

Confit celeriac,
cimi sauce, salsa verde,
celeriac crumb. — 14

Cod, confit potatoes,
salsa verde — 19.5

Potato & Comte pie, green
mustard sauce — 19.5

Beef burger, gorgonzola & green
chilli rarebit, spinach — 12

Chicken, confit garlic, rocket — 20

Salmon, crab bisque, breadcrumbs — 21

Cider braised pork cheeks,
chicharrones — 18

Steak tartare, chips,
gem salad — 25

Fried polenta, wild mushroom,
bean broth, white truffle oil — 16.5

Bistrotheque fish & chips — 21

The sensorial as infrastructure Making pandebono

**Andrea Cetrulo,
John Bingham-Hall
& Elahe Karimnia**

During one of our visits to Oscar and Valeria at La Caleñita, the café they've been running for nine years in one of the adapted railway arches at Elephant and Castle in South London, we were greeted with a coffee accompanied by a soft, warm, cloudy savoury sphere-like bread, known in their native Colombia as *pandebono*.¹ It was meant to be accepted as an act of generosity and hospitality in the vein of Marcel Mauss' idea of the gift, a form of exchange underpinning the formation of alliances and solidarity beyond self-interest (Mauss, 2002[1954]). It is through these dynamics of altruistic reciprocal relationships that La Caleñita operates on a daily basis.

Recipe as knowledge infrastructure

The etymology of the bread in question is something of a mystery, yet the most commonly accepted version is that it derives from the Spanish word *pan* (bread) *de* (of) *bono* (from *buono*, Italian for good), attributed to an Italian baker who used to sell the pastry on the streets of Cali chanting "Pan del bueno!". Another version is that it was named after the Finca del Bono, an 18th century rural stately home in the small-town Valle del Cauca, in Cali, where the bread originated and was sold.

The mythology and folklore surrounding its origins encompass a sort of syncretism that is reflected in the ingredients themselves: blending yuca – or cassava – and corn, both autochthonous to South America; cheese and butter made with cow's milk, introduced to the Americas by European colonizers; and the artisanry of the Italian immigrants of Cali who allegedly initiated its production. Pandebono is often accompanied by *dulce de guayaba* and a cup of hot chocolate, both tropical fruits that, as Gabriel García Márquez (Mendoza and García Márquez, 1996 [1983]) wrote in *El Olor de la Guayaba*, evoke memories of his childhood and permeate the imagination through their very smell. Smell as memory. Texture as memory. Vivid, tangible, yet somehow intangible in the imagination. A glutinous dough that agglutinates individuals from diverse Latin American countries in a faraway city, and acts as an infrastructure for sustaining everyday life. The amulet of the nomad, embodying both displacement and persistence at the same time.

When Valeria was prompted to share her recipe, she smiled and said 'pan de bono is something that I relate to that time of the day in the afternoon before late dinner. I always had it at my home after school'.

Andrea Cetrulo is Associate in Programme and Content Curation at Theatrum Mundi. Prior to this, she worked as a researcher in global cultural policy organisations. She also holds an MSc in Urban Studies from University College London, with a focus on the configuration of public space through music and sounds in the urban context.

Dr John Bingham-Hall is Director of Theatrum Mundi. His ongoing research interest is in the ways urban design shapes the public lives of cities, linking technology, performance, cultural organising, media, and infrastructuring – as topics and as methodologies. He has held research and teaching posts at LSE, UCL, and CSM and studied both music (BMus, Goldsmiths) and architectural theory (MSc & PhD, UCL).

Elahe Karimnia is the Urban Research and Spatial Practice Associate in Theatrum Mundi. She is a practiced architect and urban designer and has a Ph.D. in Urban Studies with a focus on 'Producing Publicness', from KTH Stockholm. Elahe has been engaged in research and teaching at the intersection of urban design and critical theory.

<http://theatrum-mundi.org/>

¹ *Acknowledgment.* This text is part of Theatrum Mundi's research project Urban Backstages, investigating the conditions of cultural production in Paris, Marseille, Glasgow, and London with support from the Ax:son Johnson Foundation. The research is conducted by John Bingham-Hall, Andrea Cetrulo, Cecily Chua, Elahe Karimnia, Fani Kostourou and Justinien Tribillon.

Pandebono ingredients:

Almidón de yuca
Harina de maíz
Huevos
Queso costeño
Mantequilla
Levadura

Valeria describes her process:

'Mix all the ingredients
grate the cheese finely
knead
form bollos in your hands
make a hole
preheat the oven to 190 degrees
leave it in for 15 minutes (or so) until. . . you know...'
Tacit knowledge reigns. When it's ready, you should 'feel' it. Don't overthink it.
Bake until golden.

The way the recipe is enunciated is in the manner of an oral culture. Or alternately, a manual or embodied culture, that of the craftswoman who performs the task with mastery, yet also with an overfamiliarity with the object at hand that makes it hard for her to rationalize and put it into words. Richard Sennett writes: '[it is] a process essential to all skills, the conversion of information and practices into tacit knowledge', and 'what you know may be so familiar to you that you might take for granted its touchstone references, assuming that others have identical touchstones' (Sennett, 2008: 50, 183). ([See Picture 1](#))

Improvised adaptations

Although this recipe travels with its makers as a kind of cultural heritage – already stabilised in form – it becomes the basis for improvisation when relocated from Cali to London. Necessarily so, in Oscar's words: 'you don't find all the necessary ingredients here. . . everything here tastes very different!' Like other restaurants forming the Latin American cultural hub nested in the railway arches of Maldonado Walk, a walkway hugging the rail line south of Elephant and Castle station, Oscar and Valeria source many of their goods from the neighbouring shop La Chatica, which specializes in importing regional products. But they must also resort to stand-in ingredients from the British supermarket chain TESCO – like the ersatz *queso costeño* (a soft salty cow's milk cheese originating from the Caribbean coast of Colombia, and a key ingredient in pandebono), mimicked by the more readily-available feta cheese. Or indeed, 'Greek-style salad cheese' – a simulacrum of one immigrant food, masquerading as another.

The import of certain Latin American animal products has been banned due to health and safety regulations in the United Kingdom.² As a remedy, La Chatica (registered as La Casa de Jack Ltd.) sells its own line of products which resembles the 'real thing'. Other delicacies such as *dulce de guayaba* are imported directly from Colombia in big batches, and then repackaged in small quantities for sale in shops across Europe. Ingredients which are not produced in London, are distributed and exported from Spain, an important Latin American migration node in the past three decades. The Spain-United Kingdom connection has been reinforced since the 2008 crisis when migrants relocated from Southern European countries to London, perceived as a better place for economic prosperity.

In London, one of the most popular food brands amongst Latin immigrants is Sol Andino, a Peruvian-owned shop with an online and high street presence at Old Kent Road in South London, a spot

² See '[Importing live animals or animal products from non-EU countries: general licences and authorisations](#)'

where Latin migrants live and gather. Sol Andino is one of the biggest distributors, catering to several shops and restaurants in the city. These kinds of networks of specialist food supply and consumption produce and reproduce this area of South London, stretching from Kennington to the Old Kent Road via Elephant and Castle, as a zone of Latin American culture. Unlike the specialist coffee joints of the aspirational middle classes (which no-one knows exactly how to define but everyone can instantly recognise) this particular entanglement of food, culture, and socio-economics is focused around resources intersecting specifically in this area, rather than aesthetics which can be reproduced anywhere. Resources that are multi-modal, evoking AbdouMaliq Simone's reading of infrastructures as a 'process of conjunction', which generates social composition from "heterogeneous activities, modes of production, and institutional forms constitutes highly mobile and provisional possibilities for how people live and make things" (Simone, 2004: 410). People, space, ingredients, knowledge: "these conjunctions become an infrastructure – a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city" (Simone, 2004: 407–408). In this case, reproducing Latin American life in south London.

The act of cooking in all its diversity of expressions is as much, if not more, the location of culture as is the dish that results

As well as being sourced in the local area, *queso costeño* is also made in-house by Oscar and Valeria themselves, which allows them to cut costs compared to buying it ready made. 'The *queso* that you find here doesn't even come close to the one from Colombia'. In their café, this improvisation is also evident in the construction of the space itself. A railway arch, emblem of a very Victorian, very British kind of progress, is reconfigured as a small ecosystem of Latin businesses, from money transfer to making clothing and *pandebono*. A lead tenant renting directly from the landlord – once the public Network Rail but now the private 'Arch Company' – has created sub-lettable units through simple plywood partitions, which have in turn been adapted by their own tenants for a multitude of uses.

What makes this place 'Latin American', or in La Caleñita's case, Colombian? Language, smells, tastes, sounds from the TV. Things that cannot be made through architecture, but which emerge from usage. Beyond the sensorial atmosphere that becomes a cultural product of this place, the way the infrastructure itself is made, the process of adaptation and making do together also embodies a culture. Coming back one last time to the recipe metaphor – the act of cooking in all its diversity of expressions is as much, if not more, the location of culture as is the dish that results. Cultural infrastructures are important not just for the cultural forms whose production and sharing they support, but for the forms of life bound up in the ways they are built and maintained.

Take a blank railway arch
provide cheap rent
adapt the space for basic needs and desires with simple materials
allow basic sub-divisions to be made without requiring permissions
allow subtenants to add the finishing touches

A recipe for coping

Informality and self-reliance have travelled in the bodies of people like Oscar and Valeria, another unwritten recipe allowing local spatial ingredients to be recooked into something distinct and culturally enriching. As a Caleñita habitué puts it, 'it [*pandebono*] brings memories of driving to the outskirts of Bogotá to have it on Sundays with my family when I was a child. It's like you need to know it, visually it's not appealing; you need to feel it. I personally love the warmth and elasticity of it.' Another customer from Chile, new to the place, inquires about the different baked goods displayed on the counter at La Caleñita, unsure of which one to pick: 'I am Chilean, but there are so many commonalities between Latin Americans anyways, it feels like home'. These often unspoken, shared codes are

held together by what Benedict Anderson (2006[1983]) coined as 'imagined communities', the idea of a Pan Latin American community based on affinity, brought by the peculiar needs of relocation and infrastructures of coping.

In Oscar's words: 'This place acts as a social hub, not only a restaurant. When a new migrant [from Latin America] arrives with just a suitcase and nowhere to go, we provide them with food and shelter. This pays back as they always return once their situation gets better'. Pandebono fulfils a social function, and enhances the power of imaginations through the sensorial, acting as a pillar for coping with the vicissitudes of instability. When it's consumed it elicits memories of place bringing to mind that 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home' (Bachelard, 1994[1958]: 5). ([See Picture 2](#))

Coping is a creative act, an improvisational activity, an attitude towards the world of uncertainties, focussing on opportunities, and forging solidarity. Migrants' way of coping with structured inequalities in everyday life is highlighted in their creative and experimental performance, as they go; no matter that Oscar and Valeria can't get the same ingredients for Pandebono in London, they are confident in themselves and their community for finding alternative resources and mutual support.

Pandebono cannot be simply reduced to a recipe of ingredients, like those attempted at formulating context-free suggestions for the problems our cities deal with. The recipe, rather than a prescriptive form, becomes support for a kind of improvisation that allows the immigrant to reconfigure the unfamiliar materials of the host country into an embodiment of home. It is an organising framework that allows unrelated elements – Greek-style salad cheese, yucca, British eggs – to participate in the construction of something not constituted by any one of them individually but by their relationships.

Cooking and infrastructuring

What do we learn from pandebono, then, about culture and its infrastructure, the conditions that enable those without institutional or political power to make and remake the city? Like recipes, infrastructures can be used to enable or to constrain. If they fix a set of pre-defined elements so rigidly that the malfunctioning or unavailability of one of them invalidates the whole structure, they bring about situations of control and redundancy. We can think of 'recipes' for cultural regeneration in the Bilbao model, built around a 'flagship' museum, pre-conceived from building to programme. If the museum does not work, having been designed to be manageable only by a large institution, itself and its surrounding 'cultural district' can become deserted wastelands, unable to be rethought and adapted from the bottom up. Like the proverbial soufflé in which one failure renders the whole thing useless, such masterplanning is what Sennett calls 'closed' or 'complete' form' (2019). Alternately, recipes can be 'open forms' – organising frameworks choreographing a set of relationships between interchangeable elements, a way of passing on ideas and methods for making form with the materials to hand. This points to a different kind of cultural planning, in which infrastructural conditions rather than finished forms allow individuals and small collectivities to make their own cultural spaces, that then become infrastructures for other things like sensing and coping.

For Oscar and Valeria, and other members of their community, improvisation is essential when working with this lack of overarching plan or institutional structure – in a state of 'unincorporation' (Bingham-Hall et al., 2019) – and without the imposition of a 'design' that predetermines the aesthetic end-point. This is evident in the social support structures that have emerged around the informally adapted infrastructure of the arches on Maldonado Walk. Improvisation is helping to find last minute accommodation for newcomers, or covering shifts with short notice, or assisting each other with moving houses, or setting up an impromptu shelter in the kitchen for anyone who needs it. Improvisation is plastering the wall of a dim, austere cave-like structure under a railway line with the picture of a tropical beach, feeding not only the stomachs but also the imaginations of those who

gather in here. But improvisation does not happen in a vacuum. As scores can provide a shared basis on top of which performers improvise with sound and movement (Bingham-Hall, 2019), infrastructural recipes made of knowledge, space, material, and planning policy are the solid ground that enables immigrant makers to improvise with and gain agency over urban form.

Despite the undeniable power that comes with the migrant's ability to reconstruct, remodel and reshape new microcosms for herself and others around her, recent regeneration strategies for the area, which include the imminent sale of the railway arches to private investors, threaten the continuity of these accessible spaces for the production of goods and immaterial affective support structures. Where there is a strong reliance on the space of place, can a place like this be swept away in its materiality without dragging with it the lifeworld of those who inhabit it?

Music recommendation: *Cali Aji* song by Grupo Niche. Listen [here](#).

References

- Anderson, B. 2006[1983]. *Imagined Communities*. Verso.
- Bachelard, G. 1994[1958]. *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press.
- Bingham-Hall, J. 2019. What kind of thing is a score? *Theatrum Mundi*. <http://theatrum-mundi.org/library/what-kind-of-thing-is-a-score/>
- Bingham-Hall, J., Chua, C., Cetrulo, A. and Ali, J. 2019. Urban Backstages: Unincorporated Artists Unite. *Theatrum Mundi*.
- Sennett, R. 2008. *The Craftsman*. Yale University Press.
- Sennett, R. 2019. *Building and Dwelling*. Penguin.
- Simone, A. 2004. People as Infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture* 16: 407-29.
- Mauss, M. 2002[1954]. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Routledge.
- Mendoza, PM and García Márquez, G. 1996[1983]. *El Olor de la Guayaba*. Random House Mondadori.