Cooking *With*: On the Meal as a Pedagogical Tool for Social Transformation

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Grace Denis

Master TRANS

Cooking With: On the Meal as a Pedagogical Tool for Social Transformation

By Grace Denis

Thesis produced as part of Master TRANS - Socially Engaged Artistic Practices

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With gratitude for the support of Pierre and Yannick Denis,

Marie-Laure and Louis Marie Coursier, and Philippe de Souza.

Cooking With: On the Meal as a Pedagogical Tool for Social Transformation

- I. Amuse Bouche
 - a. Introduction: Consumption, Collaborative Survival, and the Arts of Noticing
 - b. Always Arriving: Working with Participatory Action Research
 - c. Transcribing with Thick Description

II. First Course

- a. Constellation of Sites of Transmission
- b. Master TRANS as Meta Site
- c. Listening: Renunciation as Precursor for Response-Ability
- d. Plant Based as Response-Ability

III. Second Course

- a. Aural Oral: Sonic Cartographies
- b. Terrapolis: Permaculture, Companion Planting, and Guilding
- c. Systems Theory: Autopioetic and Sympoietic
- d. Componere and the Edible Lexicon
- e. Coalesce: To Grow together
- IV. Digestif
 - a. Contemplating Duration
 - b. Creative Ecologies
 - c. Art World and Consumption: A Subjective Survey
 - d. Consumption in Crisis
 - e. Un-Conclusion

I. Amuse Bouche

Introduction: Consumption, Collaborative Survival, and the Arts of Noticing

"Collaborative survival describes how our (human) ability to persist as a species is deeply entangled with and dependent upon the health of a multitude of other species. It is a guiding narrative for designing systems that prompt humans to notice and become compassionately concerned with the wellbeing of non-human species."

- Anna Tsing, The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins

How can we adapt our patterns of consumption in cognizance of collaborative survival? Can we implement a meal as a platform for formulating and exploring these possibilities? How can we collectively encourage sustainability, through the cultivating and cooking of our food? In *Mushroom at The End of The World; On The Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins,* Tsing presents the notion of collaborative survival, citing it as "a guiding narrative for designing systems that prompt humans to notice and become compassionately concerned with the wellbeing of nonhuman species."¹ My investigation of the meal as an artistic medium serves as a translation, of Tsing's *arts of noticing*, as an endeavor to instill a furthering of mindfulness into the domain of consumption. An evocation of alternate forms of awareness is pursued in the time-space juncture of the meal in a suggestion of possibility. The principle catalyst in this pursuit is my experimentation with engagement, whether it be in the listening to sound of a meal being cultivated and cooked, to the collective creation of a compost with the remains of a dinner. A curiosity to explore new potentials modes of interacting with food enforces the undercurrent *arts of noticing* in my work. The meal is taken as an opportunity to engage in a tri-temporal reflection, to dissect where our food is coming from and where our food as well a possible moment to learn

¹ Collaborative survival as explored in *Mushroom at The End of The World; On The Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* by Anna Tsing.

from, and *with* our food. These extended engagements are instigators that aim to induce a state of inquiry stretching beyond the temporality of the meal.

Can the meal, implemented as a performative moment in the trajectory of creative research, be expanded to foster an exploration of these possibilities? The meal, a space to nurture the potentiality of these systems, proves to be a site for the propagating of what Tsing calls the *arts of noticing*, that is, our acknowledgement of entanglement.²

Consumption entails participation within a system; it is an integral segment of the complex chain of interdependency in both natural and man made structures. In times of increasing precarity, an acknowledgement of the systems we implicate ourselves into through the decisions we make is particularly of pertinence. The etymology of the word "consume" is derivative of its morpheme, *sumo*, meaning "to take." Subsequent variants of the word include the late fourteenth century definition of the word, "to destroy by separating into parts which cannot be reunited, as by burning or eating." ³ *Consume* originates from its ancestor *consumere* meaning literally "to use up, eat, waste" but it was not until recently that the word donned a comestible connotation. It is curious that this word evokes a depletion of resources in its action, in that waste and destruction are definitive components of the word.

This genealogy provides a ripe site for reflection, propagating the potentiality of crafting a sustainable alternative to our methods of consumption, one that is not imbued with the detriment of destruction. How can we migrate from the notion of waste and devastation in our contemporary consumption patterns? Can we render a more reciprocal substitute for this model of consumption, one that is less predicated upon its root "to take" and more saturated with the presence of "to give"? Current global food market infrastructure pays little heed to the concept of regeneration, neither in economy nor ecology. This beckons a large-scale scrutiny; an illumination of the possibility of working in cognizance of collaborative survival.

The extension of a meal beyond a shared moment of conviviality situates it as an interactive installation in formality, yet simultaneously renders it into a research tool. It morphs into a platform for knowledge exchange, and is the mechanism that feeds the cyclical nature of my

² Tsing, Anna. (2015). *Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton University Press.

³ The genealogy of consume sourced from www.etymonline.com/word/consume

practice The meal established in this context provides a means to test the possibility of a system, calibrated to Tsing's *arts of noticing*, that prompts the raising of awareness towards our consumption patterns. By implementing the meal as a medium, how can we embark upon a tritemporal exploration of our food, using the present to understand where it comes from, and where it goes? My work unravels this potentiality, through the incorporation of information and interactivity in the performative moment of research. It aims to evoke an inquiry as to how as a species we can encourage sustainability through the cultivation and cooking of our food, consuming in cognizance of our embedding in a dynamic, multi-species entanglement.

Structurally, a meal resides in the temporal space of its present, however my fabrication of the term "tri-temporal" in this context aims to incorporate its neighboring temporalities into that juncture. Ephemeral in nature, yet saturated with a contingency upon past and future, the meal permits malleability in its exploration of past and present, as its two contingent collaborators. "Tri-temporal" considers precursory action simultaneous to subsequent effect.

My interest in the present moment of a meal as a platform for exploring these proximate temporalities renders the meal as a sort of temporal amalgam. In Donna Haraway's definition of the Chthulecene she explains "it is a compound of two Greek roots (*khton* and *kainos*) that together name a kind of time-place for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth."⁴ She continues to unravel the etymology of Chthulecene to reveal that *kainos* "means now, a time of beginnings, a time for ongoing, for freshness. Nothing in *kainos* must mean conventional pasts, presents, or futures. There is nothing in times of beginnings that insists on wiping out what comes after." Haraway states that "*kainos* can be full of inheritances, of remembering, and full of comings, of nurturing what might still be. I hear *kainos* in the sense of thick, ongoing presence, with hyphae infusing all sorts of temporalities and materialities." In the closing of this definition, Haraway poses the present as a time of possibility, leaving the door ajar for the multitude of potentialities. The orchestration of multi-temporalities comes into play in my experimentation with meal, as in my reference to the polyphonic assemblage.

⁴ Haraway, Donna. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Tsing's definition is taken as a point of departure in the pursuit of cooking and consuming within the frame of collaborative survival. In times imbued with ecological precarity, we are beckoned to examine actions with pernicious repercussions and contemplate sustainable alternatives. How can we "stay with the trouble" as Haraway proposes, and postulate possibilities to collectively navigate through it? My work adopts the meal as an artistic and pedagogical tool to acknowledge these implications, and as a platform to responsibly situate ourselves within that of a multi-species entanglement.

This text unravels the trajectory of my work, tracing the genealogy of my interest, and situating my research in the context of Tsing and Haraway along with references such as Yoland Wadsworth, Karen Barad, and TJ Demos. The mapping of an investigation of cultivation and consumption fertilizes a ground for the *arts of noticing*, propagating new questions and forging new paths of inquiry.

Simultaneous to the interactive meals, a collection of exercises, anecdotes, and recipes has been collected, weaving together a book that explores this act of cooking, cultivating, and consuming in the frame of collaborative survival. These artifacts serve as traces of interaction and exchange, weaving together a dynamic tapestry of collaborative practice. This collectively produced book aims to incite action as a document that initiates the reader into the terminology of *response-ability*⁵ through a series of suggested engagements. The tangible rendering of a practice bound by an ephemeral materiality allows for the fabrication of a form of an active, or "living" archive.

The book consists of an illustrated lexicon of relative terminology, navigating concepts that encompass a sense of stewardship and engagement. By presenting artistic interpretations, the lexicon fosters accessibility to these topics, creating digestible content. Participants were invited to select a term from the lexicon to embark upon an illustration of their *response-ability*. Participants include past and potential collaborators, primarily chefs, farmers, and artists. The fulcrum of the book is that of collaborative survival, yet topics explored in my work such as companion planting and composting, are integral facets. Through the exercises and recipes, the reader is invited to

⁵ Defined by Haraway as "cultivating collective knowing and doing," illuminating ethical capacity to respond

partake in an embodiment of the concepts as the book presents an invitation to be written *in*, read *from*, and cooked *with*. It is a workbook of sorts, designed with integrated blank spaces for writing and drawing. There will be around 200 copies printed that will be distributed in the United States, France and Switzerland. The book release will take place in the fall of 2020 in Berlin where it is being published with non-profit publishing house Circadian⁶, with a potential second launch at Navel, an arts space and collective in Los Angeles that I am involved with.

Always Arriving: Working with Participatory Action Research

The employment of a participatory action research methodology, in particular the lineages developed by Fals Borda and Yoland Wadsworthⁱ⁷ valorizes the interactions exchanged amongst participants in the projects, rendering the artifacts of these exchanges into a form of research. Participatory action research distinguishes interaction as the primary tool for obtaining new knowledge, allowing new questions to be generated by the pursuit of the initial questions. In her text, *What Is Participatory Action Research?* Australian researcher and methodologist, Yoland Wadsworth states that the ultimate step, which is hardly ultimate in the convention of a finality, concerns the "changing (of) our actions as part of the research process, and then further researching these actions" ⁸ Conventional research, usually hypothesis driven, advances in a forward direction with sight fixated on a formalized answer or conclusion on the horizon. A line of research with this orientation can be considered as kindred to the modernist notion of progress, in that it is predicated upon perpetual expansion. The mythology of progress imbued in capitalist systems entertains unsustainable growth, and this epidemic of thought wreaks havoc upon micro growth and local possibility. My interest in adopting participatory action research lies in its nourishment of potentiality, as a generative cycle that allows for inquiry through experimentation.

⁶ Circadian is "concerned with proposing ways of stimulating embodiment and bridging the content of the book into the reader's experience. A book then becomes the source code for an operating system that can be tried on by anybody who's interested to expand their capacity to act." <u>www.circadian.co</u>

 ⁷ MacDonalid, Cathy. (2012). Understanding Participatory Action Research: A Qualitative Research Methodology.
⁸ Wadsworth, Yoland. (1998). What is participatory action research? *Action Research International*. Institute of Workplace Research, Learning and Development, and Southern Cross University Press.

Wadsworth continues to state: "instead of a linear model, participatory action research thus proceeds through cycles, 'starting' with reflection on action, and proceeding round to new action that is then further researched. The new actions differ from the old actions - they are literally in different places." The constraints of a forward trajectory, one fixated on an ultimate arrival, would hinder the sympoietic nature of my work. Tsing writes, "progress is embedded, too, in widely accepted assumptions about what it means to be human. Even when disguised through other terms, such as 'agency,' 'consciousness,' and 'intention,' we learn over and over that humans are different from the rest of the living world because we look forward – while other species, which live day to day, are thus dependent on us. As long as we imagine that humans are made through progress, nonhumans are stuck within this imaginative framework too." ⁹ Staying with this deviation from traditional ideologies of progress based research, the process of participatory action research encourages a state of what could be deemed as *always arriving*, a successive fluidity that propagates new questions. The figure below illustrates a participatory action research spiral, conveying the constant of questioning and reflecting.

⁹ Tsing, Anna. (2015). *Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton University Press.



Credit – Alice McIntrye

This format prompts cessation after each interaction, providing imperative periods of digestion of the information gleaned from investigation. The process of participatory action research fertilizes both the discursive and the reflective nature of my work. This lineage is frequently implemented by artists working collaboratively as it acknowledges interaction and engagement as primary sources of research. The valorization of these exchanges is made evident by the involvement of other "actors" in the work, and often extends to include their participation as an integral part of the work, as in the case with my work, Aural Oral (see p. 19) and Terrapolis (see p. 26).

II. First Course

Transcribing with Thick Description

In this text, I oscillate between a micro and a macro scale of examination to embrace a multitude of perspectives. A fluctuation between proximities allows for dynamic interpretation of the actions and reflections. Implementing thick description¹⁰, from anthropologist Clifford Geerzt's *Thick Description: Toward An Interpretive Theory of Culture* written in 1973, to extend the examination of behavior to include the context. This magnification transcends the topography of action, indulging a robust reading of action in place. This methodology encourages a qualitative evaluation of action in relation to circumstance through the inclusion of voice and sentiment. Sociologist Norman Denzin elaborates on thick description stating "a thin description, in contrast gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experience as a process. Out of this process arises a text's claim for truth, or verisimilitude." ¹¹ Denizen proceeds to expound this analysis to include five integral components of thick description; biographical, historical, situational, relational, and interactional. In the accounts of projects such as a *Componere* (see p.36) and Terrapolis I will don a form of thick description in an expansion of context.

Constellation: The Sites of Transmission

The constellation formed by mapping the sites of transmission elucidates the inherent complexity of working with a multitude of sites. This exercise allocates a sense of unification amongst the myriad of partners and projects, unifying the ostensible insularity of separate sites. The various locales of the mapping below intertwine to weave a tapestry of sites. The

¹⁰ Geertz, Clifford. (1973). Thick Description: Toward An Interpretive Theory of Culture.

¹¹ Denzin, Norman. (2017). *Qualitative Inquiry Under Fire; Toward a New Paradigm Dialogue*. Routledge.

implementation of the term "site" pays homage to Robert Smithson's site, in the consideration of these sites being bound by physicality, imbued with a sense of raw reality. ¹²



Mapping the sites of transmission.

Each of these sites is bound by a state of interaction, and successively hosts a transformation of the material originating from the first site. The sites of transmission commence at the farm or garden, the site that sources the materiality. There is at times a deviation to a market in the case that I have to work with a farmers market as an intermediary structure due to lack of physical access or proximity to a farm. From these two sites of origins, the work migrates to the kitchen, in which assembly and transformation of physical material occurs. Subsequent to the kitchen, the organic matter arrives at the table, where it encounters a new modality of interaction, one that activates the phenomenon of consumption. In its departure from the table, the material is assimilated into the body, ultimately returning to the earth after a transition through

¹² Flam, Jack. (editor) *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings.* (1996). University of California Press.

the ultimate point of physicality of this cycle. With each new site, the material is subject to the process of translation, donning a new form to adapt to its new context. In this regenerative transit, decomposition is equivalent to composition, inducing a series of re-compositions along the way. The cyclical motion of agriculture and its passage through varying stages of consumption prompts a reflection upon the kindred form to that of the participatory action research spiral, in which materials, or questions, are subject to perpetual generation, in a sense *always arriving*.

Master Trans as Meta-Site

Master TRANS — has served as a meta-site to the constellation of these sites of transmission, in its provision of a reflexive frame that nourishes self-referential examination. TRANS fosters a lens of criticality of socially engaged and collaborative modalities of practice that has influenced my inquiry of the meal as a pedagogical tool for social transformation.

TRANS — calibration to the idea of transpedagogy, as popularized by artists Tania Bruguera and Pablo Helguera, provides a ripe meta-site for reflection of the convergence of art and pedagogy, specifically one that takes root in interaction and collaboration. Helguera proposes the notion of transpedagogy to "describe a series of projects by artists and collectives around the world that blend the educational processes and art making in ways that are clearly different to the more conventional functions of art academies or of formal art education."¹³ Reflecting collectively on our modes of food consumption through the medium of a meal is a transpedagogical approach that ruptures traditional modes of learning or making, creating an interactive and immersive divergence from conventions of eating and learning. Helguera continues to define transpedagogy as "the migration of the discipline and methods of education into art making, resulting in a distinct medium where the artwork is constituted simultaneously of a learning experience or process and a conceptual gesture open to interpretation." It is in the spirit of this migratory act that I have adopted the meal as a medium that embraces both the conceptual gesture and the learning experience, referred to by Helguera as constitutive of a transpedagogical approach.

¹³ Extracted from Pablo Helguera's essay *Transpedagogy*.

The master explores interaction based research practices through its encouragement of collective practice and individual practice with a predisposition to social engagement, its valorization of collaboration as a means of learning is referential of the process of participatory action. Bruguera emphasizes "it is important that the project plans at several times (especially when successful) to stop and create again a sort of chaos or a sort of disorganization of its structures so again new distributions can emerge as well as a new rotation of possibilities to be accepted and the space to validate new proposals."¹⁴ It is in this spirit that Master TRANS promotes self-reflection as a tool to further develop.

My first encounter with the formality of a jury in this context occurred in the fall of 2018 and was a direct importation of my practice into the frame of the master, in that I created an interactive meal in which the jury and the students of the master were invited to participate a dialogue activated by edible elements. This piece consisted of an installation of tamales, a Mesoamerican dish made of corn masa and steamed in a cornhusk, prepared by a group of students, tied together to draft a large circle around the table. A small scroll of text was tethered to each tamale, containing words about the meal as a potential tool of transmission, as well as some quotes from the references of my work. This facilitated moment of listening invited each participant to unfurl their text and read their scroll to the group. After the moment of collective reading, the tamales were eaten in correspondence to a dialogue circumnavigating the concepts presented.

This project was later expounded upon during the portes ouvertes of HEAD in which I proposed a tamalada, which is a gathering, traditionally of women, to prepare the labor-intensive dish of tamales. The hospitable climate of the dish's preparation usually includes an exchanging of personal stories, in a typically familial context. The intimacy of this tradition, taught to me by my Mexican grandmother, was an element I was interested in exploring in the proposition of a tamalada to a group of strangers that would pass through the TRANS Atelier. The workshop fostered a space for conviviality and personal exchange amongst the group of strangers, propagating acquaintance through the process of preparation, yet it also presented a critical lens

¹⁴ Brugeura, Tania. *Transpedagogy: Contemporary Art and the Vehicles of Education.*" Panel discussion curated by Pablo Helguera at MoMA in New York on May 15, 2009.

in the examination of the histories of the dish. Tamales originated in Mesoamerica in around 6000 BC and were implemented as some of the first portable foods, to be utilized in journeys of long distance, specifically in battle. They were given as offerings to the Aztec, Mayan, and Olmec gods, and during the Spanish colonization of Mexico, tamales became appropriated as a dish typically made for Christmas, undergoing a transference of homage from indigenous gods to a Catholic god. This workshop briefly examined the effects of colonization on food through facilitated dialogue around the Spanish's implementation of native dishes and was an exercise in using the meal as a tool to explore culinary histories, as in one of works in the Aural Oral series (see p. 19)



Tamales preparation for Master TRANS jury, 2018.



Tamales preparation for Master TRANS jury, 2018.

For my second jury, in the spring of 2019, I experimented with the notion of translation, as a deviation from another importation of a meal into the context of the jury. My interest was piqued by the process of translating a meal without donning a replicatory model of my extraneous work, and with the omission of comestible matter. Implementing information as the material for collective digestion, I experimented with serving terminology as a meal, with loosely inspired plate formations inscribed with words such as assemblage, sympoiesis, and response-ability. In the center of the tablecloth was a hand painted diagram of the participatory action research spiral adopted during my research, conveying the generative cycle of inquiry that nourished the work. This installation was accompanied by the rough draft of my book exploring cultivating, cooking, and consuming in the frame of collaborative survival. Keeping with the notion that each translation ultimately renders a new copy, I worked in heed to the adaptation to the constraints imposed by the formality of the jury. This simulation of a meal alluded to another modality of consumption, and fostered a discursive examination of the collective digestion of my research.

Listening: Renunciation as Precursor for Response-Ability

When working in the context of site specificity, in the spirit of Miwon Kwon's definition, "focused on establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site, and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion,"¹⁵ I am engaged initially in listening to and with the site, often through walking and sensorial interaction. In order to engage in response-ability it is imperative to consider the site in its existing form, rather than arriving blinded by intent. Through the act of listening, one engages with a site in a state of observation, rather than one predicated by premeditation. In the act of listening there is a sense of renunciation that occurs, a relinquishing of intention, a practicing of the *arts of noticing*. The act of listening serves as an integral precursor to *response-ability*, as in my series Aural Oral. I work with the act of listening as a means to arrive, as well as a means to translate material to a multitude of sites, as explained in the sites of transmission diagram (see p.12).

Plant Based as Response-Ability

¹⁵ Kwon, Miwon. 2002. One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Local Identity. MIT Press.

The working with and from plant based sources lays rooted at the foundation of my work. Although not always apparent in the preliminary steps of a piece, such as the invitation or the initial conversation, the meals are consistently fabricated solely from a basis of plant matter. This position stems from a facet of *response-ability*, in that what one consumes is indicative of their participation in agricultural systems. One whom eats locally and seasonally, with a primarily plant based gravitation, has much less of a role in environmentally detrimental agricultural practices than one whom consumes meat and imported foods. In this regard, consumption can be considered as an equivalent to civic participation.

The impact of the cultivation of livestock and their feed has had an astronomical impact on our planet. The industry is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation's report *Livestock's Long Shadow*.¹⁶ Humans are said to use 59% of arable land for livestock feed, and industrial agriculture, in particular meat and dairy, is one of the major contributors to the endangerment of around one million species, as stated by an extensive report released this year by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.¹⁷ The impacts of these industries will increase exponentially if a major shift in consumption does not occur.

In *We Are The Weather: Saving The Planet Begins at Breakfast,* Jonathan Safran Foer states that "choosing to eat fewer animal products is probably the most important action an individual can take to reverse global warming—it has a known and significant effect on the environment, and, done collectively, would push the culture and the marketplace with more force than any march." ¹⁸ Diet and consumption are an ultimately delicate subject, and this is something which I pay heed to. I deviate from any degree of imposition of my personal choice, and aiming instead to present it as a possibility rather than a command. This remains a rather fragile facet of the work, and I am in exploration of new ways to facilitate dialogue around this subject.

¹⁶ A comprehensive report issued by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that builds upon the research of the Livestock, Environment, and Development Initiative based in Rome.

¹⁷ Steinfield, Henning. Garber, Pierre. Wassenaar, Tom. Castel, Vincent. Rosales, Mauricio. De Haan, Cees. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2006). Chief Publishing Management Service.

¹⁸ Safran-Foer, Jonathan. (2019). *We Are The Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast.* Hamish Hamilton.

Most recently, the global pandemic induced by the corona virus is said to have originated from the production of animals for human consumption, categorizing it as a zoonotic disease. According to the World Health Organization, "a zoonosis is any disease or infection that is naturally transmissible from vertebrate animals to humans." ¹⁹ The intersection of food production and wild ecosystems forges a pathway for pathogens to leap between animal and human. The majority of infectious viruses of the century have direct correlation to industrial animal farming; the AH1N1 and Sars came from pigs, the bird flu was of aviarian origin, while other zoonoses include Ebola, salmonella, and mad cow disease. The magnitude of havoc wreaked by the influx of zoonotic disease beckons a transformation of the global food system through the cessation of industrial animal agriculture.

III. Second Course

Sonic Cartographies: Aural Oral

The genealogy of my work with the meal as a medium can be traced back to the project Aural Oral that began in 2015 in Los Angeles. Aural Oral explores a meal as a sonic meditation, proposing a reflection on processes of cultivation, fabrication, and assembly. In the formality of the performance, the meal pairs a sonic cartography of ingredients with its consumption, each course accompanied by an ambient archive composed *with* the dish. The amplification of micro actions through the ambient soundscape presents an examination of processes often silent or haphazardly witnessed. In Aural Oral the miniscule gestures of the farmer and chef are magnified to illuminate the intricacies of these polychronic practices, offering an expanded sensorial relationship that extends beyond the domain of the gustatory.

Aural Oral functions as a form of sonic research in the investigation of fabrication and cultivation practices. The series implements piezo microphones to take contact recordings of culinary actions such as chopping, slicing, grating, as well as agricultural actions such as digging

¹⁹ Zoonoses as defined by the World Health Organization, <u>https://www.who.int/topics/zoonoses/en/</u>

and harvesting. Hydrophones are employed in the recording process to capture water-based interactions such as boiling, steaming, and rinsing.

The first meal in the series took place at Navel, an arts space and collective in Los Angeles I have been working with over the course of the past five years. The first meal was an invitation to expand upon a piece I had created in which a soup was "listened to" in accompaniment to its consumption. The nascence of my interest in expanding the perceptive intake of our meals continued to unfurl with the subsequent meals of Aural Oral. The second piece in the series served simultaneously as a furthering of this sonic research and a research into the particular culinary histories of shojin ryori, a monastic lineage of cooking in Japan. My interest in this way of cooking and consuming is largely predicated upon their sense of stewardship with the land, of eating in seasonality, and with an adversity towards waste. In this way of thinking, a practice consisting in eating the entirety of the vegetable or fruit in gratitude, *kansha*, the literal translation of "thanks", is of great importance.



AURAL ORAL

A SONIC DINING EXPERIENCE BY GRACE DENIS

APPETIZER

ZENSAI

SPRING SURINAGASHI SOUP PUREE OF FRESH FAVA BEAN AND SNAP PEAS WITH LOTUS CRISP

MAIN COURSE

ICHI JU SAN SAI

SATSUMAIMO + SHISO PESTO ROASTED PURPLE SWEET POTATO WITH SHISO AND CHESTNUT PESTO

FENNEL SUNOMONO + MARINATED MYOGA SOFTLY PICKLED FENNEL WITH FRESH KUMQUAT JUICE + MARINATED GINGER BUDS

MISO GLAZED MUSHROOMS SHITAKE AND KING TRUMPET SLOW BRAISED IN MISO

THREE SEAWEED MILLET KOMBU STEEPED MILLET WITH NORI AND DULSE

BOK CHOY WITH BLACK TAHINI ROASTED BOK CHOY HALVES WITH GINGER BLACK TAHINI DRIZZLE

DESSERT

DEZATO

TANGERINE SORBET + WASABI CREAM TANGERINE TURMERIC SORBET WITH WASABI COCONUT CREAM AND PISTACHIO DUST

FEATURING WINE BY PSHYIC WINES AND TEA FROM STEEP CO

Aural Oral Menu, 2015.

The menu of this meal was used as a tool to convey what they were growing, and explored the history of their cultivation practice, for example millet was used to signify the grain's popularity before the large scale implementation of irrigation systems that lead to mass cultivation of rice.

The most recent Aural Oral in the series worked in collaboration with two farmers practicing organic and biodynamic methods at the foot of the Atlas Mountains outside of Marrakech. I had been invited as an artist in residence to work on a site-specific Aural Oral that explored contemporary Moroccan farming practices and culinary histories of the region. During my six weeks of research, I spent time working primarily with two farms, Domaine Sauvage and Dar

Slimane, both which focused on organic and permaculture cultivation methods. The project additionally collaborated with a group of women in the Agafay desert, at the artist residency I was hosted by, to learn particular culinary practices such as bread making. Sound recording was done both on the farm during harvests and in the kitchen during production, creating an extended ambient reflection upon these two processes. I worked exclusively with Souhail, the owner of Domaine Sauvage, on the recording process, who created the first organic farmers market in Marrakech.

I returned this winter to meet with the two farms to explore an elaboration upon the continuation of our work together. One of the farms is creating a "living kitchen" which will be an outdoor kitchen, integrated into the farmland, constructed entirely from organic materials on site. The living kitchen will host a myriad of edible plants growing from its structure, within a hands grasp for use while cooking, as well as a compost pile housed behind the structure. I have been invited to create an inaugural piece, or meal, for the living kitchen, which will hopefully transpire in the summer if travel permits.

This series explores engagement in a form various to that of my subsequent works, in that it does not draw upon the meal primarily as a modality for knowledge exchange, instead Aural Oral creates an immersive environment to invoke what Anna Tsing coins as the *art of noticing*.²⁰ Aural Oral employs the experience of listening as a primary point of entry, as a means to enter an expanded observation of both sites of meal's preparation, the farm and the kitchen. The revealing of a myriad of micro actions inherent in the preparation of a food and its successive form as a meal instills a greater sense of awareness and engagement. This gesture encourages a moment of collective reflection, eliciting a space of inquiry. In an imagined chronology of potential response to the current environmental crisis, Tsing's *arts of noticing* could be positioned as the first rung on the ladder towards creating more sustainable habits. Donna Haraway's notion of *response-ability*, defined as to "to cultivate the capacity to respond"²¹ would be the second; the first instilling awareness, the second inspiring action. These two sequential modes of awareness are individualized experiences, bound by their own duration, one dependent on the person. Aural Oral proposes immersive listening as catalyst to potential states of response.

²⁰ Tsing, Anna. (2015). *Mushroom at the End of the World.* Princeton University Press.

²¹ Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene.* Duke University Press.



Recording of Aural Oral, 2019.



Recording at Domaine Sauvage Farm and dish from Aural Oral, 2019.



Produce from Domaine Sauvage for Aural Oral, 2019.

Terrapolis: Permaculture Companion Planting and Guilding



Terrapolis collectively produced painting for menu book, 2019.

Terrapolis is an ongoing series of dinners created in collaboration with two artists, Jo Vávra and Gal Sherizly, sprouting from a project that took place in the summer of 2019, in which I was invited to propose an interactive meal at creative residency in Portugal. At the time, Jo was running a restaurant in Fonta De Telha, a small fishing village south of Lisbon that invited artists

and chefs to imagine projects. She had heard about my work in Aural Oral in Morocco with the farms Domaine Sauvage Bio and Dar Slimane. Jo and I were connected through a mutual friend, and reached out to extend an invitation for me to propose a project at her space in Fonta De Telha.

Upon meeting, there was an immediate bond in our shared discourse and web of references. I had conveyed my interest in creating a dinner exploring the notion of companion plants, in which I intended to implement the menu as a medium to convey these partnerships. We began to discuss our common interest in the practice of permaculture and out of that the concept for our first dinner was born. We both drew heavily upon Donna Haraway's Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, commencing an exploration of concepts embedded in the text. I had been researching the practice of companion planting, a technique within the field of permaculture in which "plants are grown in proximity to each other because of their ability to enhance or complement each other."²² The first dinner expanded upon this practice, pairing complementary plants in various dishes to convey their symbiotic relationship. Working with the plants available in the bioregion as a starting point, we crafted a menu that transmitted these relations. The dinner occurred in an outdoor location in the village of Fonta de Telha, and all of the produce was sourced from within an eight-kilometer radius. The majority originating from Quinta da Hardeira farm, and remaining elements purchased from the gardens or potagers²³ of inhabitants of the village, in an effort to contribute to the village's local economy. The material from the farm included quince, grapes, cabbage, and peppers while herbs, figs, and tomatoes were harvested from the overgrown gardens of the neighboring homes as well as from the site of the piece. This modality of sourcing remains one of the core pillars of our practice, adhering to an interest in supporting local food systems. All our preceding menus continued to be fabricated in the fashion of celebrating locality and seasonality.

²² Githinji, Leonard. *Benefits of Companion Planting in Gardening.* Virginia State University.

²³ French term for vegetable plot.



Terrapolis dinner, 2019.

The name Terrapolis draws inspiration from Haraway's description in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene:*

"Terrapolis is a fictional integral equation, a speculative fabulation. Terrapolis is n-dimensional niche space for multi species be- coming-with. Terrapolis is open worldly, indeterminate and poly temporal. Terrapolis is a chimera of materials, languages, histories. Terrapolis is for companion species, cum panis, with bread, at a table together - not "post human" but "com-post" Terrapolis is in place; terrapolis makes space for unexpected companions. Terrapolis is an equation for guman, for humus, for soil, for on- going risky infection, for epidemics of promising trouble, for permaculture. Terrapolis is the SF game of response-ability."

Terrapolis employs Haraway's notion of *response-ability* as a vertebrae for its actions, interacting with peripheral environments through the means of response. The collective aims to engage guests that include both acquaintances and strangers, in an exploration of local possibility. This interest communicated through a consistent sourcing of ingredients within small radiuses and an illumination of the impact of transportation. Terrapolis has continued to implements the menu as a pedagogical tool to communicate companion, citing Haraway's *Companion Species, Mis-Recognition, and Queer Worlding.* An elaboration on the root of companion "bring us to eat together, to breaking bread, to a classical meal cum panis. ' To companion' ties us together in eating and pleasure." ²⁴ The denotation of a together at a table remains a seed from which the collective florescences. Terrapolis plays with this meaning by presenting definitive examples of companions in the plant genus, together at a table, with bread.

Shortly after the first Terrapolis dinner, it was decided to continue the trajectory of our collective work, adopting the name as a moniker. The second dinner created occurred in November of 2019 at an art space in Lisbon during Lisbon Art Week. The meal delved further into the notion of companion species and the notion of a plant guild. In permaculture, guilding embraces the form of a human guild, defined as a group working collectively toward a shared goal, applying it to an assemblage of plants that enhance each other's growth. In the planting of a guild, there is generally one plant that is situated as a form of pillar, from which compatible species are planted concentrically. The main course of the second dinner consisted of a dish that was modeled after a chestnut guild, using the chestnut as a focal point and adding its partners, kale, amaranth, and thyme in the guilded dish.

²⁴ Haraway, Donna. (2008) Companion Species, Mis-Recognition, and Queer Worlding. In: Giffney, Noreen and Hird, Myra. *Queering the Non/Human*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.



Terrapolis II Menu, 2019.

My interest in permaculture lays in its mimicry of systems such as conglomerations of plants replicating the unity of a guild and food forests' application of layered planting to create dynamic and polycultural edible ecosystems. Permaculture is a guide for designing systems that emphasize interspecies collaborations, and carves a role for the human construction of environments where these multi-species entanglements can flourish. Founded by David Holmgren and Bill Mollison in the 1970s in Australia, permaculture originated as a sustainable approach to

agricultural systems, presenting an alternative to monoculture and industrial farming. The portmanteau "permaculture" is derivative of "permanent agriculture", echoed by the systems' ability to self sustain. Since permacultures nascence as an agricultural approach it has expanded to include an implementation in the fabrication of other systems. Holmgren describes it as a "design systems for resilient living and land use, based on universal ethics and ecological design principles."²⁵ He continues to express the malleability of its usage, "the same ethics and principles apply to design of buildings, tools and technology. Applying permaculture ethics and principles in our gardens and homes inevitably leads us towards redesigning our ways of living so as to be more in tune with local surpluses and limits." The twelve pillars of permacultural approach commence with a state of observation and interaction, in correlation to Tsing's *arts of noticing* and Haraway's *response-ability*.

In permaculture systems, human intervention is a means of introduction or initiation, delegating the role of fabricator to the human as they create a form of armature, in which the sculpture subsequently commences to build itself, allowing the system to self orchestrate from there on. The one who intervenes becomes an agent of activation, a catalyst that prompts the fabrication of a platform upon which nature can take its course. The role of the intervener is one that I return to often in the analyzation of my practice, particularly the delicate equilibrium in the construction of this armature, whether physical or social. Once established, this armature propagates intra-action, a replacement term for interaction proposed by theoretical physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad. Intra-action "necessitates pre-established bodies that then participate in action with each other. Intra-action understands agency as not an inherent property of an individual or human to be exercised, but as a dynamism of forces in which all designated "things' are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably."²⁶ By embracing permacultural approach in the orchestration of the dinners, the collective creates a structure that nourishes intra-action amongst human and non-human matter. Working with the

²⁵ Holmgren, David. (2018). *RetroSuburbia: The Downshifter's Guide to a Resilient Future*. Melliodora Publishing.

²⁶ Barad, Karen. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning.* Duke University Press.

parallel between the intangible social structures and the tangible structures of permaculture provide fosters the collective's desire to learn from and with intra-action in the frame of a meal.



Example of intra-action of a permaculture system. Credit; Sustainable Agriculture Institute

The collective's first two works occurred in Portugal as the residency based in Fonta da Telha was the point of convergence, however the upcoming series will take place in Berlin where my two collaborators are now located. A criticality of distance and travel surfaces in our discussions, and we are in pursuit of how to synthesize our work into a primary local, with minimized travel, in calibration to our pursuit of exploring locality. The conversation circling the next piece bestows heavy emphasis on the significance of duration and location, with an interest in working intimately with particular farmers and cultivators spanning beyond one meal. The question of temporality comes into play upon the examination of these relations, and the tendency to be more instantaneous and ephemeral in nature procures critical analysis. The group strives to proceed in cognizance of a cultivation of these relationships, as the question of duration becomes increasingly relevant the further we delve into the field of agriculture and ecology. This question is situated as part of the epicenter of conversation concerning future projects. Embodying this notion, the group aims to create conditions that facilitate extended and expanded relations, spend longer durations in the cultivation of these projects. For the launch of the collaborative survival book in Berlin, Terrapolis will be hosting an interactive meal, with a correlating workshop that activates the collective's contribution to the book, an exercise to collectively construct a recipe exploring sympoiesis.

Systems Theory: Autopoietic vs. Sympoietic

Collaborative approach lays at the core of the practice of the collective, from the initial collaborations amongst the group to the extraneous actors that the group consociates with, Terrapolis remains a platform open to encounters. The collective aims to continuously evolve its work, akin to the elaboration of a guild as we develop through and with our intra-action. Terrapolis' interest stems from the exploration of new means of engaging in sustainability, through action, practice, and sharing. This modus operandi is in calibrated to formations classified as a sympoietic system, as coined by M. Beth Dempster in her text Sympoletic and Autopoletic Systems: A New Distinction for Self Organizing Systems. Dempster proposes the word sympolesis for "collectivelyproducing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries." Terrapolis embraces the definition of a sympoietic system, identifying with its predisposition towards an evolutionary orientation. As a collective the group remains "organizationally ajar", welcoming external collaborations, often with farmers or other artisans and artists, and morphing form to fit context. The collective, at its core is composed of three artists, yet favors malleability and valorizes working with people from other métiers. Beyond collaborations with farmers the collective has worked with ceramicist Cecile Mestelan and Florian Tonello, specialist in biodynamic and natural wines. For its upcoming series in Berlin, the group is in the process of

developing new collaborators, highlighting primarily local agricultural producers. Terrapolis favors a participatory process, both with its collaborators and the attendants of the meals.

AUTOPOIETIC SYSTEMS SYMPOIETIC SYSTEMS

tree individual human clique or group-think technical jargon expert driven task force normal science forest community open group common english participatory process post-normal science

Table 2 – Examples of autopoietic and sympoietic systems

Dempster, M Beth. Sympoieitic and Autopoietic Systems: A New Distinction for Self-Organizing Systems.

Sympolesis, composed of two Greek roots, "sún" meaning "together" and "poíēsis", meaning creation or production, encompasses the ability for a dynamic system to self organize, as mirrored by the work of the collective and it's exploration of permaculture systems. In their text *Synergy and Sympolesis*, John Wood, professor at Goldsmiths, and O#o van Nieuwenhuijze, independent research scientist in Amsterdam, explore sympolesis as "an act of co-creation in which an insightful meaning emerges spontaneously or unexpectedly from the collaborative process."²⁷ Sympolesis can be digested as a literal translation of the phenomenon of *making with*, and it is this implementation of the term that Terrapolis identifies with.

²⁷ Wood, John and O#o van Nieuwenhuijze. (2006). *Synergy & Sympolesis in the Writing of Joint Papers (Anticipation with/in Imagination)*. International Journal of Computing Anticipatory Systems, edited by Daniel M. Dubois. Volume 10. Centre for Hyperincursive Anticipation in Ordered Systems. Liege, Belgium.

Extending beyond the scope of my work with Terrapolis, a distinguishment between autopoietic systems and sympoietic systems appears in the examination of the constellations formed by my work, and the particularities innate to interaction, as each project is bound by a language predicated upon exchange. Exchange lays at the core of these participatory practices, and the classification of the types of systems I have been working *in* and *with* has been an important distinguishment of the work. This self-prompted analysis has illuminated the modality in which I interact and intra-act with others. This identification supplements additional forms of classifications, including the mapping of the sites of transmission and the calibration to the phases of participatory action research. Classifying these various interactions nourishes a differentiation between the organic and the assembled formations in the trajectory of the work.

AUTOPOIETIC SYSTEMS	SYMPOIETIC SYSTEMS
Defining Characteristics	
self-produced boundaries	lacking boundaries
organizationally closed	organizationally ajar
external structural coupling	internal and external structural coupling
Characteristic Tendencies	
autonomous units	complex, amorphous entities
central control	distributed control
'packaged,' same information	distributed, different information
reproduction by copy	amorphous reproduction
evolution between systems	evolution within system
growth/development oriented	evolutionary orientation
homeostatic balance	balance by dynamic tension
steady state	potentially dramatic, surprising change
finite temporal trajectories	potentially infinite temporal trajectories
predictable	unpredictable
Advantages/disadvantages	
efficient	adaptable, flexible
constrained, codified information	open to new and different information
require certainty	ok with surprise
Table 1- Comparison of poietic system characteristics	

Dempster, M Beth. Sympoietic and Autopoietic Systems: A New Distinction for Self-Organizing Systems

Componere and the Edible Lexicon
In the fall of 2019, the curator Ekaterina Shcherbakova invited me to create a piece for her arts space focusing on time based practices in Paris, All The Best. The piece is a two-part project dinner project, the first segment titled Componere and the second called Coalesce. Componere, a conversation activated by edible elements, occurred in November of 2019. The title Componere is derivative of the Latin word for compost. In the examination of the etymology of compost, I encountered componere, which broken down is composed of two roots; "com" which signifies "with, or together" and "ponere" which translates as "to place." Componere was an endeavor to collectively create both a physical compost and a metaphorical compost, through a collective digestion of concepts. The decomposition and recomposition of terminology, through reading, examination, and conversation, positioned the group in form kindred to a digestive system. The group assembled as an entity to consume edible and theoretical material, breaking it down through discussions, and shifting the form of the material through the process. The processes of assimilation, transformation, and translation of matter were an integral facet of the illustration of composting. The performance began with a series of questions that I wrote as catalysts to ignite conversation about specific concepts. Small groups paired to explore these questions that were digested in a moment of collective reflection towards the termination of the dinner. The questions circumnavigated the field of ecology, exploring our relation to our peripheral environment, as well as an examination of the term "anthropocene" and the subsequent predominant forces of our time. Participants were asked to state what they deemed to be the predominant force of our time and generate a new term for this influenced epoch, proposing an alternative to that of "anthropocene" or "holocene." This question preceded the introduction of terminology such as "plantanionocene" as coined by Anna Tsing and Donna Haraway, Jason Moore's *capitalocene*²⁸, Haraway's "chthulucene."

Inspired by ethnographer Marilyn Strathern's statement "it matters what ideas we use to think other ideas" and further expanded upon by Donna Haraway in that "it matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate

²⁸ Jason Moore's *capitalocene* posits capital as the predominant force of an era shaped by endless acclumation. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism. Visual Culture.* (2016). PM Press.

relations." I was curious about the possibility to propose new ways of relating relations, and of thinking thoughts. These semi-prompted discussions invited a formulation of these possibilities through collective inquiry and exchange. The fruit of these exchanges fertilized a florescence of new questions, kindred to of the generative questions of participatory action research. The questions commenced rather generally, including the likes of "how do you define ecology?" and "how do you relate to your environment?" which sparked a conversation about noticing our ways of relating, forging the possibility for new ways of relating. Another set of questions focused on the notion of the widely debated term "anthropocene" and commenced with a positioning of the term, followed by a question concerning the predominant forces of our time. The group identified these forces as guilt, economy, resilience, power, attraction and repulsion, information, and consciousness from which a discursive speculation of alternative names took place.

Eugenius Warming, a Danish botanist, was the first to coin the term ecology in 1905, describing it as "the study of organisms in relation to their environment." Embracing Warming's definition of ecology as a point of departure, the discussion migrated through a diverse array of ecologies, surveying relations, and situating the human as the primary organism in this relational observation. The study of relation can be considered as a part of Tsing's *arts of noticing*, in that it prompts, first and foremost, an awareness of peripheral environments, and the myriad of embedded entities. The calibration to an art for noticing offers a multitude of entry points, and I am interested in the generative possibility associated with this modality of thinking and being.

Componere was composed of three courses, each paired with a micro-topic derivative of the vast expanse of ecological thought. The first course, constituted of an mélange of small dishes that were easily interacted with, was served alongside the series of questions mentioned to kindle the fire of conversation. This was the only course of the meal that was static, in the sense that the dish was consumable without interaction from the participants; all of the other dishes' comestibility was contingent upon collective activation or construction. This introductory course allowed a group constituted of strangers to become simultaneously acquainted with themselves and with the terminology.

The second course was composed of the Edible Lexicon, in which select terminology was introduced in a comestible form. Each person in attendance was given a piece of rice paper on

which a definition had been inscribed using a "beet ink" I created. The definitions encompassed a multitude of natural relations, such as biotic and abiotic, mutualism and commensalism and symbiosis, as well various nomenclatures for this period, including the above mentioned capitalocene and chthulucene. Additional terminology included in the Edible Lexicon was the definition of ecology as coined by Eugenius Warming in 1905, Haraway's notion of *response-ability*. These elements were implemented in the construction of a spring roll, in which each person read their definition to the group preceding the assembly of their roll. The group, seated in a circle on the floor of the exhibition space, was invited one by one to enter the center of the circle where an installation of the spring rolls contents sat with a bowl of water. Upon the submersion of the Edible Lexicon in water, to permit malleability of the rice paper, the definition. This gesture eliminated the definitions from the surface of the papers while simultaneously rendering the paper permeable, and therefore usable, opening them up to be filled. The end of this course left a large bowl of pink water, a liquid amalgamation of all the erased definitions.



Edible Lexicon, 2019.

The third course constituted of a collectively constructed meal, initiated by each attendee receiving a base, in this case a papadum, a toasted flatbread made of chickpea flour. There was a different ingredient placed at each seat, amounting to seventeen various elements, one for each person. Select ingredients included a carrot and harissa spread, masala roatsted purple potatoes, turmeric coconut yogurt sauce, beet and kohlrabi "companion plant" slaw, dried calendula flowers, zhoug, and pickled persimmons. The plate containing the papadum was passed around the circular assembly, with an element added with each migration. In correlation to the placing of an ingredient on the dish, each person was invited to read one of their partners' answers from the opening of the performance. This facilitated an exchange of answers anonymously, presenting an opportunity for the group to listen to each other's replies to the introductory questions on the subject. Upon the plate passing through each element, it returned to its original place, completing the circle with the arrival of a collectively constructed dish. Conversation on the questions and experience took place in small clusters until the end of the course, closing with the gathering of the organic material remains into a large bowl that was implemented in the fabricated of the compost. Preceding the final course, the group, on their own accord, initiated a clean up of the table installation, and in a moment of amiable conversation, collected all of the scraps lingering from prior moments of the dinner into the bowl for the compost. In this piece there was an interesting dynamic between the orchestration of suggestion and the additional gestures of participation and engagement the attendees, reflecting a sense of their response-ability. The occurrence of these gestures made Componere an interesting reflection on the equilibrium between the premeditated and prompted, and the organic and reactive.



Componere's collaboratively constructed dish, 2019.



Compost generated by Componere, 2019.

Coalesce; To Grow Together

The vessel passed at the end of each course of Componere, gathered the organic remnants to commence a compost that will be housed at the exhibition space as the matter decomposes. This compost will metamorphose into a soil that will house new material. The tangible and conceptual composts generated by the dinner, now coalesce into one entity of matter that will create a site to grow select ingredients of the second part of the proposal. The compost now sits outside the exhibition space in Paris, which I tend to from time to time, adding dry leaves

and other materials to balance the carbon and nitrogen levels. Once decomposed, I will return to mix the material with soil to fabricate a small garden, which will host elements for Coalesce.

Coalesce, originating from 16th century Latin, can be traced back to the two roots *cum*, meaning *with*, and *alere*, denoting the action "to nourish". This term underwent a series of morphologies to arrive at the contemporary version of the word; co-alescere, indicating the phenomenon of "to grow together" preceding coalesce. Of pertinence is the return of the root "cum" in the lineage of the word, and the root's recurrence in my work. This return to Haraway's dissection of the etymology of "companion," prompts a meandering to contemplate the relevance of "with" in the title of her book "Staying With the Trouble." The significance of this "with" elucidated by the presence of companion, iterating the influence of togetherness in both the *arts of noticing*, and *response-ability*.

The temporal trajectory of Componere and Coalesce is now subject to a timeline beyond my control, the relinquishment of my hand to that of biological phenomenon subscribes it to entropic laws inherent in decomposition. The duration of the piece lays in contingency upon a natural process, fluctuating in correlation to extraneous elements such as temperature and humidity. This facet of relinquishment is a component I am propelled to expand upon in upcoming works. My work with Ekaterina Shcherbakova will continue through the year as the compost develops, as well as in the context of a group exhibition at Centre D'art Plastique – St Fons, outside of Lyon.

The *arts of noticing* and *response-ability* are not insular endeavors; they propagate spaces of collective contemplation and action. I return to the notion at the core of coalesce, to grow together. What can we grow together by staying with? If staying with entails ongoing presence, how do we sit together, at the table cum panis, to deliberate the capacity for change? Are the possibilities of raising awareness solely embedded in moments of collectivity or can initiatives in the *arts of noticing* be cultivated individually to be transmitted collectivity, weaving together a larger, complex fabric? The oscillation between individuality and collectivity in my practice provides a fruitful reflection on the articulation of various modalities of transmission.

42

IV Digestif

Contemplating Duration

These projects, primarily site-specific, don a form of their own, often constituted by a locale. Upon the examination of the larger scale trajectory of the work, there is an omnipresent undercurrent of inquiry, unraveled in piecemeal fashion through the process of each project. The practice leans on various levels of participation, and is calibrated to a process-based modality of making and learning. This all is contingent upon an undercurrent of individualized interest, which undergoes a series of topographical transmutations in adherence to its particular contexts. The congruency of the collection of projects to its core intent of raising awareness about the possibility of collaborative survival and its propensity for sustainable practices.

Throughout the past five years of nourishing a practice that reflects on food production and consumption, I have come to be more reticent to engage in shorter-term projects, as an imperative understanding of the value of longevity continues to develop. Oscillating between temporalities in the work has proved to be arduous in particular contexts. It's almost seasonal or semestrial nature is innately saturated with various intensities. The proclivity for a pausal rhythm in the work provokes analysis, and renders a desire to shift to temporalities predisposed to longer durations. In this reflection, I encounter a return to Anna Tsing's implementation of polyphonic rhythms in *Mushroom At The End of The World*, in which she uses this type of melody as a metaphor for an assemblage, whose parallels ultimately prompt me to return to the nature of the sympoietic system. Tsing explains that polyphony entails the entwining of "autonomous melodies" which can be applied to a constellation constituted by a myriad of actors in a project, which convene to form a cohesive, harmonized body.

Tsing introduces this form of assembly, explaining, "we are used to hearing music with a single perspective. When I first learned polyphony, it was a revelation in listening; I was forced to pick out separate, simultaneous melodies and to listen for the moments of harmony and dissonance they created together. This kind of noticing is just what is needed to appreciate the

multiple temporal rhythms and trajectories of the assemblage." ²⁹ This dissection is helpful in the identification of autonomous forces at play in my work, which are at times muddled and embedded into the collective work. A further elucidation facilitates clarity in both the roles and the relations.

Tsing continues with this metaphor to draw another parallel with farming, stating;

"It may be useful to imagine the polyphonic assemblage in relation to agriculture. Since the time of the plantation, commercial agriculture has aimed to segregate a single crop and work toward its simultaneous ripening for a coordinated harvest. But other kinds of farming have multiple rhythms. In the shifting cultivation I studied in Indonesian Borneo, many crops grew together in the same field, and they had quite different schedules. Rice, bananas, taro, sweet potatoes, sugarcane, palms, and fruit trees mingled; farmers needed to attend to the varied schedules of maturation of each of these crops. These rhythms were their relation to human harvests; if we add other relations, for example, to pollinators or other plants, rhythms multiply. The polyphonic assemblage is the gathering of these rhythms, as they result from world-making projects, human and not human. The polyphonic assemblage also moves us into the unexplored territory of the modern political economy." ³⁰

This metaphor can be expanded upon to return to the pertinence of the permaculture systems in my work, the compatibility of separate entities to formulate an aggregation such as a guild. The polyphonic melody, the assemblage, the constellations, and the guilds all exhibit the prominence of gatherings and groupings, yet I return to my question of the individual within these formations. How can we provoke the simultaneous cultivation of both manners of practicing the *arts of noticing,* extending beyond the convivial clustered moment of sharing food as *cum panis.* I am interested in how the work lives on beyond this moment, and am in pursuit of unraveling this post-event possibility in the future projects. While working in the field of agriculture and ecology,

²⁹ Tsing, Anna. (2015). *Mushroom at the End of the World.* Princeton University Press.

³⁰ Tsing, Anna. (2015). *Mushroom at the End of the World.* Princeton University Press.

one not subscribed to a finite temporality, I contemplate an elasticizing of duration to calibrate to larger expanses of time in the continued unraveling of my work.

Creative Ecologies

TJ Demos, art historian and cultural critic, asked in an article published in *Take* in January orf2017, "what role can the arts play in cultivating livability amidst this profound and intensifying disorientation, at once geological, socio-political, and economic?" This question of livability explored through art calibrates to my inquiry of the meal as a pedagogical tool, as a modality to imagine new modes of engaging in sustainable practice. The role of the art is integral in my exploration of both collaborative survival and response-ability, as it is the medium that catalyses thought into action.

Creative ecology is defined as "directing the science of biological connectivity (ecology) toward the generative, rather than destructive, ends. It supports a culture of life, rather than one of the short-term profits and the ruination of livability."³¹ The valorization of creating in support of life and it's prolongation, rather than a market or profit based orientation propagates the possibility for alternative ways of art making, favoring collaborative, immersive, and interactive modalities. Demos continues to state that "proposing a notion of creative ecology means decolonizing nature – not in the sense of reclaiming some sort of original wilderness or pure nonhuman environment (these represent fictions of a colonized world), but instead releasing the environment from its reduction to "natural resources," as if it exists purely for human exploitation and consumption." My preference for working *with* rather than working *from* echoes the sentiment of deviation from a non-reciprocal and extractive modalities of making. The emphasis of *with* is recurrent thematic in my practice, sculpting space for unintended encounter and exchange.

³¹ Demos, TJ. *Creative Ecologies.* (2017). *Creative Ecologies.* Take on India: Ecology. Volume 3, Issue 1.

Art World and Consumption: A Subjective Survey

Consumption is not only contingent upon comestibility; its phenomenon extends beyond the domain of the gustatory and its situation in the realm of art includes a form of ongoing digestion. In thinking of the art world as an entity with immense capacity for consumption, the question of insatiably arises. The omnipresent demand for new modes of making preceded by the feeding of its market spectacularizes the new. The art markets proclivity for perpetually consuming new material renders it into a ravenous organism, one that inches forward in search of its next bite. The ingestion and egestion of the art world demands constant nourishment, yet simultaneously exhausts its sources. The postulation of a plateau in momentum fosters the possibility for regenerative modalities of making, acknowledging interactive and pedagogical practices. The embracing of practices with a proclivity for social transformation recently popularized by art institutions illuminates a digression from production-based practice.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed an extensive influx of interactive practice in contemporary art, multiplying the number of artists who began to experiment with the meal as a medium. Works such as Gordon Matta-Clark's FOOD, Daniel Spoerri's Eat Art Gallery, and Allen Rupperseberg's Al's Cafe all catalyzed a migration from formalized experimentations with food, prioritizing artist run spaces imbued with a hospitality and artistic approach to collective consumption. These endeavors were perceived as an "attempt to escape formal, commercial, and institutional art world structures – in good company, buoyed by food and/or drink, in spaces of the artist' own design and designation"³² This departure from institutional space was an imperative rupture in formality, referred to, along with other conceptual practices of the time, as "escape attempts" by critic Lucy Lippard³³. As stated in her essay *Escape Attempts*, "the art establishment depends so greatly on objects which can be bought and sold that I don't 'expect' it to do much about an art that is opposed to the prevailing systems (…) Hopes that 'conceptual art' would be able to avoid the general commercialization, the destructively 'progressive' approach of modernism were for the most part unfounded (…) It seemed that these artists would therefore be forcibly freed from he

³² FEAST: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art. (2013). The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago.

³³ Lippard, Lucy. Escape Attempts. (1972). University of California Press. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.

tyranny of a commodity status and market orientation."³⁴ These hybridized practices called upon the social and political, instigating an exodus from institution, simultaneously transforming the trajectory of creative consumption. FEAST: Radical Hospitality In Contemporary Art at the Chicago SMART Museum in 2012 was the first museum exhibition to survey the intersection of conceptual art and comestible material, including work from the likes of Rirkrit Tiravanija, Tom Marioni, Alison Knowles, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Suzanne Lacy. FEAST generated a site for the investigation of the politics of food, importing often peripherally dwelling lineages of art such as social practice into the context of the institution. A multitude of the works highlighted in this exhibition ran parallel to other forms of political and social radicalization of the 1960s and 1970s. Some of these works were "construed as escape attempts, but rather than reworking public and semipublic formats like the restaurant of salon, much of this art radicalized the form and function of the private domestic meal," as explained in the exhibitions catalogue. The exhibition surveyed several micro-domains of this field of practice, including a historical unraveling of "performative" and conceptual feasts" including the Futurists and Suzanne Lacy's International Dinner Party, a twenty-four hour performance running in conjunction with her former teacher, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* that extended a global invitation to the event, documented by telegrams sent to the museum. FEAST additionally included a contemporary regard to socially predisposed creative endeavors, highlighting the likes Lee Mingwei and Mella Jaarsma. This space for critical examination illuminated the slow emergence of artistic interpretation of the meal as a medium, valorizing this modality of making in an institutional context for the first time in history. The situatedness of these typically fringed practices acknowledged the implementation of "convivial settings [as] vehicles for experiments with economic, social, and aesthetic form."35

Consumption in Crisis

The peril perpetuated by the corona virus illuminated the myriad of instabilities in global food systems, amplifying the increasing precarity of over-production and over-usage. Near cessation of transnational activity sculpted a reflective space for collective scrutiny, a virtual site

³⁴ Lippard, Lucy. (1972.) *Escape Attempts*. University of California Press. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.

³⁵ FEAST: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art. (2013). The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago.

for the examination of our consumption patterns and our subsequent relationship to it. The durability and locality of food sources surfacing as an area of concern elucidated the depletive nature of current systems. In the stillness of such unprecedented times, the detrimental repercussions of our actions ripple continuously. Large-scale contemporary farming has strayed from its relative of regenerative practice, morphing in response to need, to become a continuum of extraction calibrated to the mining model.

In some communities, the pandemic has prompted a return or reversion to what could be considered a more antiquated relationship with food, in that temporality and proximity have resurfaced as pillar values. The re-investment of time into cooking gave rise to activities such as bread baking, which depleted stores across many cities of flour, and the cooking of dried beans, spiking a 40% increase in the sales of beans.³⁶ Some chefs even touted the peeling of each chickpea in the preparation for hummus, prompting a saturation of images of peeled chickpeas on social media. These anecdotes have been gleaned from the constellation of communities I have worked in and with, generating a harvest of information from both online and physical exchange. The constellation includes farmers I know in the United States and Morocco as well as chefs that in Germany and France that I have worked with and remain connected to through the Internet. These exchanges have facilitated a substratum of comprehension of the effects of the pandemic on intimate communities in which food is the fulcrum. This new found abundance of time re-instilled the value of intimacy into consumptive endeavor, a practice that if maintained might help to shape a decrease in ecologically detrimental mass production and the status of to-go culture.

The significance of locality and seasonality has been emphasized by initiatives to support local farmers, and farmers markets have never been busier, with lines snaking around the block. Traversing beyond the intimacy of buying directly from farmers, the pandemic has given rise to the popularity of cultivating one's own food, as local nurseries and garden supplies stores have witnessed an onslaught of demand for seeds and plants. The popularization of the pursuit of proximity in consumption has been an interesting shift to observe as its escalation has nearly wiped out specific sources, prompting an examination of the durability of seemingly sustainable action. If we are all to embark en masse towards sustainable models, is there an adoption of a

³⁶ Yaffe-Belany, David. (2020). *A Boom Time for the Bean Industry.* New York Times.

steady collective momentum that poses an alternative pace to that of the modernist rushing forward that our society is so predisposed to? Sustainable change should be enacted with *response-ability*, without an exhaustive heedlessness that further depletes resources. Implementing Elizabeth Povinelli's notion of sustainability, expounded upon in her text *Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories,* as a force that "can quickly become a call to conceive a mode of (multi) existence that is pliant to our desires even as political alliances become very confusing."³⁷ In this period of global turmoil, the pandemic has catalyzed a slight divergence from international commodity chains and monoculture systems, yet there must be a modality of approach that takes into consideration our capacity to act with cognizance of our actions.

Another facet of proximity prompted by the crisis was the translation of social gatherings, those involving comestible material or libations specifically referred to in this context, to that of virtual convergences. The transference of clustering around a table to that of the screen is a curious but appropriate shift in the light of a virus transmitted by adjacency. The computers capacity as a tool to induce proximity in a period of critical social distancing amplified its versatility. rendering the screen into a form of new dining table. The onslaught of Zoom³⁸ dinner parties. holiday meals, and happy hours sculpted a new virtual space for convivial interaction. Will this new domain of hospitality endure past the scope of crisis, and if so how can we use it as a tool for social transformation? During the pandemic I assembled a weekly book club that invites individual ingestion of a text, shared by a different member each week, as a precursor to collective conversation. Our meetings have become a site for discursive digestion, in what some of the members refer to as our dining room. The evident intangibility of this space poses no threat to the traversable depth of our discussion nor the intimacy of our exchange, what commenced as a group of acquaintances and strangers has morphed into an assembly of friends eager to collectively gather around the ingredients of our literary meal. The crisis has witnessed virtual proxemics becoming further replicatory of physical proxemics, in that intimacy now perhaps feels more appropriately imbued in digital exchange. The potential of virtual space as a frontier for

³⁷ Povinelli, Elizabeth. (2016). *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. Duke University Press.

³⁸ Zoom is a video communications platform that witnessed a surge in usage during the pandemic.

gathering as *cum panis* provokes the possibility of sharing both organic and virtual matter without the environmental impact of individual movement, exposing a further stratum of locality.

Diametrically opposed to pandemic's influence on proximity lays its impact on the proliferation of food waste. The closure of almost all global dining institutions drastically reduced the audience for what was being produced, inducing an excess of organic matter. This generated a new problem for farmers, particularly in the United States where the nation endured a hit in the loss of monoculturally produced vegetable sales. Farmers have began to shred and bury their produce as a means to eliminate rotting surplus, as one farmer said there is "no possible way to redistribute the quantities we are talking about."³⁹ The diary industry has produced an astonishing amount of waste, as a cow's success in creating a distributable product is contingent upon multiple milkings per day. In the United States, there has been an estimation of 3.7 million gallons of milk discarded per day, which not only emphasizes the precarity of these systems if the quantity of consumers is diminished, but also illuminates the benefit of opting to eat plant based.

³⁹ Yaffe-Belany, David and Corkery, Michael. *Dumped Milk, Smashed Eggs, Plowed Vegetables: Food Waste of the Pandemic.* (2020). New York Times.



Millions of pounds of beans and cabbage being destroyed. Credit: Rose Marie Cromwell for The New York Times



A field of onions to be buried in a pit dug to dispose of the unused produce. Credit: Joseph Haeberle for The New York Times

Corona virus' influencing of an en-masse shift in relating to food presented the possibility of relating *with*, rather than a relationship solely predicated upon a *to* and *from*. This possibility further embeds us in our food systems, resituating the human as an integral part of these entanglements. The divergence from a consideration of this integration is perhaps what perpetuated the exhaustion, in the thinking of the recipient and source model of supply and demand.⁴⁰

In the span of the crisis, a shift in my relationship to time morphed from a calibration to a calendrical system to an observatory interaction with time moving through matter. The abstraction of time in continuum prompted a questioning of its pertinence beyond a quantitative tool, one contingent upon a systemic adherence. The temporal warping of this period germinated alternate forms of measurement; assessments of movement made evident solely by the witnessing of organic phenomenon, of ripening and rotting, of blooming and withering. Fermentation often felt to be the only indication of time actually passing, as through the process one beings to taste time and it is this tasting of time that become the only way of truly digesting it. Embracing the rediscovery of this pre-modern notion of measurement induces a form of return, an arrival at the intimacy of the arts of noticing.

Un-conclusion

In attempt to conclude I encounter the notion of an un-conclusion; my investigation of the meal as a pedagogic a tool for social transformation could hardly be classified as definite, it does not reach an end, nor an answer, rather it is *always arriving*, continuously re-orientating itself towards inquiry. This trajectory's relinquishment of destination or deduction nurtures ongoingness⁴¹ as an orientation, one that reveals the potential for learning through and with as a modality to cultivate response-ability. This simultaneously fosters a sense of permeability in the research process as it embraces entanglement and adopts interaction as a source of information.

⁴⁰ Steuart, James. *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy.* (1767).

⁴¹ Ongiongness referred to by Donna Haraway as learning to be truly present, and thus capable to response. (2016)

The nature of my subsequent work with agricultural systems, specifically in the lineage of permaculture, is replicatory of the phenomenon by which it is bound, a regenerative and cyclical formation that continues to self-nourish, illustrating the phenomenon of sustainability. Working with a sustained modality of research to spark the possibilities of sustainable action ignites a fruitful intra-action as the process and the practice begin to cross-pollinate. The implementation of participatory action research coupled with site-specific interactive installation extends the possibilities for collective examinations of consumption patterns, unraveling the thread of a large and complex fabric. This web encompasses a multitude of sites of transmission, from the farm to the kitchen to the table; each site is ripe with potential for the examination of cultivating, cooking, and consuming in the frame of *collaborative survival*. Each step of the process renders yet another question, posed without direct pursuit of an answer, seeds planted to be sowed through inquiry and exchange. The propagation of these questions serves as a catalyst, kindling the embers of the *arts of noticing*.

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