

Blade Runner

Werkplaats Typographie has always attracted an international mix of students. At the moment, though based here on the Rhein, we are from Vienna, Antwerp, LA, Rio, Seoul, Ghent, Lisbon, Tallin, Berne, Arnhem, Amsterdam and London.

We also like to think of our operation as being as light, mobile and adaptable as we are as people. We once decamped the entire school to a large empty bus garage in the French town of Chaumont, and we've just returned from 2 weeks living on the teeming streets of Seoul.

For *Libelle* we thought we could test the futuristic limits of our own building.

A school should be somewhere you go to in order to think about what you do but also because you want to take part in the school. In other words it requires a certain ecological framework. The best school would involve being part of a dynamic social group, in a building that also offered itself as connective parts of a flexible social architecture.

Spaces like the kitchen or the library are obviously essential for this because they can connect us to each other around a table of food, or to a wider world through resources of knowledge.

So one idea we had was to bring in our friends from the Gagarin bookshop in Seoul – its shelves are stocked haphazardly with donated books from all over the world – to see how far we could go with our *facsimile library* project. In the future “books” will be facsimile back-ups of electronic documents: stacks lined instead with vast bootleg-reader anthologies that bind (rather than blur) the usual subjects together like colours in the light spectrum.

But for *Libelle* we were also very keen to focus on the kitchen. It's an important engine of the WT building day and night – we keep the coffee machine here too – and even though, like our adhoc library, it exists on zero budget, everything in here works and we thought it was time to launch it as a dynamic model for resourceful communal living.

For this reason we turned to our favourite most culturally adventurous, alchemically intuitive and radically mobile chef, the great Joshua Ploeg.

And we wrote to him in letters of sunflower seeds, throwing them westwards into the setting sun, in the general direction of California:

Dear Joshua Ploeg, professor of forbidden rice, cranberry addict, non-dairy ice-creamer and diviner of the lost taste, will you please guide us and our friends at Libelle magazine into the future as adventurers and fabulists of our own epicuriosity?

Ps What would be the best cocktail to drink with that?

A week later (someone may have emailed him too) he showed up at the door with a big supermarket bag full of ingredients and moved into the kitchen to prepare lunch. From that moment on the Werkplaats kitchen would never be the same again and neither would any of us.

Joshua Ploeg is best known as the traveling vegan chef from Seattle Washington. He's currently based in Sacramento where he prepares weekly selections for the Pangaea Cafe (2743 Franklin Blvd. at Castro, across from Gunther's, you can't miss it!).

His menus are ridiculously fantastic: Roasted Eggplant Roulades with Green Olive and Almond Tapenade, Zucchini Falafel with Chutney Vegan Mayo and Onion-Chili Sauce, Blackeyed Pea Hummous and Bok Choy, Shiitake and Herbs in Lime-Toasted Sesame Dressing, Pistachio-Coated, Deep Fried Tofu with Tangerine Sauce, Tempeh "Fish" with Orange Herb Sauce and Garlic Linguine, Almond Sheet Cake with Lemon Custard, Rosemary Lemonade.

And his recipes are free form lists of magical ingredients that make me think of the Californian poet Gary Snyder, a beat hero of the wilderness whose verses are speckled with food and campfire meals out on the trail:

Floating of vapor from brazier

*"get foggy
We're going out to dig
Buttercup roots"*

*In spring the Avocado sheds dead leaves
Soft rattling through the Cherry greens*

But don't tell Joshua I compared him to that old beloved hippy of mine. Or that I called him an urban food forager and punk rock Gary Snyder of the supermarket. He'd prefer that I also thought of that scene in Blade Runner, every dystopian futurists favourite literary epic, when Deckard (Harrison Ford) takes what he thinks is a fish scale downtown to a Cambodian "vegan" fish-manufacturer, who instantly tells the blade runner that it's "Not fish. Snake."

We were in those local Turkish, Chinese and Dutch farmers markets with JP, and let me tell you, nothing goes unidentified in that endless search for the fugitive flavour. Every moment was a positive appropriation of the urban wilderness, with its remorseless animal brands and dead livestock. And why shouldn't preparing food also be a lesson in how to transform everyday acts of survival into everything else you need to know, from biology, nutrition and thermodynamics to comparative literature.

In the future, which if you hadn't noticed has already begun badly enough, things won't be different because 'the future is different' but because so much of our lazy selfish lives

have to change or there won't even be a future to be different in. And won't that be different?!

It's not a financial investment, although that would help, but to be invested in this priceless world is about how we take part in it, and how we respond to how it works.

Graduates of WT move on to become artists, designers, radiographers, stenographers and graphologists. We know the world as a readable space. Now we know it as an edible space too.

Paul Elliman, WT 2009