

Wedging



Fig 1. My bowls, 2024 (Otis Burian-Hodge. Private Collection)

Wedging

When making a bowl from clay, the first step is to decide on the amount of clay to use for my vessel. This will prompt me to formulate a vision of what the completed bowl will look like. Involved in this is what the bowl will be used for, whether someone will make matcha within, put trinkets in, or eat soup out of.

Wedging

I begin by wedging the clay, removing all air bubbles from the clay's insides, so that it does not explode at later stages. This is done by continually and firmly compressing the clay into itself against a hard surface, forming the clay into a wedge-like shape.

*Attaching**Centring**Opening**Shaping*

As I attach the clay to the wheel, each rotation of the hunk of earth slowly brings into view its final shape. A compression here, a push there. However, I am not a very good potter, and the physical properties of the clay that I use are often quite hostile to human hands, so I am not entirely in control of what the clay vessel will turn out to look like. Eventually, we negotiate on a shape together.

*Cleaning**Drying**Trimming**Drying*

After the vessel has partially dried, I begin to trim its foot. My trimming process is in many ways a lot more involved than other practices. I like to help these bowls retain as many elements of their interactive human origins while also imbuing them with their own unique foot and marking, providing them with a language and the means to convey something uniquely theirs, to their owner.

*Bisquing**Glazing**Firing*

This is the part of the process where the human hand is least visible. The bowl is preliminarily heated to a moderately high temperature, the first of the reification processes; after this point, the clay has undergone a permanent, chemical transformation. Next, glaze is applied to showcase a rudimentary pattern and colour change, but more importantly it allows the vessel to be considered water-tight after the final firing. Here, the vessel undergoes an alchemical change.

Making

Making things is a very important process for me and for many others I know as well. It reminds me of how much thought and work has gone into the objects that are all around us. It makes things seem magical, asking us to consider the reality in which we find ourselves in in which a hunk of dirt is able to undergo an alchemical transformation and come out of a kiln with a name: a bowl. I have come to the particular form of these bowls organically but I could easily have gone to a museum to see 1000 bowls just like it, connecting me to a long lineage of clay making history.

Making Things

There are many types of things, but I mostly focus on the ones with names. Just recently, I made a Box from wood. While the box making process was incredibly joyful, I preferred the process of making from wood. Of course, the process of the box is both of these things, but raw materials such as clay or wood exude an entire dictionary of possibilities that the process of the becoming of the box does not possess.

Raw Material

When making from wood or from clay, I term these raw materials because they come from the earth and they are un-living. So too do we come from the earth, yet

Aristotle makes clear his distinction between living and non living things, being that non-living things don't die when their soul is separated, whereas living things do.¹ I find this such a compelling definition which becomes most persuasive when I look at clay, as shapes so easily gain and lose their soul. Especially when on the wheel. A soulless hunk of clay rotates until thumbs are plunged into its centre, and a bowl is found. But then it may come loose from its base, a slip of the hand and its soul has been lost. So back into a hunk of earth does this raw material return. While I gaze in awe at the soul of the made object, Aristotle still holds dear the sanctity of the inseparable soul of living stuff, which is perhaps why in Wojnarowicz's confessional work 'Weight of the Earth (Excerpts)', he admits to dreaming of smashing the things in his room, he dreams of smashing "...the chairs and the tables...", but not "...the things I've made or the things that live in this room, like the scorpion or the tank that it is in or the crickets."² Wojnarowicz admits that some made objects are of the same status as living objects. This seems emphatically true as when something I have made is broken, I feel heartbreak as if I have lost something. But what and how is it that some *thing* can be made so special?

Relationship

I have no relation to the grey bowl from freedom that sits in my cupboard, or the cupboard itself for that matter. I like them both and they do their job well, and in fact I do quite like the circumference and depth of the freedom bowl. However, there is a lack of relationship between me and these things, much like the lack of relationship between Wojnarowicz and his chairs. This is a relationship that is only formed when something is made by ones own two hands. I am certain of this connection and more importantly, that anyone is able to feel it. It is the familial

¹ Non-Living objects may indeed be separated from their souls, however, Aristotle provides the example of "an axe [whose soul consists of being] an axe... If it[s] [soul] disappeared from it, it would have ceased to be an axe, except in name." Barnes, J. (Ed.). (1984:657). Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1: The Revised Oxford Translation. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vjv4w>

² Wojnarowicz, D. (2018) Weight of the Earth [Excerpts]. Artforum Inc. New York

connection of care that you feel between someone else's essay and your own, between a spoon you made and the spoon you bought, or between the tomatoes that you planted and grew and the ones you got at the grocery store.



Fig 2. 2 Cupboards in my house. (Private Collection)

There is a semblance of ownership here, but it is not a definition that can be likened to a capitalist, possessionalist sense. When Benjamin claims that "... ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects." ³, I believe he is rather talking about a relational ownership where the subject has received something as well. For example, my grey, freedom branded bowl somehow found its way into my cupboard, perhaps I picked it up from vinnies one

³ Benjamin, W. (1999:69) Illuminations. Pimlico. London.

day, or perhaps a friend brought it over with some food in it that has long since passed. Either way, there is no substantial history between me and this bowl, and thus I do not care for it. On the other hand, in a separate cupboard, there sit 4 or 5 soup-sized bowls that I have made. From wedging their clay, to pondering their shape, to entering, opening, trimming and glazing them, we have shared a history with each other and I have imbued each of them with a bowl soul.

Giving

I remember all of the other bowls I made during the same period, as well as all of the labour I spent wedging their form into shape. These other bowls have since been gifted or sold, meaning that I have deprived myself of something intimate, yet given this gift to someone else. When I consider how these bowls change hands, I wonder how they form relationships with their new owners. I wonder what take aways their new owners receive from their physical form? In this way, I view my bowls and other soulful objects as physical recipes of a sort.

Learning

Teaching

The first step to understanding a bowl is to understand the dialect with which they speak. Here, Hito Steyerl proposes the ‘Language of Things’, insisting that “...God shines forth through the mute magic of things”. ⁴ This connotes that once a thing has been imbued with a name and soul (symbolism analogous to God), only then can it hold something to be understood. Here, to understand from a bowl is equivalent to the bowl teaching us something. Thinking of how to translate the language of the bowl, teacher, sculptor, performer, and writer Gordon Hall implores us to think of "...sculpture as a form of embodied pedagogy—". ⁵ If we view

⁴ Steyerl, H. (2006:3). The Language of Things.

⁵ Hall, G. (2016). Reading Things: Gordon Hall on Gender, Sculpture, and Relearning How to See. Walker. Visual Arts. Artist Op-Eds.

objects as knowledge holders perhaps then will we understand why it is important to keep soulful objects around us. To commit ourselves to objects, one also commits themselves to learning, and what better way is there to learn than from a recipe.



Fig 3. Chicken in Red Clay. EDIBLE EARTH

Instructing

Informing

Helping

Firstly, if we consider the bowl a recipe we can learn a great deal. The bowls I make vary in height, depth, width, shape, and texture. Once imbued with their souls, each characteristic may convey something different to their owners. A bowl in itself acts as a sort of recipe of how one should eat from it. By putting time and effort into my bowls, this time is reflected through them, ideally culminating in a

slower and more considered eating approach. When considering that slower and more mindful eating practices are related to greater feelings of satiety and wellness,⁶ we notice that there are many ways to learn from a bowl, mindful and embodied. Another way in which to learn and interact with the clay bowl is through their raw material. Clay persists as its own recipe, teaching us ways of interaction that are wholly irregular.

Clay

Soil

Earth

Clay: the materiality of my bowls, can undergo an alchemical transformation into solid, soul bearing thing, but there is another transformation that can occur. As shown by the work of Dr. Masharu, the founder of the Museum of Edible Earth, there is another way of interacting with this earthly material, cataloguing the rich and varied cultural history of eating earth.⁷ We eat out of clay vessels so it does not seem so far to imagine that there is something to gain by eating clay itself. In *Iron*, Astrid Lorange expresses one method of ingesting iron may be through cooking our food in cast-iron cookware.⁸ While clay is not (to my knowledge) a necessary element needed for healthy functioning, who am I to deny peoples palates its distinctness? Perhaps it is rather unfortunate that clay cookware does not operate in quite the same way as iron-ware does, as there is an entire library of tastes that clay would offers us that we are devoid of. In addition to the alchemy that occurs when transforming raw material into soulful objects, these accounts express another form of alchemy in which the raw material of clay becomes living thing through ingestion. This interrelation of inert materiality and souled matter is one of the many ways in which pedagogy is inherent in matter.

⁶ Hawton, K., Ferriday, D., Rogers, P., Toner, P., Brooks, J., Holly, J., Biernacka, K., Hamilton-Shield, J., & Hinton, E. (2018). Slow Down: Behavioural and Physiological Effects of Reducing Eating Rate. *Nutrients*, 11(1), 50. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11010050>

⁷ Museum Of Edible Earth (n.d.) Retrieved From: <https://masharu.nl/Museum-of-Edible-Earth>

⁸ (This iron is required for normal bodily function). Lorange, A. (2022:IV) Iron

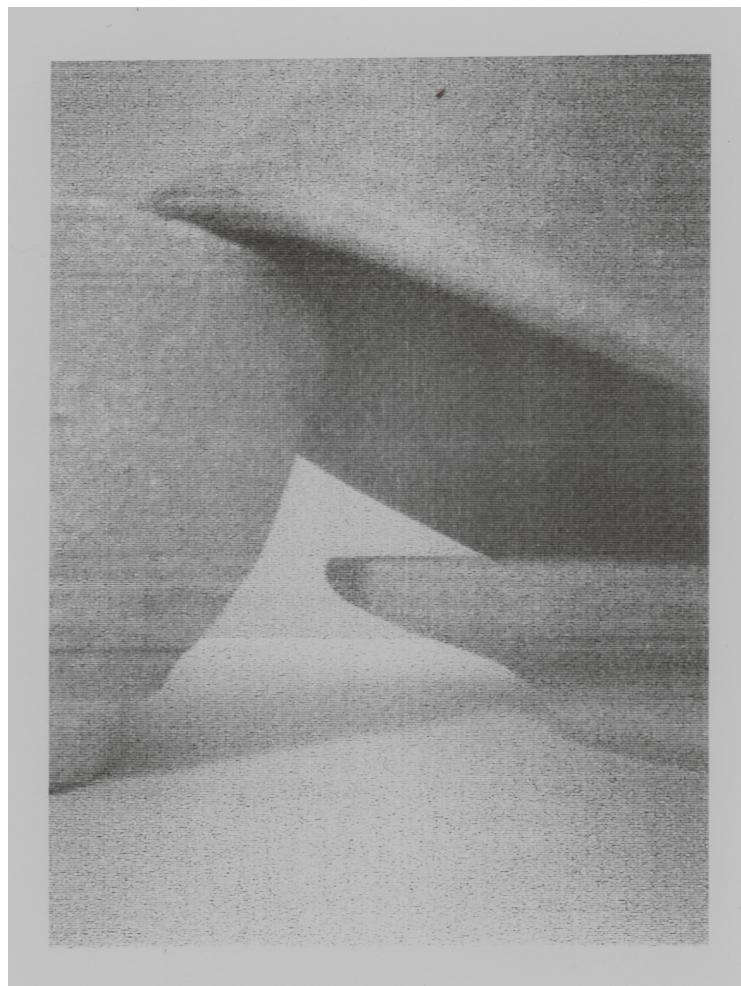


Fig 4. Bowl close-up. (Otis Burian-Hodge. Private Collection)

Hunger

Research

Recipes

Reading

There is another type of intimacy here that is only known to these Edible Earth enjoyers, it indicates that perhaps our own phenomenal reality is not so detached from theirs. While these clay consumers interact with this raw material through taste and smell, another way to interface with this practice is through soil (of which a large percentage of is clay anyways). Food that is grown in soil already absorbs much of the nutrients that is present in the ground. Thus perhaps there is a notable

percentage of clay already present in my carrot. Maybe more if i don't wash or peel it. This surely presents another way in which to intimately learn something about our food, earth, and constituent stuff.

Food

Energy

Shopping

I see the grocery store as a recipe book, wandering up and down isles are like flicking through pages, cataloguing future sensory delights. I picture the farmers and the farms and their fronds ⁹ peeking from their topsoil. Images of an agricultural version of Christian Jankowski's 'The Hunt' ¹⁰ spring to mind as I envision violently swinging my hoe at a sack of potatoes and exposing its insides, taking only what I need. I envision the long journey that each potato has taken to get here. From seed spud to crop, drawing in nutrients from the earth and sun, there is an entirely new mode of interaction involved in photosynthesis that I cannot fathom. The unwashed ones especially still sing of the harvest.

Grow

There is something so appealing about an unwashed potato. It puts overalls and a straw hat on my head. The 'Botany of Desire' is a term patroned by Michael Pollan, who writes of how plants and potatoes in particular have "...domesticated us as much as we domesticated them." ¹¹ This intertwining of our domestic histories sheds light on the relationship that we now share with our food. They give us nutrients to grow just as much as we give them nutrients to grow. What a wonderful cycle of domesticity. Perhaps it was not only the potato that saw our

⁹ The leafy green top of a carrot

¹⁰ Christian Jankowski (1992) Die Jagd/The Hunt. https://youtu.be/Ix76IfiUVU4?si=8n_9npe7waY4Gljt

¹¹ Pollan, M. (2001). Botany of Desire. Retrieved From: <https://michaelpollan.com/interviews/botany-of-desire/>

transformation from hunter/gatherer but rather our love of things and cooking that saw us pick up the hoe and build the bowl and house out of clay. Irregardless of origin, we are certainly fuelled to beautiful docility by the food we eat, and after all, what is a meal if not shared with someone you love.

Taste



Fig 5. Die Jagd/The Hunt. 1992. (Christian Jankowski)

I am unfamiliar with the actual recipe book, but the more I age and eat the more my head becomes a sort of recipe book. Meals my mum has cooked me and meals my friends have shared with me all swirl around my tongue as I think about what to make and buy and cook. Each recipe is attached to a feeling, place and setting. Some are comforting, others social, all are intimate in their own way.



Fig 6. Bowl and Soup. (Private Collection)

Reading

The recipe has changed much in recent time. Once implemented to educate lower socio-economic classes on the dining etiquette of the upper class at the turn of the century,¹² the modern recipe employs discrete detailed descriptions of measurements and tasks, culminating in an often technical document. A strange modern turn, the recipe used to consist of a string of narrative contingencies.¹³ This sequestration of the foodly narrative is contrasted only by the obscene expansive biographies that inhabit the foreword to something like a recipe for

¹² Skinner, J. (2024) On Recipes: Changing Formats, Changing Use. Wayfinding Through History And Design Of The Cookbook. Mold. Retrieved From: <https://thisismold.com/process/cook/history-of-cookbook-recipe-formats>

¹³ Alicia, K. (2021). On Recipes: And the cumulative learning experience that is cooking. Retrieved From: <https://www.aliciakennedy.news/p/on-recipes>

chicken schnitzel on a site like [seriouseats.com](https://www.seriouseats.com/chicken-schnitzel-recipe).¹⁴ While usually seen as an annoyance, especially when frantically googling how long to cook a steak for and having to scroll down 3 pages, maybe we should be welcoming this reintroduction of narrative back into our kitchens. After all, maybe it really is important for us to learn about the intricacies of salting ones steak.¹⁵

Googling

If I am going to hear a story about food, I prefer the personal touch. When asked where he got his delicious recipes from, my grandfather would always say *Mama Google*. I don't know what memories he thought of or stories he read when he read recipes, but I can only assume that if there is any shared biology, he was captivated by how food binds us together. Soul, body, other body.

Cooking

Cooking for me begins on the internet. I wish I could lie and say I pick up my favourite copy of Kitchen Confidential, but instead I search up my recipe and head straight to 'images' to see which one looks best.

Steering

Parking

Shopping

Once I have cross referenced my shopping list with my pantry, I head to the grocery store wearing the biggest and baggiest pants I own. Hoe in hand, I stroll down the grocery isle placing frond on frond within my basket.

¹⁴ Bousel, J. (2022)Chicken Schnitzel Recipe: Juicy and tender, with a golden, crunchy exterior that is almost impossible to resist. NC. <https://www.seriouseats.com/chicken-schnitzel-recipe>

¹⁵ Cloake, F. (2012). How to cook the perfect steak. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2012/oct/25/how-to-cook-the-perfect-steak>

*Prepping**Chopping**Slicing*

Once home, I empty my freezer of frozen bones into a pot, along with some roughly chopped up celery, carrots, leek, onion and garlic. Peppercorns and bayleaf accompany.

*Reducing**Stirring**Staring**Simmering*

Sat beside this mess of golden goodness for as long as I can stand to. Eventually I say enough is enough and strain all of the liquid into its own pot, clearing out as many impurities as I can.

I chop more vegetables, much finer this time, and stir in some shredded chicken. All of these are added to the new broth. Some noodles are boiled. I sit with this pot for less.

Bowl

It is ready, the bowl is filled and soon my stomach will be too.

Mouth

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Bradley Mendels

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Bradley Mendels