

# 12 things you can learn from sourdough making

## 1. {Dormant wakefulness}

The concept of dormant microbes, or yeasts in a state of restful inertia, with the possibility to resurrect or elicit wakefulness with biologic (plant flour) and atmospheric (water) matter was humbling.

## 2. {The agency of atmospheres}

The realisation that the 'environment' or 'surrounds' are all powerful actants in the generating and maintaining of life. Hands, air, surface, neighbours are have life-making and world-making capacities. James Lovelock and other's Gaia Theory of the Earth as a regulating system - a chance to witness some of those exchanges in action.

## 3. {Borderless Bodies}

Through sourdough we learn of the inside-outside nature of living things, the ultimate expulsion of the 'I' individual subject, the 'we' embodied. Skin and surface is not a separating divide but a permeable membrane, a skinterface for material and transformative exchange. The body is turned inside out as the 'environment' becomes a material component of the body of bread, and the bodies of microbes in habit the 'environment' of the flour and water. 'Shared' becomes key as signatures from my microbiome will form the long hain of life that will live on.

## 4. {Engaging Sensorium}

In the collaboration with sourdough we must collaborate on an organism-to-organism level, we 'think' and communicate with our full sensorium, the scent tells us stories, the eyes indicate clues, sounds speak to us, our hands get gooeey, feel the resistance and feel the bounce! Relating to life is not rationally comprehending the facts but experiencing its processes.

## 5. {Activated Air}

Air as a source of activation and activity has been so potent this year. Microbes are pulled from the air into the dough, gas is released in the energetic process and breaks free in the baking. The metabolic processes of life, the inhale and exhale that suspends life was brought incredibly and emotionally into view - in a year through forest fires, Covid-19 and police brutality have had individuals fighting for this precious breath.

## 6. {Fossilising Life's Traces}

Life leaves traces and fossils as it performs its sustaining actions. The aerated holes in dough are fossils of this traced life.

## 7. {A window of time, an alternate reality}

We have lost track of time. Humans see their time as the end of time, their lifetime the benchmark and the future as a thing that will not come if we are not living it. To make sourdough sense is life's life-making processes in action, to make visible on a microcosmic and rapid scale.

## 8. {On the limits of our knowing}

The process reminded me of the limits of our knowing - where do the microbes come from? Was there ever a more potent reminder of the microbes all around (in an age of virus). Were they sleeping in the flour? Skirting the edges of a container ready to cuddle it's flour? Suspended in the air in time? Are they waiting? What are they doing in there? In the water? Transferring from my skin?

## 9. {A site of magic and mystery}.

The recipe is always a secret! Rebellious counter to our hunger for wisdom. As humans we feel we have a right to know, and knowing is something all achievable. This is where the 'wild' in 'wild' yeast comes in. Something untamed and uncontrollable. I encourage the conditions for life to flourish but the microbes are actants with their own intentions.

## 10. {Dough is a site of care-full, co-creation}

Inspired by Czech artist Jan Svankmayer, the sourdough loaf becomes a site of multiple gestures of care. Lovingly **tended**

Sensitively **attuned** to its needs - it it hungry, is it warm enough?

**Folding** gently - don't disturb the bubbles!

Checking **folding**

Tenderly **smoothing**

Enabling **resting**

**Stroking**, impressing, **caressing**

**Maintaining** rather than managing

**Encouraging** rather than controlling

## 11. {Containers for care}

It also evokes Astrida Neiman's concept of a 'carrier bag body' of care.

## 12. {Metabolic Cycles}

Microbes in the starter > air, skin, surface, surrounds > emerge as a symbiotic and collaborative corpus > eaten > metabolised