EXPERIENCING FOOD, DESIGNING DIALOGUES: PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FOOD DESIGN AND FOOD STUDIES (EFOOD 2017), RICARDO BONACHO, ALCINDA PINHEIRO DE SOUSA, CLÁUDIA VIEGAS, JOÃO PAULO MARTINS, MARIA JOSÉ PIRES AND SARA VELEZ ESTÊVÃO (EDS) (2017)


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It is always troubling to hear established academics declare that food and design do not sit well together and dub scholarship at their interface a ‘distraction’ from the important work designers ought to focus on. While non-perishable goods and materials do make a significant part of our daily lives and built environments, ‘from the spoon to the city’, to use Ernesto Nathan Rogers’s slogan, they represent only a fraction of the building blocks of the complex social–ecological–technological systems that we are part of and interact with every day. Thus, it would be misguided, as scholars and professionals, to turn our backs on arguably one of the most essential and influential materials and systems in our lives – food – and short-sightedly entrench ourselves in the institutional and disciplinary silos we have inherited from the twentieth century.

Thus, it is a real delight to read Experiencing Food, Designing Dialogues edited by Bonacho et al., a volume that collects the proceedings of the first international conference on food design and food studies, which took place in Lisbon in 2017. The book offers a timely recognition of food design as an autonomous intellectual endeavour and a domain of practice of great social, cultural and ecological relevance, yet rarely taught as a subject at schools of design or benefitting from the support of national government research agencies.

In the book, design scholars and practitioners who specialize in bridging food and design in their work present a wide range of unique opportunities to advance the field. Together with the editors, they take on the complex task of educating us on food design’s importance and vastly overlooked untapped potential. Defined broadly, food design is about making visible the
For the numeration of the book sections and chapters used in this article please refer to Figure 1.

For the relationship between food, people and the environment, while transforming it for the better. Outcomes include more mindful and healthier consumers, urban residents with heightened cultural competency and environmental awareness, communities in touch with their culinary heritage to chart their future development and a new generation of young, self-directed designers with distinct professional identities. As the 35 contributions in the book eloquently illustrate, to accomplish this, food designers draw on and creatively blend the strengths of multiple disciplines.

Experiencing Food, Designing Dialogues is organized in four parts: (1) Educating people about food, (2) Experiencing food, (3) Designing for/with food and (4) Food for thought. Because food design scholarship and practice are inherently interdisciplinary, many of the contributions cut across multiple spheres of practice and often defy the boundaries of the four themes the editors used to organize the chapters of the book. Figure 1 provides a roadmap and a glimpse into the richness and complexity of these interrelations.

Part 1 of the book fittingly focuses on education and includes a two-part critique of traditional pedagogy in the culinary arts fields by Mitchell and Woodhouse (1.6, 1.7). The authors, based at the Food Design Institute in Dunedin, New Zealand, call out culinary pedagogy’s current limitations and advocate for a design ‘turn’ in culinary education to surmount them. A design-based approach to culinary education, the authors argue, is ‘liberating’ and can...
help instructors nurture self-discovery and identity-building in their students who, this way, are empowered to use the learning process to develop their distinct professional character and not merely absorb technical information. The article offers a threefold strategy – explore, engage and emerge – as a way to resist and go beyond current master-apprentice models of instructor–student communication. This critique is echoed by Larsen, who, in Part 2 of the book (2.7), reflects on pedagogy in an MS in Integrated Design Studies at Aalborg University (now at Copenhagen University), Copenhagen, Denmark. The author holds food studies and design educators responsible for continuing to presume that ‘learning by doing’ is utterly divorced from ‘learning through knowing’. Moreover, the article calls attention to the connection between food design, broader social and political issues, and the need to create space for an increased dialogue between the disciplines.

The question of integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines in the service of food design research and practice is a central matter of concern in the chapter by Hansen and Hansen (1.8). Also based at Aalborg University in Denmark, the authors report on the work of a Foodscape Innovations and Networks research group engaged in integrated thinking and interdisciplinarity in food studies education and research. The conceptual approach they offer to blend competencies from separate fields of research hinges on the notion of ‘ontonorms’ – encompassing ‘all ontological assumptions embedded in scientific norms’. The chapter is not always a simple read, and the high level of abstraction sometimes makes it hard to follow, but the authors temper that through a practical example on healthy nutrition and lunch arrangements in kindergartens deftly laying the groundwork for theory building in the field of food design.

While Part 1 of the book, titled Educating people about food – the theme of this part of the book – entails devoting special attention to food design pedagogy, an equally important question is how food designers can use their talents to educate everyday consumers. The chapters by Bertran and Wilde (1.1) and Lynch and Niimi (1.2) offer useful examples of how food designers can approach this vital task in practice. In the first case, experimentation with playful gastronomy reveals the importance of active interaction – as opposed to passive participation in a chef’s creation – as well as the significance of socialization during dining and learning experiences. In the second, by replacing disposable cups at a university café, researchers were able to bring about tangible system change. Contrary to initial expectations, they observed an increase in sales at the café and a positive ‘ripple effect’ affecting other institutional procurement services with the result of lowering the business’s ecological footprint.

But beyond consumers, food designers can help educate and improve communication among city residents and across supply chains. The chapter by Pillan and He (1.3), for instance, shows how by using experience maps they uncovered cultural values as key component of the communication between clients at restaurants in Chinatown in Milan, Italy. Yet, restaurant owners were unaware of it, and thus, as the authors argue, are missing on an opportunity to solidify and expand openness between the two food cultures. Along the same lines, in Turin, Italy, Remondino et al. (1.4) focused on interventions to educate residents and visitors of different neighbourhoods about the different ethnic cuisines through design projects focusing on language, religion and tourism. These explorations are important but also warrant a note of caution: researchers must tread carefully when devising interventions aimed at greater social
cohesion and avoid making things more difficult for groups that may already be segregated or stigmatized.

Finally, at the supply chain level, Bursztyn and Martins (1.5) illustrate the value of mapping agroecological family farms in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The systematic cataloguing of these farms is used as a means to educate city restaurants about the local foodshed and help agroecological farmers with the commercialization of their products and access to mainstream markets. This attention to the larger food chain and the design for alternative food networks is later reiterated in the chapter by Pimenta et al. (4.7), reporting on the design of a community oyster initiative in Alagoas, Brazil.

Part 2 of *Experiencing Food, Designing Dialogues* shifts gears from knowledge about to experience of food and calls attention to the importance of harnessing the theoretical arsenal of disciplines such as psychophysiology, gastrophysics, ergonomics, communications design, food process design, systemic design, architecture, urbanism, culinary arts, history, sociology, chemistry and anthropology to purposefully reshape the interface between food and us. Designers are urged to put people’s lived experiences and senses front and centre in their work and use them as the basis for re-envisioning not only the objects we ingest but also the tools, thoughts, spaces and practices that accompany them.

Questions of how memories interact with embodied food experiences and how physical shapes alter sensorial perceptions are among the stickiest in this sphere of food design. The findings presented in this volume are beginning to throw light on the ways in which designers can pursue food experiences as a line of inquiry. The opening chapters by Leonor et al. (2.1) and Bonacho et al. (2.2) of Part 2 introduce the reader to how sensations of longing for the past and nostalgia can be triggered through music and the atmosphere in which food is consumed. Gabriel and Mata (2.5) push this relationship further and turn the research question on its head by asking how memories can be used to shape the foods and meals we consume. Their chapter is a useful segue to the contribution by Mota et al. (2.3), which focuses on using psychophysiology to inform container design and purposefully craft drinking experiences. The entanglement of aroma perceptions with container forms can also lock people into certain experiences and make them adverse to alternatives. Evidence of this is provided by Nihal Bursa and Galip Koca (2.8) in their exploration of coffee drinking experiences in Turkey.

By turning to intergenerational memories, the chapters by Santos et al. (2.4), Slesinger (2.9) and Krasae-in and Rodjanathum (2.10) scale up this dialogue and test different approaches to preserve and elevate (gastronomic) cultural heritage through food design. In their original examination of threading traditions and technological innovation, for instance, Santos et al. point to ‘food embroidery’ – a creative culinary technique using methylcellulose threads derived from orange juice, instead from egg yolks and rice paper. The outcomes of this experiment are new versions of two typical Portuguese desserts – Rice Pudding and Nun’s Throat – and convincingly, prove that the dichotomy between tradition and innovation is not inevitable. Sophie Slesinger looks at butter sculpturing – an integral part of agriculture crafts and traditions in the United States – which has hitherto been scantly documented and not infrequently falls through the cracks; food design can offer a timely intellectual grounding and refuge for this practice. Finally, Krasae-in and Rodjanathum (2.10) present a multipronged design strategy to uplift gastronomic and architectural heritage and revitalize the city centre at a UNESCO site in Thailand. The theme of tourism and how to best educate the ‘outsider’, by devising a
wayfinding strategy through food experiences, for instance, echoes some of the neighbourhood-level work explored by Italian researchers in the previous section. In a similar vein, Marat-Mendes (2.6) makes useful connections between urban food systems, sustainability, urbanism and learning experience design in the context of a graduate course in architecture.

Part 3 of the book, titled *Designing for/with food*, more squarely addresses the making and crafting dimensions of food design with several of the projects specifically focusing on product design. Among these are the design of a lunchbox for healthy meals by Duarte (3.1), the design of tableware (i.e. cutlery, dishes, accessories) as a means to weight reduction by Cinovics (3.2) and the design of serviceware guided by symbolism, taste of place and haptics, undertaken by Bender and Tan (3.5). The task of designing for the relationship between taste and place is extended further by Marcelo (3.6) who reports on the design of a logo and a dish to create a stronger visual identity for a large publicly owned building for corporate events in Portugal. The design hinges on four key elements – spirit of the organization, location, history and broader region – and provides insight into the interface between food design, branding and marketing.

Food labelling and packaging constitute another, related area of experimentation for food designers interested in modulating the product–user experience and its environmental and public health outcomes. Inspired by the success of energy efficiency labels, the chapter by Pires et al. (3.8) offers a clear example of how designers can help improve the way the density and nutritional quality of foods is communicated to consumers. The authors express a frustration with the existing ‘traffic lights’ model adopted in the European Union for its limited ability to help users meaningfully compare and contrast different products. Considering Denmark’s recent policy on carbon food labels (Czarnezki 2019), envisioned as part of the country’s long-term 2050 sustainability plan, and the widely circulated article by Camilleri et al. (2019) on the positive influence of carbon food labels on consumer behaviour, this is a relevant and timely contribution.

Beyond labels, the design of food packaging itself has the potential to improve both health and environmental outcomes of current food supply. Both Pallaro and Remondino (3.3) and Turhan (3.9) tap into the ample opportunities that food designers have to contribute in this area. Turhan specifically explores the tantalizing concept of ‘active packaging’ – that is packaging whose material is constantly interacting with the surrounding environment to eliminate any harmful microbes – made with natural, edible ingredients and no synthetic chemical additives. This is a new frontier in food design research and one in need of urgent attention, considering that we recently uncovered robust evidence that the amount of plastic pollution has vastly risen in recent decades (Ostle et al. 2019).

Two contributions that ostensibly weave together multiple strands of food design with insights from other disciplines and, in so doing, provide valuable ‘food for thought’ are the chapters by Stephen (3.4) and Castanho et al. (3.7). Many of us are familiar with the phrase ‘appetite comes with eating’ but, as Stephen’s research attests, appetite comes also by seeing others eat. A close observation of the unfolding of this dynamic in streets throws light on some of the factors that trigger (the desire for) food consumption in public spaces. Given that most street food in the United States is high in added sugars, sodium and fats, and that ‘seeing others eat in public spaces’ is effectively a form of marketing, it is imperative that part of food design’s future research
agenda commits to examining how to tap into these mechanisms and businesses to encourage the consumption of healthy foods instead.

Food design, as Castanho et al. see it, involves a ‘human-centred approach’ to the development of food-related products, spaces and services. The originality of the study, which focuses on the popularization of a local variety of rice, however, lies not so much in the design of a new product but in the use of design thinking to question established methods of market analysis of consumer choices, such as surveys. Inadequate or inflexible data collection methods have a lot to answer for. If designers do not ask the right questions in the right way, the very foundation of their work – their ability to engage with people’s unique needs and aspirations – becomes out of reach. To circumvent this, the team of researchers used pictures and focus groups to improve their survey questions and elicit feedback on how to best adapt them to the uniqueness of local languages and circumstances.

Finally, Part 4, *Food for thought*, offers a collection of original, thought-provoking perspectives – from bridging architecture and gastronomy (Sanchez Salvador [4.3]) to unearthing early twentieth-century vegetarian utopias (Reis [4.5]) and translating short fiction stories into culinary experiences (Bonacho et al. [4.4]). It nudges readers and researchers to take a lateral view on their work and dares to imagine even bolder directions for the future food design.

The part opens with a theoretical contribution by Virgen Castro et al. (4.1) who rightly points out that understanding the dialogue between food and space is crucial for designers concerned with place (architecture), materials (design/art) and technology (media). While this highly conceptual chapter becomes, at times, impenetrable for the non-expert, *space* – or the ‘mealscape’ as authors define it – merits indeed a privileged position in food design scholarship, as it constitutes a unit of analysis that unifies (food) designers operating across multiple scales and domains of practice, including virtual ones. The chapter by Sanchez Salvador (4.2) offers a fresh segue to this theoretical examination by tracing the chronology of cooking spaces through history and their relationship to architecture, social hierarchy, emancipation and eventually detachment and deskilling in modern western societies.

The longing for a genuine reconnection to cooking spaces in the homes of twenty-first-century consumers, not infrequently designed to accommodate little more than a microwave oven, is well portrayed in Falchetti’s (4.9) account on the rise of mass media cooking shows where everyone can become a celebrity chef. But not all cities around the world have entirely succumbed to the pull of globalization and outsourced basic food skills for the sake of convenience. As the chapter by Dhadphale (4.6) persuasively demonstrates, in India, traditional food retail continues to thrive and is the preferred option despite the arrival of global supermarket chains. Counter to expectations, traditions of food trade and purchasing there do not bend (at least for now) under the allure of modernism, efficiency and convenience. Food designers can help ensure that they endure and prosper for as long as it takes.

Overall, what I found slightly disorienting in the volume were the many disparate methodological approaches, units of analyses and interpretations of food design that each article offered. And, aside from the preface, the book offers no other space where synthesis within and across the four thematic spheres – education, experience, design and food for thought – is attempted. But this is a small price to pay considering what the volume (and first international conference) accomplishes in setting the stage for recognizing food
design as a legitimate domain of scientific inquiry and a community of practice in its own right.

Ultimately, *Experiencing Food, Designing Dialogues* offers something for thinkers and practitioners from different walks of design, from seasoned and convinced food designers to people who so far (but hopefully no longer) deem food design as a ‘distraction’ or choose to disregard its advances. Food design and its ally disciplines of food-sensitive urban planning and urban design (e.g. Donovan et al. 2011; Viljoen and Wiskerke 2012; Ilieva 2016; Raja et al. 2017; Cabannes and Marocchino 2018) are here to stay so we have only to gain from paying close attention.

**REFERENCES**


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