



Culinary Concept-Personal Essay
It's all Greek to me
Towards a broader view of food science and “creativity” in gastronomy

Will Goldfarb^{a,b}

^aMejekawi by KUDETA, 9 Kayu Aya, Seminyak, Bali 80361, Indonesia

^bWillpowder, www.willpowder.com.

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Abstract

Philosophy's role in the birth of science is well documented. The author examines the role of a variety of social sciences, including art, language, and history, in the creative process. Five abstractions of creativity in the kitchen are presented. The relationship between the philosophy as a driver for technique and ingredient research is fundamental, and underscores the importance of the scientific method in pursuit of the “new” in gastronomy.

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Introduction

If you do your best work with a gun at your head, I'm not prepared to verify that empirically. When approached to contribute to Emilie Baltz's *L.O.V.E. FOODBOOK* (2012), little did I know that the ideas would crystallize in such a “scientific” way. A blend of interest in social and physical sciences allowed a personal reinterpretation of the role of art and science in gastronomy (Baltz and Boisseau, 2012).

The thoughts below concern the creative process in general, as well as the plated dessert in contemporary cooking in specific, with four recent examples. The idea is to contextualize “food science” in “gastronomy” through relationships in the arts and sciences, including, but not limited to: performance art; physics; chemistry; philosophy; and language. The first step in this journey involves an analysis of the creative process in the contemporary kitchen and its methodology.

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Five “abstractions” of creativity in the kitchen

An early inspiration from physical science came from Chapter 25 of Einstein's general theory of relativity, specifically, the concept of Gaussian coordinates with flexible axes and “fixed” coordinates which reflect a “mathematical treatment of continua” (Einstein, 1961). It recalled the phenomenon of site-specific flavor, where food tastes differently depending on *where* (Sforza et al., 1994) it is consumed, in practical terms: across a dimension of distance. This so-called “relativity of taste” (Goldfarb, 2005) served as a springboard for the “five levels of creativity in the kitchen”.

It is safe to say that El Bulli was instrumental in the professionalization of “creativity” in the kitchen (Svejenova et al., 2005). This was internalized during my time at El Bulli and evolved to a new personal concept of commercializing creativity. (For those children of the age of “advanced capitalism” (Murakami, 1988) the logical evolution of professionalization is commercialization, but I digress.) The pursuit of understanding in various disciplines has lead back to the start. Here, the science of mathematics (as it relates to commercialization *vis-à-vis* game theory (Pathak et al., 2010) a relationship not elaborated upon here) can advance food science and gastronomy

through direct inspiration. Commercialization itself forces the innovation conceptually, and is converted into reality with scientific principles.

Understanding of space (or distance) and time was integral to the ideation of these concepts, which generated new and exciting dishes, techniques, flavor combinations, and concepts. It may seem a stretch, but on a sandy beach in Brazil, the flavors/memories of Malaysian Laksa appeared, disguised as a traditional Brazilian Moqueca. If this doesn't demonstrate the relativity of taste, I don't know what does: the same items (baseline) create different elaborations in different places at different times, but retain a fundamental sameness, or relation.

Here is an outline for the dishes presented. It begins with the pursuit of the ingredient, then the technique, then the philosophy, and so on... (The five levels of creativity in the kitchen are a demarcation, a way to categorize the creation. Each level is integrated, intersects at different points, in different places, and at different times. Originally, the levels were classically hierarchical, but that has blurred as pragmatism usurps)youth's dogme (Von Trier, 2003).

Ingredient

The first level of creativity in the kitchen is fundamental: the ingredient. Without principal ingredients of the highest quality *available* (across any spectrum of values: taste; texture; origin... *ad infinitum*) creativity does not have a meaningful starting point.

Technique

Technique is a creativity “multiplier” in that it serves to provide the chef (and therefore, the guest) with another way to prepare or enjoy the principal ingredient. For example, if you only know how to poach fish (or anything), and then you learn how to roast it, you have extended the range of possibilities in your creative sphere. You can now do two things to every ingredient, instead of just one.

The creation of a new technique is a personal creativity *multiplier*, which can then be shared at the author's discretion. (This is in contrast to finding a new ingredient, which *adds* a new flavor, texture, color... to an existing repertoire.)

Philosophy

Here, a breakthrough finding is a third level of creativity, thanks to the extensive field research in Almese, Italy, and Hasselt (Stevoort), Belgium. Thanks to personal contributions (written (Goldfarb, 2005) and otherwise) for AKWA, or more specifically, my insistence on the primacy of philosophy, I began to understand the value of philosophy as the driver behind the scientific method as it pertains to technique and technology, and ingredient. For example, the entire concept of treating the product with “integrity” is, in point of fact, a philosophical construct, and its application has demanded consistency and accuracy (among other *subjective* attributes) in food preparation, *e.g.* sous vide (or old fashioned low temperature cooking). (The author doesn't suggest that accuracy is inherently subjective, but rather that the desired

characteristics of taste, texture, and general desirability that the accuracy serves, is.)

Further, without getting all Socratic in here, the concept of the question that originates in philosophy is the principle upon which the research in food science is the answer. Could philosophy be the bridge between art and science? I think this is an area for continued deliberation.

Love and solitude

I have chosen to combine love and solitude for the sake of brevity. I found love, literally and figuratively, as a key ingredient in cooking, and sure enough, who hasn't heard the phrase, “it was prepared with love.” There must be some deep underlying value that is common across cultures and disciplines, so I don't claim to be inventing the notion of the influence of love on food. However, using Love, specifically, as a lever to reground (or relaunch) creativity in the kitchen, particularly with regard to food science and avant-garde cooking, is worth a mention in its own right. There is no ambiguity, though I can only offer anecdotal evidence for the effect of love on creativity. Perhaps the research of Forster et al. (2009) successfully reinforces the notion that romantic love is fundamental to problem solving. Forster argues, rather convincingly, that being in love forces the “victim” (my quotation marks) to “play the long game” (again, my quotation marks). The argument being that deferring instant gratification (as in looking for sex) for the pursuit of love generates a problem-solving mentality conducive to creative thought that the cold analytical single-minded pursuit of sex does not. (Admittedly, the dish can be hot and steam(ed)y, but that doesn't negate the previous conclusion; it just offers an alternative outcome.)

The final level evolves from love, in the “definition” from Rainer Maria Rilke that describes it as, “two solitudes that border, protect, and salute each other” (Rainer, 1993).

Laboratory/clinical evidence could offer a clue towards the enduring power of the self, but for the time being we can satisfy ourselves literarily via Paulo Coelho's musings (2013), so popular they become accepted wisdom, “without solitude, love will not stay long by your side.” Solitude would therefore *be* the ingredient for love, and loneliness an inevitable waste product of love's ruthless efficiency – or, as Murakami (1988) would say, its “refinements of consumption.” Creativity *can* be driven through extended isolation, which enables reflective thought and creative breakthroughs. Alas, a return to society generally beckons.

Some desserts

The following desserts illustrate the five levels of creativity in the kitchen, utilizing contemporary and innovative techniques in food science and gastronomy. The five levels bubble to the surface in different ways at different times, overlapping to form a web of creative impulse, ideally (but not always) funneled into delicious, beautiful, texturally complex and interesting dishes.

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