

## Tasting the Future

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The 2018 IPCC report gave us 12 years to take radical action to avoid catastrophic climate instability.<sup>1</sup> Other reports confirm the need for urgent action.<sup>2-6</sup> Yet, people and governments are struggling to respond.<sup>7</sup> *Tasting the Future* investigates how embodied design, using food and eating as anticipatory actions for future world-making, might assist us to break this impasse—shift the scale of the crisis to the scale of the body, make it personal, material, sensual, relatable, so that societal actors can envision new futures and act. As a research programme, *Tasting the Future* underpins context-specific projects and targeted participatory actions to assist civil and civic society actors to common specific issues, imagine what Beckert would call *imaginaries of the future*,<sup>8</sup> then collectively negotiate the necessary infrastructure to transform these imaginaries into *implementable nows* through new practices, policies and technologies. This process encompasses the two ‘necessary but distinct components’ of anticipation: ‘a forward-looking attitude and the use of the former’s results for action.’<sup>9</sup> It leans powerfully on Beckert’s notion that present imaginaries of future situations can provide orientation in decision making, despite the incalculability of outcomes,<sup>8</sup> and ‘allow actors to move beyond inherited thought patterns and categories by bringing them into an *as-if* world in which given reality is surpassed and a different one considered.’<sup>8,10</sup> *Tasting the Future* leverages Design’s world-making capacities<sup>11</sup> to bring forth new practices, policies and technologies that are personally meaningful, contextually relevant and ecologically impactful. It reorients embodied design methods<sup>12,13</sup> towards food and eating, to disrupt assumptions and ensure engagement. Design inquiry and the food domain are recognised as potent loci for anticipation.<sup>14,15</sup> *Tasting the Future* furthers this scholarship by introducing food and eating as anticipative actions for world-making.

Two projects will be drawn from to exemplify the approach. *The SHIT! project* aims to help people befriend and tend their gut microbiome the way they might tend a garden. Our gut is a black-box system containing a hidden world over which we have little awareness or control. Food consumption and defecation are caught up in rich cultural arrangements saturated with social norms, rituals and taboos. Yet, our alliances with the microbes in our gut go largely unnoticed unless we encounter digestive problems. Our gut microbiome plays a crucial role in health and well-being.<sup>16</sup> As many as 20% of people, worldwide, suffer from chronic gut issues.<sup>17</sup> Befriending our gut thus seems wise. *SHIT!* brings together chefs, fermenters, gastroenterologist, public health organisations, bacteria, eaters and design researchers to consider a) how to cultivate meaningful relationships with our gut microbiota, and b) what kinds of changes might be wrought in the food system to support the resulting imaginaries. In complement, *The Soil project* considers interconnections between soil and more-than-human health. For half a century, industrial approaches to agriculture have degraded soil and environment health through land management practices, including expanding agricultural chemical use.<sup>18-20</sup> We find increasing evidence of a corresponding degradation of human and animal microbiota, associated neurological disorders and diseases.<sup>16,21-26</sup> *Soil* engages food producers, educators, policy makers, geologists, environmental economists, soil and gut microbiota and (human and more-than-human) eaters to consider a) what alternate imaginaries may be put in place to rapidly and radically alter food production and consumption processes, support ecosystem regeneration and whole-of-system flourishing, and b) what policy measures might assist in fast-tracking desired imaginaries.

Both projects use toolkits, food lab tools, food stuff and carefully scripted procedures of self-experimentation to engage participants with food production processes, build system models, eat, taste, feel and smell a way to future imaginaries and implementable nows. The aim is to spur a genuine interest in our otherwise taboo-ridden social discourse on shit, dirt and the food systems, develop new imaginaries, and begin an infrastructuring process. This approach 1) combines social imaginaries—collective beliefs about how society functions, that can enable or disable societal transformation and are critical to its realisation<sup>27</sup>—historical practices and existing infrastructure to understand, imagine and support transformative change; 2) develops food-oriented embodied encounter methods—by remodelling methods that leverage embodied engagement, estrangement and enchantment to respond to a complex impasse<sup>12,28,29</sup>—to surface new imaginaries in new ways of thinking; and 3) investigates how to infrastructure the new imaginaries to achieve real-world change. Infrastructuring invigorates democracy, sustains participation and design-for-future-use at community and societal scales; and is necessary to move from ideas to action and implement change.<sup>30-34</sup>

The ways we approach ecological breakdown are socially constructed through semantics, social reproduction and social practices. Transforming our approach, therefore, requires transforming our practices. It requires a shift in mind-set as a society and as actors in policy-enforcing nations. This research brings together human

and non-human stakeholders to anticipate seductive alternative practices that are personally and ecologically enriching; and collectively negotiate the necessary infrastructure to transform these imaginaries into ‘implementable nows’. It productively disrupts current infrastructuring practices—through inclusion, and a bottom-up approach to policymaking—to ensure transformative outcomes, bringing meaning, value, responsibility and purpose to bear on questions of the environment.<sup>35,36</sup> It involves diverse stakeholders in engaged analysis to ‘enrich the policy and public discourse about an Earth whose long-term future we are now making day-by-day,’<sup>37</sup> using food as aesthetically-charged ‘materiality’ so that alternative practices can become imaginable.<sup>38–40</sup>

Everybody eats and has expertise around eating. We eat for nutrition, socialisation *and* degustation.<sup>41–43</sup> All 17 of the UN’s sustainability goals can be linked to food<sup>44</sup> and the food system is a major driver of climate change due to changes in land use, freshwater resources, and pollution of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.<sup>19,20,45</sup> Food is personally, socially, culturally, politically and ecologically potent, making it an appropriate and timely vector to reconnect humans with nature and respond to ecological breakdown. *Tasting the Future* positions food and eating as anticipative actions for future world-making. The research responds to calls for Future Studies to more fully take up work from Design Studies<sup>14</sup> and contributes to Anticipation Studies with new methods, new imaginaries and robust moves towards new approaches, policies and technologies.

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