

## Abstract

An article about the aesthetics, politics and dramaturgy of taste implicit in Reckless Sleepers' The Last Supper (2003). The authors explore notions of gustatory taste and the multi-sensory potential of serving food in performance and the ethics of (mis)representation of real life events; the assassination of the Romanovs and Che Guavara proving to be the most unreliable narratives. The piece sits between fact and fiction, the found and the fabricated, and is punctuated with the arrival of the real last suppers of convicted felons. The work speaks from a primarily western religious perspective, inspired by Da Vinci's Last Supper (1498) and the act of communion that takes place in church services. In this way, it leans towards an occidental, spiritual notion of taste, where transubstantiation allows the rice paper script to become both the body of Christ and the symbol of his own last supper.

Nietzsche's notion of intoxication comes into play as performers and audience share wine, or blood, and drink to absent friends. The article proposes that the piece enacts a dramaturgy much like a meal, where conversation ebbs and flows, and a sense of togetherness, or act of communion, is engendered. The authors posit that the tacit contract with the audience is redrawn by food as both an aesthetic and dramaturgical encounter. As such, it becomes an invocation (or intoxication) of taste, mortality and last-ness that continues to resonate thirteen years after its devising. Both Pinchbeck and Westerside wrote about this performance when they first saw it at the same venue in 2006, both conducted interviews with members of the Reckless Sleepers, Mole Wetherell and Tim Ingram, for their ongoing research into dramaturgy, aesthetics and taste in contemporary performance. Now this research is woven together into a tapestry of reflections on the piece, a pentimento of memories.

For art to exist, for any sort of aesthetic activity or perception to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: intoxication. Friedrich Nietzsche ([1990](#)) Nietzsche, Friedrich (1990) *Twilight of Idols and Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Classics. : TI, 'Expeditions', 8)

Almost all theatre performances appeal to the visual and auditory senses, but spectators' senses of smell, touch and even taste are also stimulated. For example, in a conventional stage drama, spectators are affected by the physical environment, the feel of the seating, the temperature and smell of the room. Some performances deliberately explore the aesthetic impact of stimulating other senses by, for example, having audiences taste food.

Siân Adiseshiah ([2016](#) Adiseshiah, Siân (2016) 'Spectatorship and the new (critical) sincerity: The case of Forced Entertainment's Tomorrow's Parties', *JCDE* 4(1): 1–16. : 9)

## THE PROLOGUE

This article explores the aesthetics, politics and dramaturgy of taste implicit in Anglo-Belgian theatre company Reckless Sleepers' *The Last Supper* (2003). Seated at three long tables, set for dinner, the audience are served the last meal requests of inmates on death row while the company perform the last words of the famous or infamous, printed on rice paper, which they then eat. The piece explores both gustatory taste and the multi-sensory potential of serving food in performance, and the ethics and politics of the (mis)representation of real-life events – the assassination of the Romanovs and Che Guevara proving to be the most unreliable narratives. The text sits between fact and fiction, the found and the fabricated, and is punctuated with the arrival of the real last suppers of convicted felons. The work speaks from a primarily Western religious perspective, inspired by Da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1498) and the act of communion that takes place in church services. In this way, it leans

towards an occidental, spiritual notion of taste, where transubstantiation allows the rice paper script to become both the body of Christ and the symbol of his own last supper. Nietzsche's notion of intoxication too comes into play as performers and audience share wine, or blood, and raise a drink to their absent friends. The last words of the piece are 'Goodnight sweethearts', the last words of Noel Coward.

Leonardo Da Vinci's fresco *The Last Supper*, Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan



Both authors of this article wrote about this piece when they first saw it at the same venue in 2006; both conducted interviews with members of the company – Mole Wetherell and Tim Ingram – for their postgraduate research, exploring absence and presence, aesthetics and taste in contemporary performance. They now seek to revisit their reading of the work as it continues to tour nationally and internationally. They draw on their own first-hand experiences of the piece, their encounter with Da Vinci's painting in Milan and their interviews. They also read the work in the context of the new wave of immersive theatre and how it has evolved in its thirteen years of touring and yet the text and meals remain the same. This article proposes that the piece enacts a dramaturgy much like a meal, where conversation ebbs and flows, and a sense of togetherness, or act of communion, is engendered through two encounters – the dramaturgical and the aesthetic. Act One stems from Michael Pinchbeck's research into Acts of Dramaturgy and takes a dramaturgical lens to the performance.<sup>1</sup>

1 The title of Michael Pinchbeck's doctoral thesis exploring the recent dramaturgical turn in contemporary performance. The title is taken from *The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook* (Chemers et al. 2010 Chemers, Michael Mark, Scott R. Irelan and Anne Fletcher(2010) *The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook*, Newburyport: Focus Publishing. : ix), which, as the authors describe in their foreword, is aimed at those who commit 'acts of dramaturgy'. Act Two derives from Andrew Westerside's research into taste and aesthetics in performance. We aim for the two acts to be both separate but in dialogue, much like two courses of a meal.

### **ACT ONE – ON DRAMATURGICAL ENCOUNTERS**

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'.

(1 Corinthians 11:23–5)

In June 1995, I take my first communion at a local church. The rich, ruby-red wine tastes not of blood, as the minister suggests it should, but of red-grape juice. This is a Methodist church and the communion wine is therefore non-alcoholic. The bread is a humble crumb, dry and flaky, it

disintegrates on my tongue. It tastes stale, like my mum's frozen sandwiches, thawed out on the radiator. This is not transubstantiation I am experiencing but unsubstantiation, not intoxication but frustration, not enlightenment but disappointment, and like Marcel Proust's *madeleine* biscuit, every time I take communion I will taste this memory – the failure of the bread and wine to faithfully represent the sacrament. Roland Barthes proposed food as a *grammar* to understand this kind of formative experience, and perhaps he was right when he said 'to the scholar, the subject of food connotes triviality and guilt' (1997: 24). Barthes described food as 'a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behavior [sic]' (ibid.). Exactly the same could be said of theatre, and what better way to enhance these images, usages and situations than to employ food.

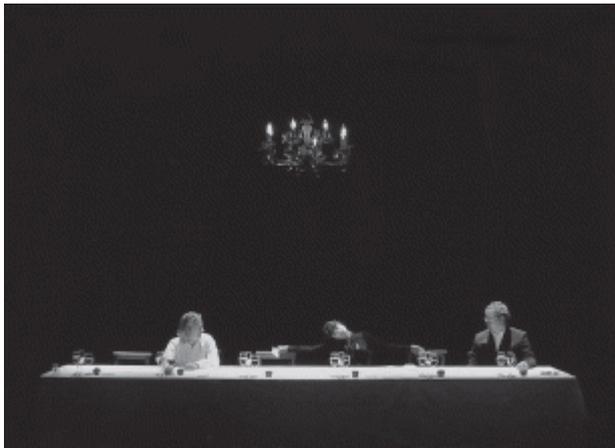
In June 2015, I visit Milan for the Expo and stay in a hotel a short walk from the Santa Maria delle Grazie, the monastery that houses Da Vinci's *Last Supper* in its modest refectory. I make a daily pilgrimage to the box office to enquire about tickets but it appears that you have to book weeks in advance as tour parties are limited and the painting can only be viewed by candlelight to aid its preservation. Every day I am turned away and I have to console myself with passing the refectory and imagining Da Vinci's painting on the other side of the wall. This is my experience of the painting, a dramaturgy of disappointment. Having travelled a great distance, I am unable to see it from the front, only from the reverse. I imagine Da Vinci's paint as seen beyond the brickwork, the first layers of paint becoming the first I could see. The surface of the painting becoming the back. I wondered what this kind of X-ray of the artwork would reveal if it were possible.

In oil painting, as paint ages, it becomes translucent and layers of paint begin to reveal revisions or amendments made by the artist in the form of *pentimento*. The layering of the devising process is equally open to making amendments visible. Freeman argues that practice as research exhibits *pentimento*, as you can see through the finished work, the layers of previous drafts and alterations, 'a change of mind' (2010: xii). There is an element of *pentimento* involved in the dramaturgy of contemporary performance, as the process of writing, or wrighting, the text is often made visible through the performance itself. For example, when Ingram, one of the devisers and performers of the piece, says, 'I don't know ... I don't know how to ...', when faced with recounting the last words of those whose words are undocumented (Wetherell [2006b](#) Wetherell, Mole (2006b) *The Last Supper* (text), 1st edn, UK/BE: Reckless Sleepers). His concerns about the text's own veracity are made visible through the text itself and it becomes what Patrice Pavis describes as a 'cultivator of doubt' (2008: 117).

On returning to the hotel, after my anti-climactic encounter with Da Vinci's *Last Supper* I was struck to find a tapestry of the original in the hotel refectory. This then was my encounter, a second-hand take on a biblical meal in a secondary restaurant, a few hundred yards from the original. I drink red wine, real this time, and reflect on the first communion that the painting, and its replica, document. Like Umberto Eco, in his essay 'Travels in Hyperreality' I found 'faith in fakes' made more hyperreal by proximity to the original (Eco [1995](#) Eco, Umberto (1995) *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, New York: Vintage). My meals in the hotel restaurant were literally overshadowed by this tapestry, which problematized notions of taste, both aesthetic and gustatory. My visit to Milan was taunted by every iteration of the image, on street signs, on postcards, on tea towels, except the original. We might describe this as a tauntology of absence and it serves as a useful hors d'oeuvre to Reckless Sleepers' piece, which flirts with the audience's experience of the artwork but subtly subverts it, invokes its presence but connotes its absence. We are invited and yet divided on arrival, a passive witness to the last words but an active agent in the last suppers served. We are complicit in Nietzsche's notion of an 'aesthetic activity' (Nietzsche [1990](#) Nietzsche, Friedrich (1990) *Twilight of*

*Idols and Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Classics. : IX, 8). As such, the restaurant is the ideal setting for the work, as Wetherell says: we share the same space. It is an unfamiliar way of presenting. So, we present it in a familiar setting. Like a restaurant. We all drink the same wine. Those who are served the food are careful not to make a spectacle out of the audience participation or what some now call 'immersive theatre'. Rather, it is all delicate and underplayed. (Wetherell [2013](#) Wetherell, Mole (2013) 'My real name is Paul or a personal history with Reckless Sleepers', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23(3): 454–8: 458)

Reckless Sleepers' *The Last Supper*. Publicity image © Reckless Sleepers



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My encounter with the replica Da Vinci in the hotel restaurant brought to mind the notion of dramaturgy as a weave, which seems appropriate to work that is more *woven* than *written*. Barba defines dramaturgy as 'the weave of performance', and cites the etymological root of 'text' as 'a weaving together' (Barba and Savarese [1991](#) Barba, Eugenio, and Nicola Savarese (1991) *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*, London: Routledge: 168). Indeed, theatre maker, Chris Dugrenier, says, Like tapestry, if you look at the image [a performance] from the front, it's all there on the front, beautifully rendered and put together. Turn the tapestry round to the back and that's what I'm describing. It's threads, intricacy, process and structure. (Dugrenier [2012](#) Dugrenier, Chris (2012) 'Dramaturgy in dialogue – Chris. Dugrenier', 7 May, <http://outsideeyeproject.wordpress.com/2012/05/07/dramaturgy-in-dialogue-chris-dugrenier/>, accessed 1 June 2016. )

The weave is hidden and the business of weaving is invisible to the audience, or rendered invisible on delivery, like rice paper text dissolving on the tongue of a performer. When it comes to devised work, and how its weave is often more on display, David Williams writes, 'Let its seams, stitchings, flaws be visible – it is provisional, contingent, in process, ravelled and unravelling, human, imperfect, a made thing still being made' (2010: 201).

In a symposium on the dramaturgy of Jean Genet, Carl Lavery likened the rig of the theatre space to the rigging of a ship's mast. He recalled that theatre technicians 'go into the rigging' as sailors did, and that French dramaturgs would see their job as undoing knots in the narrative. This metaphor of knots and threads, this weaving and unweaving, reimagines performance as a nautical knot, a robust, functional tapestry knitted together out of disparate threads. Lavery proposed that the 'wound' of which Genet wrote is the past tense of 'to wind' and that Genet's dramaturgy operates somewhere between 'a winding and a wounding, a winding of the imaginary into the real, a *dénouement* and a *renouement*' (Lavery [2011](#) Lavery, Carl (2011) 'Aesthetics and politics of Genet's

late theatre', *Genet: Sex, Power and Dramaturgy*, Nottingham Contemporary (14 September), pp. 1–12. ). *The Last Supper* winds together the real and the imagined, as Ingram suggests: 'There was a fine line between fact and fiction, perhaps faction' (Ingram [2006](#) Ingram, Tim (2006) 'Reckless Sleepers', 10 October, *Acts of Communion*, <http://actsofcommunion.blogspot.co.uk/2006/10/reckless-sleepers.html>, accessed 1 June 2016. ). Lavery offers a provocation that 'the dramaturgy of the wound is the dramaturgy of dislocation' (Lavery [2011](#) Lavery, Carl (2011) 'Aesthetics and politics of Genet's late theatre', *Genet: Sex, Power and Dramaturgy*, Nottingham Contemporary (14 September), pp. 1–12. ), a liminal space between page and stage, in which dramaturgical knots cannot easily be undone.

Reckless Sleepers' *The Last Supper*. © Heidrun Löhr, courtesy of Performance Space, Sydney



What Reckless Sleepers have done with their wounded material, woven together, for *The Last Supper* is also dislocating for the audience. As Emma Govan writes,

*The Last Supper* creates a sense of the invisible inhabiting the space and in this manner, fiction and fact are shown to be equally unreliable, and the notion of history as a stable entity is banished. This sense of dislocation and instability is reflected in moments in the show when different endings are played out. (Govan et al. [2007](#) Govan, Emma, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington (2007) *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, London: Routledge. : 116)

Claire MacDonald has written about the dramaturgy of an exhibition as the curating of a narrative experience in a gallery. She suggests that 'contemporary dramaturgs ... engage the space between the elements of composition and the unfolding of a performance in the presence of viewers' (2010: 94). The same could be said of a meal, the space between the cooking and the eating, the tasting and the digesting. This dramaturgy of the performance is described by Ingram thus:

In *The Last Supper* there is an arc, from meeting and greeting the guests, toasts, speeches, drinking and the piece shifts from very formal to more casual and laidback. We wanted it to reflect the pace of wedding reception. Where the mood becomes more laconic after a few drinks. (Ingram [2006](#) Ingram, Tim (2006) 'Reckless Sleepers', 10 October, *Acts of Communion*, <http://actsofcommunion.blogspot.co.uk/2006/10/reckless-sleepers.html>, accessed 1 June 2016. )

Just like a wedding after a few drinks, things can sometimes unravel, and Ingram describes how narratives around Che Guevara trigger a 'mini-argument onstage with contradictory evidence presented – discrepancies in describing the same incident but described within the same time-construct' (ibid.).

The company have, by their own admission, 'a complex relationship to alcohol, although work is not usually made directly under the influence' (Brown and Wetherell [2007](#) Brown, Andrew, and Mole Wetherell (2007) *Trial: A Study of the Devising Process in Reckless Sleepers' Schrödinger's Box*, Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press. : 75). After the performance, the audience stays to talk with each other, sharing wine, finishing the food and reflecting on the stories of the condemned. I posit that the contract with the audience is redrawn by the food as both a narrative device and an invocation (or intoxication) of taste, mortality and last-ness. Wetherell writes that,

How alcohol is used in *The Last Supper* is interesting in the way that red wine becomes part of the party that often takes place after the performance, as blood, a social and sharing experience. People are given drinks and become relaxed, thus becoming part of the event, implicated in it. (Brown and Wetherell [2007](#) Brown, Andrew, and Mole Wetherell (2007) *Trial: A Study of the Devising Process in Reckless Sleepers' Schrödinger's Box*, Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press. : 75)

This notion of implication is key to the way in which the work places the audience in an ethical dilemma. We are literally consuming the narratives and last meal requests of those on death row who never knew they would be remembered in this way. It asks if it is right to laugh at a jar of pickle brought out on a silver platter by a chef in the knowledge that it was the last thing someone ate before they were given a lethal injection.

Reckless Sleepers eschew the end-on and sit us around tables the same as theirs. There are thirteen audience members on each side of a traverse stage but the performers remain behind a table of their own, with wine glasses, apples and stacks of rice paper. The paper is both a 'reference to the scraps of paper upon which Kafka wrote in his last moments when he was unable to speak' but also a symbol of holy communion (Brown and Weatherell 2007: 32). Made of rice it also connotes the Far East where one of the piece's fictional narratives will later take us. Everything is significant. As Ingram says: 'Any move we make is very significant in the stillness' (Ingram [2006](#) Ingram, Tim (2006) 'Reckless Sleepers', 10 October, *Acts of Communion*, <http://actsofcommunion.blogspot.co.uk/2006/10/reckless-sleepers.html>, accessed 1 June 2016. ). Brown writes:

Apples appear in most Reckless Sleepers' performances. Apples signify knowledge (in a biblical sense) and Newtonian physics. In *The Last Supper* apples reference Newton, James Dean (who stopped to buy a bag of apples shortly before his death), Magritte, New York and John Lennon. (Brown and Wetherell [2007](#) Brown, Andrew, and Mole Wetherell (2007) *Trial: A Study of the Devising Process in Reckless Sleepers' Schrödinger's Box*, Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press: 70)

With such imagery on display it is a densely loaded piece, both semiotically and religiously. I am reminded of Pearson's and Shanks' idea that 'performance is a saturated space' (2010:28).

The wine too heightens our senses. We sip the red wine in front of us, its taste reminding us of our first drink, our first communion, our first hangover. As Barthes writes, 'wine is remembering and forgetting, joy and melancholy; it enables the subject to be transported out of himself' (1997: 61). For *The Last Supper*, our own memory of wine is fused with a surrogate memory, that of the convict eating their last meal. Our first with their last, our present with their past. Richard Gregory of Quarantine, another company that has worked with food in performance, writes of 'the taste of something we didn't want to eat, the smell of the kitchen we grew up in. We all have to eat' (Gregory [2007](#) Gregory, Richard (2007) 'Paper to a conference on social engagement', <http://qtine.com/resources/articles-interviews/richard-gregorys-paper-to-a-conference-on-social-engagement-at-tramway-glasgow/>, accessed 1 June 2016. ). We all have to eat and we all have to

die. It is the space between food and our own mortality that *The Last Supper* inhabits. The final meal the convicts order is not so much exquisite as mundane, and this makes the fact it was their last more compelling.

This image making takes on different resonances when the work is sited in different locations, for example a church in Chester or, in Geneva, a large hall where the performers closed the doors in 'a choreographed sequence that sounded like prison doors being shut' (Brown and Wetherell [2007](#) Brown, Andrew, and Mole Wetherell (2007) *Trial: A Study of the Devising Process in Reckless Sleepers' Schrödinger's Box*, Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press. :4). Wetherell has said that the ideal venue for the piece would be on Alcatraz Island. The piece is site-specific, site-responsive and immersive in the twenty-first-century sense. As my nervous neighbour at the Arnolfini in Bristol said at the beginning 'I don't know what's expected of me.' We sit, divided from friends, guided by a prisoner's number printed onto rice paper as 'It breaks apart that social bond' (Wetherell [2013](#) Wetherell, Mole (2013) 'My real name is Paul or a personal history with Reckless Sleepers', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23(3): 454–8. :458). We sip red wine poured by performers, barefoot but not afraid to meet, to greet, to wait. To both wait for us and wait on us. The lights dim. Two chandeliers hung from the rig illuminate the space. And the music begins. An unfinished symphony. The last moments of last tracks attached to the narrative of last words. Each death connected to the next. Each version of events erasing the last, the change of mind made visible, like the *pentimento* in Da Vinci's painting. As Govan writes: 'The piece, in rearticulating last words, evokes a sense of the past inhabiting the present and this effect is increased by transporting an elaborate banquet setting into a performance space' (Govan et al. [2007](#) Govan, Emma, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington(2007) *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, London: Routledge. :116).

Marilyn Monroe and Marie Antoinette are connected by Chanel no. 5. JFK and Jesus Christ are connected by Lee Harvey Oswald trying to stop a bullet with his hands. There are collisions and echoes – corrected accents, corrected dates, corrected numbers of Saddam Hussein substitutes, corrected accounts of the same story. The chaotic slaying of the Romanovs. The botched assassination of Trotsky. We do not know where facts end and fabrication begins. The imagined epitaphs of Hiroshima victims are most moving as words cascade and mouths fill – the initial stimulus for the show of 'eating your words' made manifest (Govan et al. [2007](#) Govan, Emma, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington(2007) *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, London: Routledge: 115). The domestic dialogue before Little Boy, the first atom bomb, lands on Hiroshima means more as it's what we all say every day. Thank you. Sorry. I love you. Goodnight sweethearts.

Reckless Sleepers' The Last Supper. © Heidrun Löhr, courtesy of Performance Space, Sydney



Now whenever I drink red wine, I remember not only my first communion but my first encounter with this performance. The ‘aftertaste’ lives on long after the show has ended, and as an audience member I still carry this memory, embedded by the gustatory and olfactory senses it pricked, and the taste of guilt left lingering on the tongue. As Proust wrote, ‘Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind’ (Proust [1992](#) Proust, Marcel (1992) *In Search of Lost Time*, volumes 1–7, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright, New York: Modern Library: *I*, 62).

## ACT TWO – ON AESTHETIC ENCOUNTERS

No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. Marcel Proust ([1992](#) Proust, Marcel (1992) *In Search of Lost Time*, volumes 1–7, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright, New York: Modern Library. : *I*, 60)

*The Last Supper* introduces food as a *liminal* aesthetic object, ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner [1959](#) Turner, Victor (1959) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, Chicago: Aldine. : 95) positions: between voluntary and involuntary memories reminiscent of Proust’s famous *madeleine*; between what a Kantian reading of ‘taste’ would call the (cognitive) utilitarian and the (imaginative) aesthetic. In this Second Act, to get a better *flavour* for that sense of the ‘betwixt and between’, I propose that a post-Kantian reading of food and eating in *The Last Supper* provides a context for understanding the contradictions and multiplicities of a gustatory aesthetic.

Perhaps it is most significant in *The Last Supper* that the ontological *plurality* of the meals (insofar as we might consider them *liminal*) does not render the work confusing or incoherent. Rather, it is in the borderland territory *between* these plural states – the gustatory, the linguistic, the utilitarian, the aesthetic – that the food finds its own *performative* ontology: not as either/or (meal *or* aesthetic object), but as multiples of and/ also. In her introduction to *The Senses in Performance* (2007), Sally Banes notes (in reference to Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger) that ‘perception happens only when the senses find themselves to be in deep entanglement with the sensed phenomena ... language, memory, affect, sensation, perception and cultural forces find themselves in a deep chiasmatic inter-subjective relationality, where each element in the relation is continuously crossing and being crossed by others’ (2001: 6).

(Mole):

Larry White

Prisoner No. 640

Date of execution 22nd May 1997

Execution No. 122

Last Meal Request Liver and Onions, cottage cheese, red tomatoes and a single cigarette

Cigarette prohibited by policy (Wetherell [2006b](#) Wetherell, Mole (2006b) *The Last Supper* (text), 1st edn, UK/BE: Reckless Sleepers. )

As served, the meals (and the red wine that accompanies them) present the spectator/diner with the problem of definition. Like the *acheropoiatoi* objects of Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), Craig-Martin’s *An Oak Tree* (1973) or more recently Joshua Sofaer’s *Scavengers* (2000), the meals in *The*

*Last Supper* serve not only as objects with *instrumental* purpose (in this case as a meal qua food), but also as objects such that they might invite aesthetic contemplation and reflection.<sup>2</sup>

2 An image or object physically unaltered by the hand of the artist. Take for instance the fourth meal served:

(Leen):

David Gibbs. Prisoner number 825. Date of Execution: 21st August 2000. Execution number 230. Last meal request: Chef Salad, any dressing except oil and vinegar, two bacon cheeseburgers, All the way, without onions, deep fried home fries, with chilli powder on top.

(Break)

Pitcher of fruit flavoured milkshake two Scotch eggs boiled and battered and deep-fried and served with syrup and a slice of pie. (Wetherell [2006b](#) Wetherell, Mole (2006b) *The Last Supper* (text), 1st edn, UK/BE: Reckless Sleepers. )

As the request is spoken, Gibbs' last meal is placed in front of an audience member whose seat number (allocated on arrival; you don't sit with your friends) corresponds with Gibbs' prisoner number. This moment illustrates well the porous relationship Broadhurst proposes between aesthetic theory and the liminal. Her argument, primarily that 'the aesthetic is not an autonomous sphere' (Broadhurst [1999](#) Broadhurst, Susan (1999) *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory*, London and New York: Cassell. : 7), in which one must resist 'a certain restricted reading of Kant', proposes the liminal as a space in which 'judgments need to be continually revised' (7), she writes:

Kant's work is central to this issue, largely because we cannot escape the structure of complex judgments. In such a review of aesthetic theorization, it is important to state that although aestheticism usually denotes an enclosed space and separation of aesthetic objects and sensations from the 'real world' of the non-aesthetic, I am using it in this study to refer to almost the opposite: that is, I am using it as an attempt to expand the aesthetic perspective to encompass the whole of actuality. In other words, I am using it to refer to a tendency to see 'art' as constituting the primary realm of human experience. (16)

The relationship between aesthetic theory and the gustatory in *The Last Supper*, then, can be articulated as follows: in Broadhurst's expanded, encompassing reading of a 'liminal-Kant', she denotes in the first instance that one may not dismiss out of hand the aesthetic *potential* of the meals on the grounds of (what Kant would call) self-interested 'charm' (or *Reiz*) – that is, because they *taste* either good or bad, because we like or dislike their colour, their smell, or that they are not objects presented for immediate (but conceptually distanced) aesthetic contemplation. Rather, we are invited to consider food as an aesthetic object precisely *because* of how it '[excites] the organ' of olfaction (Kant [1987](#) Kant, Immanuel (1987) *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W. S. Pluhar, Indiana: Hackett: §14 [72/226]), of how we might revel in the 'tapestry' of a 'chiasmatic inter-subjective relationality' (Banes 2007: 6)

This 'largely unexplored rhetoric' of what Banes has called the 'olfactory effect' (2001: 68) has seen a great deal more critical attention as a result of a 'widening-out' of the terms of Kantian aesthetic engagement. In 'An Exchange on Disinterestedness' (2007), Arnold Berleant proposes an expansion of the Kantian aesthetic field similar to that of Broadhurst. He proposes that 'intrinsic value need not be exclusive but can occur in harmonious juxtaposition with instrumental concerns ... there is no need to sacrifice the distinctive, complex quality of aesthetic appreciation without separating such

experience from its other modes' (Berleant [2007](#) Berleant, Arnold (2007) 'An exchange on disinterestedness', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, <http://www.php?articleID=209>, accessed 20 December 2016). It follows then, from this 'widening-out' of Kant, that what we would call – ontologically speaking – the 'accidental' features of the meals (colour, smell, taste, temperature) can become the sensory *basis* (what Kant would call *das Moment*) for a consideration of them in aesthetic terms.<sup>3</sup>

3 This is in opposition to an object's 'essential' properties. Essential properties are roughly defined by those things that we cannot perceive such as space and time. Essential properties then include spatial and temporal shape, and structure. The accidental properties of an object may change, but the substance (the thing-in-itself) remains the same. Any *essential* changes, however, also change the substance of the object (that which it is). To engage with and *eat* the food, then, becomes an act burdened with the weight of its surrounding semiotic and narrative framework: a *gustatory aesthetic*. To illustrate, consider the passage of text (attributed to Bobby Sands) spoken immediately prior to the arrival of the Gibbs meal:<sup>4</sup>

4. Robert 'Bobby' Sands (1954–1981) was a member of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and later a Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Sands died while on hunger strike while serving a fourteen-year sentence in HM Prison Maze for possession of firearms used against the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

(Tim):

They tried to give me a plate of food. It was put in front of my face but I continued on my way as though nobody was there. My weight was 57.70 Kilograms. I was thinking today about the hunger strike. Firstly, the body doesn't accept the lack of food, and it suffers from the temptation of food. The body fights back sure enough, but at the end of the day everything returns to the primary consideration, that is, the mind. The mind is the most important. They won't break me ... they won't break me because the desire for freedom, and the freedom of the Irish people, is in my heart. (Wetherell 2006)

If it can be argued that we encounter the food as aesthetic (or aestheticized) objects *within* a larger 'tapestry' of composition and design, then the anecdotal evidence of a mother being emotionally affected by the presentation of a hamburger,<sup>5</sup> 'There's a moment where it goes "Last meal request: none", and you get this groan from the audience. Then "at the last moment decided to eat hamburger on his mother's request". And I run on and present this hamburger. I presented it last week to a woman and there was an immediate sadness. I talked to her afterwards and her daughter was in the audience, but sat opposite, and she thought about her daughter – and that it says "mother" – and it really moved her, that particular moment. But some people don't have a problem at all. Some people get the food, eat it, and don't think about the consequences of it, or the fact that you can hear them munching away in the middle of the show. There's a moment where we point to a big meal which is right before "Elvis" and after "Bobby Sands", and we point to it – it's during a made-up sequence of Saddam Hussein being out with his brother eating two hamburgers – and normally I point to the stage-right corner. And in one of the shows it had disappeared, the meal had gone. It had dispersed around the table and people had already begun to share this food. At one show the liver and onions got moved off the table because the smell was too much for some people in the room' (Wetherell [2013](#) Wetherell, Mole (2013) 'My real name is Paul or a personal history with Reckless Sleepers', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23(3): 454–8. ) or of being unable to touch a meal – being somehow implicated by it – is to put into practice Broadhurst's desire to conceive of the liminal as a place which 'expand[s] the aesthetic perspective to encompass the whole of actuality' (1999: 7). Indeed the Sands text that precedes the arrival of Gibbs' last request is an

indication of the liminal as a space in which ‘judgments need to be continually revised’ (7). In that particular sequence we hear of a man who starves his body, is skeletal and nearing death, and trying to convince himself of a dualism in which the body needs food, but where the mind can overcome such ‘temptation’. Thus the Gibbs meal, when it arrives, is not just about Gibbs; *it simply can’t be*. As the food is served, we are tempted as Sands was tempted, the echo of his words ‘spills over’ into the next sequence of the work. The heat and smells that seduce the senses, that might make us salivate, or the stomach rumble, draw us at the same time more deeply and keenly into a *felt*, gustatory sense of the work. We revise judgement: we may or may not be hungry, we may or may not eat, the smell of the hamburger flickers between appetising and abhorrent, from delicious to disgusting and back again. If we *do* eat, the taste is flavoured as much by our betrayal of Sands, and acceptance of the fate of Gibbs, as it is the liberally applied chilli powder. If for Reckless Sleepers the impetus for *The Last Supper* is about being ‘interested in eating words’ (Wetherell [2013](#) Wetherell, Mole (2013) ‘My real name is Paul or a personal history with Reckless Sleepers’, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23(3): 454–8. ), for a spectator (diner, prisoner, apostle), it’s about finding out what it *tastes like*, quite literally, to swallow one’s guilt or swallow one’s pride. This technique of overlapping sequences, realities and fictions, in order to aesthetically situate the food, repeats itself throughout the work. A later sequence begins as follows:

(Tim):

Diana

(Mole):

Diana Spencer. Last Meal Asparagus and Mushroom Omelette appetizer Dover Sole with Vegetable Tempura Tattinger Champagne.

(Tim):

The 13th pillar

(Mole):

August 30th 1997 at 10:08pm (Tim): Last Words

(Leen):

What happened?

(Tim Serves)

(Mole):

Ricky Blackmon. Prisoner No.893. Date of execution 4th August 1999. Execution No. 181. No last meal request only requested something to drink. (Wetherell 2006)

Here, the fine dining and opulence of Diana’s imagined (and unknowing) last meal is contrasted moments later with the monastic simplicity of Blackmon’s ‘something to drink’ (which is a glass of water). Here, and in contrast to the Sands/Gibbs example, it is the *absence* of flavour or texture before us, an absence that follows an *imagined* meal of asparagus, Dover sole and champagne, which situates the glass of water in the realm of imaginative (aesthetic) play and contemplation. Here the water connects Diana to Blackmon in the same subtle way that the piece weaves (wound) together Copernicus, Newton and an apple, or Franz Kafka and pieces of rice paper, or, by following the death of Andy Warhol – ‘at 5:45, sitting up in a hospital bed, after a routine operation,

watching *The Wizard of Oz* on Television. He turns blue. Turns yellow. Turns grey. And pronounced clinically dead for the second time at 6:21am February 22 1987' (Wetherell 2006) – with the last meal request of Stacey Lawton: a jar of dill pickles that becomes eerily reminiscent of *32 Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), aestheticized and in Duchampian form. In each case, these objects of olfactory sensation operate as a connective tissue for the work, holding together and binding a fragmentary structure with communal material objects made strange by the flitting and flickering between reality and fiction, implication and silent witness.

At the beginning of *The Last Supper* (and in spite of its title) the glass of red wine we are cordially poured is not too heavily burdened by any symbolic or theological frame of reference. The second offering, at the halfway point of the piece, carries the weight of all the material that precedes it, taking on an aesthetic, rather than theological, transubstantiation. In this moment our experience is 'wound' backwards – and we see that first offering again, only this time *pentimento*, from the back of the tapestry. This experience, which Wetherell has called a 'residue', might be best articulated in this instance to an 'aftertaste': a gustatory afterglow of the first glass of wine, the flavours and tones of which linger on one's tongue like a kind of guilt.

In Marie-Pierre Genecand's review of *The Last Supper* for *Le Temps Geneve*, she notes how 'the spectator takes on an air of a conspirator as he/ she is almost party to capital punishment; in swallowing the hamburger ordered by a man who himself has not swallowed anything for a long time' (Genecand 2006 Genecand, Marie-Pierre (2006) 'Eat, Speak and Die', *Le Temps: Geneva*. ). It is Genecand's astute observation of being 'almost party' that reveals in *The Last Supper* the spectator's 'ability to react' (Lehmann 2006 Lehmann, Hans-Thies (2006) *Post-dramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jeurs-Munby, London: Routledge. : 135). The spectator in *The Last Supper* occupies Jane Turner's place 'between reality and fiction' (Turner 2011 Turner, Jane (2011) 'Diegetic theatre as a "place" for the theatricalised spectator', *Platform* 6(1). : 30). Spectators do not 'play' their prisoner-number counterparts, nor are they afforded the luxury of being able to judge from comfortable distance the barbarism of the death penalty. Instead, there emerges an understanding that I stand in, or bear witness, for the absent and the dead. In the liminal, as Schechner notes, we 'enter a time-place where [we] are not-this-not-that, neither here nor there' (2006: 66). And perhaps it is this 'bearing witness' that contributes to audiences sharing food around the tables; tables organized in a 'U' formation whereby each audience member becomes as much an object of the spectatorial gaze as the actual 'performers'. Indeed, in Lehmann's conception of the postdramatic 'the actor of post-dramatic theatre is often no longer the actor of a role but a performer offering his/her presence on stage for contemplation' (2006: 135). One might argue that there is little difference, therefore, between performers from *Reckless Sleepers* and their thirty-nine (to borrow from Boal) *spect-actors*.

Wetherell's observation that 'everyone was talking [and] we'd broken a load of rules', is a product not only of the spatial configuration and familiar social structure that forms the compositional spine of the work, but also of how the piece hands over a degree of agency to 'participation in the process' (Lehmann 2006 Lehmann, Hans-Thies (2006) *Post-dramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jeurs-Munby, London: Routledge: 135). The very idea of participation, of course, is something Wetherell himself is 'worried about'; preferring terms like 'open' or 'communal' to describe the work that *Reckless Sleepers* make. Here perhaps, the distinction made by Kai van Eikels and Bettina Brandl-Risi in 'What Will There Be Instead of an Audience' (2011) between 'directed' and 'self-constituted' participation is a more useful way of thinking about the 'place' of the spectator in *The Last Supper*.

## THE EPILOGUE

This notion of self-constituted participation is what connects, in *The Last Supper*, Turner's notion of the liminal as 'between reality and fiction' (2011:30) and Broadhurst's liminal as the 'possibility of potential forms, structures, conjectures and desires' (1999:7), allowing for a broad spectrum of 'participatory communal relationships between spectator and performer' (Lancaster [1997](#) Lancaster, Kurt (1997) 'When spectators become performers: Contemporary performance-entertainments meet the needs of an unsettled audience', *Journal of Popular Culture* 30(4): 75–88. doi: 10.1111/j.0022-3840.1997.3004\_75.x:76). Rather than a singular diegetic mode in which the spectator has no freedom to choose whether or not they will be implicated in the narratorial world(s) of the work, or as Helen Cole proposes, to 'follow you and match the risks you take with risks of my own' (2008:126), the audience of *The Last Supper* is placed at the threshold of multiple diegetic narratives or 'theatricalised space[s]' (Turner [2011](#) Turner, Jane (2011) 'Diegetic theatre as a "place" for the theatricalised spectator', *Platform* 6(1). :30). To what extent an individual spectator may or may not choose to find a 'way of entering' (Van Eikels and Brandl-Risi [2011](#) Van Eikels, Kai, and Bettina Brandl-Risi (2011) 'What there will be instead of an audience', *Performance Research* 16(3): 19–34. doi: 10.1080/13528165.2011.606020:22) is subjective and self-constituted. The evidence of the 'collaborative theatrical experience' that Turner proposes (2011:28) can be seen in the material 'residue' of the work: 'a series of empty plates ... a still-life ... this beautiful image that's still there', an echo of spontaneous *communitas* 'across a ritual limen' (Schechner [2006](#) Schechner, Richard (2006) *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd edn, New York and London: Routledge. :71). The reason why Wetherell might be happy 'if someone doesn't eat the Scotch egg' is because it points towards agency on the part of his audience, a self-constituted diegetic engagement: theatre's *liminal* place. We shall leave the final words of this article to Mole Wetherell, when asked how its ideas might continue to resonate with its audience years after its original devising:

The last thing I want to say with *The Last Supper* is that the massive narrative is that this happens again and again throughout history, and this really happened, and it can happen to us. I could have easily said 9/11 or Tsunami, or another event in history. We go through the same conflicts and the same arguments and the same love affairs and the same things happen and we all have one last thing to say ... And that cycle of history repeating itself is very clear to me. (Wetherell 2006)

## Notes

1 The title of Michael Pinchbeck's doctoral thesis exploring the recent dramaturgical turn in contemporary performance. The title is taken from *The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook* (Chemers et al. [2010](#) Chemers, Michael Mark, Scott R. Irelan and Anne Fletcher(2010) *The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook*, Newburyport: Focus Publishing. : ix), which, as the authors describe in their foreword, is aimed at those who commit 'acts of dramaturgy'.

2 An image or object physically unaltered by the hand of the artist.

3 This is in opposition to an object's 'essential' properties. Essential properties are roughly defined by those things that we cannot perceive such as space and time. Essential properties then include spatial and temporal shape, and structure. The accidental properties of an object may change, but the substance (the thing-in-itself) remains the same. Any *essential* changes, however, also change the substance of the object (that which it is).

4 Robert 'Bobby' Sands (1954–1981) was a member of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and later a Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Sands died while on hunger

strike while serving a fourteen-year sentence in HM Prison Maze for possession of firearms used against the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

5 'There's a moment where it goes "Last meal request: none", and you get this groan from the audience. Then "at the last moment decided to eat hamburger on his mother's request". And I run on and present this hamburger. I presented it last week to a woman and there was an immediate sadness. I talked to her afterwards and her daughter was in the audience, but sat opposite, and she thought about her daughter – and that it says "mother" – and it really moved her, that particular moment. But some people don't have a problem at all. Some people get the food, eat it, and don't think about the consequences of it, or the fact that you can hear them munching away in the middle of the show. There's a moment where we point to a big meal which is right before "Elvis" and after "Bobby Sands", and we point to it – it's during a made-up sequence of Saddam Hussein being out with his brother eating two hamburgers – and normally I point to the stage-right corner. And in one of the shows it had disappeared, the meal had gone. It had dispersed around the table and people had already begun to share this food. At one show the liver and onions got moved off the table because the smell was too much for some people in the room' (Wetherell [2013](#) Wetherell, Mole (2013) 'My real name is Paul or a personal history with Reckless Sleepers', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23(3): 454–8. ).

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