

Glutinous narratives
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TEXTURES

There is something both materially intuitive and physically *strange* in crossing bread making with ceramics in the way that Ariadna Guiteras puts forth with *Gentle Bread*. Both practices share processes such as wetting, modelling, printing, kneading, amassing, sculpting, stretching and firing. Both are also the result of a manual labour where different gestures imprint form and texture onto a shapeless mass. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us that to perceive a texture is “always, immediately, and de facto to be immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesizing, testing, and re-understanding of how physical properties act and are acted upon over time”¹. To think through texture is to try to deduce if it is bread, clay or something else. It is to discern how it became to be, and how it affects you. It is to speculate if that body is laminated, granulated or polished; if it is furry or rough, or if it is wise to grab it, bend it, stretch it and push it. More than any other system of perception, touch is a nondualistic production of knowledge, as touching is always reaching, caressing, wrapping, holding and understanding the swampy entanglement of interdependencies and mutual affections in which we live. Touch and affect don’t reside in a body, an object or a subject; they adhere to them and cause change in them. Intimate and at the same time impersonal, they imply to comprehend through affinity, empathy or tremor. Touching furthermore underlines the importance of the skin, of the visceral and the muscular, of the molecular almost non-perceptible and the emotional in these economies of transference and transformation. Therefore, I wonder: what narratives is the skin of these sculptures telling? How do they react to a song? What do we absorb when making bread and ceramics? What do we apprehend from applying pressure to a mass –of bread, of clay– that is undifferentiated, confused and promiscuous?

CONTAMINATION

Bread and ceramics, clay and flour, are also correlated to voraciousness and the telluric. Geophagy, or the practice of eating soil, is common across animal, geographical and temporal spectrums: certain soil types are consumed occasionally due to their capacity to absorb toxins, their delivery of mineral nutrients and their palliative function. Although as can be read in Wikipedia, this human behaviour has been despised

1. Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke University Press, 2002. Pág. 20

since modernity as pertaining “to children and pregnant women in rural or preindustrial societies”, or as the result of an eating disorder such as pica. But the intake of earthly substances belongs as much to the future of pharmacology as it does to its origins. From Jennifer Teets² I have learnt how sealed clay pastilles from the island of Lemnos in Greece and “pan de tierra bendita”³ in Oaxaca, Mexico, led to the development of complex networks of trade, exchange, extraction and distribution. According to her, these create *muddy narratives* which connect the history of mineralogical archaeology of Pliny and Galen with the current mass extraction of clay for the cosmetic and wellness industries. In fact, there is a relation of voracity that intersects the hunger to eat earth with the mining sites that, literally, devour the land and its resources; a geophagic traffic of political toxins, sensitive minerals and visual pollutions in several digestive systems. To think from this kind of telluric hunger is to embrace a contaminated absorption that muddies every so-called scientific truth and unleashes instead visceral speculation.

TURBULENCE

In English bread is referred as a *bedrock food*, a foundation stone of nourishment. And, indeed, bread is a crucial substratum of nutrition, society and politics, whose subterranean movements are subject to significant turbulences on the surface. A great number of historical conflicts carry the mark of a *bread riot* as a catalyst and the memory of the *breadlines*⁴ in the period after the unrest, from the Flour Wars of 1775 or the Storming of the Bastille in 1789 in Paris, to the wave of the Arab Spring at the beginning of 2010. From this last episode I draw from memory the picture of the helmet made of bread loaves worn by a demonstrator in Tahrir Square that found its way around the Internet. Bread, here, is a defensive weapon and a prosthesis; its production, its circulation, its consumption and its diffusion are pure glutinous politics. Gluten is an ensemble of proteins from cereal flours. When wet, they cluster together forming a viscous and elastic net that along with fermentation endow bread with volume and spongy consistency. But, for some time now, gluten has been a subject of discussion, given the uncontrolled proliferation of gluten-free

2. In the last few years Jennifer Teets in collaboration with Lorenzo Cirrincione has developed Elusive Earths /Tierras Esquivas: a series of in situ works, processes and dialogues that focus on the sinuousness of rare clays, soils and earths with forgotten origins.

3. “Pan de tierra bendita” literally translates as “holy earth bread”.

4. In English breadline is a synonym of misery: as the most impoverished condition in which it is possible to live. In North America it refers to the long line of people waiting for free handouts. The bread riots were the fruit of the unrest that resulted from the scarcity and / or the rise of grain and bread prices. Historically women played a prominent role in these conflicts, both in orchestrating as much as enduring them. Far from being an issue of the past, bread riots have become recurrent since the 1980’s with subsidy politics of agriculture applied by the World Bank and IMF, which affect the production, exportation and importation of cereals.

diets and supermarket aisles. The demonization of gluten (whose closeness to “glutton” is suspicious, to say the least), the rise of its intolerance and the industrialization of bread are parallel and interlinked processes: the standardization of its production made bread accessible, but the withdrawal of its natural fermentation in the process unsettled its digestibility and created new health problems and trends, as well as new business solutions. Almost a century later after the beginning of this triangulation, sourdough bread –wholemeal, authentic and organic– is the privilege of a few in the global north. Mass produced bread (0.70 for a baguette or 0.90 cents for a loaf) is however ubiquitous. This is neoliberalism at its finest: paradoxical, perverse and viscous.

GENTLENESS

Fermentation is a process of metabolic transformation carried out by the culture of bacteria and yeasts. This food proto-technology is in fact a living process and thus unstable, based on interdependency and interconnection principles. In fact, fermentation is a prime example of the symbiogenesis theory developed by the biologist Lynn Margulis, which dismisses the Darwinian theory of individualist and competitive genetic evolution, to advocate for a coevolution and symbiotic coexistence between organisms. In other words, a feminist mode of being-in-the-world.

We need malleable, viscous, contaminated and contaminating processes. Audre Lorde in *The Cancer Journals* says that self-care is not self-indulgence but self-preservation, and thus, an act of political warfare. Today, in times of rampant neoliberalism in which the subject has been reduced to an economic calculation of self-confidence, and care has been tuned to an individualist mantra of the wellbeing ideology, we need more than ever to take care of ourselves. We need to care for each other as bacteria do, in a collective and symbiotic manner. We need to embrace the nondualistic viscosity of affect and touch, to hang out elastic nets and weave glutinous narratives. We need to embrace, softly, the turbulences that such viscosity implies. We need to *engage*⁵ the body, the skin, the hand and the stomach. Because making bread, like fucking, is and should be a process of feminist transformation.

5. Translator’s note: in the Spanish version appears as “poner el cuerpo”, which refers to the long traditions in feminism of situated knowledges in which embodiment and bodily politics are inbuilt.