

A Processing Medium: Humans Imitating Bacteria Accessible Zine

Introduction:

A Processing Medium: Humans imitating Bacteria is a project envisioned and led by artist Sean Roy Parker, with support from Michelle Walker. Running over four days during the post-lockdown summer of July 2021, Sean and Michelle invited communities in Bootle and Granby to learn skills and gain knowledge surrounding fermentation, preserving surplus food and reducing food waste. Working with bacteria, we produced delicious and sustainable foods together: including rhubarb and carrot kimchi, lacto-fermented wild berry salsa and sauerkraut.

Running in both North and South Liverpool, the project touched on the movement of food in and around cities, and the importance of reducing this movement from global to local, sourcing from nearby places, solidarity and sharing resources. The four day's worth of knowledge sharing was rounded up with a "meals for peels" event in Granby Winter Garden; where local chefs Yamm Tree and Valerie Watson invited the surrounding neighbourhoods to come and drop off their compostable waste in return for a free meal made from surplus veg. Concluding the project full circle, another "meals for peels" event took place in the May Logan Centre in Bootle, in the Autumn of 2021.

This zine and poster is an accumulation of all our learning, recipes and thoughts from the project for sharing with our wider community and friends.

We're with the seed in the soil, providing warmth, love and comfort.

We're at the germination, celebrating new life where there was none.

We're seeing the seedling grow, receiving warmth from the energy.

We're attached to the harvest, tucked deep between the leaves.

We're travelling in a cold van or plane or shipping container.

We're sitting on a shelf, getting hungry and hiding from light.

We're back on the road, meeting with others in a big bag.

We're washed and rubbed, still clinging on for life.

We're boiled and give ourselves up, making way.

We're food for the next dominant species.

Project Text – by Sean Roy Parker

Our climate crisis is typified by humans maintaining separation from nature and ignorance of our entanglement in ecologies. In seeing ourselves at the top of the food chain, with our insatiable material needs driving us to environmental destruction, we uphold superiority over all other living beings; animals, insects, trees, bushes, plants, mycelium, yeast. Perhaps we would act differently if we appreciated the one lifeform that connects us all.

It covers every surface inside and out, keeping us and our more-than-human counterparts alive and thriving.

Bacteria.

There are millions and trillions of microscopic microbes –bodies that move beyond boundaries– in a teaspoon of soil or a pinch of your flesh. Our closest friends and allies, invisible to the naked eye yet shaping and changing the environment we live in. They are experts at chasing potential nutrients, breaking down complex materials into usable parts, working collectively to preserve surplus, and digesting organic matter for fuel. They communicate their needs non-verbally, shifting resources from the centre outwards, constantly pushing new frontiers.

The way bacteria work can be scaled up:

watching dendrobaena worms in compost

cooking and eating a meal with friends

mutual aid groups working in the community

Food is a necessity for human life and society: for maintaining health and well-being, for battling disease and injustice, and for sharing joy and solidarity. None of this would be possible without microbes – in our soil, on our hands, with our food, with our gut. By learning from and mimicking bacteria, we can begin to think like them, embodying a primal knowledge that holds the key to our existence. *A Processing Medium* is a survey of the complete lifecycle of a vegetable from the viewpoint of a microbe.

Sean's Lactofermented Gooseberry Salsa

Ingredients:

To make 1L

500g gooseberries - we picked ours at Gateway Collective in North Park

250g mixed other berries - strawberries, raspberries, blackcurrants

1 medium or ½ large cucumber

A handful of small tomatoes

Fresh herbs - mint, fennel, thyme, rosemary

Sugar, syrup or honey

Sea salt

Equipment:

Chopping board

Sharp knife

Large bowl

Clean jar

Instructions:

Firstly, clean your fruit and salads with cold water and leave to drain. Wash your hands and equipment with warm, soapy water, then rinse.

Put a damp cloth underneath your chopping board to stop it slipping. Start by chopping about three quarters of your gooseberries in half, quarter your tomatoes and dice your cucumber. Put them in your bowl with the rest of the berries whole.

If you can weigh it all, do so, but it's not necessary, the total weight should be around 1kg. Using 1kg as a guideline, you need to add 3% salt (you can scale up and down depending on how much fruit you have). Add 3 level tablespoons of

fine sea salt or flakes and a tablespoon of sugar or honey and stir in very well. You can even use your hands if you like.

Herb preparation depends on what you have. Mint, fennel, and oregano can be chopped up finely and added into the mix. Rosemary and thyme will be better to keep whole.

Once you're happy it's all combined, lay a teatowel over the top of the bowl and leave it on your kitchen counter –not in direct sun. For the next two days, everytime you look at it, take the towel off and give it a good stir to introduce new wild yeasts that will help the fermentation process.

On day three, taste your salsa. It should be sweet, sour, tangy, maybe fizzy! Well done –you have lactofermented gooseberries! Get your jars ready and start spooning your salsa in. Press down the mixture with the back of your spoon to ensure no air bubbles are trapped. Label with stickers or tape, including the date, then pop the jars in the fridge.

I love eating this with barbecued veggies, potato dishes, cheese, hummus and curry.

The Wealth in Fermental Health

Plants, people and food was a really good way to reconnect with everyone since the Systemic a.k.a Pandemic! Sean Roy Parker's residency at Granby Winter Garden and his Fermental Health project was so timely: the invitation to participate in the project and engaging in topics such as — giving, taking, sharing and solidarity — themes which are fundamental to Granby community.

Illustrated by the fresh baked sourdough bread gifted to Sean (and shared in the workshop) by local resident baker Rob; me and Sean strolling through L8, foraging along the way; Yamm Tree 'patties' capturing stomachs and minds of all, with his exquisite Nigerian cuisine. Or simply the personal gems of wisdom conveyed to Sean by "Auntie Val". That's L8.

From the outset of the project, I could hear echoes of Dr. Geri Augusto's concept - "Thinking Through Plants". Ultimately, it's what drew me in. Gaining knowledge of everyday plants in our locality, learning the fermentation process and eating vegan foods; combining to improve health and wellbeing. It reminds me of Mohamed Bourouissa's Resilience Garden project, which explored Franz Fanon's knowledge plants, mental healing and gardens.

This time, we were in the gorgeous Granby Winter Garden. I love the place and have forgotten how infectious it is. The wonder and splendor of the unique space, the amazement on the faces of visitors and the positive energy it forges. Complimenting this, is the 'Secret Garden' behind Granby Winter Garden.

I did what I'm quite good at — bringing people together. Linking Sean with the community, cultural cooks, Granby Winter Garden, residents, participants and navigating collaborations. Watching Sean and Val melding creates energies, engrossed in their exuberant conversation about food; flipping ideas, tossing suggestions and gelling practices.

The parallel with bacteria was interesting, people breaking down barriers similar to bacteria breaking down complex material. Participants sharing ideas, skills, knowledge, experiences, memories. Like bacteria preserving surplus, essential food for growth, our conversations revealed the preservation of culture and heritage needed for vital growth and evolution.

The project tantalised taste buds, electrified palates, broadened brainwaves; and exposed our desire to reframe our environmental practices. For me, it was a reminder to expand our knowledge of nature that surrounds us. This concept is familiar to the culturally diverse community of Granby, understanding from our fore parents that food is everywhere - to be picked, dug up and plucked, with the right knowledge.

Food has always been a key to cultivating common ground between groups. The Fermental health project reflected our desire to expand healthy eating practices, share and increase natural knowledge and solidarity to improve our environment. Such is the wealth of fermental health.

Michelle Peterkin-Walker
16/08/21

Val's recipes: Veggie Stew Peas Stew + Rhubarb & Elderflower

One Pot Veggie Pea Stew

Ingredients:

- 1 Cup of Dried Red Kidney beans
- 1 Scotch Bonnet
- 1 Tin of Coconut Cream
- 1 Cup of Green Peas
- 1 Leek
- Any left over veggies you might have in your cupboard (carrots, potatoes, yams, pumpkin etc)
- 1 tsp Garlic powder
- 1 tsp Black pepper
- 1 tsp Curry powder
- 3 branches of Fresh Thyme
- Pinch of salt

Equipment:

- Big pot
- Knife
- Teaspoon
- Large wooden spoon

Method:

1. Leave your red kidney beans to soak in water overnight if they are dried.
2. Boil your kidney beans in fresh water with finely chopped leek, until soft then add all your seasoning; garlic powder, black pepper, curry powder, salt, and one whole scotch bonnet and simmer on a low heat.
3. Add a tin of coconut cream and peas to your pot and simmer on a low heat.
4. Remove the scotch bonnet before the next stages of your food prep if you don't want your dish to be too hot.
5. Cut up any veggies you have left over in your fridge or cupboard — potatoes, carrots, yams, cabbage. This dish is really flexible, so you can add whatever vegetables that need using up and make it your own. **Remember:** if you are using harder vegetables (potatoes, carrots etc.), these will take longer to cook than softer vegetables (cabbage, broccoli etc.), so add your softer vegetables later than hard vegetables.
6. Now simmer down until all your vegetables are cooked and enjoy! You can have your with rice, bread, ferments or eat on it's own.

Rhubarb, Apple & Elderflower Juice

Ingredients:

500g of Rhubarb
500g of Apple
100ml of Elderflower Cordial
50g of Honey
Juice of one lime
A couple of Juniper seeds
One Cinnamon Stick

Equipment:

- Big pot
- Knife
- Teaspoon
- Large wooden spoon

Method:

1. Wash and cut up rhubarb and apples into small pieces
2. Put in a pan cover with water and bring to the boil
3. Add honey, Cinnamon Sticks and Juniper seeds
4. Add Elderflower cordial to your flavor and continue to boil
5. Once the Rhubarb has soften, leave the mixture to cool and strain the liquid from the pulp
6. Add water and lime juice to taste — or if you like it sweeter you can add apple juice instead of water
7. You should have a soft pink liquid to serve and enjoy.

YAMM ONE POT

Ingredients

4 large red onions
2 bell peppers
1 courgette
1 leek
1 African puna yam
1 squash
100ml red palm oil
800ml of water(add more if needed)
Tbsp onion granules
1/2 tsp clove
1 Tbsp allspice
1/2 alligator pod ground up
1/2 tsp fenugreek powder ground up
1 tsp paprika
2 thumbs of ginger
6 sprigs of thyme
6 tamarind pods
5 medjoul dates
1 scotch bonnet
Bunch of coriander
100gty

1. Peel and cut yam into chunks, making sure to remove all eyes and any bits from the yam.
2. Wash the yam and put on to boil the smaller the chunks the quicker it cooks.
3. As that is cooking you should chop up red onions and put into a separate pan with red palm oil. It's best to leave this on a medium to high heat, as to ensure the onions brown properly. The onions should sit in oil and not stick, but stir if needed.

4. Check that the yam is cooked. It should be easy to eat with a bit of firmness. If so turn off and leave to one side

5. Now add tomato purée, chopped up ginger and thyme to the onion pan. At the same time, add the spices. All spice pepper, clove, Alligator pepper (powder), onion granules, sea salt & paprika, fenugreek. Stir this in and a sprinkle of water so that it doesn't stick to the pan. Now you want to put on a lid and turn down the heat, so that it can cook for 5 minutes.

6. Plenty of time to cut up the leek, courgette and bell peppers. Now add these in while making sure you stir every couple minutes. Add another sprinkle of water and leave on medium heat.

7. Now add the squash and more water. Turn up the heat to allow the squash to cook.

8. As it is simmering, we are going to peel the tamarind and blend with pitted medjoul dates, 1/2 of scotch bonnet (washed and de-seeded) & water until smooth. Leave it to one side.

9. Next, we will wash and de-stem the greens we have. That's the callaloo and coriander.

10. Make sure that the squash is cooked before doing step 11. If not, leave it to cook for another 5 mins and check again.

11. Now we will take the yam and add it to the pot along with the blended mixture and greens.

12. As soon as you add it, turn to low heat and cook for another 7 minutes while stirring to ensure it doesn't stick (sticking is more likely at this point).

1. The food is now ready to share with your favourite people. This will serve between 6-8