

THE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE HISTORY OF FOOD AND DRINK



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What's Happening

Molecular Gastronomy

On 10 September the Research Centre hosted a seminar on molecular gastronomy presented by Dr Peter Barham, Professorial Teaching Fellow in Physics at the University of Bristol. Tina Kalivas reports below.

Culina Mutata: The Changing Kitchen, Uppsala, 3-5 September 2007

Bernadette Hince reports on the conference celebrating the 300th anniversary of the birth of Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778), Sweden's most famous scientist. See below.

The Seven Deadly Sins of Obesity

Barbara Santich reviews *The Seven Deadly Sins of Obesity: How the Modern World is Making Us Fat*, edited by Jane Dixon and Dorothy Broom. See below.

Dining on Turtles

The good news is the publication of the collection of papers entitled *Dining on Turtles: Food Feasts and Drinking in History* by Palgrave Macmillan. Edited by Diane Kirkby and Tanja Luckins, it contains chapters written by many members of the Research Centre including Barbara Santich, Ken Albala, Lynn Martin, Sarah Black, and Tina Kalivas. The bad news is the price: \$160. In sharp contrast is *Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Food Studies*, a collection of articles from conferences of the Canadian Association for Food Studies cited below and priced at \$25 Canadian.

Plus Our Regular Features

- Websites
- Publishing Opportunities
- Conferences
- Publications
- Exhibitions

A Research Centre of the
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Sophie Coe Prize in Food History

Anne Mendelson is the winner of The Sophie Coe Prize in Food History for 2007, awarded at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery. The subject of her prize-winning essay was "The Lenapes: In Search of Pre-European Foodways in the Greater New York Region," which will appear in *Gastropolis: Food and New York City*, edited by Annie Hauck-Lawson and Jonathan Deutsch (Columbia University Press, 2008).

Websites

The British Library has recently launched a new interactive resource entitled Food Stories, a website that examines the revolutionary changes that have taken place in the production and consumption of food in the United Kingdom over the last century:
<http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/food-stories/index.html>

John Evelyn's *Acetaria: A Discourse of Sallets* is now online:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/15517>

A Catalogue of Seeds, Plants etc. Sold by William Lucas at the Naked Boy near Strand Bridge London, 1677
http://www.thomasetty.co.uk/resources/1677_william_lucas.pdf

The website of the International Commission for the Research into European Food History contains information about the Commission, its colloquia, and publications.
<http://www.vub.ac.be/SGES/ICREFH.html>

A list of five hundred songs about food:
<http://www.mixedup.com/foodsongs.htm>

A list of food films:
<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/fooddocs.html>

Publishing Opportunities

Ken Albala is looking for authors and/or editors for new projects for Greenwood Press. These include two remaining volumes in the Food Culture Around the World series on Food Culture in Portugal and Food Culture in The United States, which would bring the series to 20 volumes. In another series are two volumes, Food in the United States: 1890s to 1945 and Food in the United States: 1945 to Today. Lastly he is looking for two editors for encyclopedias, The Encyclopedia of Organic and Sustainable Food and The Encyclopedia of Vegetarians Around the World. Ken is looking for authors with either a PhD or expertise in the field and significant writing experience (a book is ideal).
kalbala@pacific.edu

The Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition is planning a special double issue on Sustainable Food Systems: A Global Perspective under the guest editorship of Angie Tagtow and Alison Harmon. Manuscripts are due on 26 October 2007. The journal is the premier, peer-reviewed journal among professionals interested in the growing connection between the environment, food, nutrition, and health. It examines local, national, and international hunger, and environmental nutritional issues dealing with food and water security, agriculture, food production, sustainable food systems, poverty, social justice, and human values.

Information about submission requirements is available at: <http://JHEN.Haworth-Press.com>

The journal is published quarterly in both print and electronic format. For a free

copy send an email to samplecopy@HaworthPress.com

FOST, the research team on Social and Cultural Food Studies based at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Free University of Brussels), has organised a session on “Food, Court Cultures and the World since 1850” at the European Social Science History Conference (<http://www.iisg.nl/esshc/>) in Lisbon in 2008. Afterwards, publishing house Kegan Paul will publish the contributions. Although the submissions for papers at the conference is closed, FOST is still looking for authors who would like to prepare a chapter for this book. The editors welcome chapters that study the power of food at a European court in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Deadline for the final contributions is 1 March 2008. Contact Daniëlle De Vooght: danielle.devooght@vub.ac.be [For details: http://www.vub.ac.be/FOST/fost_in_english]

Research

Ancient DNA harvested from pigs has allowed scientists to determine the arrival of early farmers into Europe 11,000 years ago, reaching the area of modern-day Paris by at least the early fourth Century BC. A study involving 18 international researchers including Professor Alan Cooper, who heads the University of Adelaide’s Australian Centre for Ancient DNA, reveals that pigs, which were first domesticated in the Middle East, were definitely brought into Europe by the earliest farmers.

Conferences

As usual, many conference notices arrived too late for either participation or attendance, but I include them fyi.

28-30 September 2007, International Association of Culinary Professionals Food History Symposium on Innovation at the Table, Delaware

The symposium took place at the Hagley Museum and Library (www.Hagley.org) and at the University of Delaware Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management (<http://www.hrim.udel.edu>). The symposium was designed to create dialogue and to share perspectives between culinary historians and current industry practitioners regarding the timeless challenges of innovating new products, design, and packaging, marketing approaches, and service environments. Scholars taking part included Darra Goldstein, Roger Horowitz, Bruce Kraig, and Andrew Smith.

19-20 October 2007, Italy and the Mediterranean Diet: Food Culture, Nutrition, and the Question of Quality, New York
New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and the James Beard Foundation hosted this two-day immersion in Italian food culture, featuring:

Discussions with culinary and nutrition experts about the Mediterranean Diet as a nutritional ideal and gastronomic program

Tastings of artisanal Italian products such as olive oil, cheese, salumi, coffee, chocolate, and wine.

Reception and dinner at the James Beard House prepared by guest chef Giordano Monni of Buca dell’Orafo restaurant in Florence.

Workshops at the James Beard Foundation with the chef-instructors of Apicius, the Culinary Institute of Florence.

A field trip to Una Pizza Napoletana to learn how Neapolitan pizza is created.

An Italian approach to understanding

and appreciating wine

To see the conference schedule visit www.jamesbeard.org/education/conferences/2007/mediterranean_schedule.shtml

30 November-1 December 2007, Forum of the European Institute for the History of the Culture of Food, Tours

The theme of the forum is “Does the Good Product Exist?” Details are at http://www.iehca.eu/forum_02a.html

20-26 January 2008, Organic Olive Harvest and Traditional Cuisine Seminar, Crete

This is billed as an Experiential Learning Program highlighting culture, organic agriculture and cuisine, organised by Crete’s Culinary Sanctuaries, an internationally acclaimed eco-agritourism network. Olive oil has been produced in Crete for over 4,000 years. This intensive seminar focuses on the olive harvest, varieties, cultivation, and different types of extraction methods. Participants will meet local organic olive farmers and producers, vintners, historians, pro chefs, and home cooks and will spend time on farms and in kitchens and explore the countryside and historic sites.

For more information: www.cooking-crete.com

13-16 February 2008, Annual Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association Conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico
The Food and Culture area of the conference offers food researchers a unique opportunity to present their work in a small setting within a much larger conference. The Food and Culture panels run over 2-3 days and do not overlap; as a result participants are able to attend all the Food and Culture area presentations and have meaningfully dialogues about their work. The organisers invite submissions of individual papers, panels, or

roundtable discussions focused on advancing cultural understanding of individuals, communities, and the construction of everyday life through the study of food. Papers and presentations are welcome from any field but must take a cultural perspective.

The deadline for proposals is 16 November 2006. Contact Melissa Salazar mlsalazar@ucdavis.edu

28-29 March 2008, Law, Culture, and Humanities Conference, University of California at Berkeley and San Francisco State University

Christopher Buccafusco is soliciting paper presentations for panels on Food, Law, and Culture for this conference. Recent work in the humanities and social sciences has begun to explore food’s role in culture, and the goal of the panels will be to apply this interdisciplinary scholarship to examine the place of food in the law. Presenters from all disciplines are encouraged to submit papers. Important questions include: How can we explain the law’s varying treatment of food? What role does law play in shaping cultural ideas about food and food production? And, inversely, how does food culture affect the law?

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24-27 April 2008, Culinary Journeys, Long Beach, California

Culinary Journeys is the theme of the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association. In an age that has seen both a marked increase in the availability of exotic foods in supermarket chains and the growing popularity of farmers’ markets and local food movements, what explains the urge some writers feel to travel far and wide in search of new culinary adventures? How does the quest for food change the nature of

the travel experience? Paper proposals addressing any aspect of culinary travel narratives, whether literary, televised, radio or web-broadcast, are welcome.

Address all questions and abstracts to Vivian Nun Halloran (vhallora@indiana.edu) by 15 November 2007. For more information: www.acla.org

4-8 June 2008, The Joint Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Food and Society and the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society, New Orleans.

The theme of this year's meeting is Resilient Culinary Cultures: Disaster, Innovation and Change in Foodscapes. New Orleans, home to one of the most distinct culinary cultures in the United States, is slowly—but surely—recovering from one of the worst disasters in American history. This year's theme is inspired by that juxtaposition: in a world in which older agricultural practices and food traditions are simultaneously vibrant and under attack, what makes a culinary culture resilient? The floods of 2005 challenged many in New Orleans to think about what was important in their lives, including their culinary traditions and practices. The disaster revealed many of the inequities built on race and poverty that framed in often unacknowledged ways the lives of farmers, fishers, cooks, and chefs—of nearly everyone—in the region.

Yet food also stood as a symbol of lost identity, common culture, and distinctiveness for those who fled the floods. Food, often cooked and distributed by heroic chefs and restaurateurs in difficult conditions after the floods, was seen by many as the first sign that New Orleans could in fact recover. With the recovery now showing progress, it is clear that the local culinary culture has both survived and been significantly changed.

Many culinary cultures face similar threats—including disasters, economic and political globalisation, corporate homogenisation, massive migrations, and violent conflicts—to their ability to survive. How will they adapt? What kinds of innovations allow us to speak of ongoing or even new culinary cultures? At the same time, in other parts of the world, governments and other economic players are revamping and sustaining local culinary traditions and identities to exploit their political and commercial potential. New Orleans will provide a fascinating context to think through these questions.

For full information see www.food-culture.org

The program chair is Alice P. Julier, Women's Studies Program, University of Pittsburgh (apjulier@gmail.com).

All submissions are due 4 February 2008.

19-21 June 2008, Annual Meeting of the Agricultural History Society, University of Nevada, Reno

The theme of this year's meeting is Fertile Connections: Agriculture, Environment and Society in a Global Perspective. In an era of rapid transit, electronic communication, international commerce, and worldwide environmental challenges, global connections abound. Reflecting those realities, a growing number of course listings sport an international or global focus with titles like Atlantic Economic History, World Agricultural History, and Global Environmental History. At the same time heightened interest in cross-cultural comparative approaches, approaches and insights from environmental and cultural history, and perspectives from related disciplines in the social sciences and humanities are enriching the field.

Desiring to promote and extend these fertile developments, the program committee for the 2008 meeting of the Agricultural History Society invites submissions from scholars at all levels and in all disciplines on topics related to the history of agriculture, broadly conceived. The submission deadline is 15 October. For submission details contact Brian Cannon: brian_cannon@byu.edu

8-9 August 2008, Reading and Writing Recipe Books: 1600-1800, University of Warwick

This international interdisciplinary conference will provide a much-needed environment that allows recipe book scholars to meet and discuss important issues such as comparative methodologies and periodisation, thereby offering a key opportunity to shape the course of future research on this genre. The organisers invite proposals for 20 minute papers on any aspect of recipe book studies, particularly on the following topics:

- Methodological essays from the disciplines of history of medicine, literature, material culture, and culinary history

- Periodisation of generic conventions

- Possibilities of new scholarly directions, for example, recipe books as life-writing sources

- Editing recipe books for modern audiences

- Evidence of larger cultural influences, such as gender, social status, and geography

- How manuscript and printed recipe collections relate to one another

Contact the co-organisers: Michelle DiMeo (m.m.dimeo@warwick.ac.uk) or Sara Pennell (s.pennell@roehampton.ac.uk)

21-23 September, 2008, Famine and Mass Violence, Youngstown State University
Famine and mass violence frequently go hand in hand. Yet scholars of famine and

scholars of mass violence often ask different questions resulting in a wide lacuna in research and the methodology for analysing connections between famines and violence. This conference seeks to bring together both famine experts and genocide specialists to engage in a dialogue with each other, first during the conference and later in a collective volume resulting from the meeting. The organisers welcome proposals that try to bring the role of social forces and governments in the emergence of famines together into coherent frameworks, whether they put more emphasis on the famine or the violence side. Both case studies and theoretical approaches are welcome.

Proposals should be sent by 1 October 2007 to both conference organisers: Helene J. Sinnreich: hjsinnreich@ysu.edu and Christian Gerlach: hcg3@pitt.edu

Daniel Niles of Clark University in Worcester MA is attempting to identify gastronomers—chefs, producer-organisers, and intellectuals of various kind—for participation in an international conference and cultural event. Ideally these would be people who explore the ecological and/or social dynamics of local foods or of a cuisine in general, and who would like to participate in talks, tastings, exhibitions...all of these things that now surround a general celebration of food quality.

Additionally, he is especially keen to identify people from the following countries: Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, China, Ecuador, Spain, France, Gambia, India, Kenya, Mali, Nicaragua, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Vietnam.
dniles@clarku.edu

Publications

Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Food Studies, edited by Mustafa Koc, Rod MacRae and Kelly Bronson, includes papers presented by the members of the Canadian Association for Food Studies at the past two annual conferences. The book is available from the publishers, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, at about \$25 Canadian. jeffs@mcgrawhill.ca

Papers include:

“In Labels We Trust: A Critical Look at Consumer Need for Food Labelling,” Irena Knezevic

“How Do You Describe Your Hot-dog? Discourses of Food-related Risk and the Unsettling of Urban Order,” Kelly Bronson

“Nostalgia on the Food Network: Eating the American Dream,” Sarah Kornik

“Please Pass the Mustard Fruit: Vancouver Foodies, Cultural Distinction and the New Middle Class,” Diana Ambrozias

“Making Sense of Health Foods: A Historical Analysis of Food Advertising in the Australian Women’s Weekly in the Three Post-war Decades,” Teresa Davis and Tania Schneider

“The Evolution of Nutrition Policy in Canada to the Second World War,” Aleck Ostry

“Spatial Colonization of Food Environments by Pseudo Food Companies: Precursor of a Health Crisis,” Tony Winson

“Individual and Household Food Insecurity in Canada: Context and Responses,” Elaine Power

“The Farm Crisis & Corporate Profits,” Darrin Qualman

“Relational Local Food Networks: The Farmers’ Market @ Queen’s,” Alison Blay-Palmer

The proceedings of a recent colloquy at

Tours on Un aliment sain dans un corps sain are now available. For details: http://www.iehca.eu/new_docs/actes_coll_aliment.pdf

Exhibitions

The Austrian Winery Boom, 6 September 2007-12 January 2008, New York

While international star architects are today designing and building spectacular new wineries around the world, a new and internationally unique scene of sustained symbiosis between contemporary architecture and viticulture has emerged in the east and southeast of Austria. The exhibition “The Austrian Winery Boom” presents for the first time a detailed survey of the new building tradition inspired by Austria’s new generation of quality wine makers. The exhibition demonstrates the development from the manor winery to the high-tech wine factory. For additional information visit www.acfny.org

Talking Heads

Tanya Freedman, a producer at Silver River Productions, is interested in speaking to experts whose work touches on the themes covered in a new television series on the history of food for Channel 4 and who can help with background research. She is also looking for people who may be interested in acting as consultants to the series as well as experts to appear on screen.

The series is ostensibly about dieting and weight loss regimes from the late Victorian, Edwardian, and Interwar years in Britain but will incorporate food history, nutrition science, medicine, fashion, and gender as well as broader social and cultural themes. The time period starts in the late Victorian Era when William Banting published the first best-selling diet book. This

was not long after the three main components of food had been determined as carbohydrates, fats, and proteins and just before the first Boer war when Britain's conscripts were found to be poor physical specimens. The series continues through the Edwardian period, when the emerging middle classes were getting increasingly fat as a result of their abundant diets and soon became a captive market for the commercial diet doctors, and it ends in the run up to World War II when the first national fitness campaign was implemented by the government.
tanya.freedman@silverriver.tv

Culinary History Tour of Egypt
Angela Schneider, who teaches Culinary History at Capilano College in Canada, is hosting a culinary history tour of Ancient Egypt that visits the ancient monuments and samples the food of the pharaohs. The tour dates are 14-31 January 2008. For details go to <http://www.greatexpeditions.com>

Weird Words: Fletcherize

To chew thoroughly.

The word commemorates The Great Masticator, a title that these days might lead to hearers getting the giggles. He was Horace Fletcher, a food faddist of the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth. He advised people to chew each bite of their food 32 times, to eat small amounts, and only to eat when hungry and free from stress or anxiety. Hence this rhyme of the time:

Eat somewhat less but eat it more
Would you be hearty beyond fourscore.
Eat not at all in worried mood
Or suffer harm from best of food.
Don't gobble your food but "Fletcherize"
Each morsel you eat, if you'd be wise.
Don't cause your blood pressure e'er to rise

By prizing your menu by its size.

The heyday of Fletcherism was the early 1900s. Time Magazine wrote a retrospective on the fashion in 1928, "For a time wealthy mothers counted their children's jaw beats at the table while ragged micks in the streets threatened to 'Fletcherize' their little enemies." A good example appeared in 1908 in Food Remedies by Florence Daniel: "But whatever is taken must be 'Fletcherised,' that is, chewed and chewed and chewed until it is all reduced to liquid." The word for a while became frequent in writings of all sorts. In 1922 P. G. Wodehouse borrowed the term in The Adventures of Sally to illustrate the seriousness of a dog fight: "The raffish mongrel was apparently endeavouring to fletcherize a complete stranger of the Sealyham family."

Fletcherism was taken quite seriously by many people and had some distinguished adherents; it lasted until the 1930s. Unfortunately, eating meals took much longer than usual and there were complaints that it severely restricted conversation at dinner parties.

Cara de Silva found this on a website devoted to weird words and posted it on the ASFS listserve. Harvey Levenstein comments: The material contains some mistakes (for example, Fletcher never prescribed a number of chews) and misses many good nuggets (such as Kellogg having a huge "Fletcherize!" sign hung in the dining room of his Sanitorium and having inmates sing a Fletcherizing song before each meal). Also, dismissing him as a faddist misses the point that he was in fact very influential in such things as protein requirements with the first generation of nutritional scientists and home economists. At one stage he was given a platoon of United States army troops with

which to experiment at Yale University. For more on Fletcher see Harvey's book *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet*, which the University of California Press reprinted in 2003. The movement lasted beyond the 1930s; in 1959 I met someone whose uncle was a believer.

Molecular Gastronomy

Tina Kalivas reports:

On Tuesday evening, 10 September, the Research Centre for the History of Food and Drink hosted a seminar by Dr Peter Barham. As a Professorial Teaching Fellow in Physics at the University of Bristol, one of his interests includes applying scientific knowledge in the kitchen, which has led to what he calls "many interesting collaborations with chefs and contributions to the creation of the new science of Molecular Gastronomy." Peter took us on a scientific journey of the physics and molecular characteristics of what happens during the cooking process and what "makes us enjoy our food." He began by explaining why many instructions in recipe books, like adding salt to boiling water to cook beans, "are wrong," and that this is largely because characteristics of certain foods and the conditions in which they were cooked have changed.

Peter also used a range of practical demonstrations and "tastings" with members from the audience. He closed off one or more of the senses of volunteers to show that we don't experience our food solely through our taste buds. He used blindfolds, nose pinching, chip crunching, salt, sugar, and umami solutions, and food dye to show us how the senses combine to detect aroma, texture, and colour, all of which is integral to the eating and flavour experience. He demonstrated how, both culturally and physiologically, everyone's taste, smell, and other sense sensitivities are

unique, raising serious questions about the degree to which we can all possibly experience food in the same way. I was horrified to learn that the aroma of truffle (a key component in its flavour) is only detected by some 40% of the population, and having never experienced one myself, I find myself wondering if I ever will.

Peter also demonstrated how molecular compatibility helps to explain why some foods we would not ordinarily associate together do indeed go together well: coffee and garlic, chocolate and blue cheese, cheese and honey. He also explained why smell, as a tool of detecting changes in our environment, leads to flavour fatigue. He suggested texture variation for maintaining interest in a dish, and demonstrated this with a cauliflower risotto recipe. Overall, Barham made a strong argument for prompting us to question why we cook the way we do, while also offering possibilities that molecular gastronomy can provide chefs and household cooks for creating interesting and enjoyable dishes. This was a thoroughly interesting and entertaining discussion that I am truly glad I didn't miss.

Molecular Gastronomy: toward a definition Roger Haden writes:

To some extent the term molecular gastronomy is an oxymoron. The early nineteenth century dream of a future gastronomy, immortalised by Brillat-Savarin in an age full of utopian dreams, was conceived of by the astute judge as a universal academic discipline. Based in part on the then nascent science of cookery, but not wholly determined by it, the idea that gastronomy could begin and end with "molecules" seems as absurd today as it would have done then. Gastronomy relates to biological as well as social and cultural systems; to food production and consumption; and yes, to food-related physics

and chemistry, but is never reducible to such “fundamentals” alone. Brillat-Savarin argued that gastronomy concerns all that affects human nourishment, which puts gastronomy, and more broadly, food culture, in its proper perspective. Indeed, these days the idea that food is connected to all facets of cultural life is something of a cliché, whether in scholarly or popular food writing. It would be disingenuous to level criticism at “the scientists,” whose methodological mainstay is a faith in objectivity, simply by saying they take no account of culture. Why would and, indeed, how could they? The term molecular gastronomy, while invented and publicly espoused by “scientists in the kitchen” like Hervé This and Peter Barham (who both work hard to expose the culinary myths of “traditional cookery”) relates, more tellingly in the cultural arena, to a new culinary elite, similar to Nouvelle cuisine.

Chefs clamour to create foams, films, sprays, and gels in the same way as feathered sauces and octagonal plates seized the imaginations of wannabe innovators in the 1970s. Coined in 1988 by Hungarian physicist Nicholas Kurti and French chemist Hervé This, MG has become the catchcry for the current culinary fashion. But while the present vogue certainly reflects the fact that the science of cookery has stepped up to the plate(!), and delivered — most brilliantly in the case of Ferran Adria — and in doing so reflects the direct incursion of science in the kitchen (direct from the laboratory in Adria’s case!), one should not necessarily heed the associated hype about the weaknesses of traditional culinary methods and techniques. If only because any science-led assault on the traditions of cookery, supposedly in the interests of gastronomy, are as doomed as has been modern nutritional science’s war against food-related illness. We need only remember that obesity is a social disease to drive home the point that

while the appliance of science can practically improve the healthful properties of foods and thereby of diets, it cannot very well change people’s attitudes, values, aspirations, ideologies, values and perspectives regarding food and eating, nearly as easily. That encapsulates the perennial problem besetting relations between the sciences and the humanities. Science doesn’t care a fig for meaning (why should it?) and the cultural historians cannot see anything but the production of meaning as being central to social life. Scientists deal in facts but facts are always digested, or not, within specific socio-cultural and historical contexts.

The apparent transparency of meaning inferred by the term molecular gastronomy is unfortunately misleading, because it is applied to emphasise the new role of contemporary science in the kitchen, but in reality deflects what should be a deeper interest in what molecular gastronomy represents as a cultural, and not merely a culinary, phenomenon.

Molecular gastronomy is not simply the vanguard form of a superior way of understanding foods and how they behave. It is the cultural expression of a number of interrelated processes: technological innovation, global affluence and influence, individualisation, and identity construction, together with consumer neophilia as this relates to the emergence of new forms of cultural capital. More than this, however, molecular gastronomy marks an interesting postmodern departure in terms of culinary style, the emergence and fashionable success of which, while relying in a practical sense on scientific innovation, gains its current prestige from its power to disconnect diners (and the foodie community at large) from the, to some extent, obligatory coded forms and stylistic clichés of traditional cuisines. Even ethnic cuisines are today vying for space with the freer forms of hybridized dishes, another sign of the breakdown of conventional forms, a process Claude Fischler once gloomily

named gastro-anomie: changes to the traditional social markers of taste in dining that pertain in whole or part to hierarchised dishes and ingredients within established culinary repertoires; typically, that of a Carême, an Escoffier, or a Bocuse. These have now ceased to have the cache they once had. Whereas Nouvelle cuisine revealed, harbinger-like, in the post-Bocuse (post-classic cuisine) era, that tradition itself can become a playful pastiche of traditional tastes and flavours, an intercultural conversation (between France and Japan in this instance), and a healthy alternative to classical cuisine all in one, molecular gastronomy moves further still away from tradition. It jettisons all reference to “food culture” in any traditional sense, unless, albeit exceptionally, in Adria’s typically tongue-in-cheek fashion. The gastronomic and cultural shift announced by molecular gastronomy is not the creation of cause and effect, simply through the advance of the science of cookery, but rather as the result of the technical ability to produce such foods that sync with social receptivity; the readiness to receive the newly invented dishes (based on foams, essences, gels, etc) within the cultural Petri dish. Culture in this sense does not issue from the laboratory anymore than the latter produces innovations in a culturally neutral vacuum.

Molecular gastronomy delivers food seemingly without culture, if we take the latter to mean the history of cuisine until the present. In a world now thoroughly dominated by consumerism, molecular gastronomy represents the greatest opportunity to create new products, freed from the strictures of tradition (whether classical, ethnic, derivative, or hybridized), and therefore affords the greatest opportunities for commercialization. What parodies, travesties, and monstrous forms of fashionable food will appear in its name?

It is often suggested that the reason antipodean chefs do so well in Europe and the UK is that they are not afraid to innovate, whereas

is that they are not afraid to innovate, whereas classically trained chefs from the Northern hemisphere are too deeply steeped in tradition to think outside the customary culinary square. Molecular gastronomers certainly represent a global push to do the latter; but to infer as the term appears to, that gastronomy is only molecular, or that chemistry is the most important thing about it, is to ignore that this phenomenon tells us about ourselves and where we are going, gastronomically-speaking.

Where we are going with regard to food, in fact, is where we have been going for over two centuries. And so, to sum up, we can note something glaringly anachronistic about the term molecular gastronomy, since surely it is the food industry, closely linked to the technoscience of food processing and the manufacture of consumer foods, that have been the champions of “molecular” food in a literal sense for well over a century, while the current usage misleads in its suggestion of up-to-the-minute innovation. Industrial chemists are the true but hitherto unrecognized geniuses of molecular gastronomy. Rheological mastery of extrusion and “deformation” in the food factory arguably knock Adria-like culinary fun and games into a cocked hat. The fad which know goes by the name of molecular gastronomy (and I do not want to subtract from the marvellous creations of some its practitioners) is more useful to look at as a cultural phenomenon and not merely as a science-based culinary innovation; at least then we can see molecular gastronomy for what it is, a mirror of our times, if not quite of our taste.

The Man on the Wettex

Culina Mutata: The Changing Kitchen, Uppsala, 3-5 September 2007

Bernadette Hince reports.

This year Sweden celebrates the 300th anniversary of the birth of Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778), its most famous scientist. The celebration has been comprehensive—you could have spent the whole of 2007 going to conferences honouring Linnaeus (also known as Carl von Linné). In fact, his name is so much in evidence that some Swedish people are beginning to tire of hearing it. You can even buy a wettex with Linnaeus' image and name on it.

One such conference was held in Uppsala this September, and I went to it (and yes, I did buy the wettex). Beforehand, I had a few days travelling in Stockholm's vast archipelago of islands. On one of these islands in the Baltic Sea I picked lingonberries and bilberries in the forest. The fruitful environment of the forests was the kind in which Linnaeus—and all Swedes—grew up in the 1700s. Like other natural historians of his time, Linnaeus was a man with diverse interests, a doctor and naturalist whose interests were above all botanical and taxonomic. It was Linnaeus who was responsible for popularising the elegant two-part (binomial) system of Latin scientific names that we use today in names like *Homo sapiens* or *Solanum tuberosum* (the potato), both names given by Linnaeus himself. He named thousands of plants and animals during his life, using the sexual characteristics of plants to classify them.

Linnaeus was an energetic and charming man, so popular among students that he was sometimes resented by other teachers. He sent his students forth to botanise all over the world, and usually maintained contact with them in later life. But he had no such

contact with one former student, Daniel Solander, who left Sweden for England and, ultimately, a life of working with Joseph Banks. It must have been a source of deep frustration to Linnaeus that in the seven years between Solander's return to England on James Cook's Endeavour in 1771 and his own death in 1778 he never saw plant specimens from the wondrous new continent of New Holland.

The conference in September was called Culina Mutata: The Changing Kitchen: A Conference on Food and Nutrition. Being prone to impulse, I hadn't looked very closely at the subtitle, so the emphasis on nutrition had escaped my notice, but the presence of nutritionists at the conference didn't. It was a smaller conference than the organisers had hoped after three years of planning. Almost all of the 60 participants were Swedish (half came from Uppsala), and many were connected with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences that hosted the conference. I was the only Australian. There were a few English people and (to my surprise) no North Americans, but like many other activities in the Nordic countries the whole conference was conducted in English.

Each session took its inspiration from an item of food or nutrition that had been the subject of Linnaeus' writing, and the background papers included some 250-year-old writings that (surprisingly) have been translated into English only during the last few years. The session topics were the changing kitchen in 300 years since Linnaeus' birth; food from his travels in Lapland, including fermented food and traditional food preservation techniques; variety in the diet; berries, and the gout-curing properties of wild strawberries (Linnaeus suffered from gout); warm and cold foods; and bread and whole-grain cereals. Within each session one paper made some direct connection to Linnaeus, and the other offered a modern perspective.

Linnaeus' approach to food plants was

utilitarian. He was interested in how humans could use plants, and whether they could be grown in Sweden. He was not a cook. His vast knowledge of and enthusiasm for food plants came from sitting, talking, and observing. His wife and servants of course cooked the meals at home.

The conference meals featured “authentic food, beverages and entertainment from the days of Carl Linnaeus,” imaginatively produced with the help of experts on eighteenth-century cuisine, Gunilla Lindell and Gunilla Englund, and chef Örjan Klein. I doubt whether Linnaeus ever ate as well as I did during the conference. Some of the traditional Swedish dishes such as yellow split pea soup would be familiar to anyone with an Anglo-Australian background. Others were less familiar—stewed cloudberries (*Rubus chamaemorus* to use the Linnaean name) and lingonberries, a pudding of beestings (a cow’s first milk after calving) simply poured into a pan and set slowly in the oven until it resembled a firm junket, small beer, green chicken with gooseberry sauce, black salsify (*scorzonera*), and reindeer with cranberries. The conference banquet—a word that for once was completely apt (menu below)—was held in the beautiful Linneanum orangerie in Uppsala’s botanical gardens.

For me the conference highlight was meeting and listening to Laila Spik, a Saami woman from Lapland who talked about her own work in preserving and teaching traditional Lapp techniques of food preparation in northern Sweden. Laila was the only speaker who had brought food to share, a generous act and one that created a lot of interest. After her talk, we sampled her dried angelica stem and root, smoked elk, elk sausage, dried lingonberries and bilberries, crispbread made from birch bark flour (delicious!), dried seaweed, lactose-rich goat’s cheese, and hard cheese, which in Linnaeus’ day would have been made from fat-rich, flavoursome reindeer milk in Lapland.

Reindeer herding was at its peak in the eighteenth century.

On my last night in Sweden I dined at a restaurant in an ancient building near Uppsala’s central cathedral. The meal included an intriguing sea buckthorn soufflé for dessert—but that’s another story...

Culina Mutata conference dinner—an eighteenth-century banquet
Linnaeus brännvin appetisers
Pickled herring á la Brantevik
European anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus*)
Hard Swedish cheese
Lamb sausage
Isterband sausage on Uppland bread with horseradish cream and capers
Tvärnö ham
Regional and Scandinavian bread
Brännvin (schnapps/vodka), beer and mineral water
Roasted lamb with green parsley and thyme sauce, roasted root vegetables and steamed broad beans, sourdough bread
Rosehip mousse with sour cream and pickled rosehips served with sweet bread in the fashion of the time of Linnaeus
Coffee and chocolate-covered cherries

Barbara Santich Reviews

Jane Dixon and Dorothy Broom (eds). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Obesity: How the Modern World is Making Us Fat*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007. 228 pp.

Hardly a week goes by without some mention in the media of either adult or childhood obesity in Australia: the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity, its associated health risks, the putative causes, the evils of fast foods, the sinister influence of television advertising. The Adelaide Food Summit, held as part of Tasting Australia in October, firmly set its focus on childhood obesity with its theme “Youth, Health and Nutrition: What’s

Working? A Focus on Solutions.” The specific association of obesity and fast foods and their advertising was addressed by the South Australian government’s Social Development Committee whose report, tabled in parliament in March 2007, included 30 recommendations; among these were, “That the Department of Health work in partnership with the food service industry to examine ways in which the food portion size and the energy density of foods can be reduced to encourage healthier eating patterns. Strategies that discourage the promotion of supersized or oversized meal offers should be implemented,” and, “That the Minister for Education and Children’s Services, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders work to remove all carbonated drinks and sugar-laden drinks from school vending machines and school canteens as soon as possible or by the end of the 2007 school year, and monitor the impact of their removal on school budgets.”

Such recommendations clearly target what has been described as the contemporary “obesogenic” environment, one that makes it easy for (if not encourages) individuals to overeat, in particular to eat more energy-dense foods, and to exercise less. The obesogenic environment that offers “an abundance of high-energy foods, sedentary jobs and leisure activities, and labour saving devices,” is also the focus of Jane Dixon and Dorothy Broom’s book, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Obesity: How the Modern World is Making Us Fat* (p. 3).

While the general increase in overweight and obesity is relatively recent (the editors point out that it’s a phenomenon of the last 20-30 years), so, too, is the focus on the “physical, cultural and social environments of industrialised countries in encouraging a positive energy balance in the population.” At the end of the twentieth century, they note, the Australian government was still emphasising individual responsibility, “exhorting citizens to adopt wiser lifestyles” (p. 8). Without denying biological causes—people gain weight when the amount of

energy they take in is greater than the amount of energy they use, and the amount of fat stored is genetically determined—this book argues that genetics cannot explain the rapid rise in obesity, nor the socio-economic differentials; rather, “human biology ... has been interacting with rapid changes in the social and physical environment, with repercussions for body shape and fat deposits” (p. 10). From this perspective, and based on the principal explanations for changes in both food consumption and physical activity (namely the rising use of convenience and pre-prepared foods, increasing “busyness” and lack of time, changing family dynamics, sedentarisation of leisure activities, escalating car reliance, aggressive marketing of food and changing knowledge, attitudes and practices to physical activity (pp. 13-14)), it identifies the seven modern “sins” of the environment:

- the commodified environment
- the harried environment
- the car-reliant environment
- the pressured parenting environment
- the technological environment
- the marketed environment
- the environment of competing authorities

Each of these “sins” is explored, to differing degrees, in the main chapters of the book. Discussing the first “sin,” economist Richard Denniss explains with elegant simplicity and lucid logic how the economy, with its axiomatic belief that more is better, feeds obesity. He also notes that the absence of debate on the extents to which markets respond to consumer demands (very little, in my opinion) and consumers respond to advertising hinders the development of good public policy. Most importantly, however, he points out the limitations of the economic models on which policy is often based, and suggests that in the current economic and political environment “the process of solving problems is not nearly as profitable as producing goods for temporary, symptomatic mitigation” (p. 34).

This, to me, was probably the best and most informative chapter of the book, possibly because I had greater familiarity with the evidence and arguments presented in other chapters. The relationship of the “sin” of the hurried environment—greater time pressure and increased “busyness” (though it’s not clear that time pressure has actually increased, partly because it’s such a difficult thing to measure!)—to increased obesity was non-conclusive. The chapter on the role of childrearing practices (or the culture of childrearing) usefully draws attention to the pressures on mothers to be “good mothers” and at the same time define themselves by their non-maternal activities, reporting that when mothers perceive more positive qualities in their job, their children’s Body Mass Index is lower. Implying that working mothers under pressure might resort to convenience foods (which “offer solutions to the organisation of everyday life” [p.55]), the authors of this chapter rely on research by Prentice and Webb to suggest that “convenience foods are associated with growing obesity” (p. 56). Most researchers, however, distinguish between “convenience foods” (which might be used to same time and effort in cooking) and fast foods; the research by Prentice and Jebb focused on fast foods.

The chapter on the technological environment draws a cautious conclusion that television is implicated in childhood obesity through an association between watching television and consuming high energy diets but overall finds little evidence that technology, in the form of television, computers, gameboys and other such technologies, has caused the increased prevalence of overweight and obesity in children. Children still practise sport and indulge in other forms of physical activity, though the authors of this chapter discern “a consistent trend favouring passive leisure over active leisure” (p.72). They also note a possible association between excessive television

viewing and low socio-economic status, suggesting that “television is a cheap activity ... [whose] appeal is magnified for those households characterised by low disposable income and lack of backyard space” (p. 78). Disappointingly, this chapter does not consider other manifestations of the technological environment; it would have been interesting to speculate on the role of the microwave, dishwasher, and other kitchen technology.

Cars might be considered another aspect of the technological environment, but the car-reliant environment is deemed a “sin” to itself, with a specific influence on obesity; Sarah Hinde cites evidence from the United States to show that the probability of becoming obese increases proportionately to the amount of time spent in a car. Not only is car reliance itself obesogenic, it is also instrumental to other social trends discussed in the book—for example, it enhances access to food—and has “facilitated a system of values, industries and physical settings that promote consumption of high energy food and prevent physical activity” (p.100).

The sixth “sin,” the marketed environment, could almost have been a book in itself had it looked at the marketing of food in general, extending its scope to range from food advertising to supermarket strategies to package and serving sizes. Instead, the author, Julie Smith, chose to focus in particular on the marketing of infant formulas, especially since the 1970s. Two of her conclusions are highly relevant: that artificial infant feeding alters people’s metabolisms and eating behaviours, which in turn predisposes them to overweight or obesity, and that breast milk competes “on highly unfavourable terms against commercial infant food products” (p. 124).

Reflecting that food is now “more culturally loaded than in the past” (p. 126) (perhaps because of the greater diversity of choice available?), Dixon and Winter discuss the rise of consumer anxiety in the context of the environment of competing authorities such as the fitness and weight loss industries, organisations such as the National

Heart Foundation and “traditional” authorities such as medical professionals. In such an environment, they suggest, government and its advisory bodies are effectively powerless to influence behaviour.

In almost all the chapters the authors note the effects of socio-economic differentials that contribute to higher overweight and obesity levels in the less advantaged groups of society; for example, the cost of organised sports can discourage participation of children in low socio-economic groups. In the penultimate chapter, Sharon Friel and Dorothy Broom report on the social distribution of obesity, demonstrating that obesity tends to be more prevalent among women, among those with lower educational qualifications, among those on lower incomes, and among indigenous Australians. They do not compare rural areas with metropolitan centres (although the book’s introduction promises that this chapter will explore the unequal distribution of obesity and show the over-representation of obese individuals in rural areas [p.5]). Recently reported research does indeed confirm that overweight and obesity are higher in rural areas compared with metropolitan centres; it would have been useful to include discussion of this, since it might contribute to the understanding of the increase in the proportion of overweight and obese individuals in Australia.

In this chapter Friel and Broom describe two hypothetical households, of different socio-economic status and in different obesogenic environments, where one or more members are overweight. The comparison would have had more validity, I feel, had the authors made reference to Bourdieu’s work showing different social categories to have different body images. His research might be over 30 years old, but is still relevant and could have illuminated the examples chosen.

The book brings together a vast amount of research from both Australia and overseas,

emphasising the multiple and often reciprocal influences on the incidence of overweight and obesity and in particular on energy input (diet) and energy expenditure (exercise), though it also suffers from the fault of so many compilations, namely lack of uniform quality in the contributions of different researchers and, I suspect, a tendency on the part of some contributors to write about what they are most familiar with rather than extend themselves to respond to the challenge of the “sin” to be discussed. It would have been relevant to include, for example, discussion of the work of Rozin et al. on portion size, especially since Denniss refers to “upsizing,” and to examine the increased availability of food, both at shopping centres (shopping is now a leisure activity) and associated with sport, whether as participant or spectator.

The editors rightly conclude that asking “Who is to blame?” is the wrong question; rather, we should be trying to understand the complete context, the complexity of the obesogenic environment; a problem that requires a multidisciplinary approach to understanding also requires a multidisciplinary approach to solving it, or, as Dixon and Broom write, “the march of the health consequences of the seven deadly environmental sins will only be arrested if there are multiple, synergistic actions by numerous actors” (p.187).

Millions of millions of words have been written on the increased prevalence of overweight, its causes and its prevention; this book is a repository of but a miniscule percentage. So many words, so little action, or rather, perhaps, so little action on a national scale, for there are plenty of small-scale, community- or school-based projects aimed at changing the trend. I realise this book was not meant to decree solutions to the problem, but the time for pussy-footing is past. Is the real problem lack of political will? Yet recently China showed itself able to tackle the problem of pollution that threatens to mar the 2008 Olympic Games, both as an event and as a metaphor for modern China, by banning one half

of all private cars from the roads of Beijing, alternating odd- and even-numbered number-plates and days. This was a drastic step, and it's easy to imagine the outrage of Beijing citizens deprived of car transport for 24 hours at a time. But this was a situation where it was necessary to endure small and temporary personal inconvenience in order to ensure a healthy future for everyone. Now, where to start?