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Big Browser Is Watching You¹

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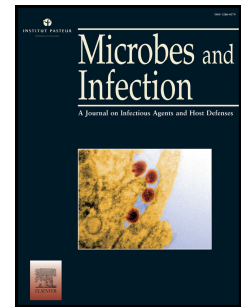
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Big Browser Is Watching You¹

The hipster version of a kitten is a SCOBY. While back in the good old days, an acquaintance might have offered you the more or less accidental offspring of their domestic feline, in these times you end up bringing home a jar holding some flabby, slimy slab immersed in a moderately appetizing yellowish liquid. This "Symbiotic Culture Of Bacteria and Yeast" then needs to swim for about a week in a concoction of black tea and sugar in contact with air, performing a first fermentation, and subsequently gets bottled with various flavor-adding ingredients ranging from ginger to strawberries for another couple of days for the second and anaerobic round of fermentation. The result is (normally) a refreshing, slightly carbonized beverage termed "kombucha" with low alcohol-content and meant to be proudly presented at any dinner invitation while loudly praising the zero carbon footprint along with the health-stimulating, probiotic assets of the potation^{*}.

My personal DIY microbiology ambitions came to a very sudden end on a so far rather uneventful Sunday afternoon, when a deafening explosion along with glass shards flying at high speed through the entire flat put more action than I bargained for into the half-hearted preparation of the upcoming journal club. Once recovered from near cardiac arrest, I diagnosed the KO by hyperactive microorganisms of two solid glass bottles, which I had filled less than 24 hours ago meticulously respecting the instructions of several protocols (admittedly, mainly YouTube videos). This left me with i. an apartment covered in glass debris and sticky liquid, ii. a third, yet intact bottle - in other words, a biological time bomb.

Once the latter evacuated with the use of a mixture of diving and skiing gear by way of protection and a few hours of intense cleaning later, the main conclusion was that although YouTube can be a valuable source of coaching for things as disparate as dissecting mouse brains and putting snow chains on car tires, there might be a few limitations. Moreover, yeast and bacteria make more capricious pets than kittens.

Yet, although they are not reported to show any extraordinary reaction at the sight of cucumbers, microbes are receiving more popular attention than ever^{**}.

Against a backdrop of the sharp rise in interest concerning the universe within our bowels, alias microbiome, the players behind the kombucha also received their share of scientific interest, including their own high-throughput sequencing analysis. Therefore, it turns out that the bacterial and fungal populations sharing the floating cellulose pellicle for headquarters are composed essentially of various *Gluconacetobacter* and *Lactobacillus* genera on the bacteria side, and of mainly *Zygosaccharomyces* on the yeast side [1].

Other studies have started to attempt a proof compilation of the supposed health benefits of the microbial cohabitation, worthy of the most expensive smoothie advertisement - including weight-losing effects, increase of antioxidant levels and even cytotoxic effects on cancer cells, at least *in vitro* and in rodents (also ducks, surprisingly) [2].

But the main point, and there has indeed been one from the very beginning on, is that microorganisms have lost all their intimacy.

The look through the microscope averted our eyes from the sky and replaced the planetary configurations and the godly wrath at work in countless fatal diseases by the

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