Four Ideas for Food - Focused Narratives

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Abstract

The sociality of food, whether in cuisine, agriculture, and its supporting infrastructure, often reveals itself to us in concrete technological forms, and the narratives that sustain the ideation and design of these technologies is overlooked, and not questioned enough.

We consider the principles of sharing and participation through a hypothetical food sharing app and its backstory, opening a space for discussion about what an app does (and does not do). We also introduce current narratives situated within the realm of food – practitioners, ideas around cultural (food) heritage, trends around kitchen tools in the food industry, and the possibilities, ecological bio-diversities can bring to public conversation on what food could look like in the future.

Author Keywords

food sharing; food cultural heritage; design futures; future of food

ACM Classification Keywords

Geographic visualization; information visualization; user interface design

Introduction

We would like to share four ideas that play with situations, narrative frames, and technological extensions of human and non- human forms. This is situated in the context of Singapore, and the wider region of Southeast Asia.

Seeing the horizon beyond low hanging fruit – examining sharing in the Neoliberal age through a hypothetical food – sharing app

Mobile phone apps have gained popularity in Singapore as a way of engaging the digital consumer in anything from from familiar consumer services like online shopping, to less familiar experiential services that gamify data collection. Crowdsourcing data about real-world phenomena has received attention as Volunteered Geospatial Information, but is more commonly known to the layman through Google Local Guides' programme of having users map the world while awarding in-app badges. While new technological platforms like this revolutionise the relationships between designers and consumers, researchers and non-researchers, sharing is not the only social action that apps can scaffold: what about other actions like searching, finding, learning, looking, listening? Isn't it time we look at what apps don't have?

Offering a playful critique of apps today, we are exploring the potential of an app that acts as a social connector, logistics solution for material for personal food-growing spaces, a Visibility Suit for these becoming-valuable materials, an events listing and search service, or even one that leads individuals towards more transformative, pedagogical forms of discovery. It proposes that home gardens, sidewalks

and other spaces with potential for food-growing can act as sites for social exchange, food and knowledge exchange. User submissions label sites, the food or materials that can be found there, and enable these sites to become live points of reference on the app. What do materials do when they're also social-media alive? How can apps change stakeholder-audience relations in urban land use enforcement and policy?

This project is based on an unlikely group entry led by one of the authors in the Singapore Land Authority's Geohackathon 2015, that won both the Heritage challenge award and emerged overall champion. This group entry considered seriously several questions, including whether data can be archived and utilised in different formats; whether technologies can democratise the production of knowledge, and lastly, how project ownership can be enhanced within our own communities. We would like to create a discussion based on that experience, around low hanging fruit (politics) and potential horizons that food apps can both obscure and reveal, in light of considerations regarding food - possibilities highlighted below, and current practices of participatory research and governance, in neoliberal education and policy frameworks.

Relooking Oral Traditions and Cultural Heritage through Virtual Reality

How might technology bridge the new and the old? In the area of food - making traditions, cultures and practices, how do we tell new narratives , or age - old narratives using new technologies - such as VR?

There are many instances of food cultures and traditions disappearing - Eurasian cuisine, *loh kai yik,* ice balls, etc. - these forgotten foods are seldom found

and prepared in commercial establishments, in the Singapore context. Imagine this for a start: we are immersing ourselves in a hawker centre in Singapore, learning from a noodle practitioner, how his father has taught him to prepare a bowl of noodles, as it was done 70 years ago. Virtual reality, could have this hawker share with us the skills of blanching, learn about sauces, the finer aspects of timing, and heat control. How might we start to embrace and adopt new ways of conveying, and teaching sensorial experiences, and by extension - consider other ways of defining what value is relating to how people typically perceive food - heritage?

Smart Equipment, in the Food Industry
Touch – screen, bone crushing blenders (the Thermomix), Paco - Jets, Sonidifiers - these equipments are found at high end dining establishments, and they are expensive. A simple distillation set, found in science labs in the 80s, could cost up to $10,000 SGD. Is this the future of dining, and what responsibility should industry folks play in balancing this act of playing - in the name of experimenting, exploring new flavour frontiers - and sharing the tools of the trade? How might conversations in HCI further tip over to how industry practitioners wield their tools, and how academics in HCI consider technologies and interactions within the food industry? We would like to explore other forms of value, and intentionalities, for instance, looking at bootstrapping efforts, open - source design and technologies in the industry, and adopting a critical engagement with the tools of our trade.

Let's Talk Ingredients
There's much talk about creating new food diets, to hacking our body systems - would like to move away from the talk about alternative protein - say lab - grown meat, and dive into the abundance of alternative proteins found in the Asian context. Tofu, bountiful indigenous legumes, and insects. How might technology bridge the gaps, in narratives largely produced from the West, and amplify, hidden gems, elsewhere? How might technology extend these narratives to inform and exercise control we have over our foods - as consumers, as purveyors of cultural cuisines, and as creators of narratives?