Macro Paradata

Taste and smell are incredibly powerful in creating and negotiating memory, identity, perspective, and experience, but it rarely forms a sustained component of heritage strategies. Epi.Curio was developed to infuse flavours and smells of the past into the experiences and gastronomic creations of people in the present. It encourages us to not only engage with artifacts normally behind glass, but to also consume them – immersing ourselves and augmenting the realities of the narratives that particular objects embody in our interpretation and imagination of the past.

Epi.Curio connects with the Heritage Jam's theme of collections, drawing on curio cabinets and antiquarian approaches to curation as inspiration. These objects were collected, curated, and shown off, sparking curiosities and engagement with diverse cultures and histories. Recipes, too, are heritage collections; individuals and families have long collected, curated, shared, or in some cases kept very secret, recipes that evoked particular identities, histories, and memories. Like historical narratives, recipes are modified, manipulated, and negotiated. They are political, social, and economic; they are both shared and individual. Epi.Curio's recipes, and the 'artifacts' they create, can therefore act as mechanisms through which to explore heritage and our understandings and imagination of the past.

On another level, Epi.Curio is a digital collection of images and recipes – openly available and accessible to stimulate engagement with heritage in experiential and engaging ways. Individuals are encouraged to bake their own collections, a creative and delicious alternative to previous practices of antiquities collecting (given the ethical concerns with the antiquities trade, repatriation, and private, inaccessible collections). Inspired by the important work of many historians and archaeologists of past foodways, as well as more Blumenthalian approaches to gastronomy, Epi.Curio is to be an approachable and inventive resource, one that engages body and mind; the edible objects also remind us that heritage is fleeting, and needs to be maintained in diverse ways.

Embracing open access resources, digital preservation, and experiential and sensory-based learning, Epi.Curio is a platform for curious and imaginative minds, and stomachs.

Micro Paradata

The steps for developing Epi.Curio were two-fold: the development of the recipes, and the development of the digital platform. These two processes occurred simultaneously, literally putting a recipe on the backburner to allow for the creation of visuals or digital resources to represent it. This allowed the flexibility to develop a web-platform truly representative of the process of creating.

Recipes were developed from historical and archaeological resources on food, flavours and cooking processes, as well as museum collections and archives of objects, pairing recipes with appropriate artifacts. Some deviations from authenticity were taken to reflect the availability of products and particular equipment in modern kitchens; these changes were noted as much as possible in recipes and the website for transparency but it was considered necessary for the accessibility of the resource. There are other opportunities for authentic versions of recipes and cooking techniques particularly at historical interpretation centres and in specialist books (and it is hoped that some of these resources can be linked into the site in future), but this is truly a resource for contemporary home bakers. This also leaves it open for others to reinterpret recipes, modify to their own abilities and resources, explore, play and get creative (and report back via contributions and comments). In future, the development of more direct commenting and crowd-sourcing/crowd-editing elements could be used to encourage wider annotation and modification of these recipes.

The digital platform was created on GitHub, to utilise it's free hosting and accessibility. The framework was established with the assistance of Bootstrap templates that were customized for the needs and aesthetics of this project. All the script is also available on GitHub to be forked (not a culinary pun this time!), modified and utilized as needed. The interface was designed to be intuitive and user-friendly but also replicate some sense of the ornate and intriguing curio cabinets of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with multiple avenues to explore, engage and interact. The visual design and photography elements were therefore extremely important in the development of this project, however the website also seeks to capture other elements of the practice of making and eating – the corporeal experiences, the smells and tastes, hinting at what can be experienced and explored. Overall, this website (and project as a whole) was developed and created over the course of a few days and is therefore a little under baked at present. Further refining of graphics and visual content, the development of more participation-based components, and the inclusion of wider resources, recipes, and discussions of heritage would help to deliver the aims and values of this project.

Bon appétit!

Epi.Curio seeks to stimulate a new sense of discovery, surprise, and desire, as an antiquarian would see these objects, but also add another level of attraction, engagement and experience. It is also a playful approach to the ways that we both make and consume heritage (literally and figuratively). When it comes to heritage, we all need to see more, do more, learn more, share more. This project represents an approach to visualizing heritage in a way that also allows us to taste, smell, hear, and touch it.