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Anna Tokareva, *Pickled Futures!* (2021).
Courtesy of the artist.

PICKLED FUTURISM!

ANNA
TOKAREVA

In a manifesto of sorts driven by *sauer power* and dedicated to the necessity of pickling, Russian writer and artist Anna Tokareva goes on a brine-full expedition into the history, present, and future of pickling. Pickling is for the people and by the people. Pickling is part of our (migrant) microbial commons that is dependent on collaboration and not consumption! This is why we need to lift our gazes, raise our arms, and proclaim the arrival of *pickled futurism!*

Native to India, cucumbers made their way to Mesopotamia, where brining is said to have begun around 2400 B.C.⁰¹ In Russia, like in many other places around the world, pickling has become an age-old method of preserving surplus fresh food and giving it a transformed reappearance in the winter months otherwise dominated with root vegetables and grains. Abundance saved from spoiling, it's made to stretch through the year, born out of a need to save up and make do. In Soviet-era Khrushchyovka condos, home-made pickles are often kept out on the balcony in the cold winters. Huge jars of cucumbers and tomatoes stacked next to earthenware pots of sauerkraut. Leaning into the harshness of winter for food protection in a satisfying climate-human-bacterial collaboration.

Picking is a practice of peasants and the proletariat. The alchemical task of women—mothers, aunts, grandmothers—with youngsters enmeshed in the process, the fledglings of witchery. An event of scale and communal effort, pickling involves preparing large volumes of produce, sterilising loads of glass jars by boiling them in large pots on the stove, sorting, filling, stuffing, labelling. Pickling aplenty. It's labour at leisurely duration, accompanied by conversation, interspersed with pauses for food and drink. Not labour squeezed out with crushing pressure (yes, we salt the cabbage and crush it with our hands to help squeeze out its lactobacteria-life-giving juices, but despite its appearance, this is not such a violent act—just a spot of strong-handed guidance).

These pickles were then consumed in tiny kitchens, often as *zakuski* to hours-long political discussions.⁰² Women's labour continues its feed of radical ferment.

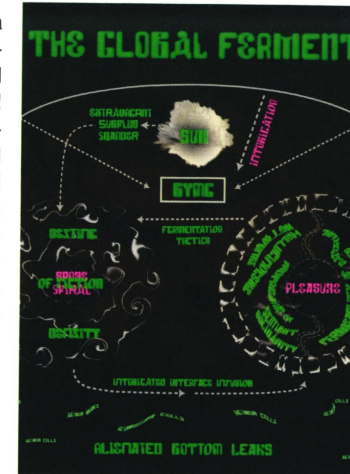
01 Sarah Pruitt, "The Juicy 4,000-Year History of Pickles," *History* (August, 2019). Online at: <https://www.history.com/news/pickles-history-timeline>.

02 Hidden Kitchens: The Kitchen Sisters. "How Soviet Kitchens Became Hotbeds Of Dissent And Culture." *NPR* (May, 2014). Online at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/05/27/314961287/how-soviet-kitchens-became-hotbeds-of-dissent-and-culture>.

PICKLING AS A PASTIME

Today, pickling has been spoiled via the hipster-filter, packaged-up as over-priced workshops of fashionable food prep, a frivolous pastime. Blasphemy! A practice of survival, of transformational surplus metabolisation severed from the lineage of intergenerational social bonds. Absorbed into the realm of capital production and consumption, reconstituted as elite 'wellbeing' hobby. Thousands of years of embodied knowledge packed into a half-day for a couple hundred quid (brief and sterile, ingredients provided prepped, no need for effort of deft scrubbing, peeling, slicing).

Is it but a fad? Can we quietly continue to reclaim our (migrant) microbial commons? Collaboration, not consumption!



Anna Tokareva, *Global Ferment* (2021).
Courtesy of the artist.

PLONKED IN PICKLE JUICE

Plucked from our life-vines that throb with synchronous flows, we begin to wither and wrinkle. Plonked into confinement, bobbing up and down to glimpse ghosts of pleasures past. After almost two years of pandemic, some are still trapped in glass bubbles, lids screwed on tight. Contorted and restricted for another winter, brined to the brim. We are fed up. Self-preserved in the present moment, we slowly ferment. The confinement of repeated lock-downs threatens our mental states with introspection-turned-nal-gazing. Suspension is frustration.

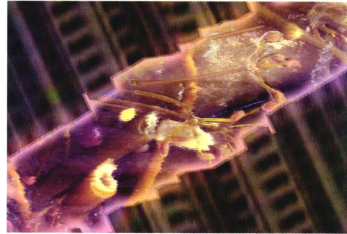
But frustration can be fruitful.

We are pressured by those trying to preserve the speed

of the status-quo, preserve the shapes extractivist late neoliberalism cuts upon the Earth, preserve a past through a monocultural filter, preserve the tastes of hyper-consumerism, preserve the contradiction of conservative infinite progress and optimisation.

But suspension can be slow resistance.

Our temporal scales can split off in parallels, circumvent capitalist drone-drips and stretch out in languid ferment. Vulnerability can be a gift, forcing us to yield to lingering radical turmoil. Our slow re-emergence can be a gesture of care-taking. We can honour, and step astride with, those whose geolocation leads to ongoing oppression and exclusion from life-preserving vaccination.



Anna Tokareva, *Khrushchevka Crunch* (2021). Courtesy of the artist

But the breakdown can be the pivot.

WE ARE IN QUITE A PICKLE

We are in quite a pickle, one could say, globally, on levels ranging from the micro of microplastics that infiltrate our waterways and bottle-fed babies, to the planetary—the mega-fire tornadoes of the United States 2020 dry season expanding to scales not experienced before. A virus is dictating our movements, who we can touch, where we can breathe free. How we get out of this pickle is a collective problem. It may be that our way out is by ‘making kin’ beyond purely biological preconditions and by encouraging an inclusive mode of ‘multi-’ and ‘inter-species symbiosis.’⁰³ These terms, which are used by cyborg feminist Donna

⁰³ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

Haraway, may be useful in not just getting out of the current pickles of modernity, but especially in envisaging livable futures that may indeed become possible.

PICKLEPANOPTICON

Complicity, penetration, surveillance via internalised transference. No longer a central invisible dominant force, hidden, but ogling the masses. Masses of microbial agents invisible to the human eye unite via dispersed collaborative tactics and transform the positions in the pan-optical power-relational configuration. An ambush of policing. A betrayal of suspicions. But the intruder is not a taker, the intruder is not an attacker, the intruder is an intoxicator. Infiltrating at a minute level, their micro-mutual exchanges disrupt hierarchical relations. Bacterial BDSM seduces power into consented dissolution. Pickle all prisons!

POSITIVELY PICKLED

Swallowing the hard hits as they come. Taking shots of the fiery stuff pouring down our throats. We take the next shot, swallow, follow. The expression of being ‘in a pickle’ was first used to describe drunkenness by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*.⁰⁴ Russians soon followed being ‘pickled’ with pickle-juice since at least the 1600s. When life gives you vodka, drink pickle juice. A harsh chaser to follow a harsh reality. No instant soothing here, just a sour after-taste to trust with electrolytes.

In a pickle, pickled: confused, in trouble, drunk, all-mixed-up. A situation to indulge in and pay for the next day with dehydrated headaches and queasy guts. But, positively pickled, we embrace the intoxication of transmutation. When walking along straight lines is the peak of sobriety, a loose veering off course will do us good.

⁰⁴ Gary Martin, “What’s the meaning of the phrase ‘In a pickle?’” *The Phrase Finder*. Online at: <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/in-a-pickle.html>

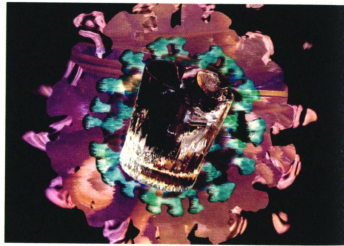
PICKLED PROGRESS

But! Pickling is not simply the glass-trap that meets the eye. *Pickling is a transformative process.* Pickling involves anaerobic fermentation or preservation in vinegar. Slavs and Tatars have politicised the pickle via their *Pickle Politics* exhibition, and the associated Pickle Bar. Interested in the *sauer* power, the Berlin-based collective uses fermentation as a strategy to critically explore what they refer to as the 'rot of our populist present.'

The power of the pickle is the power of the now and the future in constant rot. Spoiled rotten, we are. Spoiled, rotten. We can seethe in it, or we can slurp up the spoils and metabolise.

Laura Fournier speaks about pickling as simultaneously a process of preservation and transformation. In her speculative metaphor, Fournier proclaims that this kind of experimental and generative fermenting feminism is a ripe framework for countering fizzy currents and approaching transinclusive, antiracist, countercolonial futures in a re-energised manner. In fermenting, preservation is concomitantly a process of becoming. In a Deleuzian sense, 'becoming' is not a mere concept, but an active process: becoming is according to feminist thinker Rosi Braidotti neither "the dynamic confrontation of opposites, nor the unfolding of an essence in a teleologically ordained process leading to a synthesising identity." Becoming instead is "the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation."⁰⁵ What is then to pickle if it is not to become!

⁰⁵ Rosi Braidotti, "Discontinuous becomings. Deleuze on the becoming-woman of philosophy." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 24(1) (January, 1993), 44.



Anna Tokareva, *Shots of Pickled Futurism* (2021). Courtesy of the artist.

POWER TO THE PICKLEPUSS!

To harness full pickling potential we must embrace a picklepuss attitude—to sour the face of false positivity and progress, to pause on just-in-time production, and let a collective ferment take its time. When Ursula Le Guin was asked what she would change in her past writing, she replied that, in the anarchist utopia of "The Dispossessed," she would have included "the communal pickle barrels at street corners in the big towns, restocked by whoever in the community has made or kept more pickles than they need." She confessed she "knew about the free pickles all along, but never could fit them into the book."⁰⁶ There is no time like now. Unrealised Pickle Futurism must be released! Bubble it up!

⁰⁶ "Twenty Questions with Ursula K. Le Guin." *The Times Literary Supplement* (March, 2017). Online at: <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/twenty-questions-ursula-le-guin/>.