

Tasting Notes

Sol Hashemi

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Western Front

Tim McCall



Mass production thrives on essence. Essence extracted and concentrated from raw material so that only the most useful qualities remain. Waste more, want more. No thing acting out: the world's exuberant heterogeneity schematized and purified into discrete predictable elements. No thing out of sync: the geologic ferment of ancient ferns or the biotic adventures of yeast betrayed to the thermodynamic bludgeon of distillation that feeds the engine of the Now. Drunker, higher, faster, more precarious, fragmented, and siloed than ever, plodding along in the hard, reified world of materialized and regulated essence. Everything behaving just as it should, performing its specific task under the law of contradistinction.

// Intermezzo 1: under rot

The holiness of Catholic persons, especially those under consideration of beatification or canonization, can be determined in part by the extent of bodily decomposition after death. Miraculous events or visionary experiences provide the pre-mortem basis for a nomination to saint status, but post-mortem preservation yields confirmation. Observed putrefaction is inversely proportional to sanctity; a qualitative analysis of a person's body measures their closeness to God. Moral corruption begets physical corruption. To assist the process of verification, viewing windows are sometimes incorporated into the caskets of pious and righteous members of the church. The ecclesiastical higher-ups authorize canonization by disinterring and examining maybe-holy bodies of would-be saints. The sweet fragrance of incorruptible, saintly flesh contrasts with the rancid odor the rest of us produce. The bodies of some saints are kept on permanent public display as a testament to their holy status. In short, what is stable and unchanging, a body that miraculously defies deathly decomposition is a holy one. Countless political figureheads have their preserved bodies on display as "auto-icons" to use Jeremy Bentham's phrase, signaling the ease with which the notion of incorruptibility can be politicized. God is materialized in that which does not degrade, mutate, or malform. Truth resides in matter impossibly disinterested in the temptations of time. The chaos of putrescence threatens the invention of natural order.

"This old authority and truth pretend to be absolute, to have extratemporal importance... they strut majestically, consider their foes the enemies of eternal truth, and threaten them with eternal punishment." [Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 212-213]

In *Tasting Notes*, the logic of isolation that undergirds the performance of mass production becomes self-conscious and self-reflexive. The desire for empirical knowledge, which depends on successive abstraction of essence from material, is spatialized and rendered in the gallery space, the very format and imperatives of display undermining the capacity to create the focal beverages to be distributed in the foyer. You can't know your beer and drink it too. The disconnection that scatters components of a complex processes—growth, harvest, fermentation—through the gallery is visually doubled by lapidary blockages. (*Untitled Brew Sculpture (Kettle)* 2023 and *various Tri-Clover Caps* 2022) O-ring gaskets lining the stonework seem to emphasize the hermetic seal of the vessels, a total isolation. A liquid re-circulates water in isolation uttering a splashy hymn of self-sufficiency (*Untitled Brew Sculpture (Selenite Fountain)* 2023). Indeed, the bathing selenite is only partially soluble at neutral pH and room temperature. It becomes even less so in solutions made alkaline by sanitizer as in *Brew Sculpture*. If indeed selenite is "eager to return to its oceanic origin", as it is characterized by the gallery guide, this chunk sulks in sterilized and saturated solution, its passage into liquidity foreclosed by a closed and conditioned system. If selenite's supposed yearning for a release from crystallinity (desire to pass into a liquid state) is an allegory for social alienation and reification under late capitalism, then the only way to accomplish this is to breach the closed system.

Yes, production sacrifices itself to its own logic like a snake swallowing its own tail, but are we condemned to a circular negation? While the photographs at first seem to offer little more than forensic evidence of a distant step of the process of selection, they nod toward escape hatches and trap doors. Apparently appalling apples, refused from the harvest on account of their blemishes are dissected in autopsy-like fashion to reveal hollowed out cores and tunnels dug out by coddling moth larvae. In another photograph, a squadron of ants intrudes on the rhubarb, leaving trails of chemical signals to invite their companions to the forbidden feast. If these photos resemble crime scene photography, they depict the scene of trespassing and sabotage, time theft and tampering. Althusser calls the invisible “a field’s forbidden vision... carrying within itself the finitude of its definition, which, by excluding what it is not, makes it what it is.” Residual evidence of invisible and clandestine activity on one hand, coordinated movements arranged by invisible messaging systems on the other. Supple tactics subvert rigid strategies. Boundaries fold and productivity wanes, parasites outnumber the hosts and define the system, doing their work out of sight and out of step. Even under the unblinking glare of audience, camera, and brewmaster, uninvited guests find their way in and back out.

If production runs on essence, extracting and aligning human and non-human resources with the goal of mass production, pruning the branches of interacting systems to put their stalks in parallel with supply lines, we are offered an alternative: putrescence. Sentient and non-sentient left to their own time and space, multiplying and expanding the horizons of misuse, tracing out transversal relationships. Even the hypochlorite sanitizer used in the fountain invites a speciation: aqueous complexes of foreign minerals (therandite, portlandite) appear. A thermodynamic model of selenite dissolution that more fully grasps the complexity of mineral speciation finds the solubility of selenite to be at least three times higher than a simplified analytical model. (molecular imposters)

// Intermezzo 2: uninvited ion

Both analytic and thermodynamic calculations were utilized to investigate the solubility of selenite ($\text{CaSO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$) in *Brew Fountain*. The equilibrium constant (pK_{sp}) for selenite in water was found to be 4.58, which resulted in a saturation concentration of 5.12 mM. While the total volume of water in *Brew Fountain* is unknown, it was estimated at 4 liters. The total mass of selenite predicted to dissolve in this case is 2.6 grams. These calculations frequently underpredict dissolution as they fail to incorporate the full gamut of possible molecular and ionic interactions that can occur in solution. Isolation cloaks the full potential of these furtive exchanges.

Thermodynamic dissolution modeling for selenite in a solution of varying concentrations of NaOCl (sodium hypochlorite) was carried out with Visual Minteq. NaOCl is often used as a sterilizing agent in brewing equipment and has a moderately basic character. Models were run with no NaOCl present in addition to

10 mM and 100 mM concentrations. The table below gives total mass loss of selenite to dissolution.

[NaOCl]	0 mM	10 mM	100 mM
delta Selenite (g)	-32.36	-32.63	-32.86

When a more complete range of ion activity is taken into account, the dissolution of selenite increases by an order of magnitude. The idealized system of selenite giving itself away for nothing misses the exchanges taking place, all those secondary collisions, trace occurrences, and ephemeral rendezvous. This is to say nothing of the spontaneous emergence of species that emerge from these oblique interactions: portlandite, thenardite, mirabilite pass in and out of formation in the crystal clear stew, circulating between real and potential just as the water itself is cycled through the fountain. The physical system is completely redefined and reconstituted by these uninvited species that come marching in and redefine it and its outcomes in their entirety. This parable of dissolution replaces the simple communication of essences for the noisy banter of badly behaved matter. If there is some kind of mineral desire here, it is toward complexity and creation, speciation and speculation. This supposedly closed system, sanitized and excluded, is still generative.

“We saw this shadow a short while back: we don’t know what belongs to the system, what makes it up, and what is against this system, interrupting it and endangering it.” [Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, pp. 16]

Sipping the beer while flowing from piece to piece recalled the magician who performs her trick and then allows you to examine the deck. Scrutinize all you want, the marvelous experience (of taste or trickery) will not succumb to rational alignment with the materials that spawned it. Belief is conditioned by invisibility and confirmed by taste. The logic of mass production folds under its own exhaustive procedures of isolation while being mocked by its antithesis, bad actors that operate intractably outside the confines of schematics and predictions. Putrescence, material flows of entropy, sidelines the extraction of essence and performance of mass production. Hashemi doesn’t make sense, he makes beer.