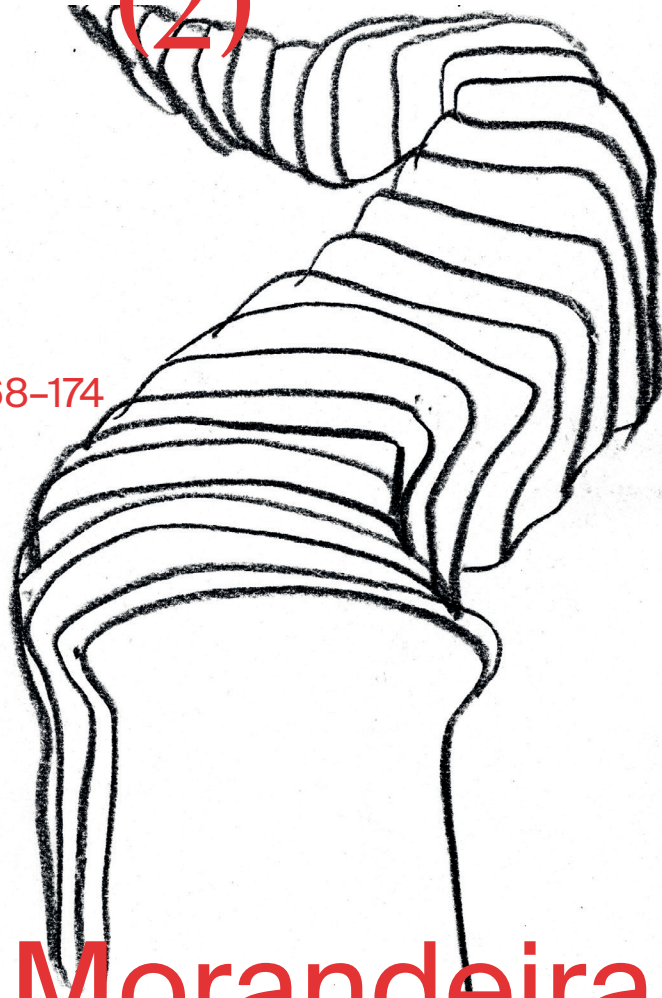


Glutinous Narratives

(2)

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PP 168–174



Julia Morandeira
Arrizabalaga

This text derives from another text which, in turn, derived from artist Ariadna Guiteras's work *Gentle Bread* (2016), composed of ten sculptures made of clay and found plastic, as well as a sung performance. In her work, Guiteras crosses bread making with ceramics, based on a sociocultural and material perspective in which non-logocentric knowledge production and transmission are explored.

Stemming from that entanglement, this text takes a journey through a constellation of issues —processes of analogy, speculation and association— that Ariadna's project suggests, ranging from theoretical inputs to personal exchanges. Textural perception, viscosity, muscular memory, hunger and voracity, digestion, history, fermentation, care and careful thinking, porosity and body operate here as particles of an elastic and sticky grammar, which implodes in a series of short thoughts and speculative fabulations.

TEXTURES

There is something both materially intuitive and physically strange in crossing bread making with ceramics. Both practices share processes such as wetting, modelling, printing, kneading, 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 perceiving a texture is a creative act, which implies “always, immediately, and de facto to be immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesising, testing, and re-understanding *how physical properties act and are acted upon over time*”¹. Thinking through

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

texture is trying to discern if it is bread, clay or something else; if those bodies are laminated, granulated or polished; if they are smooth or rough, if it is wise to fondle them, bend them and stretch them. It implies touching with the eyes, with the body, with a situated imagination. Sedgwick goes on to explain that more than any other system of perception, touch is a non dualistic production of knowledge giving its reciprocity: touching is always reaching out, caressing, wrapping and holding while at the same time, reciprocally, being reached out to, caressed, wrapped and held by what is being touched. This radical reciprocity makes touching a key co-transformation tool,



↑ Stick together

paying close attention to materiality, embodiment and contingency, as well as to the vital affective and interdependence web we are immersed in together with everything that surrounds us. It is a non-verbal language, with its own rhythms and grammar, that circumvents reductive objectivist viewpoints. Touch enables us to comprehend through affinity and empathy (Ari would say that it enables a *radical empathy*), and does so through the skin, the visceral, the muscular and the emotional: stratum that archive knowledge and accumulate a semantic through time. Ariadna had never baked bread or clay prior to moving to London to complete the residency which gave birth to Gentle Bread. She learned from a group of people she met in the process through different exchanges: verbal and non-verbal. To Ariadna (who addresses the world from a situated, feminist and materialist position) the knowledge received was never hers but “from every body and for every body” as she understood herself as part of a longer, thicker and uncountable line of transmission, mainly formed by women, in which recipes and instructions are shared through memory, muscle and voice. “The knowledge my body hosted (and still hosts) was based on the shared gestures and verbal transmission I received from four people who regularly worked with ceramics

and baked bread. [...] The sculptures materialised the *textural knowledge* I learnt during the two months of the residency. Rather than keeping it within my body I decided to leave it outside of it and apply it to one of the materials I was working with: clay. The sung performance collected verbal information shared while touching the mass of bread and clay. My intention was both to put the oral knowledge I received back into circulation and to activate other layers of meaning embedded within the sculptures.”

STICKINESS

Viscosity² is a property of matter introduced by Newtonian physics to describe the capacity of a fluid to resist deformation or the propensity to flow. Something is viscous when its molecules

tend to stick together or flow slowly (oil versus water, for example) and maintain its entity, despite being composed by particles that can potentially

become independent or intermingle with other substances. In social sciences, viscosity has (timidly) started to re-emerge³ as a term within certain materialist paradigms to describe the logics of adherence that operate in the fleshy entanglements of

human and more-than-human worlds embraced by interactionist ontologies. It is an inherently bodily mode, which defines the capacity of *stickiness* and aggregation of new particles to a body, which can no longer be understood as an impenetrable unity but as a contiguous body-environment assemblage. Nancy Tuana⁴ uses the term “viscous porosity” to refer to the interaction between all types of entities and phenomena through different membranes (skin and flesh, prejudgments and symbolic imaginaries, habits and embodiments) which mediate between

and undo the nature/culture division. Affects, according to Sara Ahmed⁵, are also sticky: love, hate or anger stick to bodies, accumulating meaning and affective value along the way and through

time. They do not reside in a body, object or subject, but they adhere to them and provoke things in them,

changes that oscillate from the imperceptibility of the molecular to greater organisations of ensembles. Signs are *pegajosos* too: for Butler (read through Ahmed), queer is a sticky sign because it acquires new meaning through performative repetitions “not by being cut off from its previous contexts of utterance, but by

² Wagner, Lauren B: “Viscosity”. Entry on the New Materialism almanac from 25/04/2018, <http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/v/viscosity>

³ Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge, 1969, pp. 610-12) wrote on viscosity and the slimy as a soft, sucking, docile, feminine (sic), sugary and somehow nightmarish substance. He already signalled then the continuous body-environment that viscosity enacts (“the overflow of myself towards the slimy”) and that contemporary theories resignify

⁴ Tuana, Nancy. “Viscous porosity: Witnessing Katrina” (2008), in S. Alaimo and S. J. Hekman, eds., *Material feminisms*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp.323-333.

⁵ Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, London: Routledge, 2004.

preserving them”⁶. In queer politics the force of the insult is retained, not negated. And finally, bread: sliced bread sticking to the roof of your mouth, the dough you knead to weave together the elastic chains of gluten.

Thinking and working with viscosity implies operating in the semiotic-material organisation of the world. The contiguity and promiscuity that emerge with adherence irremediably hijack the vision of the “body” as a closed entity⁷. For Ari, *Gentle Bread* signalled a new understanding of the corporeal, in which the flesh of the world interweaves with hers and skin becomes a permeable membrane rather than a limit. Here, matter is an extension with the world which retains a memory⁸ and allows a multi-faceted connection with different layers –be that physical, reflective, affective or political. This extension of the battlefield unleashed a whole set of new questions and conflicts (“What can, then, a

⁶ Ahmed, Sara. *Op.cit.*, p. 166

⁷ As Ricardo Guerrero, Lynn Margulis, Luis Rico and Dorion Sagan note in “Proprioception: when the environment becomes the body” (Madrid: Centro Cultural Conde Duque, 2003, p.6): “Mucous, excrement, urine, saliva, cadavers, pornography, and other marginal separations and representation of the human body question its essential hegemony, its universal nature”

⁸ A few months ago, Ari wrote to me: “During the process of Gentle Bread I was (and still am) fascinated by the the agency of matter and memory. On the one hand, muscular memory, the one that doesn't go through the logos and is transmitted through touch and gesture (and that is why it is so important, because it turns it upside down and says ciao to phallogocentrism) and on the other hand, matter's memory. In this case, clay and dough. I didn't know but in one of the encounters, Ella told me that clay has a memory and that once it is introduced in the oven, it tends to get back to its previous shape. That is why you need to touch it for a while before giving it a form and there are different gestures that are applied in a specific manner to the lump of clay for it to lose its memory. With bread something similar happens, but the gesture and the touching allow gluten proteins to strengthen and form an elastic mass. It always happens to me that when I am in the midst of processes such as this one, I tend to think through the word (what I read, what I am told, what I say, what I write) but also through muscle and other types of writing. One of the things I do is drawing intuitively. You will find attached two drawings I made at that time, thinking precisely about clay's memory and the forces of gluten. It's graphite on marker.”



↑ Can you fly with this?

body be? What would the limits of performance be, if we cannot identify the limits of a body?”) in Ariadna that, far from finding resolution, have become the driving forces behind her work. “Staying with the trouble”, to put it in Haraway's words. When we worked together for the *escuelita* session, the program I co-direct with Manuel Segade at the CA2M-Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Ariadna proposed finishing her session by collectively kneading 12.5kg of clay, and hence experimenting together the ideas of the body as a host, muscular and material memory, haptic knowledge and non-verbal transmission that we had previously discussed. From that indiscernible collective handling resulted a monstrous assemblage, which she referred to as “a vulnerable archive” later in an email⁹.

⁹ An aside anecdote on a literal image of viscosity. The first time I met Ari in person she was up to her shoulder in vaseline after plunging her arm into a bucket of lubricant. I had never seen so much vaseline together, and the textural vision of that half-translucent, soft and sticky slime all over Ari's body was amazing.

CONTAMINATION

Ari and I met through the magical mediation of Jesús Arpal Moya, who introduced us due to our shared interests “around food, biopolitics and feminism”. In a similarly intuitive manner –literally “in a flash of light”– Ari invited me months later

to write a text. It would accompany the vinyl record-cum-publication that collected the “non-visible, but structural” materials, such as conversations and songs, of Gentle Bread. At that time I was finishing another chapter of my project *Canibalia*, thinking about digestive ecosystems, and I had just started to cultivate yun and kéfir ferments. I accepted immediately and we scheduled a Skype session. From that chat, Ari remained haunted by the notion of voracity that came up in the discussion, which she described as a drive traversing “hunger, sex, turbulence, hyper-production, hyper-productivity, even death and fascism, cannibalism”.

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. However, as seen in Wikipedia, this human behaviour has been despised 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 Teets¹⁰ I have learnt how sealed clay pastilles from the island of

Lemnos in Greece and “pan de tierra bendita”¹¹ 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. Voracity implies violence, destruction and passion—and this also resonates in *Gentle Bread*’s pieces. This telluric hunger allows us to embrace a contaminated absorption that muddles every so-called scientific truth and unleashes visceral speculations instead.

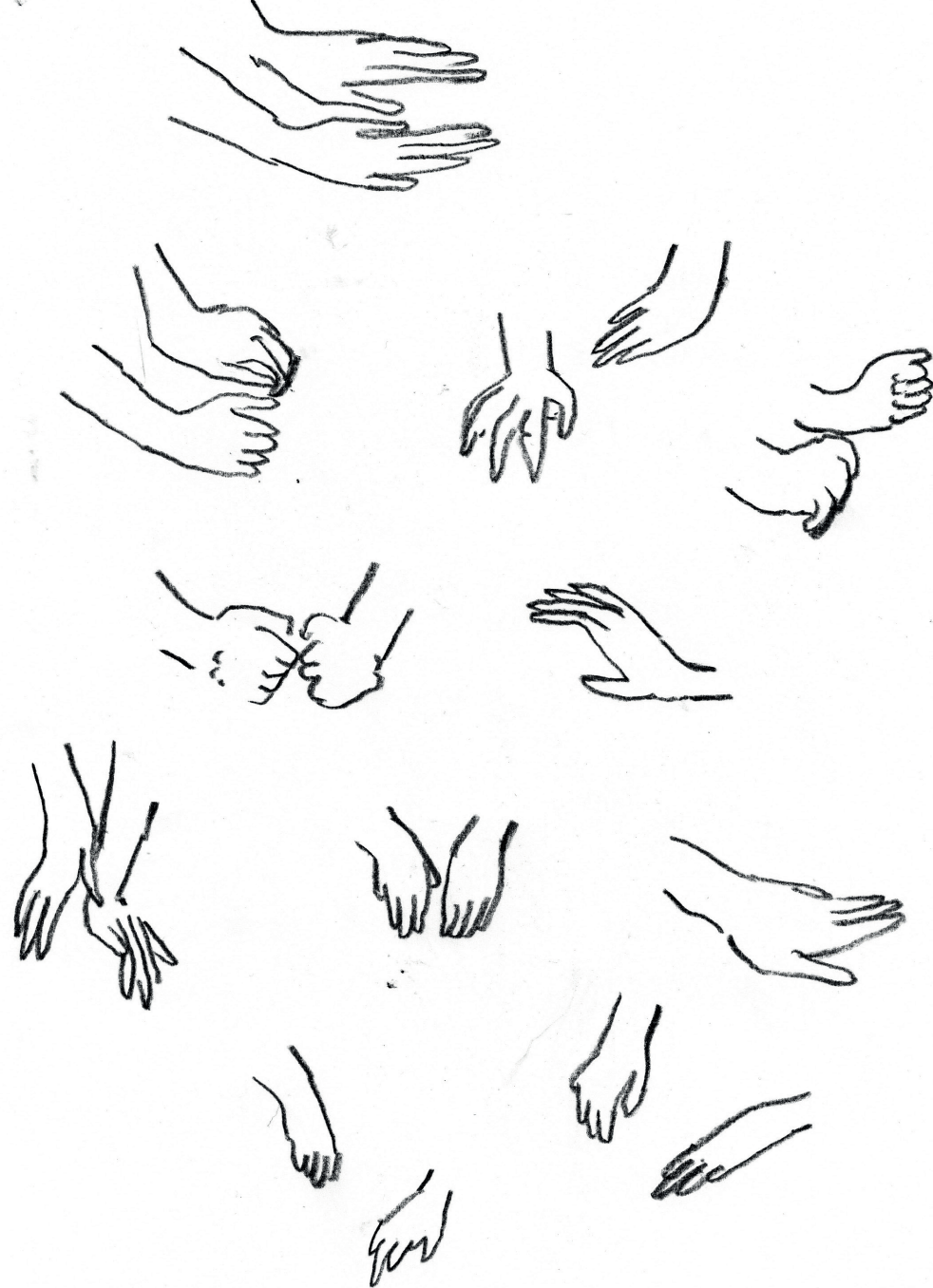
In *Gentle Bread* a correlation between matter, form and the performative takes place. Reading the transcription of the encounters¹² Ari organised to learn how to make bread and ceramics while in London, a series of echoes and reflections start to emerge between both experiences, ranging from the techniques used to crazy details in the participants’ biographies. Even if she asserts that it was not intended¹³, the works that resulted reflect a contamination of forms and processes: many of the ceramic pieces can be recognised as a loaf of bread, a chapati or a sad forgotten slice. This is partly due to the textural projection we mentioned before, and partly, to the use of plastic that Ari introduced when she realised that the sculptures on their own were oblivious to the industrialisation process bread is a product of. In order to mend this, she added several plastic wraps from baguettes, sandwiches and loaves of bread which, in a way, return the works to quite a mundane and not very romantic place. The last element is the text: sung or written in English, Spanish, a mix of both and a bit of Catalan. Without reaching the creolisation of Spanglish, Ariadna’s sung poetics invoke those linguistic landslides through small colloquial gestures and affective winks, when for example she says “Mi abuela es una chef, you know?” or “I like the figure of the amateur because usually then you approach things from another point of view, más desaprendido”. That gesture, partly minor and partly huge, enables the affective and the geographic to filter through the stories she tells, as well as

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ “Pan de tierra bendita” literally translates as “holy earth bread”

¹² These are included in the vinyl *Ariadna* produced thanks to the Miquel Casablanques Prize, which she won in the publication category. The vinyl-publication is edited in 2017 by Sant Andreu Contemporani / Ajuntament de Barcelona, in collaboration with Hangar, Barcelona.

¹³ “It looks like a slice of bread, but all I did was to apply the act of cutting to what was left in the clay bag—which I left under it— and what came out was bread! So I decided to leave it as it was, without that being my first intention.”



↑ Manos

everything intimate and sticky that is kept in the folds of language.

TURBULENCE

Baguette, Chorleywood bread, *pà de pagès*, artisan or diet bread. Writing about bread making in the times of hyper-consumption, hyper-production and violence we live in demands immersing oneself in an archaeology of class, economy, politics, gender and even sex. As Hadria Yazidi (one of Ariadna's bread making teachers and one of the strongest figures in the project) puts it, "bread is a food of the poor, and has always been" but "making bread, like fucking, is a bourgeois privilege": it implies a time we don't have anymore, that has been expropriated from us, that has become a luxury. In *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol. 2: Living and Cooking*, Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol devote a chapter to bread, which they consider "less a basic food than a basic 'cultural symbol', a monument incessantly restored to conjure suffering and hunger"¹⁴. Bread is, according to the authors, inseparable of the working class and "carrier of a social writing" that we must learn how to read correctly. Needless to say, bread is a crucial substratum of nutrition, society and politics, a bedrock food 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 in the period after the unrest. In English *breadline* is a synonym of misery: access to bread indexes the most impoverished condition in which it is possible to live. In North America it refers literally to the long line of people waiting for free handouts.

The *bread riots* are the fruit of unrest that derives from the scarcity and the rise of grain and bread prices, resulting in malnutrition and hunger. It was bread that sparked the Storming of the Bastille in 1789 in Paris, as well as the mobilisation of citizens and the radicalisation of the French Revolution until 1793. It starred in the Flour Wars, initiated in 1775 when Anne-Robert Turgot opened grain's free trade (controlled by the State until that moment) and unleashed a wave of bread protests in the Parisian region. [Note: it is worth noting that women played a prominent role in these conflicts, both in orchestrating as much as in enduring them].

Decades later, the rise of the price of grain and bread

¹⁴ De Certeau, Michel; Giard, Luce; Mayol, Pierre. *The Invention of Everyday Life, Vol 2: Living and Cooking*, Minneapolis · London: University of Minnesota, 1998, p. 86



↑ Clay memory

would be a key factor in each episode of the 1848 revolutionary wave, the so-called Spring of the People. And far from being an issue of the past, bread riots have become recurrent since the 1980s with subsidy politics of agriculture applied by the World Bank and IMF, which affect the production, exportation and importation of cereals. This extends to the recent Arab Spring, from Tunisia to Egypt and Yemen, in which images of young people selling *kaik* as a sign of protest or a helmet made of bread loaves worn by a demonstrator in Tahrir Square found their way around the Internet. I am interested in this last image in which bread is a defensive weapon and an ontological sticky prosthesis, a glutinous extension of a subject in revolt against the extractivism of capitalism. Bread—its production, its circulation, its consumption and its diffusion—are pure glutinous politics. These not-so-erratic divagations make me think that it is possible to imagine a glutinous ontology, built from this palimpsest of revolutions, hunger, gluten webs and mundane prosthesis.

DIGESTION

Three-four ingredients are needed to make bread: flour, water, salt and air. Gluten is an ensemble of proteins from cereal flours. When wet, they cluster together forming a viscous and elastic net that, along with fermentation, endows bread with volume and a spongy consistency. But, for some time now, gluten has been the focus of debate, given the uncontrolled proliferation of gluten-free diets and supermarket aisles. The demonisation of gluten (whose closeness to “glutton” is suspicious, to say the least), the rise of its intolerance and the industrialisation of bread are parallel and interlinked processes: the standardisation of bread production made it accessible, but the elimination of natural fermentation from the process unsettled the digestibility of bread and created new health concerns, as well as new trends and business solutions. Almost a century after, 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 sticky.

Fermentation is a cultural process¹⁵ of metabolic transformation carried out by cultures 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. We do not (only) evolve by the survival of the fittest, “but also suddenly and forcefully, by means of the seduction of strangers, the involvement and internalisation of the other in oneself – viral, bacterial and eukaryotic”¹⁶. I am fascinated by this idea that we evolve in contact with the *other*, in this web of feedback eco and interdependent relationships of nourishment; there is a force there to be reckoned with. Thinking through the microbiome requires displacing humans out of the center in the same way we acknowledge that bacteria were here long before homo sapiens and that without them we would be nothing¹⁷. Consequently, it also implies a reconfiguration of the notion of the body into a wider microbial landscape¹⁸ and, above all, to think from non-indulgent places.

¹⁵ I am thankful to David Zilber for this clarification. David is a photographer, chef and currently Head of Fermentation at Noma restaurant Copenhagen. He defends that the participation of a third agent in the fermentation process, be that human or non human, always has to be taken into account and that therefore, we should consider fermentation as a cultural-natural process of domestication and transformation of bacterias throughout time.

¹⁶ Margulis, Lynn; Rico, Luis; Sagan, Dorion. “Proprioception: when the environment becomes the body”. Madrid: Centro Cultural Conde Duque, 2003, p.3

Instead, it implies embracing a complex wilderness, understood as that which cannot be fully controlled, that can never be totally

hygienic, and whose rough edges cannot really be eroded; an ambiguous and turbid place from which partial, unruly and contaminated positions always emerge. Margulis signals that the qualities of bacteria are sensibility, seduction, union, acquisition, fusion, accommodation and perseverance. These have to be apprehended as guiding principles of our interaction and our being in the world, that align us with the activity of bacterial colonies in the stomach, the process of kéfir and kombucha fermentation, the circulation of virus and infections, or the sensory intelligence of slime molds, just to cite a few. Fermentation is a process based on reciprocal nourishment, care and mutual transformation with our environment and our biome.

What is care? For Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher¹⁹, it includes *everything we do* to maintain,

¹⁷ This idea was shared by Joshua Evans (PhD student at the University of Oxford researching the flavour and evolution of microbes in novel fermentation practices) during the public conversation on fermentation, held in the framework of my exhibition *Nothing is true, Everything is alive* at Peryton, Copenhagen, on July 21st 2018. Participants included Adam Bencard, Ida Bencke, Joshua Evans, David Zilber and myself.

¹⁸ Adam Bencard (Medical Museion, University of Copenhagen) a researcher and curator who has worked extensively on the history and philosophy of microbiome research, proposes thinking in the terms of “molecular being” and “metabolic societies” to expand the comprehension of the body through the microbiome.



↑ Matriarcado

continue and repair “our world”, in order to live in it in the best possible way. That world includes our bodies, their bodies, ourselves, and our environment: *everything that we weave into a complex web of vital maintenance*. In Peter Weeden’s words (former chef at The Newman Street Tavern in London, and another figure that instructed Ariadna in the bread making process), “we need to exist with our environment”. We need malleable, viscous, contaminated and contaminating processes that recognise our position in the larger biome, and that do so from a co-responsible and political stance. We need to understand knowledge as a materialisation of worlds, and to re-materialise knowledge as care of and for the world. 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 into 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, because fermentation is a material metaphor of a vitalist and feminist mode of being in the world²⁰. We need to embrace the non dualistic viscosity of affect and touch, to hang out elastic affective nets and weave glutinous narratives. We need to embrace, softly, the turbulence that such viscosity implies. We need to engage the body²¹, the skin, the hand and the stomach. Making bread, like fucking, is and should be a process of feminist worlding that shapes co-responsible and careful ways of being in this world.

¹⁹ Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria. *Matters of care: speculative ethics in more than human worlds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, p. 3

²⁰ This proposition is further developed in the work of Fournier, Lauren (ed.), *Fermenting Feminism. Laboratory of Aesthetics and Ecology*, 2017. I am thankful to Ida Bencke and Dea Antonsen, founders of the Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, for their friendship and all the exchanges in affinity around feminist living in more-than-human-worlds during the writing of this text.

²¹ Translator’s note: in the Spanish version this appears as “poner el cuerpo”, which refers to the long tradition in feminism of situated knowledges in which embodiment and bodily politics are inbuilt.

