

F L O C

Extract from Spring 2021 book length publication, text & images, IEDZ Marrin

Grazing

It starts with a plot of uncultivated land, the plotting of this land presents a translation of material into futurity; the production of a spatial arrangement of knowledge. Beneath this there is another kind of plotting taking place, within the microbial population of the soil and the multiplicity of agencies incorporated into it that progress by their own devious routes towards the boundary's dissolution. And different arrangements too, for instance: the passing of pathogenic material through the body of a ruminant, for instance a cow. Or, for instance: the passing of the land through the body of a ruminant *translated through milk into taste and nourishment, an intense concentrated expression of pastures and animals, of microbes and time ... the way of all flesh.*¹ Different seasonal or climatic conditions affect the likelihood of anthrax infection in grazing cattle. Different organoleptic traits in dairy products reveal seasonal and qualitative changes in the land itself as *the basic flavour of fresh milk is affected by the animals' feed, lush pasturage provides raw material for sweet raspberry-like notes (derivatives of unsaturated long chain-fatty acids), as well as barnyardy indoles.*² As the milk is condensed into dairy products this causality is concentrated. Cooked hard-pressed cheeses, which are matured for up to two years, present hyper-concentrated objects containing a multiplicity of sites and plots. Genotyping of the anthrax bacteria *B. anthracis* reveals a spe-

¹ Harold McGee, *Food & Cooking, an encyclopedia of kitchen science, history and culture.* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004).

² Ibid.

cific history of migration and mutation, from the champs maudits to the sacrifice zones.

Diaspora

Lactic acid bacteria allow for the preservation of milk by fermenting the sugar lactose producing lactic acid and so inhibiting pathogenic bacteria or spoiling. The lactobacillus forms a biofilm in both the vagina and the digestive tract, the relationship between the human body and these flora is mutualistic. There exist hundreds of different forms of fermented milks, *most of them originated in western Asia, eastern Europe, and Scandinavia, and have been carried across the globe by countless emigrants, many of whom dipped a cloth in their family's culture, dried it gently, and guarded it until they could moisten it in the milk of their new home.*³ The spore diaspora of *B.anthraxis* originated in the fertile soils of Asia Minor, now it is an ever-present environmental presence and its transformation from a zoonotic telluric disease into a cosmopolitan organism and bioweapon, describes a network that can be mapped over the historic migrations of animals and humans; the global sporulation of commodities, knowledge and weapons. *B. anthracis* is a hardy traveller, part of a mobile elite, a migrant well suited to the homologous age of the container unit. Once they entered the laboratory, their place-based identity slowly eroded, the laboratory is the apparatus for de-territorializing, an anti-terroir, the migrant body is absorbed and anonymised within a bureaucratic epistemic system. In the United States, the market for process cheese, a mixture of aged and fresh cheeses

blended with emulsifiers and repasteurized, is now larger than the market for 'natural cheese'... *at the beginning of the 21st Century, most cheese is an industrial product, an expression not of diverse natural and human particulars, but of the monolithic imperatives of standardization and efficient mass production.*⁴ A 'natural' cheese is a pastoral problematic, whose nature are we talking about here? Bill writes on the whiteboard 'I. ANARCHY', he explains 'if we plant coconuts but grow pineapples then we have not achieved our goal'. At the dairy we are keen intestinal gardeners, we like to think of ourselves as promoting embodied knowledge: somatic mutation, hetero-culturing, xenobiosis, incorporating cultures of otherness, loners, losers, cloth-dippers.



Intimacy issues

*Accidental and deliberate deployments of B. anthracis have created new and more deadly anthrax districts—environments not safe for humans or their animals to inhabit. We have invited in an organism that is one of our predators into ever more intimate contact with us.*⁵ The Internet says: There are 10 silent signs you might have intimacy issues. It says: Fear of intimacy?

4 Ibid..

5 Susan Jones, *Death in a Small Package, A Short History of Anthrax* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 78.

Get in contact! How can we make contact across scales? What do we mean when we say life-sized, what size fits the criteria for life? We have overseen the development of anthrax spores that are so tiny they float miraculously out of envelopes and can travel deep within the respiratory system of an organism where the lung tissue is thinnest, the contact is most intimate. When I think of a microbe it is not shape of a microbe but the shape of my thought as I am thinking it which is not a shape at all but an idea, it is a means of connection somewhere between con-and-tact. When I think of intestinal flora I think of flowers. *There are some tiny flowers—beautiful, tiny flowers—high in the mountains where I have my but. I feel like I am together with these flowers—they are more beautiful than me, but we are together as one entity. This is very striking, because I couldn't feel that way with flowers anywhere else. The conditions there are so extreme, and the identification is so deep, that we are one.*⁶ They are so tiny, he says, so tiny, but they are not so small, I can see them in the youTube clip, I can see him bend and touch them with a leathery fingertip, I cannot reach into my gut to touch the symbiotic bacteria but we are in constant con-tact.



6 Arne Naess, “Here I Stand”: An Interview With Arne Naess’ (2001),

What kind of idea allows for identification with intestinal flora as well as wild flowers?

Endoscopy

The new species of optics is endoscopic, there’s nowhere left to go but downwards and in, an inside job, of course, it always is. Medicine as a technique of health is much more concerned with what is going on in the body than in the soil. If a bacterium can find its way into the smallest bronchial passages then we must chase it through these passages with new ways of seeing. Have you ever watched footage of a bronchoscopy? Pink wet walls rippling and pushing in, it must be so claustrophobic down there. Some kind of horrific slippery vulvic valve dilates welcoming us in, and in we go like dupes in a horror film, why always so willingly? Don’t panic! The procedure can cause discomfort but is important the subject remains calm. Two choices present themselves, two deep mauve ribbed tunnels pulsating, take either, neither, some kind of liquid squirts over the camera in iridescent bubbles, then more choices, endless choices, more shiny bubbles and tubes everywhere, identical pathways, we’re never getting out of here! Three branches, four, just follow your nose, a kind of taught pulsation of the walls urges you on, the membrane bridging between each choice is stretched and raw. Where does this end? With a simple idea: a foreign body, the object of our enquiry. The introduction of an unknown agency into the body compromises the integrity of the body, it becomes implicated in anonymous processes but the optics are equally important here whether it’s a drone or a bronchoscope, they

implicate us in xenophobic process of controlled corporation, a prescriptive somatic structuring. Do we perhaps see each body only insofar as it sees itself and insofar as we see ourselves? Our ways of seeing have become weaponized, *we use the microscope like a cudgel.*⁷ What makes a good weapon? infectivity, casualty effectiveness; availability; resistance; means of transmission; specific immunisation; therapy; detection; and retroactivity.⁷

A pure and loving relationship

A cheese maker controls the conditions of production but there are occult agencies beyond his control. We need to talk about the October cheeses says Bill, he is discouraged by the increasing variability of quality in production, I thought I was invincible, he says. It is important to recognise that cheese is not a collection of species which we simply need to identify in order to subsequently reconstitute a community capable of optimally performing all its functions. We are systematically non-taxonomic at the dairy. Bill collects employees with a purity of mind, what he calls ‘a beginner’s mind’, an ability to expect a multiplicity of consequences to any action, perhaps not to expect anything at all from any action but to be always beginning. We inhabit the post-Pasteurian dream of complex consequentiality. Pasteur promised us a purity of social relations: *after we have sterilized milk by spreading throughout all farms methods of pasteurization, then we will be able to feed our infant in a pure loving relationship.*⁸ Instead he

entangles us between two actors, both the microbe and the laboratory must be integrated into every loving relationship. In the umbilical cord of future mothers living on a farm and consuming farm-made butter they observed a greater quantity of mediator compounds of an immune response favouring a subsequent protection of the child against atopic allergies. Wherever the microbe is present the laboratory must intervene as an interlocutor. Where is the laboratory? It is having dinner with your wife, it is texting your girlfriend, it is emailing late at night *do you love me?*



Silent strata

The detective must walk backwards into events looking forwards, a difficult trick. Especially as some events rearrange themselves chronologically, as any geologist will tell you rocks do not = time, there are gaps which are silent or strata that have been pushed and folded allowing patterns to repeat themselves, for instance: the disease from thawing human and animal remains can get into groundwater that people then drink. Events continue to assert themselves, for instance: there was the letter sent by Toussaint to the Académie des Sciences in Paris in 1880 with his formulation for a vaccine for animal anthrax which would subse-

⁷ Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice*, Artificial Eye, 1986.

⁸ Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

quently be plagiarised by Pasteur, the letter was dated and sealed not to be opened without permission, but despite these narrative constraints this letter reasserts itself in 2001 emerging on the desk of Bob Stevens the editor of American Media in his office in Florida. The content of the letter is different from Toussaint's, in this instance it contains a threatening note and a beige powder but it is the same letter, again it is the same operative, we find the same agent and apparatus at work in both. And people too persist in this plot, the Pasteurians of course prevail, and there is a meshwork of Bills, Bill C. Patrick III a USAMIRIID retiree who had served as plant manager of Anthrax Tower and was one of the few left in 2001 who could remember how to sporulate the bacilli, whose car and house were unsuccessfully searched by the FBI; Bill Cawthra the foreman wooll sorter from Bradford whose death was followed by agitation across the mill towns as workers organised themselves against the owners to demand safe working conditions and an end to the importation of contaminated or cut price fleeces; and poor old Bill Boyles of Building 470 fondly remembered as Vollum 1-B, then there's our Bill, a benign strain we hope.

