



## MAKING, SYNERGIES & EMPOWERMENT

*Maker describes each one of us, no matter how we live our lives or what our goals might be. We all are makers: as cooks preparing food for our families, as gardeners, as knitters.*

—DALE DOUGHERTY

*Making* is creating, is using your body and your senses, to prototype your ideas and transform them into action. *Making* is based on collaboration, skill sharing, exchange and networking. In this essay I aim to explore the idea of *making* from a grassroots perspective, as a tool to empower communities, hack the system and offer different ways of seeing through the workshops we had this year in Pollenzo, highlighting the ones we shared with Marije Vogelzang and Caroline Gatt; and Giulia Mattaglia, Alieksei Taran and Nino Boi, based on both artistic and gardening approaches. I fondly believe that *makers*, through their personal questions and constant exchanges are changing the world every day.

### **What is the *maker movement*?**

The *maker movement* gained popularity around the 2000s when the *Maker Faire* was launched along with a magazine in California<sup>1</sup>, and it is often linked to the intersection of design, engineering, fabrication and education through exploration of new technologies with like-minded people and moreover the socialisation of knowledge. Nonetheless, the root of the *maker* goes beyond time, it is entangled to our ability of tinkering –a basic skill that the industrialized-capitalist power has been controlling since the industrial revolution–, and the constant exchange –inside a community– of our abilities with others, grounding the ideology of co-operation and sharing.

This movement has created a culture worldwide, it's not a coincidence that during recent years clusters of innovation, or communal workshops, have been emerging, where a *maker* –creative or inventor– can easily find the necessary tools to prototype her/his ideas, moreover she/he could find a community of like minded people that strongly contribute to the development of these ideas into tangible projects, being the community itself the first group of testers / audience.

The *Maker Movement* is grounded in an ideology promoting cooperation and sharing (Pieri & Domeniconi, 2016), according to the paradigm of collaborative and open innovation. Open innovation is defined as “the use of purposive inflows

and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation and to expand the markets for external use of innovation” (Chesbrough,2003). Adopting open innovation approaches implies redefining the firm’s boundaries, allowing knowledge to become an exchangeable good (Chesbrough, 2003).<sup>2</sup>

One could argue that Pollenzo is a *Maker* hub, because it is precisely in the physical –and now virtual– space where the experimental culture of openness, collaboration and sharing happens, where interactions between peers and professors create the do-it-together culture, merging collaborative interactions, for the sake of shared curiosity. Openness, peering and sharing are integral parts of the *Maker Movement*, where different types of knowledge exchanges are required for innovation and where the multiplexity of sharing knowledge can only produce more curiosity paths.<sup>3</sup>

The magic of *making* is deeply committed to local, collaborative, community-based invention; networks to share tools, technologies, and ideas not only through physical spaces but also through online communities. In the *making* philosophy, knowledge is an exchangeable good of resistance and creativity; *making* is about identity, self sufficient communities, sustainability and empowerment, thus it is about stories and abundance of knowledge that communities carry.<sup>4</sup> *Makers* at their core are enthusiasts,<sup>5</sup> therefore I would like to share in the following lines the enthusiasm that connected students with mentors during this peculiar year.

### **Art and Performance, or the power of flow and prototyping as a creative process**

The unexpected beginning of this peculiar covid year was paradoxically marked with the end of one of the most amazing workshops I have been participating in, Marije Vogelzang enthusiasm and energy challenged our school setting to create a collective performance around fat for the UNISG community. The group was divided in pairs, each pair would explore the concept of fat to create an experience, keeping in mind these key questions:

- What can you do with only 5 minutes to make your experience memorable?
- How can you explore the concept of fat from 7 perspectives:
  - » senses
  - » psychology
  - » nature / education
  - » culture
  - » science
  - » society / climate
  - » material
- What do you want the audience to go away with?

After some brainstorming with Lucia, we decided to explore through the lens of sensory analysis, aiming to convey a story around fat as a transmitter of taste and beauty: fat is a surprise, is beautiful, is emotional and is biodiversity.

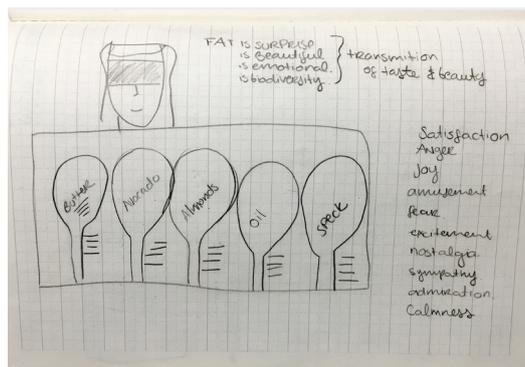
With a very simple set up, we hosted a blind tasting with 4 different fats, sunflower oil, coconut oil, olive oil and butter. We guided our guests to think of the fat they were tasting differently, by exploring elements of each sample, decontextualize them and transform them into an animal that we would be live drawing to create a graphic memory, the result was very interesting, who would think that piedmontese organic melted butter will taste like a swordfish? or that olive oil could taste like a human?<sup>6</sup>

**Our research task was to play, explore, experience and be curious, moreover to make our guests live this peculiar tasting with curiosity by playing with different relations around flavours and diversity.**

Besides being a great experience on a personal level, I would like to highlight the collective spirit of our fat parade: *Something to hold on to*. I was amazed by how each pair interpreted the same concept differently, how we were able to create an event in such a short time, how this idea of exploration and prototyping brought us together as a group. I hold fondly the idea of contagious enthusiasm, and its ability to transform simple things into powerful tools to make things happen through creativity.



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Something to hold on to. Pollenzo. February 2020

In a very different setting –an online classroom, close to the end of the program– and with a new wave of Covid, Caroline Gratt welcomed us with open arms to share her approach to anthropology through perception, sensations, movement, performance, memory, imagination and collaboration, focusing on being fully present. Caroline’s anthropological-theatrical practice is based on paying attention to the senses in order to understand human behaviour.

Through exploration movements, Caroline guided us to re explore our imagination with a key question: **What if?**

- What if we reimagine the possibilities of human encounter?
- What if I open my perceptual abilities?
- What if a memory could trigger imagination?
- What if we experience openness?
- What if I expand my peripheral vision?
- What if my daily habits could change my perceptual abilities and I start perceiving something new?

With an inquiry-perceptual lense, we explored the possibilities of food and our relationship with it. We started looking to other ways of life in order to ask ourselves how we live and how we relate to our food. Opening a discussion around the *Nine Provocations for the Study of Domestication*<sup>7</sup>, we discussed how our relationship with food is not innocent, how ingredients carry a whole oppressive history linked to progress, colonisation and domestication.

In the short 12 hours that Caroline guided us through her process, we concluded with a quick task in pairs: designing a meal. In about 20 minutes Eva –& Martjin– and I prototyped a meal with the idea of rediscovering our environment, where we would make present to our guests the inquiries around domestication / colonisation of concepts of food and dining, the paradox of the individual and communal space, aiming for reconnection with our forager souls through a soundscape in an agroforest in Mexico. Many things of this workshop I am still digesting, but I would like to hold on to this idea: **Check in everyday, you are a sphere of perception.**



Expanding my sphere of perception via Zoom. Bra. November 2020 © Bruno Valasse

## Gardening practices, or the wise words from Nino: *la terra è tutto*.

Last but not least, I would like to briefly highlight the power of communities, the value of seeds and moreover the act of resistance by growing your own food as an important part of the *maker movement*: Growing a garden is creativity!

I was very lucky to spend a good part of my summer mornings helping at UNISG garden, learning about soil and crops planning with Nino and Alieksei. Those days, besides being a balm to my heart, reassured my profound interest in biodiversity, and the impact of our fork choices every single day, and made me better understand the theory of Edible Gardens we would later have with Giulia Mattaglia.

We discussed many interesting things: diversity; vegetable families; intercropping; health of the soil and some possible ways towards a sustainable agriculture –organic, low input agriculture, biodynamic, permaculture and agroecology–; and most importantly the idea of sustainability as the intersection between ecological, social and economical aspects.

On this extent, the understanding of agroecology caught my attention for being considered a holistic and participatory **science**, a sustainable use of renewable resources **practice**, and a **social movement** toward food sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> The 13 principles of agroecology<sup>9</sup> sum up pretty clear why I think is the most powerful and holistic way of sustaining our bodies: **recycling, social values and diets, input reduction, land and natural resource governance, soil health, animal health, biodiversity, connectivity, synergy, participation, economic diversification, fairness, co-creation of knowledge**.

**Final thoughts:** Through these days of co-creation of knowledge that immersed our brains and hands into the value of diversity and community one can only hope that the seeds these wonderful people planted will flourish in our daily lives and choices. **Diversity, soil, intersection, presence, curiosity, exchange, gratitude**. These words would have never been possible without the enthusiasm and resistance of every single person that have been building the amazing *Maker hub Pollenzo* is.



Harvest at UNISG Gardens. Pollenzo. Summer 2020



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