



foodthing sampler, AC Institute, New York, April 2019





The foodthing is a collaborative research project exploring foodways and the politics of the everyday. The foodthing sampler event combines a simple meal, where guests are asked to share food, with an informal presentation of ideas from this ongoing work. Guests are asked to consider some examples of how questions of food and questions of political imagination cross connect in the daily encounter at the table. The purpose of the event is to provide a sample of ideas from the foodthing project.



On the sampler menu: "From the flatbread earthers", a first course on eating and universalism; "From your hand to my mouth", a second course on feeding and mutuality; "From the recipe salon", a third course where guests are asked to tell of a favourite recipe; "The green, and not-so-green, things I will not eat and why", a fourth course, where guests discuss what they dislike; and finally, "Of courts and judgements: The question of chocolate ", a course of tasting chocolate. Interspersed with the taster menu courses are short readings from texts generated by the foodthing and short screenings.

THE PROGRAMME

Rolling screenshow (of previous foodthing events and actions and providing context, and referencing art-and-food precedents of different kinds.)

Welcome

Reading *"Not to be swallowed whole."*

...

Starter course: From the flatbread earthers

Food Flatbreads with hummus and guacamole
(Some gluten-free flatbread, dips gluten-free and dairy-free)

Activity the flatbreads must be shared by tearing,

Reading *"Those who break upon the flatbread earth"*

...

Second course: From hand to mouth: The Chicory of You

Food Individual chicory leaves with strawberry, mango and sunflower seed salad
(Vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free)

Activity Only allowed to consume what someone else offers to you

...

Between courses: All About Andy

Screening Andy Warhol eats a burger <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LDHSBVZpzc>
File also available in google drive: 4 and a half minutes duration – with sound

Reading *"On the uncanny-ness of the foodthing, Andy Warhol's is eating a burger"*

...

Third course: From the recipe salon: Thaitalianated

Food sauce (coconut, black olives, sundried tomatoes) with rice noodles

Activity People asked to write down or tell a recipe
Where it comes from? Why they would share it?

Reading *"Recipes and Copyright"*

...

Fourth course: The green, and not-so-green, things I will not eat and why

Food Salads (to be worked out by the chefs – but different form the second course)

Activity Guests asked to tell each other stories of the "greens" – the vegetables – that they will not eat and the reasons why they will not eat them.

Reading *"She spoke the word aesthetics ..."*

...

Fifth course: Of courts and judgements: The question of chocolate

Food Chocolate a range of high & low end, mainstream & ethically sourced etc.

Activity Screening of Flake ads
People asked to eat chocolate in silence
BUT to somehow encourage others to eat the chocolate that they each think is good!

Reading *"Slave to the Taste of Chocolate"*

...

Goodbye: Short presentation via video link.

THE READING TEXTS

Short text one to be read “Not to be swallowed whole.”

(spoken in a formal voice, as if calling a court to order)

We are the foodthing.

(spoken in a precise but not formal way – something akin to an internal monologue being voiced out loud)

A careless imagining takes hold of me: that the foodthing could be this uncanny universal; that the foodthing is the part of the world that enters our bodies, becoming part of us, while a remainder of its unassimilated matter transits further through our bodies, to be expelled as a wasted paste, a secondary contaminant to be disposed into the outer world once more.

Imagining that this unsettling transaction of body as, and with, worldly thing could be a shared horizon of all bodied beings. Imagining a universality of foodthings ever in transition. Imagining a vast commensalism of all eating beings, a great solidarity in all consumption even as we all might be devoured in our devouring.

But then this other one, she is there somewhere, and she cautions me again, saying:

“No matter how uncanny or unsettling, it seems somewhat imperious to imagine your own universality. As always constituted by an exclusion.”

She then continued in her challenge to my careless talk of “we who are the foodthing”:

“Let me return to you one of your old discriminations: *all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales whether among all the swarming things or among all the other living creatures in the water are to be regarded as unclean.*”

(spoken in a formal voice, as if calling a court to order)

We are the foodthing.

Short text two to be read “Those who break upon the flatbread earth.”

(formal voice) We are the foodthing.

(voiced as straight forward information, clearly addressed directly to the people in the room)

“On the flatbread earth” was the title for an event held in Dublin in Spring 2012. The event involved people gathering in a private house and sharing food that was served on a variety of different flatbreads. Flatbreads are a common feature across many different food traditions and range from Indian roti, paratha, and chapati to Mexican tortilla, Ethiopian injera, Mediterranean and North African pita, Italian pizza and Chinese bing. We are the foodthing.

The food prepared at the original event was based on a range of recipes for flatbreads and dips, sauces and accompaniments designed to be eaten with flatbreads. The dips, sauces and other such wet foods that go with the dry flatbreads are sometimes called “tastey pastes.” We are the foodthing.

In part this event echoed the kind of superficial enthusiastic rhetorics of globalisation that celebrates diversity as a driver of consumption; and that celebrates the free market for the flattening out of human relations. The printed matter produced as part of the event also pointed to this false universalism of global free markets. It pointed to how such global celebrations of diversity typically obscure the systematic inequity, dispossession and cultural domination of globalisation. However, the event also asked the question as to whether some other kind of universalism was instanced by the body’s need to eat, to consume and to expel waste, to excrete. We are the foodthing.

The breaking of bread together can have religious connotations. What the anthropologists call “commensalism”, and what we might call “having a bite to eat together”. But we were more interested to think about the physical and material implication of bodies and food stuffs in eating together. The material logics of bodies breaking food matter into pieces and internalising it is an everyday aesthetic operation. We played with our food. We moved between the practicalities of sharing food through individual plates or sharing food through communal dishes.

(formal voice) We are the foodthing.

Short text three to be read

“On the uncanny-ness of the foodthing, Andy Warhol’s is eating a burger”

Spoken at different points during the video screening that last 4 and half minutes

(formal voice throughout) We are the foodthing.

He looks at the burger. But when he is biting the burger, when it is entering his mouth and leaving his visual field: He looks somewhere else.

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He looks at the burger. But when he is biting the burger, when it is entering his mouth and leaving his visual field: He looks somewhere else.

He is careful with the paper and the card wrapping. But looks uncertain as to where they should be, where they should go next. He tidies them to his left.

The foodthing enters his mouth. The foodthing leaves his visual field. He looks somewhere else. Not at the camera, not at the table, somewhere else that is not quite looking inside his mouth to see where the foodthing goes.

He is careful with the paper and the card wrapping. But looks uncertain as to where they should be, where they should go next. He tidies them to his left.

He looks at the burger. But when he is biting the burger, when it is entering his mouth and leaving his visual field: He looks somewhere else.

Spoken after the video has finished screening

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The foodthing enters his mouth. The foodthing leaves his visual field. He looks somewhere else. Not at the camera, not at the table, somewhere else that is not quite looking inside his mouth to see where the foodthing goes.

At the end, he composes himself and he says “eh.. My name is Andy Warhol and ... eh... I just finished eating ... eh ... a hamburger”

We are the foodthing.

Short text four to be read “Recipes and Copyright”

(formal voice) We are the foodthing.

(voiced as straight forward information, clearly addressed directly to the people in the room)

The dish you are eating is called thaitalian and is an original recipe by an Irish designer called Dearbhla Gowen. She gave this recipe to the foodthing project for inclusion in a cookbook that is still in development. The cookbook is based on compiling shared recipes and the different ideas that these recipes implicate for the cook and for the eater. The US Copyright Office declares quite confidently that: “Mere listings of ingredients as in recipes, formulas, compounds, or prescriptions are not subject to copyright protection. However, when a recipe or formula is accompanied by substantial literary expression in the form of an explanation or directions, or when there is a combination of recipes, as in a cookbook, there may be a basis for copyright protection.” For this reason, copyright is generally understood as not applying to lists of ingredients (“200 grams of flour, 100 grams of butter, 1 tbspn of water”) or simple instructions (“bake at 200 degrees centigrade for 30 minutes”). However, copyright may apply to a more complex and “original” formulation of a recipe. We are the foodthing.

Some prominent chefs have argued that: “culinary traditions are collective, cumulative inventions, a heritage created by hundreds of generations of cooks.” We might wish to think of these trans-generational traditions of cooking and food making as a kind of commons. Identifying cooking and food lore as ‘a commons’ means that food culture becomes understood as a shared space of knowledge, skill, idea, application and invention that constitutes a resource that is both produced and reproduced by distributed communities and networks of practice. We are the foodthing.

The International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) has a “Code of Professional Ethics” that includes a broad code of good practice for generating, sharing and publishing recipes:

- (1) where one obtains a recipe from another source and makes minor changes but the recipe remains fairly intact, one should credit the source;
- (2) where one has made changes to a recipe but the original essence still remains, one should indicate that the recipe is “adapted from” or “based on” another; and
- (3) where one has changed a recipe considerably but still wants to indicate derivation from the original, one should indicate it as “loosely adapted from” or “inspired by” another recipe.

(formal voice) We are the foodthing.

Short text five to be read “She spoke the word aesthetics ...”

(formal voice) We are the foodthing.

(spoken in a precise but not formal way – something akin to an internal monologue being voiced out loud)
I imagined that she spoke the word ‘*aesthetics*’. The sounds of this estranging word coming as soft, though rapid, pulses in the air formed in the now narrowing, now widening throat; pulses in the breath that washed breezily round and through the half-stoppages of her tongue; her tongue arching from the under-palate to tip the upper-front-teeth, not to taste the air in the incisors’ gap but concentrated on forming the ‘th’ consonantly, before withdrawing slightly and racing upwards, to finalize the short terminal ‘*..tics*’: her punctual pronouncement of ‘*aesthetics*’.

Just as the gentle pulses of sounding the first syllables of ‘*aesth...*’ passed into the further exteriority – beyond those enfolded exteriorities of throat, and lungs, and stomach – some saliva spilt over her lower lip, at the dropped corner of her mouth. This thick anticipatory un-spat spit rolled slowly across the oral border, its viscosity thickening in the cooler drier air that mixes with her wet outflowing breath. She spoke the word ‘*aesthetics*’ from a drooling mouth.

The shadow moment of her gustatory utterance then quickened as an erratum of shame: shame quick passing with the wipe of a hand and a short intake of the new breath in an exaggerated inhaling, as if to suck back into her body’s hollows the smallest drops of a lost integrity.

(formal voice) We are the foodthing

Short text six to be read “Slave to the Taste of Chocolate”

The text is spoken alternating with the videos

Video-text-video-text – so that the speaker’s voice is not competing with the video soundtrack

Flake Advertisement Video 1

(formal voice) We are the foodthing

Flake Advertisement Video 2

(formal voice) We are the foodthing

Flake Advertisement Video 3

(voiced as straight forward information, clearly addressed directly to the people in the room)

On the screen you can see advertisements for a British chocolate bar first invented in the 1920s. The advertisements span the late 20th and early 21st century. They promise sexual pleasure. Sometimes even orgasms seem to be historically and socially constructed.

(formal voice) We are the foodthing

Flake Advertisement Video 4

(voiced as straight forward information, clearly addressed directly to the people in the room)

Recently, the voice of former slaves has been heard in a US court process that indicates the active collusion and enabling of slavery by the “big” chocolate corporations Nestlé and Cargill. These cases have been proceeding in the courts for a decade or so. The court cases center around the right of three former child slaves from Cote d’Ivoire to sue Nestlé and other leading corporations in the cocoa trade. The plaintiffs, the former child slaves who were kidnapped and forced to work on cocoa farms in Cote d’Ivoire, alleged that the defendants (large manufacturers, purchasers, processors, and retail sellers of cocoa beans located in the United States) perpetuated this system of child slavery. We are the foodthing.

Flake Advertisement Video 5

(voiced as straight forward information, clearly addressed directly to the people in the room)

Specifically, the plaintiffs alleged that the defendants, Nestlé and Cargill, aided and abetted slave-holding cacao farmers by providing certain “kickbacks” that were outside of ordinary business conduct to keep prices of, and competition for, cocoa low. The plaintiffs further alleged that the defendants were aware of the child slave labor because the defendants established exclusive buyer-seller agreements with the slave owners, provided training and equipment to the slave owners, and visited the slave owners’ farms several times per year. We are the foodthing.

Flake Advertisement Video 6

(voiced as straight forward information, clearly addressed directly to the people in the room)

Within these court proceedings it is recorded that the three child slaves were forced to work for up to fourteen hours per day six days a week, given only scraps of food to eat, and whipped and beaten by overseers. They were locked in small rooms at night and not permitted to leave the plantations, knowing that children who tried to escape would be beaten or tortured. One of the children is recorded as having witnessed “guards cut open the feet of children who attempted to escape”, and another informed that the guards forced failed escapees to drink urine. We are the foodthing.

Flake Advertisement Video 7

(voiced as straight forward information, clearly addressed directly to the people in the room)

Despite their knowledge of child slavery and their control over the cocoa market, the defendants – big chocolate - operate in Cote d’Ivoire “with the unilateral goal of finding the cheapest sources of cocoa.” The

defendants have also lobbied against congressional efforts to curb the use of child slave labor. In 2001, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would have required United States importers and manufacturers to certify and label their products “slave free.” The defendants and others in the chocolate industry rallied against the bill, urging instead the adoption of a private, voluntary enforcement mechanism. A voluntary enforcement system was eventually adopted, a result that, according to the plaintiffs, “in effect guarantee[d] the continued use of the cheapest labor available to produce [cocoa]—that of child slaves.”

Flake Advertisement Video 8

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