

"Enfin je me rappelai le pis-aller d'une grande princesse à qui l'on disait que les paysans n'avaient pas de pain, et qui répondit : Qu'ils mangent de la brioche."

J.-J. Rousseau, Confessions (écrit 1765, publié 1782)

"Saa gik Keiseren i Processionen under den deilige Thronhimmel og alle Mennesker paa Gaden og i Vinduerne sagde: "Gud hvor Keiserens nye Klæder ere mageløse! hvilket deiligt Slæb han har paa Kjolen! hvor den sidder velsignet!" Ingen vilde lade sig mærke med, at han intet saae, for saa havde han jo ikke duet i sit Embede, eller været meget dum. Ingen af Keiserens Klæder havde gjort saadan Lykke.

"Men han har jo ikke noget paa," sagde et lille Barn. "Herre Gud, hør den Uskyldiges Røst," sagde Faderen; og den Ene hvidskede til den Anden, hvad Barnet sagde.

"Men han har jo ikke noget paa," raabte tilsidst hele Folket. Det krøb i Keiseren, thi han syntes, de havde Ret, men han tænkte som saa: "nu maa jeg holde Processionen ud". Og Kammerherrerne gik og bar paa Slæbet, som der slet ikke var."

(H.C. Andersen, "Keiserens nye klæder", 1837)

A Recipe for Sand Cakes

On the Lack of Proper Words, the Loss in Translation, the Richness of Bakery, on Cakes and Caking, on Land Art, Entropy, Rising Sea Levels, Naked Emperors and the Practice of the Finnish Art Collective Forest Camp

How bitterly I search not only for the right word, but also for the right translation. To no avail. When I pray for a word of guidance, the only response I hear is: "Let them eat cake".

Let's start with the sand cake. For anyone of a right mind, but still not a native English speaker, a sand cake would be a cake made of sand. We must assume there was one such once, in the old days before books with baking recipes were invented. A beautiful, maybe slightly tilting, cake made from sand by a playful child or adult with access to some sort of bucket, cup or other suitable mold. Then something happened. Someone was inspired to make a cake, in the image of a sand cake. The word is now totally absorbed by the industrious hoard of home bakers. Sand cake. It is a terrific cake, I am sure, but it is of no use here. We need to stick to sand, and to buckets.

That's the point where someone suggests 'beach bucket cake'. That is yet another pastry. It looks pretty much like a cake made from sand, but is still a flour-based artifice. It occupies a word for which I have more proper use, even a more rightful right. However far I reach for words, it seems that the influence of an ominous curse takes me to the flour bin. The famous quote from Marie Antoinette comes to mind – except that it is wrongly attributed to this sensitive and sensible young woman whose life and body were cut much too short, and a bit too freely translates: "If they can't have bread, let them eat cakes". The first known reference is in Rousseau's autobiography *Confessions*, and he talks about *brioche*, a bread enriched with eggs and butter. We need no cakes, no cookies, no biscuits, and certainly no brioches. We need sand.

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The Finnish art collective Forest Camp are notorious for a few different things, but above all for their 'caking' projects (from the Finnish word 'kakutus', literally meaning 'to cake-ify'). This form of caking does not immediately relate to the phenomenon of

'caking' in common English dictionaries, which is the tendency of dry powders' to form lumps. The lumps Forest Camp deals with are of a reasonably standardized size and in the form of the inside of an upside-down beach bucket. Let us call them 'sand cakes', for short, and just hope the trade union of bakers won't read this. 'Sand castle' refers to a much larger and complex edifice. 'Caking' as a verb indicates activity. In our custom-made dictionary slowly taking shape, 'caking' can be described as:

'the artistic activity of suddenly, usually with no prior notice, adding one, a few or a great number of sand cakes to a place of public or semi-public character'.

This place could be a beach. On such a place, the materials necessary for the making of 'sand cakes' are readily at hand. Grab you bucket, fill it with wet sand and turn the bucket upside-down. Pat the bottom and sides lightly with your little plastic shovel, and carefully remove the bucket. *Voilà!* There it is, a perfect 'sand cake'. You and your friends can now repeat the process until the result is satisfactory, wholly or partially filling the grounds of this public space.

If there is tidal water, you will soon see the waves sneak closer and closer, nabbing and grabbing what you earlier created. Or if a general public is turning up with bath towels, swimsuits, lunch baskets and all, they will bring havoc to your creation. The children will trample it, the beach bullies will follow, and the big gents and ladies will cover them with their huge towels without taking any notice. This art is in a way auto-destructive, but possibly in a softer sense than Gustav Metzger meant or Jean Tinguely enacted when they made their pioneering self-destroying works and Metzger published his manifestos for Auto-Destructive Art. The comparison to the bold and violent gestures of Tinguely and Metzger point in a different direction. Tinguely aimed his art at the big museums and their audiences, Gustav Metzger wanted to start a revolution in art outside of the institutions.

Forest Camp is from a different, much younger stem grafted to the same Dadaist tree from where the works of Metzger and Tinguely sprung. It wasn't born under the perceived shadow of threatening total and imminent annihilation from nuclear warfare, like Metzger's and Tinguely's works were. This art of 'caking' goes softly away, like the cream cake in the rain a truly bad pop ballad from the late 1960's gives melancholy tribute to:

*All the sweet green icing flowing down
Someone left the cake out in the rain
I don't think that I can take it
'Cause it took so long to bake it
And I'll never have that recipe again*

(“MacArthur Park”, text & lyrics by Jimmy Webb)

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Despite the gentle gestures of 'caking', a different radical tradition can be discerned in the activities of Forest Camp. The 'caking' projects have intervened in streets and galleries, leaving the apparently “natural” context of beaches to the side. It reminds of the poetic chant during the 1968 student revolt in Paris, “*Sous les pavés, la plage*” – ‘under the cobblestones, the beach’. The phrase comes from the surprising experience when breaking up cobblestones from the streets during street riots, that the stones rested on a bed of sand. It is, as you already noted, a metonymy, a rhetorical figure

where the beach represents an aspect of liberty. The first of the virtues “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” for which the French Revolution fought.

As the particular revolution of Forest Camp operates on a smaller scale and only with modest interventionist methods, it is unlikely it will cause any bloodshed in the style of most other real world revolutions. It is a revolution for us who might hesitate to die or kill for liberty, but certainly are ready to ‘cake’ for it. Instead it aims at a form of disjunction or dislocation of expectations, a rupture of the everyday discourses of our lives. It is a form of public poetry, intervening softly, gently into our minds, as we walk by, caught up in our own worlds of FB chats and text messaging on our phones, or the occasional quiet reflection on other aspects of life if we forgot our communication tools at home (or the battery just ran flat).

For that reason, the finest ‘caking’ projects of Forest Camp are made where the means and the efforts are the least, i.e. on the beach. It will truly affect only the first visitor in the pristine light of the morning sun, who might not even know or realize it is a work of art. He or she might just rejoice the moment, an epiphany in the sense James Joyce wrote about, a near spiritual moment where the veil is lifted and a truth momentarily revealed. This truth lies in the pure experience only and is beyond verbalizing. The best ‘caking’ is still to be made. It should ideally happen on a desolate island far from other shores. It would be there, waiting for our discovery, or it could be gone, eaten away by the waves or the rising sea levels. Or it might just appear in the Hubbard telescope one day, on the surface of a remote uninhabitable planet. “Look!” the scientists would say. “It must be... ‘caking’. How remarkable...”.

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We know that global warming causes rising sea levels, threatening to drench entire island nations in the Pacific Ocean. The process won’t be reversed by any ‘caking’, however ardently performed. But the processes are reciprocally illuminating. The vanishing of a ‘sand cake’ invokes the sad poetry of a vanishing island. Washed away, slowly eaten by the erosive powers of the surf. With the rising sea levels in mind, the process of ‘caking’ turns into something much like a laboratory simulation of the effects of climate change. This is also a direction where Forest Camp has been moving in their discussions of how ‘caking’ is to be understood – compared to the playful Dadaist spirit of the earliest interventions. This is one of the basic aspects of art never to be forgotten, neither in the case of ‘caking’ nor generally for the activities of Forest Camp: our understanding, interpretation, call it what you like, will always develop over time. In the case of Forest Camp, their projects seem to increase in relevance over time. Other projects have dealt with the burning of wood (burning 2m³ of wood in a concrete well for 24 hours, burning and replacing park benches), interacting with homeless people, creating a shrunken exhibition space, making sap wine from birches about to be felled. In retrospect, the themes turn increasingly environmental and socially aware. The ability of the works to absorb new meanings shows a strength often overseen. Many “environmental” and “political” works are so keen to address their topics, that they die away together with the urgency of their causes. The open character of Forest Camp’s projects allows for the opposite movement. They absorb weight over time, weight not necessarily aimed for but nevertheless inherent, potential for their projects. It is not “art by accident” – it is rather a matter of affinity, as in chemistry when matters seen as incompatible form new substances. Affinity was in old scientific discussion the natural process of attraction. As time passes, new meaning is attracted to Forest Camp’s projects, like the metal grains shaping unpredicted patterns around a magnetic pole.

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As you insist in telling me, there is land art. I might have forgotten if you hadn't reminded. Land art often involves sand, gravel, stones, rocks and other mineral materials. Let's skip all those peripheral land art works by Christo, Richard Long, Walter de Maria, James Turrell and their ilk. We deal here only with Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*. And I agree with you, that Smithson's work is a sort of up-scaled 'caking' project. But I wouldn't go as far as you in taking all credit off Robert Smithson's work. It deserves a place in art history not the least because despite it was invisible for decades, covered by the rising water of Great Salt Lake – in fact the work has only in recent years been more permanently visible and is currently surrounded not by water but a salt desert due to a long drought – still people talked about it as if they had actually seen it. It is a land art piece that exists much more in the minds of non-viewers than as something actually observed IRL. That's in line with the very philosophy of 'caking'. If you see it, you are just lucky; if you can perceive it as an idea and be fully content by that, you are a true art lover. The emperor is not naked. He is just out 'caking' and forgot to bring his swimsuit.

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