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Healthy People are Bad For Capitalism

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts Studio Art, Hunter College
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2017

Thesis Sponsor:

December 15, 2017
Date

Paul Ramirez Jonas.
Signature

December 15, 2017
Date

Nari Ward
Signature of Second Reader

I dedicate this work to
my artner, Daniel Greer,
my sister, Kizna Loosle,
Hartzell,
and
my mother.

List of Illustrations.

Fig. 1: ***Installation Detail of Red 40 MSG Apothecary***

Fig. 2: ***52 Week Plan***

Fig. 3: ***Installation View of Red 40 Zen MSG Rock Garden***

Fig. 4: ***Theta Wave Eternal Flame Meditation***

Fig. 5: ***Red 40 MSG Studio Lab***

Fig 6: ***(Un)Nutritious Facts***

Table of contents.

- 1 **Abstract: *Healthy People are Bad for Capitalism***
- 2 ***Red 40 Monosodium Glutamate Apothecary***
- 3 ***Red 40 Zen Msg Rock Garden***
- 4 ***Theta Waves Eternal Flame Meditation***
- 5 ***Red 40 MSG Studio Lab***

Healthy People are Bad For Capitalism is a four part installation that creates an alternative space for the chemicals, Red 40 and Monosodium Glutamate. Presented as a holistic center that offers healing services and remedies, *Center for the Red 40 and MSG Healing* explores the homeopathic doctrine of *Like Cures Like* (*what make a human ill also cures them*) through the relationship between Traditional Japanese Healing Practices, and Western Capitalism.

Healthy People are Bad For Capitalism presents *Red 40 MSG Apothecary*, *Red 40 Zen MSG Healing Rock Garden*, *Theta Wave Eternal Flame Meditation* and *Red 40 MSG Apothecary Studio Lab* in a body of work that stages the artificial food dye, Red 40, and the synthetic food additive, Monosodium Glutamate, into a fictional space that provides healing services and support for wellness and rehabilitation.

The Red 40 Monosodium Glutamate Apothecary

Apothecary derives from the Latin word, *Apotheca*, which translates to “storehouse”. Today, Apothecary is a synonym for “Pharmacist”, a health professional trained in the art of preparing and dispensing drugs. The apothecary’s investigation of herbal and chemical ingredients was a precursor to the modern sciences of chemistry and pharmacology. Traditionally dispensing herbs, drugs, and medicines. Today’s Apothecary also sells a wide variety of health-care products such as beauty products for skin, hair, and/or nails.

Today the retail space of the modern Apothecary utilizes retail brand strategies to sell their products. The term “Apothecary” is now commonly used by contemporary companies and drugstore owners as a marketing strategy to use the old-fashion charm of the term to label products they sell. Utilizing the strategies of a visual merchandizer,

Red40 MSG Apothecary is a space that retails health and beauty products derived from the chemicals, RED40 and Monosodium Glutamate extracted from Flaming Hot Cheetos with a sole purpose to sell the product.



Fig. 1

Installation View of Red 40 Msg Apothecary

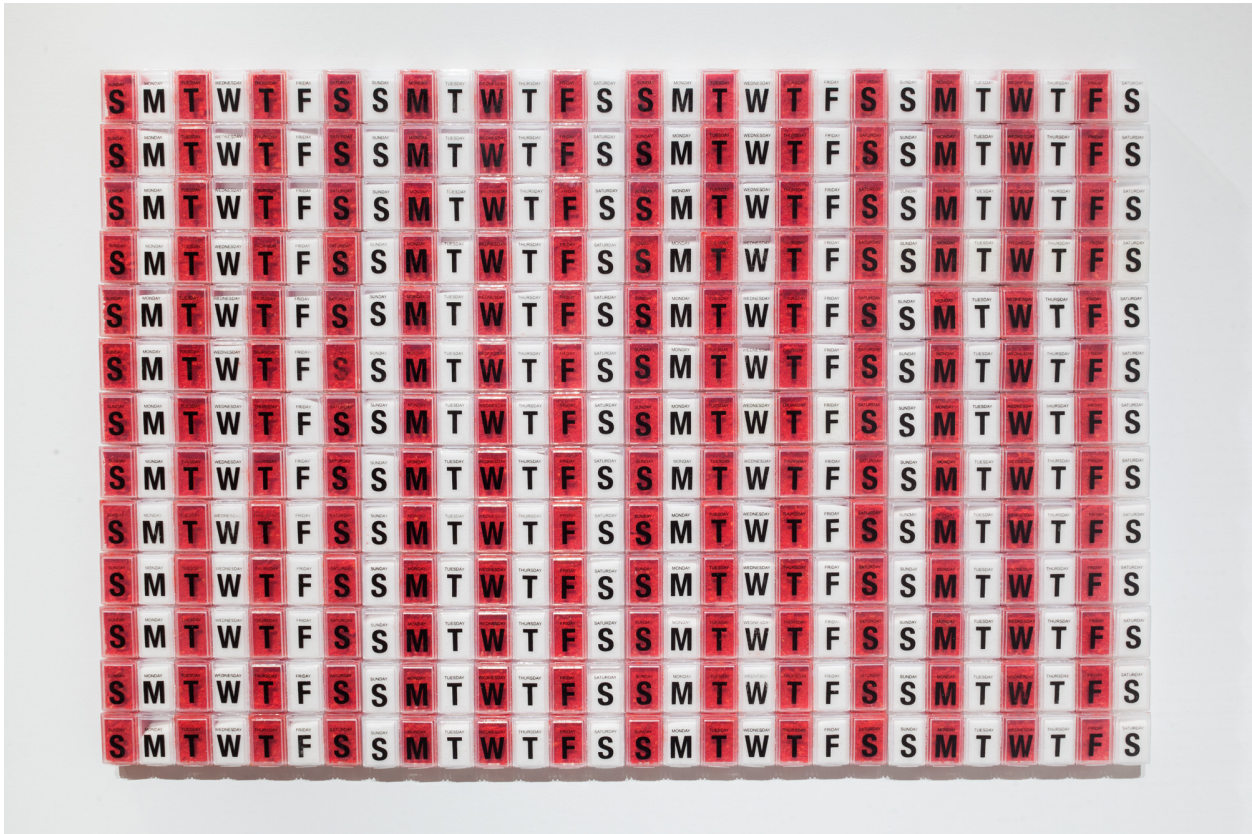


Fig. 2

52 Week Plan

All products contain Red 40 and Monosodium Glutamate.

RED 40

Red 40 is the material property that is most immediately observable to the viewer's retinal experience once exposed to Hot Cheetos and it is the most commonly used artificial food dye. This chemical compound can be found in various consumable goods such as food, beverages, bakery goods, candies, cereals, drugs, and cosmetics. Red 40 is also referred to as Allura Red, Food Red 17, Red 40 Lake, FD & C Red 40, E 129, or Disodium Salt.

In a 2010 report, “Food Dyes Rainbow of Risks” written by Michael F. Jacobson and Sarah Koblylewski, PHD, Red 40 raises health concerns that pose a risk of cancer and hyperactivity in children. The authors believe these dyes should be banned. The chemical contains known carcinogens and are synthesized from coal tar and petroleum.

According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, despite these concerns, each year manufacturers pour about 15 million pounds of synthetic dyes into our foods. Per capita consumption of dyes has increased five times since 1955, thanks in part to the proliferation of brightly colored snack foods, breakfast cereal, fruit drinks, and candies- all advertised to children.

Red 40 has been long known to cause allergic reactions in some people and furthermore, a proliferation of studies have demonstrated that Red 40 causes hyperactivity in children. In addition, artificial food dye does not enhance the flavor or add any nutritional value to the food; they are purely an aesthetic gesture to lure consumers and increase sales.

Monosodium Glutamate

According to my research, the addictive trigger is caused by another key ingredient in Flamin’ Hot Cheetos: Monosodium Glutamate. Most commonly known as MSG, this substance is an additive utilized in the food industry to enhance the flavor with an umami taste that intensifies the savory flavored food. The umami flavor was first described by Japanese Biochemist, Kikunae Ikeda, which translates to “delicious” in English. MSG is found in a wide variety of foods and is a key molecule determining the flavor of those foods. MSG acts as a preservative and enhancer of palatability.

Through its stimulation of the sensory receptors and by improving the taste of meals, MSG positively influences the appetite, and thus induces overeating and consequently, weight gain. Despite its taste stimulation and improved appetite enhancement, reports indicate that MSG is toxic to human and experimental animals (Eweka).

Monosodium Glutamate is highly addictive and creates a vicious cycle where neurons continue to seek foods that deliver the pleasurable reactions to the body. MSG affects receptors in the brain in a similar way to drugs; in which one's craving can simply never be satisfied. This cycle results in weight gain and obesity (Staughton).

Red40 MSG Apothecary & Studio Lab offers a variety of first-rate unhealthy products made from repurposed Red 40 and Monosodium Glutamate extracted from Flamin' Hot Cheetos. These products include healing MSG stones and crystals, Red 40 and MSG Vitamins and Pain Relievers, 52 Week Care Plan, Red 40 Lake Contact Lens Solution and many more.

Through the use of the unethical actions of corporations who sells products that harm their consumers, I aim to create a space that sells the product that makes the danger visible to the consumer. Center for the *Red 40 MSG Healing's* mission is to use the dissemination of information, meditation, and creativity as the source of healing. Behind each harmful product is a path to enlightenment and higher self being. Each visit will include a nice stroll around the Red 40 Zen MSG Garden and a service *Theta Waves Eternal Flame Meditation at the Center for the Red40 Healing*.

R40 Zen MSG Garden



Fig. 3

Installation View of Red 40 Zen MSG Rock Garden

Influenced by Traditional Japanese Zen Gardens, *R40 Zen MSG Rock Garden* is an installation inviting viewers to relax and meditate on the important teachings offered through the chemicals, Red 40 and MSG (made available in the *Red 40 MSG Apothecary*). Its primary aim is to clear the mind of all worldly attachments. Just like the famous Zen Gardens in Kyoto, the MSG Rocks are strategically placed in carefully raked Red 40 sand that evokes peace and beauty. Though simple and serene, the

powerful and abstract nature of Zen landscapes are designed to invoke deep meditation.

Repurposed from over a 100 lbs of Flamin' Hot Cheetos, The Red 40 Sand is entirely hand-pulverized through a mortar and pestle. The four MSG Healing Rocks are placed inside the garden to cleanse and deodorize the air from the chemical Red 40. The Salt rock purifies the air through the power of hygroscopy, a process in which the rock attracts water molecules from the surrounding environment and absorb those chemicals into the salt crystals. As the salt warms up from the heat produced by the light inside, the same water then evaporates back into the air and the trapped toxic particles remain locked in the salt. When the salt releases cleansed water vapor back into the air, it also expels negative ions which have the opposite effect on our airways- increasing cilia activity to keep our lungs clear.

Viewers are invited to Rake the R40 in the Zen Garden as an exercise in calming the mind.

Theta Waves Eternal Flame Meditation



Fig 4

Theta Wave Eternal Flame Meditation

Video, Theta Wave sound

Theta Waves Eternal Flame Meditation provides a space where viewers can view the screening of, “*Eternal Flame (ing) Hot Cheeto*” while tuning into a brainwave entrainment, particularly Theta Waves, as a way to enter the state of meditation and heal. The video depicts a hand emerging out of darkness holding a single Flamin' Hot Cheeto on fire. Composed in an infinite loop, the cheeto performs as an apparatus that keeps the flame lit eternally. The video was created after learning the chemical, Red 40, which are found in Hot Cheetos, contains petroleum.

Inspired by the snack's own subscription to being a flamin' product, I struck a match to an individual Hot Cheeto and the spicy food snack caught on fire. I was disgusted that the popular snack food proved itself flammable, yet I was mesmerized by the movement and flicker of the slow burning flame. The occasion of the binary opposites confronting each other in this moment inspired an onset of dichotomies inherent in the food product. The occurrence of attraction and repulsion as well as pain and pleasure are processed in the same area in the brain. Used by Frito Lay entirely for aesthetic purposes, the chemical Red 40, which is the cause of its ability to be set on fire, is used as a way to attract its consumers with its artificial brilliant red-orange color, as well as a visual signifier that the color red symbolizes something hot or spicy like a red chili pepper. The fascination behind this snack is not only the color, but the spice

level that consumers enjoy challenging themselves with during its consumption. This human behavior is coined by the Psychologist Dr. Paul Rozin in a theory called, *Benign Masochism*.

In this theory, Dr. Rozin coins the term 'Benign Masochim' as a way to describe the psychological motivation behind the human appeal of negative sensations and emotions like painfully spicy foods, deep tissue massages, roller coasters, reading sad novels, and watching scary movies when humans are reassured that no harm will come to them. The call and response of pain and pleasure causes a sensation that is euphoric, releasing endorphins which rewards your neurological system with the sense of endurance and overcoming a challenge. Another key ingredient that causes a pleasure sensation while damaging neurological receptors is Monosodium Glutamate. This effect on the brain's reward system can sometimes be harmful and cause addiction. Drugs and processed foods flood the brain with feel-good neurotransmitter dopamine, affecting the regions that govern pleasure and self-control. Over time, the function and structure of the brain change and dopamine receptors are reduced, making drugs and food, and other substances less enjoyable, but still desired. Likened to the delight of watching a Yule Log burn, if you get too close to it, you will also burn.

Theta Waves Eternal Flame Meditation is a wellness service provided by *Center of Red 40 MSG Healing* where the guests are invited in an enclosed space to meditate and heal. Viewers are prompted to watch the screening of *Eternal Flame (ing) Hot Cheeto* while listening to an auditory brain entrainment created specifically for the video. The brain entrainment combines the sounds of Theta Waves and the crackling of a

synthetic fire utilizing Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) techniques through binaural beats activated from Wireless Headphones.

The Theta wave range is the one which the body and mind's natural healing processes are activated and optimized. Theta waves are present during deep relaxation, dreaming, meditation, and hypnosis. Theta Waves can be a source of creativity, intuition, increased memory, and enhanced concentration. When Theta brainwave are induced by certain mental practices and specialized brain entrainment products, they lower stress and anxiety levels as well as facilitate healing and growth. Theta waves enables the mind to access the power and wisdom the unconscious, which is usually inaccessible in alert sates.

Combining Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response with Theta waves is an experimental healing technique that aims to aid guests enter the meditative state during their visit to the *Center for the Red 40 MSG Healing*. Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response commonly known as ASMR is a pseudo-scientific term for a perceptual phenomenon characterized by a pleasurable, tingly sensation that begins in the head and scalp and moves throughout the body, causing the participant to relax (Young and Blansert). Through the use of visual and auditory experiences *Thetawave Eternal Flame Meditation* is designed to stimulate the individual on a multi-sensory level and relieve guests from the effects of being exposed to the chemicals Red 40 and MSG.

During the course of the service, guests are invited to sit on an elevated tatami mat designed for the comfort of both Western and Eastern siting customs.

Red 40 MSG Studio Lab



Fig. 5

(top)

Red 40 MSG Studio Lab

Fig.6

(bottom)

(Un)Nutritious Facts Drawing

Inside the Red 40 And Msg Studio Lab, spectators are invited to explore inside the laboratory where products from the The Red40 and MSG Apothecary are assembled. The laboratory is equipped to conduct pseudo-scientific experiments, tests, and investigations taking elements from the manufacturing processes of drugs and chemicals. Extracted directly from my graduate studio, I invite guests to see the inner workings of my studio practice and my



experimental research of the chemicals, Red 40 and MSG.

Conclusion

This project is a culmination of my three years as an MFA Candidate at Hunter College. By fusing the manufacturing laboratory as well as my studio into one installation, I present a way to enter the conceptual framework of both the artist as a homeopathic healer (by way of manufacturing harmful drugs and chemicals for profit) and the vision of a fabricated Holistic center that provides illumination to the truth.

Homeopathy is a system of alternative medicine that claims a substance that causes the symptoms of disease in healthy people would cure similar symptoms in sick people. In *Healthy People are Bad for Capitalism*, I am the homeopathic healer, the mad scientist, and an artist that takes a contradictory path as a way to reach a deeper understanding of the truth. Though facts create norms, this alternative space aims to create illumination. In Werner Herzog's manifesto, *Lessons of Darkness*, he states "*Facts sometimes have a strange and bizarre power that makes their inherent truths unbelievable... There is such things as poetic and ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication, imagination, and stylization*"

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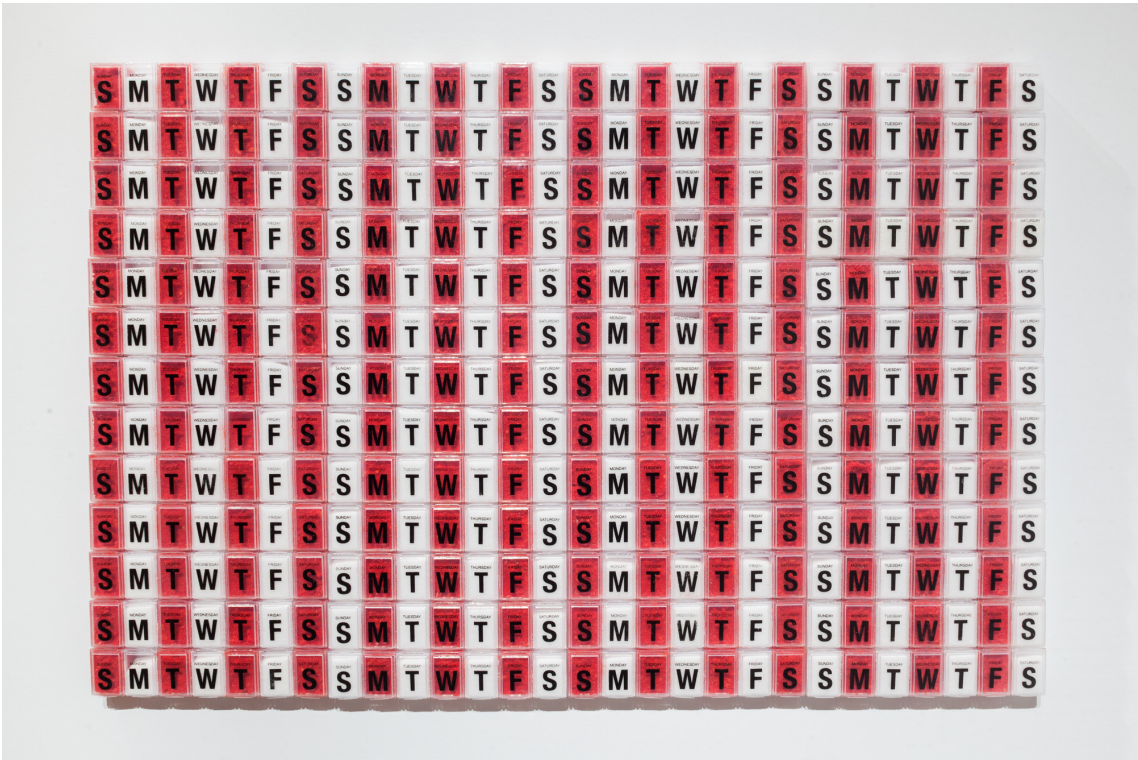
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Image list

1. **52 Week Plan**
52 Pill Organizers, Hand Pulverized Hot Cheetos, Monosodium Glutamate, Salt
23.5"x 35.5"
2. **Installation View of Red 40 MSG Apothecary**
10 Glass Shelves, 1500 Red 40 and MSG Pills, Various Glass Jars, Salt Crystals,
Plexiglas Display Case
3. **Detail of Red 40 and MSG Products: Zen Mind Supplements & Ichigo Ichie Daily Vitamins**
268 Red 40 and MSG Pills, 4 Glass jars with Red Cap, 2 Plastic Test Tube Holders
4. **Detail of Red 40 and MSG Products: Third Eye Therapy Eyeshadow, MSG Healing Crystals, and Red 40 Lip Licking Moisturizer**
42 Cosmetic Sampler with Pulverized Flamin' Hot Cheetos and Monosodium
Glutamate, 5 Healing Salt Crystals, 2 Red Acrylic Display, 12"x12' Acrylic Box
5. **Detail of Red 40 and MSG Products: *New* Essential Emotion Potions collection and Existential Crisis Solutions collection**
Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Green 5, Blue 1, Candy, Cough Syrup, and Various Glass
Vials
6. **Installation View of Red 40 MSG Apothecary and Red 40 Zen MSG Rock Garden**
7. **Red 40 Zen MSG Rock Garden**
Hand Pulverized Hot Cheetos, 4 Msg Salt Rocks, Stretcher Bars, Zen Rake, Plastic
Mickey Mouse Glove, Marble Mortar and Pestle, Plastic Shower Curtain
64" x 64"
8. **Detail of Red 40 Zen MSG Rock Garden**
9. **Installation View of Red 40 MSG Studio Lab**
Mixed Media
10. **Detail of Red 40 MSG Studio Lab**
11. **Un (Nutritious Facts)**
Ink, Marker, Pen, Acrylic, Archival Paper
18"x 24"

Individual works and Installation View images

1. 52 Week Plan



2. Installation View of Red 40 MSG Apothecary



3. Detail of Red 40 and MSG Products: Zen Mind Supplements & Ichigo Ichie Daily Vitamins



4. Detail of Red 40 and MSG Products: Third Eye Therapy Eyeshadow, MSG Healing Crystals, and Red 40 Lip Licking Moisturizer



5. Detail of Red 40 and MSG Products: *New* Essential Emotion Potions collection and Existential Crisis Solutions collection



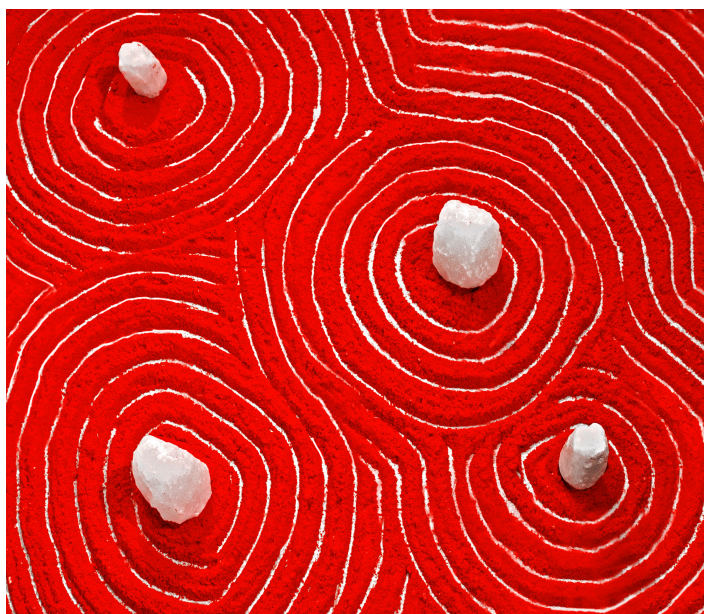
6. Installation View of Red 40 MSG Apothecary and Red 40 Zen MSG Rock Garden



7. Red 40 Zen MSG Rock Garden



8. Detail of Red 40 Zen MSG Rock Garden



9. Installation View of Red 40 MSG Studio Lab



10. Detail of Red 40 MSG Studio Lab



11. (Un) Nutritious Facts

