

# Performative Food

: (Syn)aesthetic Object-Oriented Event



By Yinuo Chen

## NOTION OF FOOD,

First of all, I want to declare that the 'FOOD' as I mentioned here should be a term transcend its obvious utilitarian purpose and anthropocentric understandings (e.g. feed the starve, food waste, moral codes etc) in order to engage one's mind with the artistic experience and appreciate the sensual qualities on its own as an art object. As Elizabeth Grosz reminds us, art is also something that occurs beyond the point of survival- art is an excess, a surplus, an abundance, an intensifying of sensations and materials (2008).

When It comes to thinking about art from post-humanism perspective. The default stance of the art viewer looking to read an artwork in terms of its creator's intentions or psychology, or its places in the historical canon, or its specific concepts and materials, or any other traditional criteria would, to an object-oriented ontology (OOO) adherent, be little more than anthropocentric hubris. As Timothy Morton quotes, " an artwork cannot be reduced to its parts or materials, nor can it be reduced to it's creator's life, nor to some other context, however defined...

The essay organized in to 3 chapter; The first chapter emphasized on the concept of food as the art object with its own **performative characteristics** and **its own status equally in relation to the other** from both historical context and contemporary performance art in theory of Object Oriented Ontology(OOO).

The second part introduced **the (Syn)aesthetics methodology** from theatre practitioner's perspective. Exploring the **sensual** and **transformative quality of food** in performance practices with supportive evidence from established theories and previous personal practices.

The third chapter focusing on the **participants/ audiences' responses** from both reception theory analysis and observed case studies in relation to (Syn)aesthetic style performances.

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## Chapter 1

- Charismatic food - ephemeral sculpture, allure in ritual ceremony
- From futurist banquet to Molecular Gastronomy.
- 'Reframing the food': The theatricality from dinner table to performance space.

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## Chapter 2

'FOOD' as new sensual stimuli in (Syn)aesthetic style performance practices.

\_ As Practitioner's Methodology:

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## Chapter 3-

\_ Reception Theory- (Syn) aesthetic & disturbance.

Case study. IMMERSIVE DINNING EXPERIENCE

- Aero-banquets RMX Review –

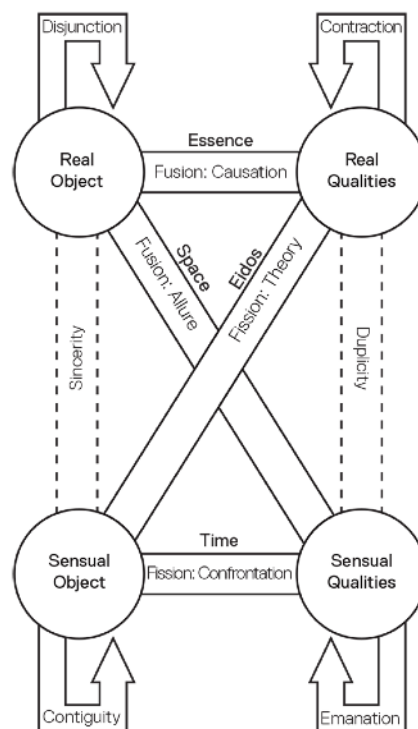
- Gingerline: The Chamber of flavor –

# Chapter 1

## Charismatic Food

"Art as charisma, pouring out of anything whatsoever, whether we humans consider it to be alive or not." —Timothy Morton

For Morton, the normative modes for thinking and talking about art ignore the agency (which he terms charisma) of the art object as well as its status as a thing that stands separate from (and equal to) all others. The charismatic pull he mentions is the art object acting on its viewers, a property he says all objects possess. 'The act on the other' for my understanding is the simple cause and effect relationships we tend to ignore/unseen. Its a non-mechanical model of causality. For a more specific and less anthropocentric term. The term of 'FOOD' can be translate in to Chinese version which appeared like '食 (shi) 物 (wu) 'or known as 'Edible Object', which distinguishes the human action from the object itself seems more reasonable in this object oriented event. The food can also be view as any inanimate objects or edible organic forms in this essay. Or, we can grab a sense of 'food' according to the beloved 'OOO' tool analysis, as a withdrawn object is translated into sensual apprehension via a "surface" accessed by thought and/or action.



(Object Oriented Ontology- The term was used by speculative philosopher Graham Harman in his 1999 doctoral dissertation "Tool-Being: Elements in a Theory of Objects")

The cause and effect must be understood as one united entity, like 无必修四环 the closure loop. According to metaphysics, we can never be able to see the essence of the real objects as so-called 'withdrawn' and only the others only have access to its surface/appearance, what it appeared to the others. The meaning of the objects only are perceptions from the viewer's mind and a classic no-no to 'OOO'.

Harman introduces two types of objects: real objects and sensual objects. Real objects are objects that withdraw from all experience, whereas sensual objects are those that exist only in experience. Additionally, Harman suggests two kinds of qualities: sensual qualities, or those found in experience, and real qualities, which are accessed through intellectual probing. The sensual quality in terms of food, is when the appearance of the real object perceived/sensed by the viewer's 'gaze', the magic of causality as the intra-action in between is what I understood as 'charisma'.

The charisma is a magical act. It animates the inanimate. It is the power all objects have (All objects made up of myriad other objects) over the objects around them, creating the push-pull relationship between viewer and artwork.

## EPHEMERALITY – The act of Decay

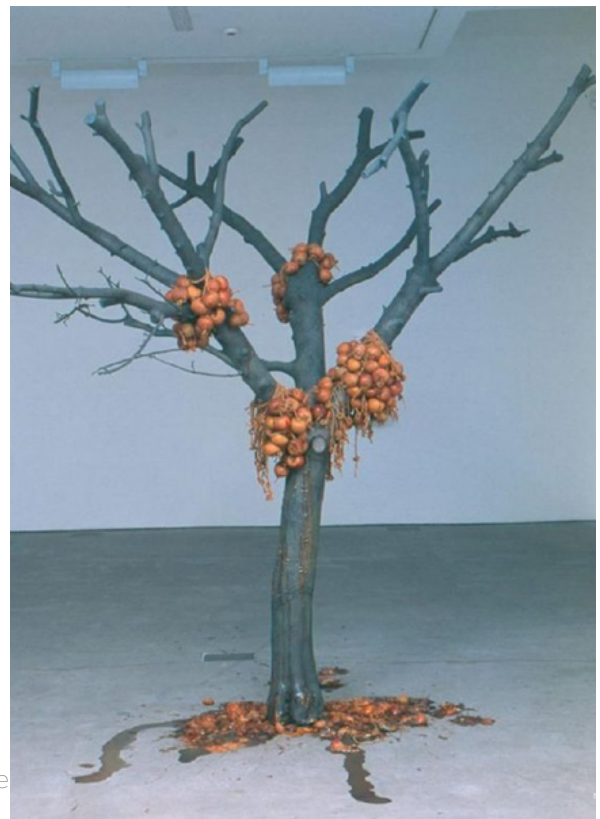
Anya Gallaccio often incorporates organic material in her work such as fruit, vegetables, plants, ice, and sand.

Often these materials change during the course of the exhibition.

Once they have left the artist's atelier nature takes over control.

Flowers wither, grass grows, ice melts, fruit rots. In other works the natural course of transformation is stopped.

Sprouting potatoes and broad bean pods, branches and whole tree trunks are reproduced in bronze, their lives prolonged indefinitely.





(Sonja Alhauser: 'Das Willkommen', 2010, illuminated refrigerated display case, Human figure Butter sculpture)

Taste and experience is hard to show, but you can create moments.  
Filled the moments with love and energy, and that is ritual.

## The act of Ritual- Ceremonial Food

Food objects also seem to be playing a vital role in the study of ancient Chinese culture, in forms of metaphorical use of culinary art and vocabularies. Ancient Chinese authors and poets tended to present philosophical positions by way of metaphors and allegories instead of abstract argumentation. As well as from a ritual perspective, the folklore tradition of 'QingMing' sacrifice ceremony traces back to ancient times, and tends to use food as an essential part of ritual medium to communicate with 'gods' and comfort those 'deceased spirits'.



*(The dinner service, and the dining furniture Sifikaki designed, are based on the Greek myth of Tantalus, in which Tantalus boils his son Pelops and offers him up as food to the gods to appease them.)*

As one of my unforgettable childhood encounter, I can still memorizing the atmosphere filled with grow-up murmuring with tears, the smoke and ashes fused burning silver-paper smell, "Her spirit will come back to eat eventually." Says my grandpa, the only footage I've left in my mind is where my gaze frozen upon those bowls of desserts and fruits right under a black-and-white portrait...

It sounds superstitious and absurd but romantic at the same time that I was doubtless about the existence of an unseen force in immaterial form 'chewing and digesting' the inner 'spirit' of an apple... This thought has weirdly influenced my sense of taste (an uncanny experience) when families all sat down and start to enjoy those lifeless 'left-overs' after the ceremony.



## F.T. Marinetti's Futurist cookbook

Futurist cooking is often presented as an entirely novel and bizarre concept, It aimed to marry art and gastronomy, to transform dining into a type of performance art.

Marinetti proposed that food was not just a background to life, but played a vital part in how people lived and thought. Ultimately, Marinetti believed, dining would become a purely aesthetic experience, with the actual nutritional part simply a matter of ingesting State-provided nutritional pills or powders, giving men "more leisure time with which to enjoy finer quality, real-food meals"

These ideas were put into practice with the opening of the "Tavern of the Holy Palate", which Marinetti described as not just a simple ordinary restaurant, but as "an arts centre holding competitions and organising Futurist poetry evenings, art exhibitions and fashion shows instead of the usual post-prandial coffee evenings or dances."



Umberto Boccioni, A Futurist Evening in Milan (1911)

The surroundings and the dishes served at the Holy Palate were designed to put diners in unsettling situations, so as to totally engage their senses and shock them into breaking free from their normal everyday habits and expectations. For example, diners could find themselves in an aluminium-lined room where a recording of a Wagner opera was playing, sitting down to a meal consisting of a collection of tiny morsels (such as a single olive) which they were expected to eat while stroking a tactile device of velvet or sandpaper. The atmosphere might be enhanced by ionizers, perfume sprays or ultra violet lights. Marinetti even dreamed of a future when ordinary knives and forks could be dispensed with.

Futurist meals came to be known from their deliberately bizarre combinations, with equally startling and provocative names. For example, **Excited Pig** consisted of a **cooked and peeled whole salami, placed vertically on the plate with coffee sauce mixed with eau de cologne**. **Chicken Fiat** was flavoured with a stuffing of ball bearings, roasted and served with whipped cream. **Drum Roll of Colonial Fish comprised poached mullet marinated in milk, liqueur, capers, and red pepper and stuffed with date jam, banana, and pineapple, eaten to a continuous rolling of drums.**

Edible food sculptures were also in vogue with the Futurists. In the Manifesto, Marinetti describes *Equator + North Pole*, a work composed of "an equatorial sea of poached egg yolks seasoned like oysters with pepper, salt and lemon. In the centre emerges a cone of firmly whipped egg white full of orange segments looking like juicy sections of the sun. The peak of the cone is strewn with pieces of black truffle cut in the form of black aeroplanes conquering the zenith".

## Molecular Gastronomy–Culinary Novelty

Although Futurist cooking is often presented as an entirely novel and bizarre concept, It inspired Chef artists like Adria, Blumenthal and colleagues from proper gastronomy background and took the futurist radical spirit into culinary practices.

Molecular gastronomy– the opposite towards the world of mass-produced food. Cooking with both scientific and aesthetic discipline aspiring to the status of art. As it utilizes technical tools and techniques to explore the materiality and novelty of food and create the dialogue beyond the plate. Taking a multi-sensory approach, dishes play on the fact that we derive pleasure through food not only from its taste, but also from the happy memories the flavors in the dishes evoke, as flavor, scent and memory are inextricably linked.



‘Sound of the Sea’-- One of the most controversial molecular dish.

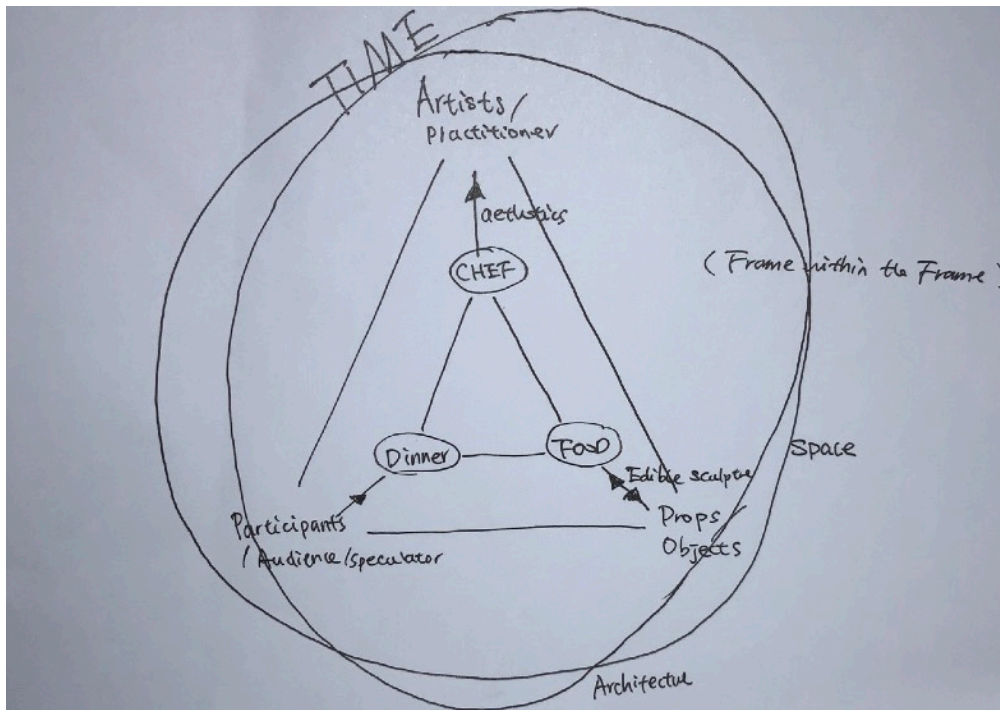
Binaural sea-scape to accompany a dish of sashimi and edible tapioca ‘sand’. The sound is delivered to the table on an iPod hidden inside a conch shell. Guests listen to the sounds on headphones as they eat the dish. The sound aims to evokes sensorial memories of the seaside, which cross the threshold of consciousness and combine to strengthen the experience and heighten perception. Claims to make the fish tastes ‘fishier’ and fresher. Some guests have been overwhelmed by the experience, some raised objection that the foam is an affront, an unnatural act and likens it to dog vomit, some even being brought to tears at the table.

“... Food is one of the most romantic things in the world and storytelling one of the most beautiful - they inspire, motivate and trigger all sorts of emotions ...” says Heston, believes strongly in the connection between taste and memory. “Whenever you eat something you relate it to an experience. Food evokes a time, a place, a moment, and we can use it to inspire,” he says.

“ For this game to be successful, It is essential that the diner has gastronomic memory, since the absence of the references turns the concept of deconstruction into mere “construction” based on nothing... the result has a direct relationship with the diner’s memory, in that although he may not see that he has been served a familiar dish, he later establishes a direct connection between the flavor of what he is eating and the classic recipe; in other words, he recognizes it.” --Ferran Adria

However, some food critics argues the importance of their cuisine should not be the technical tools and techniques that enable it, any more than the chemistry of paint is the essence of the paint. It seems to brought back the old question on territory locating.

Restructuring the 'FRAME' for "FOOD"  
: From dinner table to Theatre space.



In classical cuisine, the vocabulary of that dialogue was often constrained by tradition or convention. Diners come to a meal with tacit understanding of and expecting what is possible and familiar, based on their previous dining experiences. The chef, at least in traditional cuisine, comes prepared for these preconceptions. Chef Heston's Sound of the sea broke these constraints by creating novel foods that provoked a reaction, forcing diners to reassess their assumptions, it also had to elicit thoughts and feelings and further change the dialogue between chef and the diners. Art as a dialogue is that the artist is in a position of control. Because we are not all used to surrendering control so completely to a chef, this forced surrender is one of the persistent criticisms of the new cuisine.

Back to theater practitioner, there is much more freedom to create or more be concerned with in terms of sensual experience forming. It has much less constraints to break comparing to chefs with one unbreakable rule that it needs to satisfy the customers' stomach in order to gain the paycheck. There is much more tolerance and appreciation from the theatre participants/viewer to have a immersive experience with atmosphere, set, sound, choreography and now the taste aspects as well shall further building up the intimacy intra-action in between.

Traditional Theater's audience spectatorship needs to be readdressed in this juxtaposition. Enabling a turn from the passive spectator position to an active actor mode ideally. There will be a need to develop certain distinguishment between theatre-goer and restaurant-dinner, whether it might in form of pre-requirements and instructions towards the event participator or it can be simply motivated their participators to act to adjust themselves and fit into the event's atmosphere spontaneously.

# Chapter 2

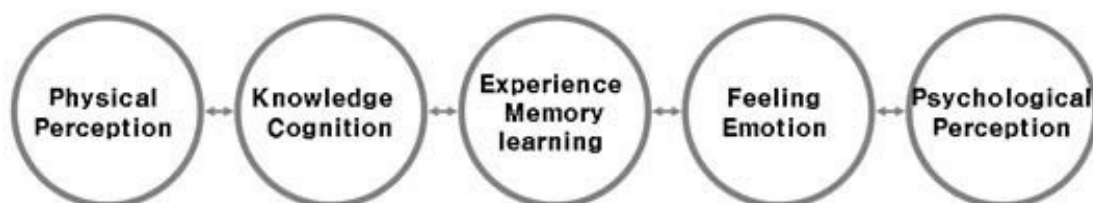
'FOOD' as new sensual stimuli in  
(Syn)aesthetic style performance.

(Syn)aesthetics derives from 'synaesthesia' (the Greek 'syn' meaning 'together' and aisthesis, meaning 'sensation' or 'perception'). 'Synaesthesia', and thus 'synaesthetic', is defined as a sensation in one part of the body produced by a stimulus applied to another part and further as the production of a sense-impression of one kind, of an associated mental image of a sense-impression of another kind. (Syn)aesthetics thus encompasses both a sensory experience and an aesthetic potential.

Performance is a medium which can encompass all of the senses, both in production and reception, and thus provides a complete (syn)aesthetic experience. Being a blend of many different artistic impulses, disciplines and techniques (word, movement, design, sound, light, dance, technology), it has the ability to communicate and affect in the greatest sense.

The (syn)aesthetic performance style is concerned with harnessing the full force of the imagination and in breaking down boundaries between the 'real' and the 'imaginable'. I argue that (syn)aesthetics is an aesthetic potential within performance which embraces the sensory experience, in both the process and the means of production, insofar as it consists of a blending of disciplines and techniques to create an interdisciplinary, inter-textual and multi-sensational work, coupled with a sensorial mode of appreciation affected within the audience resulting from exposure to such work.

Perception of flavor and visualization:



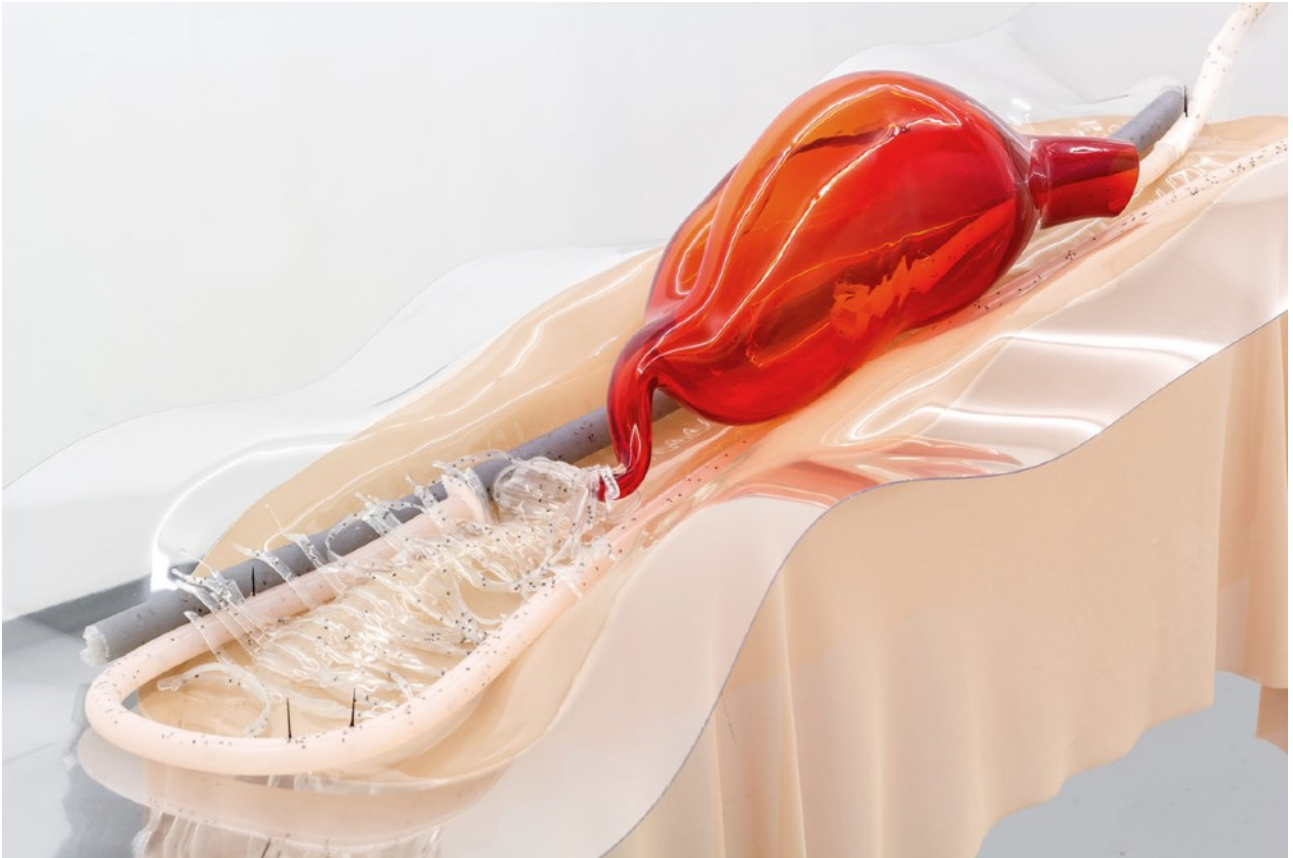
The visualization and feeling of flavors can be said to be processes of perception. When the process of perceiving objects is observed and tasted, objects are recognized by eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and skin, and this information is transmitted to the brain from optic, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile nerves. From the psychological aspect, it can be said that objects are felt rather than simply seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and touched.

It is my opinion that performance, due to the very nature of its 'liveness', and the fact that it is an amalgamation of all of the senses within a three-dimensional, heterogeneous form, reaches beyond the experience of sensations in singular (aural, visual, tactile, olfactory, oral).

The act of preparing and consuming food is ultimately (Syn)aesthetic. The fusion of (Syn)aeasthetic style performance further explore and magnified the joys and aesthetic immersion in simple culinary experience. As it celebrates the interface between, and flux within, linguistic, corporeal and technological praxis and can manipulate various combinations of performance texts to establish a special *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

## A return of sweetness

By Pakui Hardware



To what extent the sensual language can triggering the imagination and activate ones' Taste buds???

'A Return of the Sweetness' is an installation piece is the diverse usage of synthetic materials (such as heat-treated PVC, silicone, glass as well as chia seeds and sea urchin spikes.) effortlessly assembled, floating in the gallery space. Machinery 'flesh' and liveness which associated with certain human organ forms in an uncanny way. It toyed with the visual language of the anthropocene, in which notions of the natural world, human intervention and the technological have become irreversibly intertwined.

This art-work echoed with me as an absolute green-tea lover via its marvelous depiction of the sensational effect on the back of your tongue after the first sip of high-quality tea. This sensory experience of the come back of sweetness (津 salivary sweet) after the dry-bitter taste (涩-astringency) on the tongue is named (回 Hui 甘 Gan) in chinese. It is a great inspiration of taste-visualization from capturing a sensational moment and magnify it into an alternative realism and also being able to generate the beyond-language dialogue with the viewer.

*Metabolism is not personal. It is engineered. The metabolism of cells rewired to get more efficient, to grant them the ability to generate new products. Fuels, chemicals, foods, and drugs. Not entirely artificial, not wholly organic. Perfect enough to keep the engines running. Just make sure to keep the by-products in a dark dry place.*



**Great vegetables, great organs,  
greater economy. An apple a day  
keeps the doctor away. A dozen of  
apples might today. They say:  
“The great nutrition collapse” –  
pointing to the sky and to the soil.  
The atmosphere is changing the  
food we eat, for the worse. The  
atmosphere, you pig, how dare  
you. Our aubergines are large as  
ever. And so are our stomachs.  
They too constantly demand  
attention. They require being  
squeezed, divided, reduced,  
bypassed, monitored. They say:  
“Boost your metabolism” –  
pointing to green tea.  
The return of sweetness after the  
third cup of pu-erh is sublime.**



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# Orange Machine

(2019)

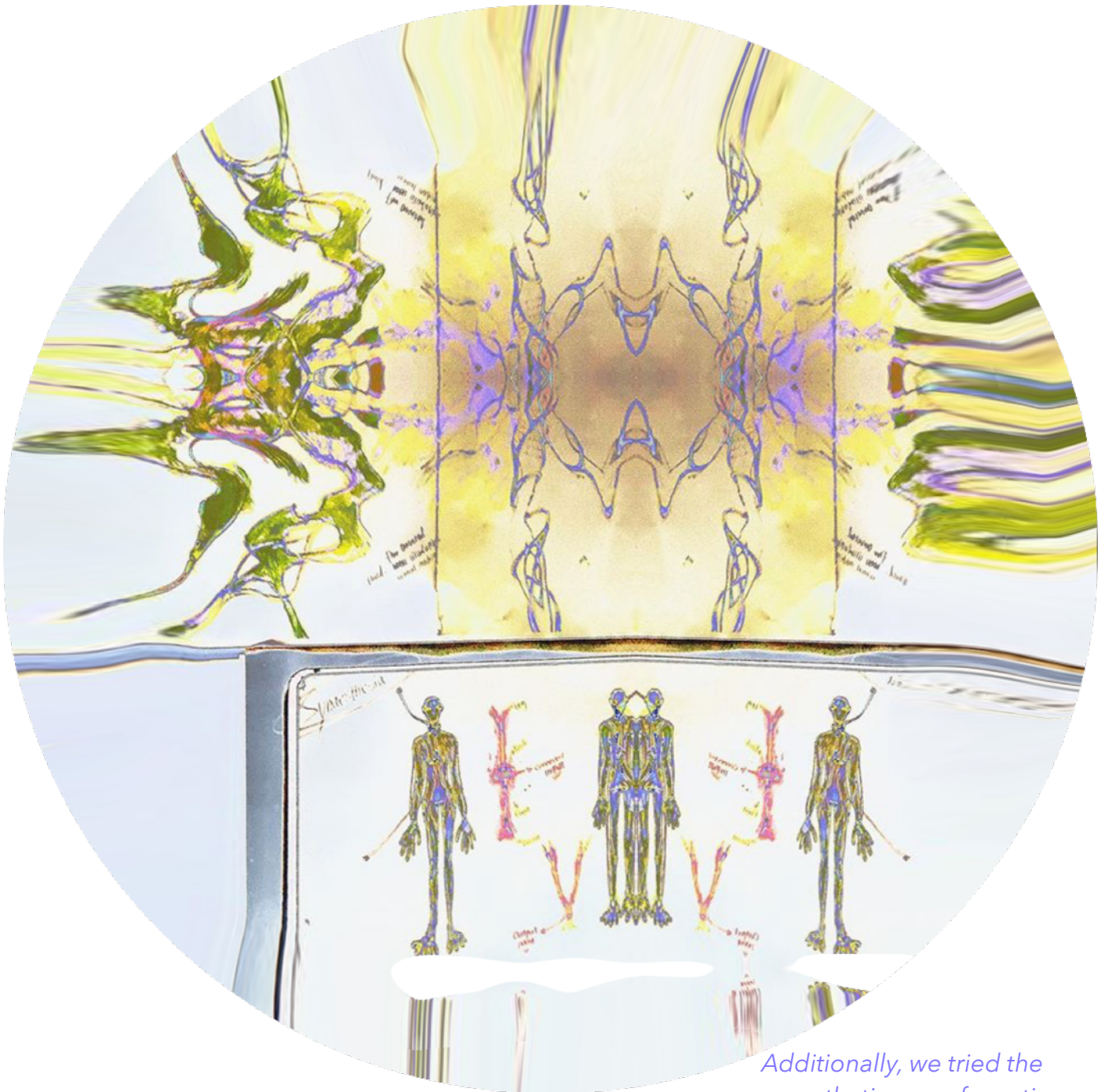
By YINUO x 00 Zhang



Photo collages all by me.

'Orange Machine' is the first choreography-oriented performance I did in 2019 for Tate exchange. This cross-disciplinary collaboration based on the study of psychological Synaesthesia and cybernetics theory to further explore and interpret the idea in forms of choreography and sculptural wise with dancers from Lambert.

We utilized our imagination in choreography process in case of personalized character forming for each dancer at the first stage. Try to 'turn' ourself from non-synesthete to Synesthete psychologically during rehearsals and attempted to use the choreography language and improvisational movement to capture what it is like to experience synesthesia from inside to outside in the final live performance in Tate.



*Additionally, we tried the synesthetic way of creative process onto other mediums to enhance the immersive effect in the performance; Costumes- water-circuit bodysuits, Props- water circulation machine, Atmosphere- citrusy air diffuser, Sound- Dj Live-set.*

# Chapter 3

## (Syn)aesthetic disturbance – Audience sensory reception

The physiological condition as documented by Luria encapsulate the (syn)aesthetic mode of appreciation within the field of performance. Fundamental to such an audience response is '**primitive sensitivity**', a 'visual quality of recall' and the experiencing of such work via an 'overall sense' where the somatic response dominates the semantic as 'images guide thinking, rather than thought itself being . . . dominant' (Luria, 1969: 28-116).

(Syn)aesthetic disturbance **defamiliarises** 'known' experience and causes a **(re)awakening** of both cerebral and corporeal memory. It thus has the potential to provide an audience member with a 'complete memory'. Also significant is the breaking down of the boundary between the real and the imaginary to provide a **(re)perception** of hidden state, of 'the invisible' which equates with the emergence of the (syn)aesthetic sixth-sense and the potential of visceral cognition. The 'real' is thus defamiliarised and perceived anew which accounts for the complete perception capable of being produced within the audience.

Crucial to my argument is the understanding that, **for a performance to be wholly (syn)aesthetic there must be an element of disturbance, of disquiet and (re)cognition, in (syn)aesthetic appreciation**. Steven C. Dubin describes 'disturbatory art' as that 'which is **confrontational**, in which there is an immediate connection between artist and audience (1992: 153). Disturbance and the idiosyncratic connection it forms between the audience and the work is an important factor in the appreciation strategy of the (syn)aesthetic style.

Norbert Servos' argument for a 'theatre of experience' helps to clarify the disturbatory impact of this complete experience within the (syn)aesthetic style. He describes **theatre 'as a communication of the senses'** where the work presented is 'made *experienceable*' (1998: 38-9, emphasis original). With (syn)aesthetic performance work, '**passive reception is impossible**' (Servos, 1998: 39), *because* it fuses the senses with sense. The double-edged rendering of making-sense/sense-making within performance means that the performance 'does not anaesthetise the senses. It sharpens them'. As a result the spectator 'is included in a total experience . . . in a state of sensual excitement'

The (syn)aesthetic style denies a single accepted valuation as the nature of the work presented strongly favours individual reaction and appreciation. It is a process of interpretation which **prioritises complete perception**, engaging the senses, the imagination. Consequently, a personal, innate response is respected over accepted codes of analysis and judgement.

# Chambers of Flavor

Immersive dining

By Gingerline



It's not themed dining or dressed up waiters or a bit of styling, it's more about story-telling with food. Chambers of Flavor is about engaging all your senses and your sense of imagination to get to immerse in the adventure. The team uses the structure of a five-course meal to present the theatrical experience. It's difficult to separate the experience from the food, because the food is an integrated part of a larger story being told.

**Secret Location:** Participants only discover the location one hour beforehand, and have no idea what they will see, hear or eat until they arrived.

**Multi-verse:** This is dining at its most immersive, matching each course, each flavour even, to the guests' surroundings. It genuinely feels like entering a parallel reality. Past events have seen guests travel by boat into enchanted forests, soar above the skies in Air Gingerline, dine with aliens; to move through small spaces with some crawling and sliding into each 'dimension'.

**Guide by performers:** The performers encountered during the two-hour experience are kept on their toes by the very nature of their roles and keep the audience moving through well without it ever feeling as though they are being rushed. The willingness of the audience to get involved is integral to the experience, and each performer manages this need well without making the audience uncomfortable.

**The desire for adventure,** risk, spontaneity is what is driving the demand for immersive experiences; whether that's cinema, dining, or theatrics. To be a true adventure there needs to be a taste of the unexpected, a narrative holding the experience together with changes of pace and peaks of action, and enough drama to create memorable moments for guests to take away.

# Aerobanquets RMX

Augmented Culinary experience

By Mattia Casalegno



>>Aerobanquets RMX is an art project consisting of multi- sensorial tasting events. It brings out the question that how contemporary technologies might revolutionize food consumption in the near future? Below showcases participant's responses towards this intro-perspective and solitary experiences in a virtual/ mixed reality.>>

## Character Confusion :

“Mattia Casalegno’s meal (show? experience?) places its participant (player? diner?) in a virtual reality landscape, across a range of scenes. And in each one, they’re presented with a small object, floating in VR, that they must eat while wearing the headset to continue the meal. Each dish resembles a small alien jewel, seemingly organic and luminescent, and compelling to eat in the same way a Tide Pod is. Seven bite-sized courses, and a smattering of pre- and post-show hors d’oeuvres and desserts. ”

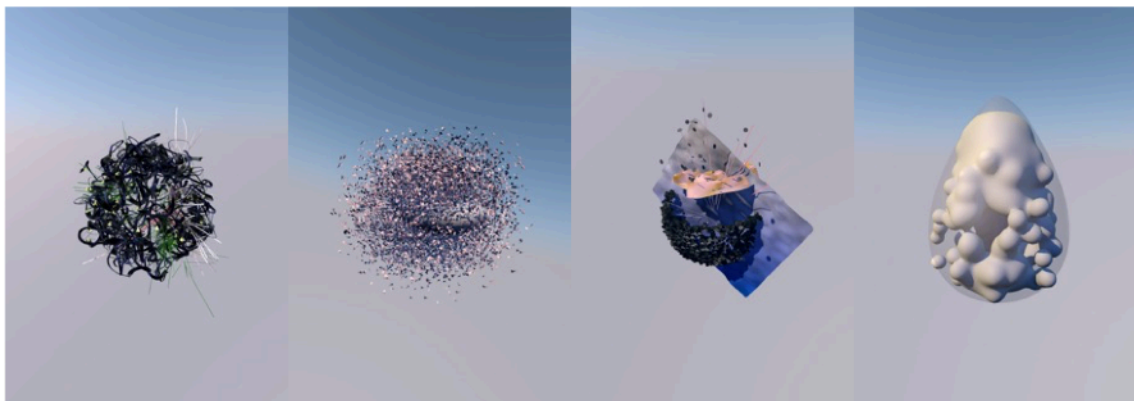


### **Felt Solitary & Lost fun of food sharing:**

“The experience felt isolating and lonely, in a deliberate and thought provoking way. The joys of the dinner table are often largely in sharing food. The act of dining out at a fine restaurant is an act of receiving the chef’s vision as much as it is an act of sharing and empathy. By divorcing food from that context and connection, eating out loses some of its joy and meaning.

### **Seamlessly Immersed In VR:**

The medium of virtual reality doesn’t go unscrutinized by Aerobanquets RMX either. Through the act of taking a virtual object into your physical body, all boundaries seem to collapse. The technology is remarkable, with hacked Oculus controllers becoming fully trackable plates, and perfectly smooth hand tracking allowing for seamless integration into the virtual world. As the surface of my hands shifted textures with each course, I felt like I was melting into the virtual world, and each bite was making me more a part of that space, like Persephone and the Underworld.”



But the surrounding stimuli created a seamless culinary illusion to great effect. I was thinking about what I was eating in more detail than I ever did in my day-to-day life. ”

**Human Cognitive Error** : “...When I was told I was eating the dreams of a piglet, squealing musical instruments made of meat rained from the sky. I was positive I was being guilted for my consumption of a pork meatball; however, it turned out to be a vegan substitute meat. The dreams of a piglet, indeed.”

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