

Micro cultures

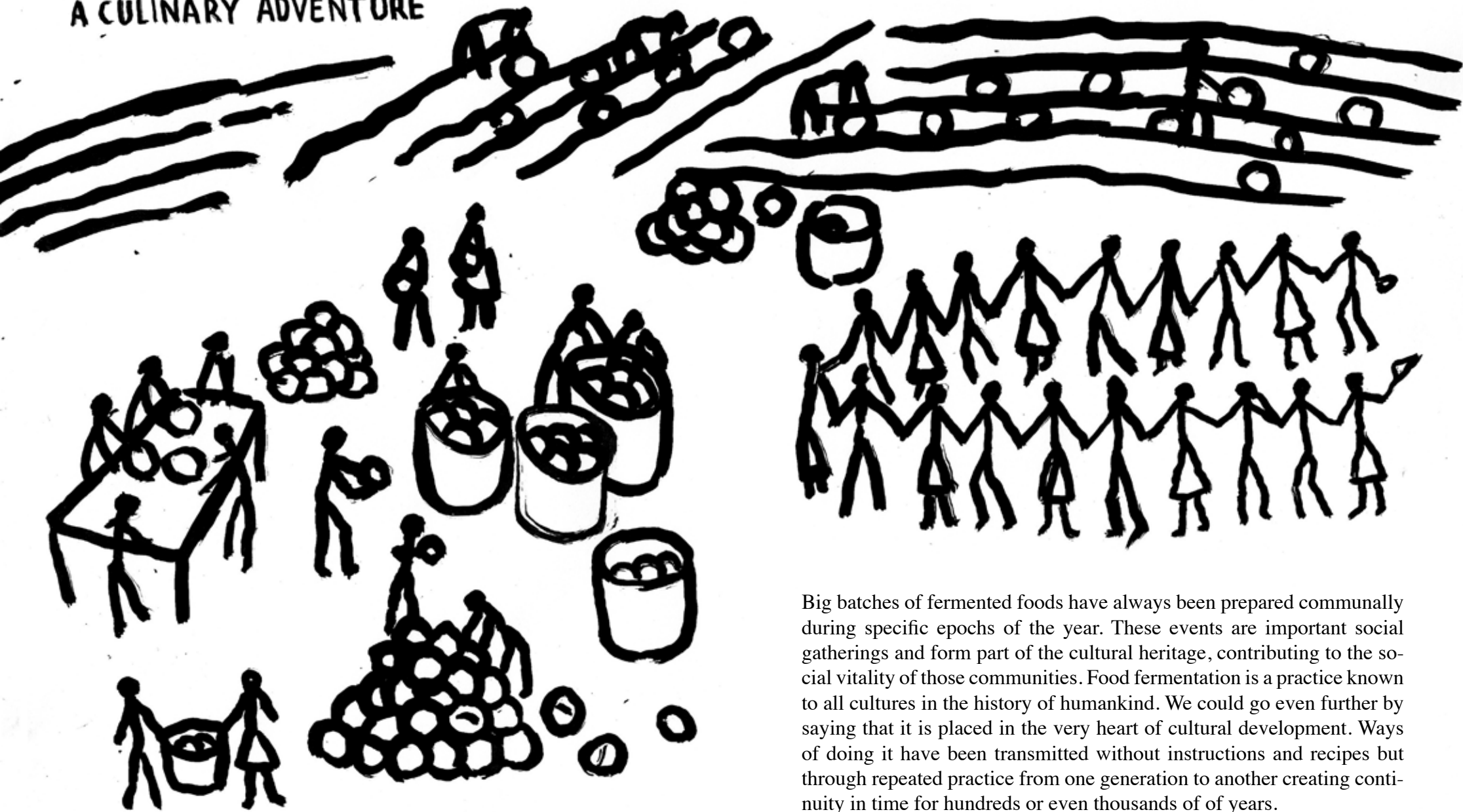
a zine designed to generate a debate about
fermentation: social, economic and culinary.



A funny thing happens during the fermentation process. A mono-cellular organism, way below the threshold of human sight, meets another, as if by pure chance. This encounter creates a reaction, which results in growth. Slowly, more and more micro-organisms join, bubbling and interacting, until finally reaching a critical mass, which is when the media they are in is transformed in a visible way. The result is flavor and nutrition. These micro-organisms are different from one place to the next, creating different flavors and textures locally (the same fermented cabbage will taste differently in different climates). This local particularity on one hand, and the interaction where a process that seems insignificant grows, bubbles up and becomes visible on the other, form the basis of Microcultures. This metamorphosis can be applied socially:

A social action, or an idea, meets another, and little by little, while growing in volume and presence, they start generating a social and a cultural wealth. This logic, of life that is in constant movement and change, can be perceived on all levels (culinary, conceptual and social).

SOME DAYS THE SPACE IS FULL
OF PEOPLE, ALL PREPARED FOR
A CULINARY ADVENTURE



Big batches of fermented foods have always been prepared communally during specific epochs of the year. These events are important social gatherings and form part of the cultural heritage, contributing to the social vitality of those communities. Food fermentation is a practice known to all cultures in the history of humankind. We could go even further by saying that it is placed in the very heart of cultural development. Ways of doing it have been transmitted without instructions and recipes but through repeated practice from one generation to another creating continuity in time for hundreds or even thousands of years.

OTHER TIMES YOU FIND YOURSELF ALONE WITH MICROSCOPIC LIFE THAT YOU HELPED CREATE

Fermentation is a reaction that proceeds from the natural proprieties of food. Humankind learned to control these properties, giving the food longevity, taste and nutrition. The activity of bacteria and fungi, potentially dangerous, develops a desired activity within the process of fermentation. This process creates live cultures, which are necessary for the vitality and good health of human beings.

We know that the elaboration of a lot of fermented foods was discovered by pure accident or error.

Can we experiment within tradition, maintaining continuity through a balance of repetition and variation? Or is tradition itself an extension of experimentation and openness over the span of many years?



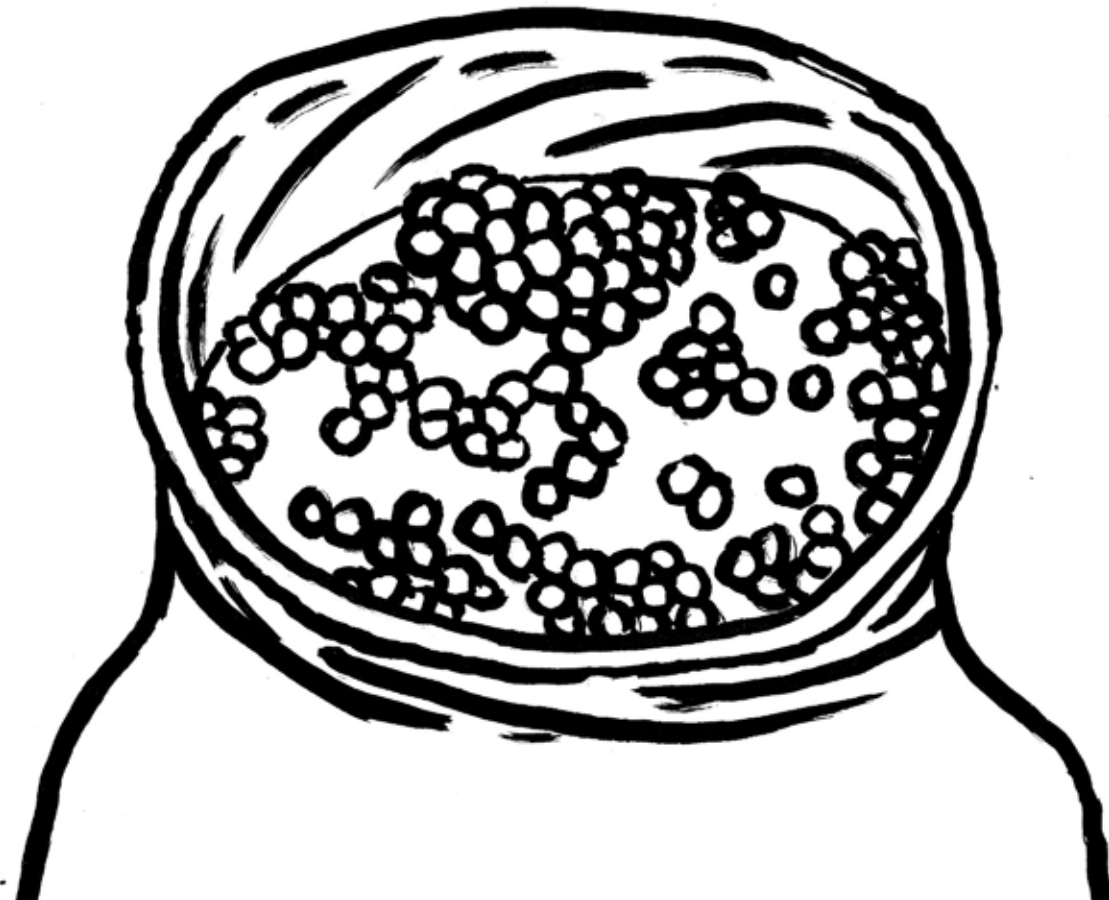
A black and white line drawing of a hand holding a bowl. The hand is positioned at the bottom of the bowl, with fingers visible. The bowl is filled with a liquid, and there are some lines indicating movement or agitation.

**BOTH ARE BASED
ON AGITATION,
ON AN IMROBABLE
ENCOUNTER**

**AND ON A TINY THING
THAT SLOWLY GROWS,
UNTIL REACHING
A CRITICAL MASS**

The culinary process of fermentation involves an interplay between agitation and quiet observation. You mix, shake, and wait. What then occurs is a result of your actions within the context of your surroundings. It is a dialogue between our desire to intervene, manipulate and create and the natural pace of the environment we are in, its temperature and the wild microscopic beings that inhabit it.

Air is very important during the processes of food fermentation. This is also true for social processes. Space and free time, the leisure to experiment and play are both perceived as luxuries in current day society. In reality they are essential for the creation of ideas and resources that help confront social challenges and economic crises.

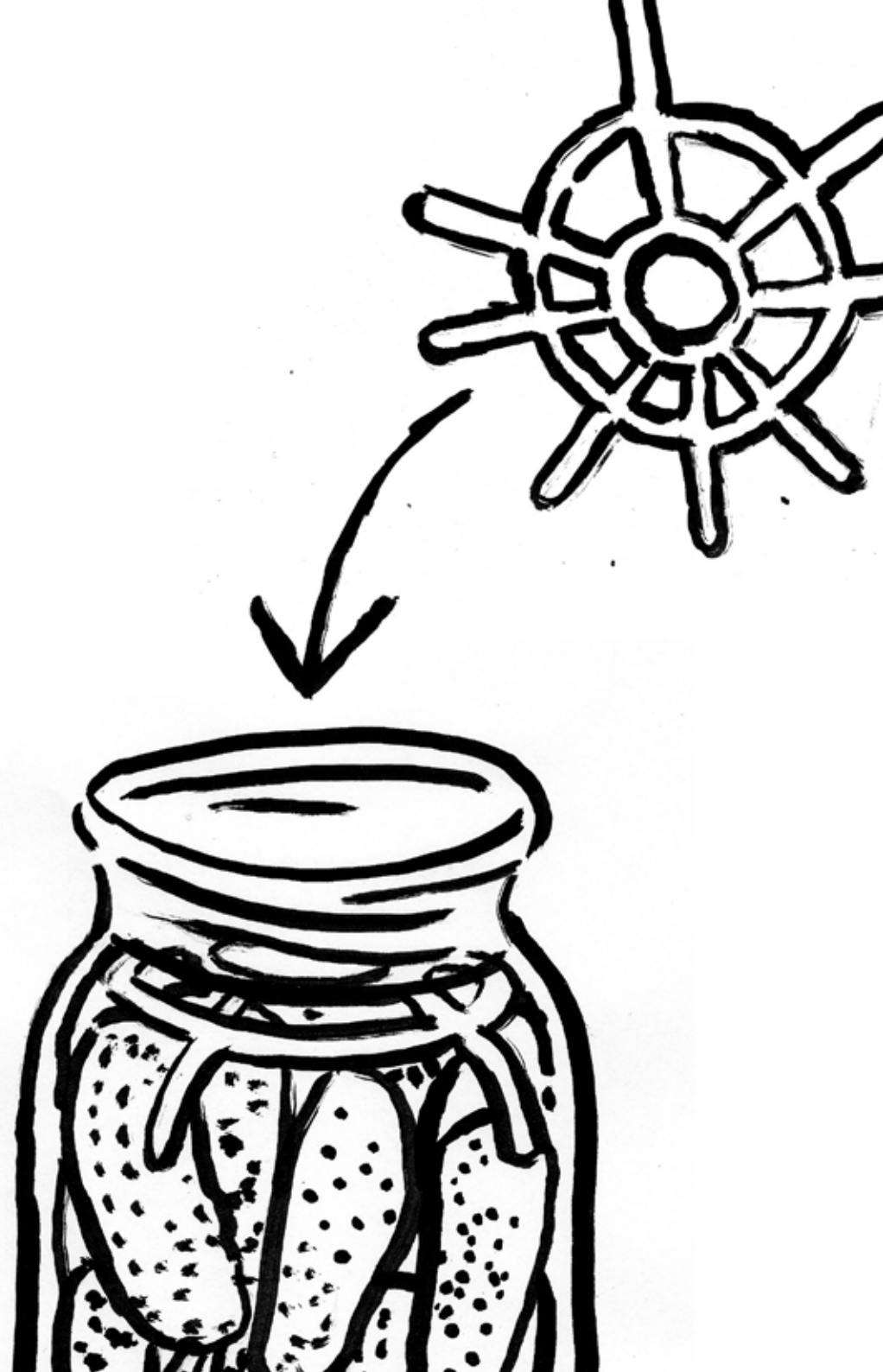


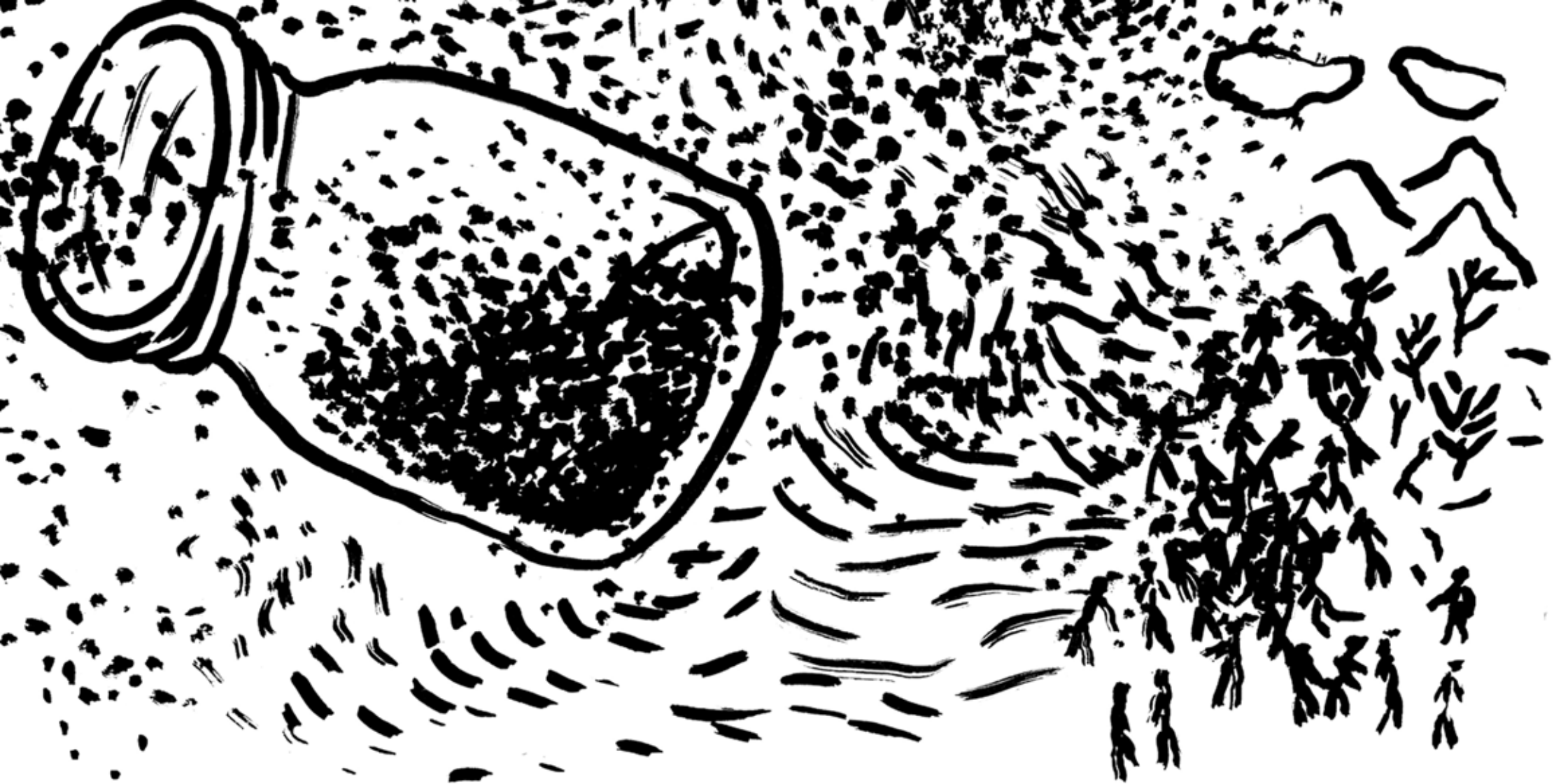


IF YOU LISTEN AND
SMELL CAREFULLY,
YOU COULD NOTE
HOW THE ACTIVITY
IN THE JARS
CHANGES THE SOUND
AND OLFATORY
ENVIRONMENT

Elaborated through fermentation, the most basic foods (vegetables, fruits, grains, milk, etc) can create a huge range of products (all kinds of yogurts, cheeses, beers, wines, krauts, pickles). These products are healthier, tastier, longer lasting, and also more valuable on the market than the original product. The process thus creates value and wealth. It benefits our organisms and our communities. It has its rules as well: it can't be accumulated because it has a limited lifespan, and its purpose is to be consumed. It has to be eaten, shared, given away or exchanged. As a response to the current atmosphere of crisis and impoverishment, we are using the microscopic dynamics of fermentation as the basis of a new economic model. This model is highly local and includes an element of chance.

The practice of fermentation, whether it be culinary fermentation or the social or artistic practices inspired by it, is the practice of creating the ideal conditions for a transformation to take place. Once these conditions are in place, the rest is left to our collaborators, the microorganisms or fungi. There are no strict recipes. Depending on the location, temperature, and humidity in the atmosphere, the quantities of water and the ingredients, the timing and the measurements will vary. They have to be found by observation and testing. Everything edible could be fermented and anyone can do it.





**THE INTERACTION BETWEEN
MICROSCOPIC ORGANISMS IS VERY
SIMILAR TO THE SOCIAL PROCESSES
THAT OCCURE OUTSIDE**

Fermented food is alive, it poetically brings to mind an animistic world where the air that we breath and the food that we eat is in constant movement. But elaborating nutritionally beneficial dishes and condiments supposes also an element of control, of human intervention, an intentionality. Where do we place ourselves as humans in this debate? Is all culture (including yogurt) colonialist and paternalistic by its very nature? Or is it a question of a certain balance that has to be reached between the savage nature of everything and our impulse (to some extent healthy) to manipulate it for our benefit.

**AGRICULTURE
IS STUPID
LET'S TAKE
SOME AIR**

Leuven, 2012

<http://bbva.irrational.org/microcultures/>