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Editorial

Chances are that in the last couple years, your life has been turned upside down by a pandemic, a war, an economic meltdown, or some combination of these. And you may feel that whatever you were lucky enough to avoid may already be on its way to you. As the coming years are sure to bring more uncertainty, maybe it's time to prepare. Buy a small armory and move into an underground bunker? Blame foreigners or neighboring countries? Attack each other online? Let's try instead to consider how our basic needs are met, as the individual and collective bodies that we are.

Many of us have grown accustomed to an era in which a global logistical orchestra targets and serves our needs and whims, bringing food to your mouth or goods to your home with surgical precision. Especially for cosmopolitan urbanites used to traveling, sampling exotic cuisine, or spending money freely, these delivery mechanisms may appear to have created the ultimate hostage situation. Is it time to bite the invisible hand that feeds? Free trade might feel great when the lines are open and all the dependencies are working in lockstep. But in fact this fragile political ecosystem has something in common with the fragility of the natural ecosystem when forced to supply illusions of abundance. Maybe it's time to see how the sausage is made.

For this issue of *e-flux journal* we've asked a number of authors to reflect on food and agriculture as foundational expressions of life—as sociality, history, and entanglement. Just as they can be weaponized for political or industrial applications, such foundations can also be embraced to explore new and old sensations of autonomy and abundance in Indigenous, interspecies, anarchist, agrarian, or simply experimental forms of life. By attending closely to something that is, for each and every one of us, the bedrock of security and survival, a world emerges where power over production and consumption can be organized less like a hegemonic system and more like a daily routine. Attending more closely to systems of survival may feel austere at first, like a mean-spirited downgrade to economy class for the privileged. But it opens the door to another kind of abundance, one that always evades scarcity. Food is absolutely political, but food is also fundamentally pleasurable and social. Hannah Arendt, while delivering a lecture to college students, allegedly asked them about the difference between love and desire. She then answered her own question: If you desire strawberries, you eat them. If you love strawberries, you grow them yourself.

With a tight deadline, we were surprised by the enthusiasm of the responses to our invitation to write about food. In a time when some tend to retreat inward, we found many people in different places thinking about and building similar things. Relationships with land and sustenance are very specific, but easy to understand and relate to when one has their own experiences. The crises that demand a new relationship with our environment also

threaten to spread into a universal condition for humanity. So why shouldn't a more intimate relationship with the conditions of our survival spread widely as well?

Wishing you a healthy and slow summer. We also asked contributors to the issue to send recipes. Try cooking them and send us pictures if you get a chance!

X

The global food system is a violent mess. It is rooted in neocolonialism, manufactured scarcity, and mass alienation. The enclosure of farms and subsistence forms of life has destroyed social and collective knowledges of how to produce and share food. It's no accident that attempts to create food autonomy and collectivize its production and distribution, even on a local scale, have been met with state violence—ask any Food Not Bombs chapter. For this issue of e-flux journal *on agriculture and the social bonds inherent to food, we have invited autonomous collectives, farmers, and artists to talk about their projects in short communiques from the garden, forest, or pasture. Spread over much of Turtle Island, they offer tactics to uproot capital and share stories about the lands they inhabit.*

—Editors

Autonomous farming collectives

Planting and Becoming

Bananas at sunset, March 2022. Photo uploaded to Ndn Bayou Food Forest's Instagram on April 2, 2022.

Communique From a Participant Defending the Atlanta Forest

I lean against a tall tree while an Atlanta Police Department helicopter thunders overhead, fifty feet above me just beyond the canopy. The people in the chopper

believe that this forest will be razed and turned into the largest police training campus in the country, including munitions and firearms ranges, a mock city for urban combat drills, and the largest soundstage complex on earth (in partnership with Blackhall Studios). The latter, they think, will be used to produce Hollywood movies and virtual reality. I instead believe that the forest will remain a forest. We are at war.[1]

As much as the forest needs us at this moment, we also need the forest. As climate change has already brought unprecedented heat and flooding to south Atlanta, we remember that the forest cools the air, shades the soil, and absorbs storm water. As famine spreads because the capitalist food system crashes against limits imposed by its own destruction of the earth, we are reminded that the South River Forest is already a food forest with many wild fruit trees and other edible plants.

We who defend and inhabit this forest have also begun planting crops and fruit trees in natural clearings and sowing edible native wildflowers in the paths of destruction left by Blackhall Studios bulldozers. By the time the Cop City project is eventually defeated, and the police are humiliated and driven from this forest, we will have already begun gently transforming it into a zone of communal food production: grafting cider apples onto Bradford pears; clearing privet and scrub with goat herding; reducing insect density with chickens, guineas, and ducks; thinning young oaks, hackberry, and maple to inspire mushroom production; planting sunchokes, sochan, nettles, cowpeas, sweet potatoes, squash, beans, okra, as well as chestnut, persimmon, pawpaw, serviceberry, mulberry, and fig trees. This is not only to feed ourselves, but also to produce a positive, material, place-based culture. This is our alternative to the destruction promised by a future ruled by cops and virtual reality.

Hiding beneath the old tree, I can clearly make out a figure inside the helicopter. I remind myself that there's almost no way he could have seen me. In this way and others, the forest protects us. The visibility from police helicopters and drones is rendered mostly useless by the canopy, driven up by a lifelong growth towards the sun. I take the opportunity to graze on a patch of tiny wild strawberries; they are smaller than peas and not very sweet, but my water bottle is empty, and their juice is refreshing. Before long the chopper veers off.

Strange moments like these are common here. The slow time of the forest breaks through the fast time of crisis, and two different worlds slide past each other. In one, my fast-beating heart. In the other, the calm and patient vastness of a centuries-old water oak. In one such moment together, while on our way to gather old truck tires for a barricade, we stop under a mulberry tree. "These are going to get me in trouble one of these days, running from the cops and I'm here stopping to snack," says one friend, recognizing the danger inherent in getting stuck in one temporality while your enemy is operating in another.

The police are not immune to this danger either: caught in the bureaucratic time of work weeks and fiscal years, the entire Cop City project can be understood as a knee-jerk reaction to conditions imposed by the George Floyd Rebellion, particularly the police's loss of legitimacy. They are even having trouble hiring new officers. Meanwhile, they are oblivious to the deep time of this forest, to all the many relationships that have developed between the forest and the people who use it.[2] They are unaware of the weight of all the harm done by them and their predecessors, the slow accretion of centuries of rage, fear, and despair into sediment, strata, and eventually tectonic plates grinding against each other, their movement slow and gradual until it isn't.

This ignorance is nowhere more apparent than their plan to destroy and build over the ruins of the old Atlanta City Prison Farm, a prison where incarcerated people were forced to live and work to produce food for Atlanta's carceral system from 1920 to 1989. It's unlikely that this is a conscious attempt by the police to erase the history of their own crimes.[3] They have already absolved and forgiven themselves. Indeed, rather than distancing themselves from the legacy of the prison farm, the Atlanta Police Foundation seems to have been inspired by it, including "urban gardens" in their design, where inmates from At Promise Youth Centers (police-run reeducation camps for unruly children) would work as part of court-ordered diversion programs. In short, prison slavery made green. Meanwhile, the plans place new explosives and firearms shooting ranges alongside the existing child jail and adult correctional center on the southern edge of the forest, so that the people who are held there would be forced to listen to the police training to kill.

Looking at the plans for Cop City, it is abundantly clear that the police do not see the 2020 uprising as finished. They have not recovered from that moment. It continues to haunt their dreams and they fear its return. They do not feel that their control is guaranteed. Despite this, they also continue to misunderstand the opposition to them, so that even a project dreamed up to bolster their morale and polish their image has been viewed by most people as a new nightmare, and as a result has inspired yet another burning barricade in their path.

Ndn Bayou Food Forest, Louisiana

From Here the Forest Can Only Grow

On its best days, Ndn Bayou Food Forest in South Louisiana is an attack on the petro-industrial agricultural system that surrounds it. It began as a resistance camp against the Bayou Bridge Pipeline four years ago. Today it

is a free nursery for the propagation of fruit trees and perennial food crops, and an ongoing experiment in assisted plant migration and the creation of food commons. It is a lush, vibrant alternative to the lifeless factory wastelands of ethanol sugarcane and commercial rice production.

Here on the US Gulf Coast, we prepare not just for rising seas, stronger storms, and saltwater intrusion, but also increased rainfall and temperatures, and at some point, full subtropicalization.

In this catastrophic era, the concept of "invasive species" dissolves into irrelevancy, perhaps to be replaced by that of "refugee species." At least half of the world's ecosystems are predicted to entirely shift in type by the end of the century—forests becoming grasslands, grasslands becoming deserts, and so on. Without human intervention to assist plant migration, these changes can only tend toward extinction, desertification, and the decimation of biodiversity. To fight against this future requires rejecting old frameworks of native and nonnative plants, instead orienting ourselves toward solidarity with both endemic and migratory species as they adapt their own survival strategies in the face of catastrophe and change.

It is critical to note that while biomes are largely determined by climactic factors like rainfall and temperature, living ecosystems impact both. It is well known that the high rainfall in the Amazon Basin is due to the exhalations of the rainforest itself. In other words, the difference between a desert and a rainforest can come down to nothing more than the trees and their natural activity. We will decide, to some extent, whether we, wherever "we" are, will live in a desert or a garden world.

At a time when coastal cities like New Orleans, Miami, and Houston live on borrowed time, as we drive past flat depopulated expanses of monoculture sugarcane production and hurricane-destroyed homes that were never rebuilt, we at Ndn Bayou Food Forest try to imagine bountiful jungle orchard gardens, densely inhabited and vibrant with temporary and mobile homes, the sounds of laughter and music spilling from the canopy.

We know that the process of planting the forest is also the process of becoming the people who live in the forest. So, at this moment when so many cannot even imagine a different food system, let alone a different way of relating to the earth, we are busy propagating fruit trees: figs, mulberries, feijoa, avocado, papaya, loquat, chestnut, citrus, moringa, pecan, and banana.

Banana plants, for example, are an ideal ambassador for the coming subtropical forest. They grow fast, making shade for humans and habitats for frogs and lizards. Many varieties thrive in warmer temperate regions but simply don't fruit because they freeze to the ground each winter. Increasingly popular as ornamentals, their eventual fruiting in the hills of Georgia or the Piney Woods of East Texas and Louisiana will bear undeniable truths about climate change.

Now in its fourth year of cultivation, Ndn Bayou Food Forest is home to figs, mulberries, bananas, citrus, cold-hardy avocados, moringa, feijoa, loquat, pecan, mayhaw, sweet potato, sunchoke, prickly pear, ginger, turmeric, papaya, amaranth, okra, celosia, squash, watermelon, bitter melon, beans, collards, basil, turnips, catfish, and an increasing numbers of birds, lizards, frogs, snakes, toads, turtles, salamanders, rabbits, mice, rats, and really big spiders. The devastation brought by Hurricanes Laura, Delta, and Ida made it clear that the food forest's only long-term strategy for survival is to grow, and so propagation continues to be the focus. By the time these trees are swept away by a storm or the rising sea, thousands of their scions will be growing across the region, part of a vast and powerful forest.

—Hadley Cels, for Ndn Bayou Food Forest

Anonymous Gardeners in the Olympic Mountains

We live on Twana and S'Klallam land in the foothills of the Olympic Mountains. This ecosystem—once a dynamic forest tended to by people, elk, bears, eagles, beavers, and salmon—is now a patchwork of tree plantations, off-grid homes, and clearcuts (results of logging practices in which all trees in an area are uniformly cut down). A century of white settlement, logging, and cattle grazing on the land we now tend has resulted in a wetland dominated by invasive grasses, stands of second-growth conifers, and a west-facing slope clearcut in 2014. Above us lies a commercial tree plantation owned by Rayonier, a timber company which exploits 2.7 million acres. We purchased this parcel three years ago, as a collective seeking to put our lives further in common.

Gardening here is an experience of contradictory timescales. On the one hand, the disintegration of the American empire, strained food systems, and accelerating climate change create a visceral urgency to grow food and unlearn dependencies on ecological and cultural devastation. On the other hand, we are engaged in a long, slow project of gardening this place. It takes time to know the soil, to orient toward the long-term viability of plant, nonhuman animal, fungal, microbial, mineral, and human life. We could grow more food, faster, if we indiscriminately cleared and tilled the land. Instead, we are urgently insisting on our relational techniques: facilitating decay, storing rain, plucking slugs off cotyledons. We strive not to force the land to be what it isn't. We are urgently trying to feed future people, cultivating what we call, citing James C. Scott, "fugitive biodiversity."

Red flowering currant is a fast-growing native shrub. Interplanted between larger fruit trees, it provides pollinator habitat, chop-and-drop mulch for improving the soil, edible berries, and beautiful early spring flowers.

Our efforts take place in a sloping clearcut—the sunniest spot on the land, damaged by logging. As beneficiaries of extractive colonialism, the least we can do is attempt repair. Slopes are difficult to farm; standard practices lead to rapid topsoil loss, erosion, and water runoff. Our guiding principles are to instead build soil and retain water. Growing food is secondary, in the short-term sense, but primary in the longer; this land will not sustain vegetal life in a hotter future without tending the soil in the present.

We clear terraces on contour, planting them with trees and shrubs that build soil, retain moisture, and add leaf-litter and shade. By hand-clearing, we can remove invasive blackberries, but preserve the still-present native plants. The red huckleberry, mahonia, and nettles that grow here are as much a part of our present and future food system as the apples, hazelnuts, and serviceberries that we introduce. Terracing with our footsteps reminds us that the trees are terracing with their roots, shifting our ontology of land. Being in good relation to this place requires observation and commitment. This spot, where stumps left by logging have slowly decomposed, is rich and moist with humus; this other spot, compacted by logging trucks, is anaerobic clay.

Growing food in this way is aspirational and experimental. Ironically, the slowness of our future subsistence tethers us more to the present capitalist food system. We feel the pinch of inflation as we are forced to purchase what we cannot produce, while our earliest crops won't bear for years. It is disorienting and contradictory—as with being white settlers opposed to white supremacy and settler-colonialism while owning stolen land. Perhaps our best intentions of undoing the culture we live in will wither through the contradictions of ownership; perhaps the hazelnut trees will die, or the winters will be too warm for the apples to fruit. In our best dreams this land becomes a vibrant food forest, its bounty accessible through knowledge, entanglement, and responsibility, unmarketable but nourishing, rooted in sharing. If we fail, we hope that our trees, the soil sponge and leaf litter, the flowering currant and the huckleberries, will contribute their nutrients, their energy, and their slow decay to the ongoing subsistence and metabolism of this place.

Upstate New York

An existence based on the earth feels almost impossible in this estranged world. A handful of corporations own the genes, while the supply chain supermarket extravaganza determines what we eat. Agriculture, treated like any other industry, becomes exploitative and demeaning; those who sustain the world are made disposable and invisible. The ability to own or access land—hence, to have the ability to grow food—is too costly or time-consuming for most to consider. Modern infrastructure devastates the topsoil, pollutes the oceans, and fills the atmosphere with carbon dioxide. We've known for at least half a century that this paves the way to extinction—of the beings around us and, in all probability, of our species. To ward off the very future those in power make real, they dream up useless technologies and sell us an endless green revolution: DRM tractors, GPS-guided drones, vertical megafarms, doomsday seed vaults, microgreens grown in space.

Food has always been more than matter. It draws us down to earth. Seeds are surrounded by stories and songs, rhythms and traditions, wisdom and gifts. Lifeways turn subsistence into sustenance, survival into nourishment. All around us, we see people grasping the chaotic danger of our times, situated halfway between apocalypse and revolution. Climate strikers cut school. Old heads from Occupy (like ourselves) leave the city behind and head to the farm. Rural folk form co-ops to meet, organize, and share with their neighbors. While the existing system skews the climate to new extremes, a new culture emerges to tip the scales against that system. From the occupied squares ten years ago to today's land defense projects, a new sensibility is forming, not quite "back to the land," but rather a return to the earth.

The fresh hands digging into newly planted backyard gardens, permaculture design, and collective land projects testify: we don't want to live like this anymore. After centuries of dispossession, it's true that most of us are without experience or tradition. Our efforts can be awkward, full of complicities and complexities, grappling with the unredeemed paradox of living on land that is not ours but that we do inhabit. Whatever the insufficiency of the attempt, we wager it's outweighed by the chance to reach into the world—not the metaverse, but the real world. We offer no solutions, only a home within the questions. By learning the song of the land, we may just outlast a civilization determined to take us down with it. In abandoning the universal, we may find the ground waiting beneath our feet. Seeking the guidance of the world around us, we might allow ourselves a small beginning in new worlds to come.

Salon Rouge, So-Called Quebec

One drunken autumn evening, a comrade returning to Montreal called us and announced that there was a deer that had just been hit on the road. What did he want us to do with a dead animal that was probably rotting? "Come and get it," he told us. "We'll prepare it. It's in perfect condition."

Despite our infrastructural advances towards autonomy, and although our communal farm manages to feed us more and more every year, we do not forget the ruins that surround us as well as the possibilities that are contained within them. Like a gift from the heavens, the ruins open their treasures to those who know how to find the melody in their din. We'd all gone dumpster diving before as part of our urban lives, but now we were ready to redefine what "useful" could mean. Half an hour later, the deer, dead from a concussion following a collision with a car, was spread out between the trunk and the back seats of an old Honda Civic. It would soon find itself on an outside table in front of a dozen neophytes confronted with their own ignorance. The beast said: "You don't know anything about me." It was true. None of us had ever set out on such a task.

Nothing was wasted: the skin was used for decoration, the meat was consumed by the whole commune over a period of several weeks, sometimes in large dinners where people congratulated themselves for having reached "new levels of dumpster diving." Some vegans who would normally be disgusted by meat coming from industrial production were even seen eating deer in the face of what they considered to be an ethical, almost immaculate form of consumption. After being hit by a car, this beast was destined for the dump or, at best, an animal-fat processing plant. Instead, she educated us on a set of vital techniques for feeding ourselves autonomously.

Eating is an activity from which we become alienated more and more every day. Its character as a "social activity" seems to be crumbling, as shown by the image of the confined person during Covid who only knows how to order Uber Eats burgers to their city apartment. Meanwhile, the continued industrialization of all forms of production intoxicates us, destroying the possibility of building knowledge about what literally makes us live: what we eat, how we eat it, the knowledge of how to produce a vegetable, and preparation techniques. All of this vanishes into the machinery of the food industry. The techno-capitalist dream of Soylent appears as the limits of possible future horizons.

In his book *America*, Baudrillard spoke of a "certain solitude that resembles no other." It was that of "the man who publicly prepares his meal, on a wall, on the hood of a car, along a fence, alone." Calling this the "saddest thing in the world," he wrote that there was "nothing more contradictory with the human or bestial laws, because the beasts always do each other the honor of sharing or competing for food."[4] To our minds, Baudrillard was right. The big pot containing food that is prepared and consumed collectively, the festive gatherings that allow for political conversation and conspiring, create visceral links between those with a plate. There is an elusive joy in these moments that build the commons and solidarities. In short, there is something deeply communist about food.

Lobelia Commons, New Orleans

Lobelia Commons formed in the specific conditions of the early Covid-19 pandemic, at a crossroads of worlds. We did not want to create a new political organization to grapple with tomorrow's activist dilemmas. Instead, we sought to urgently make relationships through food production and semi-agricultural experimentation. The meetings of the many crises of land exploitation and climate chaos brought on by the Covid pandemic mirror the shrinking strip of land between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain here, and between the city of New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico. The globally precarious situation is not unlike our local one.

Our dependency upon the state and its monoculture is engineered by technologies of floodwalls, levees, spillways, and river control structures. These same technologies that preserve a city in a delta seek to separate civilization from the commons, ultimately denying access entirely in what has become an existential struggle for the swamps. While some maintain piecemeal relationships with these places beyond, most of us are left expecting ships, trains, and trucks to bring food from across the world. To imagine a world beyond that monoculture, we must practice new ways of relating to agriculture, the land, and food itself.

Photograph: Salon Rouge, 2022.

Tree crops can provide huge bounties of fruits and nuts while being much more tolerant of climate fluctuations. Planting more trees spreads tried and true carbon sequestering technology and, when done at scale, can help buffer strong winds. Uploaded to Lobelia Commons' Instagram on January 31, 2021.

Through conversation over coffee in a friend's garden, chatting in Signal groups, in book clubs, with neighbors, smoking too much weed alone, we come upon our best—and worst—"what ifs." What if we made easily reproducible mobile okra planters? What if we promoted the hell out of the idea of putting free plants in front of people's homes? Maybe we could start growing pumpkins in that lot down the street? What if we threw Malabar spinach seeds in the bushes in front of Airbnbs? How about propagating hundreds of fruit and nut trees to give away for free? Any one of these ideas is informed by a desire for a decolonial future as well as by knowledges of survival that precede and defy New Orleans. We claim no ownership but simply seek to pass along what has inspired us.

This spirit brought us to editing and producing the *Earthbound Farmer's Almanac*.[5] We hoped to proliferate these types of conversations. Not that we assumed they weren't happening—we knew they were. We just wanted them to happen even more commonly between even more people. The *Almanac* publishes thought and practices that could be described as anti-colonial, earthbound, autonomist, queer, and anarchist. But beyond ideological labels, we could describe it as "being in favor of the creative conditions which promote life." We print thousands, distribute widely, cheaply, for recipients to use however they see fit. We hope they spark interesting dialogues and maybe even more interesting friendships

We believe that at the juncture of climate chaos and histories of fugitivity lie new forms of life that transcend politics. As the tides rise, our new agricultures emerge.

Jessica Green, Foothills of the Green Mountains

This contribution is a brief honoring of the beings to whom I am indebted. There are few identities I am willing to claim, but one I feel quite sure about is *shepherdess*. I tend sheep primarily for wool, which I use to weave cloth. I have lived alongside sheep for over a decade, and the mythologies and lessons I could recount are as endless as the accumulation of days we've been a flock together.

The wool of an animal is a tangible record of real time, of seasons, of when the rain came and when it didn't, of time apart, of the mineral content of soil, of birth and strength and loss. The makeup of their wool holds the contents and contexts of each year that it was grown. Once they are shorn, our collaboration continues in a different manner with the spinning and dyeing and weaving of the wool. My seasons and my experiences are then embedded as the wool becomes cloth.

I also slaughter, butcher, eat my sheep, and tan their pelts. As if the gift of their being isn't enough, I also experience their immense gift in not-being: the gift of giving an animal a dignified death and sharing the bounty of all the time that they spent as breathing bones and frolicking fat, as bleeding flesh and soft, ever-growing, delicious wool, as creatures who magically metabolize sun-drenched pastures into meat.

As days ramble on, I appreciate the years or the moments when my time and the sheep's time feel closer together: when what we notice, record, and desire feel part of the same story, when I feel close to the hills that claim us. I wonder why it feels more wholesome and even more beautiful when my human story feels more animal, but it does. The sheep help tether me to the earth and my true nature, and I try to tend to them with respect to their sheep-ness, to honor the beings that they are—even as I continually intervene for the convenience of my humanness.

I've experienced the sheep's ability to hold what I cannot—they feed the land just by being.

X

1
For a timeline of the defense of the Atlanta forest, see "A City In the Forest," *CrimethInc* https://crimethinc.com/2022/04/11/the-city-in-the-forest-reinventing-resistance-for-an-age-of-ecological-collapse-and-police-militarization . For ways to support, see https://defendtheatlantaforest.org/ .

2
The South River Forest is a perfect example of a feral ecology, where nonhuman entities are tangled up with human infrastructure projects. During the night, Intrenchment Creek breaks out in a chorus of frogs hitting different pitches to build strange chords, and the turtles grow huge despite the terrible runoff from an adjacent landfill and the Atlanta Police Department firing range, which surely the deer must know to avoid by now. But the biodiversity of the forest goes beyond just those animals who live there, and includes many different people who have formed relationships with it, whether they come to forage, explore the ruins and tag the walls, walk their dogs, ride dirtbikes or ATVs or mountain bikes, find quiet among the pines, or throw a party or have a bonfire.

3
There is likely to be evidence of such crimes, including the graves of an unknown number of inmates who died of abuse, intentional neglect, and outright murder by guards. See Atlanta Community Press Collective, "A Brief History of the Atlanta City Prison Farm," August 14, 2021 https://atlpresscollective.com/2021/08/14/history-of-the-atlanta-city-prison-farm/ .

4
Jean Baudrillard, *America* (1988; Verso, 2010).

5
The 2021 and 2022 editions of the *Earthbound Farmer's Almanac* are available from Emergent Goods https://www.emergentgoods.com/product/2022-earthbound-farmers-almanac .

Mary Walling Blackburn

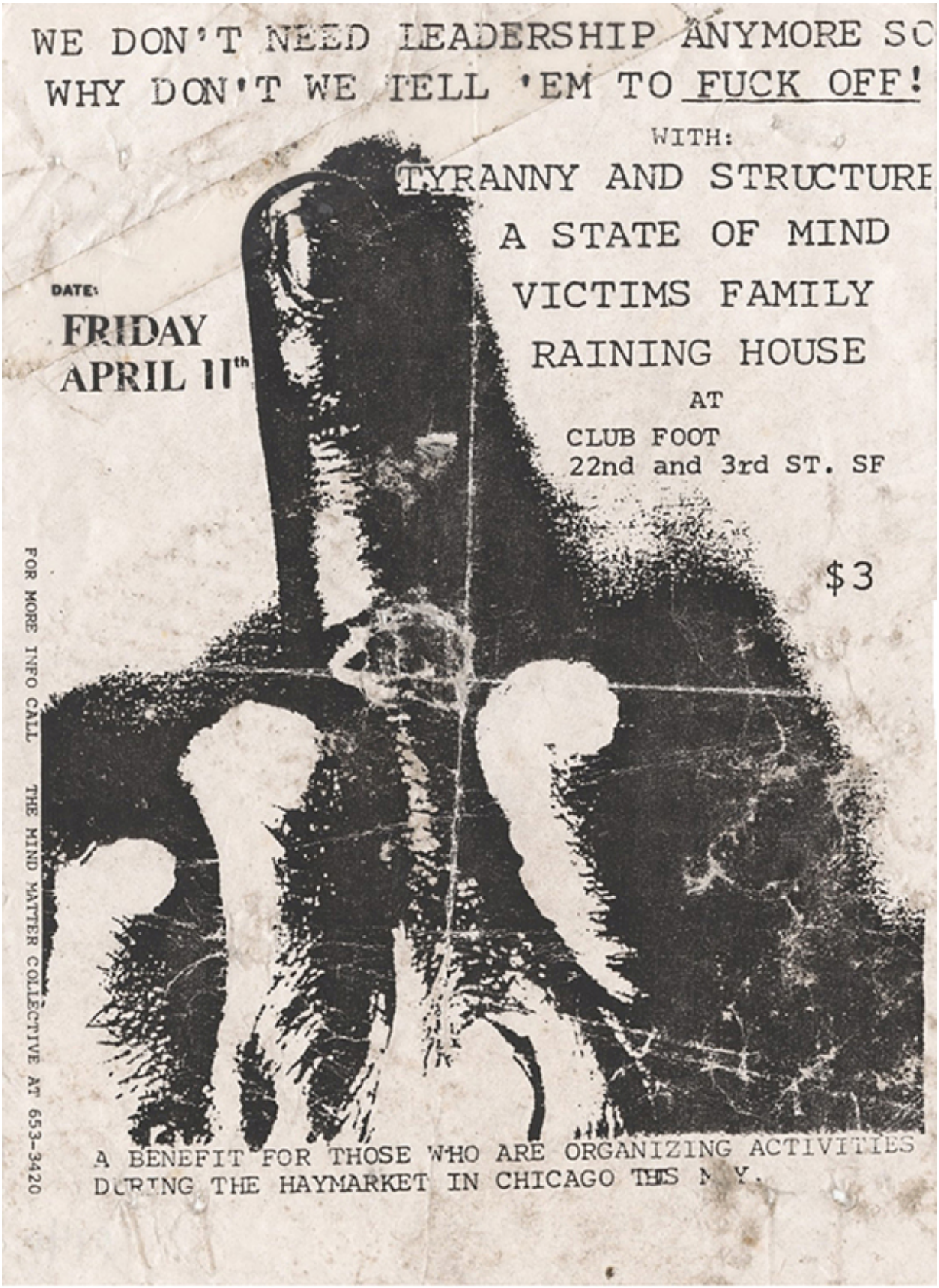
Porcupette

Let's channel twentieth-century psychoanalysts. More specifically, why not siphon their professional form of note-taking—one that dithers between stage direction and poem and police incident report. It dithers this way because their work meanders between making traumatic records, spelunking in the unconscious, and directing the patient through a labyrinth of ranked governance. I ape their method because it is a faster way to sketch the breakdown of relations in an early 90's rental apartment in Boston:

> *In a small sunny kitchen, J is cooking. J's housemate, C, has just woken and enters the kitchen. C notices steam flowing upward from the pan towards the ceiling. C notes a smell that has a deep and foul base note. C also notices that N (who is J's lover) is sitting at the table eating. N eats whatever is on the plate all up. C then asks N what N is eating—J answers for N—J states that N is eating "a jizz omelette"—N confirms that N is eating "a jizz omelette"—C asks with a combination of disbelief and belief whether J is truly cooking an omelette with sperm—it is confirmed that in fact J is cooking an omelette comprised of butter, egg, and his own sperm— C realizes that they are breathing in vaporized sperm—C leaves the room and tells other housemates: O and her lover, K.*

Two of the noted housemates later relayed this story to me, a visitor to the same apartment. The afflicted never noted that their punk housemate operated as if diplomacy was hopelessly classed, hence fatally rigged. But punk fliers' frantic scrawl papering Puritan City's telephone poles back then. Cut-out words nestled between grainy xerox reproductions of white skulls and white asses provided the dicta. The ethos, in short: *destroy what is destroying you* and maybe, some realized, *destroy what is destroying us.* Despite Boston's white punk sperm righteously gunking class and its properties, that serum, hot then cold then warm, did nothing to unbind the supremacy of the white male body. His symbolic violence still hangs around, directionless. No one seemed to move out. Remembering the grievances, I seek clarity in the steam—something useful in the micro-stink.[1] Sure, there is this spectacle and its splatter. But beyond that, let's try to sieve out, propagate, and apply the transformative revolt in the revolting.[2] To turn; to turn away from; to turn away from in disgust; to turn towards in disgust; to turn towards the gust; to overturn with gusto. The punk chef's idea is that heat will take care of what he finds rotten and make the substrate ready for seed.

Today, some three decades on, I channel a punk locavore while simultaneously seeking out the care of out-of-fashion psychoanalysts, a discipline on the brink, smothered first by pharmaceuticals and pastors, then Influencers and Life Coaches, and always, an astrological



Club Foot flyer, 1986. Aaron Cometbus Punk and Underground Press Collection, #8107. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

chaser.

Six days after a session, I am online seeking out an easy crockpot recipe but dreaming of trans-temporally hijacking the infinite scroll of food-bloggers' aggressively cheerful posts; to pose and post as them but with another content: a Nixon-era culinary trend, the Watergate Salad (pistachio Jell-O pudding mix and Cool Whip), on a relentlessly bright Insta that features cocktails with birch syrup and granola with beech nuts.[3] Maybe, next I will infiltrate archived early-aughts Xanga sites and insert EU illegal recipes for, say, hasu muhidu, one of many residual peasant cheeses that achieve their distinct taste by incorporating the active larvae of a fly and purportedly operate as aphrodisiac. The eaters purr: *We might be dying, so may we die fucking?* This happens because sometimes the insect survives a horny, stooping Foodie's first gulp then chews itself through Foodie intestines.). My fantasies are not on the scale that will tip us all away from any of the real voids that checker the land. The Watergate salad and Watergate cake—green as dollars—have never managed to turn citizen-eaters into community organizers, class-traitors, helpful saboteurs … No January Sixth Salad makes the rounds. All claim they are full…they blame Trump's omelette. I blame a limp sickle.

When I was a child, on the left coast of America, shattered war vets with no *where* to go loitered on the streets in greater numbers. Driving by their posts, it was possible to tune a car radio to Bruce Springsteen songs about losers who kept losing, too cut by defeat to locate an effective route to revenge. The Boss was so sad, but his jeans and tush were so tight that he made it seem possible that even losers got sucked off sometimes—cumming against or with the grief? And an art realm iteration of that period? Bas Jan Ader wandered around San Diego in *Sturm und Drang* drag, and even if he was "Too Sad To Tell You," someone probably licked the tears rolling off his high, storm and stress cheekbones. Bas and Boss. This was before we knew that viruses that may have seemed long passed can hole up in our body—Ebola and Covid released in cum and tears. Yesterday, I was weeping. My child darted forward, wiped a tear from my cheek, and sucked the tear from the tip of the index finger.

"Don't!"
"Why?! It tastes good!"
"Tears can harbor viruses!"
"I would have already caught whatever you have!"

But there are remedies to these ills, snares to trap loose vengeances … long before the earth cools. Some apologetically suggest that these methods might be nonviolent. This reminds me of my own child asking to eat gold. I respond: "Yes, if you pan it from the river yourself. That way there is no harm done to others." My child scowls. We watch a short video clip of a Dubai deli serving samosas wrapped in 24-Karat edible gold. It is clear that no one in the video is panning their own gold, hammering it down, and bringing it to the cafe. The customers just hand over their money and then eat gold. Later, that gold is shit out; presumably, no alchemy transpires. Humans and gold remain qualitatively the same.[4]

Today, I sit on my laptop-shaped-ass, destroying through consumption instead of creating through destruction.[5] Soon I will slip on a hairshirt and drink a glass of EntoMilk™.[6] I will slice the galette de rois and, with luck, I may receive a ceramic fève in my mouth. I want a fève in the shape of Teresa Feodorowna Ries's *Witch Doing Her Toilette on Walpurgis Night* to clonk around in my teeth and gums. The French manufacturers of these miniatures baked into cakes seem willing to replicate any consumable—domestic, commercial, ancient, or contemporary. Are they faithful or faithless to the original *objets*? Do I feel both of the sculpture-fève's hands with my tongue? Is the right one holding shears, lopped off or not lopped off? I will fetishize either origin or mutilation.

Lately, I keep remembering how anarchist Francesc Tosquelles and revolutionary Frantz Fanon, active medical colleagues, sometimes deployed a violent treatment to heal a patient doubly violated. Sometimes the intention of annihilation therapy née electro-shock was to void the cumulative trauma exacted by both intimate circumstance and political system. By that time, it was too late in the twentieth century for a patient to be slipped in the dark into a high voltage bath. Luminous hair was not standing on end; no heart muscle rattled in its ribcage. So which method did they use to sear but not cook? [figure 128_MWB_06] The notion was that there was no gradual rehabilitation to be had inside of active capitalism. When examining their patients after shock therapy, the psychologists witnessed actual regrowth after a totalizing burn. See how this tempts? Macro might respond as micro did. We consumers hope, like every Born-Again Christian that ever crossed my path, that we will get a second and a third and a fourth chance … an infinite chance after shitting gold. Fanon and Tosquelles' electric suggestion seems yet another chance. But if it is only an academic idea, we are back to squat and squander. Jizz Omelette, NOT AGAIN!!!! [Intonate a mid-century US commercial for a food product.]

7

Georges Le Glopier (AKA Noel Godin), a Belgian anarchist, in a self-described "cream psychosis" cakes Marguerite Duras in 1969. He claims he has caked her because her celebrity is empty, but not because she has transformed her colonizers' trauma[8] into brainy, somehow cool and drafty, pornography. I wish the record was less bizarre and more descriptive: Are her forehead, cheeks, mouth, and glasses covered in cherry, chocolate, or cream?[9] Each color and texture, built up around a supposed deficit, carries a separate communique. Without it, I can't read Le

Fève from an obscure, deep web list serve in French for fève enthusiasts.

Glopier's transmission. But what of the Glopier's explanation? Avengers often seem to supply an explanation that radically differs from what seems to be probable cause. But also, is this really an anarchist act? S *pl-at*? Boom ... ScrEETCH ... [10]

Hanna Poznanska Segal (1918–2011), location unnamed and photo undated. From the Hanna Segal Photo Gallery, Institute of Psychoanalysis, British Psychoanalytical Society.→ Segal, a stateless jew, was the daughter of an art critic and barrister, a youth member of the Polish Socialist Party, and, after WWII, was a central figure in repairing and restoring the mental health of shell-shocked Polish soldiers. Her first paper, "A psychoanalytic contribution to aesthetics," lauds the capacity of artists to mourn our ruined parts in order to revive and restore the world anew. Segal claims the audience is thirsty for this and responds in kind. Segal's later work ranged from child analysis to symbol formation, from deep disturbances of the mind to nuclear armaments. Her paper, "Silence is the real crime," is a psychoanalytic contribution to the nuclear debate.

1909: The earliest known cinematic example of pie diplomacy.[11] In shifting light, bodies jerk. The pie is not thrown. It is hand-held. A woman working at a cafe feels the customer, a Mr. Flip, grab at her body eight times. She grabs him by the head. She smashes his face into a pie. He turns to face us; his mouth and jaw are dark with filling. But this act is more related to self-defense and not so much to vengeance. Mr. Flip has moved through the American city groping women, each repulsing him, alone or in concert, with scissors, food, or electricity. During and after womens' repulses of Mr. Flip, most laugh hardily; is that laughter also an electric fence? Something so gestural and temporary! Yet their mouths release the sound and it operates as object. A cackle encircles Mr. Flip over and over again. It seems to deflect reprisal. And then more reversals! Consider the pie: it is an inanimate thing that in transit becomes an animate being- and then, when stationary, returns to its prior state, an inanimate thing, again. There is magic in this struggle.[12] But 1908 is a foreign country.

In 1979 (another foreign country?), Hanna Segal, a protégé of Melanie Klein, writes:

> *In the child's phantasy the mother's body is full of riches- milk, food, valuable magic feces, babies, and the father's penis, which (in this oral stage of his development) the infant imagines as incorporated by his mother in intercourse).*[13]

After reading this, I re-translate a baby's incessant scream as a punk anthem filled with daddies' dicks and other shit; but let's not cry it out or turn it down and tune out. I think I, too, might want the v *aluable magic feces.* A complicated and overwhelming food that changes everything. But I am not a baby seeking everything in my human mama. Cut loose, an adult, I am seeking what is available within this planet AKA *Mother Earth*. No need to exit the homosphere to core the universe. The valuable magic feces is right here, isn't it? I have to track it like a truffle pig.

I assume it is not human unless I am scenting a human concept.
The screen has no scent.

On a spring evening on Zoom, a Vermont porcupine rehabilitator and naturalist, Patty Smith, mimics porcupines; the event facilitator tells her that everyone is charmed. I imagine pleasure rippling through many screens. Contrary to Sigmund Freud and Arthur Schopenhaeur, Patty Smith relays that porcupines are not miserly hermits.[14] They socialize and share their resources, as she is doing, too. Smith recommends that we observe porcupines more closely, that we internalize their belief in surplus—their sharing behavior. I am watching her zoom presentation in the crowded kitchen I share with my family. Dog vocalizes: food. Pots clank. Through the din, I think Smith says: "To save ourselves, we should become more like them." On the chat, a response from a viewer floats up: "How much do porcupines weigh?" This guest can't bear the enchanted shit.

The summer before my child was born, I was living in a small, one room shack on a mountain. One starry night the porcupines were screaming for sex from the tops of apple trees. If another is summoned by their screams, they carefully navigate the other's spikes to reach the interior. Their fucking is always consensual.

In the day, I slowly lumbered along the forest's edge. I managed to see the animal's face, and I found it very beautiful. The summer before, our friend, who was living on the same land, killed a porcupine. I was told he did it because he did not like their noises in the night. He did not

Photo from All Ages: The Boston Hardcore Film, held by Gallery East Network.

bury the creature.; he ate it because he had killed it. Some magic homesteader shit.

"Until we become *like* them [porcupines]," she said.

Patty Smith tells us that a woman pulls over to help a porcupine smashed by another speeding car. The porcupine is dying but it is also giving birth. The scientific term for an infant porcupine? A porcupette. Its needles are soft and bendable as it travels down the birth canal. The bystander delivers the porcupette … She takes it up in her hands—a one pound baby—returns to her car, and brings it to Patty Smith[15] who will raise it and release it into the Weltshmerz-Free Zone.

X

Mary Walling Blackburn was born in Orange, California. Artist and writer Walling Blackburn's work engages a wide spectrum of materials that probe and intensify the historic, ecological, and class-born brutalities of North American life. Publications include *Quaestiones Perversas* (Pioneer Works, Brooklyn, 2017) co-written with Beatriz E. Balanta, and *MAGIC FECES or cream psychosis*, a forthcoming book of collected writings (e-flux, 202+).

1
Now if you are Reader who is also *Owner*, remember that cooking equipment in rentals is shared between inhabitants and that the social and political are created … sometimes fed between people living together. Through meals and scent, any feeling (affection on through to rage) is incorporated into one another's bodies and the objects they live amongst. Here skillet, spatula, fork, and plate were deconsecrated. It is uncertain whether soap and scalding water are able to reconsecrate. After the punk dude and his punk lover escalate domestic tensions by preparing and eating his sperm by fumigating a playwright, a future community conflict resolution advocate, maybe a queer pole dancer (did he ever move in?)

2
Maybe you are a stunt eater, too, stimulated by the possibility of culinary extremes. And maybe another reader is a stunt-fucker who wonders if what they thought of as totalizing sex should also include the GI like this? Yet another reader claims they want no stunts that don't result in action. But N is no stunt eater. N is accomplice. N provides a punk tender front for making aggression atmospheric. Will this lite gassing work better than law or blood—housing court or brawl? When I have been wronged, I have never been personally vindicated by the heads of the systems—a governor, a judge, a trustee, a principal … but I never deployed the jizz omelette …

3
One high-end food blog, "Salad for President," sometimes features conceptual artists making salads, like sound artist Alison Knowles. But the collection, despite the title, does not feature a dish like Watergate Salad in material or concept.

4
Last week, I was looking at a photo of a marauder in Kyiv, shrinkwrapped to a pole, pants around his ankles and a potato crammed in his mouth. Watching people, naked in war, trying to stay alive in a compressed zone, I have trouble figuring out where my own identifications lie: do I elide with looter or watchman, be they soldier or citizen? Me, I am the potato. The old root placed in the first ready orifice. I am thick, inert, and culpable. A flesh tater? A Mr. Potato Head.

5
Choosing instead to wash, decorate, and eat my voids (first to soap up my innie with a bar of goat's milk soap shaped like a plucked and roasted chicken and scented with lemon and pepper, or to lather my armpits with a bar formed like dog feces (the copy reads: "smells like cut grass").

6
https://gourmetgrubb.com/faq/

7
Hall and Ellis, in an 1897 study of dolls, catalog girls' feelings about the death of their dolls. Some are broken and some are murdered, some have souls and some don't. One participant, a twelve-year-old black girl, states: *"Dolls did not go to heaven for it was bright; they were put in the dark earth, hence went to hell."* Here, supernatural forces, volcanic eruption, take a naked baby doll to what another participant, a white girl, calls *the bad place.* So "*what constitutes the death of a doll? When lost or crushed do children assume a future life for a doll and does this assuage their grief?"* ask Hall and Ellis. However, how would this psychic act—the burial of white dolls at the turn of the twentieth century—play out for Paulette and Jeanne Nardal, one sister being one of the few female founding members of *La Dépêche africaine,* the official bimonthly newspaper of the Comité de défense des intérêts de la race noire (Committee for the Defense of the Interests of the Black Race)? Loaded dolls, black ones and white ones, as diagnostic tool, were central to Dr. Kenneth Clark's Doll Test, administered in the 1940s to black children. Clark, the first black head of the American Psychoanalytic organization, conducted the studies in a number of US states, including Arkansas and South Carolina. Clark stated: the results repeatedly confirmed that American society in the segregated South was telling blacks that they were "inferior to other groups of human beings in the society." One wants to imagine that Clark's Doll Tests would have different results in the Nardal and Roussi households. That the white head tumbling in the sand wasn't theirs.

8
I am aware that I want the shrink to shrink my personal and ancestral trauma. At first, this process feels like the archeological dig I used to work at: where we referenced an old map of every season's outhouse hole before we sunk the new one. I ask her to do this with me without delivering me back to the larger hole: normative America. My psychoanalyst reminds me that she still has the cotton boll I gave to her twelve years ago, picked by my mother in honor of our cotton picking, sharecropping forebears: my grandmother, my great aunts, my great grandmother, my great-great grandmother, and so on … I am uncomfortable: the cotton boll feels not just cornball in 2022 (as if I might be the sort who enshrines it, placing it under a glass bell arranged on a rustic board that is white with fresh milk paint; a white signboard hanging above the shelf displays large, gold, cursive script reading "Tits + Grits + Celtic Shit."). I evoke the Etsy white-devious: the mode or zone where folks are dowsing white class origin to evade a racial reckoning. This sort of messaging befuddles a drowsy white ("near-woke") who might have started to think about how to defund capitalism. Remembering a coffee shop in Dallas, Texas: The barista, a white guy who grew up there, says: "Just outside of the city, pay attention to the roads; they were built to accommodate cotton plantation equipment; they have these specific pull-offs for the vehicles to turn around. This whole area, before oil, was cotton and people like to forget that the money around here started with slavery. But you just got to understand the roads and it is obvious." Whites, on a country drive, dust up the grid, making visible for miles the infrastructure that has supported them alone.

9
I cannot locate documentation of the caking online. The effect might resemble tactical camo clinging to her skin, but I am also remembering how white suburban tweens at Waldorf-inspired nature schools claim camouflage is their intention when spreading mud on their faces and how the end result is something that clearly lands in their desire to still participate in blackface without retribution. I crave the glouped Duras reproduction, not blackface. However, I imagine there is a missed lesson for me here—in how one holds one's face when some public humiliation is a second skin.

10
A brief conversation on pieng women in the United States (70's era) can be found here: https://www.fluentcollab.org/might-be-good/mbg-issue-194-tacks-tape-and-a-level/. It touches upon the pieing of anti-gay activist Anita Bryant and of pornographic actress Linda Lovelace.

11
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fo2fG3t0eE . (3:37).

12
I want to reference both Tierra Whack's *Unemployed* video and the Irish Hunger. The blighted spuds connect to colonial plunder and rule, fungus and famine and the state-backed merchant companies' development of the plantation, in occupied Ireland and colonized America, as a frontier settlement scheme. Tierra Whack's *Unemployed* video (dir. Cat Solen) includes the singer as laboring intermediary between a verklempt potato sliced and fed to gigantic, sentient potatoes. But both references require a secondary cascade of footnotes flowing from this footnote.

13
Hannah Segal quoted in Claudine and Pierre Geissmann, "Melanie Klein: early object relationships," *A History of Child Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2005), 107.

14
Sometime after a youthful investigation of the reproductive parts of dead eels, Sigmund Freud seeks a living encounter with the porcupine. Freud smells the porcupine before he sees it. When he beholds the porcupine, it is in a state of decomposition. In 1909, he begins to keep a https://www.freud.org.uk/collections/objects/3146/ on his desk. When the metal quills are stroked, it tines melodic. Scent and sound keep reshaping the human-porcupine encounter. The Freud Museum claims that "Freud incorporated Schopenhauer's use of the porcupine as a metaphor in describing the difficulties of group relationships." But according to biologists, groups of porcupines share dens without much conflict and do not bloody one another in desperate attempts to warm themselves. Philosophers and analysts fantasize about animal discord as a way to cloak the human energy to violate without reason.

15
Contaminated by pop culture, I

simultaneously imagine a porcupette delivered to pop-icon Patti Smith—her one long black gloved hand rehab roughhousing her spiny adolescent friend.

Sophie Chao

Forest Foodways in West Papua

Crouched ankle-deep in the mud, Marcella, a Marind woman in her late thirties from the Mirav village in rural West Papua, was teaching me how to cook sago.[1] With her callused yet nimble hands, she patted the freshly leached sago starch into round, even-sized clumps, and slid them into chopped bamboo stalks, alternating sago with shredded coconut flesh, destalked papaya leaves, slivers of possum meat, and plump, writhing sago grubs. Then she carefully placed the bamboos atop a small fire of dried juniper twigs and sago fronds to steam. Her three-year-old son, Fransiskus, sat beside us, giggling. He was entertained by the sight of red ants scrambling madly around the fire, competing over stray crumbs of sago pith and coconut flesh. The air was alive with the sounds of birds and wind and river. Villagers were pounding sago and singing nearby. Children laughed and splashed in the muddy waters of the grove. Eventually, the bamboo stalks crackled and split under the heat. The sago was ready to eat.

Marcella let out a sharp hand-whistle. One by one, her companions slowly made their way to the fire—some bearing bows, arrows, machetes, knives, others fruit, betel nuts, and tubers. She distributed the bamboo stalks, pulling the charred strands apart to release the steaming contents. She took a bite, chewed it, then spit it out and placed it into her daughter's gaping mouth. Her companions proceeded to do the same for each other—for their wives, uncles, nephews, and grandmothers. The first bite, Marcella told me, is about sharing skin and wetness. She would not eat just yet. Preparing the sago and watching her friends and family eat it had already made her feel sated. Her sweat had mingled with the sago. Now, it mingled with the bodies of her kin. This, she said, was how people shared skin and wetness with food, and then with one another.

As people ate, they began to talk and sing—about their mothers, the forest, their plant and nonhuman animal siblings, and the ancestral spirits inhabiting the grove. Singing and storying, they told me, enhances the flavors of foods consumed. It reminds people how these foods came into being, and why they always taste so much better when eaten in the forest, rather than in the village, city, or on the plantation. Singing and storying also remind people that by eating well, they too can become good food for others. Their blood, grease, sweat, tears, and flesh, nourished by plants and animals today, will live on in the bodies of organisms that consume them in the future. "In the forest," Marcella explained, "we eat and we are eaten. We feed the forest and it feeds us. We are all food for each other." A shrill shriek reverberated in the grove. Marcella's son had just noticed a black leech hanging off his calf, already plump from the blood it had sucked. His mother's resounding laugh reverberated through the forest. The multispecies feeding had begun.

An Indigenous Marind villager pounding sago in the grove. Photograph: Sophie Chao.

The Nourishing Forest

Foraging expeditions, such as the one described above, constitute a central part of everyday life among Indigenous Marind communities in rural West Papua, among whom I have been conducting ethnographic fieldwork since 2011.[2] Marind people rely primarily on native forests, swamps, and groves for their daily subsistence, which they procure through hunting, fishing, and gathering. Sago groves provide them with their staple starch food, sago flour, which is manually extracted from the felled boles of sago palms prior to flowering. Carbohydrates are supplemented with tubers and roots (mainly taro and yam), and proteins are obtained from fish and game such as deer, lorises, cassowaries, tree kangaroos, crocodiles, and pigs. Fruit including rambutans, papayas, bananas, and golden apples are also gathered in the forest, alongside roots, barks, and saps that serve to make medicinal brews. These and other foods are procured during collective expeditions that take place approximately every three months, lasting between a week and two months. Participants in the foraging expeditions I joined in the field ranged from eight years old to over thirty and included nuclear family members as well as those from extended families and clans. Children were also often brought along, as foraging trips were deemed central to their enculturation into Marind society.

Forest foodways are widely associated by Marind with the condition of satiety, or *kekenyangan* in Indonesian. This satiety, my companions explained, stems from the vitality of the living organisms from whom forest foods are derived. Plants and animals, which Marind call "grandparents" (*amai*) or "siblings" (*namek*), share kinship through common descent with different Marind clans (*boan*) from ancestral creator spirits (*dema*).[3] Also included within this more-than-human kinship system are various abiotic elements and forces—the sun, rivers, soil, rain, lightning, and dew—that, together with organismic life-forms, animate and sustain the sentient ecology of the forest.

Procuring, preparing, and consuming forest foods involves an array of ritual codes that commemorate and celebrate Marinds' ancestral interspecies kinships. These include the incantation of spells during hunting, the ritualized handling of foods when gathered and cooked, and the recitation of songs when food is distributed and consumed. Food restrictions, too, are often explained by Marind people as expressions of respect towards plants and animals, encompassing prohibitions on hunting juvenile or gestating animals, capturing animals during the mating season, and gathering plants at the early stages of maturation. Abiding by these restrictions, Marind people attune and respond to the meaningful beings and doings of the forest, and simultaneously make respectful use of forest resources without leading to their depletion.

Spending time with children in the forest constitutes a central part of their enculturation into local foodways. Photograph: Sophie Chao.

Marind women and children sifting through sago flour in preparation for a ritual feast. Photograph: Sophie Chao.

Knowledge (*ilmu*) and freedom (*kebebasan*) further enhance the satiation that Marind people associate with forest foods. *Ilmu* encompasses the varying array of origin stories, ecosystemic relations, and functional uses of plants and animals created by *dema* (ancestral creator spirits) in time immemorial. This vast body of knowledge, instilled into children as soon as they are able to walk and speak, includes the diverse organisms, habitats, climates, and seasons that produce the forest as a composite, nourishing, and temporally patterned environment. It entails a meticulous apprenticeship concerning which forest trails to follow or avoid, how these decisions vary depending on age, gender, and clan affiliation, and what meaningful signs or signals to consider along the way—for examples, the color and level of the river, the relative brightness or cloudiness of the sky, or the voice of a kindred bird alternately inviting human presence or cautioning against imminent danger. Transmitted from one generation to the next in the form of stories, songs, and skills, knowledge and freedom imbue forest foods with memories that are at once bodily and affective, individual and collective, and human and more-than-human.

Marind affirm that forest foods are most satiating when eaten in the forest itself. Full-bodied auditory, olfactory, and kinesthetic immersion in—and acutre observation of—this more-than-human environment enhances the gustatory, nourishing attributes of foods consumed. In the forest, for instance, Marind pay close attention to the rippling of meandering rivers, the gentle swaying of sago fronds, and the fleeting movements of insects and birds. They notice the patterned bark and foliage of nearby vegetation, and the footprints left by itinerant packs of boars and cassowaries. As they rasped and pounded sago, my companions would breathe in the rich scent of burning juniper twigs, petrichor, and damar resins. Between activities, they ran their fingers along the pubescent leaves of shrubs and bushes, and deep into the rotting sago stumps where plump sago grubs and larvae incubate. Eating, working, and feeling blended here is a form of more-than-human synesthesia. Taste and touch meld with sounds, smells, and sights.

Skin and Wetness

As Marcella imparted during our meal of sago in the grove, forest foodways are satiating because they require and enable the sharing of skin (*igid*) and wetness (*dubadub*). Central to Marind conceptualizations of the body, skin and wetness express the state of health of the individual and their social and cosmological relations. Skin refers to the exterior and visible surface of the body. It includes the physical skin of human beings, but also many other kinds of skin: the bark of trees, the coats of mammals, the laminae of leaves, the carapace of beetles, the cuticle of

Sharing wetness with sago. Photograph: Sophie Chao.

larvae, the topographic relief of the land, and the sleek or rippled surface of rivers and streams. Skin's counterpart, wetness, refers to the various fluids that animate human and other-than-human bodies. Human and animal wetness takes many forms: blood, grease, muscle, sweat, saliva, and tears. It also includes sexual, maternal, and post-digestive substances such as breast milk, vaginal excretions, semen, urine, and feces. Reptile and amphibian wetness manifests in the mucilaginous integument of frogs, toads, newts, and salamanders, and in the gluey scutes and scales of snakes, lizards, and crocodiles. In vegetal organisms, wetness is found in resin, sap, pith, nectar, and in the water-carrying xylem of roots, stems, and shoots. Rivers, mangroves, swamps, mudflats, and clouds, too, are imbued with dispersed, life-sustaining wetness that supports the landscape's terrestrial, subterrestrial, aquatic, and aerial milieus.

Each of these valued bodily attributes testifies to the organism's ability to sustain life-generating symbiotic relations with other organisms in the forest, as both feeder and fed. Each in turn gives rise to the aesthetic, gustatory, and nourishing qualities of plants and animals as food for humans. For instance, the meat of cassowaries—that grow in the forest, drink from its rivers, and consume its berries, nuts, and snails—is chewy, salty, and intricately patterned with blood-rich capillaries. The flesh of fish nourished by juicy algae, shrimps, and worms is compact and firm to the touch, but melts exquisitely in the mouth. Similarly, sago starch is most dense and moist when obtained from palms that flourish in the abundant wetness of mangroves and swamps.

Forest foods in turn beautify and replenish the skin and wetness of Marind by imparting the life-sustaining flesh and fluids of the kindred plants and animals from whom they derive. These interspecies transfers of vitality begin long before food is ingested. For instance, as they journey across the landscape on foot during hunting, fishing, and foraging expeditions, people imbibe the moisture of the soil beneath their feet, the dew hanging in the morning air, and the droplets of rain falling from overhead. Wetness is also produced and passed on as Marind participate in food procurement and preparation activities in the grove: when they fell sago palms, rasp their boles, leach their pitch, and cook their starch. Skin, meanwhile, is strengthened through tactical engagements with the forest environment: running palms along the meandering trails left by insects along the ribbed bark of trees, caressing the fur and feathers of captured birds and possums, or digging fingers deep into the fertile muds of the grove. Matter and meaning crystallize in the forest as a multispecies contact zone, inscribed in and deciphered through the storied textures of the landscape and its nourishing beings.

Becoming Good Food for Others

Indigenous Marind foodways entail a cultivated praxis of wonder that is inextricably intertwined with the forest—a realm animated by myriad, more-than-human alterities in perpetual movement and flux, shaping Marinds' own sense of eco-relational being, becoming, and belonging. But human satiation is only one part of the story. Just as important as the nourishment Marind obtain from the forest is the nourishment that Marind themselves provide for their other-than-human kin. Being Marind, in Marcella's words, means becoming "good food for others" (*jadi makanan enak buat lain*). This entails participating in reciprocal chains of eating and being eaten within a multispecies spectrum whose collective well-being depends upon the willingness and ability of every single organism within it to shift across multiple and interlinked subjectivities—as feeder, fed, and food.

Transfers of bodily fluids are one way in which Marind become good food for others. For instance, the sweat of community members as people walk the forest sustains the growth of vegetation when it meets branches, leaves, and twigs. Villagers enhance this transfer of wetness by intentionally rubbing their hands, forearms, and calves against the trunks, shoots, and adventitious roots they encounter along the way. Sweat infiltrates the soil as people labor in the grove, nourishing a mixed community of insects and gastropods, including centipedes, ants, snails, and grubs, and infiltrating the root systems of nearby shrubs and grasses. Human blood becomes fodder for hematophagous critters such as the leech that surreptitiously crept up young Fransiskus's leg during our visit to the grove, and the mosquitos that swarm the forest during the monsoon season. When breastfeeding their infants, women also feed the forest by smearing droplets of colostrum—the thick, golden fluid produced in the first few days after childbirth—on the trunks and shoots of nearby sago palms to encourage vegetative reproduction in the form of suckers and stolons.

Other, more indirect transfers of fluid are encouraged through the ritualized etiquette that accompanies food procurement, preparation, consumption, and disposal in

A Marind father and his son return from a fishing expedition at the Bian River. Photograph: Vembri Waluyas.

the forest. Hunters, for instance, impart their sweat upon the small portions of fruit, nuts, and sago flour that they leave at the sites where they capture and kill game. These are given in exchange for the life of the animal taken and as a sign of respect towards its kin. Similarly, when people encounter juvenile or gestating animals and birds in the forest, tactically mediated food offerings are left near the animals' nests or burrows. When food is being cooked, villagers scatter sago flour around the fire for maleo fowl and pigs to consume. A share equivalent to an adult male's intake, and often including a portion of pre-masticated food, is always saved for forest animals, and is usually placed atop a mound of soil or wrapped in layered banana leaves. Formulaic songs and incantations are performed to entice animals to consume this food and to find nourishment in the human sweat and saliva that have mingled within them.

Beyond their own life, Marind continue to become good food for their other-than-human kin long after their death. While burial in the village cemetery is now widely practiced, many of my companions affirmed that they wished to be interred in the forest, so that their bodies would become "useful" (*berguna*) to others. In the traditional mode of burial, corpses are wrapped in dried sago fronds and placed a meter or so underground, then covered with earth, upon which a young nypa or other palm shoot is planted. As the body decomposes, human flesh and fluids seep into the ground where they are ingested or otherwise absorbed by subterranean earthworms, beetles, and millipedes. Larger mammals, reptiles, and birds that prey upon these organisms take in the skin and wetness of the deceased, passing it on to their own progenies through reproduction and eventually returning it to the forest when they die or are consumed. The flourishing of the plant atop the burial site is also enhanced by the community of critters that feed off the flesh and fluids of human bodies, and to the nutrient-enriched soil that this decomposition produces.

Eating Well in a More-Than-Human World

For Marind people, eating well during one's own lifetime is significant not only for the health and well-being of the consumer, but also because it enables the consumer to become good food for others. This care of the self is also a

A young Marind boy practicing shooting in the lowland plains of Merauke. Photograph: Sophie Chao.

care for the many human and other-than-human beings across space and time. The skin, wetness, and vitality of their bodies constantly disperse, cycle, and recycle within the feeding flows of forests as nourishing terrains. Just as the collective care of feeding other humans is recognized in the anatomic form of bodily skin and wetness, so too the collective care of nourishing the environment is concretized in the perceived health, diversity, and fertility of the landscape itself. The state of the body affects that of the environment and vice versa.

Indigenous Marind foodways are animated by humans, animals, and plants who are bound with and against each other in reciprocal dynamics of feeding and being fed. Across these diverse relations of mutual nourishment, different foods serve different transformative purposes. Each is dependent on, and diagnostic of, the inter-agentive relations between the consumer and the consumed. As ontological and material relation, food connects human and other-than-human beings within unevenly distributed meshes of eating and being eaten.

Reckoning with these connections raises the moral question of what it means to eat well and feed well in an increasingly vulnerable more-than-human world. In this age of self-devouring growth, when intensifying capitalist extraction are undoing ecosystems at local and planetary scales, we might generatively take Marinds' lead in asking ourselves: How do practices of consumption connect humans, in (perhaps) unwitting yet complicit ways, to seemingly remote places and communities? What powers and forces dictate what goes into which bodies, what counts as food when food means life, and who or what becomes the eater and eaten? How do cultural values and system shape not just what we eat, but what is eating us—to whose benefit, and at whose cost? And how might we counter anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism by reimagining ourselves, like Marind do, as *good food for others*?

*

Recipe from the Sago Grove

Ingredients:

–sago flour, freshly rasped
–sago grubs, plump and writhing
–coconut flesh, sweet and slippery
–bamboo stalks, semi-mature
–papaya leaves, slim and of the darkest of greens
–juniper leaves, bushy and dry
–banana leaves, wide and yellow

Directions:

Light a small twig fire. Rinse the bamboo stalks in fresh water, inside and out. Fill the bamboo stalks, alternating sago flour, sago grubs, coconut flesh, and papaya leaves. Press the ingredients compactly into the stalk. Right before cooking, add a few juniper leaves to the fire for fragrance. Line the bamboo stalks along the top of the flames, turning them around every few minutes for an even cook. Look up at the sky. Look around in the grove. Notice the smells. Notice the sounds. Join them with song. When the ends of the bamboo stalks start to steam and their surface becomes lightly charred, remove from the heat. Wrap the stalks in banana leaves to retain fragrance and heat. Once cool enough to handle, knock the stalks against each other firmly to break them. Pull the bamboo filaments downwards to release the content. Serve the bamboo stalks on a bed of fresh sago fronds.

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This essay is derived and adapted from the monograph *Land of Famished Beings: An Indigenous Theory of Hunger from the West Papuan Plantation Frontier*, currently under review with HAU Books.

Sophie Chao is an anthropologist and environmental humanities scholar whose work explores the intersections of ecology, Indigeneity, capitalism, health, food, and justice in the Pacific. Her most recent book is *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua* (Duke University Press, 2022).

1
Pseudonyms have been used throughout this essay for the safety of persons named.

2
I conducted eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in the villages of Mirav, Bayau, and Khalaoyam in the capacity of human rights counsellor between 2011 and 2013 and in the capacity of doctoral and postdoctoral researcher between 2015 and 2019. My fieldwork was facilitated by Indonesian and Papuan human rights NGOs and explored how deforestation and agribusiness development reconfigure the more-than-human lifeworld of Marind communities. Central to this research was a close observation of and participation in Marinds' everyday and ritual food procurement, preparation, and consumption practices across the spaces of village and forest.

3
All the terms in this sentence are in Marind.

Lia Dostlieva

Grain, Ink, and Stones: The Story of Ukrainian Hunger

I'm starting to work on this text in a cafe. The noise of the coffee machine, the sound of voices, the clatter of dishes, and the music mix together in the background of my working day. Like me, some of the other customers work while having a cup of coffee. Others customers chat with friends or eat a piece of cake. Sometimes, it's difficult to realize how deeply food and food-related practices are entangled with our social interactions. Food is an integral part of human culture and identity. But all those food-based rituals rely on food being easy to acquire in sufficient quantities. A lack of food not only threatens human survival as such but also disrupts cultural rituals. Hunger reduces a person to their body, to exhausted flesh whose existence becomes centered around satisfying very basic needs. This experience is impossible to imagine for those living in relative comfort. But according to UN World Food Programme, 276 million people worldwide were already facing acute hunger at the start of 2022.[1]

During various periods of history, various societies have suffered from a devastating lack of food. In 1932–33, Soviet Ukraine was swept by a terrifying wave of hunger as the Soviet government starved to death up to four million people, mostly peasants, with an artificial famine. Organized and armed brigades confiscated harvests, which, along with restrictions on villagers' movements, led to mass starvation and death. Dead bodies littered the streets and corpses were buried in mass graves. This period was later called "the Holodomor"—from the Ukrainian expression " *moryty holodom*," to starve someone to death. Almost until the very end of the Soviet state's existence, any mention of the famine was suppressed by the totalitarian regime, which pretended it had never happened.

Despite the attempts to cover up this starvation (or maybe precisely because of it), the famine left a deep and traumatic impression on the collective memory of Ukrainian society. The first-hand experiences of those who witnessed the Holodomor—its victims and survivors—is the focus of *Project MARIA* by Canadian-Ukrainian artist Lesia Maruschak. Through a series of visual installations, she tells the story of a girl name Maria who managed to survive the Holodomor and emigrate to Canada while millions of others died. Maruschak edits and reworks archival photographs. The resulting images are blurred, ghostly, and poetic. The visual language appeals to the spectator's emotions, empathy, and imagination. Maruschak says about her project that it "aims to create a memorial which facilitates the construction of collective memory." She continues:

> I would construct a mobile memorial that avoids the physical and monolithic language and form of traditional memorials by making a mobile work through which the active participation of audiences from a range of locations and cultures works to unconceal knowledge of this event.[2]

Peasants deliver bread in the Baryshiv district of Kyiv, Ukraine, 1930.

While avoiding the monumentality of traditional memorials, *Project MARIA* still repeats in many ways the established imagery used in official Holodomor commemoration. The artist chooses a small girl as the main protagonist of her project. The protagonist's age and gender imply her total inability to resist the harm that is being inflicted on a wider group of people of different ages and genders. A child—moreover a girl—cannot fight back, becoming a passive and silent victim of the totalitarian regime. A similar focus on the most vulnerable group of victims can be seen in, for example, a sculpture in front of the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide in Kyiv: a thin exhausted girl stands holding ears of wheat in her small hand.[3]

It is quite common for the Ukrainian commemorative tradition to use the image of a woman or a girl to embody the suffering of the whole nation. In academic and journalistic discourses, the horrors of hunger are often illustrated by eerie stories about women on the brink of desperation and images of exhausted women or girls.[4] Women are thus portrayed mostly as silent victims of tragic historical circumstances. But the actual history of the Holodomor includes numerous cases of active resistance to forced collectivization in which women played a crucial role. It was precisely because of the numeric predominance of women among the participants of some of those peasant revolts that they were called "*Bab'i bunty*" ("peasant women's protests") in official documents.[5]

But the story of Maria can also be read differently: even though the project has a clear commemorative intention, its female protagonist survived. For women and girls, survival in these inhuman conditions meant existential victory over the regime. Maria did not only manage to survive: she emigrated to Canada and built herself a new life there.

Collective traumas—wars, genocides, mass hunger—do not remain confined within the experience of the generation that endures these traumas directly. They

Lesia Maruschak, Four Fish To Sell (from the Project MARIA series), 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

transform and are transmitted—through oral stories, habits, and behaviors—to subsequent generations, who absorb them often without even realizing it. Marianne Hirsch calls this indirect traumatic memory "postmemory."[6] Traces of traumatic memory about the Holodomor are still present in everyday practices of my own generation, the third one since the originating event. These traces are the focus of a project I did with Andrii Dostliev called *I still feel sorry when I throw away food – Grandma used to tell me stories about the Holodomor*.

Traumatic traces of the Holodomor can be found in certain attitudes toward food in Ukraine, especially the strong reluctance to throw away even tiny scraps of food. Despite the fact that twenty-first century Ukrainians, even during the worst of times, have always had something to eat, throwing away food scraps still produces a strong feeling of shame and guilt.

To better analyze these feelings, for several months Andrii and I have kept a sort of a visual diary of wasted food. Before throwing out food scraps, we cover them with black ink and make a print on paper. We also write on the print the date, the type of food, and sometimes the reason why we threw the food away. Each of the prints also has a small piece of a landscape photograph, too small to identify the place. We added these to remind viewers that the Holodomor has left almost no trace on the landscape—unlike many collective traumas that have exact geographic locations and are present in the landscape in the form of "places of memory."

The title of the work is meant to emphasize that the transmission of this traumatic experience across generations is gendered. Older women traditionally looked after their grandchildren and were also responsible for feeding them. They shared their memories and helped

Lia Dostlieva and Andrii Dostliev, I still feel sorry when I throw away food – Grandma used to tell me stories about the Holodomor (Left: one big flaccid carrot, February 17, 2018; right: brown rice with sausage, March 3, 2018). Courtesy of the artists.

shape the food-related habits of their grandchildren—for example, by pressuring them to eat everything on their plate. Men spent less time with children and were also more reluctant to share their personal traumatic experiences. One reason for this may be that identification with the role of passive victim of a man-made famine does not fit into the traditional male image of a warrior and protector capable of bravely resisting any external circumstance.

Zhanna Kadyrova's project *Palianytsia* (made with Denis Ruban) refers to a new phase in the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine. The installation consists of stones that look very much like loaves of bread. "Palianytsia" is a Ukrainian word for traditional round wheat bread baked in an oven. The word is also a Ukrainian shibboleth, as only native Ukrainian speakers can pronounce every sound of the word correctly. (Even though a significant number of Ukrainians consider Russian their first language, any Russian-speaking Ukrainian would have no problems passing this test.)

When the full-scale Russian invasion started, this test became a quick and practical way to check who was a native Ukrainian and who wasn't: it was used to discover Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups who were trying to infiltrate Ukrainian cities in civilian clothes, pretending to be locals while gathering intelligence. It is also worth remembering that the so-called "language question" has for decades been instrumentalized by various political parties, and that one official justification for Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 was "the protection of the Russian-speaking population," even though it was often argued that in the Ukrainian context language cannot be used as a proxy for political views or pro-Russian identity.[7]

Palianytsia thus becomes a reference to notions of traditional culture and identity, but also to existing stereotypes. Ukraine is often called "the granary of Europe," which can be read both as an acknowledgment of the importance of this territory, and as a product of the colonial gaze that views these lands as a mere

Zhanna Kadyrova, Palianytsia, 2022. Fundraising project for Emergency in Ukraine; Castello 2145, Venice. Photograph: Natalka Diachenko.

resource—an endless field of grain. At the same time, the people who live here are often seen as nothing more than a service workforce devoid of their own agency and voice.[8]

It is important to note that these "bread loaves" were not handmade by the artists; the stones were found by Zhanna and Denis on a river bank in Transcarpathia while they were wondering around the village looking for a place to stay and work (after they had to move out of Kyiv at the start of the invasion). This natural origin of the loaves links the work to notions of nature and landscape. No human being—neither an artist, nor a baker—made this bread. It simply existed in a landscape and was recontextualized by an artistic gesture that transferred it to an exhibition space. Thus we encounter a stone bread loaf that resembles the real one and looks aesthetically pleasing but is impossible to consume. It appears to be made deliberately but in fact was simply found by a river.

No war, especially a modern one, can be understood only as violence committed by humans against each other. The category of the victims of war is wider, encompassing nonhumans as well—animals, plants, and nature as such, all interconnected and interdependent. The war should also be analyzed as environmental violence and ecocide.[9]

Here, food links war-afflicted humans and nonhumans in a system of mutual dependency. Let us recall a media story from the early days of the war. In a city recently occupied by the Russian army, a brave local woman who was talking to an armed Russian soldier offered him sunflower seeds: "Put sunflower seeds in your pocket so they grow when you die."[10] This gesture initiates a series of transformations: an offering of food instead of hospitality becomes a warning of impending death; food (sunflower seeds are a popular Ukrainian snack) becomes seeds that will return to the ground; and a conqueror becomes an integral part of the land he came to conquer.

But the story about Ukrainian seeds in Russian pockets has a darker dimension. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, there have been numerous reports from occupied regions about stolen or destroyed grain supplies. According to a report from a local administration, in Luhansk Oblast the Russians destroyed or stole three years worth of grain stocks.[11] In Melitopol (Zaporizhzhia Oblast), a witness recorded video of dozens of Russian trucks moving grain out of the city.[12] Similar videos have

also been recorded in other places in Zaporizhzhia Oblast[13] and in other regions. According to Ukrainian intelligence, stolen Ukrainian grain is being moved to Russia, occupied Crimea, and Syria.[14] Attempts have also been made to sell this grain to other countries.[15]

Commenting on one such video, Sergej Sumlenny noted that it had a "strong feeling of Holodomor."[16] Indeed, when comparing the two images below—one showing forced collectivization and grain expropriations in the 1930s, the other showing a town recently retaken from Russian forces—it is difficult to ignore the tragic similarity between the two events. History seems to be repeating itself.

Photograph published on Telegram on April 4, 2022. Post read: "Rashists [a pejorative term for Russian troops] stole grain from the people as they retreated. They cut the sacks and scattered them so that no one could get them. The descendants of those who organized the Holodomor in Ukraine have returned."

But it would be a great mistake to believe that this war is entirely local, purely a Ukrainian problem. Since the first days of the invasion, experts have been warning that the war in Ukraine could cause the kind of worldwide food crisis unseen since WWII, due to the disruption of global supply chains, especially grain exports.[17] They estimate that at least forty million people around the world will be pushed into extreme poverty, which will in turn cause a new worldwide wave of forced migration in regions that are remote from the conflict.[18]

And if this indeed happens, humanity will face a set of new challenges we cannot even imagine now.

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Translated from Ukrainian by Andrii Dostliev.

Lia Dostlieva is a visual artist and cultural anthropologist who works with notions of trauma, memory, identity, and vulnerable groups.

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Alix Guibert

We Will Lack Bread No Longer

There are three things that have long fascinated me about bread. Firstly: it is everywhere. Every place, every culture has its own bread, whether made from barley, rice, corn, spelt, rye, or teff, fermented or not, flat or leavened, brown, yellow, or white, often round, fried, boiled, or cooked in all kinds of ovens. Some breads taste slightly of ashes or oil, while others can be acidic or sweet. Sometimes bread is more than just the combination of flour and water; it might have sourdough, salt, sugar, or seeds. It has many names: *chapati*, injera, pita, tortilla, *baozi*, *ugali*, and many more. Many Western bread-lovers might contend that some of these examples shouldn't even be called "bread," but I take a more expansive view. For me, bread is what daily human meals have centered around since the species started to harvest cereals, the food that we carried with us when we were nomadic because it lasts for many weeks in a bundle.[1]

The second thing that comes to my mind when I think of bread is "company." *Con-panis*. With-bread. In its older usage, the word draws from *companio* in Latin, literally "one who eats bread with you."[2] If bread is essential to what humans eat, it thus sits at the center of social interactions. When we share it, with humans and nonhumans alike (think of your dog, or ducks at the park), it signals love, bonding, companionship. Making and eating bread is a collective human experience.

Lastly is the role that bread has played in social and political change. In Ancient Rome, emperors used *panem et cicenses* (bread and games) to keep the people happy and disciplined. Historically, so long as the otherwise exploited could put bread on the table, relative stability was ensured. But once the price of cereals rose, many took to the streets. This has of course continued to play out in more recent history. Examples include the Flour War (April–May 1775) in the lead-up to the French Revolution,[3] revolts across the entire Italian Peninsula following the 1869 grist (ground grain) tax,[4] or the post-2008 spike in grain prices at the dawn of the Arab Spring,[5] just to name a few. The increasing frequency of bread riots since the 1970s (Egypt in 1977, Tunisia in 1983–84, and Jordan in 1996) reveals the destruction to the global food system brought about by structural adjustment programs designed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In short, bread leads to revolution. There is much to be said about that historical correlation, but personally I'm more fascinated by the courage of people who defend their access to a good loaf. Because, as far as I'm concerned, access to a good loaf is essential to human dignity.

The Many Deaths of Artisanal Bread

I started making bread at home when my home was no longer France, in places where bakeries were overpriced and not that good. Later, when I lived at a squatted farm in

Joyful morning in Le Fournil des Buis. Courtesy of the author.

Tuscany, I began to bake artisanal bread to sell at markets of local producers. This is when I learned that sourdough is not all that complicated and that its active cultures—living beings—are what make it so alluring. I've slowly tamed bread and it's slowly taming me, just like Le Petit Prince tames the fox and vice versa: fully respecting what the other is, bonding anytime our paths cross, embracing the fact that neither of us will own the other. It's been a journey that has taken me across France to make, talk, and dream bread with many people. Observing the French and wider European contexts, I've found that the politics of bread is a proxy for talking about the broader dynamics and deficiencies of the current international food system.

Though the milling industry had already become big and powerful by then, after WWII in France (and elsewhere in Europe) the various links in the industrial chain came together to form a giant bread business. Along with implementing land reforms, the French state slowly limited the wide variety of available wheats to a selection of "modern" ones; the only varieties to be sold after 1949 were more resistant to lodging[6] and guaranteed high yields when spayed with the right pesticides and fertilizers. Modern wheats were also selected for their baking strength. The higher the strength, the more resistant the gluten is when it comes into contact with water, and thus the easier it is to make leavened bread.[7] Since kneading had come to be done by big machines instead of human hands, high baking strength was necessary for producing loaves attractive to consumers. But this came at a nutritional cost: bread rich in heavy indigestible gluten is one of the reasons for the development of ubiquitous gluten intolerance today.[8]

In the 1950s, French wheat fields expanded in size to produce the right raw materials for this new milling industry. In the mills, flours were (and still are) mixed and refined on a continuum from white to whole wheat, depending on the amount of bran left in the flour. The less bran, the poorer the flour is in fiber and minerals.[9] To compensate for the nutritional loss from the chemically induced whitening process, the milling industry started to enrich flours with nutritional supplements and all sort of

IBM gathering in Le Perche. Courtesy of the author.

"delicious," "healthy," chemically produced processing aids, which would become standard.[10] In fact, when bread first became a commodity, white bread was always trendier than browner bread.[11] It's a class thing: historically, white bread was traditionally for rich people because it was thought to demonstrate the "cleanliness" and "purity" of the flour.[12] This fallacy was reproduced with industrial bread production, and so shitty industrial white flour started to flood the market.

After the milling industry came the baking industry. In the postwar period, bread-making companies began to use a wide array of baking improvers while also over-kneading the dough to oxidize it so it would whiten further. In this situation, bread-making no longer depends on its environment: in dry or humid weather the recipe remains unchanged. Bread is no longer alive; it has become a machine, just like the baker.[13] In bread factories, flours only need two hours to become bread, rather than the typical twenty-four. Like most of the food we consume in the West, bread became rationalized. And hyper-leavened, innutritious, high-glycemic-index white bread took over supermarket shelves. Efficiency above all else, at the cost of quality, respect, and pleasure.

The bread industry could have continued in this direction and thrived. Instead, in a quintessential neoliberal move, it co-opted a smaller "mom-and-pop" industry, adding a new link to its corporate chain. It all began in 1998 when the French government passed the May 25 Law, probably under pressure from small bakers afraid of disappearing due to supermarket competition. The law established a strict definition for what it means to be an "artisan" baker. To claim this title, bakers have to perform the entire bread-making process from kneading to baking, using selected raw materials, at a brick and mortar establishment, and without in-process freezing. While the rest of Europe saw many of its traditional bakeries close in the face of aggressive supermarket chains, France sought to save its bakers, while also using the romantic image of the baguette (especially paired with French cheese and wine) to attract mass tourism. The campaign was successful on its surface, as 95 percent of French consumers now buy their bread from artisanal bakeries.[14]

Fred shaping the dough in La Fauchère. Courtesy of the author.

This would be a beautiful story about successful state intervention if, twenty-five years later, I could go the artisanal bakery around the corner and eat delicious, healthy bread. But, as is often the case with state intervention, the public was misled—including at least one disillusioned Australian blogger living in France.[15] The story of institutionalizing "artisan" bread production in France is really the story of corporate recuperation and consolidation. The food-processing giant Vivescia (3.1 billion euros total revenue in 2021) now controls much of the artisan-bread value chain; it owns the second largest grain cooperative in Europe, and its brand Francine is a huge player in the milling industry (covering 32 percent of all-purpose flour market in France in 2018). Since the May 25 Law, Vivescia has also absorbed fifteen thousand artisanal bakeries into its affiliate chain Campaillette, forcing subsidiaries to follow standardized recipes and to use Vivescia-produced ingredients, turning bakers into mere machines. In 2015, an amendment to the 1998 law guaranteed the production of unhealthy bread in artisanal bakeries by introducing the requirement that artisan bakers hold a special degree (Certificat d'Aptitude Profesionnelle, or CAP). This new requirement systematizes the learning of "traditional" bread making recipes that rely exclusively on chemical yeast and near-white flours. As a result, many artisan bakers wake up in the middle of the night to combine water and ready-made mixes, breathing in industrial flour and baking improvers that trigger asthma and pollute their lungs[16] —all to make second-rate bread that does nothing for the health of those who eat it.

Now there is a new player in the "artisan" bread game. Let's call it the "bobo" (bourgeois bohemian) baker: typically a former white-collar worker who left the corporate world in search of more meaningful work. Bobo bakers are behind the growth in organic sourdough bakeries. They are fond of greening capitalism but are sometimes blind to class and social struggle—which is one reason why they can sell a one-kilogram loaf for as much as fourteen euros in Paris. It is good bread made with good flour, and it tastes great if you can afford it. (Admittedly, this picture is a bit exaggerated—I unashamedly hold the greenwashed capitalist system

responsible for this situation, not the workers who comprise it, save for a few.) Some of these bobo bakers have themselves been exploited my even more aggressive and cynical bread entrepreneurs. Thomas Teffri-Chambelland is a major French bread star, praised for his skillfully marketed approach to sourdough bread. Knowing that some deserting white-collar workers are more than happy to spend a lot of money to make their bakery dreams come true, he opened the private Ecole Internationale de Boulangerie to train future top bobo bread bakers, charging "only" fourteen thousand euros for a four-month course.

Another lucrative branch of "eat-healthy" capitalism is the gluten-free bread industry. What's ironic about the gluten-free market is that it offers a solution to a problem created by food industrialization in the first place. As mentioned earlier, it is precisely the over-consumption of industrial bread (and other industrial products) that has created a huge population of people who are unable to digest it.

Bread Strikes Back

If you love bread but hate agribusiness and monoculturization, what are you to do? I started to find answers to this question when I got involved a year ago with a Francophone bakers' network called the Internationale Boulangère Mobilisée (Mobilized Bakers' International, IBM). It is not a collective; it does not have a common charter. I can only speak about my own understanding of us because this "us" is still in the making. IBM is composed of whoever wants to join—from those who bake at home, to mobile bakers with DIY wood-fired ovens, to semi-large-scale *paysannes-boulangères* (peasant bakers) who make bread from wheat they grow themselves and legally sell it. IBM gathers around an idea of bread made with sourdough and peasant-wheat flour,[17] by hand or with the help of small machines, baked in wood-fired ovens when possible (though we are looking for more ecologically friendly alternatives). We all believe that bread is political, though we may not all agree on the exact political form it takes. We all try to integrate bread into our lifestyle, work, and relationships, if in different ways. At its most basic IBM is a mailing list with about 250 subscribers, where we ask each other for help and share ideas. We sometimes meet in person for a couple of days in various places in France, to make bread or croissants together, exchange recipes, invite townspeople for pizza and performances, learn to weld or build a wood-fired oven, talk and write about bread politics, and build friendships and solidarity. IBM also runs the Ecole Boulangère Mobilisée, a self-managed school for those who wish to pass the CAP test to be an artisan baker in France without following the conventional curriculum.

In IBM, I have found the energy to expand the political horizons of my bread quest, because I am no longer alone. I have found a network of companions and deep relationships—friends to call and visit and make bread with. I have grown hopeful that the seemingly little things we do can become powerful when done together. I have learned that anyone anywhere can make good bread, for everyone and not just for those who can pay. I have realized that a political loaf always tastes good, always fills the stomach with good stuff, even if it sometimes looks flat or lacks the sheen of supermarket bread. This is not because breadmaking, collective or otherwise, is by itself going to change the contemporary food system, but because together we have the power to create imaginaries of work and relationships that do not conform to the dominant paradigm of production.

Recipe courtesy of Bertille Gatteau, 2022.

X

Alix Guibert is passionate about bread, olive oil, and the politics of food. She travels and experiments with collective lifestyles around France and Italy.

1
For most of this article, I will talk about bread common in the West: leavened bread, made mostly of wheat flour, that is said to have appeared in Ancient Egypt four millennia or so ago—even though some women somewhere earlier had surely experienced the chemical reaction of flour and water giving birth to yeasts and bacteria. See Ali Rebeihi, "Les plaisirs et bienfaits du pain," April 7, 2022, *France Inter*, podcast https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/grand-bien-vous-fasse/grand-bien-vous-fasse-du-jeudi-07-avril-2022 .

2
See https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/companio .

3
The title of this text is taken from Louis Blanc's *History of the French Revolution* , where he recounts the victory cry sung by people who captured the King, Queen, and their child: "We will lack bread no longer! We have brought back the baker (masculine), the baker (feminine), and the little baker." See https://www.histoire-en-citations.fr/citations/nous-ne-manquerons-plus-de-pain-nous-ramenons .

4
See Association Terracanto, "Le chant des grenouilles—1 chapitre," June 24, 2020, *Chant de la multitude* , podcast https://deezer.page.link/keB1NusaiWUZSRpY6 .

5
See Rami Zurayk, "Use Your Loaf: Why Food Prices Were Crucial in the Arab Spring," *The Guardian*, July 16, 2011 https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/jul/17/bread-food-arab-spring .

6
Lodging occurs when a vertically growing plant falls over, damaging the potential for growth. See http://wheatdoctor.org/lodging .

7
For more details, see https://naturalyeastsociety.com/blog/the-science-blog/flours-strength/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=flours-strength .

8
See Groupe Blé de l'ARDEAR AURA with Mathieu Brier, *Notre pain est politique* (Dernière Lettre Eds, 2019).

9
But bran also provides shelter for most of the pesticides and chemical inputs. Be wary of nonorganic whole wheat flour!

10
It's like any current food-processing method: the raw material is not used for its content, but for its role as pure matter. The industry needs wheat to turn into flour, but the process empties the wheat of its substance, so new substances need to be added. The same goes for cheap wine: harvested grapes can be green or moldy—it doesn't matter because the taste will be created chemically. As part of the current fad for healthy living, one finds many articles describing white flour processing and its consequences.

11
This trend has now completely reversed: a browner color now means healthy, more expensive bread.

12
Until the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for millers, retailers, or small merchants to add ashes or tiny rocks to flour, so it could be sold at a higher price.

13
Paraphrased from an artisan baker interviewed by Ali Rebeihi, "Les plaisirs et bienfaits du pain."

14
See https://www.mapa-assurances.fr/boulangerie/appellation-artisan-boulanger .

15
Wendy Hollands, "Artisan vs. Industrial Bakeries," *Le Franco Phoney* (blog), February 9, 2014 https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000740530/ .

16
See https://www.inrs.fr/media.html?refINRS=TR%2029 .

17
There is an quasi-political distinction between ancient wheat (*blé ancien*), which is most commonly used, and peasant wheat (*blé paysan*). The former implies a return to tradition, to a kind of lost Eden that never existed, and does not acknowledge the interaction between seeds and the peasants that sow and mix them, between seeds and the environment they naturally evolve in and with.

Left: The author sits with her amma in her parents' bedroom in Connecticut. Right: The author with her father's father in Nallur, Sri Lanka, June 1983. Photographs from author's family collection.

Mythri Jegathesan

Passing Blood, Consuming Memories: Making Fish Cutlets with Amma

> This is a story that either happened a long time ago, and has passed out of telling but not out of blood-memory, or will happen one day—in some way.
>
> —Sharanya Manivannan, "Sanguinary" in *Incantations over Water*[1]

Ink in the Fish

In the early hours of July 17, 2020, I had a dream I was cooking with my *amma* (Tamil for "mother"). We were together in my childhood home in Connecticut, making *meen* (fish) cutlets. Fish cutlets are a variation of *bolinho*, the deep-fried and breaded Portuguese fish-and-potato croquette. In Sri Lanka, *meen* cutlets fall into the culinary genre of "short-eats"— handheld bites prepared for entertaining guests or a quick snack on the road.

My amma has given me her *meen* cutlet recipe in person multiple times, and now once in a dream. I never wrote her directions down, but every telling remains sensorially clear. Each scene hosts an audience of unmeasured ingredients. Cloudy, unmarked plastic canisters of spices and leftover loose curry leaves watch for hands and tiny spoons. The potatoes wait to be diced and boiled. Then, they anticipate being mashed together with tinned mackerel in a mixing bowl and combined with finely chopped curry leaves and green chilies, and onion and mustard seed, cumin seed, lime juice, salt, black pepper, chili, and curry powder. In the foreground, a pile of Progresso Italian-style breadcrumbs is spread out over two layers of an old Tamil or English newspaper that my

Assembling ingredients, with measurements. Photograph by author.

appa (father) has long since finished reading. My amma, center stage, makes snarky, confident instructions in mixed Tamil and English. While she talks, my fingertips trace small inlets in the breadcrumbs.

As a child, I never thought twice about consuming the newspaper ink and wood-pulp fibers that bled into the cutlets' pre-fried insides and bristly, deep-fried outsides. Both pulp and ink were just two more ingredients in my childhood, unmeasured but always present. Newspapers accompanied food as intimately as the background noise of mourning and uncertainty filtered through my amma and appa's hushed tones and loud cries on telephone calls with loved ones back home. Between 1984 and 1996, none of us visited my parents' respective villages of Kalmunai and Nallur in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. The last time we traveled there as a family was in 1983, just before the anti-Tamil riots of July. From what my amma and appa tell me, I spent most of my days there that June running outside with other children, being chased by dogs in the garden, carried by doting aunts and uncles, and hand-fed by my ammamma (grandmother) or amma.

My first clear memories, back in Connecticut, are of my amma hoisting me up onto the countertop to watch her make cutlets. Later, as a six-, seven-, and eight-year-old, if I was lucky, I would be allowed to help her dip two or three of the small, molded balls of cooked fish and potatoes into a bowl of egg yolk to coat them, and then roll them gently over the small hills of breadcrumbs. She would place the raw, breaded cutlets onto a newspaper-lined plate, which she would then bring out to the back deck to fry.

The bubbling amber sea of vegetable oil in her outdoor Fry Daddy terrified me. From behind the armor of my amma's body, I would watch her gently submerge the cutlets with a slotted metal spatula. After easing them down, she would let the boiling liquid saturate their insides and turn their skins to a warm golden brown. After a minute or two she would retrieve them, one to three at a time, and place them on the newspaper, careful not to break their delicate molds.

At the Threshold

Watching my amma make *meen* cutlets—and eating them hot out of the fryer on our cold, Connecticut deck while the ink of Tamil and English scripts bled into their makings—formed my only childhood memories about a Sri Lanka marked by stability and constancy. From 1983 to 2009, the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fought battles over their competing, insatiable dreams of ethno-nationalist control. Their warring desires were unleashed at the expense of civilians, with the violence disproportionately devastating the lives of Sri Lanka's Tamil and Muslim minorities.

Four months into the Covid-19 pandemic, my elderly parents, both physicians, continued seeing patients. As more and more people around them died or fell sick, my anxiety about their exposure to the virus intensified. It was no surprise, then, that my amma and her cutlets visited me in my dreams that July. In my own home, three thousand miles away in Northern California, I had all of the ingredients, but no measurements. I decided to call my amma and ask her to recount the recipe once more. Only this time, I wrote it down.

Three and half months later, on October 29, my appa tested positive for Covid. My amma's positive test followed a day later. Appa's oxygen levels fell rapidly, and he was admitted to the hospital on day six with Stage 4

Molding and combining. Photograph by the author.

pneumonia and put on oxygen. Three decades earlier, he and my mother migrated to the United States to complete their medical residencies at the same hospital.

My amma, with only occasional wheezing and a loss of smell and taste, was home alone for the first time since she and my appa married. She lost her appetite and stopped drinking water and taking her daily vitamins and medications. I took a red-eye from San Francisco to Connecticut on day ten, and when I greeted my mother outside their house with my luggage in hand, she immediately told me to come inside and have a wash after the flight. I told her that I could not because she had Covid, and she became frustrated that I had even travelled to see her. In her words, "What is the point of you coming all the way here if you can't even come inside and eat?" I didn't have a good response. She was right; I felt inconsolably helpless. What good could I possibly do for her if I could not even enter her house to eat?

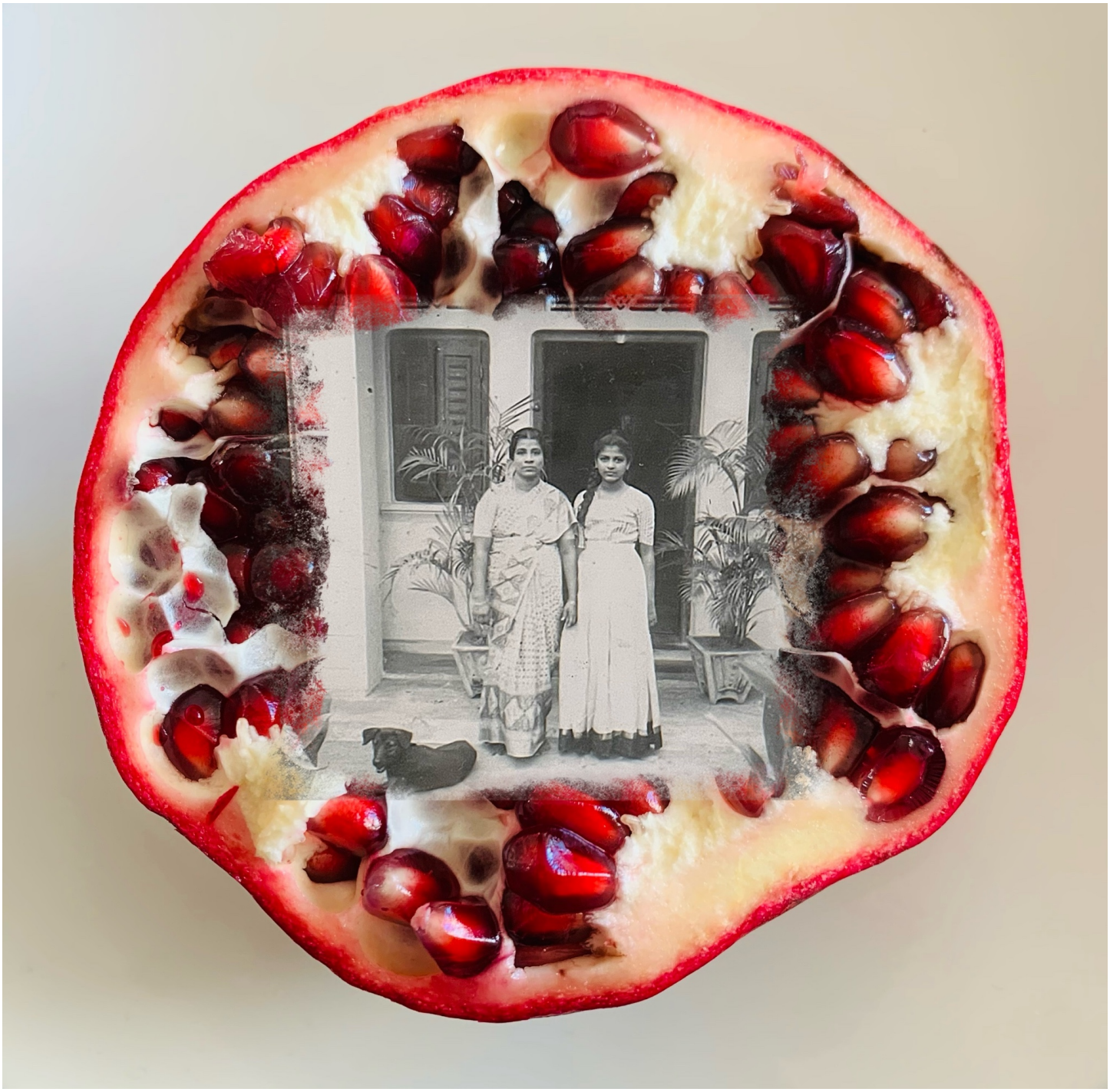
Eventually, because it was unseasonably warm for early November, she joined me on the deck and brought out some broken-up pomegranate, telling me that it was the only thing she felt like eating. I gave her some coconut water and told her that she needed to drink. We sat there in distant patches of the brisk sun, drinking coconut water and eating pomegranate seeds until she got tired and went inside to nap.

Later that week, when it was time for her to pick up my appa from the hospital, I followed her in a separate car only to watch her pull into the parking lot of a department store less than half a mile from the hospital. She could not remember how to get there. I got out of the car and told her that it was okay. She has not driven since. When I left Connecticut, she blew me a kiss from the threshold of the garage door and asked me if I was coming home for Christmas. I blew a kiss back to her and told her I would have to wait and see.

Blood-Memories

> Sometimes, after an intense event, we are temporarily given a glimpse into that which we do not yet know. Nothing of the calm that follows gives away the revelation that came, or the devastation that remained.
>
> —Sharanya Manivannan, "Marigram," in *Incantations over Water*[2]

When I found out I was pregnant a month and half after leaving Connecticut, I chose not to tell my amma, who was still recovering from her brain fog. Instead, I would talk to her about cooking and her childhood. I asked for her cutlet recipe again and again but did not mention that I could not eat tinned mackerel because of the mercury coursing through their bodies. She told me about her own amma's cutlets—about how, when she was thirteen years old, her mother taught her how to make them. If there were no breadcrumbs to buy in Kalmunai town, her mother would put out pieces of bread in the hot sun and dry them out, smashing them to a crisp. They cooked cutlets with fresh fish back then. Every day, her father would bring home fresh fish caught by fishers from Kalmunai Beach, about a mile or so from their house. Other days he would bring home *kanivai* (cuttlefish) and *nandu* (crab), and her mother would cook them for her and her older brothers. On weekends the children would walk their two dogs to



Bursting pomegranates in the sun. Author's mother with her own mother outside their home in Kalmunai. Photograph from the author's family collection. Estimated date: 1960–––64. Image compilation and back layer image by the author.

Kalmunai Beach. Other days, when not in school at Carmel Convent for girls, my mother would help her amma care for the baby chickens they were keeping in a small incubator on the dining room table: black, brown, white lagoons, and another variety called Plymouth, as my amma's elder brother would later fill in.

On December 22, 1964, when my mother was seventeen years old, a cyclone devastated Kalmunai, Batticaloa, Mannar, Trincomalee, and other coastal areas in the north and east of Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon. She recalled how the storm felled all the coconut trees along the water. With the groves downed, they could see the coastline clearly from a mile away. The stormwater had come up to the steps of their house, but not inside. In that sense they were spared, but so many neighbors in their town and in

nearby villages lost their lives and homes. Later, she would tell my niece and sister how her amma and appa had opened their home to those who had been displaced by the damage.

Like the tiles that flew off their roof that December, our winter 2020 conversations leapt across time, forming a never-ending ocean; I knew how to ask contributory streams of questions so that we could talk about anything except the changes in my body. The stories also went on because perhaps my amma was eager to respond—a steady and welcome distraction from confronting the changes in and lack of control of her own body.

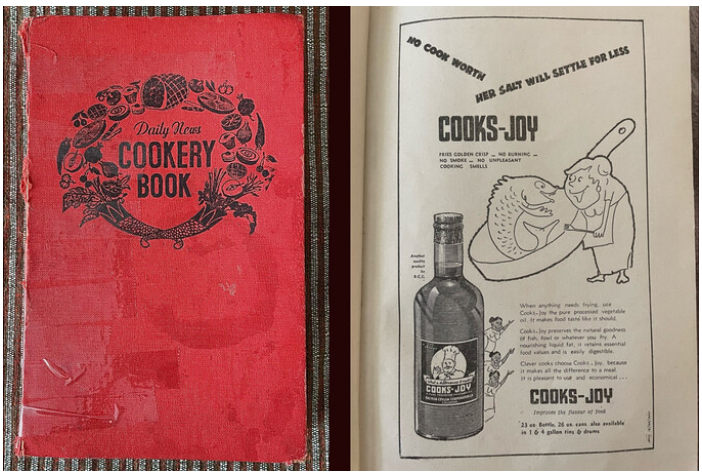
After seeing a heartbeat on a late January ultrasound two days after my fortieth birthday, I told my amma and appa that I was expecting. Two weeks later, on my amma's seventy-fourth birthday, it was confirmed that I was miscarrying. As I lay alone in the emergency room, bleeding on a different ultrasound table, I thought of how, when I was in grade school, I had lain next to my amma in bed as she recovered from her hysterectomy. She, like me now, had a uterus that was deemed myomatous. For years she had endured severe cramping and bleeding, and because she was done having children, her doctor recommended removing her uterus and the smooth tumors it held. The surgeon recorded the procedure and sent her home with a copy of it on VHS. Together, in her bedroom, we managed to watch it for a few minutes. It was the first time I had seen the insides of a body. But it would not be the last.

I also thought of a story that my mother had told me recently, in those months of brain fog before I learned that I was pregnant. She talked about the time she learned to cook *meen kuzhumbu* (fish curry) on her own. When she was a teenager, her amma had traveled alone from Kalmunai to Jaffna, in the north, to cook and care for her older sister and their family. Her sister was recovering from her own hysterectomy. Alone in the ER, I ached for my sister, with whom I share the diagnosis of living with endometriosis and the collective experience of four endometrial ablation surgeries. I thought, let this blood flow from my womb tonight. And take with it this unending devastation. But leave behind my blood-memories and bloodlines. In my sanguinary trauma, I did not know the future and the necessary bonds they would lead to. But somehow, I knew I would need them in the months to come. Two months later, I would make my amma's cutlets. Six months after that, I would make them again. Each time, they tasted more and more like the ones I had eaten as a child.

From Ink to Blood to Fish

> If we let go of the family tree and instead model relating on eating, being generative is not about having offspring, but about cultivating crops. If we do not focus on the companions with whom we sit around to table, but on to the foods that are on the table, we find that our love for them harbors violence, while our devouring may go together with gratitude. There is something complicated to do with how, in eating, individuals and collectives relate.
>
> —Annemarie Mol, *Eating in Theory*[3]

In July 2021, I returned to Connecticut to visit my amma and appa. There, she gave me her 1964, revised fifth-edition copy of the *[Ceylon] Daily News Cookery Book* edited by Hilda Deutrom. She brought the book with her to the United States when she left Sri Lanka in 1973 and had used it throughout our childhood to make us love cake, beetroot and spinach ribbon sandwiches, milk toffee, and caramel pudding. There are stains on its red cover and the binding was taped with eight clear pieces of cellotape. But the original bookmark—an ad for ""Housewife's Choice"" V.B.F." Pure Creamery Butter—somehow remains affixed within its seams. The first three advertisements in the edition are for gas cookers: "Gas is your reliable assistant, loyal friend, and faithful servant. Therefore, use gas." Towards the end of the book, I found another advertisement, for Cooks-Joy vegetable cooking oil: "No cook worth her salt will settle for less."



Amma's 1964 copy of the Daily News Cookery Book, and a back-page advertisement for vegetable cooking oil. Photograph by the author.

I have not made my amma's cutlets since September 2021. But I think about them often as the ink from my childhood continues to haunt my blood. Since 2019, Sri Lanka's president, Gotabaya Rajapakse, along with his now former prime minister brother, Mahinda Rajapakse (who also used to be president), have steeped the country's civilians in an unrecoverable economic crisis

through a series of longstanding policies and practices of militarization, ethno-nationalist violence, and corruption. Food prices have inflated to unmanageable heights, life-saving medicines and medical equipment are no longer available, and imported gas, diesel, and petrol for cooking, transportation, and daily life are docked on cargo ships off the island's coast. The goods remain unloaded; there are no dollars in the country to pay for them. Fishers, who would have caught the kind of fresh fish that my amma and her amma cooked at home, cannot go out to sea because there is no diesel for their trawlers.

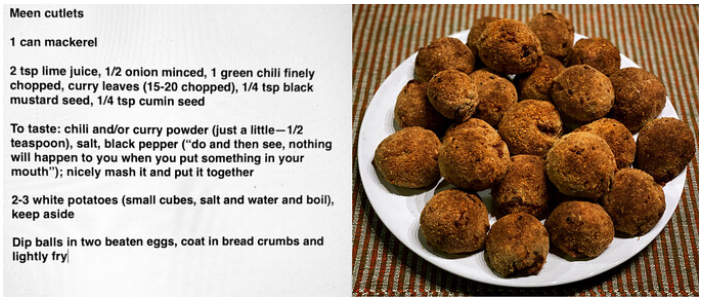
As of May 1, 2022, one kilogram of potatoes, which cost 140 Sri Lankan rupees ahead of the 2019 presidential elections, is now over 220 rupees. Tinned fish, once 231 rupees, costs 800 rupees. A cylinder of gas, once 1493 rupees, if even available, is 4,860 rupees.[4] Members of civil society have demanded the abolition of the executive presidency. But the recent reinstatement of majoritarian-appeasing prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, combined with continued assaults and arrests of protesters, have suggested that the worst is yet to come.

Ink in the fish. Image by the author.

In the opening pages of my amma's *Daily News Cookery Book*, I found the following inscription collected from a previous edition:

> Good cooks thrive best in the wholesome atmosphere of good homes. Conversely, domestic felicity is usually much beholden to a refined taste in what is crudely described as "feeding the brute" … A country's culinary prowess is often an index of its domestic well-being.

While I continue to long for the warmth and texture of her *meen* cutlets in my mouth, when there is no gas to heat them to a golden brown in Sri Lanka, when the politics of home dismembers the only molds of what I knew as stability and constancy, my hunger for blood-memories becomes too violent to stomach. Until then, I must assure myself that I and other daughters of mothers and



Left: Amma's recipe for meen cutlets, as told to the author in July 2020 on the telephone. Right: the finished "short-eat," slightly bursting and golden brown, in September 2021.

grandmothers in Sri Lanka will make fish cutlets again. For one another, and together, in and with the fish in the sea. Our makings will hold traces of ink and blood. But one day, it will happen. As my amma told me, "Do and then see. Nothing will happen to you when you put something in your mouth." We should settle for nothing less.

X

Mythri Jegathesan is a cultural anthropologist whose research explores questions of the politics of home, labor, kinship, and the plantation. She is the author of *Tea and Solidarity: Tamil Women and Work in Postwar Sri Lanka* (University of Washington Press, 2019) and her work has appeared in the Colomboscope interdisciplinary arts festival and *Scroll: Projects on Paper*.

1
Sharanya Manivannan, *Incantations over Water* (Westland Publications, 2021), 113.

2
Manivannan, *Incantations over Water* , 57.

3
Annemarie Mol, *Eating in Theory* (Duke University Press, 2021), 125.

4
Nadia Fazlulhaq, "People Fed Up as Essential Food Items Soar in Price by 200–500 percent," *The S unday Times* , May 1, 2022 https://www.sundaytimes.lk/220501/news/people-fed-up-as-essential-food-items-soar-in-price-by-200-500-percent-481360.html .

Ou Ning

The Agrarian Mind

Twenty-five million people recently went hungry in China's most economically developed city. No one could have imagined this happening in Shanghai, where per capita disposable income is the highest in the entire country. The reason wasn't insufficient food supply, but the city's lockdown, which started on March 28. More than preventing the spread of Omicron, China's zero-Covid strategy has been all about political display. Nongovernment elements in society are suppressed, while only the omnipresent government is allowed to act. Initially, residents confined to their homes scrambled to order food via mobile apps, while also relying on government rations. The problems began when market channels closed due to "uncontrollable" and "unsafe" deliveries, shifting food distribution entirely to the government's domain. Although the grid-management systems of Chinese cities penetrate the "capillaries" of every street and every community, it is obviously insufficient to rely on a limited number of grid managers and volunteers for large-scale food distribution. Mountains of donated food piled up without reaching residents. Under the power of the omnipresent government, residents couldn't save themselves, let alone react autonomously. At most, they could bang pots and pans from their windows in protest. With an abundance at the supply end, food was scarce at the distribution end. This is what a food crisis in an affluent society looks like.

In 1930, there was a "famine in a good year" (豐年饑饉) in Japan as well. The Great Depression in the US weakened the international raw silk market, while a rich harvest caused a decline in domestic rice prices in Japan. Coupled with the Japanese government's deflationary policy, purchasing power in rural areas dropped sharply, resulting in a large-scale famine now known as the Shōwa Food Crisis. If the famine in Japan was due to the collapse of an international market, impacting the country's export-oriented agriculture, then the food crisis in Shanghai today is the result of an internal policy that tries to separate China from the global community. Even though Omicron is no longer listed as a serious Covid variant in most countries, China continues its tight "circuit-breaker" policy on international flights, clinging to the strict zero-Covid strategy used in Wuhan in 2020 and shutting down Shanghai regardless of the damage to its economy and people. In Shanghai this spring, the most primitive form of politics was at stake: food distribution.

In essence, politics is the distribution of human survival resources. Why has land ownership become the basic yardstick for defining various political systems? Precisely because all the resources that humans depend on for living, producing, and harnessing food and energy are attached to the land. Politics itself originates in the need to control scarce resources, yet politics also relies on that scarcity. When a society develops to a certain level, new technologies liberate its productive forces, introducing a degree of abundance, thus reducing scarcity. This allows market circulation to be gradually decentralized,

Government food rations sent out by local officials to alleviate food shortages consisted largely of counterfeit products. Yuan Wei, Untitled, 2022, Shanghai.

weakening the need for political controls on scarcity. In order to maintain power, governing forces will then need to produce scarcity. The food crisis in Shanghai is not the result of any shortage in production or supply; it is the result of a political intervention. If citizens resist, the situation risks turning into a political crisis. When food is abundant—when anyone with the means can eat at a restaurant or buy food from a supermarket—you have the freedom to cook an exotic recipe or read Isabelle Allende's book on food and sex, *Aphrodite*. But when there is no food to fill your stomach, even a common green onion exposes its cruel political nature.

Food is an absolute necessity for people, and food is power. This power runs through the entire process of food's production, distribution, and consumption. Shanghai is an abnormal example of panicked food rationing causing people to feel thrown back from the free market to a planned economy. But the free market is not a paradise where everyone can independently decide the terms of production and consumption, since the market also pursues scarcity. The needs of the market drive capital to demand that certain agricultural regions grow monoculture crops, depriving such regions of their food sovereignty and destroying their ecology. As a consumer, if you don't cultivate or forage your own food or participate in any food production, the meals on your table will always be limited by market supply.

That's why Michael Pollan, despite the abundance of "organic" ingredients available from Whole Foods or small family farms, still prefers the wild boar he personally hunted, the chanterelles he foraged after a forest fire, and the abalone he caught along a Bay Area seashore.[1] Similarly, some Shanghai residents, when their fridges are empty, forage plants from nearby green areas to fill their stomachs. As urban dwellers, they must dream of having their own farmland and grain storage, like peasants in the

countryside, so that they can secure "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" during the lockdown period.[2]

To cope with food problems during the Covid pandemic, community refrigerators appeared in New York and other cities as a way to share food beyond government distribution and market trade. Also called "freedges," and placed in public spaces so that community member can take or leave food, these fridges function less like charity (which only gives) and more like mutual aid, emphasizing participation and sharing. They are close in spirit to the Cincinnati Time Store, founded by nineteenth-century anarchist Josiah Warren. The Time Store used "time currency" instead of dollars to measure labor hours and encourage mutual aid through the direct exchange of labor and food. It is only during a crisis that people remember the teachings of long-neglected agrarians and realize that food and agriculture are the foundation of human life. For this reason, some organizers also see the freedges as a form of education, viewing their long-term operation in the community as a process of engagement and empowerment.[3]

People in big cities like Shanghai and New York should always maintain an agrarian mind. They are part of dense nonagricultural populations that are completely dependent on external sources for food. Urban people usually work in offices and steer clear of farming, thinking they can buy good food by spending money. They have little interest in how food grows from the land, how it is harvested, how it enters the market, or how agriculture promotes sustainable development in the natural environment and in human society. Urban people love cooking and know how to eat healthily and safely, but they often don't realize how food can break through mental barriers, unite families and communities, and activate a sense of place. Living peacefully amidst abundant resources, one doesn't learn how to save and store food to protect from the possibility of shortages. Social unrest and political crisis caused by hunger may even appear remote and irrelevant. But today, the Covid pandemic is awakening people to the reality around them.

Historically, China was always a predominantly agrarian country whose rulers regarded agriculture as the cornerstone of social stability. Many dynasties collapsed due to agricultural failures, famines, climate extremes, and epidemics, which triggered peasant uprisings. Confucian ideology learned this lesson and attached great importance to agriculture and food. The political power of China's rulers was rooted in agricultural settlements, and this power was bolstered by a strict hierarchical system of Confucian household registration and taxation. It was not until the successive failures of the Opium Wars and the first Sino-Japanese War that the Qing Dynasty began to develop industry by learning from the West. In the premodern world, agrarianism was popular in many countries and regions, but with the spread of industrialization and urbanization since Britain's Industrial Revolution, agrarian thinking has become increasingly marginalized.

After the Communist Party seized power in 1949, China's industrialization became even more fanatical. Rural grain was forcibly collected and exported to the Soviet Union in exchange for technical support for industrialization. The Great Leap Forward caused the Great Famine, which lasted from 1958 to 1962. The Household Responsibility System (家庭聯產承包責任制) in 1978 and the end of the People's Communes (人民公社) in 1980 brought a brief period of vitality to agriculture, but subsequent urbanization transformed much farmland into industrial and real estate land, turning farmers into migrant workers bound for the city. Although the Communist Party understands that the Three Rural Issues (三農問題, agriculture, rural areas, and farmers) are critical to its political power—hence policies like Building a New Socialist Countryside (建設社會主義新農村) and Poverty Alleviation (扶貧), which aim to heal the wounds caused by the urbanization of farmers—a huge gap remains between urban and rural areas. With China's grain reserves guaranteed through a combination of domestic industrial agriculture and international imports, no one in a city like Shanghai should go hungry under normal conditions. The present situation is actually a psychiatric illness of the political organism under the effects of Covid.

It was not actually the Confucians who first attached importance to agriculture in China. They were preceded by a little-known agrarian philosophy called Nongjia, which emerged from the Hundred Schools of Thought (諸子百家) during the Warring States Period (475–221 BC). Nongjia (農家, "School of the Tillers") philosophers did not leave any original texts, and their thoughts can only be glimpsed from biased comments written by the Confucian Ban Gu (班固):

> The first Nongjia may have been agriculture officials who grew different kinds of grain and encouraged people to till land and plant mulberry trees to produce enough food and clothing. Food is so important that it ranks first among the eight major areas of a state's policy, followed by property. The merit of early Nongjia was their emphasis on food production, which Confucius said should be a priority for any ruler. However, their vulgar successors, who believe that a saint-king in the Confucian sense would be useless, attempt to disrupt the social hierarchy by calling on rulers to plough alongside their people.[4]

This representative of Nongjia was Xu Xing (許行), whose sporadic remarks were recorded in the chapter "Duke Wen of Teng" in *Mencius*. The biggest difference between Xu Xing's agrarianism and Confucianism is that he advocates that "a Sage should cultivate and eat

together with the people (賢者與民並耕而食)," taking as a model the legendary Shennong (神農), who first discovered herbs and taught Chinese people to cultivate. Xu Xing insisted that everyone, whether king or civilian, regardless of wealth, should cultivate and eat together—a notion of equality that David Graeber has identified with early anarchism.[5] In order to refute Xu Xing, Mencius made his famous assertion that mental laborers govern, while manual laborers are governed.

Even in the premodern period, when agrarianism was popular, Xu Xing's thought was hard to accept for monarchs, let alone today's rulers. However, Nongjia's original intention was not to provide a grand political framework but rather a simple way of life with no need for a monarch. While Confucius praised Nongjia's emphasis on food production, he never agreed with the disintegration of political hierarchy. Confucius and Mencius are both worshipped by Chinese people across generations, but few know about Xu Xing. In Japan—also an agrarian country deeply influenced by Confucianism—another agrarian thinker named Andō Shōeki (安藤昌益，1703–1762) in the Edo period dared to accuse the Confucian saints of "not ploughing but being greedy (不耕貪食)." He read Chinese classics well, but gradually became a fanatical opponent of these classics. He regarded "mental laborers" as lazy parasites, and the books of the Confucian saints as the root of social conflict because they justified evil laws and promoted self-interest. After more than two thousand years, Shōeki's harsh criticism of the Confucian saints resonated with Xu Xing.

Shōeki was originally a doctor. In his time, Japan's population grew rapidly and rice farming was more widely adopted. However, due to the huge demand for soybeans in both Japan and China, the Shogunate encouraged the northeast region where Shōeki lived to start burning wilderness to plant soybeans. Due to the poor fertility of the soil, the burned land needed to lie fallow, which attracted wild boars, who then ate all the surrounding crops, resulting in the Wild Boar Famine (豬饑饉) of 1749, when over three thousand people died. This made Shōeki so resentful of the Shogunate's greed and ignorance that he stopped his work as a healer and became a utopian dreamer who criticized the times and sought to improve society, developing his grand theory *Shizen shin'eidō* (自然真營道，"The True Way of Administering According to Nature").

As his philosophical foundation, Shōeki put forward the dialectic of the "Subtle Way of the Mutualization of Natures (互性妙道)," which outlined the relationship between all things that are interdependent and mutually transforming.[6] He then named the world dominated by politics and law the "World of Law (法世)", and the world where everything runs itself the "World of Self-Acting (自然世)." Regarding the former as a thieving and violent world, Shōeki's ideal was to transform human society from the World of Law to the World of Self-Acting. To realize this ideal, Shōeki said that a "Right Man (正人)," a messiah-like figure, needed to educate the people in "Right Cultivation (直耕)," i.e., direct participation in agricultural labor and farming management, according to the principles of the "Mutualization of Natures." Farming season should be arranged according to the "five permanent features of nature" (自然五常): occurrence, prosperity, harvest, storage, and achievement. To avoid disasters like the Wild Boar Famine, it is also necessary to respect the principle that species, land, and climate are interdependent.

Shōeki's World of Self-Acting is very close to the ideas of the eighteenth-century French physiocrats, who believed that government policy should not interfere with natural economic laws, and that land is the source of all wealth. The World of Self-Acting and Right Cultivation are essentially the same as modern permaculture theory, which advocates maintaining a virtuous-circle ecosystem and realizing sustainable agricultural development through a minimum of human intervention and a maximum of natural processes. This principle is also applicable to the management of human society.

From eighteenth-century Japan, Shōeki foreshadowed many influential ideas that followed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His magnificent 101-volume book *Shizen shin'eidō* was accidentally discovered in an old bookstore in 1899 by Kano Kōkichi (狩野亨吉), who marveled that Shōeki "may be the only great thinker in Japan who we can boast about to the world." Due to Shōeki's concepts "figurehead monarch" (虛君), "millions of people are one person" (萬萬人為一人), and "man and woman are one person (男女一人)," in 1908 the daily newspaper *Heimin Shinbun* (平民新聞，Commoner's News)—founded by Japanese socialist and anarchist Kōtoku Shūsui (幸德秋水)—said Shōeki was "an anarchist 150 years ago." Right Cultivation can be understood as similar to the Tolstoyan movement; it is also very close to Mao Zedong's anti-Confucianism. *Shizen shin'eidō* is a deep well of ideas that allows future generations to take what they need. Dialectics, materialism, Marxism, communism, anarchism, utopianism, agrarianism, deep ecology, anti-capitalism, anti-globalization—philosophies and movements of all kinds can find their own sources in it.

In America, Thomas Jefferson was an important voice for agrarianism. He once advocated that the US should take small farms as its economic base and let "the work-shops remain in Europe."[7] Unfortunately, history did not follow his wishes. In 1930, "Twelve Southerners" published *I'll Take My Stand* to promote the agrarian tradition in the South, but they were criticized as conservatives praising the old days and ignoring progress.[8] Even their spiritual leader, John Crowe Ransom, eventually stopped believing in the possibility or desirability of an agrarian restoration, declaring it a "fantasy."[9] However, with the back-to-the-land movement in the 1960s and '70s, many

The first page of the "Great Introduction" to Shizen shin'eidō (The True Way of Administering According to Nature) by Andō Shōeki, 1753. Photo by the General Library of the University of Tokyo.

hippies left cities to build their own houses, cultivate land for self-sufficiency, and establish intentional communities. By regarding themselves as part of nature rather than its conquerors, they demonstrated Andō Shōeki's *Shizen shin'eidō* on the scale of small communities.

By the 1990s, agrarianism no longer assumed the scale it had with the hippies, but people did begin "urban farming" and planting vegetables on their balconies. Teachers in schools also became interested in "agricultural literacy," as seen in initiatives like Edible Schoolyards. "Locavores" became all the rage. More importantly, contemporary agrarian thinkers like Wendell Berry revived the forgotten ideas of Thomas Jefferson and the Twelve Southerners. Berry lives on a farm near the small Kentucky town of Port Royal, where he says to his visitors, "One of my ambitions, perhaps my governing ambition, was to belong fully to this place, to belong as the thrushes and the herons and the muskrats belonged, to be altogether at home here."[10] From this rooted place, he farms, writes, and participates in broader debates and protests on environmental, ecological, agricultural, and community issues. Only by becoming "altogether at home" can we understand the value of land, farm, and home itself.

Berry writes: "The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life. Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life."[11] When reading this, I think of the people of Shanghai under lockdown and wish they could have their own plot of soil to farm in such a difficult time. Maybe the harvest won't come in time to alleviate their immediate hunger, but at least the *Mycobacterium vaccae* in the soil will stimulate the serotonin in their brains to bring pleasure and fight depression.[12] As farmers say, farming is the hope!

X

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1
Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin, 2006).

2
Quoted from US president Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech (State of the Union address, 1941).

3
"One Love Community Fridge works to empower and engage the community through education and by providing access to healthy fruits and vegetables." *One Love Community Paper* , no.1 (Winter 2022).

4
Ban Gu, "Treatise on Literature," in the *Book of Han* (《漢書·藝文誌》), Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD).

5
"In China, while many of the founders of the 'hundred schools' of philosophy that blossomed under the Warring States were wandering sages who spent their days moving from city to city trying to catch the ears of princes, others were leaders of social movements from the very start. Some of these movements didn't even have leaders, like the School of the Tillers, an anarchist movement of peasant intellectuals who set out to create egalitarian communities in the cracks and fissures between states." David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Melville House, 2012), 237.

6
All of Shōeki's terms come from his book *Shizen shin'eidō*, which he originally wrote in variant Chinese. The manuscript is now in the collected works of the General Library of the University of Tokyo. The English translations here are quoted from Toshinobu Yasunaga, *Andō Shōeki: Social and Ecological Philosopher in Eighteenth-Century Japan* (Weather Hill, 1992).

7
Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Penguin, 1999), 18.

8
Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

9
John Crowe Ransom, "Art and the Human Economy," *Kenyon Review* , no. 7 (1945): 686.

10
Quoted in Erik Reece, "Wendell Berry's Wild Spirit," *Garden and Gun* , August–September, 2011 https://gardenandgun.com/feature/wendell-berrys-wild-spirit/ .

11
Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (Counterpoint, 2015), 70.

12
According to research by Dorothy Matthews, Department of Biology, Sage Colleges, Troy, New York https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23454729/ .

Enrique Del Risco

A Turntable

As soon as I started working, I would buy myself a turntable. I was set on it. Not right away, of course. With my first paycheck as a recent university graduate, I would treat my parents to eat at our family's favorite restaurant. But if I saved a quarter of my following three monthly paychecks of 198 pesos, by the beginning of the following year, one of those turntables from the German Democratic Republic that had spent decades accumulating dust in the capital's stores would, at last, be mine. It didn't matter to me that humanity was moving on, en masse, to the crystalline sounds of CDs, or that, months before, the Berlin Wall had fallen. CDs were still an urban Cuban legend, and of the clamorous falling of that wall, only a vague buzz reached Cuba, a place that was more of an island than ever in those days. My dream of at last having a device that would play back any music I wanted seemed viable. Although not quite. I wasn't going to listen to *any* music I wanted. If anything, maybe a few domestically produced records as dusty as the turntable I planned to buy myself and some classical music sold at the Czechoslovakian House of Culture, an institution that was increasingly becoming a relic of the past. A past in which expressions like "Soviet sphere" and "Soviet bloc" made sense.

However, and without any effort on my part, my seemingly modest ambition turned into an unattainable utopia. Then, it turned into nothing at all. But at least, after my first month of working at the cemetery, I was able to invite my parents to eat at El Conejito. It was the night of October 9, 1990. I remember because, as we were settling in at the restaurant, Cleo mentioned that it was John Lennon's birthday. That night, I was unaware that the country that manufactured my beloved turntable had disappeared just days before into a union with its former rival, the Federal Republic of Germany. Nor did I know that it would be the last time I would eat at that restaurant. Or that soon enough, even the very notion of a restaurant would enter a phase of extinction. I, who thought that with that dinner I was celebrating my debut as an employed person, was actually bidding goodbye to the world as I had known it until then.

For our family, that dinner was the end of the world that had been socialist prosperity, an oxymoron that was made up of nearly endless lines for nearly everything, horrible public transport, and the forced ascetism of the ration card. A prosperity in which meat, seafood, and beer were absolute luxuries, but in which at least rum and cigarettes were plentiful. A world in which anything relating to food services was a sadistic enterprise and bureaucracy was Kafkaesque to such a degree as to infuse this writer's works with new meaning. A choreographed poverty for which we would soon develop a fierce nostalgia.

The following months would be ones of a prodigious quantity of disappearances. First, the rum and cigarettes disappeared. The rum disappeared from lunch counters, leaving the bottles of Soviet vodka at the mercy of the

Mother's Day with my family, Santiago de las Vegas, 1995. Image courtesy of the author.

boozers who had not noticed them until then. Later, vodka also disappeared. Not food. Food had disappeared from lunch counters ever since the 1970s: what it did was reappear intermittently, more or less. Until, at a moment that was difficult to pinpoint, that intermittence also disappeared. Something similar happened to toilet paper: after having an evasive relationship with our asses for years, it came to be definitively replaced by newspaper. (Some, with a more vengeful streak, recurred to the pages of the Socialist Constitution, of the *Programmatic Platform of the Cuban Communist Party*, or of the complete works of Marx, Engel, and Lenin printed by the Soviet publishing house Progreso on pleasant Bible paper).

Not long after, public transport would disappear almost entirely. The buses that used to come every half hour started to come every three or four hours. Many of the bus routes disappeared without a trace.

Porch lights also disappeared.

As well as any outdoor furniture.

And cats.

And fat people.

Cats because they were hunted and eaten. And fat people because they didn't eat enough. All that remained of the obese of yesteryear were pictures in black and white, framed in living rooms alongside those who sat, unrecognizable, with their skin hanging off of their arms, evoking what they now viewed as their good times.

Not everything was about disappearances.

Some things actually appeared and others reappeared after not having been seen for a long time, almost all of them meant to substitute for the absence of food and transport. Or cigarettes and alcohol.

There's nothing like a good crisis to turn alcohol into an essential item.

A good deal of the food, public transport, and alcohol substitutes were provided by the government itself to ease a crisis that it insisted on calling the Special Period.

Novelties such as:

–Soy *picadillo*

–(Hot) dogs without casing

–Goose paste

–Texturized *picadillo*

And, of course, bicycles.

The bicycles were not to be eaten. They were meant to substitute for public transport. The dogs, *picadillo*, and paste were equally unpalatable, but were aimed at substituting for food. (Don't let yourself be fooled by names that had little to do with what they represented. Just as our stomachs were not fooled when they tried to process these dishes.)

The following also appeared:

–Rum in bulk

–Orange sparkling wine

–Yellows

–Camels

(Yellows were government employees who, posted at bus stops and strategic points around the cities and highways, were authorized to stop public or private vehicles and jam into them as many passengers as possible. Camels were enormous trucks poorly retrofitted for passenger transport, to the extent that the passengers came out transformed into something completely different. It's no wonder that the camels were nicknamed "the Saturday night movie" due to the sex, violence, and adult language that took place on them.)

Between reappearances, there was an incredible uptick in the production of home-produced alcohols. And of the names to designate these: "train spark," "tiger bone," "time to sleep, my boy," "man and earth," " *azuquín*," and others that were even more untranslatable into any known language.

Pigs became domestic animals: they would grow alongside the family and sleep in the bath tub to be devoured or sold as soon as they had gained sufficient weight.

If they weren't stolen first.

Rarely-heard-of illnesses appeared, the natural offspring of poor nutrition. A result of poor hygiene and lack of vitamins.

(Because soaps and detergent—I forgot to say—were also among the first casualties.)

Illnesses that resulted in disabilities, blindness, or, if not treated in time, death.

Epidemics of polyneuritis, of optic neuropathy, of beriberi, of suicides.

Suicides not just of people. In those days, I recall seeing more dogs run over in the streets than ever and I supposed that they, too, tired of living. Or that the drivers tired of swerving around them.

Everything else was shrinking. The food rations that the government sold monthly, the hours of the day with electric power, the gas flame on the burner. Life.

The monthly ration of eggs was reduced to the extent that eggs ended up being nicknamed "cosmonauts" because of the countdown: "8, 7, 6, 5, 4." I remember that at some point, the personal ration was reduced to just three eggs per month. After that, I don't remember anything.

Bread also shrunk until it was nothing more than a portion that fit in the palm of your hand and, as a result of its obvious lack of basic ingredients, it turned out to be difficult to keep from crumbling between your fingers before you got home. (Paper bags had also disappeared and the plastic kind had always been a privilege reserved for foreigners, so the carriage of bread was inevitably done manually.) But not even the miserable and shrinking condition of those breads protected them against our hunger.

The struggle for our daily bread became a literal one: one day, while visiting the home of a fairly successful actor, I found myself in the crossfire between the actor and his teenaged son, whom the former was reprimanding, after the latter had consumed the bread belonging to them both, before trying to scarf down his mother's piece.

The only thing that remained unchanged was official discourse. With "official discourse," I am not referring to the "tendencies of elaboration of a message though expressive means and diverse strategies." I'm talking about the more concrete definition of "a series of words or phrases employed to manifest what one is thinking or feeling." Or, more precisely, what the country's *máximo líder* thought and said, which was equivalent to what the country itself thought and said. Words and phrases that unfurled for hours in order to say the same thing over and over again: how willing we were to defend the conquests of the Revolution and how poorly it would go for us if it occurred to us to change our political regime Or how poorly it was going for the world when compared to us. Or how well we were doing if we compared ourselves with everyone else. I don't remember them exactly nor do I have any desire to reread those speeches.

Said speeches also insisted on the irreversibility of our decision to build socialism, taken long before we had been

Commemorating the thirteenth anniversary of John Lennon's death at Lennon Park, Havana, December 8, 1993. (It's funny because at the time of Lennon's death, his music was censored in Cuba, but years later Lennon homages became official.) Image courtesy of the author.

born.

It was becoming clear to us that capitalism was built at the slightest neglect, while socialism required decades of incessant labor and we still couldn't see whether we'd be able to put a roof on it.

Ours was open-air socialism.

Print media and television imitated official discourse in not letting on that there were any changes happening in our European sister socialist republics: the same triumphalist discourse about local advances in the building of socialism, the same quantities of overachievement, the same exuberant potato harvests that you couldn't find anywhere later. That media did not outright announce the fall of the Berlin Wall. Or the execution of Nicolae Ceauşescu. Or the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

The events that were inconvenient to official discourse were either ignored or communicated in a way that differed as much with the reality as our homemade moonshine did with industrial alcoholic beverages.

In all those years, I did not hear the official media pronounce the word "hunger" except for in reference to another country. In those years, our misery did not receive any other name besides Special Period, a phenomenon that had its origins in "difficulties known to all."

It was in those years that I was young, a recent graduate, happy.

I was lucky. Others were in the roles of mothers and fathers overwhelmed by the task of feeding their children without having any available food. Forced to make an omelet out of a solitary egg for four, five, ten people. Forced to prostitute themselves so their children could wear clothes. Forced to steal so their grandparents would not die of hunger.

Because there were those who died of hunger. Many.

With the other curators of the exhibition “Del Bobo un pelo,” after being informed that the exhibition had been cancelled by the government, Old Havana, 1992. Image courtesy of the author.

They were not reported as such. Somebody was reduced to nothing more than skin and bones and then a simple cold, a heart attack, a stroke finished him off. Or he committed suicide. Or he jumped on a balsa raft, which was another form of suicide. A hopeful suicide. Because if you got to Florida or some American boat picked you up along the way, you were saved. Back then, we called that “going to a better place.” Leaving the country, I mean. Traversing over ninety miles in those contraptions made of wood, nets, ropes, and truck tires across a rough sea, brimming with sharks, has always been something akin to a miracle. Even if we distribute the possibilities of death and escape evenly, it is a shuddersome prospect.

From 1990 to 1995, at least forty-five thousand Cubans arrived in the United States via balsa rafts.

You do the math.

And there are others, the ones who died in their homes of some illness that was hurried along by hunger.

Of those deaths, no one has reliable numbers. Nevertheless, this might give you an idea: in 1990, the average number of burials in Havana’s main cemetery fluctuated between forty and fifty daily. Forty on weekdays, fifty on Saturdays and Sundays. I know because I worked there. I left and when I returned, three years later, the sum had doubled: eighty burials from Monday to Friday and one hundred on weekends.

You do the math.

In the middle of that silent massacre, I treated myself to

Later on in the day of the exhibition "Del Bobo un pelo." On the other side of the little Cuban flags were printed the exhibition's credits. Image courtesy of the author.

many luxuries. The luxury of going to the movies, of reading, of going to see friends and having them over, of continuing to write. The luxury of being haughtily irresponsible, of being happy in the midst of that atrocious hunger that invaded everything and made people pass out at bus stops or in the waiting room of any medical clinic.

That didn't save me from going to bed hungry. Or from waking up hungry. From having a glass of powdered milk for breakfast and half of the infinitesimal piece of bread Cleo shared with me. From putting a bit of rice and soy *picadillo* or fish croquettes in a plastic container as my lunch (please don't take the names we gave our meals too literally: we used them out of habit, so that we could deceive our hunger in the most effective way possible). Then, from biking over to the cemetery. Yes, throughout a large part of my last Cuban years, I pretended to be the historian for the city's main cemetery. Fifty-five hectares covered in crosses and marble. Or, what amounts to the same thing: fifty-five hectares of hunger surrounded by hunger on all sides.

Because even in the very center of the city, in an area surrounded by lunch counters, restaurants, pizzerias, and ice cream shops, everything was closed due to a lack of food.

In times of absolute state control over the economy, the equation was simple: if the state didn't have anything to sell, then there was nothing to buy.

And if they suddenly sold some cold cut with a dreadful appearance, you would have to spend three or four hours in line to buy it.

That was why I had to abide by whatever I carried in that little plastic container and wolf it down before the savage heat of the tropics turned it into a slimy, foul paste. Savor it

down to the last crumb because there would be nothing else to eat until I returned home, at five in the afternoon, on my bicycle.

Or not. Because at home I wouldn't find much, either. Rice, some vegetable, and later a brew of herbs yanked surreptitiously from the neighborhood's flowerbeds to fool a hunger that was increasingly clever. I preferred for hunger to overtake me while I was out, watching some movie. Usually something I had already seen, at the Cinemateca, because the alleged new release movie houses projected the same films for months. At least at the Cinemateca, they showed one and sometimes two different films per day. I would meet up with Cleo there, when she got out of work, and my brother and his girlfriend or any of my friends would show up. In a city in which anything at all cost between twenty and fifty times what it used to be worth, at least a movie ticket remained the same price.

GDR turntable. Image courtesy of the author.

With my monthly salary, I could go to the movies two hundred times. Or buy myself two bars of soap.

It was rare for us to miss a concert, a play, or a ballet. There weren't many artistic performances to attend: local singer-songwriters, Third World rock bands, European theater companies lost in some exchange program.

The empty, dark city, and there we were pedaling around. And praying for the "difficulties known to all" not to cancel that night's event. To not return home with an empty stomach and equally voided spirit. Plowing through the dark, desolate city atop a bicycle, with a machete in hand so that anyone with the intention to attack us could see it.

Bicycles were like gold in those years. Like everything that could be used to move, get drunk, bathe, or fill a stomach.

The next day, the cycle would repeat itself: powdered milk, bicycle, rice, beans, movies, bicycle, rice, beans, and herbal brew.

A cycle accessible only to those of us who had the privilege of not having to support a family, a household. The luck of not being forced to take life seriously.

Between that October in which I invited my parents to eat at their favorite restaurant and the other October in which I finally left Cuba, five years passed. A horrific, interminable quinquennium.

And a happy one, because I had the good fortune of being young, irresponsible, and in good company.

But, as far as I can remember, not a single time in those five years did I again think of the record player. The record player I had not been able to buy myself because the country that produced it had disappeared along with our lives of yesteryear.

Disappeared for good and for worse.

Now, at last, in the middle of hipsters going gaga over vinyl records, I've bought myself a small record player. A pretext for gathering, in no hurry, but steadily, the record collection I never had.

Let others search for an authenticity in those records that is unknown in the digital world: for me, that turntable has the sweet, cold taste of revenge.[1]

Recipe: Rooster Stew

No recipe came to the rescue more often in the Cuba of my younger years than so-called "rooster stew." The previous sentence requires two clarifications. First: the Cuba of my younger years coincides with the era that the Cuban regime, with its fertile imagination for naming reality, called the Special Period. "Especially miserable" is what they meant, but they didn't say so out of modesty. That creative Cuban penchant for dubbing the universe leads me to the second clarification. And it is that

so-called rooster stew is nothing more than a mixture of water and sugar. The bit about "rooster" is purely metaphorical and there was not a single thing in the rooster stew that evoked stew except for its watery consistency. I don't know if the name was invented at that time or if it was an old popular expression brought back into service. What I do know is that in the 1990s, the state's lunch counters (the only ones in existence by then) advertised water with sugar as "rooster stew" on their menus. Often, it was the only thing they had to offer. Or they presented it as the main entrée along with a dessert that usually consisted of sweetened grapefruit peels.

"Rooster stew" was not the only name for that combination of water and sugar. It was also called "prisms." In this case, I can explain the origins. It comes from a television program with that name, *Prisms*. It came on around 11:30 pm and was advertised with the tagline, "Just before midnight … *Prisms* is for you." That was at roughly the same time water with sugar was needed most to calm hunger pangs and allow us to go to bed with something in our stomachs. "Milordo" was another appellation this mixture of water and sugar received, but I do not know the etymology. As they say about the Inuit and snow, we Cubans had an abundance of names for sugar dissolved in water. Sugar was still our country's main industry and, within the strictest rationing constraints we had to survive, the sugar quota was particularly generous: five pounds per person per month. Water was not exactly plentiful, but at least there was enough to prepare said dish.

Ingredients:

–water
–sugar

Directions:

Fill any container with water. It can be cold, hot, or room temperature, that's how adaptable this recipe is to individual tastes. Then add as many spoonfuls of sugar as you like. Stir the mixture vigorously with a spoon. That's it.

You can serve the rooster stew immediately or, if you prefer, refrigerate before serving. Don't take the recipe's name to heart. There is no need to serve it in a bowl or to eat it with a spoon. A glass will suffice.

Note:

After drinking it for a few days, the taste of rooster stew becomes monotonous. In this case, I recommend that, prior to adding the sugar, you boil the water with some aromatic herbs. You might say that in the places where rooster stew is an acceptable dish, aromatic herbs aren't abundant, and you would be right. As such, when the time came for me to prepare my rooster stew, I would go wander around my neighbors' gardens and steal some sprigs of balm mint or lemongrass. This made the nighttime consumption of rooster stew a perfect compliment to the task of eluding any surveillance the neighbors could exercise over their gardens. I never thought of naming this variation, but it could well be "rooster stew aux fines herbes." If the word can't lend a certain grace to the matter, then how to justify its existence?

X

Translated from the Spanish by Anna Kushner.

Enrique Del Risco holds a PhD in Latin American Literature from New York University, where he works in the Spanish and Portuguese Department

1
Excerpted from Enrique Del Risco, *Nuestra Hambre en la Habana: Memorias del Período Especial en la Cuba de los 90* (Plataforma Editorial, 2022).

Martha Rosler

What Sort of an Art Is Cookery? Are the Great Chefs All Dead?

Julia Child and Craig Claiborne are sitting in a small wine bar at the Pittsburgh airport, luggage at their feet.

Julia: Thinking about new developments and fashions in cookery always makes me slightly anxious … We have a certain fear of ephemerality, the recognition of time as cookery's enemy and master, and yet the Platonic ideal of the perfect form of the dish is still something of a rigid precept.

Craig: This is how information passes among generations: formulas, or recipes, allow the constant re-creation anew. The work is reborn each time in its perfection. This does seem to make cooking a type of performance, like a musical score. Perhaps Michael Fried, who has led to this reconsideration on our part, is incorrect in his judgments of theatricality, for example?

Julia: There is always that possibility, yes. But thinking of Plato reminds me that his writings on the judgment of our labors is even more dismissive. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates demolishes the concept of rhetoric as art by classing it with cookery. Even worse, he makes reference to the idea of the production of an "experience," which is what we have been discussing in contemplating restaurants high and low:

> **Polus:** What, in your opinion, is rhetoric?
>
> **Socrates:** A thing which … you say that you have made an art.
>
> **Polus:** What thing?
>
> **Socrates:** I should say a sort of experience …
>
> **Polus:** An experience in what?
>
> **Socrates:** An experience in producing a sort of delight and gratification.
>
> **Polus:** And if able to gratify others, must not rhetoric be a fine thing? …
>
> **Socrates:** Will you, who are so desirous to gratify others, afford a slight gratification to me? … Will you ask me, what sort of an art is cookery?
>
> **Polus:** What sort of an art is cookery?
>
> **Socrates:** Not an art at all, Polus.
>
> **Polus:** What then?
>
> **Socrates:** I should say an experience … An experience in producing a sort of delight and gratification, Polus.

Symposiast reclining on kline, putting his fingers into his mouth, and vomiting into a bowl on the ground, assisted by a boy. Kylix painted by Douris, ca. 480 BC. Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum. License: CC BY-SA 4.0.

Polus: Then are cookery and rhetoric the same?

Socrates: No, they are only different parts of the same profession.

Polus: Of what profession? …

Gorgias: A part of what, Socrates? …

Socrates: In my opinion then, Gorgias, the whole of which rhetoric is a part is not an art at all, but the habit of a bold and ready wit, which knows how to manage mankind: this habit I sum up under the word "flattery"; and it appears to me to have many other parts, one of which is cookery, which may seem to be an art, but, as I maintain, is only an experience or routine and not an art.

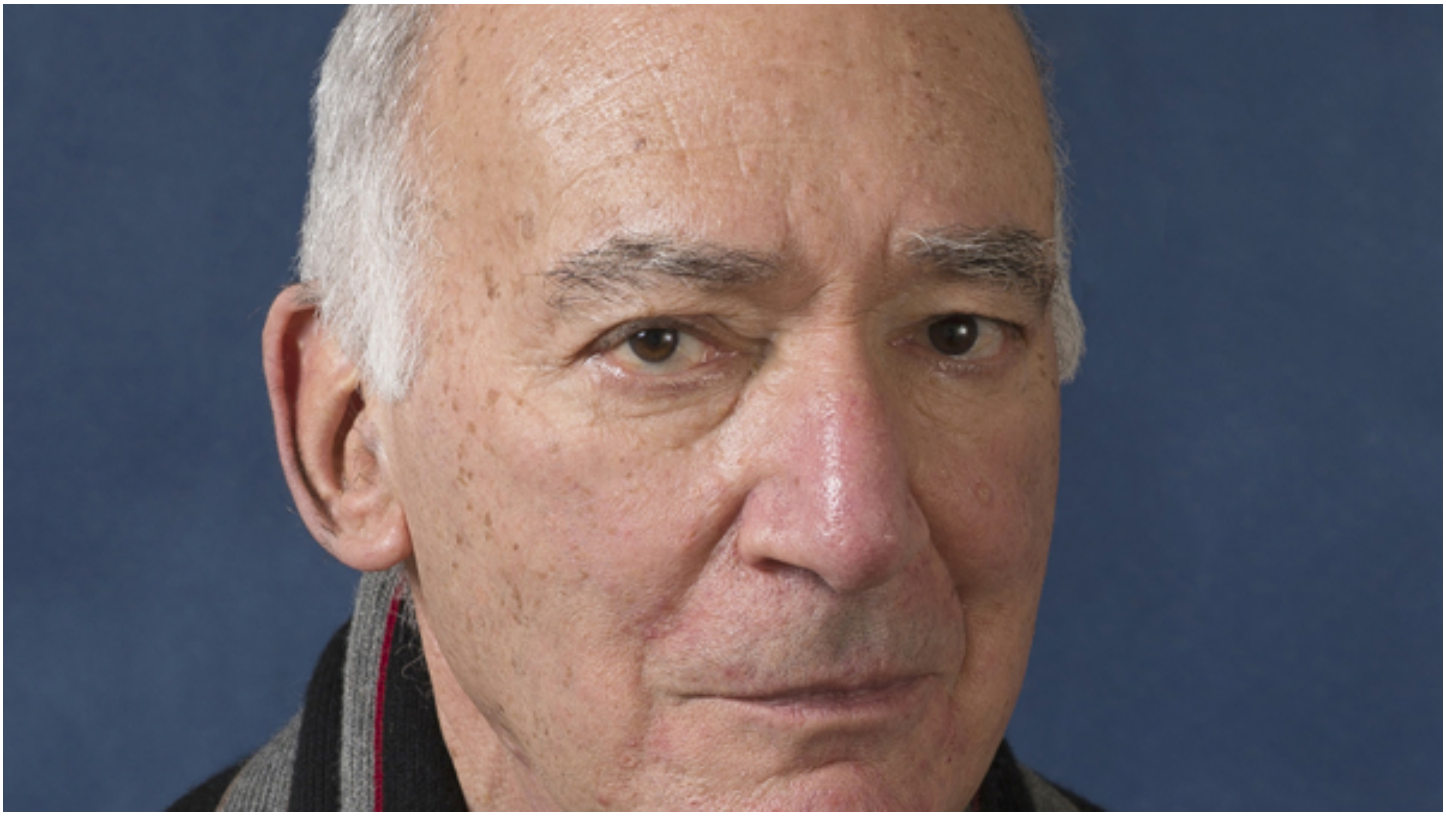
Craig: Heavens! … Is cookery manipulation, let alone flattery? I could easily imagine these Greeks at dinner lavishly praising the cooks' *art*.

Julia: Greeks saw meals as social rituals more than occasions for self-gratification. In the symposia—the post-banquet drinking parties—elite thinkers met and formed the polis by dint of their discussions.

Craig: [gesturing with his half-empty wine glass] We have snagged the term "symposium" for our modern panel discussions—with or mostly without wine.

Julia: The Greeks derided the Persians for excessive luxury, especially in dining, which they interpreted as weakness, possibly femininity. One observer sniffed that the Greeks' meals consisted of a porridge for lunch and a porridge for dinner. But that doesn't mean that their cooks failed to develop sophisticated dishes.

Under Socrates's dismissal of the arts that please as "flattery," would the fine arts themselves—I mean painting, and sculpture, and I wonder about architecture—no longer be considered "art" by Socrates? We must think here of both Kant and Fried.



Michael Fried

Craig: [pauses] In the modern period, ostentatious overreaches from periods of concentrated wealth have been tirelessly stripped away.

Julia: But we must ask if our repertoire has become static—flattering diners without challenging ourselves or them.

Perhaps the work of great creators is in the past, when chefs were truly inventors, not interpreters, and the spark of genius is missing.

Craig: [takes another sip of wine and gestures with his glass, spilling a few drops] The classical repertoire can still be superb, and enjoyed in many restaurants and homes. Last spring we were invited to dine by M. Jean Cruse and his wife. Their eighteenth-century chateau "produces a variety of excellent wines, and also contains one of the finest private kitchens in the land."[1] In such great houses, at least, one can still dine well.

Julia: No doubt. [mischievously] Forgive the indelicacy, but wasn't M. Cruse embroiled in "Winegate," the unfortunate incident of inferior and adulterated wines, labeled as Bordeaux, especially for export to America?

Craig: Some unfortunate and hasty decisions were made, to meet the enormous demand for wines … [pours each of them another glass of wine]

Julia: Hmm … now, perhaps, the American monster corporations, agribusiness and the like, are the creators—but in their hands cooking is precisely a chemical art! For wholesome ingredients they substitute artificial and suspect chemical horrors, because their major criterion is not *delectability* but profit. Their taste runs to money rather than to satisfaction or transport of the senses.

Craig: We've circled back to chemistry—"food science"—leaving aside the sad case of wine adulteration and fraud you raised. But food industry executives, like M. Cruse, don't dine on junk food, or bogus wines.

Julia: Maybe, like the great classical—and Romantic—composers, the great chefs are all dead. Today's chefs often represent themselves as keepers of a great tradition rather than as brash innovators. Curators rather than creators.

Craig: They've been saying that since the Revolution.

Julia: And since then, a steady stream of French chefs have chosen to migrate—first to England at the height of empire, and now to America … The art market, I hear, has also decamped wholesale to New York from Paris; we may

Gottlieb Doebler, Immanuel Kant, 1791.

Detail from a fresco from Chehel Sotoun palace. Esfahan, Iran, ca. seventeenth century.

William and Daniel Downey, Sarah Bernhardt as the Empress Theodora in Sardou's "Theodora," 1884.

then expect the cutting edge of cooking to arrive there soon as well.

Julia: Could we get back to theatrics? If we think of stage artistry as being the simulation, the faking, of an emotional response, while the creation of plays or of paintings is taken as the genuine expression of emotion, then stage artistry is the lesser art, because we value authenticity above simulation. This is the Romantic idea, I believe, and we are still dominated by it to a great degree today.

Craig: Artists today seem to be trying to get away from that idea, are they not? They dislike the idea of being slaves to emotion. But that Romantic attitude is probably what prompted Stanislavski to recommend to actors that they kindle in themselves a real emotion—then "genuineness" will actually produce the emotion that is called for. [Puts his hand on his heart, theatrically.]

Authenticity is much sought after, as we live in an era very conscious of the rising tide of commercialism. But it is elusive—it is the aim of commercialism to simulate emotion that viewers will react to positively.

Julia: But I'm thinking about judging things as art.

Craig: But how? We judge food by whether it gratifies *our* taste and *our* vision.

Julia: Then why bother to think about it as theater? There is a distance between spectator and performer ... Drama, comedy, music, dance, and athletics moved out of private houses into public arenas where there *was* such a distance. Only then, people began to see these occupations as noble, as inspiring in a great sense, a public sense—to think of them as what we today think of as art, different from just "life."

Craig: You mean when patrons stopped subordinating

artists directly to their wishes?

Julia: Something like that. When music of court and chamber served as background, an accompaniment to social interaction, then music wasn't venerated as a high art. Music had to be divorced from that setting, to have a room of its own, to use Virginia Woolf's metaphor, and command people's primary attention, before it joined the high arts.

Craig: Yes, it had to become sufficiently "useless"—not instrumental [giggles] to other purposes.

Julia: But food is still very much part of the setting for social interaction. [She offers him a bowl of nuts.]

Craig: Art also serves this function. Not in museums or galleries, perhaps, but in people's homes. Nevertheless, there *are* art lovers, and there *are* food lovers ...

Julia: And theater lovers. But the lack of commonality of experience intrudes on cooking more than it does on theater. Art lovers share experience by talking about art, with a shared vocabulary. But I can never taste *your* morsel of food, and the number of people who can directly experience a single culinary work is quite limited ...

Craig: Let's compare connoisseurship in wine with connoisseurship in food. Then wine is a kind of multiple, a limited edition, which preserves its market value and aesthetic worth, in contrast to an art multiple, which has the potential of being infinitely reproducible.

Julia: It is just this dilemma that caught M. Cruse—how to preserve the allure of a fine but limited product while making enormous amounts of cash from volume sales. American food giants have the edge there, because for *most* households, quality in food is more about preserving technical safety and scientific nutrition than purity or limited production, meaning exclusivity.

Craig: For luxury goods, scarcity is precisely the selling point, even when, as with wine or perfume or cars or gowns, what we see is limited production, the product of artisans invested in the product and not the mass-produced output of an industry. Some European luxury cars are like handmade precision watches—or rare wine—

Julia: Or art.

Craig: To return to *our* concerns, I say classic cuisine is a victory of refinement and civilized tastes over the simple, natural, one might say brute, appetites. People of all ages, conditions, and estates must eat—but we appeal to the higher faculties of taste when we are involved with cooking as art.

Julia: Austin de Croze, the very man who successfully introduced the resolution to the Salon d'Automne in 1923 that cooking be considered one of the major arts—

Craig: The Ninth Art, if I recall, alongside Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Engraving, Music and Dancing, Literature and Poetry, the Cinema, and Fashion.

Julia: [grimacing] Yes, yes—de Croze wrote: "Cooking (of course we speak of *good* cooking, not that of ignoramuses and amateurs), being an art, has evolved and is evolving, slowly, without those crises caused by Fashion, but according to the traditions not only of the old cooks but of the common life of the people."[2]

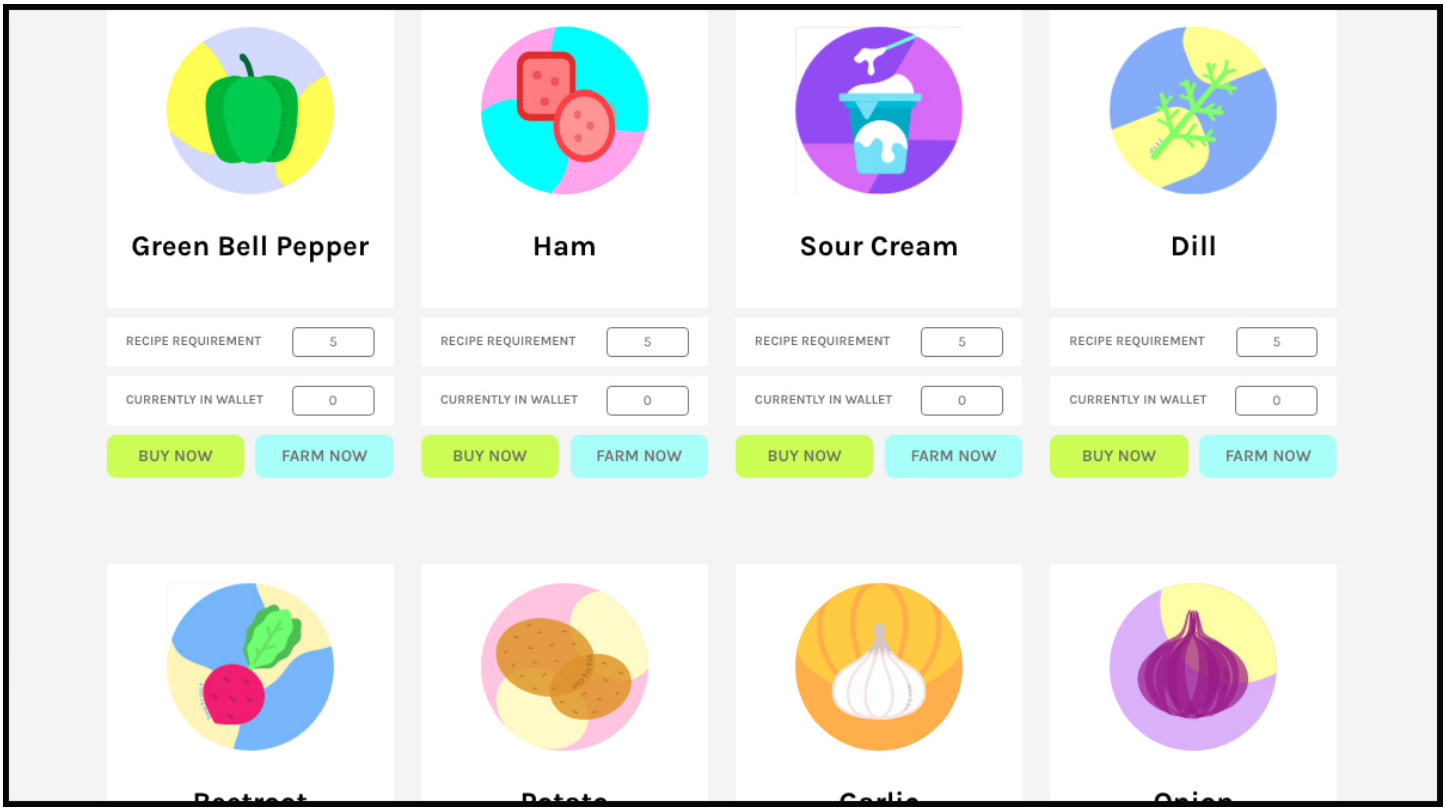
Craig: Civilized man ennobles his instinctive needs by transforming them into esthetic pleasures ... But not everyone in a civilization is equal to everyone else. For some, eating is just satisfying a bodily appetite, and for them, presumably, so is sex. As Brillat-Savarin himself said about dining, "Animals feed themselves; men eat; but only wise men know the art of eating."[3]

Julia: The bodily appetites, as you call them, certainly don't enjoy the prestige of the intellectual or spiritual appetites—why, the OED defines the fine arts as "those in which the mind and imagination are chiefly concerned." De Croze himself asked the question of materialism versus idealism—the traditional question of art:

> Does gastronomy deserve such glory? ... It is so materialistic! As a matter of fact only idealists have proved themselves capable of becoming connoisseurs of food and beverages, recipes, and good taste ... There is something more than materialism in *good* cookery, something of ideal thought, something which is so closely concerned with the most intimate and instinctive spirit of every race, tribe, clan, family, individual that the dishes of a nation will reveal her soul more certainly than any other factor.[4]

Craig: Bravo! "Now, the sense of taste falls properly into the realm of aesthetics. A nation that thinks critically of its food is certain to think critically of its painting, writing, acting, music, and *objets d'art*. The arts have always flourished most opulently in cities where people lived well and paid a reasoned and critical attention to their senses ... and the arts of dining and banqueting flourished concurrently."[5]

Julia: The question of taste has always been problematic in relation to gastronomy though. Already in the eighteenth century the philosopher David Hume commented on the error of trying to locate objective standards of taste relating to quality or beauty:



OneRare is a metaverse dedicated to food and has hence been called a "foodverse." In its so-called kitchen space, ingredients are available to farm or buy. NFT recipes from famous chefs are also available to purchase.

> Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty … To seek the real beauty … is as fruitless an inquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter. According to the disposition of the organs, the same object may be both sweet and bitter; and the proverb has justly determined it to be fruitless to dispute concerning tastes.[6]

Craig: But Hume affirms that some people are better able than others to develop their tastes—which are responding to real qualities—and thus they can be guides for others:

> Though it be certain, that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external; it must be allowed, that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings … Where the organs are so fine, as to allow nothing to escape them; and at the same time so exact, as to perceive every ingredient in the composition: This we call delicacy of taste.[7]

Julia: [draining her wine and raising the empty glass] Splendid!

Craig: [matching her gesture] "If the French consider cooking an art and insist that eating well is a mark of civilization, it is not because materialistic pleasures are given too much importance. On the contrary, it is because they seem unimportant in themselves if they are not raised to the level of an artistic achievement."[8]

Julia: Ah! Again we see that leaving behind nature in favor of culture, or "civilization," is seen as basic to the definition of an art. But it seems especially necessary for ingestion, which otherwise is inarguably about materiality, and even need.

Recipe: Greek Garum[9]

Ingredients:

–3 kg of small, whole uncleaned fish (anchovies, mackerel, sardines)
–500 grams (2 cups plus one tablespoon) of sea salt

Allan Ramsay, David Hume, 1711–1776. Historian and Philosopher, 1754.

–500 grams (2 cups plus one tablespoon) of coarse salt
–2 bay leaves

(The finely grained salt penetrates the fish; the coarse salt allows greater separation of the salt from the final sauce, making it less salty.)

Directions:

Rinse fish under running water; cut into smaller pieces. In airtight jar, layer the fish well with the salt. After the second layer, place the bay leaves.

Seal jar as tightly as possible and leave at room temperature.

Every three days, stir the mixture with a wooden spoon.

After 35–40 days, filter the mixture through a double-fine mesh strainer lined with cheesecloth.[10]

The resulting liquid is the garum. Place it in a closed glass jar. Refrigerate, and use within 2–3 months.

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Excerpted from Martha Rosler, *The Art of Cooking: A (Mock) Dialogue Between Julia Child and Craig Claiborne*, unpublished manuscript. A previous excerpt appeared in *e-flux journal* **#65** and, as a comix coauthored with Josh Neufeld, in *e-flux journal* **#110**.

Martha Rosler utilizes various media in her work, primarily video and photography, and also installation and sculpture; she also writes about art and culture. Her work has for decades considered matters of the public sphere and mass culture; war and geopolitical conflict; housing, urbanism, and the built environment, and systems of transportation—especially as these affect women. Many of her projects have been extrainstitutional or developed and enacted with groups of people. Rosler sees her work, her teaching, and her writing as continuations of a broader engagement with the currents of cultural critique and social and political change. Her work may best be summed up as both a conceptual art and an activist practice—focused on questions of representational form but joined, however uneasily, to a commitment to political agitation. Video, which she adopted in its infancy, presented itself as at the crossroads of both. Rosler spent the 1970s in California and Canada. In 1980, she returned to her native Brooklyn, where she lives and works.

1
Craig Claiborne, *Classic French Cooking* (Time-Life, 1970), 20.

2
Austin de Croze, *What to Eat & Drink in France; A Guide to the Characteristic Recipes & Wines of Each French Province, with a Glossary of Culinary Terms and a Full Index* (Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd, 1931), xii .

3
Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste: or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* , trans. M. F. K. Fisher (Liveright Publishing, 1948), 15.

4
De Croze, introduction to *What to Eat & Drink in France* , xi–xii.

5
"Publisher's Preface" to *The Physiology of Taste* , by Brillat-Savarin, ix–x.

6
David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *English Essays from Sir Philip Sidney to Macaulay* , ed. C. W. Eliott (1757; P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), 206.

7
Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," 210.

8
Fernande Garvin, *The Art of French Cooking* (Bantam Books, 1958), 6–9.

9
Adapted from Giorgio Pintzas Monzani.

10
The solids remaining in the strainer are called allec but difficult to use in modern cooking. If you wish to try, place them in a glass jar and use within two months.

Vivien Sansour

Hanan and the People of the Soil

In Arabic, generous people are referred to as people of the soil— *ahl al thra*. The language has other references to soil as the mother of us all, but the most telling is *zareea'*, which means "plant" and "seed," but is also the word for "children." Hanan is one of the *zareea'* whose life was cut short in April 2022.

Hanan, whose name means "tenderness" in Arabic, didn't have a cell phone when I met her. She was barely eight years old. Wide-eyed and mischievous, she had an eye for photography, so she would often take my phone and snap pictures of flowers and people around the courtyard of her house in the village of Faqua. Though she was a little girl and I was in my early thirties, Hanan was often my foraging guide and mountain companion when I would join her family on Fridays for picnics in the hills. She had a name for every poppy flower and every blade of grass she collected to give me before I left. At the time, I was documenting the stories of people and plants in Palestinian villages, so I always had my camera with me. Hanan always had ideas on what and whom I should photograph. From green almonds to wild thistle, her relationship to the land inspired me, filling my heart with wild optimism that it was still possible to save our bio-heritage. It is young people like her who can carry forward the priceless Indigenous knowledge that only comes from spending time with and being part of the natural world. Needless to say, Hanan and I became research buddies; we loved taking pictures together as much as we loved eating together.

I could never have imagined that only ten years later I would share her photograph in an insufficient eulogy of her short life—a life targeted and eliminated specifically for representing the survival of a way of life incompatible with Israel's colonial hegemony. While claiming to have made the desert bloom, Israel murders its native inhabitants and destroys their ecological systems—one seed, one aquifer, and one human life at a time.

I first met Hanan when I started visiting my colleague Mahmoud in his family's village of Faqua. Hanan was Mahmoud's daughter. Faqua sits atop a solitary hill in the heart of Marj Ibn Amer, the largest plain in Palestine, and is one of many Palestinian villages that has kept its indigenous and ecological features. Many say that Faqua has magic in the air because everyone's lungs expand when they go there, and that was true for me. Whether in the air, the soil, or the kindheartedness of its people, Faqua was a place where I received large doses of love from all the elements, including children like Hanan who welcomed me without hesitation.

I met Hanan on the first day I visited Faqua. That spring morning, the rugged road up to the village was filled with cacti on both sides. It carved through green terraces sprinkled with wild red poppies and yellow and purple wildflowers. The vegetation was lush and gentle at the same time, as if testifying to the deeds of the birds and

Photo courtesy of the author.

winds that scattered the seeds across breathtaking terrains. “Don’t be dazzled by the flowers,” said the driver, noticing my eyes glued to the window in the front seat of his eight-passenger Ford bus, as we rode up an incline so endless that it seemed to prepare me for some kind of pilgrimage. “Wait till you see Faqua’s wild mushrooms.”

Wild mushrooms? This guy must be exaggerating. But before I challenged his claims he asked, “Why do you think the village is called Fuqua?” I lowered my head and in a smirking apology said, “Of course, from *faqua*, Arabic for mushrooms.” Then he pointed to a fence running alongside a pine forest and explained, “All of this was for our foraging. We were famous for our mushrooms because we had an abundance of them, but in recent years an Israeli settler came and fenced us off from our lands and started a cow farm.”

After getting off at the center of the village, I walked closer to the fence and was startled by a herd of Holstein cows, with the black-and-white irregular maps drawn across their skins. They were as foreign to the landscape as the barbed wire, dividing the earth and declaring autonomy over what should never be owned: seed, soil, and people’s freedom to be part of the world of trees. But this was all swept away by the sight of a little girl whose messy black curls bounced with each hop she made as she approached me.

“ *Inti Vivien?*” She asked enthusiastically while taking my hand and leading me into her mother’s kitchen. “We’ve been waiting for you for lunch.” Abeer, Hanan’s mother, pulled a chair out for me and ushered me to a table of delicious home-cooked and wild-foraged greens. Hanan began to name each one of them, but asked me to eat quickly so she could show me the courtyard. I spent two years after that with Hanan and her family, who, in many ways, adopted me as one of their own and brought me into their lives. Hanan became my little sister, daughter, and both my mentor and mentee at the same time. I saw myself in her and she saw a role model in me. But how is Hanan’s story relevant to the complexities of our food system? How is this little girl, who grew up to be a diligent young woman grounded in the soil and seasons of her village, related to the future of crop diversity and earth knowledge?

In over a decade working in seed conservation, I have

come across many speeches, programs, projects, and publications declaring a commitment to the earth, to farmers, and to Indigenous knowledge. But what is this world we activists for the planet say we want to create? What is this new way of being with the land that we say we must reinvent? The truth is that we don't have to invent that other world because it already exists. It may seem very remote because, at best, it's portrayed as pastoral fiction, and at worst, it's being destroyed. Yet we can find that world in villages like Faqua. We find it in young people like Hanan, who are seeds being murdered and discarded along with their communities. We find it in the wild mushrooms and the forests, which are being replaced by commercial cows subsidized by settler militias that are supported by US taxpayers.

I have traveled across the planet meeting different peasant communities whose lives are being shattered by agro-industry, militaries, and political policies that are designed to eliminate them. The same powers that claim to fight for food justice through US- and European-funded organizations are in fact contributing to the demise of our agro-biodiversity through their cultural and economic hegemony. They destroy our communities and then accuse us of being broken and underdeveloped, whether in Iraq, where war has destroyed the ancient marshes, in Mexico, where the government has sold the rivers, or even in places like Italy, where some farmers have been banned from farming for refusing to follow big-business standards. There is a dark and deep-seated violence inherent in many ecological slogans that create a higher moral pedestal for consuming well-packaged products that claim to save the environment and protect biodiversity, while simultaneously using economic and political means to shame and dominate people.

The reality is that, until the food movement plays a more honest role in telling the brutal stories and histories of the fancy new superfoods we consume, we will never have a healthier diet. Because everything we consume is kneaded with the blood and tears of living beings who allow all of us to have our romantic story about the environment. There is nothing romantic about farmers being removed from their lands or trees being uprooted to make way for settler roads, or water sources being drained for settler agribusiness plantations. Seeds and people are not separate. Every living creature has sprouted from a seed or a spore that allows the continuation of its species. The question of who gets to live from, and who must die for, our food is one that our movement can no longer deny.

Foodies around the world who like to share staged images of their exoticized dishes or their newly forged salads must reckon with the fact that, without a real conversation about the political realities of every geography whose bounties we consume, our relationship to food will continue to be toxic. There is no new green movement without the acknowledgment of the multitudes of genocides that are happening across the globe. From Palestine to Haiti, to Brazil, to India, and to the prairies of America that have been brutally contaminated and emptied of their peoples, our food embodies massive amounts of pain.

Hanan was someone I knew and loved, yet sadly she is not the only example of a young seedling defying the harsh world by choosing to love the poppies and wild mushrooms of her village. She was a carrier of the Indigenous knowledge we all claim we want to preserve. But like many other murders, Hanan's killing was silenced by a food movement caring only about the olive oil her family produced and not the lives that produced it. Very few were willing to tell her story, and some wanted me to just keep talking about food when the conversation became "too heavy." But the conversation was not as heavy as their dismissal, nor as heavy as the silence.

Hanan was shot in the belly by an Israeli soldier as she was riding in a taxi back to her village, taking the same route I took more than ten years ago when I embarked on my seed journey and first visited her family in Faqua. She was also taking the same path of persevering—the one many Palestinian farmers have taken, with little acknowledgement or support from a food movement that refuses to take a political stand yet insists on claiming social justice as a pillar of its sustainability goals.

As another of our beautiful seeds lies in the ground, dead and silenced, I am reminded that being Palestinian means adjusting to grief as a constant state rather than a random incident. People we love, people who inspire us, role models, people we see on TV, our educators, journalists, friends, children, and even our plants and trees—all are subject to murders that go unseen, unheard, unrecognized, and unreckoned with in a world that believes our lives have no value and that we don't even exist. Hanan did not only matter because she was my friend, or because she was Palestinian. She mattered because she represented a whole world and future that is going extinct. Children like Hanan hold in their dreams and in their endurance a hope for our planet. Luckily, hundreds like Hanan still live and persevere in villages like Faqua across our beloved planet. They are the ones who can carry us into a more tender future if, and only if, we find the courage in ourselves to do what it takes to protect them and their communities. Anything short of that is empty talk and a false show of love, because ultimately, we are the seeds, and we are the soil that we are claiming to care for.

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Vivien Sansour is the founder and director of the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library. She works with farmers to propagate and recover threatened heirloom varieties and creates local and international public awareness

campaigns to educate people about Palestinian agricultural heritage and biodiversity.

> Producers have few direct incentives to build products to last, to make them easy to repair, to use less packaging, or to make their goods or packaging easy to reuse, recycle or compost. In fact, it is often beneficial for producers to make goods intended to be used once or temporarily so that consumers continually buy more.[1]

Rachel Vaughn

A Meditation on Food Waste, Imperfection, and Accumulation

The elevator doors in my urban apartment building open with a gratingly cheery *ding*! and I begin to mutter under my breath—something about unpaid waste work, the false promise and wishful thinking of recycling *aaaaanyway*, and the shit-end of proverbial family care.[2] Clumsily dragging this week's numerous bags of sorted recycling behind me while perilously balancing a leaking municipally approved compost bin on two fingertips, I use my hip to bump the door open to the sorted dumpster area. Buzzing florescent lightbulbs, straight out of a cheesy horror movie, spring into action overhead. A trail of dripping compost water punctuates segments of my bitter path, and the putrid scent of ammonia fumes from the overflowing bins waft into the crisp morning air.

In the city of Milan, residents must separate all recycling, placing it in barcoded bags for random accuracy checks (at the risk of fines), and dispose of green waste in biodegradable bags that are then processed in a city-wide anaerobic digester.[3] I am a country kid, and the daughter of rural auctioneers; the intensive labor of reuse has always marked my life and is nothing new. Here, I am daily reminded of the work that goes into grappling with quotidian waste, but with none of the additionally beautiful benefits of that labor I grew up loving, albeit complexly. No herbaceous nitrogen rich soil available at all times, no corn rustling, bees bustling, trees chattering, or earthworms wriggling. Here I do not find foxes picking through freshly turned compost piles, and there are no small mammals churning the garden soil with their curious paws, stuffing cheek pouches with found morsels or snatching hard-won snap peas from the blooming vines; no mournful coyote cries call kin in the distance.

This city is internationally praised for the success of its municipal recycling, redistribution initiatives, and greenwaste-biogas management.[4] I am not contesting such facts. However, I am also clearly missing some of the sweeter elements of food waste as I knew them in another life, another place far from here. Likewise, I cannot shake what political scientist Kirstin Munro has argued more broadly concerning the labor of waste as "work transfer." She writes that "recycling sorting—the state-directed separation by households of valuable from undesirable waste—is unwaged work that provides useful raw materials to industry as a free gift and contributes to overaccumulation and crisis."[5] Source separation like this exemplary morning trek is, moreover, largely behavior reliant, and waste specialists have long documented that

Ice-cream cone packaging at Seibu Dome, Tokorozawa, Saitama, Japan, 2009. License: CC BY-SA 2.0.

much of the food packaging consumers grapple with cannot be recycled, is not recycled, or disrupts the apoliticized "neatness" with which recycling has historically been framed.[6]

This essay is an exploration of waste failure, or shall I say, imperfections and longings; it is about how visions of circularity may succeed at certain scales, yet also fail to fundamentally question the logic of accumulation at industry levels. More specifically, this is a meditation on the conundrums of food waste and its packaging, and an examination of the politics and potential of increasingly capitalized metabolic systems—of the objects and of beings from surplus food products to the gut tracts of grubs—that are deployed to supposedly clean up and (re)shape the riddles of human-produced rot, disintegration, and decay.

The *matter* of food waste is rich with possibilities and teeming with microbial life. Yet food waste is most often framed as a problem, a failure, a moral quandary, an object around which to frame "good" citizenship through the yardstick of better, more responsible consumer trends, especially in the home. "I'm a bad apple and I can cost you real money. Don't let good food go bad," declares Oregon's "Bad Apple Campaign" PSA, for instance. Food waste is regularly defined as an individual household conundrum to be fixed and managed, more so than a systemic outcome or supply-chain predicament: "To End Food Waste, Change Needs to Begin at Home," declares one exemplary headline.[7] Colorful infographics made by the USDA, the EPA, for-profit management firms, and even *National Geographic* all declare food waste a problem that is placed at the doorsteps of households and individual consumers, estimated at one third of all food acquired by households, and consistent with other estimates of total food system loss in the US which commonly ranges from 30 to more than 40 percent.[8] While loss is documented at all stages of the food supply chain, and definitions as well as measurements of food waste vary, mainstream emphasis is not predominantly placed

Maintainance of biogas plant in Naivasha, Kenya, 2009. License: CC BY 2.0.

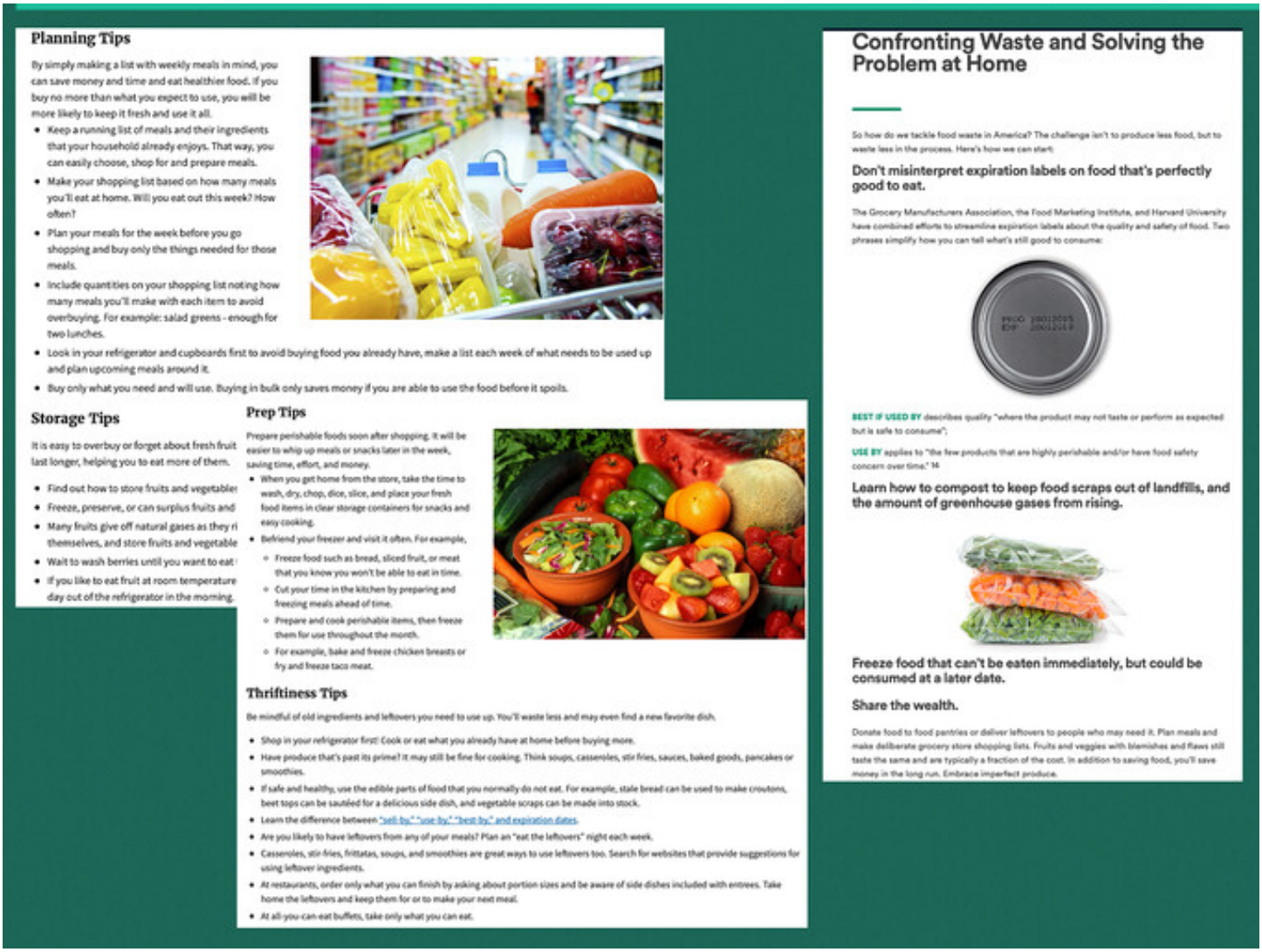
on industry, policy, overproduction models, subsidies, or package design, but on consumer habits and household trends.[9]

S *o what!* you might declare. Behaviors must change if we are ever going to reduce climate crises or achieve increased livability. Perhaps, but the fact that food waste is responsibilized within the post-consumption realm most frequently, and by way of encouraging better consumption and/or consumption of "better," more "pure" products, along with a steady arsenal of the right recipes or adherence to waste-saving "tips," should definitely give us pause. Food waste is most often represented in the popular imagination as a problem to be managed for key moral, environmental, and also for upcycled product-development reasons. 1) Moral reasons: nations like the US, China, Canada, and Australia waste so much food, yet food insecurity rates remain high, and debates over how to address such disparities are ongoing.[10] 2) Environmental impact reasons: food waste generates methane in landfills, contributes to greenhouse gases, and wastes water, money, and resources.[11] 3) New product development goals: upcycled or redistributive products like Regrained or Ugly Fruit revalue ingredients considered waste to turn a profit on new consumer goods reintroduced to the market, like the surplus foods intentionally left to rot in fields due to their cosmetic imperfections based upon arbitrary industry standards.[12] The persistence of such standards, and of sheer industrial surplus production quantities, means that companies are thus able to rebrand food "waste" as marketable and valuable rather than useless or undesirable, thereby generating more consumer products deemed pure or revolutionary because they're upcycled.

Addressing food waste on an individual and household level becomes the duty of so-called moral citizens, good mothers, and careful parents. These roles depend on middle-class and gendered ideals or aesthetics of achieving sustainability through the right type of consumption, what consumer capitalism scholar Christine Harold calls "mindful minimalism movements promoting abstinence or at least restraint." Sociologist Katherine MacKendrick refers to this injunction as "precautionary consumerism," wherein consumers are able to mitigate their own exposure risks through purchasing power "in an absence of precautionary policies."[13] Yet that complex, debated range of 30–40 percent overall food systems loss documented in the US, so often cited by food waste warriors, represents the normalized outcome of food systems that are permissibly, unjustly, and sometimes proprietarily wasteful by design (wasteful of low-wage labor, resources, chemicals, fertilizer, water, of precious life). Many shoppers have little choice, for instance, when it comes to the prepackaged manner or the quantities in which products are presented to them for purchase. Industries might reconsider cosmetic standardizations,[14] packaging requirements, or confusing "sell by" dates, but often do not.

I do not raise these points because I am interested in parsing and defining exactly how to live so-called better, cleaner, or more moral lives through the exact right kind of recycling, salvage, or by way of what Alexis Shotwell calls the "the pursuit of purity."[15] I am most interested in how the revaluing of specific materials and organisms often sidesteps broader questions of continued accumulation and extraction on a systemic and industry level, rather than disrupting these phenomena. This might be achieved through a combination of systemic factors: more socially just policy, different waste infrastructure that is culturally appropriate to its contexts, product and packaging redesign, by way of shifting tastes or industry cosmetic standards, halting market speculation on food products and overproduction,[16] and through critical disruption of the normalization of surplus- and plantation-oriented production models that produce both hunger, glut, and unjust labor conditions at devastating scales to ecologies and communities. As waste scholar Gay Hawkins aptly puts it, "Where the real disruption to disposability has to come from is in the design of economies and markets that are not built on structural wasting either in production or consumption."[17] The emphasis here is not simply on redesign initiatives per se, but on taste trends and the economic and market-based paradigms in motion that render waste continuously desirable.

Turning to some of the most intriguing recent food design initiatives, one still finds a paradox of disposability and accumulation. For instance, the biodegradable dining-ware company Chuk makes its products out of bagasse, an industrial pulp leftover from sugar cane production—a process that reportedly wastes nearly one third of the plant to begin with.[18] In 2017, founder of plant-based bioplastics Avani Eco, Kevin Kumala, declared that his company's patented cassava and



U.S. Department of Agriculture infographic on how to reduce food waste at home.

vegetable oil compostables are the only bioplastic bags in the world "that have passed an oral toxicity test," meaning they dissolve in water and can be safely ingested—an act which Kumala himself demonstrates to the audience.[19] Touting the potential to "become millionaires one day" by redistributing the prospects of industrial grade cassava starch, Kumala describes polyethylene products as "ugly," styrofoam as "disgusting," and plastic straws as "nasty" in comparison to the company's revolutionary cassava starch bioplastics designed from surplus agricultural waste.

Both compostable product examples successfully harness the potential of industrial agricultural waste. They reflect a form of strategizing against plastics dumping largely from the Global North onto the Global South, as well as local- and regional-level waste-related public health concerns like the pollution of waterways, the dangers of landfill fires, and more equitable laborer wages and conditions. They also tow a line between feeding ideologies of disposability (they offer take-away commodities like disposable dinnerware and bags), while experimenting with waste(d) products within broader global solid-waste infrastructures that may not yet have the capacity to fully "manage" biodegradable products or compost-driven responses.[20] In the US context, for example, *BioCycle* published a 2019 survey documenting only 185 (responsive) management facilities with the capacity to process compostables.[21] Packaging alone reflects a substantial portion of metabolic burdens. For instance, policy analysts found that nearly 30 percent of the US's overall garbage composition was specifically made up of containers and packaging.[22] Thus, even when entrepreneurs respond to specific waste concerns through design innovation in individual products, the broader infrastructural, agricultural, and economic dynamics may prove persistent. This underscores the necessity for systems-level thinking about waste as opposed to consumer-driven models of tweaking home habits, product selection, or packaging to make things somehow

less bad.

Galleria mellonella also known as the waxworm; the rather muscular and chiseled form of an introduced pest of bees nests.

Returning to those wriggling worms and other riotous nonhumans from my introductory storytelling, a very different sort of biodegradation pattern emerges. A 2017 headline in *Chemical & Engineering News* reads "Waxworms Take a Liking to Plastic Shopping Bags."[23] The text is accompanied by a mesmerizing time-lapse video of delicate straw-colored waxworms eating their way through the bags. A similar article in *Fast Company* features another time-lapse video, this time of floating fire-colored crayfish, crickets, beetle larvae, and chickens eating cassava Avani Eco bags with the label "harmless when consumed by animals."[24] These articles and videos propose product edibility as a metabolic tool to fight waste. The metabolism or biodegradation of waste proves to be an environmentally vexing (though financially lucrative for some) conundrum of our ecologically devastated times, including in its role in colonialist land appropriation,[25] increased pathogens, antibiotic resistance, and contributions to habitat destruction.[26] From designer concepts like the plastics-to-food-source Fungi Mutarium , to biotechnological developers and farmers, the metabolic and enzymatic potential of multiple organisms to deal with waste is being studied, manipulated, and deployed.[27] The gut tracts and flora of worms, grubs, moths, and caterpillars, the enzymatic secretions of fungi and bacteria—all have growing technoscientific value in the face of community and climate urgencies of waste management.[28] However, this potentially incentivizes a purely postconsumer emphasis, and sidesteps meaningful paradigm shifts to fundamentally alter wasteful production models.

In our explorations of ingestion, metabolism, and feminism, food scholar Sarah Tracy and I pondered together "examples of capitalism's creative destruction in the breakdown of edible tissues and eating bodies into functional, quantitative units to be remixed and optimized in commercial product formulations."[29] This is exactly the case in the increasing appropriation of more-than-human metabolic systems revalued for their biotechnological potential in waste economies. Specific microbes, enzymes, mycelia, crustaceans, and insect digestive tracts are deployed to "resolve" capitalism's postconsumerism discontents, when this could instead be accomplished though product redesign or industry divestment from problematic practices. The likes of crayfish, fungi, bacteria, and insects are incited to clean up—to counteract ecological devastation wrought by plastics and styrofoam, for instance. The guts of others become crucial sites of

toxic waste disposal, capital investment, and product development—what Stefan Helmreich refers to as a biotechnological "cosmopolitanism" in which "boutique" products emerge from the capitalization of the complex metabolic and enzymatic capacities of nonhumans.[30]

Like so many, I find myself blundering daily on the municipal waste front. I am an unintentionally imperfect recycler. As a waste scholar, I struggle with the regular outsourcing of blame onto consumers as opposed to industry and policy, and with the mixed and manipulative messaging about sustainability. Much of my scholarship is driven by the broader question of whether or not "sustainable" communities as they are popularly defined are the same as more *just* communities, and how an equivalence between the two might be achieved. As I awkwardly drag that weekly waste down many circuitous routes through hallways, into elevators, out of elevators, down flights of stairs, into and out of multiple doors, I ponder futility, imperfection, longing, and "management." I miss the tangible mutualism of my family's compost bin (though these are wildly diverse scales and contexts).

I recall Filippo Bertoni's articulation of compost not as perfection or consensus but "the coexistence of many different worlds that … hold together and come apart in differently relational ways."[31] As Michelle Murphy and Max Liboiron suggest, waste is not a singular substance or material, but a network, a set of nodes, obligations (or failures), and relationships.[32] I consider the number of times I have been scolded at the local supermarket for not individually bagging fruits and vegetables because the available "green" bags are supposedly biodegradable *and* keep shopping "sanitary." My capacity to respond immediately to such absurd declarations in an insightfully synthesized manner like a "good" scholar might is also imperfect. What is this meditation a longing for then? As I explore in greater depth in a forthcoming publication, proponents of the circular economy want to manage and streamline waste through "green" capitalism and recycling. But we who study discard also know that waste is unjust, messy, complex, intentional. Even in the face of waste's so-called managerial success, there remain crucial accumulative failures to tussle with and continue to make visible. Along these lines, the sociologist Alice Mah has written on the paradox of plastics circularity: "The circular economy offers something grander yet more nebulous than other corporate sustainability discourses: a technological fix to 'take-make-waste' models of industrial growth, without actually giving up on growth."[33] Accumulation is systemic, incentivized and industry driven. The responsibility for interventions cannot simply be placed upon consumers.

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