



**CHARTING  
(ART AND OTHER  
CULTURAL) COLLECTIVES:  
THE GOOD, THE BAD,  
AND A FEW RAW THINGS  
ABOUT THE DYNAMICS OF  
COLLECTIVIZING**

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# I. HOW TO COOK A COLLECTIVE

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“Collectives” are DIY complex soupy fares presented in diverse styles of utopian imaginations and occasions. Ideally, they function as alternative sources of nourishment often produced as a healthy counter to prevailing power structures that leave us either hungry or stuffed with a diet empty in nutritional value.

Not all collectives are created or taste the same. Certain collectives come off as fiery gastronomical delights, whereas some versions are best served quietly and cold.

Collectives are comfort (or special) food — they can be consumed daily, seasonally, or maybe, just once and never to be tried again.

Traditional collectives are composed of basic ingredients but contemporary approaches to the dish are numerous and are always dependent on one’s preference, conditions and hyper-locality.

## INGREDIENTS (*Variable serving size*)

An assembly of people in various textures, types and shapes  
(*consider them as tofu – one of the most malleable and accessible of proteins*)

A hearty amount of shared aesthetics, political stance or social identity  
(*choose 1 or 2 or all*)

A compendium of personality quirks, peeled and diced  
Supplementary supportive alliances, rinsed and drained  
Material conditions as base

Money and funding for added flavor

## EQUIPMENT

A vessel or any containment unit

A cocktail shaker or blender

Non-stick cookware

Swizzle stick or an electric soup whisk

Anything that you may see as essential

### *Pre-Preparation:*

*Ready all your cookware and coat them with material conditions.*

*If possible, marinate your protein — days, months or (even) years beforehand— in a liquor concentrate of individual struggles and (personal) aspirations.*

*Understand the multi-dimensional and occasional hustle culture of each ingredient.*

*Sift through them and segregate according to needs, desires, flexibility and availability.*

1. Organize your tofu in groups of two, or more, and dump them in a non-stick container or *space*.\*
2. Set over medium heat and combine with the broth of shared philosophy and beliefs. Let simmer for a period of time. Later, you may add some of your allied support fibers into the mixture to enhance its flavor and value.

3. Season with common goals to bring out the blend's natural spiciness and tastiness.
4. While occasionally stirring, slowly sprinkle a compendium of personality quirks into the soup. Adjust heat and temper things with a balance of work assignments and camaraderie.
5. Instead of using metric or imperial systems, see if deconstructing estimations will harmonize all ingredients. How does one decolonize portions?
6. Do not overcook by boiling. But if the bouillon does get bubbly, recognize the beginnings of hierarchy formation. When it appears as a frothy layer and difficult to negotiate, do not panic. Fizziness is not the end of the world. For fun, use your swizzle stick to dissolve the pyramid of foam. Better yet, smoothen everything with the electric soup whisk.
7. Ask yourself while whisking: Is this what I want? What are we doing? Are these gestures of closeness, and coming together in the name of shared interests and solidarity, teaching me to have a more compassionate and enlightened worldview? Am I making money from this? But wait, is making profit my goal?
8. When in doubt, step back and observe if the soup is showing signs of uneven coagulation, or whether elements of the collective body are manifesting emotional and physical wear-and-tear. Should one or two tofu balls be given time off to do self-care? Are the different members of the soup unnecessarily crumbling due to excess or continuous heat?
9. After the initial surprise and potential resentments arising from the (unchecked) temperature, check yourself and address the blind spots. If dregs appear and get bothersome, allow for the passage of time for the sludge to disintegrate on its own. But if the liquid begins to uncontrollably ferment, choose whether you would want wine or vinegar to be the outcome of your dish. Both are useful and the result is not usually predictable.
10. In a separate skillet (ah! You forget that a side dish was always there pan-searing on its own), see how your support food is becoming crusty. Are the edges getting

burnt? Does the side dish still want to be part of the spread? Or does it look like it's showing resistance to integrate with the rest and participate in a common cause? Are such fibrous interconnections becoming more burdensome, or is the side dish better positioned in someone else's house instead of in yours? Remove from heat and contemplate its fate.

11. If a formation of chunky bits and pieces in your soup base is not to your liking, consider its present and future. Ideally, a cocktail-shaker or blender can be used to deal with blocks. But not everyone appreciates smooth-sailing puree. Some of your guests may be open to experiencing more bumps and conflicts to help develop personal character.
12. Concentrate your individual will and align it with your cooperative duties to whip the dish into its desired shape and flavor. Re-model consistency. Reconsider its stand and movement. Adapt to the soup's flexibility! Believe in its potentials.
13. Observe if notions of authorship are causing the dish to become watery or even to evaporate. Are the different ingredients' individual spunk and flavor being diluted into some unidentifiable blend? Troubleshoot sogginess by re-distributing the stress points. If necessary, learn to identify the source of sensitivity and delicateness. Sensibly resolve possible bitterness in taste.
14. Tweak the recipe — maybe, additional doses of *criticism and self-criticism* discussions will help decrease the acidity? At about this time, ask yourself: Are there too many cooks in the kitchen? For now, focus on working on organizational unity and *longevity*.\*
15. Always do periodic taste tests. If disputes and disagreements are turning dynamics unpalatable, go back to your pantry and check for extra binding agents. Pour, sprinkle, or shower generously, as needed. A quick review of core values will, hopefully, bring back the zest to the collective pot. Encourage the ingredients to engage in peer support and collaboration.

16. Examine the concoction's worth. Measure the dish's maturity level. Is it a dish worth repeating and replicating? Does it smell right? Is this particular recipe a worthy model for all other soupy endeavors? Exercise a critical outlook: Sweet or savory? Simple or splashy? Which road will you take?
17. Reduce heat, remove from the stovetop and cool to room temperature.
18. Dribble the soup into mounds of hollowed out *artisanal*\* bread; garnish with other tokens of collegial appreciation; and serve.
19. It's easy to be seduced into cooking a bigger bulk if this dish turns out well and the whole package looks delectable. Photos of the work-in-progress and posted in different socials can always make things look amazing and seemingly effortless. Go ahead and make that big bulk! Invite everyone to the party and even host a biennale of soups! But be warned: the bigger the serving size, the more annoying it can also get.
20. Add money, whether institutional or private funding, to taste.

#### NOTES:

*Spaces* can be temporary or permanent. Collectives can be spaceless or can come in different generic plastic containers or branded Tupperware.

*Longevity* is also associated with expiration dates. Some ingredients only mesh well with each other in a limited amount of time. Although a dish like *adobo* is best indulged in after a few days to its cooking, a plate of rice spoils easily when left out in the outside world.

*Artisanal* — it's always kind to be supportive of small and medium enterprises.



### III. HOW TO PERFORM THE DEATH OF THE COLLECTIVE



After an array of soups has been served, there could be moments when some samples seem dreary. Some soups that were once comforting just do not seem like that anymore. Or in other cases, ingredients are lacking or have become extinct — maybe even culturally or ethically inappropriate. Economic inflation (or force majeure) has also caused certain components to become unavailable.

There are many reasons why things must reach the conclusive or even transformative stage — for instance, convincing people that the party is over and that it's time to leave because the hosts have other things to do. Death, ruptures, transitions are always imminent.

What happens afterwards?

Maybe some soups are best appreciated as an acquired taste?

What if some broths can no longer be metabolized or are not anymore in-sync with our pandemic-affected bodies?

When do we acknowledge that a recipe needs to be tweaked or, in fact, discontinued?

When do we tell the cooks that preserving an old formula, just for its sake, is not the most sensible attitude and that institutional alterations to traditions must be introduced?

Sometimes the beginning of the end happens after a single botched and unresolved taste test. Every so often, it's a compendium of reasons that lean toward wanting less of a particular soup and more about desiring other soups on the spread instead.

## RITUALS OF SAYING GOODBYE

What you need:

An assortment of action verbs

An assortment of non-provocative adjectives

Dramatic gestures

Niceness (optional)

Composure and wisdom

Memories whether intended for personal archiving purposes or legacy building

Degrees of openness (optional)

*Pre-preparation*

*Discern/Understand the reason for the change in inclination*

*Contemplate the level of grief and assess what kind of goodbye is most appropriate*

*Decide the logistics of the goodbye that one is willing to participate in*

*Consider the type of ending: **hostility, combustion, rot, assisted suicide, natural death, or intermittent exits?***

*Consider your role: Are you the cook or the originator of the recipe? Do you feel like you are a neglected or misunderstood tofu? The hungry guest?*

**For Hostile shakeup and breakup:**

Dramatic endings are not always clean and smooth because messy is messy. Trauma from this type of ending can be protracted; one can make a curatorial and artistic career mentioning/writing/critiquing its demise.

1. Prepare for war.
2. Go over one's personal memories and make an inventory of various types of capital: ideas, objects, equipment, excess funds.
3. Debate over their ownership.

**For Combustion:**

Things just ignite without a warning. Everything is burned to the ground, but no personal injuries are inflicted (or, so we think). It's a type of clean slate. Sometimes, no preparation or celebration or even grieving is needed.

1. (But) Postmortem, prepare a press release to serve as public service announcement so that inquiries regarding unfinished projects can be given closure.
2. Occasionally mention its existence in one's curriculum vitae.
3. As a sign of respect and reverence to what once was, members can still acknowledge each other in public spaces. But there's an unspoken rule to no longer reminisce about the glory days.

**For Rot:**

Some goodbyes are romantically tragic, dragged-out and non-verbalized. This is about love lost and letting things run their course through simple abandonment. It doesn't need to be physically or intentionally unfriendly. It's just plain sad.

There are soups you stay with because you just don't want to be alone on cold days and nights. But there are soups that are just no longer meaningful and forgotten in the fridge for days or weeks. Sometimes it's difficult to completely dispose of the

soup (*sayang*). Often, it's easier to just let it stay where you found it — to ghost it — so it can evolve on its own (or break up with you instead).

Occasionally, you pop the lid to check if it's the day to thaw and eat the soup. But most times, any day is never "THE" day, so the soup gets returned to its forlorn spot.

Then the inevitable happens: There are problems with the thermostat. And the freezer is not freezing. So, mold develops, and the soup becomes feral. What was once seemingly controlled and harmless becomes a microcosmic example of the Anthropocene.

The vessel cracks, the soup leaks out, and a virulent ungovernable ecosystem now lives in your freezer.

1. Say goodbye by defrosting and throwing away what once was.
2. Say a little prayer to the extra strong cleaning and disinfecting agents for their capacity to remove every bit of memory from the soup.
3. If all else fails, flee.
4. Go about your other chores.

### **For Institutional Hara-kiri:**

1. Set a deadline. Have a pre-determined date. Either one goes with a big bang or just quietly disappears.
2. Organize: Will a simple remembrance led by close friends suffice? Or will there be a well-executed, pre-planned celebration to go with it — exhibition, archived materials, publications, etc.?

### **For Natural Death:**

It happens. Collectives are only as good as their context. Some will just fade out because of old age or because the founding chefs are exhausted and younger cooks are also not interested to keep the brew going.

But some collectives do cease early because the reason for its existence has been met. What is needed is only a simple send off.

1. Take a moment to see what the shared dish was once about.
2. In your eulogy, include tears, but also drink, eat and be merry.

### **For Intermittent Exits**

Not all soups are meant to be available 24/7. Some are seasonal dishes and are only put together during special occasions. If such is the case, then saying goodbye isn't always difficult. The goodbyes are always given. One day the soup is there; on other days the soup is just not part of the menu.

Just the same, there must be closure (although some may not need it).

1. Know that temporariness is a part of life.
2. Know that relationships are fleeting.

### **NOTES:**

Death comes with differences in definitions, too. Some deaths mean the ultimate termination. For others, it's just energy transposed to something else.

Explore the breakdown/spoilage/shutdown. Discuss if immortality through self-replication or rebirth is also a secret goal. See if the "end" is just a form of dormancy, like fermenting and pickling.

## IV. HOW TO SAVE THE SOUP THAT'S GONE BLAND

MY STYLE OF DEALING WITH INNER TURMOIL AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IS THE SAME. WHENEVER I FEEL THE CLAMMY HANDS OF UNFINISHED PROJECTS, UNREALIZED GOALS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES REACHING OUT TO ME, I SLAP THEM SILLY AND SAY, OH PLEASE. NOT TODAY.



Not everything in life must be instantly discarded. Although a few of those leftovers may seem to have overstayed in the real-estate space of the refrigerator, food is food when we find ourselves hungry.

If there are no undesirable microbes in the soup, an afterlife is possible! Re-direction is key.

A few are bound to ask: Why bother? Can't we just erase everything and start fresh?

But sometimes starting a new collective from scratch, like creating new dishes, isn't the best and only option. Revising, refurbishing, and reconnecting with whatever is available in the pantry may be the feasible and cost-effective solution.

There are always (often untried) rescue remedies considering that making good, robust soup requires hard and dedicated work.

Here are simple tips to help rejuvenate the collective plate.

#### INGREDIENTS (*Variable serving size*)

The C-words: concentration, commitment, conviction

*Presence* more than *absence* (if you don't show up, then there won't be any soup, too)

A medley of paradigm shifts

Fresh herbs and new ideas

#### EQUIPMENT

A blender that can chop or puree the rough patches

Everything that can be used as an improvised cooking tool

#### *Pre-preparation:*

*Commit to experiment, to hang out, and to work on the internal dynamics of the soup.*

*Do the inner work to ensure a cache of stamina and determination is available when in a hot kitchen.*

1. Assess how much of the dish can be saved. Locate its problems. What is the state of this concoction? Is the problem with the foundational broth? Does it need a little more excitement? What ideological direction is the soup taking? Do the vegetables and protein look listless, depressed?
2. Once the stress points have been determined, see what short — and long-term — remedies can be utilized to help revamp this soggy blend.
3. Remove the excess, rehabilitate the flavors, and adjust the heat. Ask yourself: Are the parts that make this recipe drowning in an unenthusiastic and meaningless soup base? Maybe what a bland soup only needs are a quick pick-upper. The surge of energy from fresh herbs plus a dash of new activities can help bring back its vitality.
4. Throwing together different tofu types with other ingredients

can result in a fusion of weird tensions and flavors. But this eclectic combination can also turn the pot into a magic brew. See what you can condense, evaporate, dilute, and compartmentalize. Some compounds only work well with specific components. See if compromise is possible.

5. It's necessary to remind all the cultural workers engaged in fixing a bland soup to practice self-awareness and avoid burnout. When things are overlooked and go unchecked, the more delicate ingredients can get singed and stuck at the bottom of the pot. To avoid depleting personal energy, one must learn to marry solidarity work with rest, recreation, and the occasional cold beer.
6. When in doubt, seek knowledge and information. There're always the library and kind people with books. Cooking doesn't have to be a solitary sport. Remind yourself that there are others out there who'll gladly contribute extra lemon juice to brighten up otherwise dull grub.
7. Not all soups can be saved by the same workers. Learn to ask for suggestions and feedback from other chefs and consultants everywhere. The collective effort will not only foster additional alliances and create paradigm shifts, but it can also generate fresh relationships — new friends, new partners, new co-workers, and new collaborators to break bread with.
8. Bon Appetit!

#### NOTES:

The key to satisfying soup is in the slow and steady simmering of its ingredients. Bringing out the best of flavors in a dish entails endurance. Sometimes, time is what's needed — channel the types of food that is fermented!

Fermenting, marinating, seasoning, and maturity spent in invisible progress can result in a nutritional ensemble in the long run.

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