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REPORT
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MASTER OF ARTS (VISUAL ARTS)

ABSTRACT

Research into the nature of food performance, within a restaurant context.

A study taking the form of photographic documentation of two performances held on the 11 and 18 of October, 1998, exhibited at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from February 5 to 18 1999, which comprises the outcome of the studio Practice component, together with the Report, which documents the course of the study undertaken.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks and gratitude to my various supervisors and consultants.

Textile workshop: Valerie Kirk, Jennifer Robinson, Annie Trevillian, Jill Pettifer.

Sculpture workshop: David Watt.

Art Theory: Ann Brennan, Mary Roberts.

Course Convener: Nigel Lendon

Food Consultant: Janet Jeffs and staff at Juniperberry Restaurant

Photography: Alan Benson

Graphics for performance menu: Nadiah Kanaway

Theatre Consultant: Roland Manderson.

Jane Barney, Director Canberra Contemporary Art Space

My heartfelt thanks to my partner Janet Jeffs for her faith and support in many ways.

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Introduction

I completed a Graduate Diploma in the textiles workshop in 1995 at the Canberra School of Art. In my studio work I was concerned with the relationship between text made flesh, through the tattooing process, and the text in textiles. During this course, I began working on the AVL Computer Dobby 16 shaft loom to produce a stitched double cloth with the intention of burning away parts of the top layer through the process of Devore. Lesley Mitchison, a visiting textile artist from Britain, introduced me to this technique. Devore is a method of applying a paste to burn away fibre. The weaving of two layers of mixed fibres together, as in a double cloth, enables a scaffold construction to hold the fabric together when the Devore paste burns away one layer.

My focus during this period was in using language as a metaphor for 'bodily inscription'. I started to burn words into my fabric which questioned the construction of gender through language. The consideration of 'my body' as 'the body' in the relationship between image, text, textiles and the body led me to produce autobiographical work. The articulation regarding my private body text into my public textile work was only made possible from a growing consciousness of my position in a wider art context. Research undertaken within the Graduate Diploma enabled me to build a scaffold on which to hang further applications within my art practice.

I started work as a chef at Juniperberry Restaurant, Canberra upon completing the Graduate Diploma in August 1995. I had been invited to apply for the Masters by Coursework but I needed employment for a year to afford to continue studying. The nature of the restaurant and my role there was to become the framework for my studio work and research when I returned to study in 1997. During 1996, I was able to observe closely the relationship between taste and distaste and the conventions of fine dining, while working in the restaurant. I need to explain that Juniperberry is a small 35 seat fine dining restaurant. The existence of an open kitchen meant that the staff acted as both performers and objects in the diner's experience. I was also able to observe the diner's behaviour at the table. My interest centred around the construction of manners and 'taste', within a dining context.

In early 1997 I was invited by the curators, Ted Gott and Jim Logan, to show selected work from my Graduate Diploma in an exhibition with ex de medici called "Indelible". The exhibition was held at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne from 24 January to 2 March. It was a pivotal exhibition in terms of professional art practice for me. It was the first time I had to seriously think about the implications of showing work grown from a traditional craft medium in a contemporary art context. My artist's talk at the opening focused on the acquisition of language as branding words and how the meaning of certain words may change either over time or is dependant on the context in which it is used.

The experience of showing work in this context and my next group show in April 1997 were almost at opposite ends of the spectrum. I showed work with Kylie Nadin and Hahn Ngo which was textile based in an exhibition called "Corps" at the Craft Council of ACT Gallery in Canberra. It was disheartening to watch people come in and leave in disgust because the work wasn't perceived to be sufficiently about 'craft'. I learnt to be particular about the context in which to show my work from this experience.

Pigtales

Masters by Coursework 1997

In 1997 I was accepted into the Masters by Coursework. The first semester I undertook full-time. Studio practice units 7 and 8 were taken through both the sculpture and textile workshops with Co-supervision from David Watt and Valerie Kirk. The first core theory unit 'Arguing Objects' was taught by Ann Brennan, the course Co-ordinator, and Mary Roberts.

The focus of the studio practice units was the exploration of the relationship between the body, textiles and dining. My general aim in this semester was to research both historical and contemporary artists who were working with food in a performative context. This research was an intentional attempt to find a context in which to base my work. My focus was on the metaphor of the pig to explore dichotomies of 'taste' and 'distaste' within a restaurant context.

Studio Practice

I spent time sample printing with Annie Trevillian in textiles printing with a mixture of pig's blood and dye. This wasn't very successful due to the rapid coagulation of the blood which made it hard to print through a silk screen. Some samples were made with photographic screens as a means of printing image and text. Samples were also made using the heat transfer press which I used to produce the menus onto cloth for the later performances.

I was originally interested in using the pig as a device to convey dichotomies of taste and distaste. Christianity depicts the pig in moral terms as an animal of disgust. It is associated with greed and sloth. The pig represents violations of taste, bad manners and boorishness. The pig eats and digests garbage and excrement from human households. For a person to be fat and unruly in manner or speech is to invite comparison to a pig swine, hog or grunter. In Italian culture to call your mother a "Porca Madonna" is one of the worst possible insults.

The pig's proverbial dirtiness comes less from its actual habits than its symbolic location in a place of ambiguity that marks boundaries between nature and culture. More than most other domestic animals, the pig blurs the line between the animal and the human because it lives in such close proximity to human households and because its habits- eating human garbage- align it so intimately with human life. This ambiguity is heightened by the use of pig's hearts in the maintenance of human life through heart transplants.

I was interested in the term "gargantuan appetite" and only became aware through reading Margaret Visser (The Rituals of Dinner) that Gargantua was the name of a giant from a C16th book by Rabelais. David Watt suggested I read the original which set me on a path of complete obsession with the book. In Mikhail Bakhtin's "Rabelais and His World" Gargantua is a baby giant with abominable manners whose grotesque body exaggerates it's processes, bulges and orifices. It is a body focused on the lower stratum through the actions of eating, drinking, defecating and copulating. The Kantian classical body privileges the upper stratum of the body; the head, eyes and

GASTROLATER'S DINNER

26 MAY 1997

SAUSAGES WILL BE
SAUSAGES

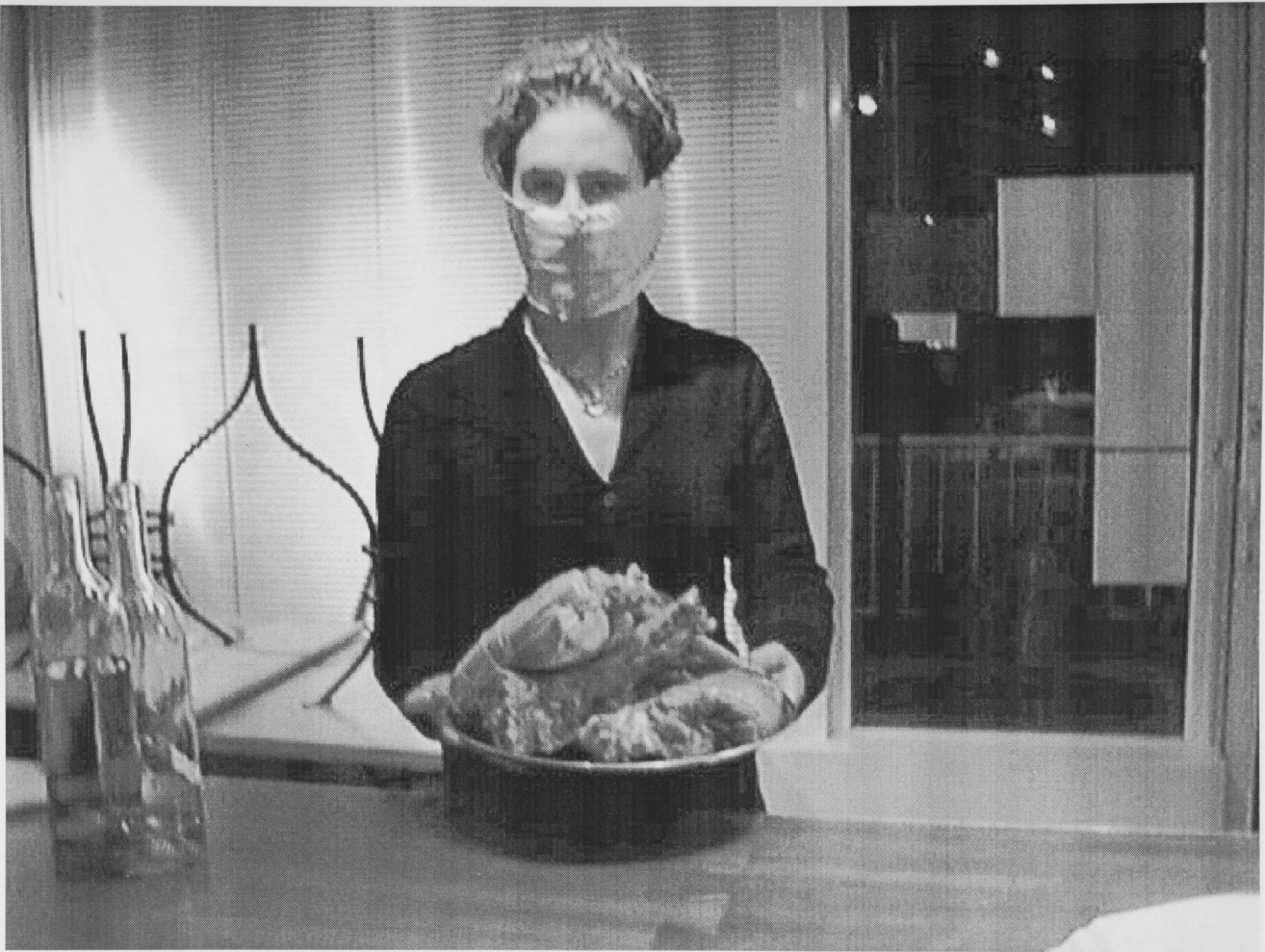
FAT PIC STEW

LOIN OF PORCA MADONNA

FLAVOUR OF THE
SHAPE



GASTROLATER'S DINNER 26 MAY 1997

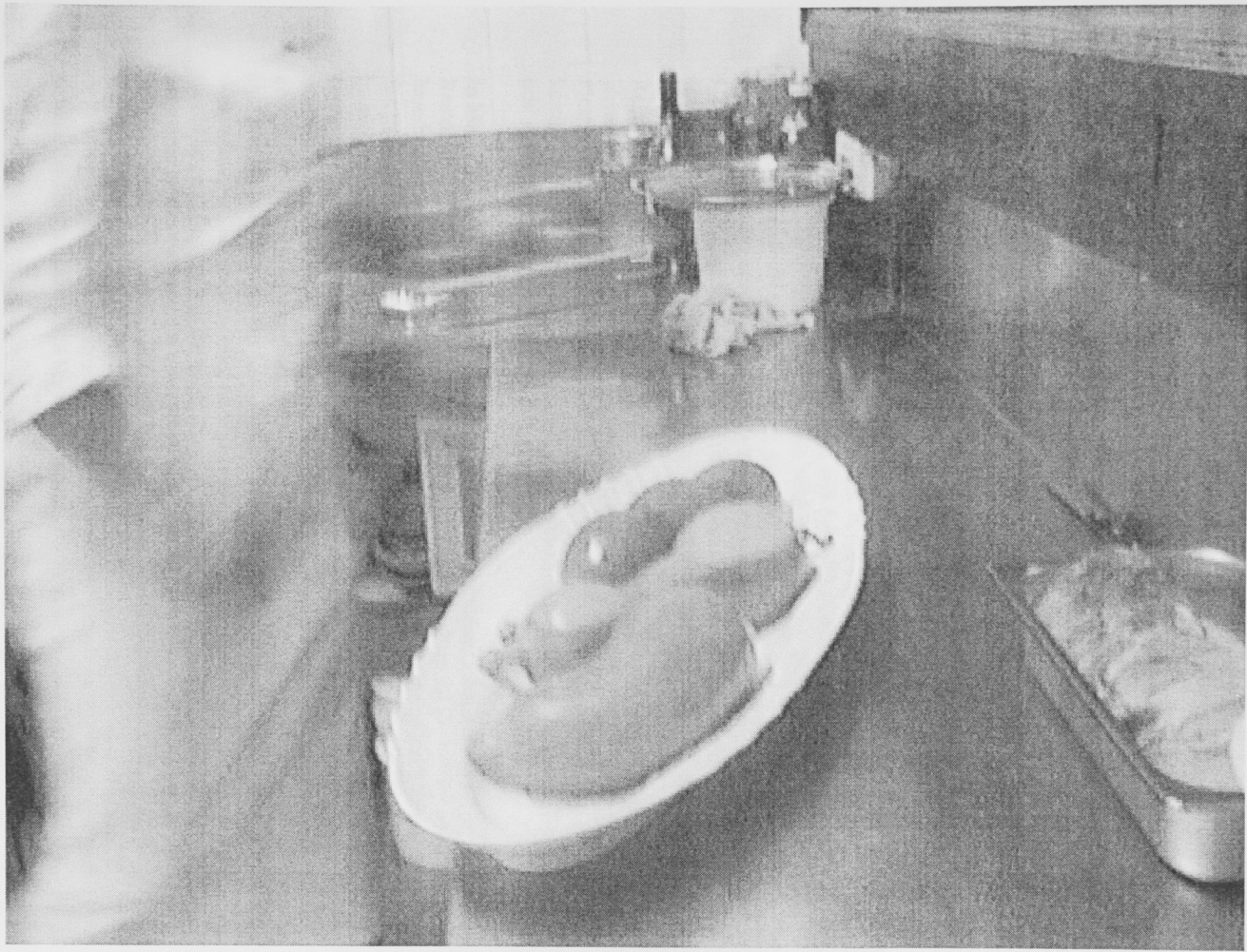


WAITER WITH FAT PIG STEW/ GASTROLATER'S DINNER 1997



TABLE/ GASTROLATER'S DINNER 1997





THE FLAVOUR OF THE SHAPE/ GASTROLATER'S DINNER 1997

faculties of reason. Gargantua's grotesque body exaggerates process and change, breaking down the boundaries between the self and the world outside it.¹

Bakhtin discusses the individual grotesque body as belonging to the collective body of the carnivalesque. Originally, carnival was a period of flesh eating before Lent. In Rabelais's time, the carnivalesque involved actual performances and events which used the cultural tools of the dominant classes in order to degrade and mock the forms of high culture. These events in the 16th century included festivals and rites like "The Feast of Fools" and "The Feast of the Ass". The carnivalesque is not mere play but involves matters of social importance such as struggles over social and political power, the material over the abstract, and the communal over the individual.

In Rabelais' Fourth book from "The Heroic Deeds of Gargantua and Pantagruel", he describes a battle between the sausage people and the warrior cooks. The warrior cooks have hidden inside a giant wooden sow in the manner of a Trojan horse. The sow is stuffed with the food stuffers who will fight the stuffed sausages. During the ensuing battle, the queen of the sausages, who is a flying pig, drops mustard on the battlefield and flies off crying "carnival, carnival".²

Rabelais makes his sausage people a carnivalesque construct. They possess irrational and unpredictable behaviour; yet their bodily shape and texture makes their belligerence laughable. The sausages are dominated by their "bodily lower stratum".

Rabelais' warrior cooks are named with carnivalesque humour which zigzags between physiological and psychological attitudes to food:-

Fleshsmith, Cramgut, FritterFryer, Mouldy Crust, Lick Finger, Sauce Doctor, Red herring, Scrap merchant, Tit bit, Sirloin, Jacket liner, Thick bawn, Swill broth, Toss pot, etc (161 names)³

In May 1997 I decided to produce a sketch for a performance at Juniperberry Restaurant. The menu was based on the pig and the placenames on the napery were based on the warriorcooks from Rabelais' book. It was called a Gastrolater's Dinner. Six people were invited to attend to provide me with feedback. My main aim was to investigate the difference between a theme dinner and a performance within a restaurant context. I wasn't sure of the difference between the two and what exactly I needed to do to construct a performance. My practical concerns were how to script, cost, time and document such an event. My intention was to structure the dinner so that the audience became the performance, rather than spectators. In regards to documentation, although filming on video may affect the diners behaviour, I thought it would be useful to analyse the event later on film. I was also interested in the behaviour of diner's around a communal dining table and if this could be inverted within a restaurant context, although the people I had invited all knew one another and this would possibly be different with strangers. No cutlery was to be given as a device to go against the construction of manners. The napery was giant sized and tied around the diner's necks when they were seated, in the manner of a Rabelian giant.

¹ Bahktin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World* p 303

² Rabelais. *The Heroic Deeds of Gargantua and Pantagruel* p569

³ Rabelais opp cit p567

This is the menu from the Gastrolaters Dinner 26 May 1997:

SAUSAGES WILL BE SAUSAGES

Pinwheels of sausages placed in the centre of the table is a reference to the warriorcooks and the sausage people from Rabelais. The warriorcooks eat the sausage people, in the end declaring that "sausages will be sausages". The sausage intestine pinwheel is a traditional way to present porkmeat.

FAT PIG STEW

A communal stew of pork trotters, pork belly and pigtails inviting excess. I was curious whether the diner would find such an obvious display of pig body parts distasteful.

LOIN OF PORCA MADONNA

Loin of pork wrapped in 6 layers of muslin and passed around the table in the manner of "pass the parcel". Each layer of cloth is printed with a directive for the diner to read and act upon. Some of the directives included:-

Draw a cipher of gluttony on your serviette
Quaff your wine and shout "Drink! Drink!"
Throw a red herring into the conversation
Suck the fingers of the person sitting opposite you
Stretch your skin tight by stuffing it
Lick your plate clean

The muslin cloths were then hung up around the table. The sauce for the meat was wrung out through a tammy cloth, a traditional way to filter a sauce, and passed over the loin of pork.

FLAVOUR OF THE SHAPE

Jelly flavoured with fruit juice and vodka was set in balloons to resemble large intestines, then, cut open at the table with scissors. This is a reference to a traditional banqueting strategy of cutting open an animal body to release something else inside.

Feedback

After discussion from the diners the general consensus was that the work sat on the border ; it needed to be pushed further into the codes and construction of fine dining, or further against it. Not enough information was given regarding the Rabelais references; the diner had no other context for the food other than it was pork based and there was a lot of it. Structurally, the beginning and ending was awkward; not clearly defined. I had granted the diner too much autonomy (because they were all familiar to me), instead of directing more clearly. It was generally agreed the music and lighting could have been emphasised more as I had made the diners too comfortable by having 'typical' restaurant music playing. The muslin cloth used to

wrap the food worked well but could have been used in a more theatrical way; the "pass- the -parcel" was a little slow and would have worked better as multiple directives involving several diners simultaneously. The documentation with the video camera and tripod was awkward and hindered movement around the table and I felt that photographic documentation would have been sufficient.

Overall, it was extremely difficult to act as a director/photographer/cook and host all at once. More support was required to divide these roles successfully. Basically, I concluded that I did not have the skills needed to produce a theatrical event in the environment I was used to working in, although the exercise was only possible because of my affiliation with the restaurant and the generosity of the people I work with. I felt I could not remove myself from my work as a restaurant chef to produce a performance within a restaurant context. I felt naive about the difference between producing a spectacle for an audience's consumption and producing an event where the audience becomes part of the performance and as such is responsible for what they get from it.

I was unsure what direction I wanted to take the studio work in after this unit and decided to concentrate on one art theory unit in second semester.

BEING FED

I studied the two art theory core units in 1997. They were presented by Mary Roberts and Ann Brennan. As I had not come up through an undergraduate degree I felt I had gaps in my ability to interpret and analyse works of art and their context. I attended the study skills centre in an effort to obtain help with my writing skills as assessment for these units was essay based.

In my first major essay for the unit 'Arguing Objects' I analysed and compared two banquet menus from the papers of the Symposiums of Australian Gastronomy located in the National Library. It was useful for me to research the term "gastronomy" and the historical context of banquets in general. I also discussed the signification of 'taste' within this context.

One of the banquets I discussed was the "Body dinner" from the 7th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy held in Canberra in 1993. This banquet was co-presented by Gay Bilson and Janni Kyritisis at the National Gallery of Australia for the opening of the Surrealists exhibition.

The banquet menu from this symposium is cited as an exemplary marker within Australian gastronomic history. It is not cited as being 'performance art'. The grammar of the menu, which was not presented until after the meal, was of gradual dismemberment of the body. The table was laid with the entrails of several beasts which had been stitched together by Janni Kyritisis. These were rolled up and removed when all the guests were seated. Without a written menu the diners were left with their senses to decide what they were eating.

This is the menu presented after dining from the "Body Dinner "7th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy, National Gallery of Australia, 1993.

MENU

STOMACH

EGG

FLESH

BONE

SKIN

BLOOD

HEART

MILK

FRUIT

Guests were blindfolded as the dinner progressed to the fruits and cereals, signifying a turning point in the proceedings. The blindfolds were removed to the sight of a bandage swathed girl covered in figs and grapes in the centre of the table. The waiters were also fitted with this theatrical device of bandages, removing themselves from their customary role. The presentation of the written menu after dining, placed an emphasis on the sensory reading. It also short circuited a written menus' ability to predetermine expectations and it's power to evoke taste. I particularly liked the brevity of the language used for this menu which does not inform the diner in any detail of what they had eaten. I used a similar one word description for the printed menus in the "Restorative, Digestion, Desired" performance dinners in October 1998.

The placement of this dinner within an art gallery and at the opening of a major art exhibition ensured it's success as a measure of culinary sophistication. The ticket cost of \$100 invites the event to be seen as an elite symbol of exclusivity. However, the presentation of this event through the Symposium of Australian Gastronomy leads it to be seen in historical banquet terms and less as art performance.

Gay Bilson has been involved in several projects labelled as performance events since the "Body Dinner" of 1993. They have elements of commonality: outdoor events, large scale, and simple food sold to diners at relatively little cost.

The performances are:

The Solstice Supper Alfred Park Sydney 21 June 1997

The Upstart Gruel for the Beggar's Banquet 18-28 April 1996

Loaves and Fishes Adelaide Festival March 1998⁴

The Solstice Supper was presented through the Sydney Performance Space; which had been allocated money from Sydney City Council to mount a community event in Alfred Park to celebrate the winter solstice.

Three hundred clay wrapped food parcels were produced which were sold for \$5 and baked in a communal fire. Approx 800 people attended the event. The perimeter of the park was marked by Anne Graham's triangular white tent sails.

⁴ I am unfortunately unable to comment on this performance as I have no written information at this time.

This public feeding was based on an earlier communal meal in Alfred Park, Co-ordinated by Victoria Spence, called "The Upstart Gruel for the Beggar's Banquet". A Congee Broth was served to anyone who asked for it (over 250 people), for free. The broth was stretched out in a parody of the loaves and fishes amongst the tents installed by Anne Graham. This event was held as part of "A progressive Dinner: A Conference and Performance event exploring Food and Culture", held through the Performance Space, Sydney. Another installation and performance work presented at this conference was "Mediterranean Symphony of the Senses" by Alicia Rios, a Spanish performance artist. Gay Bilson describes this work in a review of A Progressive Dinner⁵:

"Rios had transformed The Performance Space's theatre into a collective sensory composition through which we wandered in suspended enchantment. By curiously touching, smelling, listening, looking and tasting, we became complicit enliveners of its secrets: we placed our hands into a dark box and were washed with Mediterranean water complete with sponge; we opened vials and smelled walls, balconies and terraces, gardens, orchards, paths, and the sea, homes and the private smells of the Mediterranean boudoir and drawer; we touched sand and stones, we blew clay instruments and clacked castanets, and listened to a soundtrack by a Spanish composer, Jacobo Duran-Loriga. We looked for each set of sensory collections through a gentle centre of coloured streamers and found sentimental objects from her Mediterranean childhood. And we ate the relief of the goddess Athena.

Athena, Alicia's Athena, the goddess who produced a fully-grown olive tree in a contest with Poseidon, was made of Spanish foods: chorizo, Bacala, pimento. Her skin was made of melons and her hair was all plump grapes. Tomatoes gilded the folds and chick peas, red onion and garlic dressed her shape. She was solid and sweet and inviting and edible. She was moist with Spanish olive oil. She was two and a half metres tall and a metre and a half wide, and she was hardly Athena by the close of the evening. We had eaten Alicia's Spain and she was pleased."

This was the first contemporary food performance I had read about that consciously employed all the senses as a device with which to absorb what was presented.

Second Semester 1997

In my second core theory unit essay I discussed the 'Grotesque' body and how this might be used as one model with which to interpret the 'Body' exhibition held at the NSW Art Gallery from 13 Sept to 16 Nov 1997.⁶

In this essay I was able to discuss Rabelais and the carnivalesque. Mikhail Bakhtin in "Rabelais and his World", places the grotesque body within the context of carnival. Carnival is a legitimate social tradition which is an expression of popular culture contesting the institutions and structures of authority. It does this through devices of inversion and parody. Carnival events do not acknowledge any distinction between the actors and the spectators. The events are not to be seen by people but rather to be lived in.

Susan Stewart in "On Longing"⁷, discusses the difference between the spectacle of the grotesque body and the grotesque body of carnival as being primarily one of spatial

⁵ Bilson, Gay Review of A Progressive Dinner Object 2/96

⁶ Bond, Anthony (Ed) Body Art Gallery of NSW

difference. The grotesque body of carnival engages in a structure of "democratic reciprocity" with the audience. "That is a space of dialogue exists with objects in front of our line of perception rather than the space above us, occupied by authority, or the space below, to which we condescend, or the space behind us, invisible and threatening".⁸

By contrast, the viewer of the spectacle of the grotesque remains aware of the distance between the self and the spectacle; there is no dialogue between the two. The spectacle only results in speculation, as opposed to Bakhtin's grotesque body of carnival and it's 'democratic reciprocity'. The 'spectacle of the grotesque' could be applied to Mike Parr's installation of video performances in the 'Body' exhibition. The elicitation of a certain response from the viewer is obtained by the employment of a voyeuristic strategy: a mini darkened theatre. The viewer is sucked in by the spectacle of bodily inscription upon the screen. While being emotionally engaged in a direct response to the work, a distancing from it is also set up. It remains theatrical, a staged event. The spectacle doesn't speak back, it exists to be spoken about. The strategy of presenting the work in a darkened theatre, positions Tony Bond, the curator, as showman, inviting the viewer to engage in a voyeuristic process.

I think that food performances can be classified as events using Susan Stewart's model of the 'democratic reciprocity of carnival' when the audience becomes the performance; this is especially evident in Alicia Rios' "Mediterranean Symphony of the Senses". Gay Bilson's 'Body Dinner' of 1993 can be read as employing devices from the 'spectacle of the grotesque' and by doing so contains the audience as consumers of a theatrical event.

STUDIO PRACTICE 1998

Studio Practice unit 9 was taken in the textile workshop. I had shifted focus from my original intention in 1997 to utilise performance as a means of combining my interest in the Body, textiles and the rituals of dining. The two core theory units undertaken in 1997 were instrumental in this decision through the reading regarding the body and craft practice. I didn't feel confident enough in my ability to be able to craft a performance as either an actor or director.

My proposal this semester was to produce a series of woven placemats for a dining table which I viewed as being props for an installation with food. The placemats would define each person as separate and self sufficient as possible under the unification of the table. This was to be based on the colour red; red cloth ,red wine and red meat. I was interested in the idea of the digestion of protein, through the application of the Devore process onto protein fibres. Sampling was done on woven double cloth using wool and cotton. Jennifer Robertson, the weaving lecturer in the textiles workshop, provided much needed technical advice for this period of research and sampling.

⁷ Stewart, Susan On longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection

⁸ Stewart, Susan Oppcit p 107

The text used to devour the fabric was based on ideas of disgust/distaste. I was particularly interested in the book "The Anatomy of Disgust" by William Ian Miller. He defines disgust as being unpleasant to the taste.

"Disgust names a syndrome in which all terms have their proper role. They all convey a strong sense of aversion to something perceived as dangerous because of its powers to contaminate, infect or pollute by proximity, contact, or ingestion."⁹ The text I intended using was taken from Rabelais and were words that defined the 'grotesque body of carnival': crusty, smelly, slimy, loose, leaky, split, squishy, wiggly, gooey, wet.

By the end of the first semester 1998 I had become disillusioned with my textile work and the limited capacity to express more than just the tactile in terms of the sensory. I felt I had placed myself in a secure position by reinventing old work by using the Devore process on woven cloth and text. In my assessment it was suggested that the work was intended as props for a performance it needed to become more theatrical, otherwise a 'placemat is just a placemat'.

After this I was a participant in a workshop called the "Chemical Treatment of Fabric" in July 1998 at the textile workshop. It was taught by Joy Boutrup, a lecturer from the Denmark Design School. The workshop concentrated on lycrimping, felting and reactive resist dyes. It was useful to be taught the chemistry behind the different methods of fabric treatment. I produced samples of chemical treatment onto handwoven and commercial cloth as a research resource. I can anticipate that the techniques I learned in this workshop will be used on napery for future performances or installations.

Being fed Again

"EAT!" the food exhibition was held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney April- June 1998. It was an exhibition curated by Ben Curnow exploring the connections between Contemporary Art and Food. It was extremely interesting for me to see the work exhibited within this contemporary art context. Daniel Spoerri's "Eaten partly by visitors to the 3rd Biennale of Sydney "1979, was an assemblage of a screenprinted tablecloth, glassware and chinaware from a meal eaten by the visitors to the Biennale. The work is a re-worked prop from an actual performance; the prop is remade into an independent work. Spoerri founded Eat Art Gallery in Dusseldorf in the 1970's which showed the work of artists that was food related. I was interested to see how this particular work stood independently from its performance beginning.

The other major exhibition I attended at this time was "Read my Lips" 6 June-9 August 1998, National Gallery of Australia.

The exhibition featured work by Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman. I was particularly interested in the work of Cindy Sherman from the late 1990's which explore the ugly, the grotesque and the abject. Katherine Weir, the curator of the exhibition:

⁹ Miller, William The Anatomy of Disgust p 2

"The body disintegrates into limbs and viscera, becomes a mere reflection amid the food remains and vomit, or disappears entirely in formal studies of mould and decomposition".¹⁰

The photographs become an investigation of the viewer's disgust and revulsion in reaction to the grotesque fragmented body. Sherman's disappearance into fragmentation and ambiguity of gender, in the work 'untitled #184 (1988) and #255 (1992), represents the grotesque body in a state of flux.

Julia Kristeva in her essay "Powers of Horror" (1980) defines this abject body as one that partakes of both inside/outside but is not clearly identified with either. Disgust with the abjected body stems from this ambiguous opposition.

"It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order; what does not respect borders, positions, rules."¹¹

While I was interested in reading material about the abject body I consciously decided not to pursue this direction in my performance work later.

SECOND SEMESTER 1998

In July, I was invited to submit a proposal for a 'food performance' by Jane Barney (Director, Canberra Contemporary Art Space). The work to be produced as part of the "Inside Out" Festival due to be held in October 1998.

I decided my proposal for the Festival could be used as the basis of my last remaining studio practice unit. It was a way I could extend and consolidate themes established in units 7 and 8 undertaken in the sculpture and textile workshops and themes developed through my work in the kitchen, at Juniperberry Restaurant. Nigel Lendon suggested I pursue this last unit as a research unit. It became a multidisciplinary project with supervision from Nigel Lendon, Valerie Kirk, and Mary Roberts.

In my proposal submitted to CCAS I suggested producing a performance dinner to whet the appetite and to aid the digestion. It was to be an investigation into stimulating the appetite and pleasuring the palate through the activation of the senses of touch, smell and taste. I was interested in the various manifestos produced by the Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti which were to form the background of the performances.

Marinetti and the Futurists were interested in the hypothetical concept of Synaesthesia in which the stimulation of one sense can cause a subjective response in another sense. For example: Scriabin built a colour organ in an attempt to convert music into visual images; Kandinsky considered the relationship of sound and colour; Kupka wrote of the relationship of movement to the sensory centres; Arthur Rimbaud correlated the alphabet with colours and Erik Satie was able to interpret music as colour. Each Synaesthetic coupling is personal and automatic. In terms of performance, Marinetti spoke of the need to "symphonize the public sensibility" through using a variety of sensory elements although not always with the objective of harmonious integration.¹²

¹⁰ Weir, Katherine [Read my Lips](#) Catalogue p 10

¹¹ Kristeva, Julia [The Portable Kristeva](#) p 232

¹² Kirby, Michael [Futurist Performance](#) p 100

Marinetti's views on the audience's role in performances is documented through various manifestos. In "manifesto of Futurist Playwrights" published in January 1911, he outlines the Futurists' attitude toward the audience as: "everything that is immediately applauded is certainly not superior to the average intelligence and is, therefore, mediocre, banal, re-vomited and too-well digested".¹³ This attitude to the audience is elaborated and expanded in later manifestos.

In "The Variety Theatre", published Oct 1913, Marinetti advocates the removal of the "Fourth Wall", a convention of drama in which the actor performs in a room with three real walls and an imaginary Fourth wall, asking the audience to remain passive spectators. Marinetti wanted to remove the separation between the audience and the presentation. The physical involvement of the spectator in variety theatre was admired by him, especially where the audience helped to create a particular quality of theatrical experience. In "The Variety Theatre" manifesto, Marinetti suggests several ways the audience might become part of the performance - the use of itching and sneezing powders, coating the seats with glue, and selling the same seat to two or more people. These occurrences were to be sufficient in themselves without representing anything else.

In "The Variety Theatre" manifesto, Marinetti sets up the distinction between conventional theatre and the experience of variety theatre. Variety theatre exalts action, dexterity, and the authority of instinct and intuition. It is in direct opposition to what Marinetti calls the psychology of conventional theatre with its ambitions, feelings, emotions and drives. Marinetti terms the response to variety theatre "Body Madness" or "Fisicofollia". In variety theatre the immediate presence of a certain physical activity or action is enough to create an experience for the spectator. The "Body Madness" Marinetti refers to is both intense and non-rational. He opposes the elaboration of interpretation of conventional theatre and advocates a performance that maximises the sensory dimensions and minimises the intellectual aspects. Like the carnivalesque, variety theatre can be seen as an expression of popular culture; both emphasise the exaggerated, excessive and transgressive body. Marinetti's removal of the 'fourth wall', like the body of carnival, positions the audience in the space of Stewart's 'democratic reciprocity' with the actors.

Marinetti also proposed a 'Tactile Theatre' that focused primarily upon the sense of touch. He created displays, which he called "tactile tables" that were intended to be felt rather than be seen possessing a variety of textures and surface qualities. In "Tactilism", a manifesto published in Jan 1921, Marinetti distributes tactile qualities into categories and scales. Marinetti's Tactile Theatre was to be composed of long moving bands or turning wheels to be touched by the spectators. Also other senses besides that of touch were to be activated. As the wheel moved there would be accompaniments of music and light to the different textual rhythms and tactile qualities.¹⁴

In 1932, more than 20 years after publication of the first Futurist manifesto Marinetti wrote "La Cucina Futurista". In it he describes a Futurism for cooking which shared

¹³ Kirby, Michael Futurist Performance p 27

¹⁴ opp cit p 147

common qualities with previous manifestos : the juxtapositioning of contrasts, a theatre, a setting into play the spectacles of food, and the style of simultaneity. "La Cucina Futurista" is an inventory of meals, lists of food, recipes, quotations and manifestos. In a section called "Futurist Meals for Particular Occasions", is a description for a Tactile Meal which substitutes sight and sound for the other senses of touch, smell and taste. At the "Tactile Meal", the host will prepare pyjamas for the guests that are made from different tactile materials such as sandpaper, felt, aluminium paper, silk, velvet etc. The guests are to put the pyjamas on and are taken to a darkened room without furniture. While blind the guests will choose their dining companion according to touch. Dishes served would include "Polyrhymic Salad" (lettuce, dates, grapes, a right hand eating, a left hand twirling a hurdy-gurdy and the waiters dance a slow geometric dance till the dish is eaten); "Magic Food" (a surprise hidden from sight which only taste will reveal); and "Tactile Garden" (platters of raw and cooked mixed greens eaten without the hands, but with the face plunged into the food; as you raise your face to chew, the waiters spray your face with lavender perfume).¹⁵ I was interested in how the ideas expressed in this hypothetical meal could be translated within a performative context.

The proposal for two performance dinners was accepted by the Canberra Contemporary Art Space and I was given the dates of October 11 and 18 . Jane Barney suggested consultation with a theatre director, Roland Manderson, to advise me on the construction of a theatrical event. He was paid by the CCAS for this work. I found this way of working to be hugely beneficial as Roland was able to help me define my role and helped me to analyse each course or action. Tickets were charged for the performance dinner to cover the cost of the food and the wages of two attendants on the floor and one helper in the kitchen.(\$20 members of CCAS) Alan Benson, a food photographer, offered to photograph both nights for free. I was relieved to be able to document the performances in such a way which freed up my role as director.

Mary Roberts was instrumental suggesting reading material which influenced the structure of the performance. I became interested in the work of Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology, the basis of which is the interrelationship between the mind and the body; we perceive and receive information from the world through our bodies. In "The Phenomenology of Perception" Merleau-Ponty argues that the senses cannot be separated from each other. The senses not only communicate with each other but they are transposable. He calls this "Kinaesthetic Intertranslation".

"The sight of sounds and the hearing of colours comes about in the same way as the unity of the gaze through the two eyes; in so far as my body is not a collection of adjacent organs, but a synergic system, all the functions of which are exercised and linked together in the general action of being in the world, in so far as it is the congealed face of existence. When I say that I see a sound, I mean that I echo the vibration of the sound with my whole sensory being, and particularly with that sector of myself which is susceptible to colours."¹⁶

¹⁵ Rohdie, Sam [A Note on F.T.Marinett's Futurist Cooking](#). Art and Text

¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty [The Phenomenology of Perception](#) p 232-34

The interplay of the senses and their unique ways of defining space all contribute to a single comprehensive space. The body's relation to time and space is a precondition of the subject's relations with objects. Our body mediates our awareness of physical and social reality in relation to sensory experience in space. It is through this awareness of and interaction with things and other people that we can construct an awareness of ourselves.

Merleau-Ponty uses the metaphor of textiles (fabric, threads, patterns) to stress and demonstrate the relational character of perception:- "My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is the general instrument of my comprehension".¹⁷ Perception takes place through the body which is the instrument of our interactions with the world. The main threads Merleau-Ponty speaks of are the body and speech. Through the capacity to think and speak we are connected with others, both as people and as culture, to form a social reality. We cannot cut the threads by which we are connected to the world; we cannot make an object from it.

I was interested in my proposed performances in literally constructing the fabric from Merleau-Ponty's metaphors as a woven tablecloth. I wanted to emphasise our social relationship with others around a communal dining table and through sensory stimulation construct an awareness of the individual body.

I worked with Roland on scripting the performances by splitting the event into several narratives. The structure of the menu, the music, the movement of the waiters and the movement of the diner/audience were tightly scripted yet room was allowed for improvised actions. The diner/audience were ushered into the restaurant in pairs by the waiters and seated opposite each other at one long table. A long napkin joined the dining companions which was then woven into the table as more of the diners/audience joined them. Tension or freedom to move were a choice built into the length of the napkin- both were dependant on the dining partners' co-operation with another. I had dyed all the cloth red as an appetite stimulant, except for the menu which was printed on plain white cotton. I wanted this swab of fabric to act as a smell recorder for the food as no other napkin was issued for the diner/audience to wipe their hands on. It also was to act as a theatre programme giving a clue to the acts or courses and as a souvenir of the event.

Here is the menu for Restorative Digestion Desired :

COMPANION

RAW

LIVE

SMOKED

FERMENTED

BITTERSWEET

¹⁷ Grosz, Elizabeth Volatile Bodies p 100

The menu is based on divisions between nature (live) and culture (smoked) and transitions in between (fermented).

Each course was announced by a waiter to the table setting up a sense of anticipation in the diner/audience. In the first course, 'Companion', bread dough is given to the diner/audience to knead into their own bread roll. The etymology of the word companion is defined as with 'whom you break bread'. The bread was then baked in the kitchen and returned during the fermented course. 'Koyaanisqatsi' by Phillip Glass was the accompanying music because its repetitive rhythms matched the movement of kneading the bread. I wanted to break down the "fourth wall" between the kitchen and the dining area in this course by having the diner/audience make their own bread. I also wanted to stimulate their sense of touch by handling the bread dough.

Beef Tartare was presented as part of the Raw course. It is a dish consisting of raw chopped beef and served with egg, in this instance with a raw quail egg. I was interested in the prejudices associated with eating certain types of food, not just raw. A cone of duck fat was placed in the diner/audience's hands to be fondled. With the heat from the hand the fat started to melt. (I had read that it was the height of culinary sophistication in ancient Egypt to place a scented cone of fat on a guest's head which would then proceed to melt during the banquet.) No cutlery was issued as a device to increase tactile sensitivity. The audience was sprayed with truffle oil in the style of Marinetti. Maria Callas was used as a contrast between the raw food of nature and the operatic music of high culture.

In the next course, live oysters were opened at a side table and fed to the diners by a waiter as a series of oyster recipes were read as a stream of consciousness poem. I wanted a contrast between the live and the cooked to be established. This was an exercise in taste as some people have a strong aversion to the texture of oysters.

Stainless steel rods containing trussed smoked quail were then presented to the table. The sound of knives being sharpened accompanied their unravelling and flesh tearing. The rods used as spits were a reference to foods traditionally used for banquets. I used the music of Erik Satie in this course (he had composed music for some of the Futurists' performances), and this music wasn't completely harmonious.

During the Fermented course a rank smelling farmhouse cheese was unwrapped at the table and the cheesecloth was held to the diner/audience's nose. Bread which was made in the first course is distributed to be eaten with the smell of the cheese. Champagne, a fermented drink, was drunk. Music by Yo Yo Ma, based on the Tango, was played as its tempo suited the waiter's movements.

To finish, a pellet of marzipan was eaten in the Bitter Sweet course. I used the music of Irene Pappas who sings odes to the men going away to fight the Trojan wars. It is a particularly beautiful piece of bitter sweet song. Rosewater is sprayed over the table-both rosewater and marzipan were traditional banquet foods. Underberg Bitters, a traditional European bitter herbal digestive was given to the diner to conclude the meal. The diner's hands were then washed and dried by the waiters.

RESTORATIVE | DIGESTION | DESIRED

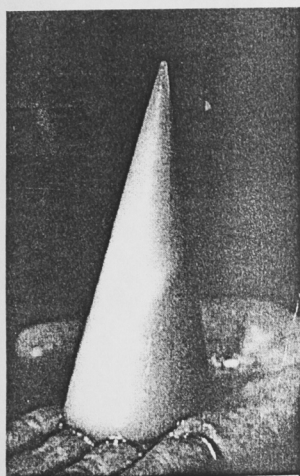
[PERFORMANCE | DINNER]

JUNIPERBERRY RESTAURANT

11 OCTOBER + 18 OCTOBER 1998

"MY BODY IS THE FABRIC INTO WHICH ALL OBJECTS ARE WOVEN,
AND IT IS THE GENERAL INSTRUMENT OF MY COMPREHENSION"

MERLEAU - PONTY



COMPANION

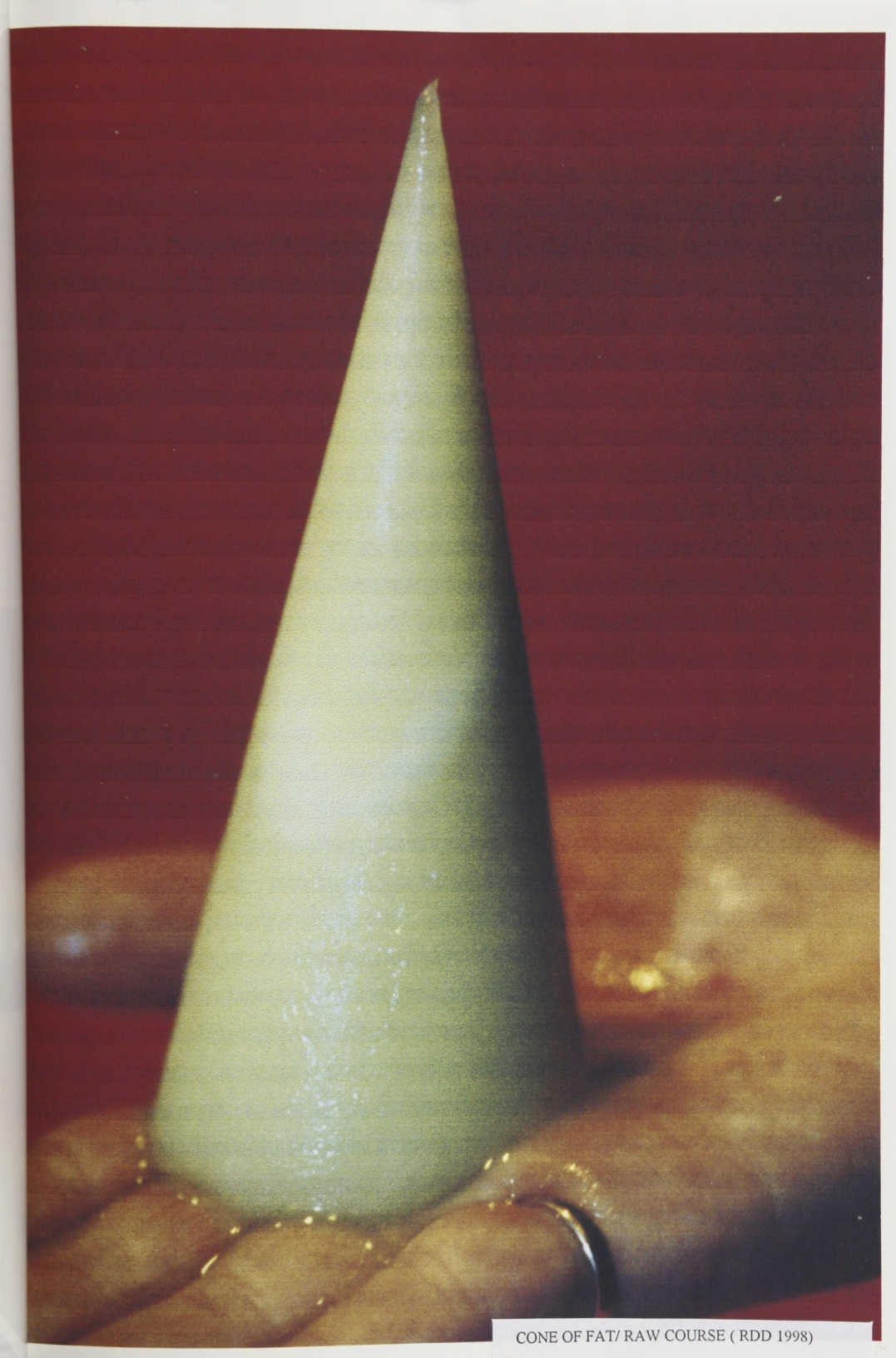
RAW

LIVE

SMOKED

FERMENTED

BITTER | SWEET



CONE OF FAT/ RAW COURSE (RDD 1998)



WOVEN TABLECLOTH (RDD 1998)



KNEADING BREAD DOUGH / COMPANION COURSE (RDD 1998)



OPENING OYSTERS/ LIVE COURSE (RDD 1998)



KNIFE SHARPENING DUET/ SMOKED COURSE (RDD1998)



QUAIL/ SMOKED COURSE (RDD 1998)



CHEESE/FERMENTED COURSE (RDD 1998)



CHEESECLOTH/ FERMENTED COURSE (RDD 1998)

Devices were used to signal the beginning and end of the performance such as the brightening and dimming of lights and the fading or increase in the level of noise of kitchen machinery. Signals, which are bad manners in a restaurant context, were used to hasten the exit of the diner/audience after the performance such as the use of a vacuum cleaner and opening the front door. A kitchen service bell (traditionally used by some kitchens to get the waiter's attention) was used to signal the clearing of the table at irregular intervals. It eventually set up a type of Pavlovian response from the diners as they started to hide their food from the waiters so it wouldn't be taken away from them. The bell device was used to construct time based actions and also to remove the diner from a position of autonomy and control normally enjoyed within a restaurant context. The removal of plates before they were finished with and the ejection from the restaurant were also used in the context of reversing the normal position of social hierarchy between diner and waiter.

Oct 11 was attended by 17 people and Oct 18 was attended by 24 people, the maximum capacity, plus a waiting list. I felt I produced the 2nd performance a little better than the first. The timing of the actions and the music was better. I also wired up speakers for the music to come from underneath the table. The attendants were more confident in the 2nd performance and started to operate independently of me and do things like eat food from the diner's plates. I was surprised at how docile and compliant the diner's were especially since they were tied together. The mix of people on each night determined their response to different actions eg the diners/audience on the first night worked together as a social unit and shared food and played with the woven tablecloth, at one point all of them leaning back to put tension on the webbing.

I thought by presenting the work through the CCAS and the purchasing of tickets and booking through the gallery that I had labelled the work as a performance clearly. However some of the audience attended because of Juniperberry's reputation and they thought it was a cheap meal. Other diners had bought BYO bottles of wine thinking they could sit and watch a theatrical event. People's reactions to the idea of a food performance were interesting. Some people told me they were expecting blood and guts and dismembered animals at the table. It is hard to work against the idea of performance as spectacle and may be it's not necessary to do so in the future but to incorporate it somehow.

CONCLUSION

Research into the relationship between food and performance within a restaurant context has given me no firm answers but has instead opened up a Pandora's Box of speculation, regarding the nature of performance, its context and documentation. I feel this is part of an ongoing process and only by presenting work can I be less naive about its nature.

On reflection, I have spent a lot of time researching 'the grotesque body of carnival'; initially through my reading of Rabelais and then in essays presented for my Theory Unit. I think generally the model of the carnivalesque has characteristics that can be applied to the food performances I presented. Carnival was originally used to describe a period of fresh eating and excess before Lent. The behaviour of its participants is marked by inversion and parody. The audience/ participants forfeited their rights as

restaurant diners to be always 'right'. The tables were turned. By removing the diners as the audience I has short circuited presenting the performance as a 'spectacle' for their consumption. However, by using this strategy I then became the audience viewing the constructed performance. I have yet to understand the implications of placing myself in this position.

I think generally that, performance falls into two categories: performance as spectacle, where the audience is distanced from what is presented; and performance as 'democratic reciprocity', where the audience becomes part of the performance. It appears to me that most food performances presented within a dining (restaurant) context play with ideas of parody and inversion. While it is hard to escape the model of good taste/ bad taste or correct behaviour/ incorrect behaviour, I am interested in finding other ways to present food performance that can bypass this dichotomy within a restaurant context. I am really interested in how both 'spectacle' and Stewart's 'democratic reciprocity of carnival' might co-exist within a performance context and think this will be my next area of investigation.

I have found it difficult to find a context in which to base my work, because there have been very few examples of performances of using food within a restaurant context. Some of the most interesting descriptions of food performance has been written by Marinetti but these are hypothetical models. The recent interest within the art world regarding the Body, food and culture, opens a wider context for me to explore.

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Kelly Leonard

Born 1960, Mudgee, NSW

Education

1997 -1999 Candidate for Masters of Art by Coursework
Canberra School of Art, Institute of the Arts, ANU

1994-1995 Graduate Diploma of Art
Canberra School of Art, Institute of the Arts, ANU

1980 Diploma of Art (Textiles)
Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW

Group Exhibitions

1998 *Inside Out Festival*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space

1997 *Indelible*, Australian Centre Contemporary Art, Melbourne
Corps, Craft Council of ACT Gallery, Canberra

1996 *Second Look*, Prospect Textile Biennial, Prospect Gallery,
Adelaide (National Exhibition)

1995 *Off the Wall*, Crafts Council of ACT Gallery, Canberra
Contemporary Cloth, Crafts Council of ACT Gallery, Canberra
Graduate Diploma Exhibition, Canberra School of Art Foyer
Gallery, Institute of the Arts, ANU

Publications

"Image Bank", *ArtLink*, V15 No 4, Summer 1995

Schubert, Robert, "Review", *Art/Text*, No 57, May/July 1997

Employment

1995-1999 Co-owner and dessert chef Juniperberry Restaurant,
Red Hill ACT

1982- 1993 Dessert chef

Performance

Restorative Digestion Desired

By Kelly Leonard, Juniperberry
Restaurant, 11, 18 October.

Reviewed by Kate Murphy

Upon arriving to attend this performance all I knew was that it would most likely have something to do with food (eating it hopefully). As it turned out 'Restorative Digestion Desired' was an experience that engaged all the senses.

Initially the audience/diners were led into the restaurant in pairs by two attendants and seated opposite each other at a long table. The red tablecloth was made up of interwoven strips of fabric that were ceremoniously tied behind our necks joining us to our partners opposite. This served the function of making us reliant on the other diners to a certain extent, we were tied to each other visibly and physically. We also each received a menu in the form of a crisp white serviette printed with the words: Companion, Raw, Live, Smoked, Fermented and Bittersweet.

As the performance progressed a series of rituals associated with dining were played out by both performers and audience. The restaurant became its own universe subject to rules and regulations that the diners had to grasp quickly in order to anticipate what might happen next. As one of our attendants announced 'The Companion', the first 'dish', uncooked bread dough, was served to only half the diners at the table. Those lucky enough to receive the warm yeasty dough had plenty of fun poking, prodding and kneading while others looked on. A bell was rung and the dough whisked away.

A series of patterns began to evolve as each course was announced and placed in front of the diners. The end of the course was signified by a bell ringing at which point plates and glasses were whipped away efficiently. This prompted some subterfuge on the part of the slower eaters who were loath to give up their food. One sneaky diner hid her bread under the red napkin/tablecloth only to have it removed by a sharp eyed attendant.

The food, however was only part of the experience. The lighting and sound were carefully controlled so that sometimes I became aware of them and at others was oblivious. I noticed discordant music at one stage and its absence at another.

The overall experience was one of pleasurable expectation tinged always with a certain amount of tension. The role of the diners over the course of the evening was for me the most fascinating element. We were placed in the position of audience, yet we were part of the performance. ■

Kate Murphy is an artist and performer.

MAVA Coursework Studio Practice Unit Project

April 1997

Unit 7 and 8 Sculpture/Textiles

Focus Exploration of the relationship between the body, textiles and food.

Aims

- 1) To research ways of printing onto fabric as a vehicle for text.
- 2) To research food recipes and presentation.
- 3) To research ways of presenting food within a performative context.

Relationship to prior practice and experience

I am still concerned with issues arising from the studio work undertaken during my Graduate Diploma regarding the relationship between textiles, text and the Body. I am interested with the digestion of food within a restaurant context arising from my employment as a chef at Juniperberry restaurant during 1996.

Methods and resources

- 1) Development of existing skills within a restaurant context with help from chef Janet Jeffs as a food consultant
- 2) Development of particular recipes using the kitchen at Juniperberry restaurant
- 3) Development of technical printing skills with help from Annie Trevillian in the textiles workshop
- 4) Development of ideas regarding performance with help from David Watt in the sculpture workshop

Context

Performance artist Alicia Rios 'Mediterranean Symphony of the Senses' 1996 Sydney

Chefs Gay Bilson Surrealist dinner 1993, Canberra

Phillip Searle and Cheong Liew 1st Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1983
Adelaide

MAVA Coursework Studio Practice Unit Project

March 1998

Unit 9 Textiles

Focus Exploration of the term 'Disgust'. Disgust is a reaction to improper treatment of food or manners. "Disgust names a syndrome in which all terms have their proper role. They all convey a strong sense of aversion to something perceived as dangerous because of its powers to contaminate, infect or pollute by proximity, contact or ingestion". ("The Anatomy of Disgust", William Ian Miller)

Aims

- 1) To consolidate themes and ideas concerning taste and distaste which have been the basis for studio practice and research and practiced in my work as chef at Juniperberry restaurant.
- 2) To investigate further the 'Devore' process and in particular its application to protein based fibres through sampling and research

Methods and resources

- 1) Woven double cloth with Devore text using the 16 shaft AVL computer Dobby loom
- 2) Joy Boutrups "Chemical treatment of fabric workshop" July 1998

Context

- 1) EAT! exhibition MCA April 1998
- 2) Marinetti " Tactile Meal"
- 3) Judy Chicago "Dinner Party" 1977

MAVA Coursework Studio Practice Unit Project

August 1998

Unit 10 Textiles

Focus This unit is a proposed research unit, which is multi disciplinary. It is a project with supervision from Nigel Lendon, Mary Roberts and Valerie Kirk.

Aims

My general aim is to consolidate themes and ideas concerning taste and distaste. The discussion to pursue performance based work rather than woven textiles as proposed in unit 9 was made after a reappraisal of the original studio practice proposal. I would like to extend the themes originally established in Units 7 and 8 through the textile and sculpture workshops. The proposal is also related to my work as chef at Juniperberry restaurant.

Methods and resources

- 1) Presentation of a performance during the contemporary art festival in October 1998 with consolation from Jane Barney (Director of CCAS), and Roland Manderson (Theatre Director), Janet Jeffs (Chef)
- 2) Documentation by a photographer
- 3) Collaboration with staff at Juniperberry restaurant

Context

- 1) Gastronomy
- 2) Work of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti

LEMON

'BODY TEXT' SERIES 1995



CIVILE

PROTEIN DEVORE SAMPLE 1997
WOOL AND COTTON STITCHED DOUBLE CLOTH

