ORIGINAL PAPER

The futures of food and the prospects of a perfect society

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Abstract:
The contemporary societies face the obstacles encountered in developing a deeper understanding of the role played by ration and logic, on the one hand, and, on the other, by fantasies and dreams in imagining and planning the future. These difficulties and obstacles have yet to be overcome, despite today's well-known confluence between science and popular culture, and scholarly interest in understanding the connection between people's feelings toward a fictional text and research policy. Over time, imaginative narratives have allowed people either to escape from real life (through fantasy or daydreaming) or to make predictions about the future of reality, constituting a source of inspiration for the progress of mankind.

The purpose of this article is to point out a "map" of the methods used in a project about the future of food and the food of the future as they result from existing scientific literature on this topic. After the presentation of specific methods of research that can be used in such a project about food and future, the article presents also the first results of a first pre-test of the "First-person theory of documentation" method which was performed on a sample of fifteen students from the University of Bucharest.

The results confirmed existence of a typology of approaches to the future from the food point of view proposed by Belasco, namely the "modern future", and the "future recombination".

Keywords: *future, forecasting, food, scenario method, backcasting method.*

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The futures of food and the prospects of a perfect society

Introduction

Over time, imaginative narratives allowed people either to escape from real life (through fantasy or daydreaming) or to make predictions about the future of reality (Bowler, 2017; Clarke, 2013), constituting a source of inspiration for the progress of humanity. More than half a century ago, a dialogue between two writers (A. Strugatski and D. Bilenkin) and the Director of the Forecasting Department of the Institute of Social Research of the USSR Academy of Sciences and co-president of the Committee to Study the Future of the International Sociological Association (I. Bestujev-Lada) highlighted not only the challenges of defining and differentiating between science fiction and the society as a whole, in a rigorous manner, but also the obstacles encountered in developing a deeper understanding of the role played by fantasy and dreams in imagining and planning the future (Strugatskii, Bilenkin & Bestuzhev-Lada, 1978). Almost five decades later, these difficulties and obstacles are not overcome yet, despite of the well-known present confluence between science and the pop culture, and researchers' interest in understanding the connection between people's feelings toward a fictional text and research policy (the latter could be related to space race, cloning or genetically modified organisms) (Vint, 2021).

Before 1989, in Romania the future and the science of understanding the future constituted an essential part of the economic and socio-political reality, being part of the industrialization process and scientific construction of the multilaterally developped socialist society (Andersson, 2018; Andersson & Rindzevičiūtė, 2015). In 1972, Romania hosted the second International Conference on Futures Research in Bucharest, where "for the first time scholars and other people interested in futures studies from Western and Central and Eastern Europe had met to discuss and exchange views" (Barbieri Masini, 2001). It is worth remembering that, in 1967, the Centre for Management Education (CEPECA) had already been established in Bucharest, its members publishing numerous studies and volumes dedicated to studying the future in the following years (Cătănuş, 2015). Starting with the changes that took place in the' 90s the future was mainly a subject of study as an expression identified in literary and artistic works (Braga, 2006; Braga, 2010; Braga, 2012; Braga, 2015), which showed a reduced interest in connecting it with the social, economic, or technical-scientific fields in Romania through a transdisciplinary approach. In essence, transdisciplinary approaches of the future have emerged on the market of ideas in our country mainly through translations from international literature, in solid theoretical works, but tributary to a highly general theoretical perspective (Attali, 2016; Attali, 2019; Guillen, 2021; Randers, 2018; Séguela, 1998; Walsh, 2021). It is not our intention to challenge the importance and value of these perspectives, but we believe that the missing element – the sociological approach of people who can make the future possible, probable and plausible – has become a necessity at this moment.

The purposes of this article are:

RO1: To present the methlogies which can be used to study the future in relation to a specific sub-domain of the social and cultural life, namely "Food".

RO2: To identify the primary empirical elements of possible and plausible aretefacts created by individuals in relation to "Future" and "Food".

Theoretical framework

The option for "food" derives from the inclusion of the theme in the general future plans over a clearly defined time period, 2020-2030 both at a European Union level (European Commission, 2020a; European Commission, 2020b) and from the point of view of the global economic and political system (United Nations, 2015; United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Moreover, while in the specialized literature, art and food have often been studied in relation to the past (the history) (Boyce & Fitzpatrick, 2017; Carruth, 2013; Coghlan, 2020; Gladwin, 2019; Hutchinson & Paris-Greider, 2002; Kiell, 1995; Tigner & Carruth, 2017; Shahani, 2018) we can see that in the academic literature references to the future are precise and conceived through the literary works that have projected the future of human society (Coghlan, 2020; Gladwin, 2019; Bowler, 2017; Canavan & Link, 2018; Roberts, 2016; Vint, 2021).

On a theoretical level, one can consider the typology of approaches to the future from the food perspective proposed by Belasco (2006):

(1). The "classic future" (which imagines a utopian future, inspired by the "horn of abundance");

(2). The "modern future" (which promoted processed food stored in easy-to-store containers, based on the concept of "scientific eating", that aimed to a maximized food production and the waste reduction, strengthening and simplifying the means of production); and

(3). The "future of recombination" (which emphasized the combination of elements from the past with some of the present, in order to obtain a product that will be used in the future, being centred on the premise that food is prepared based on a process of consolidation and segmentation of food, which means that the agriculture will also be transformed, by implementing "experimental cultivation systems" and "controlled farming").

This typology could be crossed with the perspective of the five phases in food-related behaviours identified by Goody (1998):

> "The study of the process of providing and transforming food covers the four main phases of production, distribution, preparation and consumption… to which can be added a fifth phase, often forgotten, disposal."

Inspired by the nowadays innovations from the artistic field (Beaumaris Art Group, 2018; Ligaya, 2018) one could try to identify the main "vectors" by which the relationship between the future and food is imagined and created by human subjects through narrative and plastic images.

But how can the relationship between the two terms of the above-mentioned relationship, "the future" and "food", be summarized?

Trying to answer this question we have identified two central concepts:

(1) "The Future of Food" – in this case we believe that the analysis could start from the present state of the food and could analyse its evolution as pictured in the literature. From this perspective, one could consider literature to be a means of exploring the future of food, by taking into consideration the analysis of the utopias, dystopias, anti-utopias, science fiction and fantasy papers that focus on food (Braga, 2015; Canavan & Link, 2018; Hobana, 1983);

(2) "The Food of the Future" – where the starting point could be the food of the future and one could identify the role of future literature in relation to it. Moreover, in this case one could explore two lines of research:

(2a) the situation in which the food of the future becomes itself part of the literature, examples in this case are the gastronomy books written and published by Marinetti and Dali (Adamowicz & Storchi, 2015; Novero, 2010; Dali, 2016); and

(2b) the case in which food is created by mixed teams of creators and consumers, where food is seen as a product which is designed and connected to the future (Bieler, 2017; Borba et al., 2018; Cesaretti, 2009; Clintberg, 2017; Dolejšová, 2021; Dolphijn, 2006; McNeill & Urie, 2020; Pettinger et al., 2019; Stourna, 2018; Zampollo & Peacock, 2016).

Possible methodological approaches

The relation between "future" and "food" can be studied using several metods of research which could be summarized as such:

(A). The analysis of science fiction, fantasy, utopian, dystopic and anti-utopian novels on the topics of "The Future of Food" and "The Food of the Future" (Bell et al., 2013; Fergnani & Song, 2020; Miles, 1990; Nikoleris, Stripple & Tenngart, 2017; Raven, 2017; Veland et al., 2018). The method of thematic analysis of novels could be applied (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Kim, 2015; Garson, 2013; Franzosi, 2010; Cortazzi, 1993). Each novel could be analysed according to a coding and interpretation scheme developed starting from the existing literature (Nikoleris, Stripple & Tenngart, 2017; Raven, 2017; Veland, et al., 2018).

(B). The method of "First-person theory of documentation" (Flint et al., 2017; Gorichanaz, 2019; Leavy, 2017; Smith & Dean, 2009; Ward & Shortt, 2020) applied on a set of collages (paper and digital) and personal narratives related to "The Food of the Future" and "The Future of Food". The method contained three steps: Stage 1 – a self-administered interview regarding the collages – each participant flls his/her answers to a series of questions related to the collage creation session. The questions seek to obtain in deep information related to the way in which the explored themes could build The Future of Food and The Food of the Future, encouraging associations, metaphors and analogies (Braga, 2019; Johnson-Laird, 1983; Turner, 2006; Turner, 2014). Stage 2 – (re-)composing narrations – here individual online interviews with each participant are made and they are focused on reiterating the already presented story through the collages, rebuilding and restructuring the thematic structure and describing the personal experience of each respondent. Stage 3 – building possible and plausible narrations – in this stage the individual narrations are compared and a number of possible and likely Future of Food and Food of the Future scenarios are rebuild.

(3). Backcasting method (Davis et al., 2020; Dreborg, 1996; Holmberg & Robèrt, 2000). This method consists of a set of workshop sessions, as follows: 1st session - Construction of The Future of Food and The Food of the Future - the participants work together to develop by consensus their preferred scenarios for the Future of Food and the Food of the Future, attempting to answer to questions such as: What aspects of the future-related narration can co-exist and how? What are the points of divergence and rupture resulting from their convergence? The aim is to set out 3-5 possible scenarios related to The Future of Food and The Food of the Future that will be developed in subsequent sessions. 2nd session – Casting back to move forward - after building and improving the scenarios related to The Future of Food and The Food of the

Future the participants work in small groups to identify three central points that could lead to the development of this future: critical events, social movements, or environmental circumstances that may lead to a reorientation of the situation. This identification must be made from three distinct perspectives: i) of a human actor that exists or may exist at present; ii) a human actor that cannot actually exist at present; and iii) a non-human actor who can be placed at any point in time. The aim is to achieve a pivotal perspective that should be common to the three previously mentioned perspectives. 3rd session – Reiteration of the story related to The Future of Food and The Food of the Future - the session is focused on reiterating one of alternatives of The Future of Food and The Food of the Future. The first reiteration presents the subjective perspective of one of the three actors presented in the 2nd session. The second one contains the reiteration of the second actor and so on. The purpose of this session is to produce a variety of perspectives, to demonstrate the degree of subjectivity of these events and to generate a new way of understanding the future. 4th session – Making The Future of Food and The Food of the Future tangible – in this session the groups present actions that can begin in the present and which may encourage local practices toward achieving The Future of Food and The Food of the Future. The aim of this session is to encourage a speculative thinking of the previous sessions by choosing the most possible, probable and plausible options.

(4). The "Science-fiction prototype" scenario method (Bell et al., 2013; Burnam-Fink, 2015; Fergnani & Song, 2020; Graham, Greenhill & Callaghan, 2014; Johnson, 2011; Merrie et al., 2018; Southern et al., 2014). The method could be applied starting from the McClemens (2019) typology and it develops as follows: Step1 – Pick your scenario and build your World. Participants choose some scenarios which could be set in the future, such as the year of 2070, and attempt to answer to the following questions: What are the implications of this scenario?; What is the worst thing that could go wrong and how would it affect the people and locations in the story? What is the best thing that could happen and how would it better the lives of the people and locations of the story? What food of the future and what future of the food are most desirable, most achievable and most probable in this narration? Responses are sought after in small groups. Participants answer these questions as a group, in writing. Step 2 – The Narrative Inflection Point. The discussion continues in the small groups answering to the following question, starting from the previous possible narrative: What are the possible effects of this type of Food of the Future and The Future of Food on peoples' daily lives, the governance, the economic, political and cultural systems? Participants answer as a group, in writing. Step 3 – Ramifications of the Narrative on People. In this stage, participants continue to work in micro-groups and they attempt to answer the following questions: Will people's lives be better or worse in the future due to these new foods? Will people adapt to the problems or opportunities caused by this Food of the Future, or to The Future of Food? Participants in the groups answer these questions as a group, in writing. Step 4 – The Human Inflection Point. Participants seek to choose between two alternatives: The actors introduced in the narration are in danger and either adapt to The Future of Food and, respectively, to The Food of the Future, as outlined in Step 2, or will ask them to avoid the deadly danger. Decisions must be adapted to the world that will exist in 2070, must be rational and must be truthful to the existing narration. Participants in the groups make the choice as a group and justify the option in writing, explaining this point of inflection. Step 5 – What Did We Learn? The experts solve the issue by answering the questions in writing: How has the narrative about the world

changed? How have the people, society and systems changed? What could be done differently? At what cautions need to pay attention? What should be different? What should be improved? What must stay the same? What ramifications have you uncovered by using the "Science-fiction prototype" scenario? Step 6 – Construction of the "pre-requisites" for a digital product. Based on the results of Steps 1 to 6, mental maps are built based on the metaphors associated with The Future of Food and The Food of the Future and a set of "pre-requisites" for a digital product (video game) could be drawn.

Results of the pre-test for the method of "First-person theory of documentation"

During the period October 1, 2021-January 16, 2022, a first pre-test of the "First-person theory of documentation" method was performed on a sample of fifteen students from the University of Bucharest. The students read a science fiction novel, made a media product starting from the elements of this novel, and, at the end, answered some questions included in a semi-structured interview guide. Of the fifteen interviews to which students gave answers, five focused on science fiction novels on food and the future. In the following we will briefly present the main results obtained.

When asked about the media product they made the respondents offered the following answers:

My proposal for a media product is a collage or a poster inspired by John Brunner's novel, "Sheep Look Up". The basic idea of the collage, which caught my attention in the novel, is that of "time", more precisely, of the 12 months in Brunner's work. I chose to reinterpret the months in the form of the 12 hours of a clock, a clock of destruction of nature that is advancing as the problem of pollution worsens. Each quarter of an hour embodies one of the (mostly irreversible) stages of environmental degradation. The first stage is that of nature in its purest form, and the fourth stage is that of environmental degradation on the brink of collapse, as society was exposed exactly 50 years ago in Brunner's novel, a society that seems to becomes a reality in some places around the world. The essential idea behind the concept of "time" in the collage is, in fact, the idea of irreversible time. I made that because it is essential to be aware of the seriousness of the problem of nature and pollution, to go back in time or at least to try to stop this process of nature's degradation. The purpose of this watch is to warn us that time is running out and that it is necessary to act before the clock strikes 00:00. This is also the motivation of the name chosen for the collage - the fact that there is hope that we can do something even at 23:59. (S2)

My proposal for a media product is a photo collage that represents the first part of the novel "The Beast" by A. E Van Vogt in which the ship is discovered and the reader understood how Pendrake acted. The pictures in which the ships are present represent the rotating object discovered by the rider as I imagined it. Lately the character has been living away from the rest of the world so that his friends didn't even know he was alive. This was represented by a house placed on a hill, secluded, where this man used to spend his time not to be in contact with other and with the humankind in general. The picture of that garage represents for me the place where the character tries to discover what the

machine is and the book in the picture represents the fascinating story that is about to be found. Thus, the elements that I discovered in the book and exposed in the photo collage are things that aroused my imagination: the mystery, the machine, the universe, the soldier, the house, the garage. In my opinion the main element is the book, that is, the book in the image that has a fascinating color around it, which indicates to the reader that there is a lot of mystery in that book. (S3)

My proposal for a media product is a collage of pictures and other graphic elements (text, drawings), juxtaposed in order to obtain an image similar to a fashion magazine. These pages of a possible fashion magazine are a personal insight into the clothing style of the two settlements described in Arthur C. Clark's novel "The City and the Stars". For Diaspar, I chose a theme with precious stones that reflects the well-being and luxury of the city of the future. The selected images illustrate clothing items whose primary purpose is to attract the attention of others, not to protect them from the cold or to protect their body in general. I thought that the accessories worn on the head would produce this effect. As mentioned in the book, in the future, clothes are purely decorative. We chose dresses with details made of precious stones, of different colors and sizes, to shine like stars. This element was inspired by the fact that the inhabitants of the Diaspar were forbidden to leave the city and travel in space. For the city of Lys, I chose a theme inspired by nature, given that the landscapes described in the book had areas full of vegetation. The life of the people of Lys was to a great extent different from that of the inhabitants of the Diaspar - the latter city is highly developed in terms of technology, while in the other society life is traditionally conducted: people cultivate their food and they raise domestic animals. Thus, their clothing style differs from that of Diaspar - they wear much simpler clothes, which have other purposes than to put in evidence the appearance of an individual. However, I have selected some outfits that can be worn during special events, but their cut is modest compared to those chosen for Diaspar. In my view, these are straight clothes, made of thin materials that allow movement and effort. (S5)

It is obvious that for the respondents included in the pretest of the first method there is a mixture between two types of future in terms of food (Belasco, 2006). We have thus identified that the relationship between food and the future implies both the "modern future" and the "future of recombination".

In the descriptions given by Romanian students one could identify, on the one hand, the food aimed at maximizing its production and waste reduction, strengthening and simplifying the means of production (respondents S2 and S3). On the other hand, these answers indicated the possibility of food that emphasized the combination of elements from the past with some of the present, in order to obtain a product that will be used in the future (respondent S5).

Conclusions

In recent years scholars' interest on The Future of Food and The Food of the Future has raised. Some universities and research organizations from the EU and the US have initiated food-related projects involving mixed research teams (artists, doctors,

anthropologists) focused on practice-driven research (National Centre for Research Method, Economic & Social Research Council, Brunel University, University of Central London, Institute of Education – University of London, University of the Arts – London, Royal College of Arts, Fashion Digital Studio, 2021; University of Central London, 2021; University of Cental London, 2021; NASA, 2021). At the same time, some recent books have emphasized both the current changes in food and the impact of technology in relation to the art and society (Leer and Krogager, 2021; Attali, 2020) and some universities even offer courses of possible futures, based on science fiction works of STEM scholars and of world renowned physicists, astrophysicists, mathematicians, biologists (Lancaster University, 2021; MIT Course, 2020; Ashman, 2021).

A possible research project focused on the relationship between food and the future can thus use any of the methods mentioned above. As we noticed in testing the "First-person theory of documentation" method, the results indicated the possibility for respondents to opt for a specific future in terms of food - in the specific case it was the "modern future" and the "future of recombination".

In our opinion, giving the existing time-lag between our country and the Western academic world, in our opinion the two key-concepts we proposed (namely, "The Future of Food" and "The Food of the Future") could be studied and the results could enrich the existing socio-human perspectives on the topics.

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