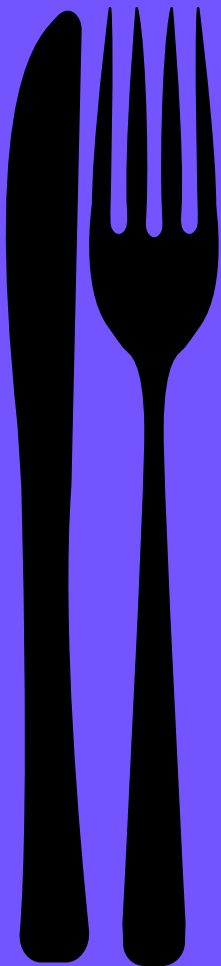


ON THE TABLE:

ASUNCIÓN

MOLINOS GORDO



Excreted Menu

MIT List Visual
Arts Center

EXCRETED MENU

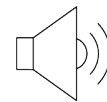
On the Table: Asunción Molinos Gordo



Asunción will offer as a departing point her project IN TRANSIT (Botany of A Journey) which consisted in garden develop at the premises of Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai, where she grew the plants that germinated from the seeds contained in 2 cubic meters of human fecal matter. The solid sludge was collected at Al Aweer treatment plant which services the main residential areas of the city, as well as Dubai airport. In this manner the artist granted the access to the seeds that travelled inside the intestines of global passengers, as well as in the guts of Dubai's extremely diverse population. Thousands of food plants grew from the sludge, proving the role humans have as pollinators and channelers of other life forms.

What Asunción proposes at her session On The Table is an imagination exercise, where the participants will examine their regular food intake and guess which garden could grow from the seeds that survived their digestive system.

Refer to the audio file for the full introduction.



1. ACTIVATED SLUDGE

Overshadow under the unglamorous category of waste; sludge, detritus, excrements, fecal matter, manure... are better known to be very precious resources in the rural world. Feces can be use as fuel, fertilizer, construction material. They can be processed to be applied as medicine or color pigments, as well as chemical detonators for dynamite-based explosives. Stool normally retain about 50% of the food intake, therefore it can still serve as food or food supplements in the diets of some animals.

The scientific community has equality shown a very strong interest for human detritus for very various reasons, one of them been the field of bacteriotherapy and fecal transplants. Paleontologist and archeologist alike, have address excrements as semiotic material, capable of telling stories about extinct ways of life and food habits, providing evidence about eating practices, since the composition of feces can release information about the person's cultural values, places of origin and set of believes.

For our imagination exercise we are going to address human feces as seeds archives, seed bombs and seed incubators.

Proposition: Assess the scale

For this first step, we are going to **assess the scale**, dimension and magnitude of our personal seed archive. In order to do that, we will monitor during one week how many times a day we excrete our food remains. Poops weighs between 14 and 17 ounces (400 – 500 grams) per deposition on average. Once we have this number we can extrapolate and calculate how many pounds or kilos of feces we produce yearly and what is our lifetime contribution.

2. SEED ARCHIVING

There is so many reasons why we put certain foods in our mouths/stomachs and not all have to do with questions of need/taste/hunger/desire. We don't eat the same all year around, when we have the period or when we are sick, at a wedding or at somebody's house party. We break the fasting with different goods if we doing Ramadan, or Fast of Gedalia/Yom Kipur or Cuaresma, Ash Wednesday... or after a detox week.

Proposition: Analyze your food intake

For a week **analyze your food intake in every meal**, and write down the reasons why you are eating those foods.

From your food intake, select those which you eat raw and pick the once which seeds are small enough to be swallowed whole without even noticing, such a strawberries, tomatoes, cucumber... build a list of those foods/seeds.

Think about other periods during the year, when you change your food habits. See if there are more foods that you eat raw, with small seeds and include them in your existing list.

Also take into consideration some exceptions, for instance some of us like to eat seeded bread, made with whole seeds from various plants such as poppies, sunflower, pumpkin... although most of which we will swallow whole, those seeds won't germinate since they lose this power after baking. Once you roast the seeds, they won't be able to sprout.

3. RUDERALITY & SURVIVAL

As we mentioned, most seeds are capable of surviving the process of human digestion and leaving our bodies almost undamaged. Tomato, pepper, eggplant, okra, grapes

and guava are some of the crops we eat that have fleshy mesocarps and strong endocarp, protecting the hard seeds from the digestive enzymes. They will survive the gastrointestinal acids successfully.

Ecologists define *Ruderality* as the capacity that some organisms have to thrive in spite of challenging conditions. The seeds contained in your feces, have a grueling task to be able to survive. It is not only that they are been contained in what Philip Grime will called “disturbed land or disturbed habitat” but also under high levels of stress.

Some of the foods we eat these days have been grown adopting industrial agriculture methods and using hybrid seeds. Those seeds have much less *ruderality*, also much less *rusticity* than normal/traditional/heirloom/peasant seeds. Modified seeds have become fragile and *inputs needy* since they have been manipulated to have very little life force in them, some of which are not even able to germinate at all. Notice, most grapes and watermelons are commercialized without seeds and this is branded as a plus.

Proposition: Outline the steps

Outline the steps of the journey the seeds contained in your food intake, will have to endure after you eat them. For the seeds to pass through the stomach and small intestine will take about 6 to 8 hours, followed by a 36 hours journey for them to move through the entire large intestine, flush the toilet or somewhere else? municipal piped network of your city? what is the final destination? treatment plant? settling pool? any other system?

4. INTERCONNECTIVITY & COEXISTANCE

One of the ideas that has greatly influence the project IN TRANSIT (Botany of A Journey) is Timothy’s Morton concept of the “mesh”. In his writings, Morton alert us to the dangers of understanding human activity as a separate category from other natural phenomena. He highlights the importance of dismantling the nature-culture divide that has reduced the concept of nature to plants, animals and rocks, and he urges on the need to understand that all life forms function in a interrelated way, stressing the idea of “absolute interconnectedness” in the mesh.

Food crops use our bodies as vehicles to travel and be propagated in other geographies. In doing so, they expand the possibility for their survival and secure the continuation of their life. Birds, bees and other animals play an important role as pollinators, humans however, locked in our cultural dimension as a separate entity from that of “nature”, are excluded from the recognition of the important role we play as seed dispersers.

Proposition: Reflect on your role as seed disperser

Try to **envision and reflect on your role as seed disperser** and your impact as such. Try to calculate in a playful matter your contribution by connecting the information you have already put together, meaning your list of foods/seeds and your excrements production, and the conclusion you can draw from it, adding or subtracting other facts as that of your interest.

5. MOBILITY & GLOBALITY

Seeds, plants, spices and various breeds of plants have been travelling and moving around from the beginning of time, using the routes readily available: strong winds, migration, birds, grazing animals, as well as people. They have travelled in our guts but also in our shoes, pockets and bags. They have been swapped between farmers from neighboring villages and traded via transcontinental commercial agreements.

Proposition: Map the journey

Map the journey of the seeds that have travel in and out of your intestines.

Where does the food you ingest come from? which countries, cities, farming regions? How they were cultivated? Greenhouses or open fields, roof gardens, family farms, agribusiness?

Do the seeds contain in them are ruderal enough? Would they have been able to survived?

Where do they go afterwards; once they leave your body? Any chance for them to reach good and undisturbed soil?