Kotomi Yamamura

SOS: Commodification Processes and Alternatives

Final Narrative Self-Evaluation Assignment

The title of my in-program Individual Learning Contract was, The Science Behind Tea Flavor, Aroma, Appearance, and Health Benefits. My first learning objective was to learn about the different processing techniques that develop the varying chemicals that produce the physiological, psychologicalal, and therapeutic effects of tea, as well as, the appearance, aroma, and flavor characteristics. My second learning objective was to learn how to curate and teach tea-tasting workshops by designing and teaching weekly forty-five minute tea-tasting workshops, based off of my weekly research. My third learning objective was to explore Kyla Wazana’s concept of critical eating through designing a digital art piece and writing an essay to explain my design.

I taught five tea-tasting workshops. The first tea-tasting workshop was an introduction to Pu er, Red/Black Tea, Oolong and Green Tea; the following four tea-tasting workshops were themed in the order as formerly listed. The workshops consisted of me preparing and serving the class tea while lecturing about the type of tea processing that could produce the characteristics of the tea the class was consuming, the chemical components and how they express themselves in the aesthetic and physical experience of consuming the tea, as well as, sharing any additional historical or cultural information. My time spent researching the different processing techniques that develop the varying chemicals that produce the physiologic, psychological, and therapeutic effects of tea, as well as, the appearance, aroma, and flavor characteristics, was pooled together at the end of each week and made into a weekly worksheet, written into an e-journal post, and shared verbally through my weekly workshops. Towards the end of the quarter I also designed an image to encapsulate and represent the totality of my research into a utilitarian art piece. The art piece is of the tea plant, Camellia sinensis, with each type of tea paired with the appropriate water temperature range for brewing, the category the type of tea falls under (oxidized, semi-oxidized, or fullyoxidized), and the chemical formula of caffeine, theobromine, theophylline, a catechin, epigallocatechin-3-gallate, theaflavin, and thearubigin. I chose to put caffeine, theobromine, theophylline, a catechin, and epigallocatechin-3-gallate so as to represent some of the main chemicals that create the positive physiological, psychological, and therapeutic effects of consuming tea. I chose to put the chemical formula of theaflavin and thearubigins because they both represent a component that changes the color of the tea liquor depending on the level of oxidization the tea leaves have undergone. The design was then burned onto silkscreen and then printed. I made three different ten print editions. To explore Kyla Wazana’s concept of critical eating I designed and made a digital art piece in response to the fifth chapter in her book, Racial Indigestion. I also wrote an essay as an e-journal post explaining my imagery and my reflections from the reading.

Over the span of my independent research I felt intellectually closer to tea, and simultaneously very far away from the soul of tea. For myself, to understand the chemistry is beneficial because it compliments my experiences by creating a richer spectrum of knowledge from which to pull from. For example, when I look at the beautiful red-brown liquor of a cup of Pu er tea, I see stones pressing tea cakes, strong hands delicately plucking tea leaves, the forest floor, and now, the chemical structure of thearubigins, caffeine, and polyphenol oxidase. Chemistry can be intimidating and exclusive. I wanted to reshape my relationship with chemistry by connecting the reductionist theory with historical, philosophical, and experiential content; I did this with the intent to help facilitate an integration of the chemical components with the aesthetic and physical experiences one would have when drinking tea. Through curating and teaching weekly tea-tasting workshops I had the pleasure of having a platform to share my personal process bridging the gap between the aesthetic experience and the chemical components, as well as, an opportunity to learn how to teach. I learned a lot about time management, effective and ineffective ways to share knowledge, the importance of social ritual and its place in reaffirming (or being more important) than the chemicals that produce the positive physiological, psychological, and therapeutic effects of consuming tea. I am most proud of the print I designed as well as the positive responses I received from the tea workshops I facilitated.

This quarter was challenging intellectually and emotionally. My ability to work was influenced by my fluctuating mental and physical health due to stress from a family member passing away at the beginning of week one. The process of grieving while continuing with school was a challenge and a learning experience in itself. I had to learn how to continue to work hard while having very little time to devote to the grieving process. I am proud of my accomplishments and my ability to persevere through my academic and personal hurtles.

**Proposed Credit Equivalencies:** \_\_8\_\_\_ Total of \_\_8\_\_\_ attempted/registered *(fill in blanks)*

? – Critical Eating Studies: Tasting Labs

8– Individual Learning Project: Tea: Culture, Social Ritual, and The Chemistry of Tea Processing

? – Creative and Expository Writing: WordPress ePortfolio