

THIS YEAR MARKS THE release of the tenth anniversary edition of Marion Nestle's pathbreaking *Food Politics*. With that book, Professor Nestle shook up the food industry, food studies scholarship, and the ways in which ordinary consumers understand the convoluted and often collusive intersections of politics, industry, and science that influence the production of the foods we put into our bodies. I am pleased that this issue of *Gastronomica* features an interview with Professor Nestle, where she reflects on the impact of her book and offers insights into where we – as scholars, enthusiasts, eaters, and citizens – need to put our energies next in order to continue to reform the food industry.

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This past spring quarter, I taught my upper-division course “Anthropology of Food.” The majority of my students are food enthusiasts in some fashion: some are active in community food justice initiatives, others are involved in campus sustainability efforts, and most are passionate about healthy eating and ethical eating, not to mention the art and appreciation of eating. But as anthropology students, they are all committed to the challenge of thoughtful critical inquiry into how people throughout the world use, think about, and value food. Class discussions often become quite boisterous as students debate what makes food healthy, desirable, and pleasurable, whether food choices should be personal decisions or are the responsibility of governments and communities, and the ethics of giving and withholding food in different political contexts. They love talking about food, and our classroom conversations often carry over into hallway chats, section meetings, and online forums. Given their enthusiasm for thinking and talking about food, I was thus somewhat surprised when they were uncharacteristically silent one day. I had planned a session on molecular gastronomy, and my father-in-law, a retired chemist, had generously agreed to demonstrate some simple molecular gastronomy techniques and discuss the science behind the techniques, thereby demystifying “molecular gastronomy” and showing how it was simply part of the repertoire of basic chemistry that ordinary cooks use at home every day. Our “equipment” included an official “molecular gastronomy” kit, basic “chemistry” ingredients such as xanthan gum and soy lecithin that I had picked up from my local grocery store, and tools scavenged from my own kitchen and my husband's professional chemistry toolbox.

My objective for the session was to challenge students to grapple with the fundamental question of “what is food”: how ingredients and foods can be transformed from one state into another by exploring the shifting terrain between food science and food art; how expectations may differ from reality in terms of the flavors, textures, and ingredients of food; and how cultural assumptions about forms of technology, the settings where food production occurs, and the individuals who make food affect the values (and prices) placed on those foods. The students were enthralled by the experiments, the science discussion, and, of course, the samples. They appreciated

the foamed fruit and the raspberry sphericals, but they especially loved the apple pie that I had made and were amazed when I revealed that it was not, in fact, an apple pie but a mock apple pie made with Ritz crackers. However, the students were reticent to engage in critical discussion afterward, which was not like them at all.

I initially assumed that, despite their interest in the principles of molecular gastronomy, they felt a vague sense of discomfort at the idea of “denaturing” food through “mechanical” means, i.e., turning food into something else, such as making Ritz crackers taste like apples, or simply at the idea of a failed experiment that might end with food being thrown away. After much probing, what we collectively discovered was more surprising: they were uncomfortable with the idea that it was acceptable to *play* with food. They acknowledged that they had internalized an American cultural value that it was bad manners, and even immoral, to do so. Many reflected that when they were children, they were scolded for such ordinary things as putting pitted olives on their fingers, building mashed potato volcanoes, and mixing multiple foods together into an unappetizing mush that only the dog would eat. That realization then opened up a far more interesting discussion about the seriousness of food and the importance of creativity, personal interest, and even personal pleasure. We thought carefully about how play and experimentation were necessary both to food and eating (how else would new recipes or new technologies ever come about?), and to the intellectual study of food. And we discussed how playfulness enhanced and celebrated the pleasurable parts of the otherwise serious activities of growing, cooking, and eating food.

This issue is devoted to playfulness and creativity – the tweaking of expectations, the upending of conventions and norms, the sense of adventure that comes from trying new things, the delight in the unexpected. As the contributors to this issue reveal, there is beauty, grace, humility, and not a little humor in our encounters with something new, something different. Each in its unique way, the contributions in this issue highlight the importance of play, creativity, and inspiration to how we experience and appreciate food.

In some cases, playfulness evokes the giddy thrill that comes from searching out something rare and hidden, as in Meredith Bethune’s and Jimmy Schwartz’s reflections on the pleasures and pitfalls of mushroom hunting, or in Brian Gersten’s cheekily thoughtful reminiscence of how an urban journey into the culinary wilderness in search of unusual meats opens up critical questions about taste, novelty, and ethics. In other cases, playfulness encourages us to take the familiar and find new ways to enjoy it, as with Barbara Crooker’s celebration of the nectarine or Kate Lebo’s contemplation of rhubarb. In still other cases, playfulness invites us to venture outside our comfort zones and explore new worlds and forge new relationships. R.J. Fox’s essay, “The First Supper,” delightfully recounts how the trip to meet a beloved partner’s family entails adventures in food and drink around a Ukrainian dinner table. In a similar vein, Enrique Fernández reflects on how the immigration experience itself is an exercise in imagining and encountering the Other and its food. For Amy Gentry, it is the play and creativity of Rob Connoley, an unconventional chef, that makes possible a wild but rewarding culinary ride that is not for the faint-of-heart but something to be appreciated and savored by similarly adventurous souls. Fox, Fernández, and Gentry help us to imagine how a bit of creative bravery might take us on journeys we never had thought possible before.

Creativity and play are also what drive innovation. Not only does innovation ensure the potential for newness in our lives, it allows food cultures to travel and

eventually settle in distant places. In her research essay on food habits in the United Kingdom, Anne Murcott elegantly details the evolution of British cookery and the history behind such familiar traditions as a “cuppa” and the “fish supper.” Kristy Leissle provides a fascinating account of the rise of artisanal chocolate in West Africa and how West African cocoa production has been in fact the backbone of the modern candy industry. Yet innovation and change may also have unintended consequences that raise important questions about whether what is new and different is always better, an issue that Jennifer Patino explores in her research brief on the many problems sparked by a honey bun in a school vending machine. Nutritional beliefs, economic realities, and the highly charged world of moral parenting – all are evoked by a simple packaged snack.

Ultimately, the contributions to this issue highlight that much of the pleasure we associate with food comes precisely from our ability to play with it – to experiment, to venture beyond how we cook and eat in our everyday lives, and to appreciate the infinite possibilities for relationships, traditions, and imagination that food can enable. And as my students recognized, food play does not devalue the importance of food, denature it, or necessarily entail wasteful frivolousness. Rather, play is a serious exercise in and of itself. Play requires thoughtful consideration, responsible oversight, and a deep commitment to acknowledging the necessity of both bodily and intellectual satisfaction. In that light, I hope that you enjoy this issue and that it inspires you to imagine or, better yet, to engage in, some play of your own.

*Melissa L. Caldwell*

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# Contributors

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**barbara crooker's** poems have appeared in magazines such as *Green Mountains Review*, *Hollins Critic*, and *Denver Quarterly*, and in anthologies such as *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, *Good Poems for Hard Times* (Garrison Keillor, editor), and *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania*. Her books are *Radiance*, which won the 2005 Word Press First Book competition and was a finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize; *Line Dance*, which won the 2009 Paterson Prize for Literary Excellence; *More*; and *Gold*. Her hobbies include cooking and eating.

**katie eisenberg** is an actor, writer, and visual artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Katie is the person behind the writing-turned-multimedia project *Here Is a Man* ([www.hereisaman.com](http://www.hereisaman.com)) and the online storytelling platform *Nice Looking Doorstep* ([www.nice-looking-doorstep.com](http://www.nice-looking-doorstep.com)). To learn more, visit [www.katie-eisenberg.com](http://www.katie-eisenberg.com).

**shelly errington's** studies focus on visible and audible aspects of culture, often those embedded in contested narrative frames. She produces some, too—among them, photographs, a video documentary, and line drawings. Her kitchen garden and edible landscape allow her to imagine that she is part of the farm-to-table crowd. She is glad to be in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

**enrique fernández** has been a columnist at *Billboard*, *Village Voice*, *USA Weekend*, *New York Daily News*, and *Sun-Sentinel*, and the editor of *Billboard en Español*, *Más*, and *Exito*. He served as Senior Vice President/Executive Director of the Latin Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences. His articles have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's*, among others. Enrique was a correspondent for the NPR program *Crossroads*, and a commentator for Univision's *Portada*. He is a winner of the 1983 ASCAP Deems Taylor Award. He was Features Editor at the *Miami Herald*, where he publishes the food column, "Consumed."

**r. j. fox** is the award-winning writer of short stories, plays, poems, a memoir, and feature-length screenplays, two of which have been optioned by Hollywood. His recent stage directing debut led to an Audience Choice Award at the Canton One-Acts Festival. A graduate of the University of Michigan, with a Masters of Arts in Teaching from Wayne State University, Fox teaches English and video production in the Ann Arbor public schools, and by pursuing his dream of making movies he seeks to inspire his students to pursue their own dreams. His website is [www.foxplots.com](http://www.foxplots.com). Or follow him on Twitter @foxwriter7.

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**naomi guttman** is the author of two books of poetry: *Reasons for Winter* and *Wet Apples, White Blood*. She has also written on Utica Greens (*Gastronomica*, 2009) and recently published an essay about parenting a picky eater, "Trial by Pancake," published in *Food and Foodways* in 2012. She teaches literature and creative writing at Hamilton College.

**dee hobsbawn-smith** is a poet, essayist, writer, educator, chef, and local foods advocate. Her award-winning journalism, poetry, essays, and fiction have appeared frequently in Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere. Her fifth book, *Foodshed: An Edible Alberta Alphabet*, won the Best Food Literature (Canadian English-language) award in the 2013 Gourmand World Book. Her essay "Elemental" made CBC Radio's Canada Writes longlist for the Creative Nonfiction Writing Prize in 2013. Forthcoming books include *Wildness Rushing In: Poems* (Hagos Press) and *Appetites: Stories* (ThistleDown Press). She is currently earning her MFA in Writing at the University of Saskatchewan.

Freelance writer and instructional designer **justine ickes** specializes in culture, travel, and education. Her work has appeared in over two dozen publications, including *Babble.com*, *The Huffington Post*, *Language Magazine*, *Litchfield Magazine*, *New Jersey Monthly*, *Scholastic's Parent & Child*, and *Up! Magazine*. Read Justine's blog at [www.cultureeveryday.com](http://www.cultureeveryday.com) and browse her instructional design portfolio at [www.justineickes.com](http://www.justineickes.com).

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**kate lebo** is the author of *A Commonplace Book of Pie* (Chin Music Press) and she's currently at work on a cookbook forthcoming from Sasquatch Books in fall 2014. Her poems have appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Willow Springs*, and *Poetry Northwest* among other journals. She teaches creative writing at Richard Hugo House and pie-making at Pie School, her cliché-busting pastry academy. For poems, pies, and other tasty treats, visit [katelebo.com](http://katelebo.com).

**kristy leissle** earned her PhD in Women's Studies from the University of Washington in 2008 by studying chocolate. She is Lecturer in Global Studies at the University of Washington Bothell, and Director of Education for the NW Chocolate Festival, the largest gathering of bean-to-bar artisan chocolate makers in the U.S. Her writing on chocolate has recently appeared in *Alimentum*, *yes!* and the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. She lives in Seattle, where she keeps a closet stocked full of chocolate at all times.

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