entirely disposable.

Fat, Queer and Anti-social

Fat activism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the US and deployed practices such as protests, sit-ins at diet clinics, conferences, and books, with the aim to critique and fight against fat discrimination in medical discourse and society at large.[8] The discipline of Fat Studies has ties to fat activism and is a broad field organised around critical scholarship surrounding discourse relating to "obesity", in particular challenging links made between fatness and ill health. Queer theory and queer studies are similarly broad disciplines with indeterminacy at their heart; as Annamarie Jagose has written: "[q]ueer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire."[9] In this section of the essay, I argue—following Francis Ray White—that there is conceptual room for fatness to fall into the realm of queerness, setting the scene for the cooptation of cows into these discourses.[10]

Fat Studies scholars have frequently drawn on queer studies to aid in their thinking around fat issues.[11] In this piece, I will be concentrating on one particular example of the generative overlaps of Fat Studies and Queer Studies. Lee Edelman's influential book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, hinges on the premise that Western society is predicated on the notion of "reproductive futurism" (that is, the confining of political discourse to heteronormativity) that denies a queer resistance that would open up other ways of doing and being.[12] Edelman believes that this insistence of seeing queer futures as "other," as not possible, amounts to queerness being equated with the death drive, the drive to nothingness, oblivion.[13] Francis Ray White in their 2012 article "Fat, Queer, Dead: 'Obesity' and the Death Drive" applies the same conceptual lens to the case of narratives surrounding the Change4Life campaign, an anti-obesity campaign launched by the UK government in 2009 with the aim of encouraging behavioural changes leading to all individuals being able to maintain a healthy weight.[14]

White suggests that there is room enough in Edelman's definition of "queer" for the concept of fatness to be included. This is because Edelman acknowledges that there are many in the LGBTQIA+ community who do conform to "reproductive futurism" and so conceives of "queer" as something that disrupts the social order. Edelman contends that "[t]he queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such—on disturbing, therefore and on queering ourselves and our investment in such organization"[15]. White believes that this definition has sufficient scope to encompass the theorisation of fat as queer, because being fat is to commit a "catalogue of transgressions [...] against normative standards of gender and sexuality, health and morality"[16].

[8] See Vikki Chalklin, "Obstinate fatties: Fat activism, queer negativity, and the celebration of 'obesity'", *Subjectivity*, 9/2 (2016) 107–125.
[9] Annamarie Jagose, Queer Theory: *An Introduction* (New York, 1996), 3.
[10] See White "Fat, Queer, Dead" (see n. 7).
[11] See Kathleen LeBesco, "Quest for a Cause: The Fat Gene, the Gay Gene, and the New Eugenics", in Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (eds.), *The Fat Studies Reader* (New York, 2009), 65–74; Samantha Murray, *The 'Fat' Female Body* (Basingstoke, 2008).
[12] See Edelman, *No Future* (see n. 6).
[13] The concept of the death drive was originated by Freud. To learn more about it see Matei Georgescu, "Freud's Theory of the Death Drive", *Review of Contemporary Philosophy*, 10 (2011), 228–233.
[14] See White, "Fat, Queer, Dead" (see n. 7).
[15] Edelman, No Future, 17 (see n. 6).
[16] See White, "Fat, Queer, Dead", 5 (see n. 7).

By the same logic, I would argue that this definition of queerness is also broad enough to include Holstein cows. If being fat is to flout normative standards of beauty and health then being a Holstein cow is to flout characteristics associated with the "natural," such as purity, wildness, and beauty. Holstein cows do not live easy lives, they are separated from their children, often have diseases, have short lives and are killed once they outlive their usefulness. In the next section, I will develop the notion of queer cows by examining disciplines such as Science and Technology Studies that see animals as actors and Queer Ecology that extends the notion of queerness to animals and the environment.

Queering the Human and More-than-Human

In my research on cows, I examine how they figure in narratives of climate change, particularly as disturbances. Cows do not fit neatly into the category of nature, nor that of culture; they straddle binaries and become disturbing. They are not seen as natural because of their breeding and domestication, and they do not fully belong to culture because they are not humans. As animals who are bound up with technologies, they are queer creatures and are seen as a threat to "wild" animals because the land they inhabit is often lacking in biodiversity. In climate change debates, cows have become much maligned creatures for their production of methane, which is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector. Such debates, by zeroing in on cows, often neglect to properly examine the global agrifood system and intensive farming systems that have contributed to many of the issues that we are now facing. Within the dairy sector, the solution to reducing emissions is seen as quantification, control, and productivity.

The discipline of STS has grown from a desire to pursue a different take, especially in relation to the conducting of scientific practices. A central theme within STS is the questioning of dichotomies such as subject/object, nature/society, and another is working to overcome certain disciplinary distinctions to foster multidisciplinary collaboration.[17] Bruno Latour once proclaimed that humans "have never been modern"[18]. Modernity is a concept rife with tropes about the ingenuity of "man" and the primacy of humankind. In disavowing modernity, Latour has sought to challenge these assumptions and in so doing make space for objects, animals and all that is not human, as they had previously been neglected and marginalized.[19] Building on these foundations, Donna Haraway has gone on to declare that not only have we never been modern but that in fact, we have never been human, leading the way for a posthuman approach.[20]

There have been numerous attempts to extend queer theory to nonhumans. Noreen Giffney has drawn attention to the ambiguity of the term "human" and believes it to be "both a discursive and ideological construct which materially impacts on all those who are interpellated through that sign, especially those who find themselves on its margins or those who transgress its boundaries"[21]. Giffney asks "whether the act of queering is always already a posthuman endeavour" and wonders what implications such a premise could have for queer theory.

One discipline in which queer theory and the more-than-human have converged is queer ecology. Queer ecology is interested in commonalities between queer and ecological concerns, and interrogates notions such as health, purity, and toxicity that appear

[17] See Andrew Pickering (ed.), *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago, 1992).
[18] Bruno, Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA, 1993).
[19] See ibid.
[20] See Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London, 2008).
[21] Noreen Giffney, "Queer Apocal(o)ptic/ism: The Death Drive and the Human", in Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird (eds.), *Queering the Non/Human* (London and New York, 2016), 83–106 at 55.

in both sexual and environmental discourses.[22] One example of research in this area is Shiloh Krupar's research into the cleanup of a former plutonium factory in Colorado which centres performances of the drag queen Nuclia Waste.[23] Another example is research into anxieties around the "gay frog," which are argued to be rooted in sexual and racist discrimination called forth by the blurring of borders.[24]

Both STS and queer ecology provide tools to see cows as actors. Returning to Lee Edelman's concept of queerness as disturbing the social order and thus prompting the queering of our own relations with society, I believe the intense debates around cows and dairy farming in recent years—in relation to things like breeding practices and separation from their calves—prompt this queering of society and in particular the agrifood sector. A strong argument can be made for cows being queer creatures within this context. This is something that I will expand on in the next section by discussing how measures such as carbon footprints are imbued with long-standing ideologies present within agriculture, and what this means for cows.

The Reproductive Futures of Cows

Lee Edelman's notion of reproductive futurism argues against "terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations"[25]. In terms of agriculture and food production, there is one particular version of this logic of reproductive futurism: that each generation of animals should be bigger, better, and more efficient than the last, achieved through genetic intervention. There are numerous articles on the subject of the agrifood system that are predicated on the imperative of future population growth.[26] Starting out with this future in mind often leads to neglecting current problems in the food system in favour of solving assumed problems of the future. Such an argument ties the reproductive futures of cows to the reproductive futures of humans. Dairy cows must continue producing children to continue to provide vast quantities of milk for a growing human population. Clay and Yurco define such a narrative as the imperative of "more milk" that has dominated the dairy industry since the onset of the twentieth century and in particular after World War II, since when milk output per farm and per cow has massively increased.[27]

Fig. 3: Image of a Holstein cow taken on a farm in Lancashire taken by myself during fieldwork

[22] See Nicole Seymour, "Queer Ecologies and Queer Environmentalisms", in Siobhan Somerville (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies* (Cambridge, 2020), 108–122.
[23] See Shiloh R. Krupar, "Transnatural ethics: revisiting the nuclear cleanup of Rocky Flats, CO, through the queer ecology of Nuclia Waste", *Cultural Geographies*, 19/3 (2012), 303–327.
[24] See Hannah Boast, "Theorizing the Gay Frog", *Environmental Humanities*, 14/3 (2022), 661–679.
[25] Edelman, No Future, 2 (see n. 6)
[26] See, e.g., Alexander Y. Prosekov and Svetlana A. Ivanova, "Food security: The challenge of the present", Geoforum, 91 (2018), 73–77; Martine Helms, "Food sustainability, food security and the environment", *British Food Journal*, 106/5 (2004), 380–387.
27 See Nathan Clay and Kayla Yurco, "Political ecology of milk: Contested futures of a lively food", *Geography Compass*, 14/8 (2020), 12497, https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12497 (accessed 3 July 2023).

Climate change poses significant challenges to this mode of productivity, as there is a need to reduce emissions significantly, at odds with continued growth.[28] Agriculture occupies 77 per cent of land in the UK and land use makes up 12 per cent of emissions.[29] Emissions are seen as a big issue in this sector, especially since there has been little reduction since the 1990s, mainly due to ineffective voluntary schemes.[30] There has been more success in areas such as energy and transport that are seen as easier to address with technological advances. Emissions from agriculture are harder to pinpoint and come from a range of livestock and land management practices.[31] One of the major sources of emissions from agriculture is methane that is produced by cows. How methane is measured and the significance of the role it plays in climate change is contested within the farming community. There are many proposed measures of how the amount of methane produced by cows can be reduced.

In Francis Ray White's paper "Fat, Queer, Dead: 'Obesity' and the Death Drive", discussed earlier, they examine the strategies employed in the government's Change4Life programme that sought to tackle the "obesity epidemic" by promoting the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. White believes that the strategy "employ[s] clinical measurements, namely BMI, in order to subjugate parents' (specifically mothers') knowledges and impose a rational and disembodied regime of regulation"[32]. The Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure that uses height and weight to determine if someone's weight is "healthy". The BMI is a highly contested measure, and has been demonstrated to be extremely unreliable.[33] Julie Guthman explains the way that social influences are entangled with "scientific facts" by examining how calculations about growth in body size are influenced by prevailing social assumptions about size and health.[34]

It can be argued that a similar move is taking place in the dairy industry as some milk suppliers have invented their own carbon footprint measurements, to be completed by dairy farmers that supply milk to them. In so doing, the tacit knowledges of dairy farmers are subsumed by the outcomes of the carbon footprint which imposes a new epistemological playing field. In these carbon footprints, like the BMI, the ways in which emissions figures are displayed and therefore what is deemed important and what is not are all at play. With the emphasis on carbon footprints that can be produced easily through readily available figures, components like biodiversity do not commonly appear in these measures, and it is often measures of productivity that feature centrally.

It is possible that milk suppliers may decide the future of contracts with farms based on carbon footprints, so the results and recommendations of carbon footprints have a lot of sway in how farmers will change their businesses. This is completely in line with reproductive futurism.

By making these footprints such important currency and enabling industries to have such a fundamental say in their creation, it limits possibilities of doing things differently, which often means that the same logic of

[28] See Oxford Net Zero, "What Is Net Zero?", https://netzeroclimate.org/what-is-net-zero (accessed 26 May 2023).
[29] See Climate Change Committee, *Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change* (London, 2018), https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/land-use-reducing-emissions-and-preparing-for-climate-change/ (accessed 3 July 2023).
[30] See ibid.
[31] See Neil Ward, Net Zero, *Food and Farming: Climate Change and the UK Agri-Food System* (Abingdon and New York, 2023).
[32] White, "Fat, Queer, Dead", 11 (see n. 7).
[33] See Bethan Evans and Rachel Colls, "Measuring Fatness, Governing Bodies: The Spatialities of the Body Mass Index (BMI) Anti-Obesity Politics", *Antipode*, 41/5 (2014), 1051–1083.
[34] See Julie Guthman, "Fatuous measures: the artifactual construction of the obesity epidemic", *Critical Public Health*, 23/3 (2013), 263–273.

productivity that has been in operation in agriculture for a very long time continues to be reproduced.

This also has implications for the lives and bodies of cows continuing to reproduce and to produce milk, in huge amounts. The next section will explore how cows feature or don't feature in imaginings of sustainable futures.

Sustainable Futures

When considering how a sustainable food system is to be achieved, one approach has been to examine the possibility of transitioning to plant-based diets. For example, there has been a study that compared the carbon footprint of cow's milk to that of soy "milk" to try and determine which would be better.[35] Whilst nutritional factors were also considered, the study mainly relied on comparing carbon footprints. Another study points to the large emissions caused by the agricultural sector and proposes as a solution a move towards plant-based diets on a "worst first" basis, meaning that the transition away from beef should happen first because that sector has the highest emissions, and cow's milk, having the second highest, should be next.[36] Such a shift is framed as a "protein" shift, away from animal sources towards plant-based sources. Cattle are reduced to protein, their liveliness is erased, their worth reduced to their ability to provide a particular food group for humans. Whilst it is widely acknowledged that moving toward plant-based diets will be necessary, this is not what I take issue with; it is that its ethical ramifications are often not broached. It is clear that cows, particularly Holstein cows, are tied to the reproductive futures of humans, and if cows are deemed unnecessary in this equation, because food sources can be drawn from elsewhere, then they are no longer required. That is often the end of the discussion, instead of considering what this could mean for the lives and futures of cattle.

Another element in the discussion of the futures of cows is affected by the concept of nature and culture. As stated before, I believe cows are queer because they do not fit in the categories of either nature or culture, and it is clear from numerous contributions to literature that they are seen as more disposable because of it. For example, George Monbiot, in his article "Unholy Cow", claims that raising livestock organically over a relatively large area of land is very destructive to the environment.[37] Monbiot, when talking about regenerative farming, states that

> *"[l]ivestock farmers often claim that their grazing systems 'mimic nature'. If so, the mimicry is a crude caricature. A review of evidence from over 100 studies found that when livestock are removed from the land, the abundance and diversity of almost all functional groups (or 'guilds') of wild animals increases."*[38]

There is a clear hierarchy here with "livestock" placed in a category clearly different from that of wild animals. Land that is taken up with cattle and other farm animals is seen as a waste, providing very little protein and producing high levels of emissions, while that same land could be far more productive ecologically if given over to "wild" plants and animals. The logic of productivity is still being used here but the argument is turned around: Cattle are not productive, whereas wildlife could offer so many more benefits for carbon storage and biodiversity. Monbiot argues that meat and dairy should be created in a

[35] See Benedetta Coluccia et al., "Assessing the carbon footprint across the supply chain: Cow milk vs soy drink", *Science of the Total Environment*, 806/3 (2022), 151-200.
[36] See Helen Harwatt, "Including animal to plant protein shifts in climate change mitigation policy: a proposed three-step strategy", *Climate Policy*, 19/5 (2019), 533-541.
[37] George Monbiot, "Unholy Cow", https://www.monbiot.com/2022/08/19/unholy-cow/ (accessed 27 May 2023).
[38] Ibid.

lab and the land should be rewilded.[39] This is certainly a neat solution; nature and culture are put back in their boxes, and there is no messy entanglement anymore. The idea of cows existing outside of the current agrifood system is an interesting one that I will explore more in the final section on cow futures.

Cow Futures

Eva Giraud has noted that when it comes to imagining possible futures for animals and advocating for practical steps to get there, multispecies research can often be silent.[40] Similarly, White believes that the same is true for Edelman's *No Future* as Edelman states that any attempt by queer people to imagine a better future for themselves just ends up reproducing the same relations of oppression.[41] The logic being that insisting on imagining a future can limit the possibilities of that same future. However, White believes there is another way to offer alternative possibilities for what next.[42]

As Alexis Shotwell writes, "[i]magining and practising futures that are not 'more of the same' is difficult, necessary work"[43]. adrienne maree brown, one of the editors of *Octavia's Brood,* a collection of short stories taking inspiration from Octavia Butler to write visionary social justice-informed speculative fiction, writes that "the stories we tell can either reflect the society we are a part of or transform it. If we want to bring new worlds into existence, then we need to challenge the narratives that uphold current power dynamics and patterns"[44]. I have produced a very humble attempt at imagining possible futures for cows, inspired by the stunning work of Shayda Kafai who imagines queer, fat food futures.[45]

Dear Cows of the future,

What do I wish for you in the hot days to come? Snouts touching cool, fresh water and gulp, gulp, gulp. Trees for shade. Each other for comfort. Plenty of grass for your tongue to sweep up and for your teeth to chew. Babies suckling at your udders. There will be an abundance of communal caring. Bee, insect, soil, human, bird, cow, fox and on and on. Strong communities. More local food. If you give milk it will be less anonymous and more appreciated. You will not be expendable. I worry for the fate of worlds to come. I worry for you dear cows that have become so entangled in this capitalist nightmare. It is a constant background hum, this worry. What becomes of the marginal, in precarious futures? We have to imagine glorious futures for each other and share them and create them. I am sorry that I cannot be certain what cow utopias look like and how to get there, but I know there is a way towards joyous futures for you, barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures.[46]

Conclusion

I am drawn again to Rosie the cow. It is late, and she is lit only by the white glow of my computer screens. She is almost cartoonish really, lopsided. Bony up top. Large udder on the bottom. An ideal of genetic breeding. All to give so much milk, which she undoubtedly did and her kin undoubtedly do, day after day. So much milk. Some drunk in coffee or on cereal,

[39] See George Monbiot, "Lab-grown food will soon destroy farming – and save the planet", *The Guardian*, 8 Jan. 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/08/lab-grown-food-destroy-farming-save-planet (accessed 31 Aug. 2023).
[40] See Eva Haifa Giraud, *What Comes after Entanglement? Activism, Anthropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion* (Durham, NC, 2019).
[41] WSee White, "Fat, Queer, Dead" (see n. 7); Edelman, *No Future* (see n. 6).
[42] See White, "Fat, Queer, Dead" (see n. 7).
[43] Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis and London, 2016), 165.
[44] adrienne maree brown:, "Outro,"", in: Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown (eds.), *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (Oakland, CA, and Edinburgh, 2015), 279–281 at 280.
[45] See Shayda Kafai, "Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures", *Fat Studies*, 9/3 (2020), 201–203.
[46] Maria Puig de La Bellacasa "Matters of care in technoscience: Assembling neglected things," *Social Studies of Science*, 41/1 (2011), 85-106, at 98.

some of it chucked. So much milk. So, I ask myself, what does it mean to live in these precarious times with a creature that has given us so much? What I ask of myself, and what I ask of you, is to dream big. Cows, Holstein cows especially, are queer, they do not fit, and yet I think it is essential that we imagine and work towards futures that contain all manner of queer creatures.

Butta la Pastiche! Camp Visions and National Palates

Sahar Tavakoli

Sahar Tavakoli:

Butta la Pastiche! Camp Visions and National Palates

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I draw from Science and Technology Studies (STS), Anthropology, and Queer Theory to show how Sociotechnical Imaginaries around national palates have, at times, taken on the sensibility of Camp – celebrating and naturalizing the artificial. Where existing work on both Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Gastronationalism have focussed largely on the material output of sociotechnical systems, I draw attention to their emotional output, asking what affects or modes are evoked when imagining food in relation to nation. Orienting the paper around a stage performance, given in 2013 by butcher and Slow Food representative, Dario Cecchini, titled 'Carne e Spirito', I ask how efforts to recognise the variability and flexibility of small scale industry can and have instead come to naturalize both nation and national body, lapidifying had hitherto been fluid. This begs a second, perhaps more pressing question: how does the camp mode of celebration potentially obscure a more insidious practice of regulating a national body?

CV

Sahar Tavakoli is a PhD candidate in Science and Technology Studies at Cornell University. Her research concerns the place of mundane technologies in broadly-defined disciplinary structures. That is, how everyday and often-overlooked objects participate in the transformation of individuals into populations upon which standardized practice can be applied. To date she has written on patient-worn hospital gowns, identification tags, gynecological models, dolls, and geographically protected foods.

KEYWORDS

Nation, Food, Camp, Geographically Indicated Foods, Food Production, Sociotechnical Systems

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Can the future of a nation be strengthened, undermined, or in any way altered or redirected by manipulating the diet of its body politic?

Introduction

In his *Physiology of Taste; or, Transcendental Gastronomy,* 19th century lawyer and epicure Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin gives a definition of the figure of the gastronome. In a series of prefatory aphorisms, he writes: "The destiny of nations depends upon the manner in which they are fed."[1] Brillat-Savarin is descriptive rather than prescriptive here, observing some general truth about the time in which he lived and ate. Nonetheless, the aphorism begs the question: Can the future of a nation be strengthened, undermined, or in any way altered or redirected by manipulating the diet of its body politic?

In 2013, butcher-poet Dario Cecchini travelled from his native Chianti Hills in central Tuscany, Italy, to Copenhagen, Denmark, where—in a circus tent set up on the harbour island of Refshaleøen—he recited Dante and slaughtered a pig. It was a political performance: a call to bear witness to an existential threat looming over a racial minority whose members are scattered all over the globe—a race of local Butchers. In this tent and for this audience, the future of nations depends not only on how its members eat but on how their food is bred, raised, slaughtered, and sold.

This is a paper about sociotechnical systems constructed around local or geographically indicated foods and the imaginaries that are baked into them. I raise the question of how sociotechnical imaginaries that both give rise to, and emerge out of, such foods naturalise social categories of community, culture, or state in such a manner that once flexible (cultural) practices are ossified in place and time. I combine Science and Technology Studies literature on sociotechnical imaginaries with the anthropological concept of Gastronationalism to ask how the feeding of a nation becomes proxy for the nourishment of a body politic. Furthermore, I queer the timelines along which these sociotechnical imaginings unfold. Rather than invoking the future to bear upon the present, the sociotechnical narratives composed around food set their referent in the past, tacking between what has been and what is yet to be, with the present existing as an incidental point on their arc. What is strange here is not that the past plays a role in the imagining of the nation in the present. This has been well described by scholars such as Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm as a component of national narratives or tradition-making. What is strange is that this queer unfolding of time, so clearly described in these texts from the fields of political science and history, has been completely overlooked in discussions of sociotechnical imaginaries, even where those imaginaries participate in the making of an image of (sociotechnical) nations. The timeline of the sociotechnical imaginary appears to be one where the future hangs over the present, the

[1] Brillat-Savarin, The Physiology of Taste; or, Transcendental Gastronomy, trans. Fayette Robinson (Philadelphia, 1854), 25.

past is forgotten. Considering the past as well as the future in discussions of the sociotechnical imaginary furthermore results in a vision of nation that is deeply Camp, lending what would otherwise be understood as "low-class" or "poor taste" a degree of respect often reserved for high culture.

Performing Pasts and Futures

Cecchini's performance, *Carne e Spirito*—literally "flesh and spirit" but perhaps more accurately "body and soul"—unfolds as follows:[2]

We begin with a stage decorated to invoke the rolling hills of the Tuscan countryside: yellowed grass covers the floor while a fallen tree trunk lies at the front of the stage. Craggy grey boulders punctuate the scene. Two figures challenge this rural idyll. First, to the right of the stage, is Cecchini, sharpening a breaking knife and dressed in a butcher's apron. Rather than the standard starched white, Cecchini's uniform is coloured with a vertical green stripe running from right shoulder to armpit and a red stripe from left shoulder to armpit. The traditional white separates the two. In the mirrored vision of the audience, Cecchini appears as a walking Italian *tricolore*.

The second figure is a recently slaughtered pig, hung by its hind legs from unseen rafters and left hovering a few feet above a bundle of straw and sawdust, into which its blood continues to gather. The effect is the suggestion of a carcass offered from the heavens above. The last decade has seen a continued downward trend in rainfall across both Northern and Southern Tuscany.[3] In Cecchini's Tuscany it might not rain cats and dogs, but it does seem to rain swine. In a dislocated performance of his daily labour, Cecchini slices open the belly of his supporting actor, scooping out purple, grey, and pink entrails. What follows is, presumably, less day-to-day. As he separates the offal by organ, Cecchini recites verses from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. "[...] io venni men, così com'io morisse. E caddi come corpo morto cade," he cries. "I fainted as if I had met my death. And then I fell as a dead body falls."[4]

The performance was the opening act of the third annual *MAD Symposium,* a three-day event dedicated to discussion on the production, protection, and culture of food and dining, founded by René Redzepi, chef and co-owner of the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen, David Chang, founder of the Momofuku restaurant chain and food brand, and the former editorial team of the now discontinued food magazine *Lucky Peach*. In 2013, the symposium theme was "Guts", dedicated to "visceral stories of strength, persistence, risk-taking, and embracing failure"[5]. Cecchini, who owns and operates a small butchery shop in Chianti, was performing on behalf of Slow Food International.

Somewhat at odds with its own international status, Slow Food defines its mission as the preservation of local methods, practices, and values related to food and cookery. The organisation first emerged in the late 1980s as a loose coalition of individuals, figure-headed by Carlo Petrini, whose first course of public action was to protest both (and sometimes interchangeably) what they considered to be the fast-foodification of Italian cities and the Americanisation of Italian life.[6] Today, Slow Food has established a much more significant presence, not

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hcn1TOYxLuE (accessed 18 July 2023).
[3] Cf. Michael Märker et al., "Assessment of Land Degradation Susceptibility by Scenario Analysis: A Case Study in Southern Tuscany, Italy", Geomorphology, 93/1-2 (Jan. 2008), 120–129.
[4] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia: Inferno*, V, 141–142. English: *The Divine Comedy,* trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York, 1991), 81.
[5] https://madfeed.co/mad-symposium/mad-symposium-3-guts/ (accessed 18 July 2023).
[6] Cf. Florence Fabricant, "A Faintly Amused Answer to Fast Food", *New York Times*, 15 Nov. 1989, C10; Roberta Sassatelli and Federica Davolio, "Consumption, Pleasure and Politics: Slow Food and the Politico-Aesthetic Problematization of Food", *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10/2 (2010), 202–232, at 206.

only in Italy but across the world, involving itself in the production of European Union food and safety legislation and organising food archiving projects based on the premise that both tradition and locality are being lost in an estranged, globalised world.[7] Above all, the organisation champions some notion of the "authentic" or "natural", in this instance through the altogether inauthentic and unnatural fusion of Dante and butchery in a mock Tuscany located in Copenhagen.

Sociotechnical Imaginaries, Gastronationalism, and Camp

Introduced by Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim in their text *"Containing the Atom: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Nuclear Regulation in the United States and South Korea"*, and elaborated upon in *"Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power"*, the sociotechnical imaginary encompasses "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology"[8]. Put differently, the sociotechnical imaginary is an animating force, one that organises and guides systems of meaning relating to the production or practice of science and technology. Important here is that the transfer of influence does not only move one way. While imagining in the present provides a foundation for what might come, collective understanding of what the future might look like, might require or deny, shapes the way science and technology projects are funded, practised, or popularly interpreted today.

If we are willing to accept that food production and preparation constitute a kind of specialised knowledge, involving specialised instruments and technologies—and we should—then it would be fair to characterise the vision evoked by Cecchini, and, by extension, Slow Food, as a kind of sociotechnical imaginary. Where Cecchini and Slow Food depart from our standard case studies of sociotechnical imaginaries is that, rather than envision some promising future as a means of informing practice in the present, they turn to a vision of the past. The future is an ominous foreboding here.

Where we wish to be is where we have already been.

Gastronationalism, too, relies on collective vision. In her study of foie gras, Michaela DeSoucey identifies Gastronationalism as an extreme form of Gastropolitics, with conflicts unfolding between social movements, state regulators, and cultural markets where food functions either as a boundary object or an obligatory passage point between interests.[9] The similarity to sociotechnological imaginaries lies in the way in which the word "gastronomy" itself simultaneously refers to identity, geography, and practice. Gastronomy is, in other words, an example of the way in which visions of "ought" shape what "is", with Gastronationalism encompassing those instances in which transformations from vision to practice are applied to populations themselves as well as to the protection or policing of those populations.

Existing literature on Gastronationalism has, in the main, focussed on overt expressions of xenophobia

[7] Alison Leitch, "Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity", *Ethnos*, 68/4 (2003), 437–462 at 440.
[8] Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim (eds.), *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power* (Chicago, 2015), 4.
[9] Michaela DeSoucey, *Contested Tastes: Foie Gras and the Politics of Food* (Princeton, 2016).

or cultural supremacy.[10] What has been missing in such accounts, however, is the acknowledgement that chauvinistic gestures may just as well emerge out of a genuine sense of affection for one's home and perceived traditions as they may out of disdain (or disgust) for the Other. To champion one's own nation is not necessarily the same thing as diminishing or disregarding another. Nations exist in both enactment and reception, and as becomes perhaps most clear in celebrations of nationhood by stateless or dispossessed populations, performances of national identity can be vital responses to the project of nation-building in the postcolonial era.[11] Furthermore, not all celebrations of nation freeze national identity in some past time. The rise of national branding decouples contemporary nations from their pasts. A nation can, for example, claim to be the future of global business without having to address its business dealings or policies to date.[12]

It is important, I think, not to characterise Gastronationalism simply as disingenuous efforts to mask bigotry in the seeming low states of food culture, or even as necessarily deliberate celebrations of national identity. More helpful, perhaps, would be to understand Gastronationalism as symptomatic of homogenisation under capitalism. Alison Leitch, for example, notes similarities between activism around endangered species and activism around preservation of national identity, arguing that commonalities are a consequence of late capitalism and its associated tending towards sameness. Nor are all efforts to protect food and food traditions necessarily Gastronationalistic. The same geographical indication (GI) labels that dissect maps also provide small-scale producers with a way to maintain relevance in an increasingly globalised market. Explaining Gastronationalism, however, is not the same as justifying it. To note that GI labels take the relationship between nature and nation as self-evident is not to say that GI labels exist to consolidate some form of national identity. Both can be strengthened at once, sometimes in seeming contradiction.

What the above efforts do have in common, however, is the affect of Camp. A notion coined by Christopher Isherwood, defined by Susan Sontag, and further developed by writers such as Richard Dyer and Morris Meyer, Camp encompasses an aesthetic quality that transforms the serious into the joyous without compromising any of its gravity. Often conflated with Kitsch, the Camp sensibility or mode is one that "rests on innocence. That means Camp discloses innocence, but also, when it can, corrupts it."[13] Indeed, Camp and Kitsch describe entirely antithetical outlooks. Where Kitsch transforms high culture to low and celebrates debasement, to embrace the Camp is to approach one's interests with respect if not reverence. As a sensibility rather than theory or framework, Camp is not applied to an object of study but instead emerges out of a subject.[14]

The "Camping" of imaginaries around food production—that is, addressing their aest-

[10] Cf. Troy Bickham, "Eating the Empire: Intersections of Food, Cookery and Imperialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain", *Past & Present*, 198/1 (2008), 71–109; Michaela DeSoucey, "Gastronationalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union", *American Sociological Review*, 75/3 (2010), 432–455; Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta, *Food, National Identity and Nationalism: From Everyday to Global Politics* (New York, 2016); Wynne Wright and Alexis Annes, "Halal on the Menu? Contested Food Politics and French Identity in Fast-Food", *Journal of Rural Studies*, 32 (2013), 388–399.

[11] Cf. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88, at 78; Sahar Tavakoli, "The Empire Strikes Through: The Drawing and Redrawing of Political Maps in the British Museum", *100 Histories of 100 Worlds in One Object*, 2021, https://100histories100worlds.org/the-empire-strikes-through (accessed 21 July 2023).

[12] Cf. Somogy Varga, "The politics of Nation Branding: Collective identity and public sphere in the neoliberal state", *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 39/8 (Oct. 2013), 825–845, at 827.

[13] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York, 1966), 275.

[14] Cf. ibid., 281.

hetics or affect rather than their material output—allows for an exploration of how efforts to protect the local instead come to reassert and reify the national without cynically reducing such technological systems to the result of, at best, false consciousness or, at worst, outright chauvinism.

I don't mean to say that we are not at risk of feeding nationalism on a diet of protected food. Indeed, I would like to suggest that the danger of feeding nationalism is greater for the fact that it can be born out of—as Camp would indicate—"harmless fun".

A Race to the Finish

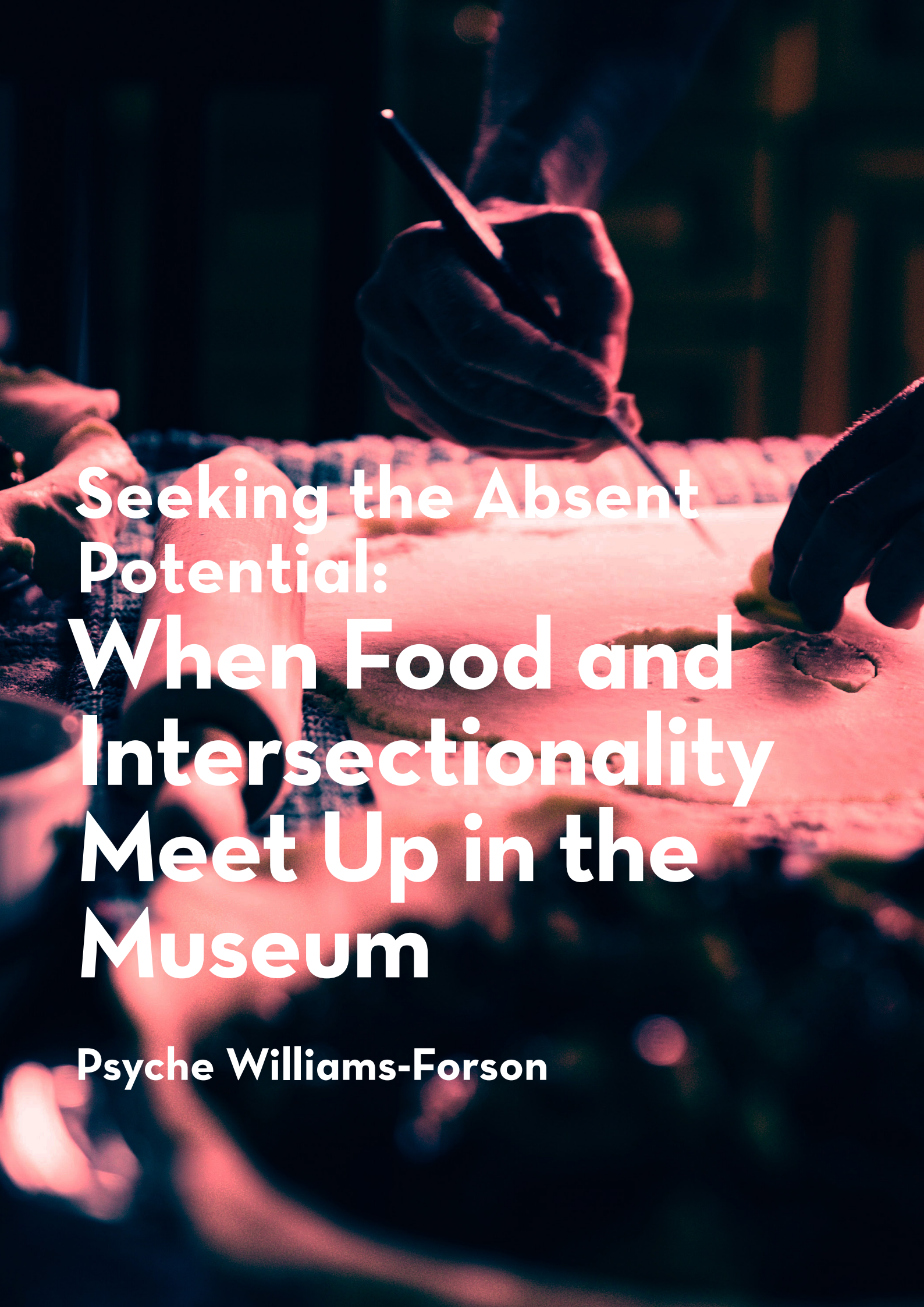
Ending his recitation of 14th century poetry, Cecchini addresses his audience directly with an urgent message. "In a world ever more filled with supermarkets", he says from behind a butcher's block topped with a stomach, a liver, and a bone saw, "and with butchers who are practically considered a race in extinction, and perhaps they actually are, I am convinced that butchers instead are actually the most delicate ring in the food chain, the most delicate link [...] But I am here as well to tell you that I do not want my world to end. I am here to tell you that butchers are an essential part in the world of food. They are my race."[15]

To treat categories of race and profession as like kinds, is, needless to say, simplistic if not downright offensive. Sliced and arranged between paragraphs of theory in a scholarly paper, the unhomeliness of the statement is clear. In a different context, however, the message might be more alluring. Despite its carnage and its problematic equivalences, Cecchini's performance is joyous and nonthreatening. One could choose to interpret *Carne e Spirito* as saying nothing more than that a local butcher's craft is only meaningful in a specific context. Camp allows affection and danger to exist side by side. Camping our sociotechnical systems affords the inclusion of a kind of dangerous politics stripped of its own warning signs.

There is an irony to Cecchini's verse of choice. Found at the end of the fifth canto, the lines are drawn from a response given by the soul of Francesca da Rimini to a troubled Dante who asks "in the time of gentle sighs / with what and in what way did Love allow you / to recognize your still uncertain longings?"[16] This is the second circle of Hell, containing the souls of those damned for their lustfulness. In contrast to its modern connotation, to be lustful in the Republic of Florence was not to be driven by lecherous desire but to love recklessly. To put contemporaneous ideas into contemporary words, what Dante asks the noblewoman is how we know ourselves to be smitten when love is a sentiment that exists beyond reason, and with what language we might express affection when, as a feeling, it exists beyond the realm of explanation. My own questions here have not been entirely dissimilar: How do we know ourselves to be advocating for exclusion when our advocacy takes on the celebratory affect of Camp, and in what manner do we dismantle structures that would further facilitate xenophobia and national insularity when commemorating community?

[15] See n. 2.

[16] *Divine Comedy*, 80 (see n. 4).



Seeking the Absent Potential: When Food and Intersectionality Meet Up in the Museum

Psyche Williams-Forson

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Seeking the Absent Potential: When Food and Intersectionality Meet Up in the Museum

ABSTRACT

"Seeking the Absent Potential: When Food and Intersectionality Meetup in the Museum," discusses the author's role in the creation and development of an exhibition for the National Library of Medicine at the National Institute of Health (USA) exploring food and foodways in the early American Chesapeake Region. Rejecting traditional museum practices and approaches to this topic, this essay details the evolution of the exhibition using material culture, intersectionality, and the "radical political potential" of queer theory to reveal how we can find the "absent potential" in the wake of meager resources that center Black voices and lives.

CV

Dr. Psyche Williams-Forson is professor and chair of the Department of American Studies at the University of Maryland College Park. She is the author of *Eating While Black: Food Shaming and Race in America* (winner of the James Beard Media Award for Food Issues and Advocacy, 2023); co-editor of *Taking Food Public: Redefining Food in a Changing World* (2013); and, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (winner of the Elli Köngäs-Maranda Prize, American Folklore Society). She is known nationally and internationally for her work in building the scholarly subfield of Black food studies, and she publishes and speaks extensively on topics such as Black women, food, and power; food and literature; food and sustainability; race, food, and design thinking; eating and workplace cultures; as well as the historical legacies of race and gender (mis)representation, with (and without) food.

Keywords

Black Culture, Exhibition, Intersectionality, Material Culture, Museum

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Reading the objects for their uses—intended and unintended—from an intersectional point of view should be undertaken as a central feature of queering the museum.

In the fall of 2014, I was invited by the Exhibition Program at the National Library of Medicine (NLM) at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland (USA), to be the lead curator of an exhibition that explored the early North American nation's first First Lady, Martha Washington, and food. I was told that the project could consider "cultural influences on food and diets during the Colonial era, and the role of women and enslaved peoples in preparing food for the family and/or plantations, among other themes". For reference, I was pointed to our colleagues at the library at Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington, the nation's first president, and a slaveholder, because they "have done good research on the topic and will be collaborating with us" (NLM email).

The Exhibition Program at NLM produces special displays, traveling and online banner exhibitions that "explore the social and cultural history of science and medicine" (NLM website). The travelling banner exhibitions are seen in public libraries, medical and academic libraries, and cultural centres nationwide and worldwide. This point was especially interesting to me because it suggested that this exhibition could have a far-reaching impact on informing the world about the roles of enslaved Black women and men and their contributions to the evolution of American cuisine—a departure from the narratives and stories that are usually told about African Americans in the United States.

In their edited collection, *Queering the Museum,* Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton maintain that "museums are both shaped by and shape the social-political landscapes in which they operate and are thus implicated in systems of power and privilege".[1] Given this, the power to convey a message of African American creativity, survival, and resilience was critically important to me as the visiting curator. More importantly, there was an opportunity here not to centre on slaveholders but, instead, on those who endured and resisted the horrors of chattel slavery using their talents with food and in other areas of domesticity. I refused to be a party to reinforcing traditional narratives of white power and Black subservience, despite Black enslavement.

For over twenty years, I have been studying the material lives of African Americans, particularly their relationships to food and food cultures—acquisition, preparation, and consumption, among other aspects. I am not a full-time museum professional but an academic trained in museum practices who believes that

[1] Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton, *Queering the Museum* (Abingdon, 2020), 107.

exhibitions need to involve theory, practice, and reflection. Or, in short, praxis. Working from this point of view, I sought to "queer" the exhibition, which according to Sullivan and Middleton basically means to deviate from whatever is perceived to be the norm or the traditional, the dominant way of seeing things, specifically to push back on homophobia and transphobia. At the same time, there was an investment in shifting the narrative to challenge traditional power systems that viewed enslaved women, men, and children—of all ages, abilities, and sexualities who worked in either (or both) the plantation household or the fields—as mere powerless servants. Consequently, I embraced the position suggested by theorist Cathy Cohen, who rejects the label "queer" because it is "fraught with unspoken assumptions which inhibit the radical political potential of this category"[2].

Building on Cohen's notion of freeing the radical political potential of queer, I noted, too, what performance theorist Sandra Richards refers to as the "absent potential" that was embedded in the description of the library's goals for the exhibition: "to explore the nation's first First Lady, Martha Washington, and food" and "to consider [...] the role of women and enslaved peoples in preparing food for the family and/or plantations, among other themes". I wanted to do more than consider this possibility, I wanted to make it a central focus of the exhibition.

Further thoughts about this interpretive project mirrored one of the central claims found in *Queering the Museum*. That is, "museums can, and should be active participants in the articulation of critically engaged and socially transformative ways of knowing, being, [and] doing".[3] And, this must be a goal because

From collection practices to interpretations, object placement, cataloguing and labelling resources, and more, almost all museums have been, and continue to be, complicit in replicating and reproducing inequitable power relations.

Sullivan and Middleton include curatorial practices that can and should be queered to include "juxtaposing disparate objects; tracing object biographies; cataloguing diverse interpretations and multiple ontologies facilitating the emergence of previously marginalised voices, knowledges, and forms of engagement; and acknowledging [...] structural violence"[4]. As the curator, I did not want to see inequitable power relations perpetuated, and arguably, neither did the NLM, which is probably why they invited me to lead why they invited me to lead the project.

Meals Tell Stories/ Martha Washington + Food – The Planning Meeting

The exhibition design team and curators held their initial creative kick-off meeting in December of 2016 to explore potential narrative approaches for the project. During the first half of the meeting, I sat silent, listening to all of the perspectives and ideas. We walked into the meeting with the tentative title of the project being *Martha Washington +* Food, and the goal of leaving the meeting with an agreed-upon storyline that would inform and focus the research and development of the content and project schedule.

As I sat there silent, taking notes, I thought about how intersectionality would inform this project but also about what was happening in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia during that time. The more I thought about these things, the more I saw the potential to do more. Our exhibit's completion would coincide with the opening of the Smithsonian Institution's

[2] Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?", GLQ, 3/4 (1997), 437-465, at 451.
[3] Sullivan and Middleton, (see n. 1), 109.
[4] Ibid., 110.

National Museum of African American History and Culture, so there would be much attention on African American life in the United States. Additionally, in 2016, George Washington's historic site, Mount Vernon, would be unveiling its own exhibition about the lives of the enslaved who lived there and how their lives were inextricably bound to the Washington family. *Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon,* explored "the personal stories of the people enslaved at Mount Vernon while providing insight into George Washington's evolving opposition to slavery". This is significant not only because of its timing in terms of the opening of the "Blackseum" but also because the timing of Mount Vernon's exhibition would limit our access to certain assets for our installation.

And here is why the "absent potential" is important.

We need to look and think beyond the norm—those ideas, sources, terrains, identities—taken as an ideal.

Sandra Richards makes this argument when she writes how scholars (and practitioners) largely ignore the African-American contribution to theatre and performance as if it is a disreputable second cousin to literature. She says, "Literature locates 'authentic' cultural expression on the terrain of the folk, but the folk have articulated their presence most brilliantly in those realms with which literature is uncomfortable, namely in areas centered in performance."[5] When the folk insists upon performance being upheld as a form of criticism then they are seeing the absent potential. Richards maintains that we have to be willing to analyse "the latent intertexts likely to be produced in performance, increasing and complicating meaning"[6] and to also see the various possible opportunities for interpretation. In drama, people embody a character through performance. In real life, however, these embodied performances are called living, and we can analyse the voices and experiences of those less often heard to spotlight and bear witness to the complexities of their lives.

Because my material culture practices and thinking are often from an intersectional point of view, I revel in reading the latent intertexts of performance where varied and complicated meanings reside but are overlooked. An intersectional point of view enables thinking beyond levels of oppression when it comes to Black people's work with food. Intersectionality is both a conceptual tool and a theory created by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. She argues for seeing subjectivity/identity as dynamic, messy, and intertwined, but never singular. More specifically, intersectionality examines the context-driven ways in which axes of power intersect and cohere. Additive models of identity (female, or Black, or middle-class, or coloured, or disabled, or ...) are limiting and tend to categorise people in terms of varying degrees, or levels, of oppression. For example, a friend told her daughter, "If you are going to be Black and a lesbian with a disability, please do not also be poor because that makes you way too oppressed." It is because identities are complex, shifting, and oftentimes contradictory with interdependent components that are lived and experienced, that intersectionality is a useful model for ferreting out a whole bunch of interpretations about food and people of the African Diaspora.

I was thinking these thoughts as I looked through the packet of select readings that we had assembled. While thumbing through the cookbook *Dining with the Washingtons: Historic Recipes, Entertaining, and Hospitality from Mount Vernon,* I came upon a page titled, "A Cooks Day" [sic]. This day in the life of the

[5] Sandra L. Richards, "Writing the Absent Potential. Drama, Performance, and the Canon of African American Literature", in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.), *Performance and Performativity* (London and New York, 1996), 64–88, at 65.
[6] Ibid.

cooks—one male and one female cook and her husband—can be found within the first fifty pages of the book, highlighting its importance in the overall story of the household cookery. It was a perfect scenario around which to tell a set of stories and to queer the archive and the museum exhibition. We left that meeting with the idea that "meals tell stories", and that we would tell these stories through the lens of "A Cooks Day, 1790s" [sic].

Meals Tell Stories/ A Cooks Day

The cook's diary page begins with the enslaved waking long before daybreak to begin preparing the day's meals. At 4:00 a.m., Nathan, one of Washington's two enslaved cooks, wakes up in his bunk in the male quarters. He washes, shaves, and dresses for the day. And, in a nearby cabin, the other cook, Lucy, and her husband Frank Lee, the butler, also wake up and prepare for work. By 4:30 a.m., the day is well underway, wood is gathered, and buckets of water are filled. Milk is obtained from the cows, eggs from the hens, flour, salt, lard, or butter is readied for biscuits. Even though I only had this one page from which to tell this particular story, aspects of this narrative occurred at several other plantations and farms, large and small, northern and southern, throughout the nation. Aside from this one page from the diary, the remaining sources reflected white experiences (the Washingtons and their guests), including documents (probate records, diaries, and other papers), and artifacts. Most of these sources came from the collections of the History of Medicine Division at the NLM, extant reference books and articles, and material artifacts housed at the historic Mount Vernon plantation. So, how would I tell the story of the changing technologies that affected the everyday lives of Black people in bondage in the new nation using such scant resources? Where would I get the rest of my sources from? What artifacts would be best for telling these stories?

One approach is to read the gaps that are left by the archives. That is, the documents that are not there and the information that is not in the written record. Artifacts also reveal gaps. Because an object, though created for one purpose, can have a number of other uses and meanings. Reading these materials from the perspective of African American lived experiences would lay bare even more of what is not there but can be interpreted, challenged, and revealed. In her article, "The History of Technology, the Resistance of Archives, and the Whiteness of Race", Carolyn de la Pena writes: "Much scholarship [tends] to focus on big questions concerning the relationship between technology and cultural values or social change, rather than examining cultures and social relations embedded in the technologies themselves. Within this landscape, there are few built-in mechanisms for producing scholarship that prioritizes race".[7] De la Pena also suggests that the real difficulty "occurs in tandem: difficult-to-locate sources combine with our own tendencies to fail to see all that can be found in what is available, and to creatively *engage* and *interpret* it in order to draw race out of the archive"[8].

De la Pena challenges us to dig deeper and read more carefully—work that involves risks. She says, "In order to write the histories on race and technology that are missing, we must, again, become the historians who ask about what is missing from the record and the archives. We have to be willing to talk about race, even when our subjects did not", and to contextualise race and other variables as intertwined even in history. Yes, as she goes on to say, "it is a risk, and it can lead to overreaching in one's

[7] Carolyn de la Pena, "The History of Technology, the Resistance of Archives, and the Whiteness of Race", in *Technology and Culture,* 51/ 4 (2010), 919-937, at 921.
[8] Ibid., 923, original emphasis.

analysis, misreading the data, and simply getting things wrong. [But] it can also open up essential new terrain in the study of how racialized thinking has shaped technological innovation and influenced our engagement with its objects in the United States".[9]

It is a risk that we must take because exhibitions should engage and use a plethora of voices, including those whose lives are interlocked by gender, race, class, sexuality, and even age but are also routed in oppression and systemic degradation.

Consequently, by using that one diary page, I wanted us to view the historical record through the lens of Black people, not to fill in what is missing but to push the evidence to move beyond the absences that were created to hear what is being said when we read the sources for Black lives, cultures, and histories. Only then, I knew, would we be engaging the absent potential.

Creating the Exhibition Script and Choosing the Objects: The Water

Over the next several weeks, the title of the project changed from *Meals Tell Stories/Martha Washington + Food* to *Meals Tell Stories + A Cook's Day.* Arrangements were made with Mount Vernon's Loan Collection Program to view assets that would be available to us for use in our exhibition, and a visit to the historic site was set up to survey these objects. We were told in advance that out of concern for safety and preservation, we would be given "no more than eight Washington original objects" but that an additional fifteen or so representational objects would be available to us (email correspondence 2015).

On a hot, muggy day during the first week of June, the project manager, exhibition registrar, and I visited the historic Mount Vernon. As we waited to go to the storage facility, I walked around the home that sat overlooking Virginia's Potomac River. Though I had been to the site many times before, this time, I was struck by an overwhelming sadness because as I looked at the river, I realised that my early ancestors were surrounded by bodies of water that ushered in both the horrors of bondage and the possibilities of freedom. The water made it possible for early Africans to be driven into the brutal mouth of enslavement, and for some, it was a way of escaping those same atrocities either because they jumped overboard during the Middle Passage, died during the journey, or escaped once they reached new shores and realised their fate. It was also a barrier to those who wanted to escape Mount Vernon but could not because they were surrounded by water and had no means of leaving. Still, for others, it was a means of escape. At that moment, I knew that I had to talk about freedom as central to this narrative because of the multiple meanings that the water represented.

The river was a source of food that provisioned the household—fish and other water edibles as well as coffee beans. African foods and livestock made their way to the Americas during the Middle Passage when Europeans stocked and restocked slave ships. Africans came to the Americas not only with intimate memories of traditional culinary practices and cuisines but also with particular regionally based agricultural knowledge. These, and other, skills were called upon to benefit New World markets, especially the tending of new kinds of crops. African women, in particular, prepared foods both during transport and once they arrived using their customary methods and borrowing from Native Americans and Europeans. They introduced plants and herbs such as tamarind, hibiscus flowers, and the kola nut to improve tastes and fight diseases resulting from vitamin deficiency.

[9] Ibid., 926.

Fig. 1: Faux fish. Photo taken by the author, 2016.

So, the exhibition begins with an illustration of how slave labour was operationalised in the eighteenth century along the seacoast. Mount Vernon's location on the river not only influenced what foods the Washington family were able to enjoy but also would have had an impact on the busyness of the servants and staff as they prepared for any guests who might visit. In the inchoate society of the 1700s, those enslaved were expected to perform a wide range of jobs that were hard, laborious, and unrelieved by time of day. These were the stories that had to go into the interpretation, and I had to rely upon historical documents, paintings, and other art owned by the Washington estate, documentaries, Washington's planter diaries, and my own research on Black women and food to tell an intricate, yet complex and powerful story.

Exhibition Design—Banners and Display Cases

It is difficult to tell a messy story in a linear way. However, exhibitions are by nature hierarchical in how the information is presented, so as to enable audiences to digest the content. And though we were not presenting this interpretation chronologically, we did want it to flow smoothly and to tell several overlapping stories. So, we began designing the banners, banner texts, call-out sentences, captions, and caption titles with Mount Vernon as the anchor primarily because of the research and interpretive work conducted there. But, we also gathered data from other plantations in the Chesapeake region, given that recent historical and archeological approaches had brought to light scholarly evidence on the daily lives of the enslaved and those landowners who benefited from the institution of slavery.

By January 2016, we had settled on the penultimate title, Fire & Freedom: Food & Enslavement in Early America, because enslavement was hellacious, and the word "fire" reflected the contradictions embedded in the hearth as a place for cooking and also for administering terror. Having settled on this, we began pulling out the elements we needed to look at them together as classes of information and for consistency, length, and messaging. There were six banners in all, and each had a title, text, and a focus statement to capture the viewer's attention. These were pulled from the banner text I had written. Lastly, they contained an image and caption titles. The exhibition contained three products—a cluster of travelling banners that were initially set up in the main hall of the NLM at the National Insitute of Health; a larger set of the same banners that were installed immediately outside the library entrance as well as inside; and, display cases.

Fig. 2: *Fire & Freedom* traveling banner display in the main hall of the NLM. Photo taken by the author, 2016.

Banner 1 – Introduction to the Exhibition

The flow of the exhibition follows the logic posited by Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie, whose TED talk highlights "the danger of the single story". That is the story that tells only one narrative of a person or group of people, thereby becoming the defining truth, no matter how false it may be. Part of an intersectional framework requires that this approach be debunked and that the myriad stories of Black lives come to the fore. This was the aim and intention of the exhibition. As the story unfolds, the viewer is made aware of the various enslaved persons who help to ensure that the meals are complete—the butler, Frank Lee, the teenage waiter, Marcus, and the cooks, Lucy and Nathan. By contextualising the cook's day within a larger discussion of the labour and technology of enslaved peoples, we can convey the various ways in which power informs meals, from food acquisition to preparation, presentation, consumption, to disposal. We can also highlight the "fires" of enslavement, especially in the kitchen, to reveal how brutal it was and how the work was often forced with threats of humiliation, separation from family and community, even rape or death.

The introductory banner and texts set the stage by communicating how meals can tell us how power is exchanged between and among different peoples, races, genders, and classes. It also highlighted the Chesapeake region of the United States and the ways in which early Europeans relied upon the labour of Native Americans on whose land they had settled, of enslaved Africans who had been forcefully brought to this new world, and of indentured servants for life-saving knowledge of farming and food acquisition. This banner explained how settler colonialists used these human resources, the natural environment, and maritime trade to gain economic prosperity. Finally, the first banner indicated that Mount Vernon was simply being used as an example for exploring how labour was extracted and the ways that foods tell stories that are beyond taste and sustenance.

To convey this story, the banner included the frontal image of the plantation site, a maritime compass, a body of water, and the visage of an enslaved woman that mirrored the image on the diary page of the "Cooks Day" schedule. The banner colour was a warm brown to imply the relatively somber tone of the narrative but also to prove to be inviting to viewers.

Banners 2 and 3 – Producing Food / Negotiating Power

The focal point for banners 2 and 3 were the waterways. Consequently, over half the banner is a dark blue representing the power of the Potomac River and maritime trade and activity. Banner 2 highlights how power was negotiated between George Washington and the enslaved. Though Washington used the Potomac River for an extensive fishing enterprise and grew food for sustenance and commerce, he relied upon the skill, labour, and knowledge of the enslaved at Mount Vernon for much of his wealth. Slaves used this position as a negotiating tool to bargain for labour arrangements that provided some degree of autonomy. To emphasise the possibility of this type of negotiation taking place, we used a portion of the painting *Washington at Mount Vernon, 1797,* by Nathaniel Currier (1852), which depicted an enslaved man talking to a white man on horseback as if explaining a situation. We extracted this image to illustrate the possibility of negotiating.

Rivers and waterways were important transportation routes and commerce centres. Markets would feature food and luxury goods like imported coffees, but they also contained human chattel, in the form of a seemingly inexhaustible source of slave labour—men, women, and children. The waterways were also a means by which some enslaved people sought to escape by secreting themselves aboard boats and steamships. To emphasise all of this, the banner contains images of slave ships as well as some of the goods that could be found in the market. The display

case that sat below the larger banner contained an advertisement for a 1769 slave auction that took place in Charleston, South Carolina, as well as faux fish and coffee beans that were created to illustrate some of the foods that were bought and traded (Fig. 3 and 4 Banners 2 and 3 "Producing Food/Negotiating Power")

Fig. 3: Large display banner representing power negotiations by an enslaved man and other representations of maritime commerce. Photo taken by the author, 2016.

Fig. 4: The display case flanking banner 2 held a book with an article on the "Natural History of Coffee", a glass plate on cocoa beans, and faux coffee beans to complement the discussion of maritime trade. Photo taken by the author, 2016.

The layout of these first three banners echoed the content focusing on enslaved Africans whose culinary labour included work both inside and outside of the slaveowner's home and the plantation at large. These installations were outside of the actual exhibition space to reflect the public sphere. Once visitors entered the library, they came into contact with the remaining three banners, all of which presented information about what took place within the domestic realm.

Banners 4, 5, and 6 – The Kitchen and the "Big House"

Banners 4, 5, and 6 moved the visitor into the library installation space, and they emphasised activities that took place inside the home. Banner 5, "Kitchen Contradictions", illustrated the chaotic, noisy, smoky, smelly, sweltering, and dangerous nature of an early American kitchen, particularly hearth cooking. Using the "Cooks Day" entry, we stated, "Enslaved cooks, such as Lucy and Nathan at George Washington's Mount Vernon, started work at 4:00 A.M." The work of preparing tasty meals over an open fire required hard and precise work. This latter point was necessary to state because it is and was often believed that Black cooks lacked culinary skills and simply intuitively knew how to cook. Research indicates the fallacies of this thinking, with records showing that several of the most esteemed early African cooks—especially those who cooked for presidents and the wealthy—were trained in and throughout Europe. Skill and precision were also necessary because if not, cooks and scullions, even children who were being watched, could get burned. If cooks unintentionally misgauged fire temperatures, they might destroy food. The changing seasons could spoil meats and turn vegetables to mush.

The "Kitchen Contradictions" banner held an image taken from the painting *Washington's Kitchen, Mount Vernon* by Eastman Johnson (1864). The central image is taken from a painting that shows an enslaved

Fig. 5: Banner and display case inside the library. Photo taken by the author, 2016.

woman cooking while hunched over a hearth, while a child sits on her lap. The banner colour is in hues of red to highlight the heat and fire of the hearth and the situation. The display case for this banner contained three assets from the eighteenth century Washington collection—a mixing bowl, rolling pin, and knitting needle. This juxtaposition of objects was to emphasise that the work of the enslaved was never done. Plantation cooks like Lucy used the large bowl to make biscuits or bread. They would leave the dough to rise for hours, and then thump it, sometimes using the side of a rolling pen, for another hour until it was smooth and elastic. While she waited for the dough to rise, she was expected to knit stockings and tend to the other food that was simmering over the hearth. And she might do these tasks while watching small children and/or supervising other kitchen workers.

Other assets in the display case included a recipe book from the NLM collection—*An Enumeration of the Principal Vegetables, and Vegetable Productions*, "by the Author of *Some Information on the* Use of Indian Corn". We turned the book to the page holding a recipe on buckwheat, one of the many crops grown by George Washington. Buckwheat was a seed favoured for its nutritional value, and its dried leaves were used for tea. Buckwheat was also ground into flour to make griddles and pancakes using a large bowl like the one Lucy worked with.

Fig. 6: Installing the large mixing bowl. The display case would also include the knitting needle and the rolling pin. Photo taken by the author, 2016.

An adjacent display case held a similar, smaller bowl included from the Mount Vernon collection. This bowl was suggestive of the kind used by "Old Doll", an aged slave who was sometimes still summoned to the kitchen to make mint water and any other food. George or Martha Washington would often summon their enslaved, regardless of the hour, to create a menthol drink to help relieve a sore throat, upset stomach, or indigestion. A recipe book entitled, *The Compleat City and Country Cook: or, Accomplish'd Housewife.,* by Charles Carter (1732), with an entry for "A cordial mint water", was used as well as faux springs of mint and an imaging plate depicting the mint herb from the NLM.

The fifth banner, titled "Labored Meals", highlighted ways in which slavery put in place social and culina-

Fig. 7: The adjacent display case held a smaller serving bowl used for mint water and other foods, along with faux springs of mint and an imaging plate depicting the mint herb. Photo taken by the author, 2016.

ry boundaries that separated those who ate from those who worked. Though food preparation is often described as a labour of love, capable of strengthening family ties, this was less so for those enslaved—regardless of gender, age, or health—who prepared food. Regardless of the kind of plantation or farm on which one found themselves, the work day might never end because they were always at the beck and call of the landowner, as mentioned above in relation to Old Doll.

In the fields, for example, women and men may have killed hogs, shelled corn, planted and gathered crops, dug holes for fence poles, and other seasonal agrarian duties. But, they were usually also cooking and/or possibly tending to smaller children and doing other tasks. Seasons primarily mattered inside the house because they determined the kinds of work needed to be done—from decorating interiors to preparing meals for birthdays, holidays, and even everyday activities. And similar to the work in the fields, there were always multiple tasks to be completed.

In the kitchen, scullions handled the menial tasks. Maids and houseboys assisted the head cook, who was often male, as was the butler who made sure that meal times were coordinated. But how do you convey all of this, and especially the demarcation and meal-taking boundaries, in an exhibition with banners and display cases? On the banner, we used a painting courtesy of Mount Vernon Ladies' Associates titled, *The Washington Family/La Famille de Washington,* by Edward Savage and David Elkin (1798). The painting illustrated the Washington family taking a meal while an enslaved person stood just off to the right in the shadows. The banner caption reads: "Servants' skills were invaluable, as they worked as the conduits between dining rooms and kitchens in wealthy homes. At Mount Vernon, under the watchful eyes of Martha Washington, Frank Lee, the enslaved butler, supervised the maids and the waiters to ensure the table was properly set, and the house meticulously cleaned."

Fig. 8: The display case contained a faux chicken prop with feathers to illustrate how a cook or scullion would chase, catch, and chop off the head of a chicken. It was accompanied by cookbooks with recipes for fried and fricasseed chicken dishes. Photo taken by the author, 2016.

The display case beneath this banner contained a faux chicken prop with feathers to illustrate how a cook or scullion would chase, catch, and chop off the head of a chicken. Sometimes, the animal would jump around without a head, spurting blood everywhere. After pulling pin feathers, the remaining hair would be singed, and the chicken would be dressed—gizzards and liver removed—and either trussed (tied) so it cooked evenly on a spit, or the carcass cut into pieces for frying. One of Martha Washington's reci-

pes required a pound of butter to be used for chicken that is fried or fricasseed (a process of stewing pieces of meat in butter). In contrast to a single cooking method, Lucy Lee, one of several enslaved cooks at Mount Vernon, most likely blended African, Native American, and European styles of preparation and cooking, thereby leaving her imprint on Washington family meals. This discussion is illustrated by recipe books found in the NLM collection.

Another object in the neighbouring display case was a dinner plate from the Mount Vernon collection, which we used to represent how enslaved butlers like Frank Lee, of the Washington estate, mastered invaluable management skills. More than ensuring the costly porcelain was simply well maintained, butlers like Frank helped safeguard the Washingtons' ability to entertain in genteel society. This included orchestrating meals with symmetry and exactitude. For example, at the conclusion of each course, he removed soiled napery to reveal a new tablecloth. To illustrate the complexity of the tasks, we included

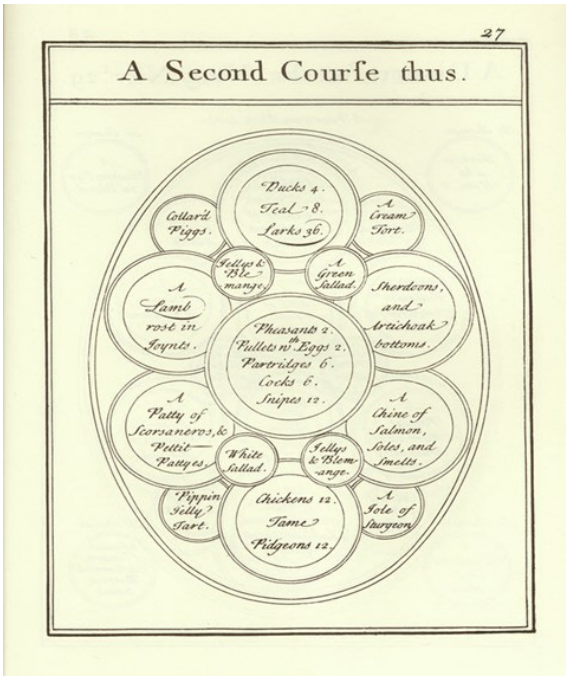

Fig. 9: "A Second Course thus", taken from *The Complete Practical Cook: or, new System of the Whole Art and Mystery of Cookery*, by Charles Carter (1730)). The rendering shows what a table filled with the second course of a genteel meal would look like. Courtesy National Library of Medicine, 2016.

a page from *The Complete Practical Cook: or, new System of the Whole Art and Mystery of Cookery* by Charles Carter (1730), showing what a table filled with only the second course would look like.

The final banner was simply titled "Freedom", emphasising the truism that slavery was never benevolent or kind regardless of an enslaved person's status on the plantation or farm. Though some were afforded extra privileges, including the opportunity to travel outside the plantation to earn income from selling leftover foodstuffs or their own crops in the marketplace, the opportunity to wear fine clothes; or to have various tools (hammer, nails, fishing rod, and even a shaving razor), they knew they were not free. Despite these minor advantages, and no matter how appreciated or "well-treated" they were, enslaved people still longed for freedom.

And slaveowners did everything they could to remind enslaved people of their status as property. For example, during his presidency, George Washington repeatedly rotated, albeit illegally, enslaved Africans between their official household in Philadelphia and the Mount Vernon plantation. This circumvented the Gradual Abolition Act, which allowed those slaves who remained in Pennsylvania for more than six months to gain their freedom. Rotating them consistently reset the point when the clock on their residency began.

Despite these shenanigans, enslaved men and some women and children found ways to escape, often using the distractions provided by holidays and celebrations. For example, it is said that noted chef Hercules, considered George Washington's favourite "capital cook", used the occasion of 22 February, 1797, Washington's sixty-fifth birthday, to escape and was never heard of again. Similarly, in her book *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge,* historian Erica Armstrong Dunbar tells the story of how Judge,

having lived in New York and Pennsylvania and thus being familiar with the Gradual Abolition Act, ran away rather than be sent back to Virginia. In May of 1796, during the day's festivities, the 22-year-old Judge walked out of Washington's mansion in Philadelphia and onto a ship that would take her to New Hampshire. She lived in New England, albeit often uncomfortably, rather than allow the Washingtons to re-enslave her.

Several assets were used to tell this story, most of them not directly centred upon escape, though the historical record is replete with runaway ads. On the banner, for example, we placed a copy of the runaway advertisement for Marcus, a young house servant who served breakfast at Mount Vernon. This illustration provides some tension for the discussion of foodways in the Washington household because, despite constant references to the slaveholders' supposed benevolence, the advertisement serves as a reminder that no enslaved person wanted to be in servitude. Consequently, the aim of these assets was to illustrate and highlight the tensions between Black realities about freedom and slaveholders' propagandistic narratives of enslavement as beneficial and kind. Also on the banner are a picture of famed chef, Hercules, images of genteel serving dishes, random calendar date entries, and finally, the image of the enslaved woman servant to mirror and bookend the opening banner.

The display case accompanying banner 6 also contained several assets from the Mount Vernon collection, including a shaving razor, a grease skillet, a metal canister, a sugar bowl with lid, and other genteel dining ware, as well as two books from the NLM—Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation by J. M. Toner (1888) and A Treatise on Tobacco, Tea, Coffee, and Chocolate by Simon Pauli (1746). I will briefly explain the

MARCUS,

One of the House Servants at Mount Vernon,

ABSCONDED on the second instant, and since has not been heard of. He is a young lad, about 16 years of age, a bright mulatto, dark blue eyes, long back hair, about 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high, and of a slender make. He had on when he left this place a coat and jacket of dark mixture, black and white, and black breeches—but having various suits, one of black, and another of very light drab, it is uncertain which of these he now wears. Originally his name was Billy, and possibly he may resume the same. It is very probable he may attempt to pass for one of those negroes that did belong to the late Gen. Washington, and whom Mrs. Washington intends in the fall of this year to liberate—the public are therefore warned against any such imposition, as he is one of those negroes which belong to the estate of Washington P. Custis, Esq. and held by right of dower by Mrs. Washington during her life.

I will give Ten Dollars Reward to any person who shall apprehend the said negro and lodge him in some safe gaol, upon producing me a certificate to that effect; and will also pay all reasonable charges over and above this reward, for the delivery of him to me at this place.

Ship Masters are hereby forewarned not to take on board Marcus; and those who are found to secret or harbour him, will be punished as the law directs.

JAMES ANDERSON.

Mount Vernon, April 11——28

Fig. 10: Runaway advertisement for Marcus, a young house servant who served breakfast at Mount Vernon. "Marcus", *Philadelphia Gazette*, 16 May, 1800.

Fig. 11.1, 11.2: A shaving razor, grease skillet, and metal canister were among the assets used to create an ironic point of view about slavery and freedom.

rationale for their inclusion and, by extension, how they serve to offer juxtaposing meanings and interpretations.

Under this banner of "Freedom", I have already discussed the runaway ad for Marcus and explained that some enslaved chose escape over extra privileges like making money, regulated movement off the plantation or farm, and even a small convenience like razor shaving, an extra privilege afforded someone with Hercules' stature among the other enslaved men. We included this tool along with the grease skillet and a canister because Hercules was "as highly accomplished a proficient in the culinary art as could be found in the United States". As a result, he had the role of overseeing Washington's kitchens. He would have mastered hearth cooking, knowing the proper amount of oil and lard to fry foods, and how to wield long-handled skillets to deftly maneuver hot pans while roasting meats. The grease skillet is a utensil placed below the spit to catch drippings from pieces of meat roasting on the hearth, including a turkey, and the canisters were used to contain flour, rice, corn meal, and other dry goods to keep out insects and vermin. They had a tight-fitting lid, making them difficult to access, and were closely guarded and carefully rationed by Martha Washington or another person in charge of the house servants, quite possibly Hercules.

A fine china sugar bowl and saucer were included because, for one, they were among the assets available to us. As a result, I had to conceive of a story and tie them to the theme of the exhibition and, more importantly, to the notion of Black freedom. Given that George Washington followed rules of polite society and behaviour at his dinner table, large meals would feature desserts of fruits, nuts, and sweet wines. Later, the Washingtons would enjoy a light repast of bread and leftover meat known as "tea", which was viewed as a necessary social performance among the social elite and often included actual tea drinking, complete with a sugar drop, an expensive commodity. Some of the enslaved even knew of the value of this performance and would earn enough money to purchase teacups and a teapot or kettle for themselves. Though their tea was taken without sugar, the performance and the implements alone would have elevated their status among those in the enslaved community.

The evidence of such sweetness, however, often belied the actual tensions that existed in the dining room. Amidst the finery of the china and other tea-taking trappings was the dire reality that the enslaved had no such time for extended leisure. While the Washingtons relaxed, the slaves' day continued. They could not eat until the dining room table had been cleared and cleaned, the teatime meal prepared and the tea brewed, the wood chopped for the next day, the dough kneaded, and the hoecake batter ready for breakfast the next morning. Thus, even amidst the beauty of the table setting lay a stark reality for those who served and were rendered invisible by their race and social status. Nonetheless, many enslaved people used their perceived indistinctness to their own advantage. While tending to the comforts of the plantation family, enslaved women, men, and children simultaneously studied these habits of dining and leisure both to avoid punishment and to be aware of opportunities for them to escape.

Oh Freedom!

During enslavement, food and freedom were often intertwined. Not only did some slaves use moments of distraction during celebrations to escape, but many more actually used food as a means of resistance. The forced labour of slavery affected everything from work routines to food distribution, preparation, and consumption. The enslaved often registered rebellion by feigning illness, breaking tools, or finding other ways of sabotaging production. In the kitchen, food could be slowly cooked, burned, and even filled with poison. This kind of culinary maneuvering is a

central aspect of our African American culinary heritage. From the African imprint left on the foodways of the New World to the creative means of acquiring, producing, and distributing foods, African American foodways have never been simple or as one-dimensional as the single story implies.

Ultimately, this exhibition highlighted some of these dimensions and dynamics, and as the lead curator, I was intent on not telling a singular narrative and on introducing visitors to new ways of reading material objects that are often only interpreted from the standpoint of the moneyed and the wealthy.

Reading the objects for their uses—intended and unintended—from an intersectional point of view should be a central undertaking in queering the museum.

Pushing past the unbalanced power relations that often exist in interpretations should be another goal. Lastly, seeking to read the gaps and being purposeful and radical in doing so by allowing oneself to dive deep into the research to ensure accuracy and balance will go a long way toward finding the absent potential in most museum exhibitions we might curate.

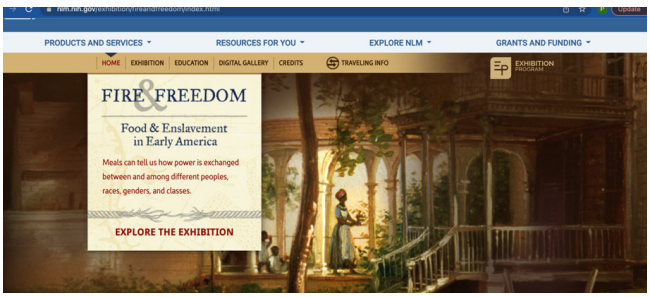

Fig. 12: The landing page for the online exhibition *Fire & Freedom: Food & Enslavement in Early America*, URL: https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/fireandfreedom/index.html (2016)

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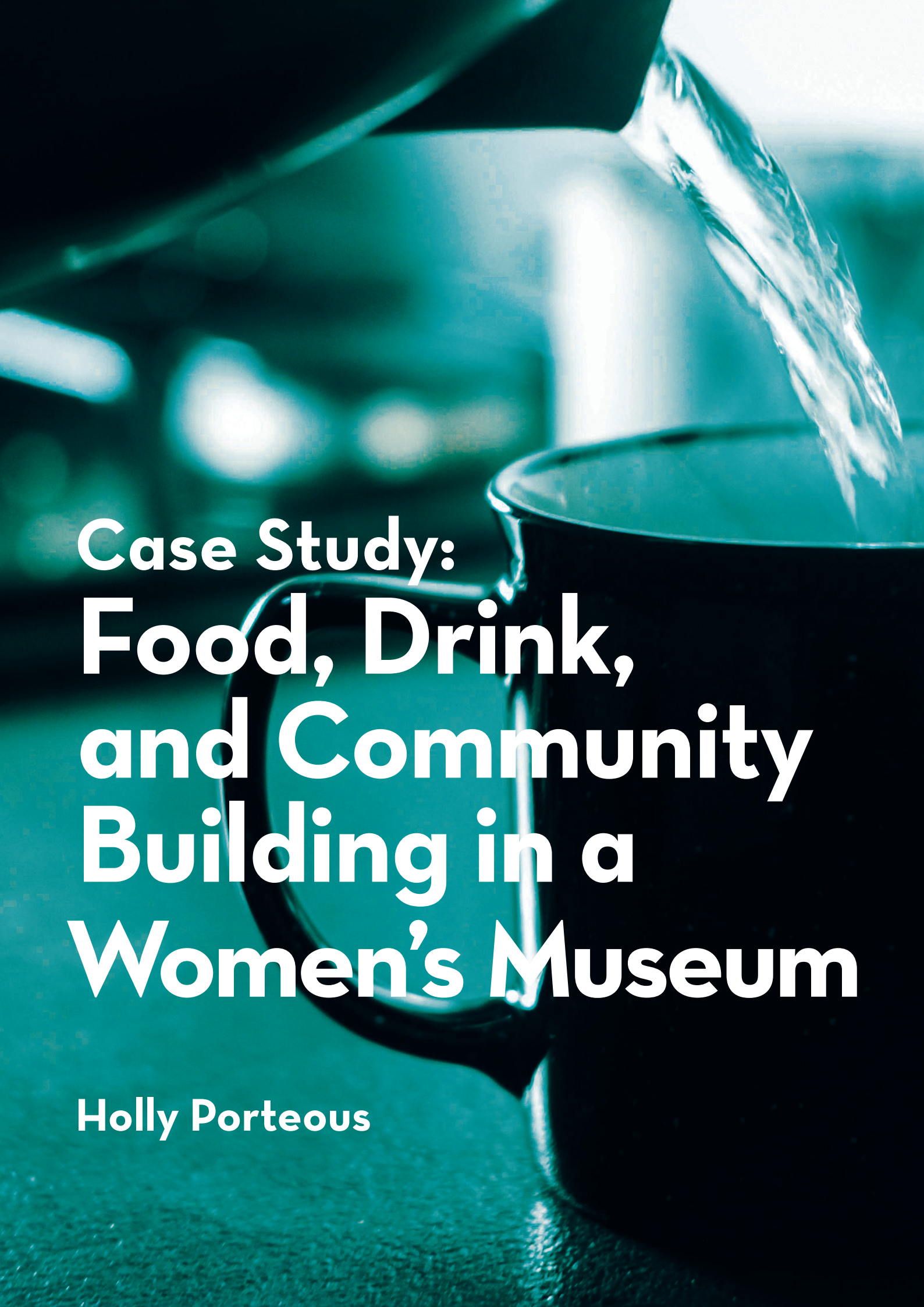

Case Study: Food, Drink, and Community Building in a Women's Museum

Holly Porteous

Holly Porteous

Case Study: Food, Drink, and Community Building in a Women's Museum

ABSTRACT

This short case study discusses how museums can draw on hospitality practices to create an atmosphere of inclusivity and mutual support. In-depth research into a women's museum, archive, library, and community space has highlighted how food and drink has been used as part of feminist organisational practice to foster a sense of openness and welcome. Our case study organisation sought to empower a diverse community of women, and the symbolism of food and drink was integral to helping museum staff and volunteers to form strong connections with visitors and service users. Building a sense of community in this way is an invaluable way for cultural organisations such as museums, which can sometimes be seen as intimidating by those experiencing vulnerability, to connect with a broader range of people.

CV

Holly Porteous is based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. Her research focuses on how inequalities are produced and reproduced, particularly from a gender/feminist perspective. After finishing her PhD on gender in Russia (University of Glasgow, 2014), she worked on projects studying how migrants from former state socialist countries made themselves secure in Scotland. Her most recent project, Transformative Servicescapes and Consumer Vulnerability, looks at how service spaces have the potential to ameliorate vulnerability.

KEYWORDS

Food, Hospitality, Material Culture, Community

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For some people, being able to come along and have tea and something to eat is really, really important – from a social aspect but also, you know, for people who are living in food poverty, to be able to come and have that.

Introduction

This short case study of a women's[1] museum, archive, library, and community space shows how food and drink has been used as part of feminist organisational practice to foster a sense of welcome, inclusivity, and community in a museum environment. As an organisation which sought to empower a diverse community of women, and particularly those experiencing vulnerability, the symbolism of food and drink was integral to helping museum staff and volunteers to form strong connections with its visitors and service users.

Background

Our two-year project, *Transformative Servicescapes and Consumer Vulnerability*[2], explored why our case study organisation in the UK was a transformative space for many women and nonbinary people. Methods included interviews with sixty-four staff/volunteers/service users/networks; material from two arts-based workshops; analysis of the organisation's archives, website, and social media; and participant observation. Quotations used below are from women and nonbinary people who held various (and often multiple) roles in the organisation, with boundaries between volunteer and service user often blurring.

Food and Drink as Welcome

Some of our research participants who had little experience visiting museums and cultural spaces spoke about experiencing trepidation on engaging with our case-study organisation based on a feeling that museums, libraries, and other cultural spaces were somehow "not for them" (for example, due to literacy issues or migrant status). The museum used the powerful gesture of an outstretched cup of tea to create a sense of welcome for everybody coming into the space:

> *"Just being offered a cup of tea is such a simple thing, but if you go in somewhere and you're immediately noticed and said hi to, and asked if*

[1] The museum space foregrounds women and nonbinary people's history and experiences. It is inclusive of all genders but holds some events which are only for women (inclusive of trans women) and nonbinary people.

[2] See Holly Porteous, Kathy Hamilton, Juliette Wilson, and Sarah Edwards, *Transformative Spaces: Final Report from the Project 'Transformative Servicescapes and Consumer Vulnerability'* (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 2022), https://doi.org/10.17868/strath.00081812 (accessed 25 July 2023).

you're all right, and offered a cup of tea. [...] You're made to feel welcome, and you're spoken to."
(Alex, staff member and former volunteer/service user)

Being greeted and offered a hot drink by a friendly face as soon as you walk into the museum space is a small gesture, but our research found that our case study successfully used such small acts to facilitate deeper, long-lasting connections and have a transformative impact on the lives of service users.

The Symbolism of Material Objects

Symbolic material objects linked to food and drink were also highlighted in our research as part of a process of connecting with the women's museum and its work. For example, a giant teapot used at group events was described as "quite an icon" by one participant. China teacups were also important for building community and for making people feel valued in the space as they felt "special":

"They would feed back and say the cups are really special: getting to use that proper china is really special. And we had that all the time, any time there was a conference or an event, that they had the proper china. People rave about it."
(Eve, community development worker)

These material objects often held nostalgic memories, especially for older museum users, of crockery only brought out on special occasions by a mother or an aunt. They were metaphors which helped to visually anchor the organisation's core goals around welcome, acceptance, and reclaiming women's history.

Community Building through Food and Drink

Embedding food and drink-based practices also helped to create an informal museum environment where groups felt comfortable to engage with material culture during workshops and events.

"For some people, being able to come along and have tea and something to eat is really, really important—from a social aspect but also, you know, for people who are living in food poverty, to be able to come and have that. And for people who are living on their own, to be able to share lunch with someone is really important. I think having that really helps create the atmosphere, and I think it helps people then relax and be able to enjoy [the space/event]." (Rebecca, staff member)

Rebecca notes that these practices helped to address social issues such as food poverty or social isolation. They also helped service users relate to one another and facilitated an atmosphere of mutual support, even within museum events:

"It's not a one-way support network, and quite often, as you know yourself, when you get a tea break and you all go into the kitchen and you're all blethering to each other is when the real magic happens, you know?"
(Iris, service user)

"Really, it was the cups of tea, like genuinely, because... [...] I felt like it was sort of a channel to talk to people and to get that kind of range of experience. And because it allowed a different kind of conversation to happen."
(Poppy, service user/volunteer)

As Poppy observes, sharing a cup of tea with somebody helps to put people at ease and makes space for dialogue. It also created a useful time for staff/volunteers to offer individualised further support (for example, with literacy or English as a second language) where necessary.

Finally, the symbolism of food and drink also became important to maintaining the museum's connections with service users during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the physical space closed, people missed the convi-

Fig. 1: An illustration of research findings from the project by Jenny Capon

viality of in-person events, but spoke to how a sense of connection and community was maintained through food and drink. For example, care packages including teabags were posted to attendees of online events, and service users were invited to meet for lunch online via video call.

Conclusion

This case study highlights the potential for museums and community spaces to use hospitality practices and the rich symbolism of food and drink to welcome visitors and service users, create an atmosphere of inclusivity and mutual support, and to encourage a sense of community in cultural organisations that can sometimes be seen as intimidating, especially by those experiencing vulnerability.

Although there is not scope here to fully explore the theoretical implications of the research findings, we note that feminist scholarship has understandably problematised hospitality practices[3], which have been associated with traditional gender roles that relate normative femininity to work in the domestic sphere (and, by association, justify women's exclusion from the public sphere). Our case-study organisation reframed the traditional offering and sharing of food and drink as a feminist practice and a means of increasing social inclusion.

[3] Cf. Maurice Hamington, "Toward a theory of feminist hospitality", *Feminist Formations, 22/1* (Spring 2010), 21–38.

Lunchables. Über den Zusammenhang von Essen und Klasse

Philipp Hagemann
Alexander Wagner

Philipp Hagemann, Alexander Wagner

Lunchables. Über den Zusammenhang von Essen und Klasse

ABSTRACT

In einem gemeinsamen Projekt setzen wir uns mit dem Verhältnis von ‚Essen' und ‚Klasse' in und außerhalb des Bereichs familiärer Sorgebeziehungen auseinander. Den Kontext des Workshops haben wir genutzt, um unsere Forschungspraxis und Vorhaben allgemein zu beschreiben und damit verbundene Fragen, die uns bei der Arbeit beschäftigen, mit den Teilnehmenden zu diskutieren. Der vorliegende Text fokussiert am Beispiel von deutschen Lebensmittelwerbungen insbesondere der 1990er und 2000er Jahre den Zusammenhang von ‚Werbung' und ‚Klasse' und arbeitet mit der These, dass Werbespots dieser Dekaden aus verkaufsstrategischen Gründen zwar keine Lebenswelten in materiell prekären Bedingungen darstellen, Hinweise auf die prekären Lebensbedingungen ihrer potentiellen Zielgruppe dennoch nicht ganz vermeiden können und dabei gezielt und auf potentiell schädliche Weise in Eltern/Kind-Beziehungen eingreifen. Die Analyse dieser Werbespots nehmen wir zum Anlass, über ermächtigende Interventionsmöglichkeiten im Zusammenhang von ‚Essen', ‚Klasse' und ‚Sorge'-Arbeit nachzudenken.

CV

Philipp Hagemann (* 1991 in Ahlen) und Alexander Wagner (*1987 in Hoyerswerda/DDR) sind in sogenannten „bescheidenen Verhältnissen" sozialisiert, kommen aus kulturwissenschaftlichen Disziplinen, arbeiten zusammen an Themen postkolonialer Theorie und wollen gemeinsam ihr textnahes Denken in andere Handlungsfelder hineinsteuern und damit Techniken und Methoden der Geisteswissenschaften kritisch-produktiv durcharbeiten.

Philipp Hagemann arbeitet als wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter im Fachbereich Philosophie an der Universität Paderborn. Er hat Englisch und Philosophie studiert und für beide Fächer als Lehrkraft an einer Gesamtschule gearbeitet. In einer Qualifizierungsarbeit setzt er sich mit den Implikationen rassismuskritischer Theorie und Bildungsarbeit für den schulischen Philosophieunterricht auseinander.

Alex Wagner ist wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter (Neuere deutsche Literaturgeschichte) an der Universität Wuppertal. Er hat über Kontinuitäten des deutschen Kolonialismus zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus promoviert. Seine Betätigungsfelder sind u.a. das Verhältnis von Literatur und Wissen, Geschlechter- und Mediengeschichte, Postkoloniale Theorie, Populärkultur, die Grenzbereiche von Kunst und Wissenschaft sowie die Geschichte der DDR und Ostdeutschlands nach der „Wende".

Momentan sind sie mit dem Aufbau des Forschungslabors für Interventionen gegen Klassismus (*FLINK) beschäftigt.

KEYWORDS
Klasse, Ernährung, Care, Mutter-Sohn-Beziehung, Lebensmittelwerbung, Prekariat, Fertiggerichte, Intervention, *FLINK, Lunchables, Kinder Überraschung

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In unserem Projekt geht es auch darum, derartiges Wissen und ähnliche Überlebensstrategien sichtbar zu machen, ihnen Wert beizumessen und sie in einem ermächtigenden Sinn neu zu kontextualisieren.

In unserem Projekt geht es um das Verhältnis von ‚Essen' und ‚Klasse', allgemein und insbesondere in familiären Sorgebeziehungen, die wir aus verschiedenen Perspektiven untersuchen. Den Workshop haben wir genutzt, um unsere Forschungspraxis und unsere Voraussetzungen grob zu beschreiben und anschließend mit den Teilnehmer_innen über die Zusammenhänge und Fragen, die uns bei der Arbeit beschäftigen, ins Gespräch zu kommen. Dabei haben wir den Charakter der Veranstaltung als Workshop ernst genommen und fühlten uns eingeladen, auch einige vorläufige Gedanken aus unserem Arbeitsprozess und unserem Nachdenken mit den Anwesenden zu teilen. Unsere wichtigste gemeinsame Voraussetzung ist unsere Herkunft aus sogenannten „einfachen Verhältnissen". Wir sind in unterschiedlichen Kontexten sozialisiert worden: als jüngstes von vier Kindern in einer nordrhein-westfälischen Kleinstadt aufgewachsen, sowie als einziges Kind einer alleinerziehenden Mutter in einer schwer von den Umbrüchen der sogenannten „Wende" getroffenen ostdeutschen Stadt groß geworden. Zugleich haben wir beide in unserer Kindheit und Jugend erlebt, wie ein wichtiger Teil der Eltern/Kind- oder in unserem Fall der Mutter/Sohn-Beziehung über die Versorgung mit Lebensmitteln hergestellt wird und welche besonderen Umstände diese Konstellation prägen, wenn sie in prekären materiellen Verhältnissen angesiedelt ist. Zusätzlich zu den zweifellos negativen Aspekten, der Scham und den vielen diskriminierenden Erfahrungen hat unsere Herkunft aus einkommensschwachen Verhältnissen zugleich unsere Wahrnehmung geschult und dabei geholfen, eine bestimmte Sensibilität für klassistische Formen von Diskriminierung zu entwickeln, auch wenn diese sehr subtil in größere Zusammenhänge eingebettet sind. Das Gleiche gilt für bestimmte Formen von Wissen und Überlebensstrategien im Arbeitsfeld alltäglicher Krisen.

Im Moment sind wir mit dem Aufbau eines *Forschungslabors für Interventionen gegen Klassismus* beschäftigt, dessen Abkürzung *FLINK auf einen in Deutschland recht erfolgreichen On-Demand-Lieferservice und Ausbeutungsakteur der Gig-Economy verweist. Mit dieser Struktur sind natürlich Fragen verbunden, die weit über den Umgang mit Nahrungsmitteln hinausreichen. Wir haben unserer Arbeit ein Set von Kategorien zugrunde gelegt, die unser Handeln und Nachdenken zu jeder Zeit anleiten. Diese sind Geschlecht, Materialität, Macht, Raum, Wissen, ‚race', die Reflexion unserer eigenen Vorannahmen und Positionierungen sowie der Menschen, denen wir begegnen und der Kontexte, die wir betreten plus n.

Das n ist eine mathematische Variable, die markieren soll, dass es sich um eine erweiterbare Menge handelt. So sind wir beispielsweise besonders an den räumlichen Aspekten der Beziehungen interessiert, die wir untersuchen. Familienbeziehungen etwa sind eng verbunden mit den Lebensbedingungen in Mietwohnungen. Raum als Sphäre der (Re-)Produktion von ‚Wissen' und Machtverhältnissen spielt ebenso eine wichtige Rolle bei der Konzeption von Ausstellungen und anderen Formen der Vermittlung. Das gilt genauso für die Materialität der Nahrungsmittel und der Dinge, die zu ihrer Herstellung, ihrem Kauf, ihrer Zubereitung und ihrem Verzehr nötig sind, wie auch für die materiellen Gegebenheiten einer Ausstellung, einer Internetseite, einer Publikation oder anderer Mittel der Herstellung und Verbreitung von Forschungsergebnissen. ‚Wissen' hat ebenfalls eine große Bedeutung. Dabei denken wir vor allem an bestimmte Fähigkeiten, Praktiken und Kenntnisse, die wir vorläufig als Überlebensstrategien im Arbeitsfeld der Krise beschreiben würden. An unseren Müttern und anderen Personen konnten wir sehen und lernen, wie sie versuchten, trotz geringer finanzieller Möglichkeiten spezifischen Anforderungen gerecht zu werden, vor allem aber, der Rollenerwartung einer ‚guten Mutter' zu entsprechen, die eng mit essbezogenen Handlungen und dem Kontext häuslicher Care-Arbeit sowie mit Vorstellungen von ‚Emotionalität' und ‚Liebe' verbunden ist. Die entsprechenden Praktiken und ihre Ausbildung waren oft von einer Scham darüber motiviert, was eine ‚gute Mutter' ist. In unserem Projekt geht es auch darum, derartiges Wissen und ähnliche Überlebensstrategien sichtbar zu machen, ihnen Wert beizumessen und sie in einem ermächtigenden Sinn neu zu kontextualisieren. Das geschieht etwa, indem gesammelte Lifehacks und Techniken für andere in einer Weise zugänglich gemacht werden, die ihre Urheberinnen und die Umstände, aus denen sie hervorgegangen sind, benennen, erklären und als wertvoll erkennbar machen kann.

Ein wichtiger Teil unserer Arbeit besteht in der Konzeption von Interventionen. Darunter verstehen wir Aktionen und Prozesse, mit denen ‚Wissen' eingreifend verändert werden soll und die immer eine praktische, öffentlich sichtbare Dimension haben. Sie werden von Recherchen und weiterführender Auseinandersetzung begleitet, sind von größeren Agenden und Programmen gerahmt und flottieren frei zwischen diversen Theoriesets. Zur Vorbereitung derartiger Formate ist die Analyse jener Phänomene wichtig, die die Wahrnehmung der relevanten Kontexte beeinflussen. Dazu zählen konkrete Erfahrungen betroffener Personen ebenso wie populärkulturelle Artefakte und Klassen- und Ernährungswissen in medialisierter Form, etwa in der Gestalt von Produktdesigns, Werbung und Vertriebsstrukturen. Hierfür beschäftigen wir uns neben Gesprächen miteinander, mit anderen Betroffenen und Expert_innen aus verschiedenen Feldern, mit ernährungsbezogenem Material jeglicher Art, seien es konkrete Lebensmittel, historische und aktuelle Fernsehwerbung, die Verpackungen von Fast Food, Forschungsliteratur, Kochbücher, Fotos von Familienfeiern, Speisekarten und so weiter. Um hier eine unserer theoretischen Fragen, die schwierige Rekonstruktion subtil in mediale Zusammenhänge eingebetteter Klassenverhältnisse, ein wenig zu erläutern, haben wir uns für ein Fertigessen für Schulkinder entschieden, das in den USA bis heute populär ist, in Deutschland dagegen nur eine kurze Lebensdauer hatte: die *Lunchables*.

Bei *Lunchables* handelt es sich um abgepackte Mahlzeiten der inzwischen zum Kraft-Heinz-Konzern gehörenden US-amerikanischen Firma Oscar Mayer. Angeblich wegen einer Krise im Absatz von Bologna-Wurst entwickelten vier Designer_innen 1985 eine neue Möglichkeit, dieses und ähnliche Fleischprodukte attraktiver zu vermarkten. Zugleich boten sie mit den fertigen Arbeits- und Schulpausenmahlzeiten amerikanischen Müttern eine zeitsparende Alternative zu selbst gekochtem Essen bei ihrer

eigenen Versorgung und der ihrer Familien.[1] Das Produkt kam 1988 auf den Markt und macht nach nunmehr dreieinhalb Jahrzehnten noch immer den weit überwiegenden Anteil am Segment vorportionierter Lunchangebote aus (2018 sollen es 84 % bei „combination lunches" für Kinder gewesen sein[2]). Im Schuljahr 2023/24 wird es sogar erstmals Teil des School Lunch Program in den USA sein, sodass Schulen ihren Schüler_innen *Lunchables* auch selbst in den Kantinen anbieten können.[3] Sollten Sie das Produkt nicht kennen, nehmen Sie sich vor dem Weiterlesen kurz Zeit, um sich mit der Zusammensetzung und dem Erscheinungsbild (z. B. online) vertraut zu machen.

Dieser in den USA weit verbreitete Akteur intervениert über seine Werbestrategien strukturell in die Beziehung zwischen Müttern, die nicht erst in den Marktstudien der *Lunchables*-Erfinder_innen als hauptverantwortlich für Schulmahlzeiten erkannt wurden, und ihren Kindern, für die diese Mahlzeiten bestimmt sind. Designrhetorisch knüpften die ersten Verpackungen an die bereits zuvor bekannten TV-Dinner an[4] und adressierten auf mehreren Ebenen das Zeitregime der Mutter, des Kindes sowie die esskulturellen Prämissen des Schulkontexts.[5] Zugleich würde sich ein genauer Blick auf diese Formen des verzehrfertigen Mitnahmeessens als Teil einer Geschichte militärischer Einsatzverpflegung für Einzelpersonen lohnen.[6] 1998 wurden *Lunchables* auch auf dem deutschen Markt eingeführt. Sie hatten dort sehr viel weniger Erfolg als in den USA und verschwanden spätestens 2007 wieder aus den Regalen der Supermärkte.[7] Das Angebot war in Deutschland sehr reduziert: Unserer Erinnerung nach gelangten nur zwei Basisvarianten der *Lunchables* auf den deutschen Markt, bei denen Putenschinken beziehungsweise „Pizzasalami" und Käse auf Cracker gelegt wurden. In den USA dagegen ist die Produktpalette sehr groß und wurde über die Jahre stetig erweitert, unter anderem mit vermeintlich gesünderen Bestandteilen als „Fun Fuel" oder Varianten mit Zimtschnecken und „mexikanischen" Nachos. Mit dem Heranwachsen der ersten Generation, die in ihren Schulpausen mit *Lunchables* gefüttert wurde, erschienen im Internet auch Reflexionen über die Esskultur beispielsweise junger urbaner, häufig klassenreisender[8] Akademiker_innen, etwa des beliebten Charcuterie-Boards. Dabei werden verschiedene Käse- und Wurstsorten sowie andere Delikatessen neben Crackern oder Brot dekorativ auf einem massiven Holzbrett angerichtet. Aus der Perspektive einer Kindheit mit *Lunchables* erscheint die Aufmachung und Zusammensetzung der Produkte dann in Memes und Reddit-Posts als deren „fancy" Variante für Erwachsene.[9]

[1] Vgl. https://www.sfgate.com/shopping/article/history-of-Lunchables-15369850.php (28. 7. 2023).
[2] Vgl. https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/11/lunchables-30-years-invented-history/576025/ (28. 7. 2023).
[3] Vgl. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/14/lunchables-school-lunch-programs und https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/13/business/lunchables-in-schools/index.html (28. 7. 2023).
[4] Vgl. etwa Michael Moss: *Salt Sugar Fat. How the Food Giants Hooked Us*. New York 2013. S. 192.
[5] Ebd., S. xxvi: „Lunchables, for one, are a marketing powerhouse, specifically designed to exploit the guilt of working moms and the desire of kids for a little empowerment. These ready-to-eat meals typically include pieces of meat, cheese, crackers, and candy, allowing kids to assemble them in whatever combination they desire. Food marketers wield pinpoint psychological targeting, and they didn't disappoint on the Lunchables ads: The ads stressed that lunch was a time for them, not their parents."
[6] Der englische Wikipedia-Artikel zu den *Lunchables* weist auf diese Verbindung zumindest implizit hin, indem die Lektüre des Artikels „Meal, Ready-to-Eat" unter „See also" vorgeschlagen wird: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunchables (28. 7. 2023).
[7] Den Flop der *Lunchables* in Deutschland vermerkt auch Oliver Nickel: „Haptische Reize in der Kommunikation effektiv gestalten", in: Tobias Langner, Franz-Rudolf Esch, Manfred Bruhn (Hg.): *Handbuch Techniken der Kommunikation. Grundlagen – Innovative Ansätze – Praktische Umsetzungen*. 2., vollst. überarb u. erw. Aufl. Wiesbaden 2018, S. 195–222, hier S. 211.
[8] Der Begrif der „Klassenreise" beschreibt den Prozess des Wechsels sozialer Milieus, ohne dabei eindimensional von Auf- oder Abstieg zu sprechen. Vgl. zum Begriff etwa Betina Aumair, Brigitte Theißl (Hg.): *Klassenreise. Wie die soziale Herkunft unser Leben prägt*. 3. aktual. u. erw. Aufl. Wien 2023.
[9] Eine kurze Bildersuche der beiden Begriffe genügt, um sich hierzu einen Überblick zu verschaffen.

Anhand des wahrscheinlich einzigen deutschsprachigen Fernsehspots für *Lunchables* aus dem Jahr 1998 wollen wir zeigen, wie intrikat die Rekonstruktion von Klassenverhältnissen in medialisierten Artefakten, die der Vermarktung eines Produkts dienen, zuweilen ist.[10]

Es liegt auf der Hand, dass Werbende in ihren Reklamedesigns die realistische Darstellung ‚armer' Menschen eher vermeiden werden bzw. liefert die Geschichte der Fernsehwerbung hierfür einen recht eindeutigen Befund: Der Fokus des werbenden Blicks liegt im Medium audiovisueller Produktwerbung in ‚westlichen' Kontexten historisch invariant auf einer bürgerlichen Mittelschicht und fällt damit weitgehend mit der Zielgruppe der in diesen Werbungen beworbenen Produkte zusammen. Anders gesagt: Das Bürgertum als Basis ‚westlicher' Einzelhandelskonsum- und Populärkultur ist marktlogisch folgerichtig auch Hauptadressat der in diese Kultur integrierten Werbung für ihre Konsumprodukte. Hiervon ausgehend richtet sich der Blick der Mittelschicht allenfalls nach oben und repräsentiert, sofern er nicht in bürgerlichen Verhältnissen verbleibt, am ehesten wiederum bürgerliche Vorstellungen vom Leben in höheren Klassen, etwa Phantasien vom Luxuslifestyle adeliger Menschen bei ihren (nicht zu) dekadenten Zusammenkünften. Werden davon abweichende Kontexte thematisiert, nutzen die Spots fast durchgängig deutliche Marker für den Inszenierungs- und Ironiegehalt des Gezeigten.[11]

Unser Befund ist, dass Produktwerbung in Deutschland so gut wie immer einen klassenpolitisch ‚mittleren' Blick einnimmt, der Abweichungen hinsichtlich ‚race', ‚gender' und ‚class' generell nur als von diesem Blick gefärbte Phantasie repräsentieren kann. Das gilt für Werbungen aus den 1990er-Jahren (dem Jahrzehnt unserer Kindheit), auf denen bisher unser Hauptaugenmerk lag, noch mehr als für aktuelle Beispiele. Zugleich unterliegt die Repräsentation von Klassenstrukturen in diesem Zusammenhang offenbar besonderen Regeln. Das mag daran liegen, dass zahlreiche Produkte sich eigentlich doch dezidiert an eine einkommensschwache Zielgruppe richten und gern an sie vermittelt werden sollen, die Werbesprache aber nicht über Methoden zur relativ diskriminierungsfreien und zugleich werbewirksamen Darstellung dieser Zielgruppe verfügt. Sichtbare Armut ist nicht gut für das Geschäft, birgt die Gefahr, als konfrontativ wahrgenommen zu werden, ist mit Negativität korreliert und auch für Betroffene werbetechnisch potenziell unattraktiv – sie widerspricht insgesamt dem Imperativ von Reklame, als ungebrochenes Versprechen eines ‚guten Lebens' fungieren zu müssen. Darüber hinaus entstammen die meisten Akteur_innen, die an der Produktion von Werbung beteiligt sind, bis heute eher der Mittel- als der sogenannten Unterschicht und verfügen also schlicht nicht über authentisches Erfahrungswissen vom Leben unter den Bedingungen dauerhafter ökonomischer Existenzangst. Und schließlich ist die Ausbildung der ‚westlichen' Konsumkultur stark mit Vorstellungen gesellschaftlichen Aufstiegs verbunden, sodass Darstellungen ‚armer' Menschen, die aufgrund ihrer sozialen Situation bestimmte Produkte konsumieren, werbestrategisch schlicht unlogisch sind. Werbung für Produkte für Menschen mit geringem oder keinem Einkommen spielt daher – für die 1990er- und

[10] Der Spot auf YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_KSv4exw-0 (28. 7. 2023).

[11] Etwa in der bekannten Mittelalter-Kampagne des Wurstherstellers Rügenwalder, in der ein offenbar außerhalb der Gesellschaft stehender Vertreter einer auf dem Land lebenden Reichsbürgersekte eine Gruppe Hausfrauen in einer Fleischerei überrumpelt, den Laden leerkauft, vielleicht auch ausraubt, und zu seiner um eine rote Mühle mit Wurstflügeln versammelten Community zurückreitet. Die Situation des blonden Hünen, der die verschreckte, nurmehr wispernde Verkäuferin mit wenigen Halbsätzen und einem eindringlichen Blick zur Herausgabe aller dicken Würste verführt, dockt unmissverständlich an Szenen aus Kolportageromanen, Liebesfilmen im viktorianischen Stil und ähnlichen Phantasien von der Überwältigung kleinbürgerlicher Frauen durch stattliche Landburschen an. Der Spot auf YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwYQMpd_eZA (28. 7. 2023).

2000er-Jahre und den deutschsprachigen Raum lässt sich das mit großer Sicherheit sagen – beinahe immer in Milieus ohne sichtbare Erfahrungen finanziellen Mangels. Die Spots sind damit natürlich trotzdem implizite Aussagen über Klassenverhältnisse, für unsere Überlegungen aber mehr noch als diskursives Feld interessant, auf dem die Möglichkeiten zur Verschleierung und subtilen Implementierung von ‚Klasse' als Differenzmarker in eigentlich bürgerlichen, ressourcentechnisch abgesicherten Diegesen ausgehandelt werden. Unsere Beobachtung ist nämlich, dass eine vollständige Unterdrückung von Hinweisen auf prekäre Verhältnisse den Spots doch nicht gelingt, respektive nicht gelingen kann, wenn den beworbenen Produkten diese Prekarität als konsumistische Wahrheit eingeschrieben ist.

Ein Beispiel hierfür ist besagter deutscher Spot für *Lunchables* aus dem Jahr 1998, der wie folgt abläuft: Wir schauen einer Frau, die gerade einen Blumenstrauß in einer Vase arrangiert, über die Schulter. Im Hintergrund liegt der Familienhund in seinem Körbchen. Ein Junge, offenbar der Sohn der Frau, kommt auf sie zu, greift routiniert und ohne dass eine Absprache mit der Mutter nötig wäre, nach einem flachen, in Butterbrotpapier verpackten Objekt auf der zwischen uns und ihm stehenden Anrichte und wendet sich mit einem enttäuschten Blick zum Gehen. Der Ort der Handlung – ein Einfamilienhaus mit offener Küche, von der eine französische Tür in den Garten führt – und die Tätigkeit der Mutter – das entspannte Verschönern des Heims mit Schnittblumen, während das Essen für den Sohn schon fertig auf der Anrichte liegt – weisen darauf hin, dass es hier weder an Geld noch an Zeit mangelt. Mütterliche Care-Arbeit, so zeigt der Spot, ist zunächst kein Problem von Stress oder finanzieller Not, sondern vor allem eine Frage von Anerkennung und in ihrem Gelingen vor allem vom Urteil der Betreuten abhängig, mithin also eine private Angelegenheit, die mit Wissen (das von der Werbung kommt) und Geld (für das beworbene Produkt) optimiert werden kann. So heißt es in der von einer ‚weiblichen' Stimme gesprochenen bildbegleitenden Rede: „Jeden Tag ein Pausenbrot ganz nach Kindergeschmack, das fällt der besten Mutter schwer. Wirklich keine leichte Aufgabe." Der Text öffnet das Bedeutungsspektrum der dargestellten Krise hin zu Problemen, die Mütter in weniger privilegierten Verhältnissen haben: Mangelnde Ressourcen, zeitlicher Stress, Mehrfachbelastung und psychischer Druck können es neben anderen Dingen schwer machen, dem eigenen Kind täglich eine ausgewogene und ansprechende, gesellschaftlich akzeptierte Mahlzeit zur Verfügung zu stellen. Passenderweise spart die Bildebene die beiden wichtigsten Parameter zur Beurteilung der kindlichen Enttäuschung aus: Wir sehen bis auf einen kurzen Anschnitt ihres Oberkörpers weder die Mutter noch wird uns gezeigt, woraus das Pausenbrot konkret besteht. Auch in den zwei folgenden Szenen, die den Jungen jeweils beim wieder mal unglücklichen Blick in eine typische deutsche Brotdose zeigen (während der Vater, als ‚gutes' Elternteil vom Sohn zum Abschied angelächelt, im Herrenanzug das Haus verlässt beziehungsweise ein Geschwisterkind, vom Regen nass, aus dem Garten kommt), sehen wir nicht, worüber das Kind sich genau ärgert. Die Imagination des mutmaßlich ‚langweiligen', dem Kindergeschmack zuwiderlaufenden Pausenbrots bleibt der Zuschauerin ebenso überlassen wie die Konturierung der Mutter als Person mit einem Körper und einer Psyche. Die mit „Zum Glück gibt's jetzt die neuen Kraft *Lunchables*" eingeführte Lösung veranlasst das Kind schließlich zu großer Freude über ein bestimmtes Produkt. Sein Blick geht jetzt genau in die Kamera und identifiziert uns als Beobachter_innen der Szene mit der ‚guten Mutter', die ihre Funktion als Bereitstellerin eines ‚guten' Schulessens, aus welchen Gründen auch immer, an eine Konsumentscheidung delegiert hat, das erworbene Produkt ohne weiteres Zutun an ihr Kind übergibt und dafür mit einem „Danke, Mami!" belohnt wird. Der Junge verlässt das Haus beschleunigt und wird dabei unterlegt mit demselben fröhlichen Hüpfsound, mit dem zuvor das Auf- und Abstapeln der Cracker, Käse- und Schinken-

scheiben als spaßiger Ausdruck kindlicher Individualität charakterisiert wurde. Im Hintergrund sehen wir den aus den anderen Szenen vertrauten Küchentisch, der nun zum ersten Mal gedeckt ist und so die potenziell fragwürdige Verpflegung des Kindes mit Fertignahrung mit einer Erinnerung an familiäre Essszenen verbindet und dadurch als ‚liebevoll', ‚selbst gemacht' und ‚mütterlich' kontextualisiert. Da auch erstmals kein anderes Familienmitglied (Hund, Vater, Geschwisterkind) im Bild ist, ist ebenso der Grad an Intimität im Mutter/Sohn-Verhältnis an dieser Stelle maximiert. Das gut gelaunte und bestens versorgte Kind als behauptetes Ziel mütterlicher Sorgearbeit stellt in der visuellen Inszenierung den wichtigsten Teil einer reparierten Beziehung dar, deren Problem vordergründig eine kommunikative Geschmacksverirrung war, die produktlogisch aber viel eher in einem Mangel an Zeit und Geld ihren Auslöser findet. Diegetisch bedarf es einer Quasibeseitigung der Mutter, die auf abgründige Weise das eigentliche Problem zu sein scheint, ist sie doch offenbar, warum auch immer, nicht in der Lage, die Rolle der Versorgerin mit ihren Kompetenzen und Ressourcen zufriedenstellend zu erfüllen. Der Konsum der kleinen Fett-Salz-Türme verspricht, das erfahren wir noch, obendrein zu guten Schulleistungen und hohem Ansehen bei den Mitschüler_innen zu verhelfen, wobei die gierigen Blicke der selbst weiter mit offensichtlich ‚gewöhnlichen' Schulmahlzeiten ausgestatteten anderen Kinder in ihrer Gerichtetheit ambivalent bleiben, indem sie sich zum Teil auf den Jungen und zum Teil auf sein Essen fokussieren. Mit der Kaufentscheidung geht also auch ein Versprechen von Aufstieg entlang der klassischen bürgerlichen Narrative von Bildung und sozialem Prestige einher.

Nur angemerkt sei, dass der Spot eindeutige US-amerikanische Vorbilder hat. Vor allem ein Werbefilm weist ein bis in Details der Familienkonstellation identisches Setting auf,[12] verfügt aber zugleich erstens über stärkere Hinweise auf eine im gezeigten Haushalt herrschende tendenzielle Nahrungsmittelprekarität („Isn't this your doggy bag from last night?") und zweitens über einen Sohn, der sich gegen die empfundene Misshandlung mit aus seiner Sicht unangemessener Verpflegung ausdrücklicher zur Wehr setzt als sein in der Frustration stummes deutsches Pendant. Zudem weist seine an die Mutter gerichtete Frage „Are you mad at me?" beim Blick in die braune Lunchtüte darauf hin, dass innerhalb der Familie Konflikte potenziell manipulativ über die Zuteilung ungeliebter Lebensmittel ausgetragen werden. Beides – die mutmaßlich problematischen Familienverhältnisse und der widerständige Sohn – wird von der Frauenstimme aus dem Off und der Inszenierung des Spots als ironisch und comedyartig ausgewiesen.

Die in der *Lunchables*-Werbung durch den Erwerb und die Konsumption des beworbenen Produkts erreichten Statuspositionen ‚erfolgreicher Sohn' und ‚gute Mutter' verweisen auf die Funktion der in den (Lebensmittel-)Werbungen auftretenden Akteur_innen, den Rezipient_innen in ihren Kauf- und Konsumentscheidungen als nachahmenswerte Vorbilder zu dienen. Dies wird auch in einem anderen Werbespot der 1990er-Jahre deutlich, in dem für die *Kinder-Überraschung* der Marke *Ferrero* geworben wird. Darin wird in wenigen Szenen die Interaktion einer reichen Vorstadtfamilie als besonders gewitzt, kreativ und harmonisch vorgestellt.[13] Der von der Tochter an die Mutter, die gerade im Begriff ist, mit ihrem BMW-Cabrio zum Einkaufen zu fahren, gerichtete Wunsch, ihr „was Spannendes, was zum Spielen und Schokolade" mitzubringen, wird vom mithörenden Sohn zum Anlass genommen, sich als „Einkaufsberater" einzuschalten und der Mutter auf der Fahrt zum Supermarkt den Kauf der *Kinder-Überraschung* zu empfehlen. Die Wünsche der Tochter nach Spannung, Spiel und Schokolade sollen, wie drei Einblendungen zeigen, mit der Bereitstellung der *Kinder-*

[12] Der Spot auf YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86Dk1I9cRmY#t=01m52s (28. 7. 2023).
[13] Der Spot auf YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hjUVShDhCY&ab_channel=schollek (28. 7. 2023).

Überraschung erfüllt werden, die in verschachtelter Anordnung ein vor dem Kauf nicht sichtbares kleines Spielzeug in einer Plastikkapsel enthält, die sich wiederum in einem Schokoladenei befindet. Stellt in der *Lunchables*-Werbung noch die Mutter aus dem Off die Lösung für die an sie gestellte Ernährungsaufgabe vor, ist es diesmal der Sohn, der für seine Beratung zudem ein Honorar in Form eines eigenen Überraschungseis einstreicht. Für die Befriedigung kindlicher Bedürfnisse in Erziehungs- und Ernährungsverhältnissen und die Erreichung gesellschaftlich und neoliberal idealisierter Positionen wie jener des klugen Geschäftsmanns, die grundsätzlich endliche und klassenbedingt unterschiedlich verfügbare Ressourcen wie Zeit, Geld, Anerkennung oder Gesundheit erfordern, wird in den beiden Werbespots eine (vermeintlich) effiziente und zeitsparende Lösung angeboten, die besonders attraktiv in Hinblick auf eine potenzielle Ressourcenknappheit von Kund_innen erscheint und mit einer positiv attribuierten Erfahrungsphantasie verknüpft wird. Auf diese Weise können Werbungen für prekäre Verhältnisse, ohne diese repräsentieren und damit explizit thematisieren zu müssen, vermeintlich einfache Lösungen empfehlen. Gleichzeitig werden dabei die Fragen nach den komplexen Bedingungen für das ‚Gelingen' von Eltern/Kind-Beziehungen oder das Erlangen prestigeträchtiger gesellschaftlicher Positionen auf unterkomplexe und die elterliche Sorgearbeit potenziell aushöhlende Weise beantwortet, indem das zur Verfügung gestellte ‚Wissen' zuvorderst spezifische Konsumentscheidungen empfiehlt.

Unter der Annahme, dass Lebensmittelwerbungen wichtige Bedeutungsproduzenten sind, die Lebensmittel, ihren Erwerb, ihre Bereitstellung und ihren Konsum mit Semantiken belegen, die von Kund_innen aufgenommen werden können und auch aufgenommen werden, und dabei implizit auf Klassenverhältnisse Bezug nehmen, halten wir ihre Analyse und Diskussion für eine Ressource klassenpolitischer Selbstermächtigung. Interventionen können konkret dort ansetzen, wo Lebensmittelvermarktungen das essens- und ernährungsbezogene Sprechen, Denken, Fühlen und Handeln im sozialen beziehungsweise familiären Milieu der eigenen Kindheit und Jugend geprägt und zum Beispiel variabel einsetzbare, aber auch semantisch diffuse Aufwertungsvokabeln wie ‚frisch' verbreitet haben.[14] Dies bezieht sich zunächst auf Produkte, zu denen es überhaupt Werbungen gibt. Gleichzeitig kann die Analyse solcher Markenartikel erweitert werden, indem die Vermarktung und Designrhetorik derjenigen Produkte angeschaut wird, die durch die Nachahmung von Markenartikeln entstanden sind oder von denselben Marken unter einem anderen Namen und für weniger Geld in Discountern angeboten werden. Dabei ist zu beachten, dass Klassenzugehörigkeiten sich mit anderen gesellschaftlichen Dimensionen überschneiden. Zum Beispiel lässt sich vermuten, dass in Kontexten, die in besonderem Maße von migrationsgesellschaftlichen Bedingungen geprägt sind, diskursive Formationen rund um die oben diskutierten Werbungen des (Halb-) Fertigessens, die dezidiert eine ‚weiße' Bevölkerung adressieren, weniger bedeutsam sind. Die Techniken, Wissensbestände und Formen der Verpflegung von Kindern können folglich innerhalb einer gemeinsamen oder ähnlichen Klassenzugehörigkeit stark variieren. Eine Untersuchung des Zusammenhangs von ‚Klasse' und ‚Essen' würde folglich auch von der

[14] Vgl. etwa die Werbespots der Marke *Erasco* zu einem konservierten Nudeltopf (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtO2lNZPICE&ab_channel=VhsChorizo, 28. 7. 2023) oder der Marke *Dr. Oetker* zu der Tiefkühlpizza „Die Ofenfrische (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1x6eG2CkfI&ab_channel=StephanCooper, 28. 7. 2023). Wie bedeutsam es ist, wenn Mahlzeiten weitgehend unabhängig von ihrer Zubereitungsform bei der Bereitstellung als ‚frisch' ausgewiesen werden, wissen wir aus eigener Erfahrung. Über die Aufwertung der Mahlzeit hinaus kann die Attribuierung ‚frisch' als Akt einer symbolischen Aktualisierung der sozialen Beziehungen der am Essen beteiligten Personen, z. B. Mutter und Sohn, verstanden werden, kontextabhängig aber auch auf Gefühle der Scham des Essen bereitstellenden Elternteils verweisen, wenn eine Ahnung um die gesellschaftliche Nicht-Anerkennung der Mahlzeit besteht.

Beobachtungskategorie ‚Migration' und der Analyse der mit migrationsgesellschaftlichen Bedingungen einhergehenden Ein- und Ausschlüsse und den darin entwickelten, verschiedenen Überlebensstrategien bereichert werden. Um diesen Kontexten diskriminierungssensibel zu begegnen, perspektivbedingten Komplexitätsreduktionen entgegenzuwirken und zu weniger verengten Untersuchungsergebnissen zu gelangen, ist neben der eigenen Positionierung die Hinzuziehung möglichst diverser Akteur_innen bei allen Schritten des Analyseprozesses unverzichtbar.

Das spezifische Klassen- und Ernährungswissen kann von an Klassenverhältnissen interessierten Akteur_innen in einer gemeinsamen Beschäftigung mit biografisch relevanten populärkulturellen Artefakten der eigenen essensbezogenen Sozialisation generiert, aktualisiert, reflektiert und revidiert werden.

Das Erkennenlernen von Codes zur Markierung von Klassendifferenz sowie Strategien und Techniken, mit denen klassenbedingte Prekaritäten etwa in Werbungen verschleiert und dennoch implizit angesprochen werden, erscheint uns als ein wichtiges Mittel, jeweils spezifische Klassenherkünfte verständlich und Diskriminierungsstrukturen thematisierbar zu machen. Dies gilt umso mehr, als Klassismus von vielen Betroffenen zunächst nur diffus empfunden und erst sehr viel später als solcher realisiert und benannt werden kann. Medienorientierte Analysen, die sich in fruchtbarer Weise mit der mitunter stark klassistischen Darstellung etwa von alleinerziehenden Müttern, Lohnerwerbsarbeitenden und Lohnerwerbsarbeitslosen in Reality-TV-Shows beschäftigen,[15] können zudem um Vorgehensweisen ergänzt werden, in denen etwa in Form eines Reenactments Mahlzeiten der eigenen Kindheit und Jugend gemeinsam erinnert, zubereitet und verzehrt und auf ihre klassentheoretische Bedeutung hin befragt werden. Eine Möglichkeit der öffentlichkeitswirksamen Ausweitung der Intervention in den Zusammenhang von ‚Klasse', ‚Essen' und ‚Sorge' besteht schließlich darin, sich die Techniken der Lebensmittelvermarktung anzueignen und sie auf künstlerische Weise im Kontext von Ausstellungen oder in Adbusting-Manövern für die Sichtbarmachung struktureller Ungerechtigkeiten zu nutzen.

[15] Siehe etwa Insa Härtel: „Gespaltene Einstellung. Messiesendungen im Detail", in: Irene Nierhaus, Kathrin Heinz, Rosanna Umbach (Hg.): *WohnSeiten. Visuelle Konstruktionen des Wohnens in Zeitschriften.* Bielefeld 2021, S. 318–334.

Lunchables. About the Connection of Food and Class

Philipp Hagemann &
Alexander Wagner

Philipp Hagemann, Alexander Wagner

Lunchables. About the Connection of Food and Class

ABSTRACT

In a joint project, we are dealing with the relationship between 'food' and 'class' in and outside the field of family care relations. We used the context of the workshop to describe our research approach and project in general and to discuss with the participants related issues that concern us in our work. The text at hand focuses on the connection between 'advertising' and 'class' using the example of German food commercials, especially from the 1990s and 2000s, and deals with the thesis that although advertising spots of these decades do not depict lifeworlds in materially precarious conditions for reasons of sales strategy, they cannot completely avoid references to the precarious living conditions of their target group. Thereby, they also intervene in parent/child relationships in an intentional and potentially harmful way. We take the analysis of these commercials as an opportunity to reflect on empowering possibilities of intervention in the context of 'food', 'class' and 'care' work.

CV

Philipp Hagemann (*1991 in Ahlen/FRG) and Alexander Wagner (*1987 in Hoyerswerda/GDR) were socialized in so-called "bescheidenen Verhältnissen", come from cultural studies disciplines, work together on topics of postcolonial theory, and want to steer their textual thinking into other fields of action and thus work through techniques and methods of the humanities in a critical-productive way.

Philipp works as a research assistant in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Paderborn. He studied English and Philosophy and was a teacher for both subjects at a comprehensive school. In a qualification work, he deals with the implications of racism-critical theory and educational work for teaching philosophy in schools.

Alex is a research assistant in the field of Modern German Literary History at the University of Wuppertal. He did his doctorate on continuities of German colonialism at the time of National Socialism. His fields of activity include the relationship between literature and 'knowledge', gender and media history, postcolonial theory, popular culture, the border areas of art and science, and the history of the GDR and East Germany after the "Wende".

Currently, they are engaged with setting up a Research Lab for Interventions Against Classism (Forschungslabor für Interventionen gegen Klassismus).

KEYWORDS
class, nutrition, care, mother/son relationship, food advertisement, precariousness, ready-to-eat food, intervention, *FLINK, Lunchables, *Kinder Surprise*

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Our project is also about giving visibility to such knowledge and similar survival strategies, valorising and recontextualizing them with a sense of empowerment.

Our project addresses the relationship between 'food' and 'class' in general and especially within familial care relationships from different perspectives. We used the context of the workshop to briefly outline the premises of our research and engage in a conversation with participants about larger issues and contexts that concern us. Because it was a workshop, we took the liberty to share with participants some provisional ideas from our working process and our thinking on the matter. The most important premise is our own origin from a so-called "humble background". We grew up in different social contexts: as the youngest of four children in a small town in North Rhine-Westphalia, and as the only child of a single mother in an East German town hit hard by the upheavals of the so-called "Wende". At the same time, we both experienced during our childhood and adolescence how an important part of the parent-child or, in our case, the mother-son relationship is established through the provision of food and what special circumstances inform this situation when economic conditions are precarious. Aside from the indubitably negative aspect, the sense of shame and many instances of discrimination, the experience of growing up in low-income circumstances has at the same time trained our perception and brought out a certain sensitivity to classist patterns of discrimination, even if quite subtly embedded in larger contexts. The same is true for certain forms of knowledge and survival strategies in the working field of everyday crises.

At the moment, we are engaged in setting up a Research Lab for Interventions Against Classism (Forschungslabor für Interventionen gegen Klassismus), whose German acronym *FLINK refers to an on-demand delivery service and actor of exploitation in the gig economy that is quite successful in Germany. This of course raises questions far beyond dealing with foodstuffs, and we have based our work on a set of categories that guide our actions and thinking at all times. These are gender, materiality, power, space, knowledge, race, the reflection of our own presumptions and positions as well as those of the people we meet and the contexts we visit, plus n, with "n" being a mathematical variable to indicate that it is an extensible set. We are, for example, particularly interested in the spatial aspects of the relationships we examine, like family relationships that are closely linked to living conditions in rented apartments. Space as a sphere of knowledge (re-)production and social power relations also plays a crucial role in the conception of exhibitions and other educational forms. This applies to the materiality of food and the things needed to produce, buy, prepare, and consume it much in the same manner as it does to the material setup of an exhibition, a website, a publication, or

other means of producing and disseminating research results. 'Knowledge' plays a particularly important role. Above all, we think of specific skills, practices, and knowledge that we would tentatively describe as survival strategies in the area of everyday crisis. We were able to observe and learn from our mothers and other people how they tried, despite their very limited financial resources, to meet specific standards, but above all to live up to a role expectation of a 'good mother', which is closely associated with food-related actions and a context of domestic care work as well as with concepts of 'emotionality' and 'love'. These practices and their formation were often motivated by a feeling of shame stemming from cultural norms of what makes a 'good mother'. Our project is also about giving visibility to such knowledge and similar survival strategies, valorising and recontextualizing them with a sense of empowerment, for example, by making collected life hacks and techniques accessible to others in a way that identifies, explains, and acknowledges those developing them and the circumstances in which they were developed.

One important part of our work is the conception of interventions. We understand them as actions and processes with which 'knowledge' is intentionally transformed and which always have a practical, publicly visible dimension. They are accompanied by research and further discussion, framed by larger agendas and programmes, floating freely between various different sets of theories. To prepare such formats, it is important to analyse the phenomena that influence the perception of relevant contexts. These include concrete experiences of people involved as well as popular cultural artefacts and class and nutritional knowledge in mediatised form, for example, as product designs, advertising, and distribution structures. For this purpose, in addition to conversations with each other, with other people concerned and experts from different fields, we explore nutrition-related material of all kinds, whether it is specific foodstuffs, historical and present-day TV commercials, the fast-food packaging, research literature, cookbooks, photos of family celebrations, or menus. To somewhat expound on one of our theoretical questions here, the difficult reconstruction of class relations subtly embedded in media contexts, we have chosen a ready-made food for schoolchildren that has remained popular in the US to this day, but had only a brief product life in Germany: Lunchables.

Lunchables is a prepackaged meal offered by the US company Oscar Mayer, today a part of the Kraft Heinz Group. Allegedly out of a crisis of Bologna sausage sales, four designers developed a new possibility for more attractive marketing of this and similar meat products in 1985, while simultaneously providing American mothers with a time saving alternative to home-cooked meals to feed themselves and their families with work and school-break meals.[1] The product was launched in 1988 and, three and a half decades later, still has by far the largest market share in the preportioned-lunch segment (with a purported 84 per cent in children's "combination l unches" in 2018[2]). It will officially be part of the School Lunch Program in the US for the first time in the school year 2023/24, allowing schools to offer Lunchables to students in their cafeterias.[3] If you are not familiar with the product, you may have a look at its composition and appearance (for example online) before reading on.

Through its advertising strategies, this market actor with a wide presence in the US structurally intervenes in the relationship between mothers, who were identified as the ones primarily responsible

[1] See https://www.sfgate.com/shopping/article/history-of-Lunchables-15369850.php (accessed 28 July 2023).
[2] See https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/11/lunchables-30-years-invented-history/576025/ (accessed 28 July 2023).
[3] See https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/14/lunchables-school-lunch-programs and https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/13/business/lunchables-in-schools/index.html (accessed 28 July 2023).

for the production of school meals not just in the market studies of the Lunchables inventors, and their children, for whom these meals are intended. In terms of design language, the earliest packages were modelled after the already well-known TV dinners,[4] addressing on several levels the time regime of both mothers and children as well as the premises of eating culture in schools.[5] At the same time, it would be worthwhile to take a closer look at this style of ready-to-eat takeaway food as part of the operational catering for individuals in the military.[6] In 1998, Lunchables were also introduced in the German market. Far less successful than in the US, however, they disappeared from supermarket shelves again by, at the latest, 2007.[7] The product breadth offered in Germany was kept to a minimum; to our recollection, only two basic Lunchables variants ever made it to the German market, with turkey ham or "pizza salami" and cheese to put on crackers, while the product range in the US is highly diversified and was even broadened over the years, for example, with supposedly healthier ingredients as "fun fuel" or variants with cinnamon buns and "Mexican" nachos. As the first generation, fed Lunchables during school breaks, was coming of age, reflections gained traction on the internet about the eating culture of, for example, young urban, often "class-travelling"[8] academics, such as the popular charcuterie board. It offers an assortment of cheeses, sausages, and other delicatessen arranged on a massive wooden board to be eaten with crackers or bread. From the perspective of a childhood with Lunchables, the arrangement and composition of products on the board then appears in memes and Reddit posts as a "fancy" version for adults.[9]

Referring to what is probably the only German-language TV commercial for Lunchables from 1998, we want to show the intricacies of the reconstruction of class relations in the design of mediaticised artefacts that serve to market a product.[10]

For obvious reasons, advertisers will tend to avoid any realistic portrayal of 'poor' people in their advertising; the history of television ads is pretty clear in this regard: historically, the advertising perspective of audiovisual product commercials in 'Western' contexts has invariably focused on the middle class, which for the most part also happens to be the target group. In other words, the middle classes as the basis of 'Western' retail, consumer and popular culture are, in line with the logic of the market, also the main addressees of that culture's consumer-product advertising. If anything, the middle-class gaze goes upward, most likely representing, where it does not confine itself to middle-class milieus, middle-class ideas of upper-class life, such as fantasies of the luxury lifestyle of the nobility at their (not too) decadent gatherings. If addressing other social contexts,

[4] See, e.g., Michael Moss, *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* (New York, 2013), 192.

[5] Ibid., xxvi: "Lunchables, for one, are a marketing powerhouse, specifically designed to exploit the guilt of working moms and the desire of kids for a little empowerment. These ready-to-eat meals typically include pieces of meat, cheese, crackers, and candy, allowing kids to assemble them in whatever combination they desire. Food marketers wield pinpoint psychological targeting, and they didn't disappoint on the Lunchables ads: The ads stressed that lunch was a time for them, not their parents."

[6] The English-speaking Wikipedia article on Lunchables points to this connection, at least implicitly, by referring to the article "Meal, Ready-To-Eat" under "See also": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunchables (accessed 28 July 2023).

[7] The Lunchables flop in Germany is also noted by Oliver Nickel, "Haptische Reize in der Kommunikation effektiv gestalten", in Tobias Langner, Franz-Rudolf Esch and Manfred Bruhn (eds.), *Handbuch Techniken der Kommunikation: Grundlagen–Innovative Ansätze–Praktische Umsetzungen* (Wiesbaden, 2018), 195–222, at 211.

[8] 'Class-travelling' derives from the German term "Klassenreise" and refers to the process of changing one's social position, taking into account possibilities of non-linear social mobility. Cf., e.g., Betina Aumair, Brigitte Theißl (eds.): *Klassenreise. Wie die soziale Herkunft unser Leben prägt.* 3. aktual. u. erw. Aufl. Wien 2023.

[9] A quick image search of the two terms suffices to get an overview of this.

[10] To watch the ad on YouTube see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_KSv4exw-O (accessed 28 July 2023).

the ads almost universally use clear indicators signalling that what is shown is staged and ironical.[11]

We found that, in terms of class politics, product advertising in Germany almost always takes a 'middle' view, which generally can only represent any variation of 'race', 'gender', and 'class' as a fantasy informed by that view. This is even more true of ads from the 1990s (the decade of our childhood), which have been our main focus so far, than of present-day examples. At the same time, representing class structures in this context is apparently governed by special rules. This may be due to the fact that many products are actually aimed for a low-income target group and meant to be promoted to them, although advertising language does not have the means to represent this target group in a relatively non-discriminatory and, at the same time, promotionally effective way. Visible poverty is not good for business, carries a risk of being perceived as confrontational, correlates with negativity, is potentially unattractive even to those affected by it, and generally is in conflict with advertising's imperative of making the unbroken promise of a 'good life'. Moreover, most of those involved in the production of advertising still come from the middle rather than the so-called lower class and therefore simply do not have authentic experiential knowledge of life under conditions of permanent economic anxiety. Finally, the formation of 'Western' consumer culture is strongly linked to notions of social advancement, so that pictures of 'poor' people consuming certain products because of their social situation are simply not logical in terms of advertising strategy. Product advertising for people with low or no income is therefore, most certainly throughout the 1990s and 2000s and the German-speaking countries, almost always set in milieus without any visible experience of financial deprivation. Of course, the commercials in question nevertheless are implicit statements about social class relations, but for our considerations they are even more interesting as a discursive field in which possibilities of veiling while subtly introducing 'class' as a marker of difference in actually middle-class, financially secure diegeses are negotiated. Our observation is that complete suppression of any reference to precarious conditions is not achieved in the spots, nor can it be if the precarity is in fact inscribed as a consumer truth in the very products advertised.

One example of this is the mentioned German Lunchables commercial of 1998, which goes as follows: We are looking over the shoulder of a woman arranging a bouquet of flowers in a vase. In the background, the family dog is lying in its basket. A boy, apparently the woman's son, comes walking toward her, routinely and without having to say a word to his mother reaches for a flat object wrapped in sandwich paper on the counter between us and him, and turns to leave with a look of disappointment on his face. The setting of the scene, a single-family house with an open-plan kitchen from which a French door leads into the garden, as well as the mother's relaxed activity of decorating the home with cut flowers while the lunch packet for the son is already ready on the counter, indicate that there is no shortage of either money or time here. Maternal care work, the commercial shows, is not a problem of stress or financial hardship, but above all a question of recognition, and its success above all depends on the judgement of those cared for. It is hence a private matter that can be optimised with knowledge (conveyed by ad-

[11] For example, in the well-known "medieval" campaign for Rügenwalder Mühle sausages, in which a representative of a kind of a "Reichsbürger" sect, living in the countryside obviously outside the society, barges in on a group of housewives in a butcher's shop, buys, or perhaps robs, the shop empty, and returns on horseback to his community that awaits him gathered around a red windmill with sausage-shaped sails. The situation with the blond hunk who, with a few seductive half-sentences and a penetrating look, makes the timid, whispering female shop assistant hand over all the fat sausages unmistakably echoes scenes from dime novels, Victorian-style romance movies, and similar fantasies of petty-bourgeois women being overpowered by handsome country lads. To watch the ad on YouTube see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwYQMpd_eZA (accessed 28 July 2023).

vertising) and money (paid for the advertised product). The female voice-over says, "Making a school lunch sandwich every day that children like, that's hard, even for the best of mothers. Not an easy task, really." The text opens up the range of meaning of the domestic crisis shown to include problems faced by mothers in less privileged circumstances: lack of resources, time stress, multiple workloads, and psychological pressure, among other things, can make it difficult to provide one's child with a balanced and appetising, socially accepted meal every day. Fittingly, what is shown on the image level omits the two most important parameters needed to assess the child's disappointment: apart from a brief partial shot of her upper body, we are neither shown the mother nor what the snack actually consists of. In the two following scenes, which again show the boy taking an unhappy look into a typical German lunchbox, while the father, being the 'good' parent who gets a goodbye smile from his son, is leaving the house in a suit and a sibling comes running from the garden, wet from the rain, we do not see what exactly annoys the boy. Imagining what the probably 'boring' school snack is that is not to the child's liking is left to the viewer, as is the fleshing out of the mother as a person with a body and a psyche. Introduced by "Luckily, there are now the new Kraft Lunchables", the solution offered shows the child taking much delight in a concrete product. Now he looks straight into the camera, which puts us as observers of the scene in the position of the 'good mother' who, for whatever reason, has turned her role as a provider of a 'good' school lunch into a consumer decision, hands over the purchased product to her child without further ado, and gets a "Thank you, Mummy!" in reward. The boy leaves the house with a quick buoyant stride to the same cheerful bouncing sound that accompanies the stacking and unstacking of crackers and slices of cheese and ham shown before as a fun expression of childlike individuality. In the background we see the kitchen table, familiar from the other scenes, now for the first time set for a meal and associating the child's being fed potentially questionable instant food with reminiscences of family dinners, recontextualising it as 'loving', 'homemade', and 'motherly'. With, for the first time, no other family member (dog, father, sibling) in the picture, the intimacy of the mother-son relationship is maximised. In this visual enactment, the happy and well-cared-for child as the presumed objective of maternal care work represents the most important part of a repaired relationship. Outwardly, the problem here was a gustatory miscommunication, though, given the logic of the product, lack of time and money would have been a much more likely cause, and one that diegetically calls for the quasi-elimination of the mother, who, in some abysmal way, seems to be the real problem here, since she apparently, for whatever reason, is unable to satisfactorily fulfil, with her competences and resources, the role of caring provider. We also learn that the ingestion of turrets of fatty salty bites promises to lead to good school performance and a high social standing among classmates, although the greedy looks of the other children, who apparently still are equipped with 'ordinary' school meals, remain somewhat ambivalent, some of them watching the boy and some the food. The buying decision thus also holds a promise of social advancement along classical middle-class narratives of education and social prestige.

It should only be noted, though, that the commercial follows obvious models from a US context. One ad in particular is identical in setting to the last detail of the family constellation,[12] but at the same time has, first, stronger references to probable food insecurity in the household shown ("Isn't this your doggy bag from last night?") and second, a son who more openly complains about perceived mistreatment by being given what he sees as an inappropriate lunch packet than his mutely frustrated German counterpart. Also,

[12] To watch the ad on YouTube see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86Dk1I9cRmY#t=01m52s (accessed 28 July 2023).

the question he asks his mother upon looking into the brown paper bag, "Are you mad at me?", indicates that conflicts within the family may be acted out manipulatively by rationing out disliked foods. Both the probably problematic family relationships and the nagging son are, however, presented as ironic and comedic by the female voice-over narrator and the whole setup of the spot.

The status of 'successful son' and 'good mother' achieved in the Lunchables ad by buying and consuming the advertised product points to the function of characters appearing in (food) commercials to serve as role models for the recipients in making their choices as buyers and consumers. This becomes evident in another commercial from the 1990s, this time for the Ferrero brand's Kinder Surprise. In just a few quick shots, interactions within a well-off suburban family are presented as particularly witty, creative, and harmonious.[13] When the daughter asks her mother, who is about to go grocery shopping in her BMW convertible, to bring her "something exciting, something to play with, and chocolate!", the son, overhearing her, takes the opportunity to offer himself as a shopping consultant who recommends buying Kinder Surprise to his mother on the way to the supermarket. The daughter's wish for excitement, a plaything, and chocolate will be fulfilled, as is shown in three inserts, by buying Kinder Surprise, which consists of a small toy that cannot be seen beforehand placed inside a plastic capsule placed inside a chocolate egg. While in the Lunchables commercial, it is the mother who, from off-camera, presents the solution to the food task posed to her, here, it is the son who even collects a fee for his advice in the form of his own Kinder Surprise. To satisfy children's needs and wants in relationships of feeding and upbringing and to achieve positions idealised in society and neoliberalism, like that of the smart businessperson, which require resources that are basically finite and, depending on social class, differently available, like time, money, recognition, or health, both commercials offer an (ostensibly) efficient and timesaving solution that looks particularly attractive in view of customers' potentially scarce resources and is associated with a fantasised positive experience. This way, ads targeting conditions of precarity can recommend seemingly simple solutions without having to represent, that is expressly address, those conditions. At the same time, questions about the complex conditions for 'success' in parent-child relationships or for attaining prestigious social positions are answered in an under-complex way that potentially undermines parental care work in that the 'knowledge' provided consists, first and foremost, of specific, recommended consumer decisions.

Our assumption is that food advertisemens are important producers of meaning, charging foods, their purchasing, provision, and consumption with semantic significance and thereby implicitly addressing class relations. These meanings can be, and in fact are, received by customers, which is why we consider their analysis and discussion to be a resource for class-political self-empowerment. Specifically, interventions can start out from where food marketing has informed food and nutrition-related speech, thinking, emotion, and action in the social or familial milieus of one's own childhood and youth and, for example, has promulgated variably applicable but also semantically diffuse 'valorising vocabulary' like 'fresh'.[14] This, of course, first applies to products

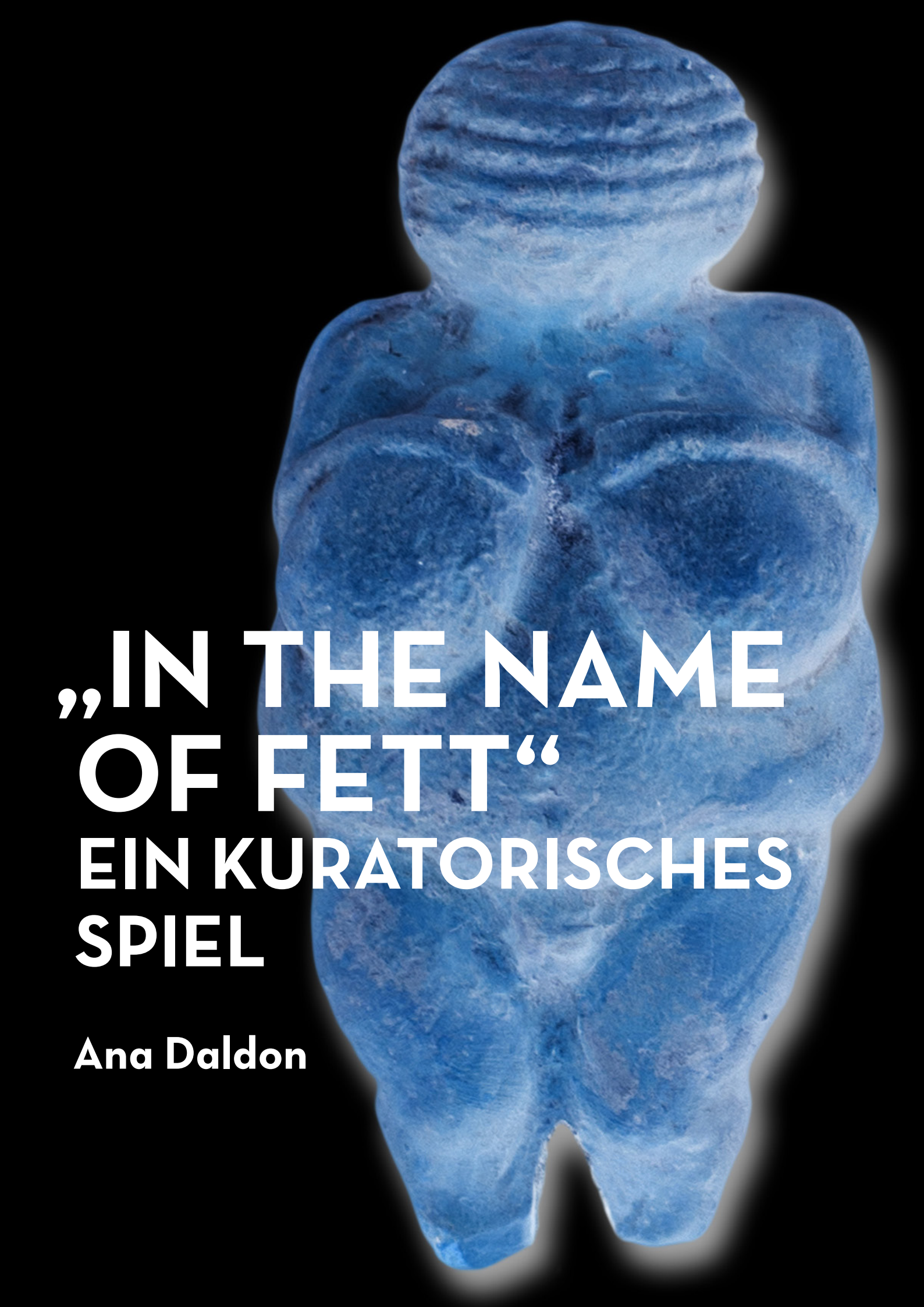
[13] To watch the ad on YouTube see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hjUVShDhCY&ab_channel=schollek (accessed 28 July 2023).
[14] See, e.g., Erasco's canned "noodle pot" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtO2lNZPICE&ab_channel=VhsChorizo) or Dr. Oetker's Die Ofenfrische frozen pizza (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1x6eG2CkfI&ab_channel=StephanCooper) (both accessed 28 July 2023). We know from our own experience the relevance of describing meals as 'fresh' when served, regardless of how they were prepared. Beyond valorising the meal, the attribution of 'freshness' can be understood as an act of symbolic 'refreshment' of the social relations between the persons involved in the meal, e.g., mother and son. Depending on the context, though, it can also be indicative of feelings of shame on the part of the food-providing parent, if there is a sense that the meal prepared is not socially accepted.

for which advertising actually exists. At the same time, the analysis of such branded products can be expanded by examining the marketing and design language of products that imitate branded products or are offered by the same brands under a different name and for less money through discount outlets. It should be noted that class affiliations are also intersected by other social dimensions. For example, it can be assumed that discursive formations around the advertisements of (semi-)ready meals discussed above, which decidedly address a 'white' population, are less significant in contexts shaped by conditions of migration. Consequently, the techniques, knowledge and forms of feeding children may vary greatly within a common or related class background. An examination of the connection between 'class' and 'food' would therefore also benefit from the observation category 'migration' and the analysis of the inclusions and exclusions that come with the conditions of a migration society as well as the different survival strategies developed therein. In order to approach these contexts in a discrimination-sensitive way, to counteract perspective-related reductions in complexity, and to arrive at less narrow research results, it is indispensable, however, aside from the reflection of one's own social and theoretical framework, to involve the most diverse actors possible in all steps of the analytic process.

Specific class and nutritional knowledge can be generated, updated, reflected, and revised by actors interested in class relations by joint engagement with biographically relevant, pop-cultural artefacts of their own food-related socialisation.

Learning to identify codes that mark class differences as well as strategies and techniques used to veil, while still implicitly addressing, class-related precarities in advertising appears to us to be an important means to make different class origins understandable and discriminatory structures addressable. This is all the truer since classism is first only felt diffusely by many of those affected by it and can only much later be recognized and named for what it is. Media analyses insightfully addressing the sometimes strongly classist portrayal of, for example single mothers, unemployed and low-wage earners in reality TV shows[15], might be accompanied by approaches in which, for example, the meals of one's own childhood and youth are jointly remembered, prepared, and eaten together in a kind of re-enactment and discussed with respect to their class-related significance. Finally, another possibility of publicly effective intervention in contexts of 'class', 'food' and 'care' would be the appropriation of food-marketing techniques to repurpose them in an artistic manner, for example in the context of exhibitions or in adbusting manoeuvres, so as to give public visibility to structural social injustices.

[15] See, e.g., Insa Härtel, "Gespaltene Einstellung: Messiesendungen im Detail," in Irene Nierhaus, Kathrin Heinz and Rosanna Umbach (eds.), *WohnSeiten: Visuelle Konstruktionen des Wohnens in Zeitschriften* (Bielefeld, 2021), 318–334.



„IN THE NAME OF FETT“
EIN KURATORISCHES SPIEL

Ana Daldon

Ana Daldon

„In the Name of Fett“. Ein kuratorisches Spiel

ABSTRACT

Aus der Idee einer möglichen Ausstellung im Technischen Museum Wien über Fett entstand ein kuratorisches Kartenspiel, das während des „2nd Vienna Workshop on STEM Collections, Gender and Sexuality“ gespielt wurde. Dieser Text zeichnet die Entstehung dieses Spiels nach, mit dem spielerisch eine Ausstellung zum Sujet erdacht wurde, und gibt Hinweise auf die Inhalte. Das Thema „Fett“ kann in einem technisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Museum u.a. theoretisch behandelt werden, indem man sich der Chemie nähert, den verschiedenen Produktionstechniken oder technischen Fetten (und Ölen). In diesem Fall wurde eine engere, durch den Workshop vorgegebene Bandbreite gewählt, nämlich ein Fokus auf Fett in Bezug auf den Körper. Sobald man tiefer in die Beschäftigung mit Fett und Körpern einsteigt, fällt auf, dass die Beschäftigung mit dem weiblichen Körper stärker in den Vordergrund rückt. Das hat auch dieses Spiel gezeigt.

CV

Ana Daldon, geboren 1986 in Zenica, studierte Physik an der Universität Trient sowie Art & Science und educating/curating/managing an der Universität für Angewandte Kunst Wien. Seit 2015 ist sie als Kuratorin am Technischen Museum Wien in der Abteilung Sammlungen tätig. Seit 2017 ist sie als Kustodin für die Sammlung „Heim und Garten“ und später für „Spiel, Sport und Bildung“ zuständig. Derzeit arbeitet sie an einer Ausstellung über die Sustainable Development Goals und an einer Führung mit dem Fokus Farbe. Sie konzipiert außerdem einen neuen Teil der Dauerausstellung über die Beziehung zwischen Spielzeug und Wissenschaft.

KEYWORDS

Fett, Kuratieren, Museum, Ausstellung, Quartettspiel, Körper, Materielle Kultur

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In zeitgenössischen Diskursen geht es allerdings weit mehr um Fett im Zusammenhang mit Ernährung und damit auch um Fragen des Körpergewichts und seiner Bedeutung in der Gesellschaft.

Fett ist ein Thema mit vielen Variationsmöglichkeiten. Im Kontext eines technischen Museums ist man zunächst versucht, an technische Fette (und Öle) zu denken, also jene Substanzen, die bereits vor der Industrialisierung dazu dienten, mechanische Apparaturen und Maschinen in Gang zu halten. Während der industriellen Revolution gewannen diese Schmiermittel enorm an Bedeutung. Ab der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts kam man allmählich von organischen (tierischen und pflanzlichen) Fetten ab und verwendete zunehmend mineralische Fetten auf Erdölbasis.

In zeitgenössischen Diskursen geht es allerdings weit mehr um Fett im Zusammenhang mit Ernährung und damit auch um Fragen des Körpergewichts und seiner Bedeutung in der Gesellschaft. Ausgehend von den USA hat sich eine Bewegung etabliert, deren Exponent_innen sich kritisch mit der Stigmatisierung dicker Körper auseinandersetzen. Ein unlängst erschienenes deutschsprachiges Wörterbuch zum Thema[1] zeigt anhand 66 ausgewählter Begriffe, auf welch breiter Basis diese Auseinandersetzung stattfindet. In alphabetischer Ordnung finden sich so unterschiedliche Stichwörter wie Behinderung, Gender, Haustiere, Identität, Klasse, Queer, Race, Scham, Sport und nicht zuletzt Verbeamtung.

Ich selbst erhielt erste Anregungen, mich mit dem Thema Fett zu beschäftigen, durch ein Buch von Amy Erdman Farrell.[2]

Um die Möglichkeiten für eine Ausstellung etwa im Technischen Museum Wien auszuloten, entwickelte ich daraufhin ein kuratorisches Spiel, dem ich die Bezeichnung *In the name of Fett* gab.

Der etwas pathetisch anmutende Titel soll darauf verweisen, was wir als Gesellschaft im Zeichen von Fett alles auf uns nehmen oder über uns ergehen lassen. Zweck ist ein kreatives Herangehen an die Aufgabe, eine Schau zu entwerfen. Das Spiel umfasst 27 Karten: eine Erläuterung, 22 Karten mit Abbildungen von Objekten (teilweise aus den Sammlungen des TMW), ihren Benennungen und kurzen inhaltlichen Ausführungen sowie vier Jolly-Karten, die für je ein weiteres Objekt- und Bilddesiderat, eine Hands-on-Station und eine Multimediainstallation stehen.

[1] Anja Herrmann, Tae Jun Kim, Evangelia Kindinger u. a. (Hg.): *Fat Studies. Ein Glossar.* Bielefeld 2022. Den Volltext gibt es auch online: https://www.transcript-verlag.de/media/pdf/db/7e/b9/oa9783839460054ZcwlOntjTnLxR.pdf (14. 7. 2023)
[2] Amy Erdman Farrell: *fat shame. Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture.* New York, London 2011.

Inhaltlich verweisen die Karten beispielsweise auf folgende Themen:

- Kontinuität mancher Einstellungen zum Körperfett, eventuelles Auftreten in neuer Form
- Wandel in der Einschätzung der Ärzteschaft, die sich in der Empfehlung oder umgekehrt der Diskreditierung bestimmter Nahrungsmittel und Nährstoffe niederschlägt
- Ernährung im Kontext religiöser Einstellungen und Vorschriften
- Standardisierung von Werten (z. B. Body-Mass-Index)
- individuelle Messung von Fett- und anderen Körperwerten
- genderspezifische Einstellungen und Vorgaben zu gesunder Nahrung
- Vorstellungen von körperlicher Fitness
- Tricks zur Verminderung des Körperfetts
- utopische Ideen, z. B. Konzeption von Robotern, die Menschen ersetzen und somit kein Problem mit Körperfett haben
- wirtschaftlicher Rahmen (Erzeuger von einschlägigen Medikamenten, von Nahrungs- und Ge nussmitteln und von Gadgets zur Selbstkontrolle)
- Reaktion der Produzenten von Kinderpuppen auf den gesellschaftlichen Wandel in der Diskussion über Fett

Um an dem Spiel teilzunehmen, erhalten Gruppen von jeweils fünf bis acht Personen ein Exemplar des Kartensets und 30 Minuten Zeit. Auf der Grundlage der Objektvorschläge und der Jolly-Karten entwerfen sie einen Ausstellungstitel, ein kurzes Konzept und eine Kapitelgliederung. Darüber hinaus sollen sie über weitere Objekte (Desiderate) und Installationen nachdenken, deren Anschaffung beispielsweise für den TMW-Sammlungsbereich „Spiel, Sport und Bildung“ infrage kommen könnte. Entworfen wird das auf einem großformatigen Blatt Papier; die Gruppen arbeiten mit Beschriftungen, Post-its und den aufgelegten Karten.

Abb. 1: *In the name of Fett*, gespielt beim Workshop *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food*

Dieses Spiel haben bisher ausprobiert:

- Teilnehmende des Workshops *Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Food* (siehe Foto)
- Kolleg_innen aus verschiedenen Abteilungen des TMW (Sammlungen, Vermittlung, Medien, Bibliothek und Archiv)
- Studierende in einer Lehrveranstaltung zum Thema Museum machen am Institut für Europäische Ethnologie der Universität Wien

Eingeladen wurden somit Personen mit inhaltlicher Spezialisierung auf das Thema Fett, ferner Gruppen mit Erfahrung in Museumsarbeit und nicht zuletzt ein Kreis von Studierenden, die sich bislang nicht mit dem Kuratieren von Ausstellungen beschäftigt hatten. Es wäre denkbar, aus diesem Ansatz ein regelrechtes Quartettspiel zu schaffen, das letztlich auch kommerziellen Gewinn abwerfen könnte.

K 1d KÖRPER(DARSTELLUNG)

Sound Costume „Monsterfrau“, 2013
TMW, Spiel, Sport und Bildung
Inv. Nr. 100642

Die Zukunft des (Techno-)Körpers: Human Enhancement oder Roboter, die Menschen ersetzen. Der Film Wall-E von 2008 zeigt zum Beispiel die Zukunft des Menschen aus Fleisch und Blut und aus Fett, fast unbeweglich und zum Liegen verurteilt.

K 5b KÖRPER(VOLLSTOPFEN)

Arsen, 1900-1920
TMW, Chemische Produktionstechnik
Inv. Nr. 90922

Die pharmazeutische Industrie bietet hauptsächlich Produkte an, die den Appetit unterdrücken sollen, wie Arsen, Fen-Phen oder Leptin, oder die Fettverbrennung anregen, wie Amphetamine, Bandwürmer und Ephedra.

K 2b KÖRPER(MESSEN)

Babywaage 1890-1920
TMW, Haushaltstechnik
Inv. Nr. 74482/1 (oder 66978/1 oder 22489)

Zum 19. und bis weit ins 20. Jahrhundert waren Ärzte in Bezug auf das Gewicht eher gleichgültig. Noch 1949 zeigen die Aufzeichnungen der American Medical Association, dass viele Ärzt_innen immer noch Zweifel an der Bedeutung des Wiegens von Kindern hatten.

Abb. 2, 3, 4: Drei Beispiele für Karten: Klangkostüm , Arsen und Kinderwaage (alle Objekte aus den Sammlungen des TMW)