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Autor: [s.n.]
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If I Was Born Rosa

cultivating care as an anti-capitalist strategy

von DA

Dear Readers,

If I Was Born Rosa, cultivating care as an anti-capitalist strategy is my first cookbook, not just for cooking - in fact it cannot be understood as a classic cookbook, but as a collection of exchanges and knowledge. It contains my notes and reflections on the kitchen as a place to experience the commons. It is meant to be a manual of caring practices.

In this artist's book you will find images, reflections, drawings and recipes related to the research conducted during my years of study within the Master of Arts programme at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. It can be understood as an archive of the actions, events, work and experiments conducted between my private kitchen, the kitchen in the department of the Master of Arts programme, and the Orto 745 project, an urban garden created in collaboration with Hannah Beilharz, which is also located within the university. This artist's book focuses on work and practice, as my artistic practice is based on actions, 'scores', which have their starting point in my everyday life as an artist. It contains some of the valuable exchanges I have had with people I have met over these years, which is why I have decided to keep the language used, so you will find recipes in Italian, English or German.

For me, the kitchen and the vegetable garden are closely interconnected spaces of fundamental cultural importance, as places where skills, knowledge and lived experience can/must be passed on. Activities in the kitchen, as well as in the vegetable garden, which have always been undervalued, are not limited to a specific period or time, but involve continuous work, planning and commitment throughout the year. Understanding my practice as an attempt to respond to the urgent social need to cultivate new forms of care, both gardening and my involvement in the kitchen can be seen as forms of care and maintenance. I consider cultivating care as a strategy that can be linked to the feminist critique of reproductive labour, which is systematically devalued in capitalism. In fact, I did not symbolically place myself in the kitchen or the vegetable garden, but I cleaned, tidied, put my hands in the soil.

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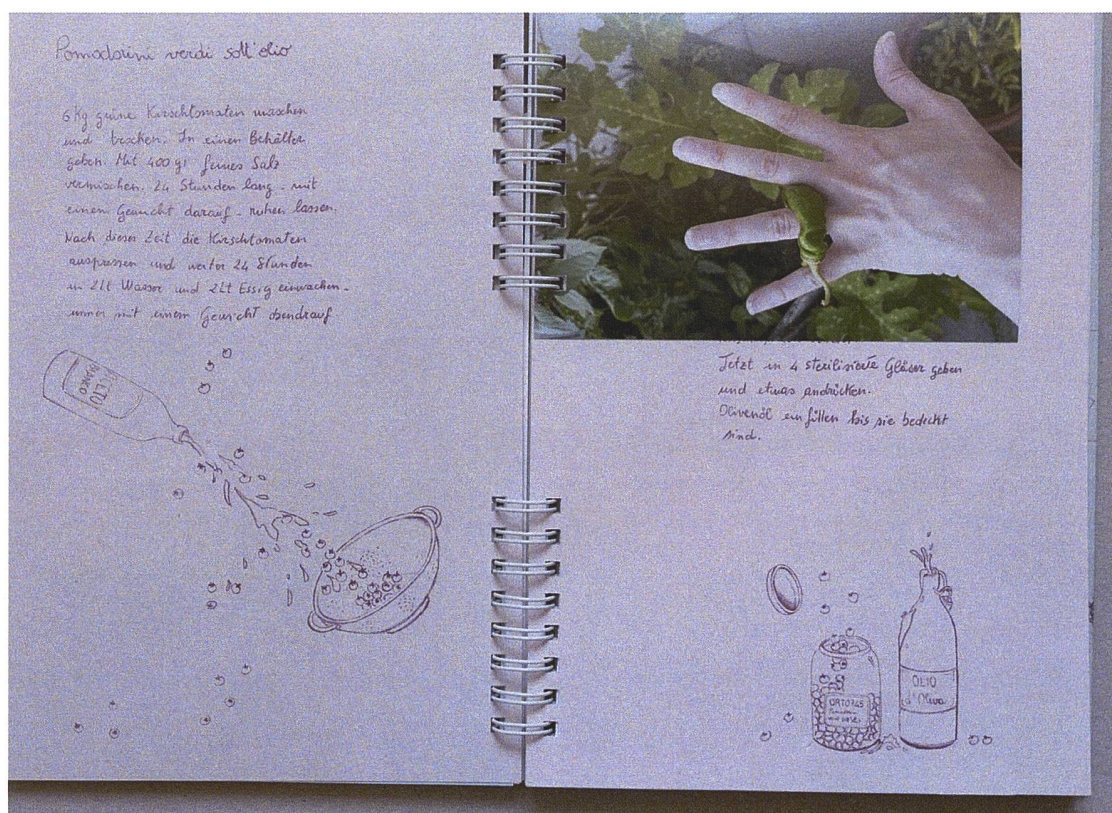
To give you a better understanding of the need for this book, we should take a step back to the moment when I made the decision to leave Italy and move to Switzerland and live with my partner. Months before my move, which took place in summer 2021, I started a decluttering process that led me to throw away, give away and sell objects that I no longer considered important. In a short time I had cleared out the studio and the house and felt ready to welcome my new life and the new objects I would encounter, but a few days before the final move my mother handed me some boxes containing various crockery, a set of twenty-four pots and pans, sets of plates and glasses for twelve people, five bathroom sets and ten different sets of double sheets. It was the dowry my grandmother had lovingly packed for me thirty years earlier in the hope that I would become a wife and mother. Receiving this important gift created a series of mixed emotions in me: the deep love and sense of gratitude towards my grandmother clashed with the rejection mixed with pride of what it means to have a dowry.

Was this my value as a woman? What were my family's expectations of me?

My grandmother Rosa, born in 1921, was one of those women who lived in the late Fascist period, when the regime promoted country life by encouraging them to take on the role of peasants. The country housewives not only prepared meals, cleaned the house and laundry, sewed and mended, but also took care of the domestic animals and silkworms, cultivated the vegetable garden and produced small items such as market baskets.

I remember that one Christmas morning, while preparing macaroni for lunch, I asked her why she had married my grandfather, and her answer was firm but predictable: 'Because he was a good worker'. And when I asked her what was required to be a good wife, she replied that a good wife 'must know how to do housework'.

The expression on my grandmother's face was as hard as Martha Rosler's in *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, but with the difference that my grandmother had taken on her role as (unpaid) housewife with dedication, without showing frustration, without contemplating the possibility of a different life. Especially since the possibility of doing another job, having been born a woman, would have been denied her anyway. But the sense of frustration was clearly visible in the next generation, in the eyes of my mother, who was also forced into unpaid work as a housewife because of my father's job. My mother, unlike her mother Rosa, always had a great passion for cooking, probably because cooking and organising big meals was a way for her to socialise, to open up to the outside world, to make contacts, to form new relationships.



In order not to fall into the sense of oppression experienced by my mother at home, and to redeem the isolation suffered by the previous generation, I decided to experience domestic space as an open environment, a place for exchange, a laboratory in which to experiment with encounters, solutions and failures. I chose the kitchen, in both private and public contexts, as the terrain for resolving this inner conflict.

During these years of research, I have deepened my knowledge in the field of art as a social question, by getting to know Rirkrit Tiravanija's participatory practice, the happenings of Fluxus artists such as Alison Knowles, the activism of Martha Rosler's works and collectives such as Prinzessinnengärten Berlin, AAA Ecobox Paris, Inland. Fundamental to my approach and way of thinking are the texts by Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen*, George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici *Commons against and beyond capitalism*, Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, Making Kin in the Chthulucene, The care collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*, Bruno Latour, *What Is to Be Done? Political Ecology!*.

If I Was Born Rosa is the question that has guided me through these years and that can have different levels of interpretation: what if I had been like my grandmother? What if I were born Rosa and thus embraced the role of woman/housewife/mother that fills the expectations of the strictly patriarchal and macho society in which not only my grandmother and my mother, but also I was born and raised?

By taking care of a shared kitchen and a public garden, I can say that I have somehow taken on the role of Grandma Rosa, that I have used the knowledge inherited from my mother and grandmother but have done so outside the family circle, extending the very meaning of family, recognising myself as a being interdependent on other forms of life, human and non-human. This role has not always been easy and effortless, as both of these places are within an institution and involve constant exchanges, discussions, sometimes misunderstandings, important mediations and often compromises. I also find it important to specify that the work I have done both in the Master's kitchen and in Orto 745 is officially recognised and paid work.



This artist's book has allowed me to question the boundaries between paid work, domestic work and (unpaid) care, and therefore cannot be read as just a cookbook, but as a point of reflection for a perspective on the post-capitalist economy. An economy in which work and care are recognised as being of equal importance and equal value.



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