Interview with Peter Scholliers, Amy Trubek and Richard Wilk

Surveying the Food Studies Field

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Full text

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Richard Wilk is Professor of Anthropology at Indiana University.

Q: What are you currently working on and why is it important for scholars in the food studies field?

Peter Scholliers: For the last two years I have been studying the relationship between food and health in Europe in the “long” twentieth century. My starting point is shamelessly simple: why is it that, despite increasing nutritional knowledge, stockpiling food recommendations, and manifold allegedly all-solving diets, people all over the world are getting overweight and even obese? The overweight-question fully appeared in the 1970s, although worries in this respect existed since the late nineteenth century. My investigations contribute to this question, using theories about the dissemination of scientific knowledge and the role of medicine in society, on the one hand, and empirical research dealing with the Belgian case, on the other. Belgium provides a case that is promising, in that this small country is at the intersection of various traditions, both in terms of culinary habits and
dietary studies.

This research moves beyond my older work. I used to study several aspects of the history of food (e.g. the labour market of cooks and waiters; identity construction; material culture; manuals of household schools), but was struck by the sweeping interest hard disciplines (medicine, biology, chemistry, pharmacy) have for the relationship of food and health in the past. Some of this work is very valuable, but other is rather repetitive, non-critical, and inventory-like. Yet, I am convinced that historical knowledge may contribute considerably to present-day questions related to overweight and obesity: without this historical understanding, it will be impossible to conceive of solutions. In short, the present-day issue of food and health necessitates knowledge of the past.

Currently, I am composing a paper that tackles this theme: I wish to research how medical doctors in Brussels hospitals advised about children’s diet in the nineteenth century, and claim that doctors have only paid particular attention to this group since the 1880s. The relevance for food studies refers to the role and influence of science in society; here, too, I am convinced that this topic is relevant for broader food studies.

Nonetheless, other types of work require my attention. For example, I am preparing a synopsis for a book that aims at comparing the diet in Belgium and the Netherlands. The book investigates the construction of two inter-related stereotypes: the Burgundian Belgian and the austere Dutchman (both images exist beyond both countries). The book will use the notion of food system.

Amy Trubek: I am currently working on a book looking closely at cooking practice among American home cooks. I think this book can make a contribution to the food studies field in terms of method, theory, and content. First, this book uses video ethnography as a method. We did an ethnographic project where we interviewed 25 people from different parts of the American Northeast about their relationship to cooking. We then videotaped these informants cooking one or two dinner meals. The interviews have been a rich source of information, but the videotapes have opened up an entire new world of possibility in terms of analysing cooking practice. Cooking is a complex, multi-faceted set of actions that reveal a tremendous amount about people’s relationship to food, to family, to the larger structures of social life. The ability to examine and re-examine the videotapes, to capture the social truth of a small moment, or the complex skill of making a particular dish, bring much more depth and nuance to a consideration of cooking. This book also extends my long interest in the intersection between food practices and concepts of quality. What makes a home cook think a certain meal tastes good? What makes a home cook think he or she is a good cook? What helps people have a sense of agency in relation to everyday cooking? What gets in the way? Finally, this book argues that educated attention to food experiences is as crucial to any field of food studies as attention to forms of meaning and structures of power. In fact, the best way to understand meaning and power lies in close examination of everyday experiences.

Richard Wilk: I am working on several projects. One is starting up a new Indiana University Food Institute; very practical tasks of finding office and lab space on campus, staffing and fundraising. This is exciting and we hope to develop a new kind of interdisciplinary food studies which will include internships, service-learning and online coursework. But it takes a lot of energy and time to start something new at a big University, especially when it’s in a permanent financial crisis.
In that regard I am working with several of my graduate students on projects connecting seafood, culture, taste and the environment. We are interested in the way the desire for particular seafoods can lead to extinction and ecological disruption in far-away places. I have seen this in Belize, where sea cucumbers have almost disappeared because they are a delicacy in East Asia. Using mostly historical and archival information, we are looking for evidence of why some exotic foods become fashionable, while other foods, once edible, drop out of favor. Ellen Ireland, a PhD student at IU is looking at the declining culinary fortunes of common carp and smallmouth buffalo (a native fish) in the USA. It would be really useful if we could figure out how to get people to eat some of the millions of tons of “trash fish” that are killed and then thrown away in global fisheries. Trawlers kill four kilos of fish to get one kilo of shrimp.

Some people in the food industry are trying to change seafood tastes, working through celebrity chefs. In May I went to an elaborate “Trash Fish Dinner” in Chicago, organized by a group called the Chef’s Collaborative. The research has also allowed me to spend some time in Singapore, where every scrap of seafood is imported from somewhere else. It is really fascinating to see how competing ideas of taste and value meet in the marketplace. I want to move my research away from looking at any particular spot or territory, and study the way taste connects people over long distances.

I am also working with my psychology colleague Peter Todd on a project to look at the “micromoralities” of everyday eating. We are interested in the way our students engage in what we call moral bargaining with their food. They might go to work out at the gym to atone for sins of pastry, or reward themselves for finishing their homework with a food or drink binge. We don’t know yet if this kind of moral logic is particular to a specific age group, class, or nationality, but like dieting in general, moral bargaining seems to increase total food consumption. This project shows us how you do not have to travel far from home to do research on exotic and unexplained topics!

Q: Seen from France, the volume of Anglo-Saxon research on seems gigantic. How can we explain the current interest of Anglo-Saxon researchers in food?

Amy Trubek: When I started in graduate school, 25 years ago, I was dedicated to studying food, particularly food practices. I could find little scholarship in the United States that took food seriously as a product of culture, as culturally significant, as aesthetically enriching and constitutive of the human experience. One of the reasons I turned to looking at French cuisine lay in the larger body of scholarly research on the history and importance of the cuisine, especially the practice, to the culture and nation. Now, there is SO much attention paid to food by American academics, most of which has emerged over the past 15 years.

Peter Scholliers: The passion for food studies in Anglo-Saxon countries is indeed huge, but not unique. One of the elements to explain this is the language: English is written and read outside these countries (which is far less the case for French, Italian or Dutch – to stick to European languages). Another element is the interest of both academic and general publishers in publishing on food (history). The latter, of course, meets a demand from the public. Hence, the question to ask is why the academic and general public have gained interest in food studies and food history.

One answer may be found in the tension between McDonaldization and terroir-ization. The increasing velocity of changes since, say, the aftermath of the Second World War has led to anxiety and insecurity among a great deal of
people: innovations appear much more than ever before. This is not to say that innovations prior to 1940 were absent. Needless to refer to examples of previous centuries like the potato or canned foods. The pace of change has increased tremendously since 1945 (agribusinesses have expanded, new products and tastes have appeared, purchasing power has increased, shopping has radically changed, et cetera). All this seems to have led to increasing feelings of doubt and even anxiety about what people eat daily. Hence, the search for reassurance, which has led to increased interest in all matters about food and, especially, the huge interest in terroir, grandmother’s cuisine and the history of food. So, yes, the current interest (not only in the USA) is a consequence of an attempt to understand present-day changes.

Amy Trubek: Unfortunately, I see the present interest to be fairly instrumental – to do empirical research on a certain aspect of food in order to forward larger disciplinary and theoretical aims. In particular, scholars interested in the intersection of political systems and economic regimes have focused heavily on food-related topics over the past decade. This may stem from the connections between changes in American social structure (more women working, less money spent on food, consolidation of industries related to food, greater income inequality) and the obvious implications for American food choices and food habits. I still think there are not enough American scholars seeking to understand how food - from production through consumption – works in unique ways because it is food: necessary for human existence, intrinsic to everyday life, sensorially significant etc.

Richard Wilk: I don’t really think I have an answer for this, except to say that much of the Anglophone world is composed of settler colonies like the USA and Australia, which have shallow historical roots. They also share the vestiges of a peculiarly British colonial culture which mixed aristocratic pretensions, racism and bourgeois pragmatism. The result was a lot of uneasy creolization, uncertainty over what to eat and a long hiatus in the development of local or creolized cuisines. In this I think it is useful to trace the influence of colonial foods on those in the metropole; the British empire was full of settler colonies, while other colonial powers had a different mix of colonies. I was fascinated, some years ago, to cross the border between Ghana and Togo; same ethnic group and language on both sides, but totally different food cultures because of different colonizers.

Q: Richard Wilk, in your research, you have insisted on the mobile dimensions of food, on the one hand through human migrations, on the other hand through the global spread of practices and representations. What do you think about current projects which aim to make food part of a local/regional/national “heritage”?

Richard Wilk: Well, we have to accept that we are living in a particular phase of the history of capitalism, where identity and origins are becoming much more important qualities of goods; globalization and the generation of localism are two sides of the same process. Because of new forms of information and social media, it is becoming much easier for people to learn more about where their food comes from and how it is produced, as well as the consequences for their health, the environment and social justice. But this time is also dominated by a liberal philosophy that minimizes the ability of government and other collectivities to regulate the many actors and entities in a food chain. Instead, the responsibility for monitoring working conditions in Thai shrimp farms is placed on the individual consumer, guided by some unknown certifying agent.
The specificity of the moment needs to be appreciated in its historical context, the long development of different forms of branding in mercantilism and capitalism. Today it seems “natural” to us that places should have their own food products and cuisine, but how did this become naturalized? Why does it seem obvious to us that there must be Italian Food, and problematic that we have trouble defining the cuisine of the USA? This was not obvious to people in earlier times – in the Roman empire, for example, people knew particular places for their special wines, oils, nuts, fruits and sauces, but nobody expected every town or region to have its own diet or cuisine. Roman food was the standard everywhere and differences were thought to be matters of climate or nature.

I am not an intellectual historian, but my reading leads me to believe that the modern meaning of “local” and the connection of places with cultures, climate and nature, were connected also with the origins of modern physical sciences. I am drawing here on Alix Cooper’s fascinating book, Inventing the Indigenous.

Q: Listening to your responses, can it be said that “Food Studies” are becoming a new discursive space for thinking about food, as gastronomy was in 19th century France?

Peter Scholliers: “Food Studies” exists in the USA but so far not in Europe where interest in food largely excludes the hard sciences (unlike the USA). So, a first requirement to launch “food studies” as a new discursive space in Europe is to define this concept. Will the old continent adopt the American broad view? Are conditions (the food chain) similar in both regions? Isn’t “food studies” not too vague a concept, and, hence, not very workable? So, before imagining this new discursive space, it must be clearly reflected upon.

Moreover, “gastronomy” appeared in Europe in the nineteenth century, but as a marginal and contested field, taste (in culinary terms) being second to sight and other senses. Isn’t the role of “gastronomy”, except in rare philosophical writings of contemporaries, a social construction of present-day social and cultural researchers?

Richard Wilk: My initial attraction to food studies was my first ASFS meeting in 2000 [Association for the Study of Food and Society]. Everyone was focussed on the research, not polluted by disciplinary jargon or status competition, and I met all kinds of fascinating people outside of anthropology. Unfortunately most of academia is still disciplinary and disciplined by our antique way of dividing up the world. So food is butchered into little bits that are scattered to so many specialities, we can never see the whole, or the most important connections. Putting the pieces back together again is a very radical step, and I worry about the future of food studies, especially for younger scholars who have to get jobs in a marketplace still dominated by conventional disciplines.

Q: Peter Scholliers, in 2012, you edited a book, World Food History, which gathers historians’ articles but which is organized according to a division through world geographical ensembles (West, Middle East, South and East Asia, Africa). Is food history necessarily geographic?

Peter Scholliers: Consider food historiography since, say, the year 1990. Two regions in the world paid some attention to the history of food: some parts of Northern America and some in Europe (with one or two exceptions in Asia). However, this interest was marginal. It took the cultural turn, the direct influence of anthropology, ethnography and sociology, and the efforts of some sturdy historians to put food history firmly on the agenda of Academia in the 2000s. To this testify the publication of new journals (e.g. Food & History,
In the course of the 2000s, this interest spread to other continents. In Japan and South Korea first, later in China, India and the Near East, researchers started studying food history. A couple of years later, the same occurred in South America (especially Brazil). And quite recently, the African continent (not just the North) was being studied. Editing a book on the history of historiography, thus, could only take into consideration this unequal development.

However, apart from this, the radically different development of foodways throughout the world makes it impossible to ignore the huge geographical differences. Indeed, each country reacted differently to the globalisation process and telling this history requires attention to local characteristics. Yet, it is possible to write a “Food history of the world” (e.g. J. Pilcher’s Food in World History, 2006, 130 pages), but this inevitably misses nuance and depth, although the comparative survey offers an advantage.

Q: You used the term foodways. Other concepts such as foodscape or food systems has been proposed to think of food as an economic, social, cultural and political system marking space but being marked by it as well. How do you think food as a geographical fact affects spaces and places?

Peter Scholliers:

The so-called globalisation of recent decades (i.e. the quickening and amplification of international exchanges of all kinds) led to local and regional reactions. Of all things important to humans, food is perhaps one of the best items to illustrate this. Globalisation in food takes the name of McDonaldization. McDonald’s eateries spread to the rest of the world in the 1970s (today, there is hardly any country in the world that hasn’t a McDo). This led to two reactions. One was immediate: the establishing of European competitors (e.g. Wimpy’s in the UK and Quick in France and Belgium), copying the US-model (especially the production of burgers and the franchise-system), but with European features (supply of food, e.g. mayonnaise with fries). The other reaction took some time and may best be characterised by the neologism terroir-isation (rooted, of course, in the French “terroir” or region), i.e., the (re)discovery of local ways of dealing with food: ingredients, habits, recipes et cetera. This interest had various effects, and one of them is the exploration of old foodways. This includes the commercial use of a series of concepts such as “grandmother”, “traditional” and “authentic”. It also includes interest for so-called forgotten food (particularly vegetables, such a topinambour [or sunroot] and black carrots – today to be found in many European supermarkets). In terms of food production, this interest led to new agricultural views (sustainable, biological [organic] foods). And finally, this interest includes the academics’ attention to the construction of culinary traditions, which opens the way to food heritage studies. The latter is fully concerned with local/regional matters. One caveat, though: in so doing, historians and other academics may very well contribute to the construction of traditions (and myths), instead of studying these (which, I believe, is the role of Academia). So, by all means food is a “geographical fact”, despite the globalisation of the economy, politics (the EU, for example) and culture.

One word about the notion of food systems. I think this has big advantages, primarily because it describes the integration of the various chains into one
coherent whole and because of the role that each chain may play. Thus, in the book synopsis I mentioned above, I will use this notion in order to explore food similarities and differences between the Netherlands and Belgium. This will start with the production of food (a local element, although techniques, breeds and fertilizers are transnational); next come mediators which include advertisements, food advice and education (increasingly transnational, e.g. the production and trade of canned foods in the USA, entailing international publicity); next is shopping (with the move from the local shop and [open] market to the internationally owned supermarket); another chain is cooking, which requires interest in recipes, customs, ingredients et cetera (habitual dishes and ways of doing, influences of migrants); next is eating, which includes interest in where, when, what and with whom is eaten; finally there is waste, which considers the use of leftovers and garbage. Considering the food system automatically leads to questioning the relationship between the local and the global, thus emphasizing the whole geographical issue. Finally, taking the concept of food systems opens up a very broad societal domain, so much so that food appears as a spyhole for l'histoire totale, once cherished by the Annales.

Amy Trubek: I absolutely believe food remains bounded, in some ways, by geography. Clearly, the global-industrial food system allows us to transcend our specific geographies in our relationship to food. However, as long as food remains, in fact, the animals, plants bugs, etc. that are, like us, aspects of the natural world, the geographies within which a bison roam or the acer saccharum tree is able to grow and flourish, how food is grown and where it comes from makes a difference.

Richard Wilk: Anne Murcott sensitized me to the loose imprecision of many words which we use to describe the connections between food and culture. When you think about it, food itself is one of those categories that seem obvious until you try to find a precise definition. It has such fuzzy boundaries. Food shades into medicines and drugs; and why is soup considered food but a frozen coffee drink with twice the calories is a beverage? What about white clay or koniaku, substances that people eat but cannot digest?

One important thing I learned in my early career as an archaeologist is that we impose our own culture and science on the world when we make up categories. You group together potsherds or stone tools in different ways, depending on the kind of problem you want to solve – this in inescapable. But we should not fool ourselves into thinking that those made-up analytical categories really exist in the world, among artefacts or the people who made them. I am always cautioning my students that they need to learn the way people themselves categorize their world in speech and language, but they should not confuse these analytical terms with their anthropological categories and labels. This is why you cannot simply go and ask people to answer your research question for you.

It would be nice if we could be more precise not just in our language, but in the things we compare to one another. I may think, for example, that the foods Americans eat in 2015 are much more diverse than what was eaten in 1915. But what is my metric? When you try to put a term like “diversity” into operation you find that it can mean many things – diversity of sources? staples? dishes? over a day or a year? And among what ages, genders or households? And how will you measure things? I learned a lot of caution about assumptions like these when I worked briefly on Bill Rathje’s Garbage Project in Arizona when I was a graduate student. There was little relationship between what people said they
ate and what was revealed from sorting their trash.

Q: Despite these methodological and lexical problems, is the ethnographic approach still relevant in understanding the dynamics of an increasingly globalised agri-food system?

Richard Wilk: Numbers give you breadth and a foggy glimpse of gross trends. Talking with people will give you the meaning of those numbers and ideas for why there are trends. To tell the truth, all the trends in the global food system make ethnography harder and less useful. You never get enough ethnographic depth in a multi-sited ethnography or when studying an assemblage of heterogeneous elements. You inevitably lose depth as you add breadth. The only solution I can see is teamwork—the kind of joint project Danny Miller is doing with nine collaborators working for extended periods in different settings, gathering the same kind of information, meeting often to compare notes and collaborate on publishing. But, in general, social scientists in the USA are all trained to be heroes on our own individual voyages of discovery, when we really need to be more like termites building something together.

Amy Trubek: I wonder if we will need to become more sophisticated about mixed-methods to make a difference in explaining the modern agri-food system. Large-scale studies do not capture the nuance of what is happening on the ground, but somehow micro-studies need to be able to incorporate larger-scale analyses, to help build a case for certain universal problems of the current system: concentration and consolidation, loss of biodiversity etc.

Peter Scholliers: The main contribution (says the historian who I am) is the fact that ethnography looks at the world “from the inside”, i.e. from what people think, expect, hope and fear, and how they give meaning to small and big events, happenings and thoughts. Of course, the “outside world” (institutions, ideology, war, diplomacy et cetera) is interconnected with this “inside meaning” (I use Sidney Mintz’s view). Much more than any other discipline, ethnography considers “small” issues that deal with banal things of everyday life. This is an excellent way to study and try to interpret people’s reaction to globalisation. This particular look hardly exists among economists, sociologists, communication scientists or historians.

Q: One of the strongest symbols of globalization is the industrialisation of food. Despite its importance in providing a large part of the world’s daily food consumption, how do you explain the weak interest of social sciences in the industrial nature of food?

Peter Scholliers: Do social sciences indeed neglect the “industrial nature” of food? And what is meant by “industrial nature”? To start with the latter, it is clear that most of our food is “manipulated”, and hardly any food is natural or original. Consider wheat or cattle: both are the outcome of centuries of alterations and mixes (improvements?) of species. If this hadn’t occurred, human kind would undoubtedly be in a different shape today. Where is the border between “manipulation” and “industrialisation”? Of course, the agribusinesses take further the simple act of growing wheat, when importing cocoa and producing chocolate bars. Still, it may be argued that manipulation occurs in all times and places, although in different forms and to different degrees.

Hence, it may be doubted that social and cultural sciences largely ignore the importance of the “industrial nature of food”. At least food historiography has paid attention to the history of margarine, chocolate, canning and freezing, biscuits, wine and beer. Nevertheless, the question may include a critique:
social and cultural sciences did not pay enough attention to the bad consequences of the industrialisation of food (adding sugar and taste enhancers, for example). This is true, and may be explained by the fact that these issues are on the junction between hard and soft sciences. Soft scientists must indeed be aware of what food additives actually mean. Their field of research, however, may limit itself to how people perceive “industrialised food” (such as convenience foods, for example, about which lots of research has been done).

Q: On the contrary, how would you explain the weak influence of social sciences researchers on food politics and industrialists' practice? Can notions such as terroir become a connexion between industrialists, decision-makers and academics?

Peter Scholliers:

This is a huge question! Actually, it is part of my current research (see the first question on the relationship between science and society / nutritional studies and eaters). First, let me take a look at the way social sciences may (or not) influence policy. This requires that social researchers are taken seriously by policy makers and, for that matter, by academic policy makers (e.g., the European Research Council, ERC). So far, this is not the case. The question is why. Would a reply be that “food” isn’t taken seriously? To a certain extent, this seems to be one element of the answer. After all, social and cultural food research is (still) a new field that has to earn its credentials (unlike hard nutritional science that deals with sustainability, hunger, genetically modified food and other vital matters). A research proposal that deals with intangible issues such as taste, food taboos or identity construction through food, competing with familiar topics such as migration studies or economic performance, has far less chance of being taken seriously by academic decision makers. A consequence is that social and cultural food research has to be legitimated much more than familiar themes in the so-called soft sciences.

Having said this, policy makers often view social and cultural food research as a surplus or even a luxury that may produce coffee-table books or a pleasant divertissement (e.g. an exhibition in a food museum, where children can enjoy tasting food). In times of financial difficulties, such concerns do not come first. Yet, implications on past and present-day societies are immense. Just consider the influence of migrants, their search to adapt to local circumstances of their new country and their influences on local foodways: all this requires investigations.

Influencing the food industry is another matter. Manufacturers aim at making money, and if social and cultural food research may contribute to this, industry may surely use social and cultural food studies. Often, this happens when an anniversary of a food company needs some historical background. This may lead to relevant work, of course, but in general this type of investigation is rather disappointing. Nonetheless, as I mentioned above, today food manufacturers use “terroir” (and grandmother, tradition, authenticity), which is often done without consent by food researchers, but so be it: once research is made public, it belongs to everyone.

Richard Wilk: In the USA, I would place the blame for this firmly on the way universities were organized and funded. From the beginning we had a Cartesian division between “Land-Grant” State universities that taught practical subjects like engineering, agriculture, and mining. Each state also established a “Liberal Arts” university for the higher learning of the humanities, the “pure” sciences and later the social sciences. When the
Land-Grant schools grew in size and wealth, they added “practical” kinds of social science like agricultural economics, rural sociology and applied anthropology. In the mid-twentieth century they served the growing food processing industry by developing programs in food science, nutrition, and public health. In the meantime, the Liberal Arts schools had no place at all for something as mundane and feminine as food, until wartimes when they did “basic research” on food policy and economic development.

In last half of the 20th century, the Land Grant colleges developed very close connections with food processors, to the point where they were really the research arm of the consolidating agro-food industry. The Liberal Arts schools depended instead on government funding and have suffered accordingly during recessions and the choking off of government services in general.

Today, this division of the life of the body from the life of the mind persists in food studies just because of institutional inertia, even though everyone, even in the food industry recognize that they need each other. While terroir is a practical meeting place for business, government and scholars in many parts of Europe, it is just beginning to be recognized in the USA, mainly through the growth of food tourism.

My own opinion is that food scholars do their best work with communities and activist groups, and we are better off without corporate sponsors. There has to be someone in the country who is independently willing to resist the quest for profit and its toxic consequences. Consulting for a local farmer who wants to sell grass-fed beef through a CSA [community-supported agriculture] seems fine to me, but let Con-Agra do their own research.

Q : Amy Trubek, your researches, especially your book The Taste of Place, show that local food production in the United States remains dynamic. What is their place in American society and in consumers’ representations? How do they get closer to and/or differ from the European ones?

Amy Trubek : First, the United States is vast. Whatever type of cuisine we might possess as a nation can never be the same as the European case given the immense variation in geography, topography, climate, ethnicity etc. Interestingly, the easy access to food that is industrially produced, from refrigerated railcars for milk and meat in the early 20th century, to TV dinners and other frozen food in the 1950s, to snack foods, health foods and more today, remains the type of food that unifies different regions of the US, from the South to Southwest, to urban hipsters in San Francisco and suburban moms in Atlanta. The fact that industrial food is shared by Americans, however, does not mean that we don’t have other ways to source and cook food.

Regionality and ethnicity are also important. Local foods are ways Americans assert variety and spatial specificity in the face of the national industrial system. The difference with Europe, to me, is the small scale, geographically proximate norm for food and foodways was not before the industrial national model, rather they emerged almost simultaneously. Thus, we don’t really see American cuisine as a form of cultural heritage, which makes us more vulnerable to industrialization and consolidation but also always makes us to be more imaginative in what we do with food.

Q : Is it possible to think that the Californian “GAFAs” (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon) will reinvent in the next decades the way food is produced?

Peter Scholliers : Even if this question is far beyond my expertise, just one comment: as a “new social medium” Facebook may be used to spread new ideas about food production (how to perform “urban agriculture”, for example), but
Google, Apple and Amazon are purely commercial firms that hardly allow the participation of citizens.

**Richard Wilk:** Science fiction has always been my favorite genre. Many things imagined by SF writers are now part of everyday life and I expect this will continue in the future. I do think there will always be a market for cheap and highly processed foods and eventually we will be eating cultured meat and pastries assembled by 3-D printers. But as I have said before, modern technoutopianism and nostalgic revivalism are not opposed to each other – they are like a married couple; they require the resistance of the other to keep passion alive. So I would guess that just as food becomes a laboratory product, conjured from bulk biomass by genetically modified microbes, people will still want artisanal food products grown in real soil and chickens that have never seen a cage.

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**Notes**

1 See research and publications at http://research.vub.ac.be/food-history/peter-scholliers.

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