

# Excerpt from Recipes for an Encounter

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Western Front

## INTRODUCTION

### On Recipes

Recipes are axioms in a sense; they reduce complex logic into language and mathematical operators recipes refer to broader circumstances but in a highly mannered, ascetic logic. The underlying desire to create recipes the motive to distill a complex situation into a set of indivisible units and variables. The recipe stands at the point where the individual touches chaos and then attempts to order it. In their reduced state, recipes are transferable and translatable and often gain agency or currency by being shared.

*Code cooking: the 09 F9 Archive*, examines how a string of numbers becomes significant through its morphogenesis. Produced by Krstina Lee Podesva and Alan McConchie in 2007, the project is comprised of a collection of a motley set of performances, musical acts, recordings, and do-it-yourself interpretations of a 32 hexadecimal digit code used to copy commercially-produced HD DVDs. Similar to a computer virus (a mathematical formula that, when ordered to run what it has been programmed to do, results in endless social consequences), the 09 F9 is a code disseminated to transgress systems of authority and control. The collection portrays a battle between individuals who replicated the code through analog and digital means, and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), who sought to minimize the widespread publication of the code. An important precedent in intellectual property was established through these events: the public right to openly replicate a code that is essentially made up of segments of the alphabet and the number system.

In the essay 'Spirited Gestures, Rational Views', new media theorist Francisco J. Ricardo writes about the infamous ELIZA computer program that was written between 1964 and 1966. The program was a naïve attempt to computationally simulate a woman. It was tested by asking subjects to conversationally interact with a computer that would respond to queries through text. The presuppositions of the scenario - the assumption that human subjectivity (specifically, *female* subjectivity) - could be measured through interaction between computers - expose the technological faith and gender biases of the era in which ELIZA was written.

As a genre of writing that privileges the structure and a highly schematized form, recipes normalize a certain order. But what is prescribed, omitted, and assumed is as significant as what is written. Vahida Ramujkic's *Schengen with Ease* (2006) critiques the limits of language and other systems of structured rules. The textbooks exercises and lesson plans intend to 'teach' non-European Union citizens how to properly enter and assimilate into the EU. The book draws upon the artist's experience as a Serbian immigrant to Spain during the Balkan conflicts of the late 1990s. To receive her papers, Ramujkic followed the Schengen Treaty, a set of instructions that describes the strict process of how to become an EU citizen. Fused with Ramujkic's scrapbook like autobiographical chronicle are references to *Assimil*, a book written by Alphonse Chérel in 1929 to assist in the process of becoming a European citizen. By alluding to both historical and contemporary codes of etiquette, *Schengen with Ease* exposes the classist and biased assumptions

underlying each text's notion of European citizenry. The humour in Ramujkic's book lies in pointing out the historicity and fallacy within any universal code for human behaviour.

Other recipes in this book also point towards the historically contingent, and therefore alterable, nature of power. *Radio Ballet* by German collaborative LIGNA was a participatory performance intervention that took place in Leipzig Central Station on June 22, 2003. Choreographed through broadcast radio, individuals listening to the broadcast were instructed to perform movements based upon Leipzig station's regulations for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. By embodying and making visible what the station had deemed as appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, the performers and LIGNA drew attention to the codification of bourgeois etiquette and the mechanisms of gentrification. The broadcast instructions of the *Radio Ballet* simultaneously ruptured one order in order to stabilize and emplace another.

Matt Volla's *Situaesthetics* (2008) also displays a desire to create rupture within an equally codified preestablished order. The work is constituted by a set of text-based rules and pseudoscientific diagrams that offer an ordered way of analysing chance as part of a historical trajectory. Volla sets up intricate operations with strict parameters in which to conduct various experiments, but adheres new values to arbitrary rules so that they yield new outcomes. The process is similar to a famous Situationist exercise in which a map of one city is used to trace its roots in an entirely different location. By developing a lexicon of illogical outcomes and alternate possibilities, Volla creates a system that frames both order and its interruption, utilizing familiar routines in hopes of making new discoveries.

Recipes canonize a certain process, seeking to preserve specific ingredients, ratios, and/or preparatory methods. Sometimes they stabilize accidents that result in auspicious inventions, such as the discovery of the antibiotic properties of an ordinary household mold (*Penicillin notum*) that we now know as Penicillin. What often cannot be ascertained is whether a recipe's curative strength lies in its chemical, psychosomatic, or ritualistic properties. This is an acknowledgement that accedes to the functional similarity of medicines, potions, curses, or spells. For example, in his essay 'Love Magic and Political Morality in Central Madagascar, 1875-1990', Anthropologist David Graeber suggests that the practice of love medicine or *odi* and its development by the Merina, an indigenous group in Madagascar, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is perhaps symptomatic of the need for agency in the face of French Colonialist oppression [i]. Although *odi* was utilized equally by men and women to bring about various means and ends, this practice was generally attributed to Merina women, because they (like any group with little or no access to the formal mechanisms of power) tended to acquire a reputation as manipulators, which, in turn, reinforced the impression that they were more likely than men to have access to mysterious powers to influence others through invisible means [ii]. In other words, if a Merina woman was able to exercise influence and power over her spouse, family, or community, it was assumed that she used witchcraft, calling upon supernatural or occult forces, rather than utilizing her own intellect or powers of persuasion. In turn, being viewed as commanding supernatural may have accorded these women more protection, since aggressors with ill intentions may have steered clear of them for fear of the unknowable powers they may have possessed. A syncretic recipe formed from indigenous traditions and the specters of colonialism, the mechanisms and 'effectiveness' of *odi* raise larger epistemological questions about causality and agency.

For artist Aaron Gach, founder of the Center for Tactical Magic (CTM), it is only through this faith in the irrational that transformation and authoritarian subversion can be achieved. CTM's mission states:

With its occult origins, revolutionary insinuations, and magical permutations, our understanding of 'transformation' possesses the potential to manifest as a unifying strategy capable of truly transforming our rhetoric into reality [...] For those engaged in politics, 'transformation' is the reformative or revolutionary remedy sought to resolve a desperate state of affairs - a reality wrought with illusions [iii]

Along with this appeal to the supernatural to bring about change, there comes the possibility of having one's wishes, prayers, or spells yield a totally different outcome than what was originally intended. As Gach writes, 'It is the process of transformation, and not the outcome, which dictates the magical moment, the mysterious reality which permeates all reality' [iv]. Perhaps it is this adherence to an open-ended outcome - one that may not even be imagined in advance - that gives a recipe for an encounter its transformative power.

### **On Encounters**

An encounter often suggests the unplanned or accidental (whether welcomed or not). Framing the encounter accedes to the prospect of disaster, windfall, fate, and chance. It calls up what literary theorist Maurice Blanchot refers to as the 'sovereignty of the accidental' [v], a force that may evade rational containment, but that nonetheless acts upon or binds. In its most frequent usage, the word 'encounter' implies a confrontation with the Other. Not necessarily a person, the Other can be understood as a psychic apparition, a landscape, or even one's inevitable eventual encounter with death. Max Goldfarb's text piece *Jump Kit* (2008) for example, starts out as a standard list of equipment when would bring on an outdoor track (e.g. flashlight, gauze, airtight container). But the enormity of the list and the objects included quickly becomes absurd, paranoid, and somewhat dangerous and it's a very un-usability (e.g. Chloropheniramine, Triamcinolone, Deminhydrinate, potassium permanganate crystals) and ends with throwing stars as the last of the inventory of necessary items. The kit conveys a survivalists impulse to take time to prepare for an unknown future. Yet the future sketched out by the items in the kit have the potential - like some sort of self-fulfilling prophecy - to deliver calamity, especially through the potentially toxic and explosive mix of chemicals included therein.

For some artists, the recipe becomes fetishized as a tool that is perceived to alter the environment or define what the British psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas calls a 'transformational object' [vi]. Bollas suggests that in early childhood experience with transformational objects persists through adulthood, often in the form of an aesthetic quest for continuity with an object. 'It is usually on the occasion of the aesthetic moment [...] that an individual feels a deep subjective report with an object (a painting, a poem, an aria or symphony, or a natural landscape) and experiences an uncanny fusion with the object, an event that re-evokes an ego state that prevailed during early psychic life' [vii]. An artist's desire to invoke a sense of continuity with the world via an object is often transferred into an impetus to draft a recipe. A recipe, therefore, becomes intimately associated with an event, taking on almost magical properties that precipitate what may (or may not) take place.

Some artists exploit frameworks in which the encounter and its capacity to thrill or shock become fetishized and the unknown possibilities of the future encounter become heightened. Lisa Anne Auerbach's *Driving Gloves* (2006) offer step-by-step instructions on how to knit a pair of gloves that use colour to pronounce the middle finger - a useful feature for the artist whose habitation in Los Angeles necessitates the right car culture accoutrement and aggressive stance. Reflecting on the pleasurable tension between prediction and outcome, Umberto Eco writes 'While there is inhibition, there is also the pleasure of expectation, a feeling of impotence in front of the unknown; and the more unexpected the solution, the greater the pleasure when it

occurs' [viii]. As in Auerbach's recipe, developing a schematic to derive pleasure from the unknown serves as a way to confront fear through a means of empowerment.

Sharif Waked's video *Chic Point* (2003) draws further parallels between fetish and trauma on the one hand, and zones of bodily pleasure and sites of physical violence on the other. In the video, handsome man with distinctly Middle Eastern features model clothing the artist developed for crossing the Israeli-Palestinian border. Using peek-through holes, mesh, and slits, Waked's costumes reveal and fetishize those sections of the Arab body - the lower back, the chest, the abdomen - inspected by Israeli border guards. *Chic Point* comments upon how sites of geopolitical conflict and borders that delineate these sites are inscribed upon the Palestinian body. The work calls to mind Edward Said's definition of Orientalism:

The imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections.[ix]

It is this battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections fuelled by a conflicted pairing of passion and discrimination toward the Oriental subject that Waked's video teasingly reveals and engages. For this book, Waked's collaborator Molly Keogh has contributed a series of instructions on how to create one of the artists border crossing costumes.

### **On Preparation**

The writing of a recipe almost always occurs as a deliberate *pause* between reflection on the past and anticipation of the future. Heard alongside this moment of self-reflection is the noise of improvisation. When similar instructionals are contrasted to one another, they display a self-reflexive impetus to interrogate, revise and perfect. *Millennial Dance (As Instructed by Angels)* is comprised of two choreographic annotations for dances performed by the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Protestant religious sect called the Shakers. Codifying the dance through ink and paper served as a visual didactic to communicate the form, pattern, and line formation to the dancers. Written or recorded at two different eras of theological leadership, each drawing offers a different instruction of how human gesture and form in body and reinforce theological values, thereby reflecting the changing spiritual pursuits opposed to a religious community at different points in time. Reacting to the former theological regime, the later version is thus fashioned with the intent of ensuring a legacy and greater aesthetic (and therefore ideological) cohesion.

Recipes also embody the potential for improvise Asian and experimentation over the course of their preparation, with different outcomes made possible by new ingredients thrown in. *A Dash of This and a Dash of That* (2007) is a cookbook consisting of recipes from Eastern Siberia, excerpts of which are included in this book. Compiled from a larger collection of recipes from individuals in Eastern Siberia and collected by Noa Treister and Marisa Jahn in 2007, the recipes draw from the culinary traditions of Serbian *gastarbaiters* (guest workers who seek employment abroad), the Vlach (a once nomadic ethnic minority existing in Serbia and Romania), and the Balkans legacy of Turkish and Greek reign. By presenting the culinary complexity of the region, Treister and Jahn (themselves of mixed ethnic and linguistic heritage) aspired to counter the region's perception of itself as culturally homogenous and to herald a future accepting of difference.

Adrian Blackwell's *Model for a Public Space* offers another platform for fostering pluri-vocality within public discourse. The Model functions as a recipe for building a non-hierarchical seating structure that facilitates conversation between large numbers of people sitting in close proximity

to one another. By building a space for both intimate encounters and political discussion, *Model for a Public Space* underscores the importance of creating the ideal in the present. Blackwell quotes the anarchist Colin Ward:

Of the many possible interpretations of anarchism the one presented here suggests that, far from being a speculative vision of a future society, it is a description of a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side-by-side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society.[x]

Blackwell's contribution in this book demonstrates the project as it was built in 2006 for Nuit Blanche, Toronto. Nuit Blanche is a city-wide annual nocturnal celebration of contemporary art produced by Toronto's art commission in collaboration with the arts community and sponsored by a national bank. The event takes place in the legitimated art institutions, public spaces, and vacant storefronts, and has been criticized by affordable housing activists as a mechanism that precipitates a neighbourhood's gentrification. For his installation, Blackwell invited specific groups to use the space. No One Is Illegal, activists supporting immigrants and people without status, performed a theatrical play called 'Stories of Struggle: Voices of Migrants in Toronto'. Regent Park Focus, a youth media arts centre in Canada's oldest and largest public housing project, recorded a radio show focused on the revitalization of their neighbourhood. And anti-gentrification activists, critical geographers and other bystanders participated in a critical conversation about arts and urban change called 'Struggling with the Creative Class', organized by Blackwell himself. These different constituencies challenged the festival organizers and the public to recognize the political underpinnings of municipally-supported arts.

Whereas Blackwell's *Model for a Public Space* rejects a deferred future, other recipes evidence their promissory quality by forestalling the future. Karen Hakobian's contribution to this book - instructions on how to colonize others by first promoting the desire for it - humorously points to thinly-veiled attempts at strategic geopolitical positioning for power and control over natural resources in the Caucasus region. Hakobian's instructions evoke the systematic workings of globalized capitalist production, what theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe as 'Empire's new paradigm' and its process of self-expansion predicated on conquering new territories and creating new markets: 'the new paradigm is both a system and hierarchy, centralized construction of norms and far-reaching production of legitimacy, spread out over world space' [xi]. They point out how 'some call the situation 'governance without government' to indicate the structural logic, at times imperceptible but always increasingly effective, that sweeps all actors within the order of the whole' [xii]. By alluding to overarching patterns of neo-colonialism and drawing links between present capitalist expansion and a long history of imperialism, Hakobian's instructions serve as a field guide for identifying these common patterns so that they may be countered and resisted in the future.

Janice Kerbel's *Bank Job* (1999) follows a similarly preemptive logic. Here, Kerbel shares highly detailed, step-by-step instructions on how to rob a bank in central London. The artists extensive research reveals security loopholes that may exist in even the most impervious of structures. Kerbel 'blows the whistle' so to speak, on the possibility of actually committing the heist, because making these loopholes public ensures that they will be accounted for and blocked. While *Bank Job* may be a self-obviating project in reference to a specific crime, in a broader context, the project symbolically upholds the potential for an individual to transgress or infiltrate even the most restrictive of environments, circumstances and institutions.

Another genre of recipes offers explicit, step-by-step instructions for inciting radical change. There were manuals published during the height of late 20<sup>th</sup> century American radicalism that

explicated the workings of ecologists, anti-capitalists, and anarchists. One of the best known is William Powell's *The Anarchist Cookbook* (1971), a collection of 'recipes' geared towards both the radical left and the made stream. As Powell notes, the book was not intended for fringe political groups; it was intended for the curious 'square guy' or the 'subscriber to Reader's Digest and Time' who wanted to know how to make tear gas, TNT, booby traps of all sorts, and create psychedelics from nutmeg and bananas [xiii]. Powell claimed that his hope was that mainstream America would become fed up with the course of history and would have a need for the tools to overthrow the State.

Jamie O'Shea's instructions to turn this volume into a 'book bomb' subscribe to your regenerative approach to creativity by hastening its own destruction. William S. Burroughs text 'Cut-Ups' served as the inspirational starting point for O'Shea. A close reading of Burroughs' text offers an understanding of the depth of O'Shea's otherwise incendiary gesture. Written in 1959, 'Cut-Ups' (modelled after an idea by Brion Gyson) posits the notion that all poetry and language is, in fact, a montage of ideas and signifiers that can generate an infinity of new interpretations when rearranged:

You can introduce the unpredictable spontaneous factor with a pair of scissors [...] The method is simple. Here is one way to do it. Take a page, like this page. Now cut down the middle and across the middle. You have four sections: one, two, three, four. Now rearrange the sections placing section 4 with section 1 and section 2 with section 3 and you have a new page.

Take any poet or writer you fancy. Here, say, or poems you have read many times. The words have lost meaning and life through years of repetition. Now take the poem and type out selected pages. Fill the page with excerpts. Now cut the page. You have a new poem. As many poems as you like [...]

All writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words read, heard, overheard. Cutting and rearranging a piece of written words introduces a new dimension of writing, enabling the writer to turn images into cinematic variation. Images shift sense under the scissors the smell images to sound sight to sound sound to kinaesthetic [...] The place of mess Killeen hallucination. Seeing colours tasting sounds smelling forms [xiv].

Within Burrough's and O'Shea's solicitations to explode the text, one might see the desire to witness one's own death, transubstantiation (its mutation into another form), and regeneration.

Burrough's work - as well as the work of many of the contributors to this book - can be characterized by its embrace of the accident, an open-ended notion of authorship, and faith in the constitutive nature of interpretation. This sentiment is echoed in the text 'The Open Work' (1989), in which Italian semiologist Umberto Eco posits the notion of an open work, which he interchangeably refers to as the 'work in motion'. This is also understood as an art in which the work relies on his receiver to be completed. As Eco explains:

The 'work in movement' is the possibility of numerous different personal interventions, but it is not an amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation. The invitation offers the performer the opportunity for an oriented insertion into something that always remains the world intended by the author.

In other words, the author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work *to be completed*. He does not know the exact fashion in which his work will be concluded, but he is aware that once completed the work in question will still be his own. It will not be a different work, and at the end of the interpretative dialogue, a form which is *his* form will

have been organized, even though it may have been assembled by an outside party in a particular way that he could not have foreseen. The author is the one who proposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organized, oriented, and endowed with specifications for proper development [xv].

For Eco, the author's intention is an organizing principle that structures disorder and enables the comparison of difference: 'The *possibilities* which the Works openness makes available always work with in a given *field of relations*' [xvi]. While Burroughs was less concerned about the question of authorship, for Eco, the structure of an open work is *predicated* on an originary author who makes possible the comparison of otherwise unrelated and inchoate incidences. In other words, authorial intent structures, pronounces, and allows for difference. For many of the contributors to this book, the question of difference, as well as its aesthetic embodiment, forms a point of departure about the political importance of plurality, dissent, and differentiation. The political philosopher Chantal Mouffe considers this question to be an imperative for the formation of democratic order:

A project of radical and pleural democracy has to come to terms with the dimension of conflict and antagonism within the political and has to accept the consequences of the irreducible plurality of values [...] Instead of shying away from the component of violence and hostility inherent in social relations, the task is to think how to create the conditions under which those aggressive forces can be diffused and diverted and a pluralist democratic order made possible. [xvii]

Taking cue from Mouffe's notion that dialog can originate from dissensus, the works included in this book address questions about the frameworks for an encounter. The recipes investigate how an aesthetics of difference shifts emphasis from author to incidence, from inscription to performance, from product to process, from conception to enactment. Perhaps, following Burroughs, the method is simple, and relies on a deliberate inversion of the text (or the framework) through the tactical reordering of the ingredients.

## Notes

- i. Graeber's essay is not included in the contents of *Recipes for an Encounter*, but excerpted in the preface of the book. David Graeber, 'Love Magic and Political Morality in Central Madagascar: 1875 – 1990', in *Possibilities: Essays in Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), 244 – 245.
- ii. *Ibid.*, 244-245.
- iii. Aaron Gach, Center for Tactical Magic, 'Transformation Magic', <http://www.tacticalmagic.org/CTM/thoughts/transformation%20magic.htm> (accessed 15 June 2009).
- iv. *Ibid.*, (accessed 1 September 2008).
- v. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).
- vi. Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Unknown* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 16-17.
- vii. *Ibid.*

- viii. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 75.
- ix. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House Press, 1978), 8.
- x. Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1973), 18, quoted in Adrian Blackwell, 'Model for Public Space – [a manual]' in *Public Art in Canada: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Annie Gérin and Jim McLean (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
- xi. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 13-14.
- xii. *Ibid.*, 14.
- xiii. William Powell, *The Anarchist Cookbook* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1971), 149.
- xv. William Burroughs, 'The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin', in *RE/Search #4/5: William Burroughs, Throbbing Gristle, Brion Gysin* (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 2007), n/p.
- xvi. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 19.
- xvii. *Ibid.*
- xviii. Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London, New York: Verso, 2005), 153.