

Multimedia Library Collection: Periodicals

"What Is the *Terroir* of Synthetic Yeast?"

Szymanski, Erika Amethyst

Szymanski, Erika Amethyst. "What Is the *Terroir* of Synthetic Yeast?" *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2018): 40-62. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-4385462> .

Humans and yeast have a long history of productive collaboration in making a global array of fermented foodstuffs including wine, bread, and beer. Synthetic biology is now changing the shape of human-yeast work. The Sc2.0, or "synthetic yeast," project aims to completely reengineer the *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* genome, designing an organism with improved capacities for scientific research and diverse industrial applications. Notably, synthetic yeast has present connections with the wine industry and likely futures in our wider foodscapes. Here I suggest that we imagine this scientific object, synthetic yeast, as an incipient cultural object by asking: what is the *terroir* of synthetic yeast? *Terroir* invokes tangled relationships among the many variably human and nonhuman, living and nonliving participants in a landscape. *Terroir* replaces synthetic yeast in its context of production, against scientific narratives that work to create utopian, placeless organisms. *Terroir* is moreover a world-building tool, not about discovering and describing a place but about constructing and connecting to one. Inquiring about *terroir* therefore suggests that rather than ask how far humans should go in manipulating nature, we instead ask how humans can continue to cultivate the relationships that constitute our humanity and sustain our environments. Fundamentally, I suggest that the best futures for synthetic yeast are those that connect rather than estrange; in other words, that we continue to value *terroir* in imagining how synthetic yeast satisfies the more-than-caloric needs of future appetites. (Text from author's abstract)

© Erika Amethyst Szymanski 2018. *Environmental Humanities* is available online only and is published under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0).

Download:

PDF: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/40szymanski.pdf

Related links:

- *Environmental Humanities* website <http://environmentalhumanities.org/>
- *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 1 <https://read.dukeupress.edu/environmental-humanities/issue/10/1>

Websites linked in this text:

- <https://read.dukeupress.edu/environmental-humanities/article/10/1/40/134710/What-Is-the-Terroir-of-Synthetic-Yeast>