

# Commensality in Socially Engaged Practices

Romain Daniel Burtin

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds  
School of Performance and Cultural Industries

August 2024

## Intellectual Property and Publication Statement

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

The right of Romain 'Leo' Burtin to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

## Abstract

This Practice as Research (PaR) PhD investigates commensality as both a performance form and a methodological approach within socially engaged practices. Through the development of two multi-component projects—*with bread* (2018-2021) and *Eat the Archives* (2019-2021)—this research examines how shared meals can act as sites of performance, knowledge production, and political engagement.

The thesis offers critical insights into commensality as a performance form, arguing that it is not only a representational strategy but also an active, reflexive mode of social engagement. It proposes that commensality's performative qualities, such as structured interactions, role reversals, and sensory participation, enable the co-construction of meaning and community.

Drawing from performance studies including Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's approach to food performance (1999) and Erika Fischer-Lichte's autopoietic feedback loop (2009), food studies approaches rooted in Claude Fischler's study of commensality (2011), and emerging from a lineage of socially engaged and feminist practices such as the work of Bobby Baker, Rajni Shah and Quarantine, this thesis develops a commensal performance methodology which enables the generation of embodied, affective, and communal forms of inquiry. In doing so, it advocates for an approach to research that is both participatory and deeply situated in everyday life.

As a performance practice, commensality emerges as a dynamic and participatory framework that extends beyond the stage, integrating elements of ritual, activism, and hospitality. The research foregrounds its potential for creating spaces of transformation—whether through the theatrical *mise-en-scène* of *with bread* or the archival reimagining of domestic dining in *Eat the Archives*. In these projects, the act of eating together becomes an artistic and political gesture, emphasising the potential of commensality to explore modes of interaction and knowledge production through food-based exchanges.

By positioning commensality as both subject and method, this study contributes to ongoing conversations about the intersections of performance, food, and social engagement, and offers a reflection on the significance and transformative potential of commensality as a performative and political act.

## Acknowledgements

I have, by now, read enough PhDs to know that they are often enabled by strong and supportive networks, and this project is no exception. It has truly been an endeavour which required community, and I hope to be forgiven if one of the many people who supported me along the way finds their name to be missing.

First and foremost, I owe a debt of gratitude to my primary supervisor, Dr Jenny Lawson. It is thanks to our exchanges, long before I even entertained the idea of undertaking PhD that this work could develop. Thank you also to Dr Anna Fenemore and Prof Joslin McKinney for their patient guidance, and generous feedback over the last six years: you embody critical friendship in your approach to supervision and for that, I am ever so grateful. Thank you also to Prof Jonathan Pitches, Dr Maria Kapsali, Prof Aylwyn Walsh and Linda Watson for their mentorship, professional trust and practical support throughout the project. Thank you to the School of Performance and Cultural Industries more broadly for the generous funding which enabled much of this research, and for providing an excellent environment for professional development. Thank you to Prof Andrew Quick and Dr Alice Booth for their support in developing my research proposal and my early practice.

At Leeds, I must also thank fellow Postgraduate Researchers who shared part or all of this doctoral rollercoaster with me. In particular, many thanks to Benedetta D'Ettorre and Lizzie Ridley whose support was invaluable notably throughout the Covid-19 lockdowns. Thank you to the members of both the Participation Research Group and the Body in Performance Research Group who provided early feedback, responses and nourished my thinking. Similarly, many thanks to the ASTR scholars in the food research group. Thank you to my former colleagues and students at the University of Salford, and to my research colleagues at the University for the Creative Arts: a strong network of likeminded folk is a necessary component of developing Practice as Research. Thank you to Prof Roberta Mock and Dr Yaron Shyldkrot for the generosity of their feedback and a very generative viva examination of this work.



Thank you to the Creative Teams, Partners and organisations who made the practical outputs for this research possible and who are acknowledged more fully in the documentation for each project. I must however offer special thanks to Louise Cross and Dr Laura Seddon whose unflappable energy, practical minds and strategic insight enabled me to be a Practitioner-Researcher and to fully attend to the needs of the project.

To my nearest and dearest commensal partners, who unconditionally support my endeavours every day and lie at the foundation of this work: Argenis, Ali and Rajni – this is for you.

## Table of Contents

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND PUBLICATION STATEMENT .....	2
ABSTRACT .....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	4
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	8
 <b>PART ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	 <b>9</b>
 THESIS STRUCTURE .....	 9
RESEARCH JOURNEY .....	10
LOCATION IN A LINEAGE: KEY TERMS .....	12
COMMENSALITY.....	12
FOOD PERFORMANCE.....	16
SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICES .....	20
RESEARCH INQUIRY .....	24
METHODOLOGY .....	27
ON NAMING PRACTICE AS RESEARCH .....	27
BOTH-AND THINKING AND COMMENSALITY.....	28
NELSON’S TRIANGULATION AND COMMENSALITY .....	30
COLLABORATION AND AUTHORSHIP .....	35
FOOD PRACTICE AND FOOD STUDIES .....	37
FORWARD .....	39
 <b>PART TWO: <i>WITH BREAD</i>.....</b>	 <b>41</b>
 PROJECT INTRODUCTION.....	 41
CREATIVE TEAM .....	43
PROJECT DOCUMENTATION .....	45
<b>MAKING <i>WITH BREAD</i> .....</b>	<b>47</b>
PROJECT TIMELINE .....	47
PARTICIPANT SELECTION .....	51
COMMENSAL COLLABORATION AND HOSTING .....	52
ON BREAD, MIGRATION AND COMMENSALITY .....	57
(S)CENOGRAPHY .....	59
<b>THINKING ABOUT <i>WITH BREAD</i> .....</b>	<b>60</b>
CONSTRUCTING COMMENSALITY THROUGH MISE-EN-SCÈNE.....	60
TABLE DESIGN AND COMMENSALITY .....	67
<b>THINKING THROUGH <i>WITH BREAD</i> .....</b>	<b>70</b>
FORWARD .....	76
 <b>PART THREE: <i>EAT THE ARCHIVES</i>.....</b>	 <b>77</b>
 PROJECT INTRODUCTION .....	 77
CREATIVE TEAM .....	80
PROJECT DOCUMENTATION .....	81
<b>MAKING <i>EAT THE ARCHIVES</i> .....</b>	<b>82</b>

THEMATIC APPROACH .....	85
OBJECT SELECTION.....	88
MENU DEVELOPMENT.....	91
<b>THINKING ABOUT <i>EAT THE ARCHIVES</i> .....</b>	<b>97</b>
ROLE REVERSAL AND POWER .....	103
DIGESTION AND INCORPORATION .....	106
<b>THINKING THROUGH <i>EAT THE ARCHIVES</i>.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>FORWARD .....</b>	<b>115</b>
 <b><u>PART 4: CONCLUSION.....</u></b>	 <b><u>117</u></b>
 <b>COMMENSAL PERFORMANCE METHODOLOGY .....</b>	 <b>117</b>
COMMENSAL PERFORMANCE METHODOLOGY: PRINCIPLES.....	122
<b>RESPONSES TO THE RESEARCH INQUIRY .....</b>	<b>127</b>
CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERDISCIPLINARY FIELDS .....	129
<b>FORWARD .....</b>	<b>131</b>
 <b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</u></b>	 <b><u>133</u></b>
 <b><u>APPENDICES.....</u></b>	 <b><u>140</u></b>
 <b>APPENDIX 1: DOCUMENTATION OF PROJECTS .....</b>	 <b>140</b>
WITH BREAD.....	140
EAT THE ARCHIVES .....	140
<b>APPENDIX 2: DAISY-CHAIN MODEL FOR THIS PROJECT.....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONS TO WITH BREAD COLLABORATORS .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>APPENDIX 4: MENUS FOR EAT THE ARCHIVES .....</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>APPENDIX 5: ETHICS APPROVAL.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>APPENDIX 6: TIMELINE FOR EAT THE ARCHIVES .....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>APPENDIX 7: <i>WITH BREAD</i> BOOK.....</b>	<b>148</b>

## Table of Figures

<b>Figure 1</b> Dimensions and role of commensality (Giacoman, 2016: 462)	<b>14</b>
<b>Figure 2</b> "Kaninchen und Ente" (Rabbit and Duck) (1892). It is captioned "Welche thiere gleichen einander am meisten?" ("Which animals are most like each other?")	<b>29</b>
<b>Figure 3</b> Modes of Knowing: Multi-mode Epistemological Model for PaR (Nelson, 2013:37)	<b>30</b>
<b>Figure 4</b> Interdisciplinary theoretical framework for my doctoral project	<b>31</b>
<b>Figure 5</b> Nelson's epistemological model with annotations (in red) of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's conceptualisation of food as a Performance Medium. In green are annotations of how this model also maps onto the three areas of my research inquiry.	<b>39</b>
<b>Figure 6</b> Basic Stage Map of 'with bread'	<b>64</b>
<b>Figure 7</b> Commensal Performance Loop	<b>99</b>

# Part One: Introduction

## Thesis Structure

This Practice as Research (PaR) PhD consists of two multi-component practical projects: *with bread* (2018-2020) and *Eat the Archives* (2020-2021). Both practical projects were developed in service of an investigation of commensality in socially engaged performance practices. The insights developed in and through both PaR outputs are documented, reflected upon and critically contextualised within this exegetic document. Multimedia documentation of each project is supplied as hyperlinks in the introduction to each project, and a summary of the documentation for both projects is offered in Appendix 1. This document is organised in four parts.

In Part One, I introduce the overall research project, define key terms, outline my research inquiry and methodology. Part Two documents, illuminates and explicates my first practical output: *with bread*. Part Three offers contextualisation, critical reflection and foregrounds the insights gained through the second practical output of this thesis: *Eat the Archives*.

Both Part Two and Part Three follow a similar structure, firstly offering an introduction to each project, an acknowledgement of the creative teams involved and an overview of the multimedia documentation. I also provide a detailed timeline for each project in order to make clear the relationship between practice, reflexivity and exegesis, following Robin Nelson's approach to deploying a PaR methodology (Nelson, 2013). Part Two and Part Three include sub-sections addressing the interconnected areas of inquiry of the project: making, thinking about and thinking through which guide the development of insights on commensality as form, process and methodology.

Part Four is a conclusion in which I summarise the key findings of the project, outline my contribution to knowledge and acknowledge the ongoing development of the work I undertook during my doctoral studies and its potential future.

## Research Journey

The development of this PaR PhD began in earnest in 2018 and builds on a body of preceding professional artistic practice which places interactions between participants over food at its heart. Each of the eight pieces<sup>1</sup> within this portfolio attempts to blur the boundaries between the everyday and the theatrical, the poetic and the mundane, the intentional/structured and the accidental. No one piece is firmly located at the extreme of any of the aforementioned spectra, and most gently walk the line between those extremes as the performances unfold in time. These pieces fall outside of the scope of my research project, but they demonstrate my longstanding interest in developing food performance. They also serve as a reminder that in beginning this Practice as Research project, I brought with me the leftovers from projects to date and the practitioner knowledge gathered through the development of this body of work.

My engagement with the construction of commensality as performance began in 2014 with the development of *The Midnight Soup*, a performance meal in which I guide the audience to prepare the titular soup while telling the story of my grandmother's life and subsequent suicide. While the project's intention was to create and hold a space for conversation around death and suicide, it was during and through the touring life of the project (first in 2015-2016 and then in 2018) that I became present to the specific potential of combining not only food with performance, but specifically a commensal approach to audience engagement, participation, and relationality. Through the making process and by performing *The Midnight Soup* in a wide range of contexts (theatres, festivals, community spaces, NHS surgeries etc.) and for diverse audiences, I developed an embodied understanding of the way in which commensal performance can facilitate complex, and potentially difficult conversations. Reflexivity through journaling, blogging and creative note-taking formed part of my artistic practice throughout the period and was enhanced by engagement with journalists, academics and other artists who wrote about their experiences of the piece. These included critic Lyn Gardner who pointed out

---

<sup>1</sup> The pieces included theatrical performances (*The Midnight Soup*), interactive exhibitions (*The Common Kitchen*), public interventions (*Le Bistrotquet*), workshops (*Around The Table*), and performative conversations/events (*Breaking Bread* series). See [www.leoburtin.eu](http://www.leoburtin.eu) for further details.

that ‘the piece, simply and without any fuss or forcing, makes a community out of a group of complete strangers’ (Gardner, 2015), playwright Emma Geraghty who, in a response to the piece I commissioned wrote of her audience experience ‘to say we leave as friends would be clichéd, but we do leave as something more than what we were when we first sat down’ (Geraghty in Burtin, 2016: 38), and food performance scholar Jenny Lawson who analysed the piece as a ‘transformative taste-encounter’ (Lawson, 2017: 48-56). It is from conversations with Jenny Lawson following the publication of her piece that I was able to formalise a proposal to undertake PhD research under her supervision. In turn, the combination of my lived experience as a theatre-maker / performer and the reflective dialogue formed the initial interest and starting point to my research in commensal performance.

Arriving to the formal frame of the PhD in 2018 I chose to begin my investigation by ensuring that I could actively engage in the kind of commensal practice I sought to investigate alongside the research design process. At the time, the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, the uncertainties surrounding the future of my daily life as a migrant to the UK, and the tension between ‘foreigners’ and ‘locals’ were deeply felt and impactful. My parallel engagement with food scholarship, both in and out of performance contexts cemented the notion that food-based exchanges have oft been used to explore intercultural relationships. In order to design the methodological framework, research processes and devising context for what would become *with bread*, I therefore called upon collaborators from exclusively migrant backgrounds and orchestrated opportunities for shared meals to take place.

Similarly, *Eat the Archives* was designed over the course of a residency period with Manchester Jewish Museum during which time I cooked and ate with members of the museum’s staff, local community and people who would eventually become participants in the research project.

This first stage of curious and active engagement was necessary to the full deployment of the commensal performance methodology which I came to develop through this PhD. It is from this embodied immersion with experiences of social eating that the

‘unexamined’ approach to commensality can be magnified through performance. In other words, it is necessary to engage with a rawer form of commensality in order that it can be later ‘illuminated’ and its potential as performance ‘revealed’ through the cooking process of performance. For this doctoral project, I concerned myself specifically with an investigation of commensality within socially engaged performance practice. In what follows, I will provide a brief overview of critical debates on commensality, and how they inform the development of what I propose to term commensal performance: as a form of performance, a method for performance and a methodology for Practice as Research.

## Location in a lineage: key terms

### Commensality

In his work on commensality, sociologist Claude Fischler asserts that it is a phenomenon experienced in all cultures (Fischler, 2011). While there is no empirical evidence of the notion of commensality being universally understood, it has been considered in many distinct disciplines from anthropology (Mars, 1997), social psychology (Barthes, [1961] 2018), sociology (Fischler, 2011; Giacomani, 2016a), performance studies (Stourna, 2018), archaeology (Pollock, 2015) and even organisational management (Kniffin et al., 2015). There is a consensus on taking an etymological (from the Latin *mensa*, table; co-together, with) approach to defining commensality as eating at the same table, or in other words, eating together. In their study of commensality within firehouses, Kniffin et al. (2015) narrowly define commensality as the moment of shared eating and completely exclude the peripatetic activities that surround eating, such as cooking and cleaning. Sobal & Nelson’s (2003) approach to commensality focusses on the social relationships at play between individuals who eat together. Claude Fischler’s work (2011) proposes a broader definition of commensality by considering its ‘features and functions’ (Fischler, 2011: 533).

Commensality often conveys a more restrictive notion than simply eating with other people. It can involve a sense of sharing food habitually, with an assumption of some degree of dependence of one or several of the commensal parties upon



another, or some degree of reciprocal commitment/involvement. Commensality is both inclusive and exclusive: it creates and/or sanctions inclusion (even transient inclusion) in a group or community, as well as exclusion of those not taking part. It can manifest equality (around the fire or a round table) or hierarchy (who gets served first or sits at the 'high table'). It provides the script or a template for many or most of human eating occurrences. (Fischler, 2011: 533)

Fischler also deplores the limited scrutiny of the subject matter in academia and frames his approach to commensality from his and others' concerns for the growing process of individualisation and 'food privatisation' highlighted in a report by Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo (Mennell et al., 1992) which warns of the possible disappearance of communal meals. As well as proposing this frame to his definition of commensality, Fischler includes a number of distinctive features to the concept. Firstly, he writes from a sense that commensality occurs primarily within pre-existing groups (family, friends, neighbours) and this view is taken on by other scholars undertaking studies of commensality (Sobal and Mary K. Nelson, 2003; Kniffin et al., 2015; Giacomani, 2016b). Unlike Kniffin et al., Fischler does include the notion of meal preparation as a possible feature of commensality, offering the possibility of exploring the distinction between commensality within a food service context (eating together at a restaurant) and in a more domestic setting, where one or more of the commensals have had a hand in preparing the food being shared. Building on Mary Douglas' work (Douglas, 1972), Fischler's definition of commensality implies that commensality exists in varying degrees and is governed by a set of hierarchies (feasts vs daily meals, for example), which in turn point to the existence of rules, formalities and manners which are crucial features in commensality.

Bringing Fischler's definition to performance studies, Athena Stourna (2018) considers the 'rules' of commensality as 'ingredients of mise en scène' (Stourna, 2018: 26) and calls on Nadia Seremetakis's sensory definition of commensality 'as the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling' (Seremetakis in Stourna, 2018: 19). While this poetic approach to commensality can seem attractive to the development of commensal performance practice, I would

consider ‘sensory memories and emotions’ to be a possible consequence of the use of commensality in performance rather than the very definition of it. Moreover, throughout her paper, Stourna at times proposes an analysis of conviviality as though it were one of commensality. Unlike commensality, conviviality implies ‘the quality of being friendly and making people feel happy and welcome’ (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019). Claude Fischler considers and warns against this collapsing of conviviality and commensality and he includes in his article a subsection on the ‘risks and dangers of eating together’ (Fischler, 2011: 538) where he highlights that contrary to value often assigned to shared meals as an ideal to strive for, it is in fact not always as ‘friendly’ and ‘happy’ as the notion of conviviality implies. In parallel and more recently, Claudia Giacoman’s conceptual model of commensality (2016) includes the consideration of the value of commensality as either positive, neutral or negative. In her model of commensality, Giacoman distinguishes this phenomenon to include three primary dimensions: interactional (shared actions, shared conversations); symbolic (meanings assigned to shared food, feeling of belonging to a group, bonding); normative (traditions, rules, social hierarchies).

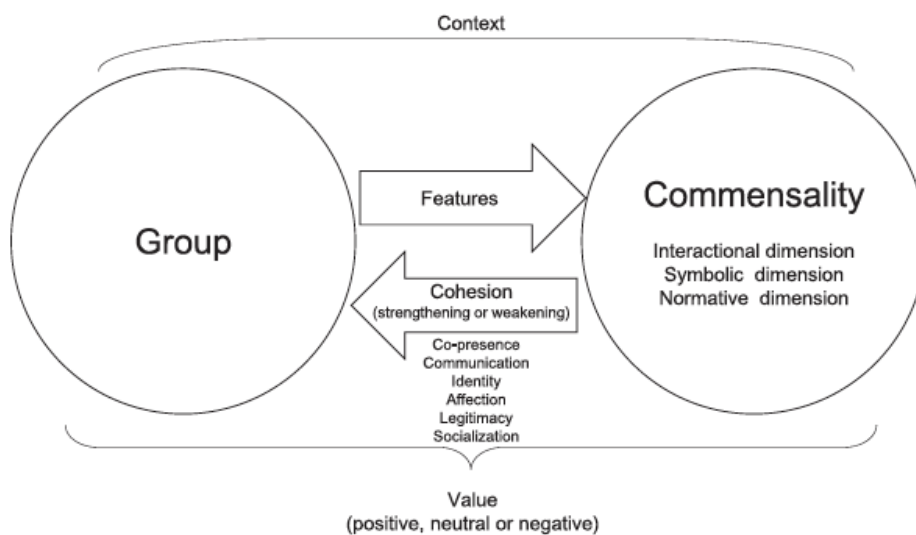


Figure 1 Dimensions and role of commensality (Giacoman, 2016: 462)

In 2021, food technologist Håkan Jönsson collaborated with social scientist Maxime Michaud and Food Studies scholar Nicklas Neuman to produce a critical discussion of commensality as an expanding research field, involving a thorough review of the literature on the topic. Their approach highlighted the value of ‘commensality as a research topic

in itself and as an entry point to unveil different dimensions of social relations between people, as well as interactions between humans and material objects' (Jönsson et al., 2021: 1). Writing in an Environmental Research and Public Health context, Jönsson and collaborators propose three dimensions to the study of commensality: the material aspects of commensality; the participants and their relationships; and orchestrating commensality. Working on commensality within the same timeframe as Jönsson and his team, my own performance-led Practice as Research sought to engage with those dimensions through making commensal performance (orchestrating commensality); thinking about commensal performance (the material aspects of commensality) and thinking through commensality (the participants and their relationships). In the concluding reflections to their discussion, Jönsson et. Al. acknowledge the historical context in which they were writing: the Covid-19 pandemic, which had significant effects on commensal practices, the consequences of which require further scrutiny.

Inevitably, the impact of the pandemic has infused my own research, with lockdowns leading to the cancellation of a national tour of *with bread* and causing severe delays, practical and design challenges to the realisation of *Eat the Archives*. In spite of the challenges, I experienced in undertaking a research project reliant on bringing people together in close quarters, to enact embodied exchange at a time of state-mandated isolation, the historical context in which this research was developed cemented my belief that commensality can be a profoundly political act which has the potential to transform quotidian activities into spaces of utopian thinking.

Working from Fischler's definition of commensality, Giacomani's model pictured above, and with an awareness of both historical and ongoing debates surrounding the notion of commensality, for my doctoral thesis, I utilised, tested and enacted a definition of commensality in performance which I proposed as including the following features:

- An expansion of the conventional commensal circles<sup>2</sup> to include strangers, as well as people who have a pre-existing relationship, in a bodily co-present context

---

<sup>2</sup> A group of people who eat together

- Elements of *communal doing* prior to eating (cooking, serving, preparing)
- Semi-structured conversation derived from a performative approach to *sobremesa*<sup>3</sup>
- Featuring the inclusion of norms (manners) and hierarchies borrowed from theatrical conventions, banqueting and domestic eating
- Featuring food(s) considered in light of their symbolic and meaning-making dimensions
- Fostering convivial interactions between participants while inviting a questioning of the romantic notion of commensality as “the almost magical ways that food reveals identity and creates relationships” (Belasco, 2008: 13)

## Food Performance

Throughout this thesis, my definition of performance is aligned with the Performance Studies approach to the term, and in particular draws on Richard Schechner’s conception of performance as a ‘broad spectrum’ which may be visualised as a web or a fan (see Schechner, 2013: 4)

From the 1970s, Schechner draws on the work of sociologists and anthropologists, including most notably Erving Goffmann and Victor Turner to articulate performance as a ‘continuum of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts, and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet’ (Schechner, 2013: 7).

To bring further precision to his approach, Schechner distinguishes existence as being parsed into: being, doing, showing doing and explaining showing doing. Within this ontological spectrum, ‘being’ is existence itself, and at the other end ‘explaining showing doing’ is performance studies. In this way, Richard Schechner articulates that:

---

<sup>3</sup> *Sobremesa* is a Spanish expression used to describe the time spent in conversation, over and after a meal which does not have a direct equivalent in English.

“Performing takes place both in doing and showing doing. The more clearly you show what you are doing, the more obviously you are performing’ (Schechner, 2013:4).

In her 2000 introduction to *Performing Processes*, Roberta Mock articulates the limitations of Richard Schechner’s definition of performance in light of the fact ‘he often uses the term itself as part of the definition’ (Mock, 2000:1) and that his models ‘largely neglect the processes outside the moment of performance’ (Mock, 2000:2). To remedy this, Mock instead proposes to focus her definition of live performance as a cycle of five processes: conception, development, presentation, reception and reflection.

In the context of food performance within which this thesis is developed, “performance” is defined dynamically within the ‘broad spectrum’ of performance studies, taking the possibility to consider commensality both ‘as’ performance (applying a performance studies lens to occurrences with food) and ‘is’ performance (the culturally specific acknowledgement of an occurrence as performance). The methodological implications of such an approach to defining performance are illustrated further ahead, in figure 5.

My existing portfolio and ongoing praxis contribute to a rich landscape of contemporary performance featuring food, and academic discourse surrounding the use of food in performance. Food and performance have an undeniable historical connection, dating back at least to Ancient Athens and the Roman Republic, where ‘festival days [...] included the consumption of food for purchase, forging a connection between play-going and eating as if the two were purposefully made for each other’ (Chansky and Folino White, 2016:3). In the introduction to her edited collection of essays *Between Feasts and Daily Meals* (2015), archaeologist Susan Pollock frames the archaeological study of ritual feasts as performance, which suggests that the relationship between a form of performativity and food may date back to the Neolithic era. Given the geographic scope covered by Pollock’s publication, this also opens up a global understanding of food as performance. Chansky and Folino White’s book takes a unique historical and global perspective on the study of food and theatre and builds upon the work of food studies scholars operating across the many and varied disciplines in the field ‘to examine the

particular problems and potentials of using food in live theatre, or specifically staged drama' (Chansky and Folino White, 2016: 2).

In introducing their project, Chansky and Folino White point to the gap in the food studies literature to consider theatre in the study of food as a 'social signifier' (Chansky and Folino White, 2016: 1). The authors claim that while performance studies scholars have demonstrated a keen interest in food in recent years, they have primarily focussed on food as performance: putting a performative lens to the examination of 'meals, restaurants and other food events' (Chansky and Folino White, 2016: 2). While indeed, the literature on food as performance is rich, the performance studies approach to food includes the consideration of artistic practices with food beyond the 'staged drama' which is Chansky & Folino White's primary research interest and focus. Kristin Hunt's more recent monograph, *Alimentary Performances* (2018), draws on examples from fine dining and her theatrical practice to 'trace the origins and implications of food as a mimetic medium' (Hunt 2018: back cover). I am aware of the rich history of food in staged drama and inspired by the potential of the study of fine dining and culinary arts through the lens of performance. My own praxis, however, is primarily rooted in a lineage of post dramatic performance practice and scholarship which was the focus of two issues of the journal *Performance Research: On Cooking* (Gough (ed), 1999) and *On Taste* (Gough and Abrams (eds), 2017).

These issues contain papers by some of the leading scholars of food and performance whose work my praxis builds upon. These include Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett who writes on food as performance medium, and elsewhere on the table as a stage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1999; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2012) and Joanne Finkelstein who coins the term *foodainment* (Finkelstein, 1999) to describe performative experiences with food in the entertainment industry. *Performance Research* also offers discussion of practitioners work such as Bobby Baker's seminal feminist approach to making performance with food (Baker and Whittuck, 1999), or Reckless Sleepers' performance on the subject of death row meals (Lawson, 2017). Beyond thematically focussed issues, *Performance Research* continues to be a significant venue for the publication of performance perspectives on food, with the 2018 issue *On Generosity*, edited by food

performance practitioner-researchers Laurie Beth Clark and Michael Peterson featuring a paper by Jenny Lawson on baking together in performance (2018: 69-73), the 2023 issue *On Care* featuring artists pages on food themes by Clark and Peterson (2023: 260) and a forthcoming 2024 issue *On Hunger* edited by the same together with Jazmin Llana.

Contemporary performance practices in the area of food performance are indebted to the lineage of feminist practitioners and scholars who have reclaimed both food, and the domestic as sites of creativity, resistance and political exploration. As articulated by Jenny Lawson's 2011 piece on the culinary feminine, the work of artist Bobby Baker resonates with feminist discourses developed during the 1970s, and is representative of feminist artistic practices which 're-imagine the idea of women and art against dominant regimes of power and knowledge' (Lawson, 2011: 339). Other practitioner-researchers working within this territory include Lena Simic, whose *Institute for Art and Practice of Dissent at Home* ran for ten years from 2007 and sought to be a 'critical intervention into family life and the normative upbringing of children' (Simic, n.d.). Elsewhere, feminist scholar-artist Suzanne Lacy draws parallels between Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* and feminist performance art in her 2005 chapter on art and everyday life (Lacy, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2005: 91-102). My work within food performance is made possible and informed by the rich legacy of feminist practitioners exploring culinary practices in everyday life creatively, and with activist aims.

My praxis, and in particular, the development of the practical elements of this investigation are informed, influenced, and inspired by the vibrant and ever-growing landscape of creative practices involving food. It is particularly indebted to and aligned with those contemporary performance practitioners committed to a socially engaged and participatory approach to food in and/or as performance. Exemplary of this approach is the Manchester-based company Quarantine. Their work is formally varied, involving installations, studio performances, workshops, and residencies. Of the thirty works listed on their website (Quarantine, n.d.) in 2018, about a third (eleven pieces), included the use of food. Sometimes food was the primary subject matter and/or modus operandi of the practice (*Kitchen Project*, *EatEat* for example), other times it was a well-documented and intentional part of the devising process (*Summer*) and elsewhere food

was used a way to foster post-show conversations with the audience (*Susan & Darren*). Writing about the company's piece *Summer*, Sarah Hunter recounts:

In conversation with Renny<sup>4</sup>, she tells me this frequent return to the meal is fuelled by an interest in the inherent relationship between food and conviviality, and a belief that in the processes of preparing for or engaging in a shared meal people will inevitably reveal something of themselves. [...] Renny too uses the word 'intimacy' when talking about the frequent use of meals in Quarantine's work, suggesting that cooking together or eating together can act as a “kind of short cut to intimacy”. She acknowledges this can be genuine or a surface level engagement, but suggests it functions either way because it encourages an awareness of one another's presence.’ (Hunter, 2017)

The notions of engagement, awareness of an other and the possibility of creating intimacy through communal doing are all features of what I term ‘socially engaged practice’. In developing my practice-as-research, I choose to situate, define and analyse my work within the context of socially engaged practice. In what follows, I offer my working definition of the term as well as a broad overview of the development of socially engaged practice as a field, in order to illuminate my particular relationship to a socially engaged approach to my artistic practice.

## Socially Engaged Practices

The notion of ‘socially engaged practice’ is discussed in a range of different terms. These terms have evolved through a number of debates which are ongoing in academia, arts practice and the industry and have been at the core of conferences including Arts Council England's *Uncommon Ground* (2018) and Heart of Glass's *With For About* which held its fourth annual edition in St Helens in May 2019, for example. The various terms proposed below, and their authors' respective work highlights the complex diversity of socially engaged practice. While each thinker offers a particular nuanced perspective and a

---

<sup>4</sup> Renny refers to Renny O'Shea, one of Quarantine's Artistic Directors



unique approach to the subject, by and large, they understand socially engaged practice to be the creation of an artist where, as Tom Finkelpearl puts it, 'social interaction is at some level the art' (Tate, n.d.; Finkelpearl, 2013).

In 1998, visual arts curator Nicholas Bourriaud coined the expression *relational aesthetics* (Bourriaud, 2002) as a way to critically approach artworks valued for the social context they exist in and the interactions they may provoke or create. In his discussion of relational aesthetics, Bourriaud develops the idea that such artworks generate "micro-utopias", he states: 'Art was intended to prepare and announce a future world: today it is modelling possible universes' (Bourriaud, 2002:13). Claire Bishop notably critiqued this notion in her writing on what she terms *participatory art* (Bishop, 2006; Bishop, 2012) because, as Kim Charnley puts it: 'Bourriaud's rhetoric of "micro-utopia" conceals the social reality of art as a nexus of power and unspoken exclusivity.' (Charnley, 2011: 39) Writing from her position as a critic, Bishop calls for an evaluation of participatory art on the grounds of artistic and aesthetic merit rather than on the basis of ethics or social good in her 2006 article *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents*. In turn, Grant Kester takes a critical approach to Bishop's aforementioned 2006 article on what he calls *dialogical aesthetics* (Kester, 2004) in lieu of Bishop's preferred *participatory arts*. He writes:

Rather than a continuum of collaborative practices, Bishop seems determined to enforce a fixed and rigid boundary between "aesthetic" projects ("provocative," "uncomfortable," and "multilayered") and activist works ("predictable," "benevolent," and "ineffectual") (Kester, 2006: 22)

Despite these debates, and the call-and-response critiques illustrated by Kester and Bishop's 2006 series of letter exchanges in the pages of *Artforum*, (which Kim Charnley discusses in depth in her 2011 paper *Dissensus and the politics of collaborative practice*), I believe a certain kind of consensus can be found in François Matarasso's writing on what he prefers to term *participatory art*:

At its best, participatory art creates a space in which all can speak and be heard, where our pain and our hopes can be shared, where we can build common ground and ways of working together, where our creativity and empathy might find better ways of living. (Matarasso, 2019: 29)

Matarasso's implication of the transformative potential of participation echoes Gareth White's proposal, made in conclusion to his seminal book *Audience Participation in theatre* that 'the practices of audience participation temporarily re-shape our social being, make it special, intensify it [...] and perhaps, on occasion, allow us to perceive ourselves anew' (White, 2013: 206). Of the different expressions and terms utilised to describe the artistic practices I align myself with, I find 'socially engaged practice' most useful. While in this case, it primarily refers to socially engaged *performance* practice, socially engaged practice can be understood in the context of any artistic discipline and embraces the postmodern blurring of boundaries between artforms and disciplinary fields. In using 'socially engaged practice' instead of 'participatory art' I open the possibility for my work to be considered within other fields. Within the academy, my practice can be contextualised as a socially engaged approach to food studies. Beyond the academy, the notion of the "socially engaged" invites the possibility of bringing such an approach to the food industry, for example. In the context of food performance, my engagement with socially engaged practice also sharpens the focus of my doctoral inquiry around commensal performance specifically. In other words, my commensal performance praxis is distinct from subfields of food and performance discussed earlier, such as staged drama (as considered by Chansky and Folino White, 2016), foodtainment (Finkelstein, 1999) or the performance of fine dining (Lawson, 2017; Hunt 2018). The social aspect embedded within socially engaged practice also resonates with the notion of commensality as a necessarily social practice.

My first professional encounter with socially engaged practice happened in 2012 when I joined Rajni Shah Projects as the company was preparing to stage their piece, *Glorious*, for its final performance. While *Glorious* held a "traditional" theatre show at its centre, the project was as much about the show as it was about the process of people (including

local musicians and participant-performers) coming together to make the show happen. As writer Mary Paterson puts it in *The Glorious Storybook*:

*[Glorious]* sought to provide a stage for self-expression and a structure for sharing ideas; to create a community of strangers, and a group of friends; to bring people together in pursuit of a difficult goal and to make everyone feel comfortable. (Paterson in Shah et al., 2013)

Echoing Paterson's words, I have previously defined socially engaged practice as 'art that creates its own community' (Burtin, 2015). I revisit this definition here as a means to articulate my approach to the term in this PhD study. I see socially engaged practice as a doing away with the idea that community always exists in its own right and can be worked with as material. I suggest that through socially engaged practice, we can actively create community through the social engagement implied in the term 'socially engaged practice'. This lens is particularly useful to the development of commensal performance, as research on commensality has demonstrated that 'commensality produces bonding' (Fischler, 2011: 533), thus suggesting it can be a powerful contributor to the creation of community. The use of commensality as a bonding strategy is reflected in performance practice also with artists such as Ellie Harrison hosting meal events throughout her long-term project *The Grief Series (2010-present)* to enable the meeting and exchange between participants in her work. Leo Kay's *Unfinished Business* see their performance meal *Only Wolves and Lions* as an 'active experiment in community' (*Unfinished Business*, 2012). Shared meals are also a regular feature of Pacitti Company's SPILL festival which aim to foster a sense of community between artists and audiences involved in the programme. (SPILL, 2009)

Through this PhD study, I propose commensal performance as a specific mode of socially engaged practice. By centring on building interactions over food, existing commensal performance practice offers a sensory experience rooted in an everyday understanding. Commensality has been deployed as an activist performance strategy by artists including May Chowdhry whose piece *What's Eating Our Reality* (Lancaster Arts, 2018) explores food justice and includes the serving of food that may otherwise have been

wasted and prepared by artists chefs FoodSketz. Elsewhere, FoodSketz have used food as the catalyst to hold public conversations on mental health, for example. Elsewhere, Alisa Tanaka-King's project *F.O.C.U.S.* (2017-ongoing) brings the Japanese fine dining art of kaiseki to wider audiences and connects international communities through conversation over dinner. By working with local and seasonal food, Tanaka-King encourages participants in her project to consider the ecological impact of the food they consume. Other practitioners are also exploring the potential of commensality as a research tool, for example, Dr Sheila McCormick studies changing perceptions of death and dying through the *Death, Dinner & Performance Project* (2018).

In developing my praxis alongside and with an awareness of these practitioners' work, I developed a model for commensal performance praxis which offers a softening of the boundaries between the notions of activist art, community art, dialogical and political aesthetics which are at the core of current debates on socially engaged practice.

The aforementioned examples of practice are not intended to form an exhaustive list, but rather to offer an illustration of the colleagues whose work shares some of the same concerns as my own, whose practices I have benefited through this research project, and whose support nourishes my Practice as Research in an ongoing manner.

## Research Inquiry

My doctoral research project has emerged from and is firstly situated within the field of food and performance, in which I have been active as a practitioner for over a decade. As discussed above, there is evidence of a connection between food and performance in the form of ritual feasts dating as far back as the Neolithic era (Pollock, 2015) and food has been used as part of artistic performances in a myriad ways ever since, from the Ancient Athens and Roman Republic festival days, to medieval banquets and the more recent emergence of the inclusion of food in entertainment experiences, or *foodtainment* as coined by Joanne Finkelstein (1999). There is also a rich history of food

being used as subject, medium and/or modus operandi in contemporary performance practice again in multiple modes from staged drama to live art experiments.

As a practitioner-researcher, I have a specific focus on the investigation of the concept of commensality in socially engaged performance practice. Despite food and performance's long shared history, there is limited scholarship which specifically considers food performance through the lens of commensality. As a conceptual lens, commensality allows us to consider how human social relations are constructed and developed over food. As a practitioner, I have participated in what Claire Bishop termed 'the social turn' (2006; 2012) in artistic practice, and prior to the start of my PhD developed artworks which sought to create particular social interactions between participants. My interest in food and professional engagement in artistic practice as a mode of community building converge around the concept of commensality, which is central to my inquiry.

The overarching aim of my research is to reveal the potential of commensality in performance practice in relation to the insights a performance practice methodology can yield in relation to our understanding of commensality as a social phenomenon, and its potential as performance.

Throughout this PhD, I therefore ask:

- In what ways can performance practice illuminate our understanding of commensality as a social phenomenon?
- In what ways can the potential of commensality as a performance form be revealed through practice?

In order to fulfil this aim, I adopted a Practice as Research methodology to unfold three interconnected areas of inquiry:

1. Making commensal performance (commensality as a performance form)

2. Thinking about commensality (commensality as a process)
3. Thinking through commensality (commensality as methodology)

In each exegetic chapter accompanying the practical outputs of my research, I adopt a reflexive approach structured around the aforementioned areas of inquiry in order to address the core questions of this overarching PhD project. Secondary research questions specific to each project, and which emerged as a result the iterative Practice as Research process are introduced in the corresponding chapters.

## Methodology

The primary methodological framework of my investigation is Practice as Research (PaR). Drawing notably on Robin Nelson's model for PaR, I seek to develop new knowledge through what he refers to as *praxis*: 'theory imbricated within practice' (Nelson, 2013: 5). As such my research follows a cycle of 'doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing' (Nelson, 2013: 32) which would be best visualised as a sphere with each of those elements having the potential to be a starting point, and with the possibility for more than one of those activities to happen concurrently (on opposite points within the sphere). Reflecting through doing; articulating through reading; doing reading, and so on. This particular methodological choice is particularly pertinent to my research in that it embraces multiple modes of knowing, which therefore supports the necessarily interdisciplinary nature of my research project.

### On naming Practice as Research

Practice as Research, as I choose to name it, after Nelson's work (Nelson, 2006; 2013) is also known by other names depending on regional and/or disciplinary contexts (Nelson, 2013: 8-11). For example, Artistic Research is often used in the visual arts, and practice-led or creative-led research are preferred in Australia. Some performance scholars prefer to speak of Performance as research (Arlander et al., 2018) to highlight the specific artistic discipline utilised to conduct research. Robin Nelson defines Practice as Research as follows:

PaR involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry. (Nelson, 2013: 8)

Some practitioners and scholars use similar definitions for the terms practice-led and practice-based research. For Nelson, the use of practice-led 'may bear a residual sense that knowledge follows after, is secondary to, the practice' (Nelson, 2013: 10). I align

myself with Nelson's view on this and would argue that the notion of practice-led research would be an inaccurate reflection of my project as 'practice' doesn't lead the way but rather happens simultaneously within a multi-mode inquiry, which I discuss further in this section.

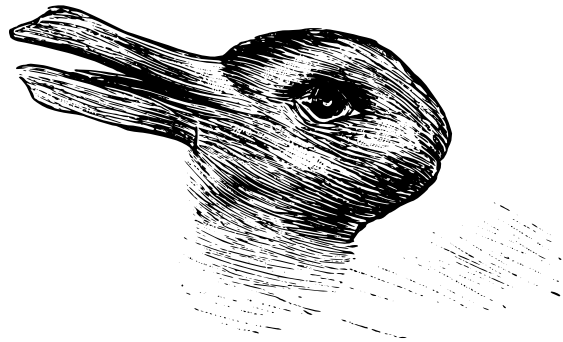
Similarly, practice-based may be read as suggesting that the research is based on practice and may imply that the practice itself does not form part of the research inquiry (but rather that the research is 'based on' the practice). As a term, Practice as Research acknowledges practice as a knowledge-yielding method. I prefer to stay away from the discipline-specific terminology of Performance-as-Research for two reasons. Firstly, as discussed earlier, I align my work within the lineage of socially engaged practice which has roots in both performance, and visual arts as well as other disciplines and feel that the term Performance as Research could inadvertently erase that multidisciplinary lineage. Secondly, my doctoral project's methodology draws on food practice, which includes domestic and everyday encounters with food as well as a wealth of creative practices related to food as a medium, beyond performance. As such, throughout my doctoral project, I will use the expression 'Practice as Research' in line with Nelson's definition. I shall refer to 'practice as a key method of inquiry [and the submission of] [...] cultural practice as substantial evidence of a research inquiry' (Nelson 2013: 8) as Practice as Research.

### Both-and thinking and commensality

In his approach to PaR, Robin Nelson suggests that to engage in Practice-as-Research successfully, one must become a 'both-and' thinker. At once a practitioner and a researcher, which he goes on to term simply 'practitioner-researcher' (Nelson, 2013: 23). Speaking at the Artistic Doctorates in Europe conference held at Middlesex University, London in April 2018, Robin Nelson illustrated this concept through the well-known, so-called 'Rabbit-Duck illusion'.



**Welche Thiere gleichen ein-  
ander am meisten?**



**Kaninchen und Ente.**

*Figure 2 "Kaninchen und Ente" (Rabbit and Duck) (1892). It is captioned "Welche thiere gleichen einander am meisten?" ("Which animals are most like each other?")*

The image is of both a rabbit and a duck, as two sides of the same coin and existing conjointly. Throughout this doctoral project, commensality is both an approach to artistic practice, and developed as a Practice as Research methodology. Commensal performance as Practice as Research becomes distinct from commensal performance when it is proactively situated in a research context, firmly located in both a scholarly lineage and having reviewed other practice within the field. Moreover, Practice as Research requires reflexivity in order to foreground the development of new insights, or what Nelson terms 'informed critical reflection'. By nature, elements of the practice developed through this thesis are the fruit of my established artistic approach, enabling the development of a context from which to apply a Practice as Research methodology to the specific inquiry of commensality in socially-engaged performance practice.

Moreover, a both-and thinking approach to research on the subject of commensality is fitting as the phenomenon of commensality is itself thought of as 'both-and' throughout the existing literature. Commensality fosters both bonding and hostility, it brings people together and highlights the ways in which they are different (culturally, emotionally, in terms of class, difference of opinion etc.) As a theoretical framework and critical underpinning, Practice as Research readily embraces both-and-ness, thus making it an ideal approach to the study of commensality.

## Nelson's triangulation and commensality

Nelson further theorises Practice as Research as a multi-mode epistemological model which puts distinct modes of knowing (know how, know that and know what) in dynamic conversation with one another.

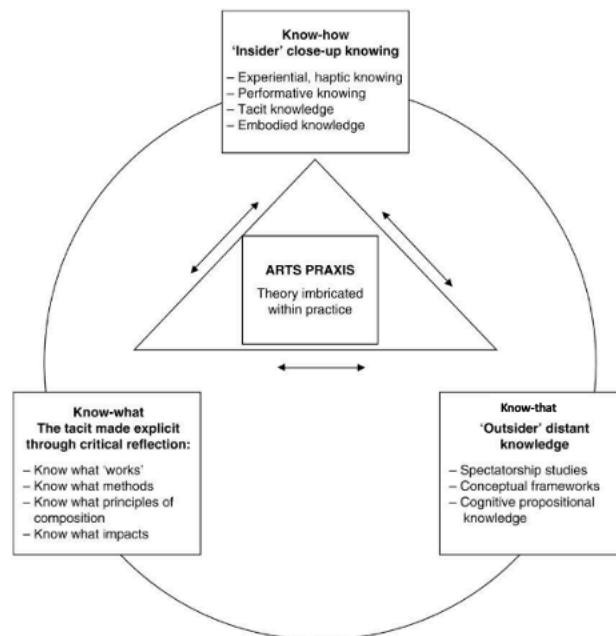


Figure 3 Modes of Knowing: Multi-mode Epistemological Model for PaR (Nelson, 2013:37)

Practice as Research, in a first stage, is a process of definition: in performing commensality, I begin by establishing a baseline of tacit and embodied knowledge – what Robin Nelson (2013: 37) calls know-how. My PaR projects will call upon my practitioner knowledge of socially engaged commensal performance. I arrive at this research project knowing how to devise such performances and with experience of the artistic and logistical implications of working with food, commensality, and socially engaged practice. I also bring embodied and tacit knowing drawn from my broader food practice: for example, my PaR project, *with bread*, as the title suggests, involves the making of bread. I know how to make bread not just by following a recipe: I know how the dough should feel to the touch. Of course, know-how and food practice are also connected by the everyday lived experience of cooking and eating.

Know-that is a mode of knowing developed through what we could perhaps think of as conventional scholarly methods. My practice is developed in conversation with the broader intellectual context it is born into. I engage with existing research on commensality, current food-performance practice, and locate my work in a lineage of similar practices (qua Nelson, 2006: 29), as detailed in my genealogies section. My doctoral research is concerned with commensality in socially engaged practice: the study of a complex and under-scrutinised phenomenon such as commensality in and through socially engaged practice necessitates a robust interdisciplinary theoretical framework. Moreover, it is thanks to this interdisciplinary approach that I can engage in the three distinct but interconnected areas of research I have identified. Engaging in research concerning food practice in performance necessitates a grasp of key theoretical debates in research concerning both food practice, performance and the areas where they intersect, as illustrated below.

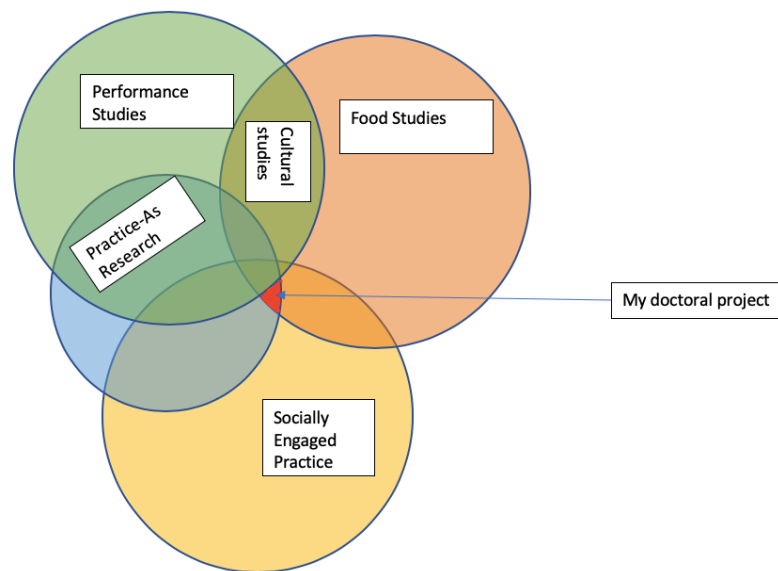


Figure 4 Interdisciplinary theoretical framework for my doctoral project

My interdisciplinary theoretical framework is enabled by the productive relationship between Practice as Research (PaR) and Performance Studies (PS) methodologies. In *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Richard Schechner states that:

Academic disciplines are most active at their ever-changing interfaces. In terms of performance studies, this means the interactions between theatre and anthropology, folklore and sociology, history and performance theory, gender

studies and psychoanalysis, performance and actual performance events – and more. [...] Accepting “inter” means opposing the establishment of any single system of knowledge, values, or subject matter. (Schechner, 2013: 24)

As an interdisciplinary field, PS is particularly potent to the investigation of commensality in performance as it allows for the consideration of commensality ‘as’ performance beyond formal commensal performances. Through the lens of performance studies, everyday or ritual commensality can be viewed ‘as’ performance and/or as performative. As a practitioner-researcher (Nelson, 2013: 23) working from a socially engaged approach to performance, this lens enables me to come back to the project of utilising artistic practice to put commensality under the critical lens of performance. What an engagement with PS also makes room for, is to then ‘return’ the knowledge developed through PaR to other fields.

Just as PS promotes an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship, Nelson’s PaR model places value on the interplay between different modes of knowing (see fig.3). Robin Nelson proposes PaR as a move ‘from “hard facts” to “liquid knowing”’ (Nelson, 2013: 48-70). Arising in the postmodern age, PaR calls into question the permanent adequacy of classical qualitative and/or quantitative research methods which yield data presented as objective, tested for repeatability and communicated through a third person, apparently objective narrative. Instead, Nelson’s triangulation offers an alternative route to rigorously generate, analyse and communicate knowledge developed through practice. Know-that and know-how are placed in dialogue with know-what: ‘the tacit made explicit through critical reflection’.

Nelson defines know-what as ‘informed reflexivity about the processes of making and its modes of knowing’ (Nelson, 2013: 44). The design of the making process for my PaR projects include a range of specific, scheduled moments of reflection which are documented in the introduction to each project. I deploy and test a collection of methods in each project to enable such reflexivity. These include:

- Audio recordings at the end of devising sessions, summarising key discussion points, learning and ideas
- Collaborative note taking at the studio table: in addition to field notes in private notebooks, myself and collaborators shared a large piece of paper for the purposes of note taking collaboratively
- Observer note taker: working with a project assistant who took notes on discussion from her perspective sitting at the edge of the project
- Blogging/Journaling: self-reflection in a personal and creative mode
- Documentation through film and photography to enable future reflection, allowing me to look back at the project from a distance
- Audience responses collated through written forms
- Audience conversations, held within the performance itself
- Written answers to questions on process from collaborators
- Commissioned writing from ‘outside eye’ collaborators after work in progress sharing
- Informal conversations with audience members post work in progress sharing
- Commentary published by audience members on social media post work in progress sharing, and post-performance
- Leading feedback sessions utilising Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process (Lerman, 2008)

The wealth and diversity of data generated by these methods then serve as the basis for periods of critical reflection through writing, away from sustained creative practice. This process of reflection both during and post-practice has been theorised by Melissa Trimingham in what she calls a ‘hermeneutic spiral model’ of PaR (Trimingham, 2002), which invites the practitioner-researcher to regularly return to their point of entry to the research enquiry with their developing knowledge in order

to establish new aims and objectives for the research. Trimingham's model acknowledges the position of the researcher and the prior knowledge (know how, know that) they bring to the research:

[t]he point of entry is worth more consideration, as the knowledge the researcher brings to the project will shape the answers eventually found. In other words, the question asked always determines the answer. This is basic hermeneutics. The aim therefore is not to attempt to enter the spiral in ignorance (as this is impossible anyway) but to ask as open a question as possible; and the aim as the research progresses is always to ask a better question, not to reach a point where no more questions need to be asked (as might be the case in a linear model of progression). (Trimingham, 2002: 57)

Over the last twenty years, both Nelson and Trimingham's methodological models for PaR have been widely adopted by the Artistic Research community and have contributed significantly to the gradual establishment of Practice As Research as an acceptable mode of knowledge generation within institutions. However, as PaR grows and evolves, so too must the methodological tools that guide them. Very recently, in one of the latest publications concerned with Practice as Research (or as they term it, Performance As Research), Joanna Bucknall points to the limitations of the existing models on the ground that they 'were failing to fully account for the subjective, localised and – more critically – relational aspects of [her] practice' (Bucknall in Arlander et al., 2018: 56). In response to this perceived challenge, she developed what she calls 'The daisy chain model' which places a more direct and explicit emphasis on the 'relational and contextual elements' (Bucknall in Arlander et al., 2018: 58) that inform the research (and which are somewhat *implicit* in Nelson's notion of know-how). In expanding upon the combination of Nelson's triangulation and Trimingham's spiral, Bucknall's daisy chain visually accounts for the multiplicity of activities and contexts that impact the research:

So instead of a single spiral or triangle, there are multiple simultaneous spirals feeding back into the research concerns/questions. Each activity that has a bearing upon the development of the praxis in response to the research

questions/concerns is represented as a ‘flowering’ that both intentionally (actively) or more incidentally (passively) informs and generates the emergent praxis. (Bucknall in Arlander et al., 2018: 60)

Adopting Bucknall’s approach to representing my doctoral research serves to acknowledge the wider context of my ongoing artistic practice and to recognise that as a Practitioner-Researcher, I have continued to develop a professional practice which cannot be readily construed or measured as *research* and nonetheless informs the deployment of my PaR. In Appendix 2, I apply Bucknall’s model to my project, as a way to rigorously map the necessary ‘messiness’ of an iterative creative process which was influenced by professional commissions, developing partnerships with a range of artistic institutions, growing relationships with communities and individuals, and a global pandemic. In doing so, I also wish to resist the urge to develop too neat a narrative of linear progress from research questions to research insights and acknowledge the multitude of contributions without which the very methodological approach which underpins this project could not have taken place. Additionally, as my investigation is focused on food practice, the daisy chain model allows for the integration of the broader influences that food practice bring to my praxis.

## Collaboration and authorship

My approach to collaboration with other artistic practitioners is discussed in further detail in the chapter on with bread, and in the case of Eat the Archives, in addition to the exegetic chapter, collaboration with the Museum’s team, artist Sheila Ghelani and project participants is also addressed in the documentary film. It is worth noting however, that in the context of deploying a Practice as Research methodology, there are creative, practical, and ethical concerns which required careful and ongoing considerations throughout the study period.

Firstly, from a creative point of view, I approached each project from an initial positionality as Artistic Director or Lead Artist, setting out the overarching vision for each project, establishing structures around the development of the work, and supplying collaborators with detailed briefs. Such an approach results in a distribution of creative

power and control which were also explored within the research, notably in *with bread*, where for the purposes of addressing my Practice as Research aims, through an iterative process, I adopted a range of strategies to hold creative power as lightly as possible (see Part II for further details). Creative decision-making emerged as a result of a range of playful exercises, discussions and shared meals and following the iterative principle ‘doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing’ (Nelson, 2013: 32) inherent to my approach to Practice as Research.

From a practical point of view, collaborators were given formal contracts in the context of their engagement as artists, setting out the terms and conditions of their participation in the project, how their work would be credited and remunerated. It is worth noting that remuneration for participation in either project took place regardless of whether a collaborator was a “professional” artist or a participant whose primary profession is not within the creative sector. This was notably enabled by each project’s existence within a professional artistic context, facilitated by my relationship with artistic institutions and funders (most significantly, Arts Council England). This research was therefore reliant on the infrastructure afforded by my professional background as an artist and producer and as such, from a practical point of view, my relationships with collaborators were in part mediated in accordance with the established processes of this wider context.

Additionally, each collaborator was also approached as a participant in a formal academic research project and informed consent was gathered following the policies and processes required by the University of Leeds, as part of the ethics approval process (documentation of which is supplied in Appendix 5, with reference FAHC 18-098). With this in mind, I introduced each collaborator to the guiding principles of Practice as Research and let them know that the work we would develop together would be *both* artistic practice *and* serve towards the development of my doctoral thesis.

The range of creative relationships developed across both projects were regularly revisited as each new phase of the project took place. For example, in negotiating the use of the illustrations produced by Katerina Radeva as part of the artistic processes for the making of *with bread* for publication – which necessitated a new contract. Similarly, guest-hosts who had supported the devising process for *Eat the Archives* later took part



in the filmed version of the performance for the purposes of developing the documentary supplied in Part III, resulting in further negotiation of how their image, contributions and reflections might serve the development of my doctoral thesis.

The centrality of commensality as subject of investigation, and its method also offered a practical framework for navigating the complexity of collaboration across artistic and research practice in an iterative manner and with care which would enable to shape the insights discussed in Part II and Part III.

## Food Practice and Food Studies

Commensality is a food practice as understood in light of Lawson's definition of food practice as the combination of lived experiences with food with 'the commercial, popular cultural representations and [...] artistic explorations with food.' (Lawson 2011: 338)

Writing in one of the most recent edited collections on artistic research, Ben Spatz critiques the openness of the 'practice' of 'practice-as-research':

'Practice' in the context of 'practice as research' is often left undefined. We may think that by not defining practice we are leaving it radically open, but in fact this lack of a rigorously epistemological definition of practice compels us to fall back continuously upon mainstream, vernacular, and above all professional definitions and standards. Practice then seems to refer by default to something like 'professional' practice, which leads to a confusing tension since the professional application of knowledge is exactly what ought to be postponed by the invocation of research. (Spatz in Arlander et al., 2018: 212)

Drawing on Lawson's notion of food practice enables me to establish my methodology with greater accuracy, as indeed, my project is concerned with food practice-as-research. Spatz proposes: 'If performance studies begins from theatrical examples, then practice studies begins from everyday life' (Spatz in Arlander et al., 2018: 213).

In adopting food practice as a research methodology within the intersection of the fields of performance studies and socially engaged practice, my work begins from the lived,

everyday experience of commensality. The frame of food Practice-as-Research highlights the potential food has to be a methodological tool, which is relatively well established within food studies. In their introduction to Food Studies research methods, Jeff Miller and Jonathan Deutsch notably cite food studies scholars such as Annie Hauck-Lawson and Meredith Abarca who utilise everyday food practice (“routine cooking”) to conduct interviews:

Food can tell the stories of migration, assimilation or resistance, changes over time, and personal and group identity. In short, many facets of the human experience can be accessed through what is eaten, avoided, no longer or more often eaten, and, of course, what is produced and prepared and how it is done. [...] And food can work in tandem with the spoken and written voices in order to enact a holistic representation of identity, politics, and human experience. (Miller and Deutsch, 2010: 9)

The field of food studies (‘as the study of the relationship between food and the human experience’ (Miller and Deutsch, 2010: 3)) is both multidisciplinary in that it includes scholarship generated from various academic disciplines (anthropology, sociology, archaeology etc.) and interdisciplinary in that it often combines a range of disciplinary perspectives to develop our understanding of food as a system (Belasco, 2008).

As outlined in my earlier introduction to Food Performance, there is a significant affinity between Food Studies and Performance – or as Warren Belasco poetically puts it: ‘If conflict is the soul of drama, then food studies makes for very good theater’ (Belasco, 2008: 35). Academic Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is a leading voice in bringing performance studies’ disciplinary perspective to food studies. She theorises that ‘food and performance converge conceptually at three junctures’ and she names these: to do, to behave, and to show (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1999: 1). This framework for understanding food as a performance medium, when overlaid with Nelson’s epistemological model provides a further methodological tool for the development of food praxis. The diagram below maps the relationship between the primary methodological framework deployed throughout this thesis - namely Nelson’s model for

PaR – alongside its relationship to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s modelling of the conceptual relationship between food and performance and my specific focus on a commensal inquiry. As discussed above and shown in Appendix 2, Bucknall’s ‘daisy-chain’ approach offers a more comprehensive opportunity to represent the overall context in which the research took place, however, Figure 5, on the next page, captures the theoretical core from which the deployment of my PaR methodology began, and which frames the development of the exegetic commentary on both *with bread* and *Eat the Archives*.

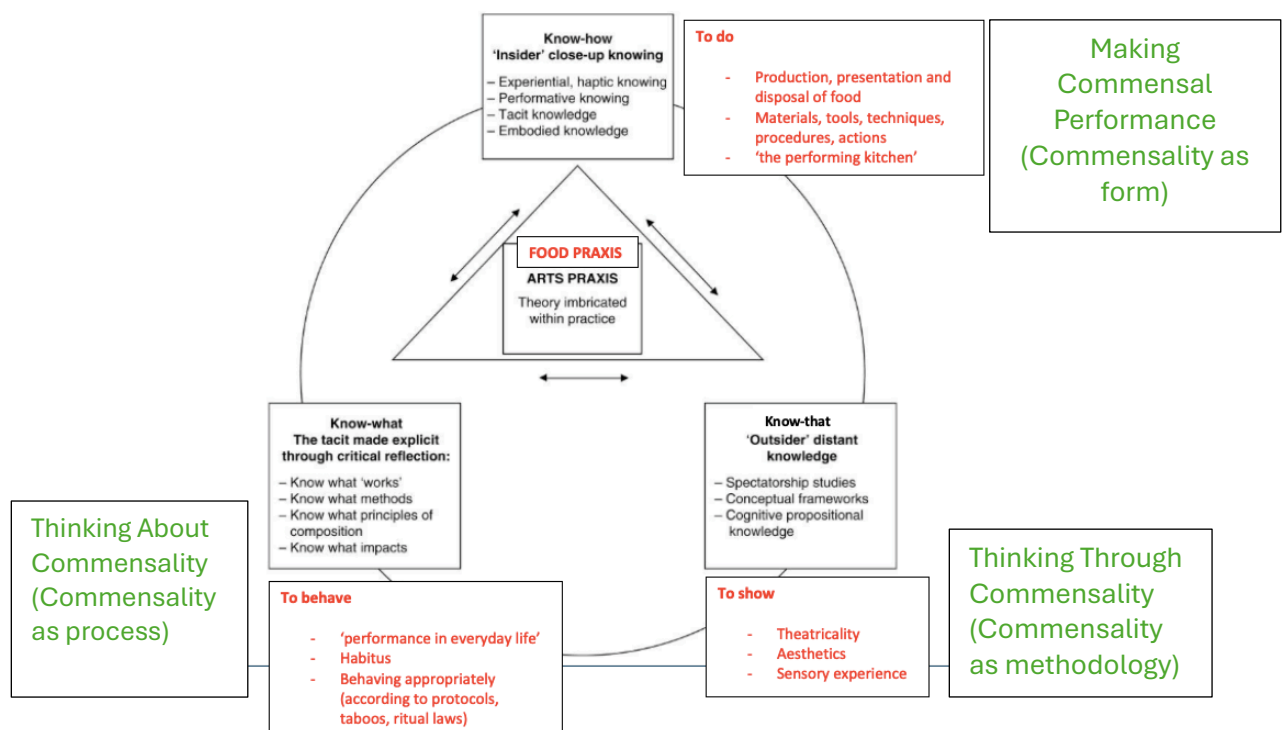


Figure 5 Nelson’s epistemological model with annotations (in red) of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s conceptualisation of food as a Performance Medium. In green are annotations of how this model also maps onto the three areas of my research inquiry.

Furthermore, my approach to PaR as a primary research methodology is enhanced by my engagement the one other field which offered useful theoretical underpinnings to the base of Nelson’s triangulation of knowing, and which particularly informed the development of ‘know-what’ insights.

## Forward

Here, in Part I, I have outlined the structure of the overall thesis in relation to both its practical outputs and this exegetic document. I have contextualised the emergence of this doctoral research project in relation to my artistic and professional practices. Following Nelson's model for PaR (2013), I have located myself in the lineages from which the research was developed and the fields in which it places itself in conversation. In mapping such influences, I defined the key terms and contexts of this PhD: commensality, food performance, socially engaged practices. I introduced my research inquiry and followed with laying out the methodology for my project: rooted in Nelson's model for PaR and underpinned by food practice, food studies and performance studies. In Part II, I turn my attention to the first of my PaR projects: *with bread*.

## Part Two: *with bread*

### Project Introduction

*with bread* is a two-act participatory performance designed for theatre spaces, for up to forty guests. The show takes place around five dining tables arranged in the round.

In the first act, a cast of six performers tell a poetic version of the history of bread, woven together with autobiographical texts. Every performer in the piece is a migrant to the United Kingdom, and three of six always perform in the show – Alikì Chapple, Katherina Radeva and myself. The other three performers are recruited locally where the show takes place. Each performer – except for me – plays host to a group of up to eight audience members who join them at their table. Meanwhile, I perform in a ‘maître d’hôtel’-like role from the centre of the set. The spoken text of the performance is paused in four moments where the audience prepare pain azyme – an unleavened flatbread – in stages<sup>5</sup>. Within these pauses, each table host also gently encourages interaction and conversation between their guests.

After a short musical break, the second act begins with tables being set for eating, and the flatbreads being served alongside two vegetarian stews. There is no formal aesthetic performance component to this act. Audiences are invited to stay and eat together for as long as they wish.

*with bread* proposes and constructs a performance context which then leads to a commensal experience within theatre. The narrative journey of the performance leads to a commensal moment – a shared meal. Participants are involved in preparing and sharing this meal with people they may not have met before (as well as people they have come to the show with).

---

<sup>5</sup> In the published script of the performance, these stages are marked as *Measuring Flour* (p. 10), *Adding Flavour* (p. 11), *Adding Water* (p. 13) and *Rolling* (p. 16) (Burtin, 2021).

As my first Practice as Research project, *with bread* sought firstly to address the core questions of the PhD:

- In what ways can performance practice illuminate our understanding of commensality as a social phenomenon?
- In what ways can the potential of commensality as a performance form be revealed through practice?

The project's design allows me to explore the relationship between performance and commensality firstly from the originating context of performance, which I will later contrast in the design of *Eat the Archives* which takes commensality as its starting point.

Secondly, as my first Practice as Research project *with bread* was designed to test the viability of my methodological approach. Through *with bread*, I developed and tested a working definition of commensal performance derived from Claude Fischler's work (2011) and Claudia Giacoman's theoretical model for analysing the 'dimensions and role of commensality' (2016). Both Fischler and Giacoman's work recognise commensality as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, which 'often conveys a more restrictive notion than simply eating with other people' (Fischler, 2011: 533). Claudia Giacoman's conceptual model of commensality (2016) includes the consideration of the value of commensality as either positive, neutral or negative. In her model of commensality, Giacoman distinguishes this phenomenon to include three primary dimensions: interactional (shared actions, shared conversations); symbolic (meanings assigned to shared food, feeling of belonging to a group, bonding); normative (traditions, rules, social hierarchies). Considering these existing definitions and for the purpose of my artistic research, I tested the following as defining features of commensality in performance through *with bread*:

- An expansion of the conventional commensal circles to include strangers, as well as people who have a pre-existing relationship, in a bodily co-present context
- Elements of *communal doing* prior to eating (preparing, cooking, serving)

- Semi-structured conversation derived from a performative approach to *sobremesa*<sup>6</sup>
- Featuring the inclusion of norms (manners), rules and hierarchies borrowed from theatrical conventions, banqueting and domestic eating
- Featuring food(s) purposefully considered in light of their symbolic and meaning-making dimensions
- Fostering convivial interactions between participants while inviting a questioning of the romantic notion of commensality as ‘the almost magical ways that food reveals identity and creates relationships’ (Belasco, 2008: 13)

The list above offered a way to practically implement the development of commensality within the performance, as well as ensure the critical questions involved in interrogating the dimensions of commensality were at the forefront of the development of the work, and therefore explored through the practice.

## Creative Team

I conceived and wrote with bread, leading to a collaborative directing process involving:

**Aliki Chapple – Performer and collaborator** – In addition to her role as performer, Aliki contributed autobiographical texts to the piece, as well as one of the dishes served during the show. Aliki was contracted as a core member of the company, as a performer and co-devisor for the piece.

**Katherina Radeva – Performer, Designer, and Collaborator** – In addition to her role as performer, Katherina contributed autobiographical texts to the piece and designed its set and costume elements. Katherina also produced illustrations as part of the devising process. Katherina was contracted as a core member of the company, as a performer

---

<sup>6</sup> *Sobremesa* is a Spanish expression used to describe the time spent in conversation, over and after a meal which does not have a direct equivalent in English.

and co-devisor for the piece with her role as designer existing in addition and being woven into the designing process.

**Louise Cross – Producer, workshop leader and collaborator** – In addition to her practical role as producer for the piece, Louise attended and documented collaborative rehearsals and offered dramaturgical support. Louise also co-led workshops with guest performers with me. Louise was contracted in her capacity as creative producer as part of the core team for the project. Louise was also working alongside me on the wider aspects of my professional practice throughout the development of *with bread*.

**Michael Norton – Production Manager, Lighting Designer, and collaborator** – In addition to his practical role as Production Manager for the piece, Michael created the show's lighting design. Michael was also involved throughout the devising and rehearsal process and offered dramaturgical support throughout. Michael was contracted as a Production Manager for this project, as well as supporting my overarching professional practice, notably in touring performances outside the scope of this thesis.

**Alister Lownie and Alison Matthews – Outside Eyes** – Alister and Alison attended work-in-progress performances to which they responded in writing as well as through offering practical dramaturgical notes which supported the overall direction of the piece. They were contracted for a single day to attend the performances and produce their response.

In addition to these members of the creative team involved in the development of the piece, a changing cast of three guest performers joined us in each location the show was performed. In addition to their roles as hosts for the audience, they contributed texts and performance moments devised through workshops. These performers were, in order of appearance: Jane Bizimana, Manel Zouabi, Araz Khdir (Stockton-on-Tees); Dionysia Bouzioti, Benedetta D'Ettorre, Ashish Sifar (Leeds); Leentje Van De Cruys, Ali Matthews, Shahireh Sharif (Salford). Each were contracted for their participation in the performance and later for their engagement in the production of the publication, as with all other contributors to the publication.



## Project Documentation

In the likely event that readers of this thesis have not experienced *with bread* as a live performance, I wish at this point to invite for them to firstly view [this webpage](#). The portfolio presented there includes production photographs, as well as a 10-min long video edit of a filmed performance. This is intended to give viewers a sense of the performance's overall design and atmosphere.

Secondly, I wish for readers to engage with the companion publication to the show which was published by artist-led press inkCONCRETE in 2021. The book includes the full script of the performance as I wrote it, together with the autobiographical texts produced by Katherina Radeva and Alik Chapple. The guest performers were given a choice to publish their contribution to the performance verbatim, or to produce new texts which would reflect their experience of participating in the project. The book also includes commissioned responses to the show written by Laura Seddon and Michael Norton, full colour production photographs, original drawings by Katherina Radeva, and of course, recipes.

The publication was developed to invite a sensory and embodied engagement with the project which would be more limited by watching a full film record. Additionally, only one of the four performances which make up the project were documented on film, and it is important to note that although the full-length recorded performance does provide an account of the project, this account is necessarily partial. The inclusion of contributions from guest performers will give readers a more accurate sense of the polyvocality of the project as well as an acknowledgement of the community which was formed around *with bread*. I hope that readers will be able to access a physical copy of the book, so that they may take up the invitation to follow along the bread-making included within the script and engage with the documentation as physical material. For ease, and in the event that this is not possible, a digital version of the book is also supplied here in Appendix 7.

Additionally, anyone wishing to view a full record of the premiere performance of *with bread* which took place at ARC, Stockton Arts Centre can access the film produced and

edited by Elvis Katoto [via this hyperlink](#). The performance was captured through a multi-camera set up placed at a distance to minimise the disruption of the live event. The film shows Act I in full, while the second Act is shown as a time-lapse, from the initial serving of the food to the last audience members leaving the space. The conversations and interactions taking place at each table were not otherwise captured on film.

## Making *with bread*

*with bread* was devised through an iterative process which began in October 2018 leading to a premiere performance in March 2019. As well as devising the piece, this period saw me establish a Practice as Research cycle involving preparatory activity, pre-performance guest-host recruitment and workshops, public performance(s) and reflective activities. In addition to the first PaR cycle surrounding the performance at ARC, Stockton Arts Centre a further two cycles of *with bread* Practice as Research took place around performances held at Stage @ Leeds on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019, and at the New Adelphi Theatre, Salford on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020. This is important to note as the public performances of *with bread* are only one aspect of the Practice as Research. The research took place in two distinct phases, each composed of combinations of activities conceived to design, test, and reflect upon a commensal approach to performance making.

## Project Timeline

### Phase 1: Research, Development and Devising

The development process for *with bread* followed Robin Nelson's methodological approach for Practice as Research triangulating *know-how*, *know-what* and *know-that* in a cyclical process. This took place from October 2018 until the performance premiere in March 2019.

### Phase 2: Performance Cycles

Each performance cycle comprised of an open call for guest-hosts, two workshops, a shared dinner, and the performance itself. These took place from October 2019 to March 2020. Further performance cycles had been planned for Spring / Summer 2020 but were curtailed by the theatre closures made necessary by the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am including here a full and detailed timeline of the making process for *with bread* in order to precisely locate my Practice as Research as the full cycle of making and

reflecting, and to clarify that the most visible outcome of the Practice as Research – the performances which took place in Stockton, Leeds and Salford – are but one part of the overall project. Indeed, just as I approach defining commensality not just as the moment of shared food consumption, but as also including the processes leading up to and out of a shared meal, I approached the design of *with bread* holistically. This approach allows me to establish through this chapter the emergence of commensality as a performance making methodology, as well as a performance form which was enabled by *with bread* as a project.

**October 2018 - *know what*** > Critical reflection through scholarly research and methodological design

Nelson defines *know-what* as ‘informed reflexivity about the processes of making and its modes of knowing’ (2013: 44). In the early stages of research design for *with bread* I undertook such a reflexive process through three distinct sets of methods:

1. A review of both literature and practice in the areas of food performance, commensality, practice as research and socially engaged practice
2. The setting up of collaborative relationships to support the development of the performance
3. The building up of a toolkit of reflexive methods to be embedded within the development process. These methods included arranging for a member of the team to document conversations; establishing a method of communal notetaking; arranging for audio recordings to take place at the end of working days; arranging for written reflections from collaborators to occur at various points throughout the development of the project.

**November 2018 > Creative Residency Cycle 1**

Collaborative Residency at ARC Stockton 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> November

Creative Writing Residency at Lyth Arts Centre 19<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> November including a scratch performance on 21<sup>st</sup> November

**January/February 2019 > Creative Residency Cycle 2**

January – work with dramaturg leading to work in progress sharing on 23<sup>rd</sup> January at the Lowry

Lancaster Arts 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> February with work in progress sharing on 15<sup>th</sup>

The Cut 26<sup>th</sup> Feb – 1<sup>st</sup> March

The first two creative residency cycles begun in a collaborative mode and involved working with the creative team to devise the structure of the show. This initial period of collaboration would be followed by a focussed period of reflection and writing I would undertake on my own. This approach allowed me to make steady creative progress as well as offer a structure where reflexivity was not separate from the process of devising, but rather as a core element of it. Additionally, I organised for three work-in-progress presentations to take place throughout both cycles in order to test the show and its ideas with audiences. Although this is a common practice across performance making, the participatory and relational nature of *with bread* as a project means that it cannot be conventionally rehearsed. Those public work-in-progress events allowed me to receive feedback from audience-participants and adjust the piece so that it would fulfil both its objectives as Practice as Research.

The devising process for the piece begun from open-ended conversations with my collaborators on their relationships to bread, its symbolism and cultural significance to their identity as migrants. In the spirit of commensal exploration each devising day was planned backwards from shared meals: identifying when meal breaks would take place and what form they would take. Sharing accommodation led to collaborative meals being prepared each day, continuing a practical, albeit less formal exploration of the ideas expressed each day. Guided by the practical necessity of bread-making within the show, we identified stories, anecdotes, action and visual elements which individuals would spend time working on before returning to the group for feedback and further discussion. Overall, the early process of devising *with bread* was more akin to an extended and semi-structured dinner party conversation than a conventional set of rehearsal room activities.

This notably allowed for the emergence of the insights on commensality as process discussed throughout this chapter.

**February/March 2019 > Creative residency Cycle 3 + Performance cycle 1**

Stockton workshop 1 19th Feb, Stockton workshop 2 18th March, collaborative work leading to performance on 20th March

The third and final Creative Residency cycle was distinct from the first two in that it was intertwined with the first performance cycle. Indeed, this final period was largely dedicated to the practical building up of the show towards its first full-length public outcome. There, rather than a process-driven mode of reflection existing alongside the practical final stage of devising and directing, reflexivity became a product of the recruitment process of guest-host participants which forms part of the performance cycle, detailed below.

The workshops offered to potential participants mirrored the overall devising process. Workshops began with an introduction to the overall project, including discussion of the ethical implications of participation and the intertwining of professional creative practice and a formal doctoral research project. Following introductions of each participant, I would facilitate an open discussion on the theme of hosting, and participants' relationship to hospitality. I would then offer creative writing prompts, based on the questions which had guided the company's thinking on their relationship to migration, hospitality and bread. Guest-hosts responses are documented within the *with bread* publication pp 17-44 (Burtin, 2021) provided in Appendix.

**Leeds Performance cycle**

17<sup>th</sup> October – workshop 1

23<sup>rd</sup> October – get in and workshop 2

24<sup>th</sup> + 25<sup>th</sup> – Performances

**Salford Performance cycle**

20 <sup>th</sup> February – workshop 1 4 <sup>th</sup> March - Performance
---

Having established the overall structure of the show and its dramaturgical outline, I was able to move towards building a clear process for each performance of the piece, as indeed *with bread* was designed to tour. The insights emerging from this project, and the discussion of *with bread* contained within this chapter reflect the touring nature of the project, rather than offer an analytical perspective on a specific performance. It is the project as a whole, include the processes involved with the development of a professional production in the publicly-funded arts sector which constitute my Practice as Research.

### Participant selection

With each performance, the company is re-configured slightly, inviting three migrants local to where the show is due to be performed to join the project. The people joining the company are identified through an open call <sup>7</sup>, distributed in collaboration with each of the touring venues and invited to participate in a first workshop. The first workshop is designed to introduce potential guest-hosts to the project, and to engage in shared bread-making, eating and creative writing activities. In other words, the first workshop attempts to re-create the devising processes undertaken by the core company throughout the development of the show, albeit on a smaller scale, over the course of a few hours. This first workshop is also designed to give potential guest-hosts an opportunity to decide whether they would indeed like to be part of the project.

In each of the performance cycles, although more than three people attended this initial workshop, only three remained interested and able to participate in the lead up to the performance. In other words, no selection process was necessary, with guest-hosts effectively self-selecting. In the event of more than three people wanting to become guest-hosts, the plan would have been to ensure as wide a range of contributions could

---

<sup>7</sup> An example of such an open call can be viewed at: <https://leoburtin.eu/calling-leeds-migrants/>

be included within the piece, and complimentary tickets to the performance would have been offered to workshop attendees. This is significant to note, as the processes of selecting participants echo the processes of commensality under investigation. Indeed, the offer for guest migrants to become part of the project is a performance of inclusion, it is an open invitation to take ownership of part of a wider piece. With this performance of inclusion comes a necessary corollary of exclusion: there are limited seats around our tables, and in inviting some people, we leave others without a seat. Of course, this dynamic of exclusion is already present within the open call itself being a specific invitation to migrants local to the area the show is due to take place.

Once their participation is confirmed, joining guest-hosts attend a second workshop designed to support them to devise their contribution to the show. Alongside this, the guest-hosts join the core company for an evening meal prepared by members of the creative team prior to the performance day.

### Commensal collaboration and hosting

Hosting, and the performance of commensality within *with bread* unravels cyclically: first, I as the artistic director host the company as part of the devising process; second, the company hosts the guest performers; third each performer hosts their table. This model offers a dynamic set of guest-host relationships which unsettle existing power structures. Authorship becomes shared, responsibilities dynamically distributed and the voice of the single author is both de-centred and called into question.

In this section, I draw upon quotations from my collaborators, (in boxes) which were collected through two distinct methods: (1) as part of the creative process, I recorded conversations at the end of each day in the studio to summarise the insights from the day and (2), at the end of the first phase of the project, post-premiere performance in Stockton-on-Tees (UK), I sent all of my collaborators the same set of questions, documented in Appendix 3, and invited their written responses. Responses from three collaborators were received, and offered insights on the project's content, its methodology as well as some practical feedback (some of which went on to inform further performance cycles). The first quotation from Louise Cross, was an additional



comment in response to the simple prompt of whether there would be anything collaborators would like to add.

I believe there was a transformation process between Leo and us that then was able to be replicated with the participants. This was a process from “hosted” to “host”. The first residency began with Leo in some ways, hosting us and welcoming us to the concept. Through this process which involved eating together, we were able to feel some sense of ownership over the project. (Cross, 2019)

The comment above illustrates how through the creative process, invited or ‘guest’ collaborators became hosts. In the first phase of the project, I hosted collaborators, and each working day culminated in a shared meal, which I would prepare, with some assistance from the rest of the group (though very much leading the proceedings, in the kitchen, just as in the rehearsal room). In the second rehearsal period, I held a dinner at the end of the first day. As the group arrived for dinner, they proceeded, unprompted, to lay the table, bring extra chairs from the kitchen into the dining room, etc. On the second night of rehearsals, one of the performers took over hosting duties. By the time the piece entered its production week, the ‘hosting’ of the evening meal was on an informal rotation. As the guest performers in Stockton joined the rest of the company for the first night’s dinner that week, my collaborators who at first had been hosted began to self-organise to maintain and develop commensality through our process. They then became hosts themselves as “the Other” (in this case, the guest performers, sitting as outsiders from the core company) became included.

[...] it doesn’t feel like there’s the process, which is one way of making and then the thing<sup>8</sup>, which looks completely different. So, just thinking about what it is that we’re doing now, is already the work, is already the piece. The energy that you’re constructing, the energy that we’re constructing as a collective is aiming to create that open space and transformative moment [...]” (Norton, 2018)

---

<sup>8</sup> “the thing” here, can be understood as “the show”

The above quotation was recorded at the end of the very first day of work with the team of collaborators. In the audio clip, very early on in the devising process for *with bread*, my collaborator corrects himself. He changes his sentence from ‘the energy that *you’re* constructing’ to ‘the energy that *we’re constructing as a collective*’. This is an early moment acknowledging the commensal process as tending towards the blurriness between ‘the host’ (“you”) and the guests (“we”); a move from working from an individual’s artistic vision towards a “collective” experience. Control is handed over, and soon the guests become hosts as the group prepares to welcome new performers – new *others*.

When meeting the participants<sup>9</sup> further down the line, I felt the ability to host them, introducing and welcoming them to the project in the same way a host traditionally welcomes their guests to their house. *The really magic moment for me came when during the performance, at their tables, these participants transformed into hosts for the audience.*’ (Cross, 2019, my italics)

In the lead up to the public presentation of the performance at ARC, Stockton Arts Centre, the guest-performers (all of whom, in this case, are not “professional performers”) participated in a series of workshop activities designed to support them in articulating their contribution to the performance element, and to introduce them to the hosting principles at play in the show. Through this process, we prepare our guests to become hosts for the audience who will join in with the performance. While guided and structured, this activity was also responsive to the guest performers’ desires: of what of their stories they wanted to share, and how. It was also responsive to their other commitments, and meetings/rehearsals were organised flexibly to suit their lives. This enabled single mother, Jane, to participate around school hours and for asylum seeker Araz to be able to manage meetings with representatives of the UK government Home Office and other responsibilities relating to his asylum claim. While this way of working

---

<sup>9</sup> Here, “participants” refers to the guest performers who joined the company for the performance at ARC, Stockton Arts Centre on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2019, namely Jane Bizimana, Manel Zouabi, and Araz Khdir.

was necessary in light of the specific situations of my collaborators, the project had been purposefully designed to be able to respond to new collaborators' needs flexibly. In other words, our invitation and our welcome to the project was a feature of a radical approach to hospitality in the sense that there was not an attempt to exercise the control of the host, instead testing the sharing and giving over of control to the guest-performers. The guest-performers become co-creators, opening the possibility as Batchelor et al. put it that 'we can no longer be hosts and they are no longer guests.' (Batchelor et al., 2019)

The role of the host became central to the development of this project, and in *with bread* the power relationships between host and guest, director and performers, performers and guest performers were dynamic and encouraged to evolve over time. As the project took shape, guests became hosts, and this transformation was a feature of a radical approach to hospitality as a way to interrogate the power relations at play between performer and audience.

Tracing the etymological origins of the word host and its host of meanings already points towards the complexity of the notion. The French *hôte* is both host and guest. Latin gives us *hostis* as stranger, enemy or later, army. It also reminds us that the Host, the consecrated bread of the Eucharist was *hostia*, the victim. Hosting here is understood as a function and act of hospitality. The host, the 'person who receives or entertain other people as guests' practices hospitality 'the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.' (Oxford English Dictionary) Hosting in *with bread* begins from this common-sense understanding and as both the performance and its making processes unfold, the relationship between hosting and the dynamics of commensality are called into question.

Just as an understanding of commensality limited to its dictionary definition of sharing a table would be a reductive account of the phenomenon, I must consider hospitality through a wider philosophical lens. Quoted in the editorial to *Canadian Theatre Review* on *Radical Hospitalities*, scholar Mireille Rosello reminds us that the practice of hospitality is 'an ancient classical tradition, a philosophical value, an ethical imperative, a political issue and also a polymorphous individual practice' (Rosello in Batchelor et al.,

2019: 5) This paves the way towards establishing hospitality as a performative act, which is bound by specific rules and highlights specific relational dynamics between hosts and guests.

The ‘ancient classical tradition’ referred to by Rosello is that of the Greek *xenia*, the Roman *hospitum*, what French philosopher Jacques Derrida refers to as the ‘unconditional Law of hospitality’. This Law of hospitality is the ancient, unspoken code that governs the guest right: that is, the law ‘that would command that the “new arrival” be offered an unconditional welcome.’ (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000: 77)

In its design as performance, *with bread*, plays with this notion of unconditional welcome. Audience members are invited to join a table by individual host performers: they are told they are welcome. As they entered the theatre, they also received programme notes, addressing them as ‘*Dear Stranger, Dear Friend*’, which is offered as another extension of *xenia*, and which could also be translated as ‘guest-friendship’ and which shares etymological lineage with *xenos*, the stranger, or even in some translations, the enemy. The performance of hospitality at the beginning of *with bread* looks to include friends and enemies alike. In their casual tone, in their offering of seats, of taking coats, and most importantly, through how they share themselves and encourage connection at the table, performers offer a hint of the possibility of transformation from *stranger* to *friend*.

This continues throughout the performance, and is reflected upon by some audience members, who, when asked in a post-show questionnaire ‘How did you feel during the performance?’ include responses such as ‘at home’ or ‘included as part of a community’. If attendees “make themselves at home” through the performance, then without further thought, we might suggest that *with bread* successfully enacts ‘unconditional hospitality’. However, Jacques Derrida frames the notion of *unconditional hospitality* as an impossibility. In their reading of Derrida, Canadian Theatre Review editorialists Batchelor et al. point out:

To extend hospitality is to initiate a relationship steeped in power dynamics for, to be hospitable, one must have the power to host: the notion of hospitality itself requires one to be the “master” of the house and therefore set the rules and be in control. (Batchelor et al., 2019: 5)

The power dynamics which exist in any given context of hospitality are especially magnified in performance. The company has been given access to the theatre; we control when the house is open, when hospitality begins, and when it ends. As the artistic director, I stand in the middle of the performance for the duration, and direct others for when they may speak, sometimes directly: ‘Alik, take it away!’ (Burtin, 2019), sometimes with a more discreet nod/look: ‘This evening we’re going to share a few stories with you’ (1 min 50 sec in Burtin, 2019) and perhaps most obviously, the performance follows a scripted, rehearsed and pre-determined structure.

*with bread* proposes to establish a model for animating commensality in socially engaged performance practice which harnesses the possibilities for the commensal experience to tend towards modelling engaged modes of social interaction: in the case of *with bread*, this involves putting “migrants” and “locals” in a new kind of relationship. In developing commensal performance, I propose that ‘hosting’ as a mode of performing, and as a performance aesthetic is a core pillar to animating commensality. As hosting – the practice of hospitality – is so deeply entrenched in power dynamics, there are some apparent tensions with notions of unconditional welcome and inclusivity. As such, a new question emerges: in what ways can hospitality be played with, re-imagined and subtly shifted to invite an alternative set of guest-host relationships in performance?

### On bread, migration and commensality

In *with bread* as a project, the primary research concern surrounding commensality, and the core creative themes of bread and migration are tightly inter-related. In reflecting upon the practice, it is challenging to identify whether the thematic potency of both bread and migration originally offered an entry point into the study of commensality, or if indeed it is the nature of commensality that led me to elect bread and migration as core creative vehicles for exploring and addressing my research questions.

In relation to migration, it is important to note that the original idea for the project which later became *with bread* emerged in direct response to the results of the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the changing nature of my lived experience as a migrant to the UK. As I formally begun my PhD research on commensality in 2018, the central tension of the commensal process as one of both inclusion and exclusion echoed both the particular political moment in which we were finding ourselves and the personal circumstances which led to a questioning of whether I would be able to remain in the country I had been calling home for close to ten years at that point. In sum, at that moment in time, the intersection of current political events, my personal circumstances and my academic interests led to the exploration of migration as being inevitable.

Considering the potency of food as a signifier, and Roland Barthes' work on food as 'a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior' (Barthes, 2013 [1961]: 24), the relative universality of bread, its symbolic and religious weight and my own personal and cultural relationship to it offered a relevant and practical starting point to the building of *with bread* as commensal performance. Moreover, in the year in which I begun to devise the piece, new research (Arranz-Otaegui et.al., 2018; Davis, 2018) disrupted the previously held belief that bread emerged after the agricultural revolution in the Neolithic period, instead finding that hunter-gatherers had been making flatbreads some 4000 years before the establishment of settled lifestyles.

Combined, experiences of migration and the evolving symbolism of bread offered a core narrative thread for the development of the show's text and structure from which commensality can be constructed in performance. Further to the narrative and participatory components of the piece, *with bread* utilises a particular approach to staging in order to foreground and bring commensality into focus. In the next section, I draw on Athena Stourna's coining of (s)cenography (2018) to articulate such an approach.

## (S)cenography

In a 2018 article theatre practitioner-researcher Athena Stourna interrogates the relationship between historical banquets (from Antiquity to the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century) and contemporary European performances using food and shared eating as a strategy used by artists to foster audience participation. In this article, Stourna draws on Patrice Pavis' (2013) definition of *mise-en-scène* to frame her analysis of what she terms *banquet performance* – performances involving sharing food around the same table. Stourna argues her choice to draw upon the concept of *mise-en-scène* for the analysis of banquet performance to:

underline a conscious, artistically driven act of putting all the different (and sometimes disparate) elements of the banquet together: performance acts, the choice of foodstuffs and food design, table decorations, the topography of the sympotic space, rituals, and the banqueters' eating and performing. (Stourna, 2018: 11)

Stourna highlights the range of artistic processes which contribute to distinguishing the performance of a shared meal in the context of the everyday, and its specifically aesthetic counterpart. A banquet performance is distinct from a historical banquet in that its *mise-en-scène* is both *conscious* and *artistically driven*. Although the use of the term *banquet* and the specific historical examples suggest a particular table arrangement – a long shared table with participants sitting either side – Stourna's notion of banquet performances echoes my own notion of commensal performance, with one significant difference. Indeed, Stourna approaches *commensality* as an 'ingredient' (Stourna, 2018: 11) of performance – one element of *mise-en-scène*. In the case of my approach to commensal performance, *mise-en-scène* rather becomes one strategy for the construction of commensality in performance. In other words, my specific approach to *mise-en-scène* is designed specifically to generate a commensal experience.

In tandem with *mise-en-scène*, Stourna introduces the term (s)cenography to her analytical approach, which she defines as a 'neologism [that] combines 'scenography'

and the Latin word *cena*— the Roman banquet’ (Stourna, 2018: 12). She further ascertains that the term performs a parallel function to the notion of the ‘scenography of the senses’ defined by Stephen di Benedetto as ‘a sensual engagement experienced through a body’s response to and within the theatrical event’ (Di Benedetto, 2017: 72).

Throughout this thesis, my use of the term *mise-en-scène* follows Stourna’s and focuses primarily on the arrangement of the performance materials (in the broadest sense) and orchestration of interactions between performers and to an extent, between participants (and between performers and participants). I also follow in Stourna’s footsteps in utilising the neologism (s)cenography, firstly to articulate the specific mode of *mise-en-scène* involved in developing commensal performance and secondly to make room for the more precise consideration of the deliberate construction of a sensual experience, with a particular focus on the senses other than sight and sound, which are traditionally the primary senses engaged in theatre<sup>10</sup>.

## Thinking about with bread

### Constructing commensality through *mise-en-scène*

In order to establish the *mise-en-scène* for *with bread*, I undertook to review existing food performance practice, interrogating how various (s)cenographies enable or impede the emergence of a commensal experience.

The *mise-en-scène* of performances involving food consumed by the audience often follow established dining conventions. People may gather around a long, shared banquet table, as in Quarantine’s 2003 *EatEat* during which audience and performers gather around a 10m long concrete table or my own 2015 show *The Midnight Soup*, where up to fourteen audience members sit either side of wooden trestle tables. Elsewhere, audience members may sit around separate tables arranged in the manner of a restaurant dining room such as Sheila McCormick’s 2018 *Death Dinner* or Protein Dance’s 2015 *May Contain Food*, where the restaurant dining room setting is further signalled by the performers being costumed as formal waitstaff. By contrast, Maya

---

<sup>10</sup> For a fuller discussion of theatre, scenography and the senses see Di Benedetto (2010).



Chowdhry's 2018 *What's Eating Our Reality*, features a singular table, with the audience seated in a manner of which may be reminiscent of a family gathering – a feeling however contrasted by the tasting menu prepared and served by professional chefs. Occasionally, such performances adopt other spatial arrangements inspired by historical dining formations, such as the medieval U-shape facing a 'high table' as in Reckless Sleeper's 2002 *The Last Supper*, where the performers eat the last words of people on death row (printed on rice paper) and select audience members are served examples of last meal requests. In the case of Reckless Sleeper's production, the table arrangement serves a dual narrative function, echoing both the historical layout of banqueters facing a high table and evoking a court room setting.

Artists may also choose to introduce food within contemporary theatrical conventions by simply serving food within an end-on seating bank, such as Ben Kulvichit's 2019 *Gaeng Kiew Waan* (a re-working and response to Rirkrit Tiravanija's seminal *Untitled* (1990)) where a curry was served to the audience at the end of the formal performance, to be consumed either standing or sitting back down in the studio theatre's rows. In contrast, the 2019 theatre production inspired by Nigel Slater's memoir *Toast* sees pastries being distributed to the audience just before the interval, again to be consumed within the seating bank or in the foyer during the interval.

In addition to the layout of the performance/eating area, artists working with food and performance generally make one of three choices in relation to food preparation areas: they are either fully visible and integrated within the performance; completely out of reach for the audience's senses or a mixture of both, where some elements of food preparation are integrated within the performance and others take place in a backstage area inaccessible to the audience. These choices are driven by both artistic and practical considerations and have an impact on the construction of the commensal experience for the audience. I will now turn my attention to this, drawing firstly on (s)cenographic examples developed by other performers, and then turning to the specific choices made in relation to the specific experience of commensality intended to be designed in *with bread*.

The U-shape facing a high table, as in Reckless Sleepers' *The Last Supper*, where the performers occupy the high table directly replicates a thrust stage, leading to a sense that although the zone occupied by the performers may be in close proximity to the audience, it is still distinct. On the other hand, sitting around a singular round table (or on the four sides of a square table, as in Maya Chowdhry's *What's Eating Reality*) positions the audience at the heart of the action, and promotes the large central area of the table as a space of scenographic possibility. In the case of Maya Chowdhry's piece, this space is used as a large screen for projected film. Every audience member can see every other audience member easily and have an equitable experience of the action unfolding at the centre of the table-as-stage. Banquet performances are almost always reminiscent of religious and/or Medieval imagery and where in order to provide a more or less equitable performance experience to their audience, the performer must occupy one of two 'head' positions, at the top of the width of the table, or in the middle of its length, on either side. This is the case for example in Xavier de Sousa's 2016 *Post* where at points, the performer sits in the middle of the length of a rectangular table facing the audience, where they (de Sousa) are joined by audience members who sit either side of the performer and on the table's width edge to not block the view of the wider audience who remain in the stalls. The image thus created inevitably echoes popular imagery of the biblical last supper, as notably represented in Leonardo da Vinci's infamous painting. More or less consciously, the banquet (s)cenography forces then any performer to pose as the shadow of a King or Messiah.

The introduction of food within a conventional theatre setting where the audience faces the stage, as in Kulvitchit's *Gaeng Kiew Waan*, I would argue presents a number of barriers to the process of commensality, most notably as commensality relies on a set of norms which is distinct from the theatre etiquette and which the architecture of such spaces enforces on audiences' bodies. In other words, as conventional theatre seating banks are not designed with shared eating in mind, the introduction of food within that space is not enough to generate a commensal experience. In the case of *Gaeng Kiew Waan*, which I experienced in the informal performance space of Camden People's Theatre's basement, audience members were invited to walk up to the stage to be served curry by the performer and could choose to eat back at their seats, or to stand and eat around the

room. There, a form of informal commensality may be possible through the interactions between audience members, though the piece did not proactively encourage this, with most people present choosing a corner of the room to eat separately from the rest of the group. The notable exception to this behaviour for *Gaeng Kiew Waan* was a group of a few people who gathered around the performer to ask them questions and share their impression of the piece with them. In *Toast*, individual tasting portions of pastries being handed to audience members further limit the emergence of commensality, with eating being framed as a solitary act.

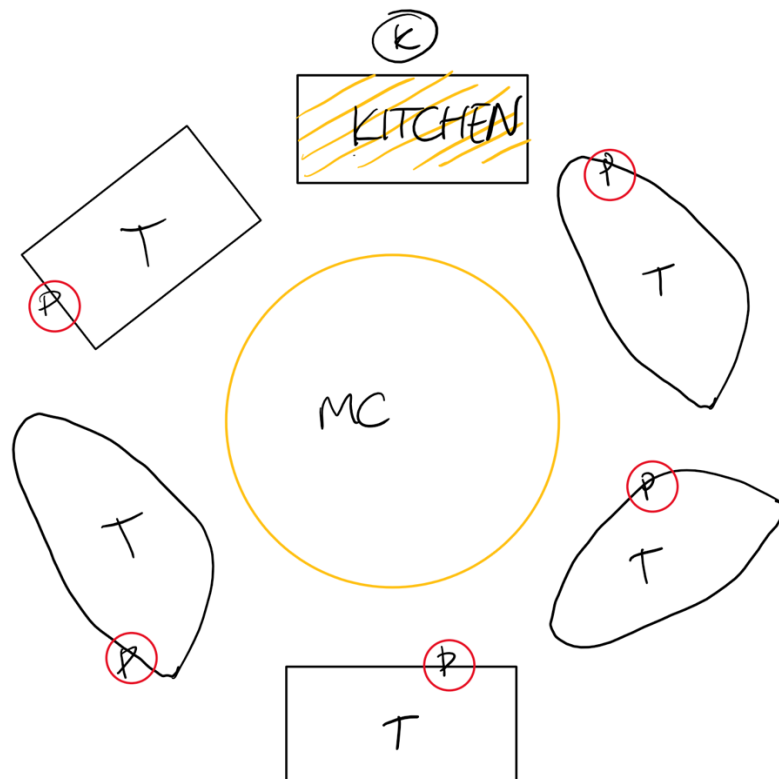
The design of the end on seating bank also presents some very tangible challenges to eating, with no room being available for cutlery for example. An early version of *with bread* was presented as a work in progress at the Lowry Studio in January 2018 in such a space and was a useful experiment in confirming the need for such a show to take place outside of this most common theatrical set up. In this version, only a few selected audience participants took part in making bread in the show, onstage while the rest of the audience watched. This particular (s)cenography limited the emergence of commensality to the people on stage, and additionally being observed from afar by a seated audience generated an atmosphere made of layers of exclusion at scale – more people were excluded from the commensal experience than those being included. Although there is scope in actively seeking to develop such a performance, the specific research aims imply the creation of a commensal experience for the whole audience, and as such, this experiment confirmed the inadequacy of this scenic arrangement.

In lieu of this, the final design for *with bread* involved a performance area delimited by six tables, arranged in the round, surrounding a music stand<sup>11</sup>. Five of those tables sit eight audience members and one performer-host each, all around them. That is to say, some audience members have their backs turned to the central area. The sixth table is a preparation area, referred to as the kitchen in the above diagram, holding some practical

---

<sup>11</sup> In addition to the practical function of holding the performance score, the music stand is a visual cue which bridges the performance world of commensality and its everyday counterpart. The stand is reminiscent of those used in orchestras (performance), but also to the religious altar and to the maître d's station at the entrance of a restaurant.

props elements, as well as hotplates which bread gets cooked on during the performance. Three of the tables are rectangular trestle-style tables, including the one used as the kitchen. The remaining three tables are irregular ovals. I will return to a fuller description and discussion of their shape. This setting enables the emergence of four distinct performance zones. One central performance area (MC), at the music stand, from which I orchestrate the performance, occupying the role of a master of ceremony-cum-maitre d'hôtel. A second area corresponds to the performer-host at each table (P). A third area is each dining table (T), and the fourth and final zone is the kitchen (K).



*Figure 6 Basic Stage Map of 'with bread'*

Each of those performance zones, in turn also correspond to a particular mode of performance. The (MC) zone is used primarily and lends itself best to the storytelling element of the show. It is from this area that the piece is orchestrated and moved along. This is made visible by the presence of the script, and the music stand in that space, elements which do not evidently appear to directly relate to a commensal experience. (P) is, in some way, a bridge area, with each performer host working in a call-and-response fashion with (MC) to connect the story told from the centre of the room to each (T) area. The (T) zone is closest to being a site of everyday commensality. (K) is a practical area,

from which performers collect the objects, which more than simple props, are necessary to undertaking the task which provides the “red thread” of the show: the preparation of flatbreads. It also becomes a participatory performing kitchen once the dough is ready and audience members become invited to select a representative from each table to cook the flatbreads. In entering the onstage kitchen, audience members cement their own status as performers in the piece, making embodied connections and crossing through degrees of everydayness and performativity.

The (s)cenography of *with bread* encourages audience-participants to engage with the piece at all three of the food-performance junctures proposed by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999) and discussed in my earlier chapter on methodology. In *with bread*, all perform food in the sense of doing, behaving and showing. The flatbreads are prepared by each audience members with their hosts (who have also done food in the sense of cooking the accompanying stew which is served at the end of Act I). To behave in *with bread* is to perform at the intersection of following social practices related to food etiquette, and to put in dialogue this context with the performance nature of the event. Then, performers and audience engage in the third and final of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s junctures, *to show*:

‘When doing and behaving are displayed, when they are shown, when participants are invited to exercise discernment, evaluation and appreciation, food events move towards the theatrical and, more specifically, towards the spectacular. It is here that taste as a sensory experience and taste as an aesthetic faculty converge.’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1999: 2)

In addition to enabling the emergence of the modes of performance stated above, the spatial construction of the piece also (1) encourages audience participants to dynamically enter into a relationship between theatre etiquette and commensal norms (table manners); (2) provides a compositional framework for the piece, allowing me to develop a rhythm by structuring the dramaturgical development of the piece, and the theatricalisation of the process of building up commensality through the flatbread recipe around those four zones.

As the audience participates in *with bread* from five distinct and separate tables, each hosted by a different performer, their experience of the piece has the potential to be radically different. Over the course of the performance, each table becomes its own commensal unit<sup>12</sup> and develops its own identity and rhythm. As I perform from the centre of the room and given that I am able to freely roam between each of the tables, I have the opportunity to gain a vantage point other performers, and audience participants cannot. I alone can observe the behaviour of each *tablee*<sup>13</sup>. The cost of such a perspective is that I am not able to be fully immersed in the commensal experience of any given *tablee*. This echoes the nature of commensality as necessarily operating within a model of inclusion-exclusion. In *with bread*, the commensal circles each participant is a part of remain visible to them throughout. Similarly, throughout the performance, audience participants are faced with several (spatial) choices to make in relation to where they can direct their attention in relation to the main performance area (MC). Your position within each of the *tablees* also informs which choices are available to you, notably depending on whether you are facing (MC) or not. You may choose to face inwards towards the rest of your table, and focus on listening to the story; direct your attention towards (MC) by turning around and seeing the performer at the centre of the room; or you may choose to (or unwittingly) switch your attention in and out of your commensal unit to the centre of the room. The choice for audience members to be sat all around the tables, rather than just to one side which would allow for everyone to focus their attention towards the centre of the stage at all times contributes to foregrounding the inclusion-exclusion dynamic of commensality. Additionally, it further reveals the physical proximity to each of the attendees at the same table, and conversely, the relative distance to the Maître D'. Each member of a *tablee* is encouraged, through the arrangement of the space to live through the performance as a member of that particular commensal unit, rather than as an individual spectator. As a process, commensality requires spatially active inhabitants.

---

<sup>12</sup> 'Commensal units are groups of people assembled at a particular time and specific place to consume meals, snacks, or beverages.' (Sobal and Nelson, 2003: 181)

<sup>13</sup> French noun, designating a group sitting around a table. I use the notion of *tablee* to avoid excessive repetition of the longer English expression and to begin conceptualising the *tablee* as a particular audience formation.

## Table design and commensality

There are two types of tables used in *with bread*. Three rectangular “trestle-style” tables, which were originally built for use in my performance *The Midnight Soup*. The other three tables are of irregular oval shapes and were designed by my collaborator Katherina Radeva and built to her brief by craftsman Luke Ham. These tables were designed and built bespoke for *with bread* and conceived during early research and development of the piece. While the original artistic intention was to follow the design principles of those oval tables (which are all subtly different from one another) for the whole set, financial restrictions led us to utilising two of the rectangular tables as part of the *with bread* set.

The design process for the tables was also somewhat guided by practical constraints. Each table had to comfortably sit nine people, be solid enough to support dough kneading and be relatively easy to clean down in order to comply with food safety regulations, and to ease the get-out process. The focus of my creative explorations with collaborators during the residency at ARC, Stockton Arts Centre where those tables were conceived was the inherent tensions implied by the nature of commensality and the relationship this had to the themes of migration, identity and belonging which I had set as key concerns to begin the creative process with. My creative dialogue with the designer rapidly settled on the idea that the tables should reflect the sense of difference we were looking to convey within the atmosphere of the piece, consciously integrating elements of *mise-en-scène* which would serve the forming of the commensal experience under investigation. As such it was agreed that every single table ought to be subtly different from the other.

Kat consolidated her design around a base rectangular frame, onto which the table tray would sit. This design allows for every diner to sit around the table without having the table’s legs get in the way and keep the overall table an acceptable dimension. This also generated a design challenge in the balancing act necessary for the tables to appear as misshapen ovals and retain their integrity as tables, which would notably be used to knead dough. It was necessary for the tables to be able to serve this function without tipping out of balance. Through a dialogical design process, Kat was able to conceive

tables which contribute to a unique commensal experience: at the oval-like tables of *with bread*, no one individual can ever be at what would be the ‘head’ of the table, nor can anyone occupy the position of the ‘guest of honour’. Moreover, the shape of the tables also prevents a suggestion of equality which a round shape might have signified. In other words, at the *with bread* table, no one is equal or can have a comparable experience to another guest, nor can anyone ever adopt a conventional position of control. The design of the tables therefore provides a further specific performance opportunity in the (P) zone, which as it is occupied by trained and rehearsed performer-hosts, inevitably becomes an area of apparent power and control. The design further supports the performance intention of the piece, which is to acknowledge this power, to hold it gently and to be prepared to pass it on to a guest who may be expert in the preparation of flatbread, or have a particularly compelling story to tell at the moment of shared eating. Given that the position of performers does not signal power through design, this enables this lightness of touch more effectively.

Conversely, in my 2014 piece *The Midnight Soup*, I spend the majority of the show at the head of a long banquet table and clearly perform and cast myself as the ‘head of the family’ (Burtin, 2016: 17). Over the many public performances of the piece throughout its five-year touring life, I experimented with choosing a different seat at the end of Act I (with Act II, as in *with bread* consisting of the shared eating, and where I no longer perform a story), and each option led to its own set of problems. For example, staying at my seat at the head of the table kept me separate from the more informal conversations taking place over the shared eating, while occupying a central seat on the long side of the table would often require asking an audience member to move and be potentially separated from whomever they were seated next to throughout the show. Switching to the other head end of the table had the advantage of allowing closer contact with those audience members I had previously been furthest to, but would feel as an assertion of power at a time where letting this power go and letting the conversation float away from the more formal context of Act I is more dramaturgically appropriate. Taking up any other seat which happens to be free may lead me to focus my attention on a specific section of the table, forgetting to keep holding the space for others, as the host to the event. These performance challenges are partially avoided with the design and mise-en-scène developed for *with*



*bread*. Indeed, the hosting responsibility for the whole commensal group is split into smaller manageable units, each taken care of by a performer-host. As Artistic Director-cum-Maître D', I am at liberty to travel and join in with any and all tablées. The performers responsible for each of the oval-like tables are sat on the edges of each of their performance zones, fully integrated within their audience group-as refl but not visibly presiding over them. Those performers in position at the two rectangular tables face a version of the challenges I encountered in *The Midnight Soup*, and if money was no object, the tables used in *with bread* would all be built as the ovoid ones. However, in terms of the relationship between the mise-en-scène and the exploration of commensality as a performance form, the use of the rectangular tables enhances the thematic exploration of the notion of difference at play in the show and its potential impact on commensality. Indeed, those two tables are obviously distinct from the three ovoids, and do not have as much surface area on which to knead and roll out the bread dough. While this may never be fully obvious to audience members at those tables, from a (s)cenographic point of view, those tables are less desirable and their size forces those sitting as part of the rectangular tablées to be in closer physical proximity. It would be challenging to draw any empirical conclusions on the quality of the audience experience, and the impact on the commensal process depending on whether you are participating at the bespoke ovoid tables, or at the standard rectangular ones. Similarly, other factors that make up the sensory and spatial (s)cenographic experience of the performance may also have an impact on the overall experience.

However, through the privileged position of MC/Maître D' which allowed me to navigate between each table, I was able to ascertain that the sense of that the distinction in audience experience was more pronounced between table types than for those in the same table type. Indeed, each table becomes its own micro-community with a shared perspective on the rest of the room, guided through the material of the piece by a performer-host undertaking their duty as host in their own, unscripted, and profoundly personal manner. It is through this approach that the (s)cenography of the piece becomes animated – audience members are invited to find their place in the world of the performance through a *hosted* approach to mise-en-scène.

As we move forward, in the next section, I return to a reflection on the mode of performing hosting at play in *with bread* as an approach to thinking *through* commensality in practice.

### Thinking through *with bread*

*with bread* is at once a formal performance, taking place in theatre spaces – spaces whose histories and architecture encourage a set of behaviours, rules and in which we are expected, to an extent, to be familiar with and follow an established etiquette. *with bread* is also a commensal event: a shared meal which can be viewed as an institution of its own, with its own set of rules and expectations, many of which imply behaviour patterns which are quite distinct from how we expect to behave at the theatre, beginning with the very act of eating, which at best is a contentious practice in the space of the modern theatre. *with bread* is also participatory in nature and the specific mode of participation which the performance invites are predicated on establishing and developing relationships between individuals: audience members, guest-host performers and core company performers.

When devising the piece, it soon became apparent that the very nature of the piece makes it a challenging environment for attendees, and that access to the piece would need to be facilitated in a particular way, through a considered approach to hosting audiences. Through the development of the practice, in deploying an iterative Practice as Research methodology, a range of questions emerged. As a practitioner, I asked: How might hosting be performed in *with bread*? How might we make and hold space for commensality to emerge in the context of the performance? What performance skills and strategies might need to utilise and develop?

The answer to the first question is, in some ways, deceptively simple: hosting in *with bread* is performed as just that: hosting. In other words, each of the performers involved in the piece are told they will be a host and throughout the devising process and within the piece are referred to as such. Within the making process, the concept of hosting was discussed at length, and each artist and participant produced personal reflective and creative accounts on the notion of hosting. No single definition of hosting was agreed,

but a common theme which emerged from these devising exercises was the notion of care, which became intentionally foregrounded in our approach to hosting. In other words, performing as host and foregrounding care were explicitly articulated as shared intentions to the approach that would be at play in the piece. To further cement and facilitate this, I made the decision to allow each of the host-performers (including myself) to work script-in-hand throughout the project, up to and including during public performances. This firstly offers the performers an opportunity to focus on their role as host: they need not remember lines or what happens next, they can be in a relationship with each other and with their guest-audience members first and foremost.

It is precisely this ability to be in relationships which holds open the possibility for commensality to emerge in the space of performance. The piece is holistically designed to tend to those relationships throughout Act I so that a particular experience of commensality might emerge in Act II. We achieve this through a number of strategies, beginning with each *tablee* being assigned a host: as an audience member, you have a person you can keep referring to or interact with directly as you navigate the performance. This person, your host is also someone who directly and explicitly *invited* you to join them. Indeed, as audience members gather in the foyer, performer-hosts are outside to greet them and specifically approach them to invite them to join their specific table. Each *tablee* is made up of a maximum of eight audience members, thus giving the host time to establish a background of relatedness with each individual prior to the formal start of the piece. Then, as the piece formally begins, there is an opportunity for each *tablee* to introduce each other and to create placeholders, so that we may know each other by name.

To mitigate the blurred nature of the rules of the performance, these are clearly stated in the opening of the piece. The etiquette being followed, somewhere between theatre and dinner is relatively open: people are told they may speak throughout and come in and out of the space. This is a gentle nod to an invitation to disruption: although the piece is devised, constructed and set, it attempts to hold open the possibility that it might be radically changed by the people participating.

The intention there is to both acknowledge the necessary power implied within the practice of hosting and to attempt to explore whether and how such power may be disrupted. In other words, by performing hosting in *with bread*, I think through, in practice the extent to which the power of the performer as host might be handled with care.

*with bread* is the first project within my commensal performance practice that features other performers. My past commensal performance projects all involved a banquet-like ‘(s)cenography’,<sup>14</sup> where, I as a single host preside over a single group of audience members sharing one table. In *with bread*, each table has its own host and builds its own community with each performer inviting audience members to join their table as they arrive to the theatre. While I retain the role of a kind of ‘master of ceremony’, my authorial control and authority are interrupted within the show in a number of ways. First, the dramaturgical structure of the piece gives the two other ‘core’ performers specific roles: One situates the piece in time and place; the other acts out quotations and provides instructions of how to make the flatbreads. Second, the text of the performance features personal stories written and performed by the other core performers. Third, a central ‘scene’ of the show is re-written for each performance and given over to the local migrant performers who join us to introduce themselves and share a story of their choosing which they have developed in preceding workshops and rehearsals. With each of those ‘interruptions’ the migrant identity is performed to be visible: accents are not hidden by acting, we are playing ourselves; where English cannot accurately convey an idea, then we use another language. In revealing personal relationships to bread, otherness blooms: The (real) story of rival bakers Hector and Achilles shared by a Greek performer could not have taken place in England; the memory of a Bulgarian performer whose grandmother had to stop making jam during the communist years is a historically and geographically specific experience. The bread we are making in the show also is other, unfamiliar. Otherness fills the room, and the commensal process is flavoured by it. Commensality, which the Law of Hospitality encourages us to trust, becomes a risky and

---

<sup>14</sup> This playful neologism references the latin *cena*: dinner and is attributed by Athena Stourna to Daniel Lemahieu. (Stourna, 2018)

fragile thing: our *us et coutumes*, our habits and customs are not the same. Can we trust the food prepared by the other to follow the level of hygiene we have come to expect?

Commensal performance exists as a liminal space between the everyday and the extraordinary.

Performance allows entirely ordinary bodies, actions, movements, things, sounds or doors to be perceived and has them appear as extra-ordinary and transfigured. Performance makes the ordinary conspicuous [...] When the ordinary becomes conspicuous, when dichotomies collapse and things turn into their opposites, the spectators perceived the world as “enchanted”. Through this enchantment the spectators are transformed. (Fischer-Lichte, 2009: 179-180)

As a theatrical event, *with bread* (as an instance of commensal performance) is what Fischer-Lichte would term ‘enchanted’. Yet it is also constructed out of everyday materials, a dinner party is being prepared and the codes which govern it are much better known by more people than theatre etiquette. The emergence of this liminal space (between the everyday and the extraordinary) allows for a particular kind of role reversal. The ‘others’ are normally at the receiving end of hospitality. This narrative is ever-present in current news coverage. Governments extend or withhold hospitality. *with bread* opens the possibility for one, relatively privileged group of migrants (White, current EU passport holders) to give place to another, often silenced group of migrants: in this case refugees and asylum seekers<sup>15</sup>. Together, we host a public event, which although other fellow migrants may attend it is by and large designed for ‘the locals.’

*with bread* is a gentle act of protest: we claim the liminal space of the theatre to give place to the possibility of transforming of the us-them dichotomy into ‘we are the people with whom we eat.’

---

<sup>15</sup> The core company: Katherina Radeva, Alik Chapple and myself, and the guest-hosts, in particular from the performance in Stockton.

While other theorists (including Erika Fischer-Lichte and Jill Dolan) may argue that this ‘becoming one’ is a function of the power of theatre, I argue that commensal performance, with its emphasis on a joint enterprise to nourish ourselves and its appeal to primal and basic biological functions enables the theatre as a space of utopian possibility to spill out into the everyday through the vehicles of our senses, our bodies and our digestive systems. Through commensal performance, we give place to the other not only by offering our seat at our table but within ourselves.

Claudia Giacomani argues that commensality as an instance of social interaction ‘manifests differently if it is conducted within or outside the home, among coworkers or with friends, or in a daily or festive context’ (2016: 461). As a performance, *with bread* offers an opportunity to construct an instance of ‘liminal commensality’: it involves both friends and strangers; it is neither fully ritual, nor an instance of daily eating. In particular, *with bread* in its dramaturgical exploration of difference (through stories of migration, performance in multiple languages, set design etc.), becomes an opportunity to play with the notion of incorporation which is defined as:

the belief that diners acquire the properties of the food they consume which can be summarised as “you are what you eat”. This principle creates a link among the diners if they share the same dishes; those who participate in a shared meal assimilate the same food into themselves thus taking on a shared identity [...] The consumption of a shared meal functions as a sign, which communicates the idea that the diners belong to a group and are differentiated from those who do not share the same meal. Accordingly, we are not only what we eat; we are also the people with whom we eat. (Giacomani, 2016: 461)

*with bread* was made in a country and at a historical moment where hostility towards migrants is at an all-time high, compounded by the results of the Brexit referendum vote with a high proportion of ‘leave’ voters in the North of England, including nearly 62% in Stockton on Tees (Financial Times, 2016). The existing literature on commensality highlights the role eating together plays in fostering and strengthening social bonds between people. The primary focus of said literature has been on already existing

commensal units and circles. The people who eat together are already somewhat like each other. Drawing on the concept of incorporation, *with bread* is a performance devised using a commensal process and featuring two distinct groups of migrants: the core company, EU migrants to the UK and guest performers from anywhere in the world. The pervasive narrative of migration suggests countries ‘welcome’ (or not) migrants as outsiders. In the liminal space of the theatre, migrants welcome locals to their event. In a sense, this particular guest-host/performer-audience/migrant-local dynamic is not specific to commensal performance, and a number of projects give place and give voice to migrant voices (see Musca (ed), 2019; Meerzon and Pewny (eds), 2020 for example). However, in the case of *with bread* as commensal performance, the boundaries between guest-host/performer-audience/migrant-local are blurred in a number of ways.

First, through the preparation and sharing of food, and in particular such a common food as bread. In making it together, diverse forms of knowledge, and experience flow through the room as participants draw on their own tactile experiences of making bread (or seeing it made). Second, through the process of incorporation and its heightened state within the theatre: we are the people with whom we eat. Third, the central presence of food in the project allows for a blurring of the boundaries between the performance itself, and everyday life. This may make the idea of the spillage between the ways of being enacted in the show and everyday life more concrete. In constructing a space to “eat across difference”, commensal performance proposes a window into the possibility of a kind of everyday activism which is simply to foster understanding, listening and being together with others.

This utopian vision must not, however, confer commensality a romantic undertone as commensality exists by way of exclusion: if we are the people with whom we eat, we are also not those we do not eat with. The bond created through the commensal exchange is also fragile, and the trust we lend each other by eating together may lead to conflict. *with bread* does not shy away from this complexity – it is referenced in the design of the dining room; separate groups are invited by separate performers to sit at tables where no one can be the head, but where no one is truly equal either. In that sense, *with bread* opens the way for a kind of practical utopia and radical hospitality. *with bread* gently and simply

encourages ‘local’ audiences to encounter the ‘migrant’ performers as specific individuals with particular stories, rather than anonymous and general ‘immigrants’. In constructing shared eating and making *with bread* sharpens the focus on shared histories, and how they connect those participating in the event to the particular place in which it is being presented. *with bread* does not offer a solution to the complex migrant-local relationship, but it proposes a playful and nourishing frame to think about it anew.

## Forward

As the first Practice as Research project of my doctoral research, *with bread* firstly allowed me to establish, test and refine a definition and an approach to commensality in performance. I conceived an approach to making performance that continually focusses on commensality: as a process of collaborating and making, a focus of mise-en-scène and a thematic departure point. By placing commensality in a theatrical context, the development of *with bread* allowed me to consider how the experience of commensality can be constructed through performance. In reflecting on the process of constructing commensality, it became apparent that hosting plays a central role to the potential commensality has within performance.

In thinking through commensality, as I moved forward to the development of other projects, I was left with a renewed perspective on my central research inquiry:

To what extent can the creative model which underpins this specific commensal performance be applied to other projects which aim to creatively harness and explore commensality as a phenomenon which uniquely holds togetherness and difference, inclusion and exclusion, conviviality and conflict as co-existing truths?



## Part Three: *Eat the Archives*

To enable human flourishing requires openness, a willingness to listen, and a democracy of hope. It is a democracy because it welcomes everyone to participate in the conversation., encouraging them to experiment by pointing it in new directions, shaping it into new forms. And it is hope because while the resulting experimentation and adaptation offer no guarantee of success, there is the aspiration of a better world, where hurt is lessened, and the virtues of a good life are possible.’ (Barnes in Hankins, 2017: 503)

### Project introduction

*Eat the Archives* proposes a performance intervention within the domestic sphere and in the context of everyday commensality. Contrasting my earlier project *with bread*, the design of *Eat the Archives* develops commensal performance within domestic (rather than purpose-built for performance) spaces. This allows me to focus my investigation on the possible effects of performance intervention within pre-existing commensal circles: people who already eat together and/or have a pre-existing relationship to a host.

In other words, developing from *with bread*, *Eat the Archives* asks the following questions:

- How can performance intervene in **everyday, domestic commensality** and with what effect?
- What does commensal performance make possible when hosted within a **pre-existing commensal circle**?

Additionally, *Eat the Archives* aims to develop the exploration of hosting as a mode of performance which I begun in *with bread*. This exploration focusses on development of a partnership with the hosts whose homes the project is held in. In parallel, *Eat the Archives* also allows for the continued development of commensality as a performance making methodology. As such, *Eat the Archives* enables the emergence of primary

insights on commensality as well as offer an opportunity to establish new practitioner knowledge in the area of commensal performance making with a view to inquire about:

- The affect and effects of commensal performance on the audience-performer relationship
- The potential of commensality as a methodology which foregrounds sensory, embodied, and relational approaches to performance making

*Eat the Archives* is designed to take place in a private home, offering the host of the performance a choice of three menus entitled respectively: *Journeys*, *Identities* and *Communities*. Each menu offers a three-course meal inspired by three to four artefacts or documents belonging to Manchester Jewish Museum's collection. For *Eat the Archives* performances, I prepare the host's chosen menu, at their home, for guests they have selected and invited. With each course, the audience of guests is also invited to interact with the corresponding museum object, and I perform the story related to each object. The *Communities* menu was not selected by any host, and as such never performed. A table outlining each menu, its associated stories and artefacts is presented in Appendix 4.

*Eat the Archives* was designed through an iterative process which began in Autumn 2019 and was completed in August 2021. The project and menus described above represent the final version of the project, as it was intended through the research design. However, the disruption related to the Covid-19 pandemic also led me to devise two alternative versions of the project involving a live, online element included in the timeline (see Appendix 6), although they are not formally included within this Practice as Research project, which focusses on the live, embodied and bodily co-present components of commensality. A film document was also created and is included in the timeline below. As the table below shows, the project was developed over three phases, each separated by a period of reflection, the first of which was impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown which delayed the planned development of in-person performances within domestic spaces.

**Phase 1** was an initial phase of research, including pilot performances designed as ‘proof of concept’. These performances were informal, with a changing menu which was not yet focussed on specific themes. The sharing of the stories related to the objects was also informal and not performed theatrically.

**Phase 2** was a period of remote, online work with the primary objective of utilising the learning from Phase 1 to plan for a later period of in-person Practice as Research, keeping abreast of the restrictions imposed on live performance and social mixing by the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Phase 3** was a period of Practice as Research including four performances of *Eat the Archives* in domestic spaces, one in the institutional space of the Museum’s learning kitchen and one staged for the purposes of filmed documentation. Phase three performances were spaced a week apart to allow time for reflection and a public event reflecting on learning from the project and offering practical insights on the possible future of the project. This chapter focusses primarily on discussion and analysis of Phase 3 performances in domestic spaces as those were specifically designed to directly address the project research questions. In particular, the online components of the project are not discussed in detail, in part as they did not form part of the original research design but were responding on the professional requirements of the project, and most significantly because their very nature the bodily co-presence necessary in my approach to commensality impossible. However, I will reflect on how the overall iterative methodology of the project was necessary to arrive at those focussed performances.

A table summarising the project timeline and highlighting periods of reflection and/or disruption is supplied in Appendix 6.

## Creative Team

**Leo Burtin – Lead Artist** – Responsible for the overall creative and research design of the project, as well as leading on the practical delivery of the project.

**Laura Seddon – Manchester Jewish Museum Creative Producer** – Bridging role between the Creative Team and the Museum, Laura's role in the project is discussed in more detail this chapter. Laura was employed by the Museum and her work in the project was funded through her formal role at the Museum.

**Sheila Ghelani – Visual Dramaturg** – Sheila's role involved supporting me as the lead artist to develop a coherent visual language for the project which would serve the overall dramaturgy of the work. Sheila can be heard reflecting on this role during an interview in the film document from 00:07:18 – 00:08:10. Sheila was contracted as a freelancer for this specific project.

**Louise Cross – Producer** – Louise's role was focused on providing logistical and administrative support. Louise's role on this project was contracted as part of her work as producer supporting my overall artistic practice.

**Jonny Randall – Filmmaker** – I collaborated with Jonny to write and direct the film document of the project, which Jonny filmed and edited. Jonny was contracted as a freelancer for this aspect of the project alone.

**Zac Barfoot – Sound Recordist** – Zac's role was a technical one for the film document to manage the complex task of recording dinner conversations in the least intrusive way possible. Zac was contracted as a freelancer for this aspect of the project alone, in a largely technical capacity.

## Project Documentation

*Eat the Archives* performances taking place in people's homes, at the Museum and through the online format were not formally recorded so that participants could feel free to interact as they would while attending any other dinner party, without being conscious of the camera's presence and to mitigate any feelings that might arise of needing to censor themselves. The project was designed to be experienced as an in-person event taking place in a private home, at the invitation of a specific host. However, as is often the case with Practice as Research, the ability to share the insights emerging from the project effectively would be significantly limited if only those people who had been able to attend *Eat the Archives* dinner party could engage with the knowledge generated within and out of the project. In order then to make the project accessible to a wider audience and give readers of this exegetic chapter a flavour of the underpinned Practice as Research, I worked with filmmaker Jonny Randall to create a feature-length film document which can be viewed by [following this link](#).

The *Eat the Archives* documentary consists of four interwoven elements:

- Interviews with the project's creative team and museum staff contextualising the project within the Museum's programme.
- A performance of the *Identities* menu re-staged for camera and for an audience of guests who had previously engaged with my food performance work with Manchester Jewish Museum and/or are involved in the Museum's community.
- Visual vignettes of the objects, documents and oral histories selected to be part of *Eat the Archives*.
- Filmed preparations of the dishes involved in the *Identities* menu, with commentary on their development process.

I would like to invite readers to watch this film document before reading on.

## Making *Eat the Archives*

Commensality is an inevitably social concept: practicing commensality necessarily involves a relationship to one or more others. In my own life, commensality is also a daily practice: shared mealtimes are the norm in my household and many others. This creates a tension for the practice of commensality *as research*. Commensality being ubiquitous makes most of us experts of social eating: commensal knowledge represents what Robin Nelson (2006) calls tacit ‘know-how.’ Commensal knowledge has been embodied through years of eating with others: the norms, social scripts and processes involved in gathering with others to eat exist beyond verbal articulation, rendering them almost invisible, unnoticeable. In his articulation of Practice as Research methodology, Nelson argues that: ‘Reflection upon [the] process of building knowledge allows for the making visible of an intelligence which nevertheless remains fundamentally located in embodied knowing.’ (2006: 40) In committing to following Nelson’s model for Practice as Research for the development of *Eat the Archives*, I seek to create a frame within which commensality is made visible, thus allowing it to be interrogated. *Eat the Archives* shares with *with bread* the core questions at the heart of this PhD:

- In what ways can performance practice illuminate our understanding of commensality as a social phenomenon?
- In what ways can the potential of commensality as a performance form be revealed through practice?

To address these questions, *with bread* – as a project designed for the stage – offered an opportunity to start from the position of performance, grounding the approach to the study of commensality in the context of performance. *Eat the Archives* on the other hand positions itself away from the performance context and is grounded in the site and context of ordinary, everyday commensality: the home.

As with the chapter on *with bread*, this chapter is also organised through three primary sub-sections entitled ***making***, ***thinking about*** and ***thinking through***. I will first reflect on

the processes of **making** *Eat the Archives*, foregrounding the methodological insights emerging from the project and their implications for the development of practitioner knowledge in the area of commensal performance, which my overall doctoral project seeks to define. Secondly, **thinking about** puts Fischer-Lichte's theoretical framework of the autopoietic feedback loop in conversation with food studies concepts to propose an analysis of the insights that have emerged out of the practice. Finally **thinking through** develops the concept of quiet politics and its manifestation within the practice to suggest ways in which the models developed in *Eat the Archives* may be extended to further establish commensal performance as an engaged method of Practice as Research.

Undertaking commensal Practice as Research implies the need for two pre-existing conditions: access to people to practice with and a framework to enable reflexivity of a practice which most often unfolds tacitly. For the development of *Eat the Archives*, both conditions were met through the setting up of a working relationship with Manchester Jewish Museum, and in particular with a community of people engaging with the Museum's programmes in and around the Cheetham area of Manchester. The project emerged out of a series of iterative 'scratch'<sup>16</sup> experiments which formed part of a commission from Manchester Jewish Museum where I was a 'food artist in residence'.

Although this role and this opportunity did not initially form part of a Practice as Research design, it offered a frame and brokered access to individuals and groups with an interest in exploring the intersections of food and culture. I have come to view my time in residence with the Museum as being comparable to the way a visual artist may have a regular studio practice, or a dancer may attend professional technique classes. Indeed, through this role at the Museum, I was able to regularly practice commensality outside of the quotidian context and this provided the starting point to the second condition for the emergence of commensal Practice as Research: reflexivity.

---

<sup>16</sup> 'Scratch involves practically testing ideas, listening to feedback, evolving the ideas and repeating the process.' (Battersea Arts Centre, n.d.)

Introducing my relationship with the Museum here serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it is to acknowledge the wider context of my ongoing artistic practice and to recognise that as a Practitioner-Researcher, I have continued to develop a professional practice which cannot be readily construed or measured as *research*. In the specific case of my relationship with Manchester Jewish Museum, there is therefore a boundary between elements of what constitutes an artistic commission and aspects of this work which were intentionally designed to fulfil the academic requirements of Practice as Research. Secondly, I wish to underline that although there is a boundary between the work I undertook at Manchester Jewish Museum as a practitioner and the use I made of this platform to design *Eat the Archives* as PaR, the emergence of the PaR frame was made possible by the wider context of my artistic residency.

As such the boundary between my identity as both Practitioner and Researcher is a porous one. This porosity was necessary to the development of the project in the sense that the rigorous making and reflecting processes involved in the development of *Eat the Archives* could only have emerged out of exploratory practice and had to hold open the possibility of not being viable as research. This also presents a challenge in producing exegetic material seeking to explicate what processes led to the development of a research methodology capable of yielding significant insights. Indeed, although Robin Nelson's model for Practice as Research is widely recognised as providing a clear approach for undertaking and communicating PaR, it does not fully account for the multitude of ways in which a project might be informed or impacted by external factors. *Eat the Archives* emerged out of a wider programme of work which built upon a relationship with Manchester Jewish Museum as an institution, and most importantly its staff and the communities the Museum seeks to serve. As such, it is particularly important for me to find a way to acknowledge, document and reflect upon the relational impact of my artistic residency at the Museum on the development of my Practice as Research. Additionally, practicing commensality is predicated on entering into relationships, not all of which can be 'sealed' within the parameters of PaR, thus cementing the need to account for the impact of relational factors on research processes. This is why I called upon Joanna Bucknall's 'daisy-chain' model to visually



represent the relational factors which influenced the development of this PaR project, in Appendix 2.

### Thematic approach

The decision to shape *Eat the Archives* around the themed menus of Journeys, Identities and Communities emerged out of Phase 1 of the project, where the events were structured in relation to the foods being served but not framed thematically. Although the food served and museum objects themselves did act as a catalyst for exchange between participants, they limited the scope of conversation to that which people were naturally willing to contribute, or to their personal response to the objects, stories, or food. Moreover, from a performance perspective, the event lacked structure which resulted, perhaps surprisingly, in a disruption of the processes of commensality. Indeed, exchanges were stilted by the frame of the project: given the project's position at the intersection of artistic event and an instance of commensality, it became apparent that as the performing host my role was crucial in modelling how interactions could function. This includes, as with other projects, offering a clear outline of the running of events (as can be viewed from 00:13:23 to 00:14:20 in the documentary film); navigating the possibility of multiple conversations taking place at once, and the transition to returning to engagement with the whole table, as evident from 00:27:31 to 00:28:26. There, an initial focus on food enables a conversational icebreaker, which later allows participants to share more intimate thoughts with each other, for example from 00:58:25 to 01:03:36.

The final performance of Phase 1 R&D revolved around extracts from oral histories collected from three individuals who identify as both Jewish and LGBTQ. This version was performed once, at a “Moishe Pod”<sup>17</sup> event hosted by Katie Kaestner-Frenchman and her husband Ben. Moishe Houses are shared houses where young Jewish people lead and deliver a number of community-building activities for their peers. They are managed by an international not for profit organisation of the same name. The performance described here took place in the couple's private home, where they regularly host events for their local Jewish community. “Moishe Pod” is the term the organisation has coined to

---

<sup>17</sup> For more information about Moishe House, see: <https://www.moishehouse.org/about-us/our-story/>

describe activity which follows the Moishe House model, but on a smaller scale and without the need for setting up shared accommodation. The focus on LGBTQ stories emerged from conversations between Katie, Museum Creative Producer Laura Seddon and me. Hosting an event for a specific community provided an opportunity to test the inclusion of a clear thematic anchor for *Eat the Archives* as well as offer a chance to foster conversations on the complicated intersection of religious and sexual identity.

Phase 1 concluded with a period of reflection during which I identified that the most successful aspects of the pilot had relied on the thematic frame. The eventual menu themes of *Journeys*, *Identities* and *Communities* emerged through a dialogic process and reflect the Museum's own themed galleries (which were not yet open at the time). Those key words were selected to become the focus of *Eat the Archives* partly in response to the Museum's own broader efforts to 'thematise', which are themselves echoes of the stories present in the collection. However, most importantly, those themes overlap in their relevance to the initial target audience of participants for the project and their reflection in the wider area of commensality research.

Indeed, although the project met a wider demographic of participants, the initial mechanism for identifying and engaging *Eat the Archives* hosts was through the Museum's community 'foodie group' which I co-led with Laura Seddon throughout the project period. The group was made up of individuals who shared an interest in food and Jewish culture and could sign up to participate in monthly free sessions which included talks and presentations about elements of the Museum's collection related to food, cookery demonstrations and themed conversations around specific foods, holidays, or traditions. The group attracted a majority of people from a Jewish background, for whom the themes of Journeys, Identities and Communities are particularly resonant.

The history of Jewish people is intricately linked to migratory movements throughout the world and across different time periods. In Manchester specifically, waves of Jewish migration took place from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with families arriving from Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East notably. As a result, many of the people who form part of Manchester's Jewish Community have direct family connections to migratory

journeys. The theme of identity allows us to catalyse conversations around those national identity and their interaction with the Jewish faith, the differences and similarities between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews and the multiple facets which uniquely make up a sense of Jewish identity across faith, ethnicity, and culture. Finally, the theme of community is pertinent in light of the specific rooting of the project in a particular locale. Indeed, Cheetham is thought to be one of the UK's most diverse areas, home to 44% of people born outside of the UK, where 69% of people speak three languages or more (Hall et al., 2015). The lens of community offers a rich array of possibilities for thinking about and problematising the very concept of 'community'. Although of course, there is specific resonance for Jewish audiences with these themes, there is of course a universality to them which allowed for an opening up of the project to people of various identities, echoing the Museum's own curatorial vision:

All the stories told on gallery are Jewish but by framing them within these universal themes they hopefully feel relevant to all of our audiences, Jewish and non-Jewish. (Manchester Jewish Museum, n.d.).

The universality of such themes is also particularly potent for commensality research. Food studies researchers have demonstrated on numerous occasions the close ties between food consumption and identity formation and expression and the direct link between commensality and the emergence and maintenance of the notion of community. As commensality expert Claude Fischler states:

Food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it assert its diversity, hierarchy, and organization, and at the same time, both its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently. Food is also central to individual identity, in that any given human individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially by the food he/she chooses to incorporate. (Fischler, 1988: 275)

Any study or project focussing on commensality is therefore already and always concerned with aspects of identity and community. The theme of 'journeys' echoes

another recurring tenet of commensality research: migrant foodways. Foodways as a concept can be summarised as the study of the processes involved in sourcing, preparing and consuming food and how they relate to the habits, customs, and traditions for a particular group. Foodways as a concept already embeds a sense of journey by considering how particular ingredients become foodstuffs and incorporated in the diets of specific regions, communities, religious or ethnic groups. Although this approach to the notion of foodways offers a broad lens to examine the relationship between commensal practices and specific ingredients or foodstuffs, the existing literature pays particularly close attention to migrant foodways.

The application of the themes of Journeys, Identities and Communities to the design of *Eat the Archives* is therefore significant in three interconnected ways:

- 1) It offers a creative anchor and a dramaturgical frame for the development of the commensal performance menus, providing an open route to the development of a shared sense of narrative between myself as performer-host, the guest-host and their guests.
- 2) The selected themes are specific enough to resonate with the interests and experiences of the community from which the project emerges. They are also broad enough to act as a conversation starter with a wide range of commensal circles.
- 3) The themes offer a coherent analytical throughline to put performance practice and commensal research in conversation.

## Object selection

The development of the project's thematic methodology unfolded in alongside a dialogic process of selecting the artefacts which would become the centrepieces of each *Eat the Archives* course. This involved a close collaboration with the Museum's Creative Producer, Dr Laura Seddon. Her involvement in the project was critical to the success of the project for two notable reasons. Firstly, she brought to the project her expertise in the Museum's collection, her working relationship with the Museum's curator and her own

background as a researcher. As the narrative and performance structure of *Eat the Archives* emerges out of the Museum's artefacts, having guided access to specialist knowledge on those artefacts from which to devise the project was crucial. Secondly, as Creative Producer, Laura would play a bridging role between myself as the lead artist-researcher and the host institution for the project, managing many of the complex logistical aspects of developing commensal performance based on historically significant artefacts. This collaboration with Laura Seddon allowed me to remain focussed on the project's primary focus on investigating commensality in performance.

To begin the process of object selection for *Eat the Archives*, Laura first identified what artefacts the Museum held connected to food and with support from the Museum's curator sought information about their histories.

Working with a museum collection as source material for performance work relies on developing a collaboration with specialist staff and this in turn goes on to influence dramaturgical choices made in the future: as the lead artist on this kind of project, my skills and the time available for the project limit my ability to engage with the full collection. For such a collaboration to be successful, the centrality of commensality to the development of *Eat the Archives* needs to be understood by all involved with the project. Centring commensality within the making process thus becomes a key tool for the development of commensal performance. This is something I have written about in more depth in the chapter concerning my first Practice as Research project *with bread*. Although, in the case of *with bread*, the centrality of commensality within the making process was more direct: 'rehearsals' for the show took the form of days organised around shared meals first and foremost. In the case of *Eat the Archives*, however, although some shared meals did take place throughout the development of the project, a fully commensal process was curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic which put significant limitations on the ability for the project's creative team to meet in person. Centring commensality then becomes an aspirational and more theoretical process: the promise of future shared eating became an area of creative conversation, underlined by the relative absence of commensality for most of the project's development period.

At this point, the process of selecting museum objects for *Eat the Archives* involved: establishing a clear thematic and methodological approach, developing a working relationship with specialist staff and centring commensality, which in turn led to a clear interest in firstly identifying food-related objects in the collection. This presented a logistical challenge in that the way in which the Museum's artefacts are accessioned does not include the clear labelling of food-related objects, and as such this process involved the need to sift through large quantities of information organised in broad categories. In other words, identifying food-related sources within the collection requires educated guesswork. This is interesting to note, given that despite clear desire for the Museum to include food as a substantial part of its programme, the technicalities of museum operations highlight the fact that food does not often take pride of place within cultural institutions. This is itself reflective of the challenges of "collecting" food despite its clear potential for being a marker of identity and tool for engaging with the changing histories of society<sup>18</sup>. This is particularly true of a Jewish Museum, given the widely recognised prominence of food and commensality in the practice of Judaism as both religion and culture. Indeed, Judaism has been referred to as a 'kitchen religion' in both a pejorative and celebratory way, notably as chronicled by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in the chapter on *Kitchen Judaism* published in the catalogue of Exhibition on the American Jewish Home held at New York Jewish Museum in 1990 (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1990). *Eat the Archives*, and commensal performance more broadly, offers a practical approach to putting food practice at the forefront of cultural programming.

Having established the thematic methodology for *Eat the Archives* and developed adequate collaborative processes with the creative team (placing the commensal inquiry at the core of the project), the following factors needed to be considered to conclude the process of selecting artefacts:

- The availability of information about the artefacts, or the potential to find further information through additional research

---

<sup>18</sup> See Edward Whittall's chapter on *Food and Objecthood* in Levant and Mihalache (Eds), 2018 for a discussion of key concerns in this area.

- The possibility for them to be handled by guests, or their reproducibility
- The extent to which their stories could be framed as conversation starters: in other words, how sharing stories connected to the objects can enable the beginning of a wider conversation
- The potential of narrative connection between the selected objects: how they might enable the construction of a coherent dramaturgical structure
- The extent to which those objects or stories could serve as a starting point for menu development

This rigorous process led to the selection of the objects, documents and oral histories listed in Appendix 4. These went on to being organised into the three menus, which I will now reflect on.

## Menu development

The notion that food can hold and convey meaning is well-established and has been discussed in significant detail by scholars – most notably anthropologists – in seminal works such as Lévi-Strauss's *The Raw and the Cooked* (1970) and Mary Douglas's 1972 *Deciphering a Meal*. Douglas proposes a system to analyse the 'grammar' of a meal, which builds upon Lévi-Strauss's work. She argues that Lévi-Strauss's binary food categories are limiting because 'he affords no techniques for assessing the relative value of the binary pair that emerge in a local set of expressions' (1972: 34) and that 'he takes leave of the small-scale social relations which generate the codification and are sustained by it.' (1972: 34) With this, Douglas foregrounds the expressive potential of food and highlights that a meal's ability to generate and communicate meaning is reliant on sociality. In other words, the expressiveness of food and eating can be understood as a feature of commensality.

More recently, food performance scholar Kristin Hunt contributed to the study of food's symbolic functions in everyday life by turning her attention to what she calls mimetic cookery and mimetic eating: 'two related phenomena in which chefs and artists intentionally treat food, cooking and eating as modes of representation.' (Hunt, 2018: 2)

Here, Hunt identifies the specificity of the *intention* placed by artists and chefs on meaning making through food, and her wider study also acknowledges the parallel lineages in food performance emerging out of both fine dining and artistic traditions. The development of each dish within *Eat the Archives* is informed by this dual lineage, and by the specific intention for the food served to respond to the imbricated artistic and research objectives of the project. It is also important to note that Hunt's use of the word 'mimesis' here refers to 'not only cases of culinary imitation and mimicry, but also culinary representation on a grander scale, including the use of food to evoke stories, spark memories or communicate ideas.' (2018: 3)

Each of the *Eat the Archives* menus is devised in relation to the wider commensal performance project. Indeed, I follow Douglas in the understanding that the meaning of food is constructed, understood and deciphered in a social manner, thus once again centring commensality. It is through the social experience of commensality that the food acquires its full ability to 'mean'. The dishes created for *Eat the Archives* follow a three-course sequence from starter to dessert, which is a familiar and habitual sequence for the project's audiences. The flavours, textures, and techniques at play in each course bear the guests in mind. If food is a language, then the guests know the language I am speaking in each of those menus, though they may not have heard the story I am telling before. Or, as Douglas puts it: 'the meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies.' (Douglas, 1972: 44)

*Eat the Archives* can be understood as constructed of three interwoven creative components which are the social processes of commensality, the act of engaging with the museum's stories and objects and crucially the food itself. In conceiving the menu, as Laura Seddon summarises in the documentary about the project, I notably ask myself: 'What could you eat to heighten that story while you're hearing it?' (Seddon in Burtin, 2021: 00:08:23-00:08:31)

The process of answering this question, and of considering the food more broadly is crucial to the development of commensal performance. Indeed, although commensality can take place with any kind of food (or even, according to some scholars such as Georg



Simmel (1997 [1910]), drink), commensal performance treats food specifically and intentionally. In *Alimentary Performances* (2018), Kristin Hunt proposes ‘four fundamental means through which cuisine functions mimetically in theatrical and performance contexts’ (2018: 13). Here, I apply Hunt’s framework, consisting of: mimetic cooking, mimetic eating, representation, and dramaturgical context to an analysis of the *Eat the Archives* menu.

The mimetic cooking function occurs in all the dishes in more or less direct ways. Hunt defines mimetic cooking as constructing a ‘representation of another time, place, or action’ (Hunt, 2018: 130). Each of the dishes in the *Eat the Archives* menus are designed to echo the content of the stories they are served with, sometimes very directly. For example, the source material with Annie Conway’s story is a photograph where she holds borekas, and the caption includes a brief description of the foodstuff. Here, straightforwardly, the food affords an opportunity to enhance the viewing of the photograph by tasting a version of the same food it features. In the *Identities* menu, where the borekas become a dessert dish, the tea-soaked fruit and spice mix used in the recipe plays a secondary mimetic function of relating not only to the artefact being presented, but echoing Annie Conway’s identity as both Irish and Jewish. The boreka’s filling here is reminiscent of Irish barmbrack rather than a traditional Jewish boreka filling. Like the story of Annie’s identity (which can be heard in the film 1:11:36 – 1:16:20), the dessert boreka becomes a hybrid, bringing two distinct cultures together. A similar process is at play with the cabbage rice polow, a dish developed to be reminiscent of Sephardi Jewelled Rice, flavoured with Syrian spices and made with seasonal British ingredients. The dish, in dialogue with the oral histories and photographs of Sephardi women which it is served alongside, tells a story of assimilation (see film record: 00:49:06 – 00:52:26). Less directly, for the main course served in the *Journeys* menu, consisting of beetroot burgers, roast potatoes and grilled asparagus, the dish utilises ingredients local to Yorkshire which would have been abundant in the countryside the children to whom the letter is addressed are being sent. There the dish seeks to evoke a sense of place and shifts the focus of the story shared from the Rabbi authoring the letter, to the unknown children it is being sent to.

For Hunt, mimetic eating occurs ‘when participants implicitly or explicitly take on the position of a performer, completing the representational circuit of an edible performance’ (2018: 131). Hunt also notes in her definition of mimetic eating that it ‘may occur in tandem with mimetic cooking’ (2018: 131). In other words, the participation of the audience forms part of the completion of the dish through their eating. Hunt draws on the fine dining example of diners licking food from a whisk prepared by chefs Achatz and Beran thus completing ‘the illusion of the menu by adding the essential element of their participation, allowing other diners to witness them nostalgically restaging an iconic childhood memory’ (2018: 131). In *Eat the Archives*, the intersection of mimetic eating and mimetic cooking through participation - occurs in a slightly different way.

Unlike *with bread*, in which participants must actively be involved in preparing pain azyme, *Eat the Archives* does not include a mimetic participation element in its overall design. However, there are two exceptions to this. The staging of the *Identities* menu for the film version, and the practical layout of the Museum’s community learning kitchen allowed me to invite the guests to fold their own dessert borekas (see film: 00:38:37 – 00:43:24). This provides participant with an embodied opportunity to experience the care, patience and skill required to prepare those delicate pastries, thus providing an additional layer of connection to Annie Conway’s story. The participants were relatively unfamiliar with the technique involved in preparing the borekas and practiced in the same way that Annie Conway would have learned to make them following her conversion to Judaism.

The third element of Hunt’s framework considers the way in which food may ‘amplify or complicate the representational contexts of mimetic cooking and eating through representational aspects of their visual, olfactory, auditory, textural or alimentary qualities’ (2018: 131). Hunt exemplifies this with reference to Homaro Cantu’s Cuban Cigar sandwich: a collard green roll filled with pork, served with a spice blend ‘ash’, on an ashtray. This element of culinary representation is entirely absent from *Eat the Archives* and my food performance practice more broadly for two core reasons. Firstly, my focus in the development of food performance Practice as Research has been on

commensality and as such the menus developed in both *with bread* and *Eat the Archives* attempt to provide a focus from which to develop commensal relations between myself and the audience-participants, and between the participants themselves. The artistic attention and emphasis are on this relationality, rather than on the potentially spectacular nature of the dish: I seek to encourage people to focus on their interactions rather than on the food as artwork. However, this also represents a potential avenue for future work: in what ways might the use of fine dining ‘complications’ inform commensal performance? Secondly, my limited training and experience as a chef would not allow me to devise and cook such dishes without the involvement of a professional fine dining chef as a collaborator. Within the scope of this study, I have chosen to integrate the processes of food planning and preparation fully in the imbricated Practice Research process. As deviser, performer and host of commensal performance projects, my own sensory and embodied connection to the food underpins the making and holding of the commensal space.

The fourth and final element of Hunt’s analytical framework is dramaturgical context. Hunt argues that the eater’s mimetic experience of any given dish may depend on other performance elements. One such element, which is central to *with bread* is the use of familiar foodstuffs (in that case, bread) which trigger memories through the audiences’ experiencing of sensory memories. Hunt suggests that the audiences’ ability to read and experience mimetically may be further primed through dramaturgy which enables ‘the eater to make meaning of eating by connecting their immediate sensory experience with a wider context of memory or cultural knowledge.’ (2018: 131)

In *Eat the Archives*, the dramaturgical context is devised in three ways.

First, the project is presented in partnership with Manchester Jewish Museum and guest-hosts were recruited on a first-come, first-serve basis following an announcement by the Museum through their mailing lists, including firstly a list of people who had a pre-existing interest in food-related activity. Participants already bring to the project an interest in food and Jewish culture and their own potential pre-existing relationship with the foods, flavours and techniques involved in each of the menus. Each of the guest-hosts were

invited to select one of the three menus for their performance and were provided with a summary of the stories involved and full details of the foods that would be served. In conversation with the guest-hosts as they selected their menu, it became apparent that their choice was guided by either familiarity or a desire to move away from the familiar. Guest-hosts took the opportunity to hold an *Eat the Archives* dinner party either as an opportunity to share their own cultural context with their guests, or on the contrary to have an opportunity to try new foods. In both cases, there is an awareness before the event even begins of the wider cultural context embedded within the project's dramaturgy.

Second, each of the scripted stories performed alongside each corresponding dish underlines, teases or connects the relationship between the ideas, locations or themes embedded in the stories and artefacts with the specific choice of food. For example, the diary of Lou Black's journey includes a description of his fascination for the abundance of Californian peach orchards, and peaches take centre stage in the dessert course of the *Journeys* menu. The *Identities* menu opens with a humble Romanian dish often consumed by sheep farmers, and the story of Nurse Dora Black opens with a description of the family's origins in Romania and the Blacks' working-class identity. In contrast, the oral history and photographs of middle-class Sephardi families which forms the main course introduce the presence of rice, spices, and the possibility of consuming more elaborate foods thanks to the employment of domestic staff by the family.

Third, and perhaps most obviously, in the performance, each dish is introduced in detail prior to being served, revealing the thought processes which have led to each dish to audiences. Examples of this are visible in the film documentation of the project, during eating sequences such as (e.g. in film 00:52:27 – 00:53:17) as well as in the cooking segments, in which I introduce some of the information which I may otherwise have shared at the table in the at-home performances (e.g. in film 00:19:19 -00:25:30).

The methodological approach to the development of *Eat the Archives* edible elements is underpinned by the well-established understanding of food as a sign-system (Barthes, 1961; Douglas, 1972; Belasco, 2008; Parasecoli, 2011 to cite but a few). As a

performance maker, my work with food undergoes a rigorous and iterative rehearsal process involving developing, testing and refining specific recipes in light of their ability to generate meaning through the experience of eating. This approach firmly places *Eat the Archives* in the lineage of creative practice where fine dining and contemporary performance making traditions align, as I have demonstrated through the application and reflection of Kristin Hunt's framework of mimetic cooking and eating. *Eat the Archives* also extends the opportunities identified by Hunt by specifically centring both the processes of performance making, and the performative outcomes themselves on the concept of commensality.

*Eat the Archives* gradually proposes an opportunity to move away from both the institutional spaces of cultural institutions and the formal theatre of restaurant. It offers an intervention into everyday commensality, designed and hosted within specific commensal circles. This affords the emergence of reflexivity in a quotidian space and context, which, I will argue in the next section, is particularly <sup>19</sup>political.

### Thinking about *Eat the Archives*

In a 2015 book chapter, anthropologist Tan Chee-Beng proposes a taxonomy of commensality through the lens of 'the organization of social relations' (Chee-Beng, 2015: 13). He proposes a spectrum from *domestic commensality*, which he considers as the 'most basic form of commensality' (Chee-Beng, 2015: 14) and concludes with *hospitality commensality* which he views as 'largely an extension of domestic commensality' (Chee-Beng, 2015: 25). He defines *hospitality commensality* as distinct from *domestic commensality* as it includes a non-family member eating with the family, which he describes as the 'highest expression of friendship' (Chee-Beng, 2015: 25). Chee-Beng's taxonomy also includes *kin and communal commensality* (communal rites such as wedding feasts); *ceremonial and religious commensality* (which often overlaps with the prior category with the subtle distinction of placing the notion of worship more centrally) and *political commensality* (as for example with state dinners). Other scholars have

---

<sup>19</sup> My use of particularly here, is to mean 'in a particular manner' rather than 'especially'.

proposed similar methods for approaching and analysing commensality as a spectrum, from private to public (Fischler, 2011; Douglas, 1971) or as a series of binaries, as in Claude Grignon's 2001 typology of commensality as: *domestic or institutional* -; *everyday or exceptional* - ; *segregative* (for example, by class-based exclusion) or *transgressive* (temporarily disrupting previously established segregations).

Such taxonomies can be useful as starting points for the study of commensality, and they also come with the risk of - more or less obviously - implying judgments of value, as in Chee-Beng's reference to domestic commensality as 'basic'. Taxonomies broadly, and taxonomies of commensality specifically, as their authors acknowledge also simplify a phenomenon which is complex and where categories could often overlap. There is a broad consensus in commensality scholarship that it (commensality) is viewed as the process through which social relations are organised *and/or* as a lens through which 'to study culture and social relations' (Chee-Beng, 2015: 29). Although this can be applied to commensal performance, the specific nature of commensality in the context of artistic practice brings into focus an additional challenge to a taxonomy-based analysis of the form and function of commensality. Indeed commensal performance responds to, and is constructed with an awareness of those existing taxonomies. Following Chee-Beng's assertion that 'commensality provides the embodied experience of social relations with people' (2015: 29) leads to an opportunity for commensal performance to be: a process of construction of social relations, offer a reflexive approach to those same relations, and give the possibility to reflect on the nature of commensality itself.

The existing taxonomies cited above do not account for commensal performance specifically. And although they may usefully offer a framework to the analysis of commensality in the context of performance, they fail to account for the dynamic, fluid, and multifaceted nature of commensality which is especially visible in the case of commensal performance, as I will seek to illustrate. Rather than modelling this understanding of commensality in relation to binary taxonomies, or as a spectrum, I propose that commensal performance may instead be superimposed onto taxonomical understanding and visualised as a loop.

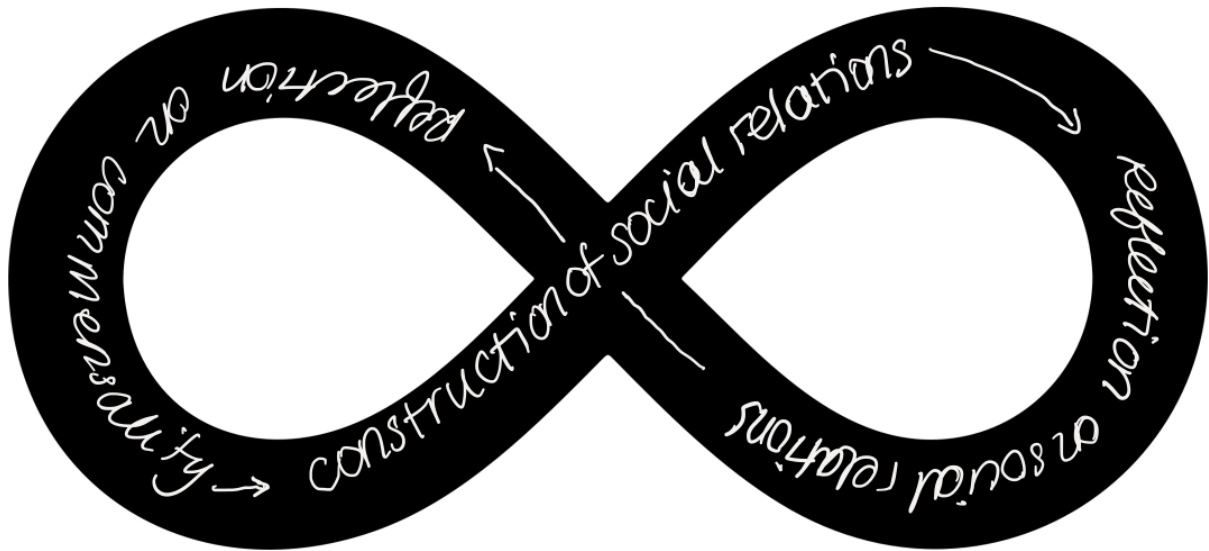


Figure 7 Commensal Performance Loop

This dynamic approach to understanding commensality echoes Erika Fischer-Lichte's modelling of performance as an autopoietic feedback loop. In this model, Fischer-Lichte relies on the concept of 'bodily co-presence' (2008: 38), the shared physical presence of people (in this case actors and spectators) in the same space, at the same time. She highlights that this 'bodily co-presence' (2008: 38) of the actor and spectator triggers the feedback loop, with each action taken by the performer generating a response in the spectator which in turn has an impact on the actor's performance which goes on to generate a reaction in the spectator and so forth. Commensal performance can effectively be analysed in such a way on the grounds alone that it is indeed *performance*. However, the commensal aspect of such a performance has implications for commensality: commensality is heightened in performance, rendering it visible as crafted for the purposes of performance (which I have previously written about in this thesis). The experience of commensality in performance is layered: it is experienced as part of the *modus operandi* of the artwork, and also in the everyday sense of commensality as the interaction with others over food. In *Eat the Archives*, the invitation to participate in the event was made by the guest-hosts, with each choosing to reveal or explain the aesthetic nature of the project to varying degrees. This became apparent in both the hosts' interactions with their guests, and my interactions with the guests. For example, in one event, the host would interrupt a conversation between two guests and invite silence before signalling towards me. The guests complied rapidly, and the

behaviours at play were reminiscent of how a theatre quietens as the lights dim to begin the show. In this instance, *Eat the Archives* is framed and interpreted firstly as a performance experience. By contrast, in another party, guests asked me at the start of the event about my background as a chef and seemed to not have known that an element of performance storytelling would form part of the evening, with this aspect initially coming as a surprise. There the experience was first of a catered dinner party, which would later reveal itself as artwork. In other instances, there was an unevenness between guests. For example, in one case two of the guests had researched the project and brought up in conversation their desire to participate in light of their own professional and artistic interest in archives. In the same event, two other guests expressed having accepted the invitation without realising it would be anything other than a dinner party in the commonly understood sense.

*Eat the Archives*, in contrast to *with bread* is not necessarily framed as performance to those who experience it and as a consequence, the dual relationship to commensality as modus operandi of the artwork and as an everyday, social experience in the context of a dinner party is also dynamic. Moreover, there may be subtle differences for guests in relation to how the invitation to attend has been made: their participation may be differently weighted in their expectation of *Eat the Archives* as artwork or as another instance of commensality. This experience is also dynamic, and following our understanding of commensal performance as a loop (a mode of construction of social relations; a reflexive approach to those same relations; a reflection on the nature of commensality itself – see Figure 7), it may change over the course of the event: A guest might attend expecting a dinner party and be surprised by a re-framing of the event as performance or conversely have their expectations of performance be disrupted by the commensal nature of the event.

Understanding commensality as a feedback loop enables us to extend the notion that the experience of commensality in performance therefore provokes a reaction on the lived experience of commensality as an everyday phenomenon. This in turns impacts the participant's experience of the commensal performance and the loop continues as with Fischer-Lichte's theoretical model. What the commensal feedback loop makes



apparent, is not only that commensal performance is influenced in its construction and experience by everyday commensality, but also (and most significantly) that commensal performance has the potential to impact and transform everyday experiences of commensality.

Indeed, performance commensality (in my Practice as Research) is both self-aware and self-reflexive. It is self-aware in that participants in commensal performance know that their social interactions over food form the fabric of the artwork: they know or discover through the performance that it is a constructed instance of commensality as performance, and they are aware of their own performance within it. It is self-reflexive in that those participating either are made aware that commensality is under scrutiny as part of the project in which they are participating, which in turn leads participants to reflect on their own experience of commensality. Commensal performance allows us to both think and practice commensality in such a way that embraces its inherent liminality. In performance, commensality does not remain an unexamined social and biological practice as it might in everyday life. What this awareness and reflexivity makes possible for the study of commensality is to propose an active lens to reveal how commensality is or can be constructed and *thought in action*. This is distinct from more traditional approaches to commensality in food studies which take a more observational stance, where in other words commensality happens and is later analysed or reflected upon.

Erika Fischer-Lichte developed the concept of performance as autopoietic feedback loop as a foundational principle through which to analyse performance as transformative. Fischer-Lichte notably draws on examples of performance practice from the 1960s onwards to argue that there has been a shift in artistic practices, and most notably in theatre and performance from the creation of works of art, to the creation of *events*. This shift from materiality to eventness is the first transformation Fischer-Lichte alludes to by titling her book *The Transformative Power of Performance*. It is this initial transformation, she argues, that in turns allows for the emergence of transformation for those involved in a given performance. She states:

the relationship between the material and semiotic status of objects in performance and their use in it has changed. The material status does not merge

with the signifier status; rather, the former severs itself from the latter to claim a life of its own. In effect, objects and actions are no longer dependent on the meanings attributed to them. As events that reveal these special characteristics, artistic performance opens up the possibility for all participants to experience a metamorphosis. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 23)

By proposing an intervention in the domestic sphere, in the context of everyday life, and at the hyper-local level of the pre-existing commensal circle, *Eat the Archives* as an instance of commensal performance offers a route towards a praxical, embodied application of Fischer-Lichte's concepts. Where, as a critic, Fischer-Lichte analyses performance works to highlight their transformative potential, by contrast *Eat the Archives* as an instance of commensal performance thinks-in-action, both in practice and as practice. Moreover, *Eat the Archives* allows for a conversation between performance theory and commensal practice to emerge, thus taking up Fischer-Lichte's invitation 'to act in life as in performance.' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 207)

The application of Fischer-Lichte's autopoietic feedback loop to commensal performance brings into focus the particular relationship that commensal performance has to the everyday. Indeed, although I would make the argument that the feedback loop in a traditional performance context ends as the 'bodily co-presence' of actors and spectators is broken on leaving the theatre, I must bring two interconnected key aspects of commensality into consideration to fully model such a loop for commensal performance. These are: (1) Incorporation and (2) Digestion.

Fischer-Lichte identifies three strategies utilised by artists as they experiment with the feedback loop, namely role reversal; creation of community; and contact/touch. In what follows, I will reflect on how each of those strategies can be found in *Eat the Archives* as an instance of commensal performance and highlight how the aforementioned elements of incorporation and digestion can enable us to compare and contrast the relationship between the performance autopoietic feedback loop and the self-reflexive nature of commensal performance.

## Role Reversal and Power

The distinction that Fischer-Lichte draws between actors and spectators is blurred by the participatory nature of commensal performance. Fischer-Lichte acknowledges that participation muddies who is an ‘actor’ and who is a ‘spectator’ at any given moment of the performance. This complication, Fischer-Lichte points out, is common to a diverse range of experimental performance practices. From the inception of the project, *Eat the Archives* relies on what Fischer-Lichte would call a ‘role reversal’. As discussed previously in relation to *with bread*, this so-called “role reversal” is in fact the default mode for commensal performance as I devise it: rather than an experimental procedure, a commitment to co-creation is at the forefront of the commensal performance project. However, as I will demonstrate, *Eat the Archives* offers a more subtle and layered approach to the notion of ‘role reversal’.

Role reversal [...] can be understood as an interplay of disempowerment and empowerment which applies to both artists and spectators. The artists relinquish their powerful positions as the performance’s sole creators; they agree to share – to varying degrees, of course – their authorship and authority with the audience. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 50)

In performances taking place in the setting of the theatre or dedicated arts spaces, the artist generally exerts more power and control than their audience in a number of ways. The artist has planned and rehearsed the event, they may be more familiar with the space they are working in, and they may utilise well established scenographic strategies to uphold etiquette which audiences are familiar with, and generally prepared to abide by. We might think for example about the process of an auditorium falling silent as lights dim.

In *with bread*, the very process of entering the performance space is controlled by the artist: performers invite audiences to join a specific table. As an instance of participatory performance *with bread* does include a number of opportunities to playfully disrupt expectations of power dynamics, as I discussed in more detail in the previous chapter. However, such disruptions exist within an institutional frame designed to lend power firstly to the artist.

In the case of *Eat the Archives*, the “powerful position of the artist” is already held lightly as the event is co-hosted at someone’s home, and they choose the audience they invite to participate from their own circles of friends and family. The event is loosely structured to accommodate the host’s preferences. The notion of choice is what begins the project: the host is asked to select a menu, and although those menus have been specifically designed, I commit to respond to the host’s needs and wants. This includes for example, the swapping out of cabbage for green beans at the party hosted by Sally Halon, or the provision of exclusively kosher ingredients (and therefore externally catered dishes) during the pilot event held at Filis Rosenberg’s house.

Each event also responds to the specific nature of the space it takes place in and the host’s relationship to it. In the pilot performance at the Kaestner-Frenchman household, seating arrangements were informal, on sofas and floor cushions in a lounge room. By contrast, the party hosted by the Halon family in Summer took advantage of a conservatory where the host re-created a semi-formal dining room with a view onto a large garden. In each case, the setting and seating arrangements are organised not only in response to the available space, but with an awareness from the host about their own performance agency, which was apparent in preparatory conversations with each of the hosts.

In addition to this, the hosts would collaborate with me to situate the museum objects, and notably the photographic portraits of each of the people whose stories are told within *Eat the Archives* to be placed within their home. Bethan Ward placed the photos along the centre of the dining table itself, while Jess Sweet and Adrian Smith chose to scatter them in their kitchen-dining room, in and among their own memorabilia. Sally Halon dressed a side table especially for the photographs and the museum objects.

This collaborative process with a guest-host already shifts the usual power dynamics that would be at play in an institutional space, or if indeed I had proposed to ‘take over’ domestic spaces for the purposes of the performance. By design *Eat the Archives* layers processes of hosting and invitation. I am an invited guest in each of the host’s houses, and they introduce me to other guests as the performance begins. I follow house rules: whether I can keep shoes on or must take them off, whether I am allowed to go into an

adjacent sitting room or not, whether I can cook with certain ingredients or not. I am also a host for the purpose of the performance, leading other guests (as well as the guest hosts) through a pre-defined commensal structure.

The already dynamic nature of power at play within *Eat the Archives* is further complicated by the specific relationship between other guests and the host. Some of the audience may have their own regular habits, and a familiarity with the space offering them a degree of ownership over the event. For example, at the event held by Jess Sweet, one particular guest entered the space from a back door, without knocking first – and although this initially took me by surprise, this particular example was a useful reminder of the fact that *Eat the Archives* integrates itself within pre-existing sets of relationships and responds to them. Despite designing the project in this very way, I could still be surprised by the impact on the performance of interpersonal dynamics within each of the pre-existing commensal circles I visited.

In other words, the domestic nature of both the space, and the inter relation between the participants shifts the usual power dynamics at play in arts spaces. Unlike performances which take place in arts spaces, and where ultimately the artist will always be able to reclaim the power and control, the event taking place in a domestic space allows for a certain degree of ‘levelling’. Although as the artist, I may keep control of the unfolding of the event – deciding when to move on to serving the next course, or to telling another part of the story – I also tread on unfamiliar territory where I must abide by the house rules, and as such any power afforded me by my position as ‘artist’ is always held lightly and could be taken away. At the theatre, in *with bread*, I signal to audiences when it is time to leave and by contrast, in *Eat the Archives*, I take cues from the guest-host about when they judge it is time to move things along, or on the contrary, as was the case in half of the Phase 3 performances, I leave long before other guests who continue the commensal exchange after the end of the ‘formal’ performance.

Rather than a straightforward ‘role reversal’ as Fischer-Lichte theorises it (and as is evident in *with bread*), involving the sharing of power between artist and audience-participants to varying degrees, *Eat the Archives* offers a dynamic, nuanced, and layered approach to power dynamics. The project’s double layer of hosting (with the guest-host

as host and the performer as host) and specific location within pre-existing social dynamics offers an opportunity to destabilise the way power is held within the frame of the performance. How might this then be sustained beyond the performance?

### Digestion and Incorporation

The notion of creation of community cannot be ever wholly separate from the idea of commensality. In her book on the transformative power of performance, Fischer-Lichte uses a number of 1960s performance examples such as Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in 69* where the audience was invited to participate in ritual-like activities to demonstrate that 'the communities brought forth by these collective actions constituted a temporary reality.' (2008: 55)

In other words, Fischer-Lichte establishes the possibility for a disparate group of people to become a community as they go through the same experience within a performance. This community is fleeting and temporary but, she states: 'they clearly highlight the fusion of the aesthetic and the social. The community is based on aesthetic principles, but its members experience it as a social reality – even if uninvolved spectators might perceive it as purely aesthetic.' (2005: 55)

In the case of *Eat the Archives*, the process is somewhat reversed. The project takes place within existing commensal circles, and as such is experienced first of all as a social reality. This social reality, through the process of commensal performance becomes an aesthetic experience, which the modelling of a commensal loop would suggest leads back to an experience of social reality. Guests arrive for *Eat the Archives* and interact with the host as they would in the context of any other kind of dinner party: the host welcomes participants by taking coats, offering drinks and engaging in casual conversation. I then formally introduce the performance and re-frame the evening before serving the first course. After serving the final course, I perform a poem which marks the end of the formal performance and take my apron off to further signal a shift to a different mode of interaction. In each performance, the initial stages of conversation would remain focussed on the content of the performance, with audiences asking questions, further examining the museum objects or talking to each other about the particular themed menus. I would then begin clearing elements of the performance away, by doing the

dishes firstly and then packing away the photographs and museum objects. In each case, this would signal a new shift for participants, prompting some to prepare to leave and others to return to a less formal mode of interaction with guests, often with an additional ‘course’ provided by the host – of tea, coffee and biscuits or alcoholic digestifs.

This return to the social reality of the commensal experience begins a new strand of the feedback loop as the event unfolds and the processes of incorporation occur. Through incorporation, the food we eat becomes part of us. When we eat the same thing with others, the same foods also become part of them, re-assembling our bodies to make us more alike. In her 2000 book *Carnal Appetites*, Elspeth Probyn uses food as a lens to ‘investigate how as individuals we inhabit the present’ (Probyn, 2005 (2000): 11) and ‘seeks to use the materiality of eating, sex and bodies in order to draw out alternative ways of thinking about an ethics of existence’ (Probyn, 2005 (2000): 12). In this context, she defines incorporation thus:

in eating we find ourselves in various assemblages, produced and producing ourselves anew. The interminglings of the cultural, the culinary and the corporeal suggest to me other ways of thinking about ethical behaviours and practices (Probyn, 2005 (2000): 12)

Digestion sets in motion the processes of incorporation and with it the re-assembling of our bodies. Digestion begins as food enters our mouths, as our teeth and saliva begin to break down what we are eating into its component parts. Accepting this view of digestion suggests that, in the context of commensal performance, our re-assembling is ongoing as the performance unfolds. As such, the self we are and who impacts the feedback loop at the start is not the same self that impacts this loop after food has been consumed. Our bodies are already changed, and the blurred boundary of actor-spectator is further eroded as the “actors” and “spectators” who begin the performance are physically transformed by the very process of the performance occurring. This is compounded by *Eat the Archives* three-course structure. Unlike *with bread* where shared eating occurs as a second act of performance (see Part II on *with bread*), eating in *Eat the Archives*

happens throughout, with each course re-assembling the participants bodies as the performance takes place.

In parallel, given that *Eat the Archives* involves participants eating the same foods, as those foods become incorporated in their bodies, they become more and more like one another. This renders the feedback loop more complex as the distinction of who is impacting whom is modified by the new assemblage of bodies which include the same food by-products. In Fischer-Lichte's conception of the autopoietic feedback loop of performance, an actor's action provokes a reaction in the spectator which goes on to impact the actor's performance which provokes a reaction in the spectator and so on. In commensal performance, the incorporation of food into the body means that with each repetition of the loop, the actor's impact on the spectator is in fact already mutual in its impact: the loop is no longer linear. The actor and the spectator feedback to each other not only through *doing*, but also as a virtue of *being*.

Finally, digestion extends the bodily co-presence of the people participating in commensal performance. If, as incorporation suggests, eating the same food makes us more like one another, then it follows that this continues beyond the end of the performance. While the 'bodily co-presence of actors and spectators' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008) physically ends as we leave the performance space, the physical processes of digestion can take as long as twenty-four hours, and the transformation of the food into the relevant nutrients in turn are absorbed and transformed into energy which is then spent and further transforms our bodies. As such, the commensal performance loop is extended beyond the timeframe of what we might otherwise think of as the end of the performance. It is through digestion that commensal performance extends into the participants everyday context, and beyond the performance frame.

This cements Probyn's assertion that 'eating is decidedly not merely metaphorical' (2005 (2000): 16), but if we return to my earlier citation of Probyn's work still we are reminded that eating involves the 'intermingling of the cultural, the culinary and the corporeal' and as such the commensal feedback loop while indeed not merely metaphorical, still does include cultural aspects: food means. This, Probyn tells us can lead to 'other ways of thinking about ethical behaviours and practices'. (2005 (2000): 11)



What Probyn suggests here is that there is potential for the practice of commensality to become a starting point for the extension of ethical thinking and practice. The behaviours and modes of organisations while we eat with others can go on to inform our ways of being away from the shared table.

In commensal performance, the intermingling of the cultural, culinary and the corporeal foregrounds the meaning-making nature of what is eaten and incorporated into the body, and as the artist-host of commensal performance, I have the opportunity to explore the connections between the foods offered up, and the ideas they might represent, the conversations they might enable me to start with other attendees. Taking for example, in *Eat the Archives*, the serving of borekas inspired by the photograph of Annie Conway. What the records in Manchester Jewish Museum's collection, and the contribution of oral histories from other members of her family tell us, is that Annie Conway was a convert to Judaism. In the performance, her story reveals the ways in which she used the preparation of traditional Jewish foods for the synagogue's community as one of the ways to be accepted into her local congregation. By making and sharing borekas, Annie Conway asserts her position within this community, and attempts to cement her identity as Jewish despite some members of her local community preferring not to welcome her openly.

Performing Annie Conway's story enables the intermingling of the cultural, the culinary and the corporeal, and in doing this, I invite the participants in the performance to consider for themselves how everyday actions (such as making borekas) may contribute to the construction of their identity and their relationship to any given community. As discussed in section 2.3., each dish served within *Eat the Archives* utilises principles of mimetic participation to animate the intersection of the cultural, the culinary and the corporeal. It is through engagement with the cultural artefacts and stories, the accompanying dishes as objects, and their conception that the invitation to connect the experience of commensality to the wider frame of social relations is extended. Let us return to Probyn, who states:

As eating reactivates the force of identities, it also may enable modes of cultural analysis that are attentive to the categories with which we are now perhaps overly

familiar: sex, ethnicity, wealth, poverty, geopolitical location, class and gender. Eating, I suggest, makes these categories matter again: it roots actual bodies within these relations. Eating then becomes a visceral reminder of how we variously inhabit the axes of economics, intimate relations, gender, sexuality, history, ethnicity, and class. In this way, we really are what we eat, but equally what, how, and with whom we eat radically bites into any stable and molar formation of identity. (Probyn, 2005 (2000): 18)

Through the lens of each menu – *Identities, Journeys, Communities – Eat the Archives* overtly connects what Probyn terms ‘the force of identities’ with the visceral aspects of eating. The physical, metaphorical and ethical link between our own identities becomes practiced through commensal performance.

As we approach eating as a ‘visceral reminder’ (2005: 18) of our position in the world, the approach to ethics defined earlier connects ‘one’s everyday existence’ (Rose in Probyn, 2005 (2000): 11) to a much wider community. As our identity as eaters is revealed in commensal performance through its relation to a wider group, the everyday ethical principles which guide the individual now become more overtly political. Under the analytical and self-reflexive lens of commensal performance which assembles and re-frames the boundaries between the cultural and the corporeal, the domestic and the institutional, commensal performance offers a fertile ground for enacting and animating a ‘quiet politics of the everyday’ (Askins, 2015; Hankins, 2017), which I will turn my attention to in the next section.

## Thinking through *Eat the Archives*

As a Practice as Research project, *Eat the Archives* constructs and opens up a commensal space at the meeting point of the home, the theatre and the museum. For me as the artist-host, the period preceding the event is undeniably the most crucial as the domestic, private space of the home of the event’s participant-host is central to the project and must be considered and prepared with care. In agreeing to be involved with the project, the participant-host is effectively agreeing to a transformation of their private,

domestic sphere into a public one, albeit partially and only temporarily. This also extends the timeline of commensality: here the commensal process begins as the participant-host agrees for the event to take place in their home, in light of the process of preparation for one's home to become both-and, private and public; domestic and institutional; mundane and theatrical. As Edward Whittall points out: 'Food, crossing the line between the everyday and the representational, the real and the imaginary, is a fervent site for the process of theatricality.' (Whittall in Levent and Mihalache, 2017: 72) Engaging with this process of theatricality, and of making performance out of the fabric of the everyday leads us towards a political mode of commensality, indebted to feminist practitioners who utilise everyday, domestic spaces for artistic and political expression.

Chee-Beng argues that 'all commensality beyond the domestic sphere is political' (2015: 14) and here, I will demonstrate through commensal performance as constructed within the project of *Eat the Archives*, that commensality within the domestic sphere can also be political. I draw on work undertaken in Human Geography by Askins (2015) and Hankins (2017) to explore the potential for commensal performance to enact and animate a 'quiet politics of the everyday', which as Hankins states is an approach to politics 'where everyday decision-making by individuals and communities can gradually, episodically, change dominant hegemonic norms and understandings, providing new understandings for social change.' (Hankins, 2017) In reflecting on *Eat the Archives*, I put quiet politics in dialogue with Erika Fischer-Lichte's (2008) conceptualisation of liminality and Chantal Mouffe's discussion of the political and antagonism (2005).

Mouffe defines the political as 'the dimension of antagonism which [she] take[s] as constitutive of human societies' (2005: 9). Such antagonism, according to Mouffe is rooted in the manner in which identities are constituted and expressed: we know who we are in relation to who we are not. This idea is also reflected as a feature and function of commensality, as I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis: commensality functions by way of both inclusion and exclusion. I have previously (in this thesis) highlighted the challenge which arises in collapsing the notion of conviviality with that of commensality: though it would be tempting to view commensality as the process of bringing people together, commensality is always a space of potential conflict. Similarly, Mouffe warns

against a consensus-based approach to the political: 'A democratic society requires a debate about possible alternatives, and it must provide political forms of collective identification around clearly differentiated democratic positions. Consensus is no doubt necessary, but it must be accompanied by dissent.' (2005: 31) If we accept the notion that no political process can achieve consensus and that thus antagonism cannot be avoided then Mouffe asks:

If we accept that this [defusing antagonism] cannot be done by transcending the we/they relation, but only by constructing it in a different way, then the following question arises: what could constitute a "tamed" relation of antagonism, what form of we/they would it imply? (2005: 19)

*with bread* revealed the potential for commensal performance to hold difference, conflict and open up a space of dialogue at the theatre through the practice of shared eating in performance. As discussed earlier, commensality is a phenomenon which uniquely holds togetherness and difference, inclusion and exclusion, conviviality and conflict. Might it thus be a possible response to Mouffe's question of what form 'tamed antagonism' can take? Here, I wish to propose that indeed commensal performance enables us to model an engagement with the political beyond antagonistic boundaries, offering a mode of social interaction which engenders what Fischer-Lichte terms a 'situation of liminality' which 'destabilize[s] the structure of binary opposites' (2008: 175).

The literature on commensality across the disciplinary spectrum of food studies has already firmly established the crucial role that interactions over food plays in shaping individual identities and organising societal relations. Identity and community have also long been clear areas of interest for performance makers, and as I have discussed earlier in this thesis food and performance have a long-shared history. However, it is still relatively rare for food to take pride of place within cultural institutions due to a range of both practical challenges (dealing with food waste, food regulations, the time involved in preparing food etc.) and to the fact that the processes involved in the preparation of food are still undervalued as 'too mundane' to be considered worthy of inclusion within the arts (Levent and Mihalache, 2018). Similarly, historical and systemic sexism still largely

associates food with “women’s work” which presents ongoing challenges for its inclusion within consideration of creative practices. Although I will not deal here with the full scope of feminist food performance practices which have responded to this, it is worth noting here that any contemporary performance practices in the area of food performance is indebted to the lineage of feminist practitioners and scholars who have reclaimed both food, and the domestic as sites of creativity, and as sites of political potential, and which I discussed in introduction.

The prominence of food and commensality in the practice of Judaism as both religion and culture has been widely documented and commented upon. Rooted in Jewish history and culture, *Eat the Archives* offers an opportunity to consider and re-frame the idea of a ‘kitchen religion’ and the notion of domestic performance in a celebratory and politically potent manner. As an instance of commensal performance, *Eat the Archives* invites participants to consider their relationship to food and commensality as both a marker of individual identity construction, and a tool of social organisation, through the development of the themed menus and the conversations they enable. Because it is a performance, crafted, presented and acknowledged as such, *Eat the Archives* offers an opportunity to not take either identity or community construction for granted but instead to reveal how those operate, and experiment with what could be. As Askins (after Mouffe) puts it: ‘This is political, in the broader sense of *politics being the making of relationships between people*.’ (Askins, 2015: 474. (Askin’s emphasis)).

Moreover, by virtue of happening away from artistic, or indeed political institutions, and choosing to instead operate at the micro level of the domestic, *Eat the Archives* is quietly political, as Hankins puts it:

This quiet politics involves the ways in which everyday decision-making by individuals and communities can gradually, episodically, change dominant hegemonic norms and understandings, providing new opportunities for social change. [...] Quiet in so far as we are not talking about picket lines or placards. (Hankins, 2017: 503-504)

*Eat the Archives* is a performance, which is also an instance of what Tan Chee-Beng would call *hospitality commensality*. It also exemplifies what I would call domestic commensal performance which is distinct from other forms of commensal performance in that it occurs in a domestic space, and its audience is selected by a host, within their pre-existing commensal circle – or in other words, it is designed to be performed with and for a group of people who have a pre-existing relationship to the host. *Eat the Archives* models and illustrates the commensal feedback loop as a development of Fischer-Lichte's autopoietic feedback loop. In offering a theatrical and performative (in the Austinian sense of the word) approach to commensality in a domestic space which is hosted by both myself as the artist and the person whose home the event takes place in, *Eat the Archives* opens a space which is dually liminal.

On the one hand, this space is liminal as it has become a space for performance, as Fischer-Lichte argues: 'the autopoietic feedback loop transfers the spectators into a state which alienates them from their daily environment and its rules and norms without offering any guidelines for a reorientation.' (2008: 179) On the other hand, the physical space in which the performance takes place remains a private home, and the experience of commensality is profoundly rooted in an everyday bodily experience, as such, the participants are not, cannot, be completely alienated from their daily environment. *Eat the Archives* is thus an in-between event both as performance, and as an instance of hospitality commensality which allows it to become a space of possibility. As an event which is both-and, neither-nor, *Eat the Archives* models an approach to commensal performance in domestic space where a group of people who already know each other may re-consider the construction of their identities and social relations, to share in what Jill Dolan has termed a utopian performative. In her 2005 *Utopia in Performance*, Dolan states: 'Audiences form temporary communities, sites of public discourse, that, along with the intense experiences of utopian performatives, can model new investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres.' (2005: 10). By bringing the possibility of the utopian performative into the liminal space of the domestic commensal performance, *Eat the Archives* echoes the 'quiet politics' discussed by human geographer Kye Askins who has 'been unpicking the everyday activities in quotidian spaces which are part of a broader continuum of movements for change, highlighting

banal, embodied activities' (Askins, 2015: 475) Although banal, commensality rapidly reveals the extraordinary transformations it causes at both a bodily level, 're-assembling' us with every bite as Elspeth Probyn might put it and allowing us to shape our relationships with one other through the processes of incorporation.

As Dolan warns us: 'creating or finding utopia in performance is of necessity idiosyncratic, spontaneous, and unpredictable' (2005: 5), and as such sharing a story of transformation emerging from practice as research on *Eat the Archives* would be disingenuous. However, by offering up a menu of food and conversation, of nutrients and symbols in a space which is both domestic and theatrical, private and public, *Eat the Archives* invites those who participate in it to consider the possibility that commensality might indeed be transformative. Through the process of Practice as Research, *Eat the Archives* arrives newly at one question: what if?

What if in sharing a table we were taking a first step away from the antagonistic politics described by Mouffe (2005)? What if the mechanic of inclusion-exclusion which is a core feature of commensality could provide us with a frame within which to hold contradictory opinions open? What if gathering with our friends and families to share food and stories could be inherently political? What if commensal performance offered a first step towards a democracy of hope?

## Forward

The development of *Eat the Archives* enabled me to explore a contrasting approach to making commensal performance to the one I had previously explored in *with bread*. In lieu of bringing commensality to the theatre, *Eat the Archives* brings performance to a site of commensality. This project allowed me to further my practical approach to navigating the relationship between the 'content' of the performance and the 'form' of commensality and put commensality at the core of the development of the meal as a sign-system. Through *Eat the Archives*, I also reflected on the nature of commensal performance as a feedback loop which enables a reflexive approach to commensality which affords particular ways of being in social relationships. I continued to explore the

position of the host, and through the design of the project was enabled to further a playful exploration of the power dynamics which unfold within the practice of hospitality.

*Eat the Archives* affords the opportunity for a host to explore their commensal network, making invitations for people with whom they have a pre-existing relationship to participate in making visible a process of commensal exchange which echoes what Jill Dolan expresses as a *utopian performative*. Being mindful of the inherent potential for conflict held within the commensal experience, the structured mode of shared eating proposed within *Eat the Archives* allows for participants to be reminded of the politics of relationship building. Furthermore, by interacting with objects and stories from a museum collection, *Eat the Archives* offers a frame through which to explore potent themes which may otherwise be considered taboo at the dinner table (such as politics and religion) in a considered manner. This project extended the approach to audience-performer relationships started in *with bread* through the mode of shared hosting made necessary by the project's location in a domestic space.

It is difficult to bring discussion of *Eat the Archives* to a close without being reminded of the time-period within which it took place: a series of government-mandated lockdowns in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, continuing to engage with commensality was a challenging act always hovering between hope and despair.

As the project ended, it foregrounded the political potential of commensal performance, and in occupying domestic spaces offered a window into the ways in which the interactive, reflexive and imaginative aspects of eating together can be harnessed for sensory and embodied engagement with the diverse challenges which come with human sociality.



## Part 4: Conclusion

### Commensal Performance Methodology

Throughout my engagement in Practice as Research over the course of this project, and considering my overarching research questions, I developed a body of work under the umbrella of what I came to term commensal performance. The creation of commensal performance, in the context of a Practice as Research project involved a multimodal inquiry which was necessarily interdisciplinary and as detailed in introduction saw me ploughing the fields of Performance Studies and Food Studies. Both fields are notably characterised by their openness to including epistemological approaches focussed on the senses, and their willingness to acknowledge the lived experience as a form of expertise.

Through the development of *with bread*, and as detailed in the corresponding exegetic chapter, insights contributing to the field of performance included the development of commensality as a process of performance-making, as well as commensality as an intentional and explicit performance medium. *with bread* also offered a contribution to food studies, with the development of insights on the relationship between commensality and hosting and a foregrounding of the inherent performative nature of commensal practices across contexts and formats.

The development of *Eat the Archives* meanwhile, allows for the emergence of insights pertaining to the impact of performance commensality in everyday and domestic settings, which develops the approaches experimented with in *with bread* and applies them to a new context, away from the theatre and into people's homes. As detailed in the corresponding chapter, this leads to knowledge being developed on the *quiet politics* of commensal practice.

In the wider context of my practice, both projects represent a gradual and considered move away from theatre and the theatrical to a new focus - as I bring this doctoral project to a close - on the methodological development of commensal performance as a form

of engaged scholarship. In a food studies context, *engaged scholarship* describes the active participation of the research in food justice activism alongside the ‘constructive analysis of its effectiveness and potential futures’ (Broad, 2016: 208). The approach to commensality I have taken through this thesis, is a subtle onto-epistemological shift from the development of commensal performance as a primarily creative endeavour, seeking to leverage Practice as Research to yield insights in contribution to scholarly debates in performance and / or food studies to one where the primary focus is on the deployment of the commensal performance methodology in specific community contexts as an enactment of the ‘quiet politics’ approach discussed through the chapter on *Eat the Archives*.

The commensal performance methodology is first and foremost a Practice as Research (PaR) methodology and as such emerges from the diverse lineage of PaR approaches developed over the last 25 years and which formed the backbone of the research methodology implemented throughout this project and detailed earlier in this thesis. As PaR methodology, the commensal performance methodology is characterised by the imbrication of theory and practice and the centrality of reflexivity in its methods. What distinguishes the commensal performance methodology from PaR in the broadest sense is the specific nature of the praxis of commensality. CP is thus particularly suited to the investigation of intangible, embodied knowledge through socially-engaged, participatory and co-created performance in commensal contexts. As a methodology, commensal performance foregrounds the performative and constructed nature of the social mode of interaction that is commensality. I use performative here to reflect both the Austinian sense that commensal performance allows a doing with commensality, and following Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s assertion that ‘food and performance converge conceptually at three junctures’: to do, to behave and to show (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1999: 1-2).

Commensal performance is a methodology of intentionality: it utilises shared meals, and more broadly social interactions over food in the PaR design process as well as in the form of the practice itself. To put it another way, commensal performance is devised using commensality in order to construct commensality. As a ubiquitous and repeated

phenomenon, daily experiences of commensality are largely unexamined. While a modest number of research studies have scrutinised commensality in a range of specific contexts (see my earlier review of the literature on commensality), the existing scholarly performance perspective on commensal events relies on applying a performance studies lens to the analysis of pre-existing food-based social interactions. What commensal performance contributes is a practical, performance-led design approach to understand the features and processes necessary to the emergence of commensality, and the principles which allow researchers to harness its methodological potential.

CP intentionally brings together a specific group or group(s) to generate and hold a social space within which to explore the sensory, embodied and broadly intangible knowledges which emerge as a result of interactions within the commensal circle(s), space and experience. Such a methodology allows for insights to develop for the individual researcher in the position of ‘host’, individual participants in the project but also at the level of commensal circle.

Scholars of commensality utilise the notion of commensal circle to conceptualise and structure the range of possible commensal relationships. Sobal establishes commensal units as ‘groups of people assembled at a particular time and specific place to consume meals, snacks, or beverages’ (2003: 181) while commensal circles ‘are networks of relationships that delineate the range of people whom individuals could, have, and do eat with.’ (2003: 181). Elsewhere, Penny Van Esterik defines the commensal circle as ‘a space where people share food, eat together, and feed each other.’ She goes on to specify that ‘these circles are pre-constituted culturally before any individual guest or newborn enters them. Commensal circles may include ancestors or spirits who are fed along with human family members.’ (Van Esterik, 2015: 33) The commensal circle in turn underpins a range of taxonomies of commensality, distinguishing meals habitually shared with family members from meals shared with complete strangers, for example in the context of food aid, which features at the outermost edge of Van Esterik’s diagrammatic representation of ‘levels’ of commensality as concentric circles.

Commensal performance is not explicitly acknowledged in existing taxonomies of commensality, although elements of performance are present in discussions of political commensality, or when exploring ritual commensality for example. In the chapter on *Eat the Archives*, I have proposed that rather than inserting commensal performance into existing taxonomies of commensality, or indeed devising a new taxonomy to include commensal performance, it is instead more productive to view commensality in the context of performance as dynamically superimposed onto those existing models. Such an approach foregrounds the potential for commensal performance to pervade a range of instances of social eating across varied formats and contexts. In other words, the ‘commensal feedback loop’ (see Figure 7) and the corresponding methodological approach can be applied within domestic commensality, in arts-based contexts or just as effectively within forms of institutional commensality, for example.

By extension, the pervasive view of commensal circles needs to be reconsidered in relation to commensal performance. Indeed, in *with bread* audience members may attend the performance on their own and as such not initially belong in a pre-existing commensal unit in that moment. However, in being invited by the performer-host they then enter a *tablée*, which over the course of the performance will become a commensal circle at the level of the table and networked to the wider audience at other tables. By contrast, *Eat the Archives* begins within a pre-existing commensal circle, which opens out through a process of invitation to other members of the host’s wider commensal circle. As a project designed for domestic contexts and spaces, *Eat the Archives* models an expanded commensal circle within the host’s wider commensal network. However, as the events are attended by both myself and Laura Seddon, there is an embedded ‘looseness’ to the project’s starting point within an existing commensal circle to include relative ‘strangers’.

A feature of both projects, and of commensal performance more broadly is the dynamic and changing nature of the commensal circles within which they take place. Domestic and public modes of commensality intersect, with the performance context offering a gentle but very concrete way to open out a distinct mode of doing commensality. By conceptualising commensal circles in this performance dynamic, the political potential

of commensality is invited to sit at a more intimate table. By constructing a situation where the process of inclusion/exclusion inherent to commensality is made visible, the political dimension of everyday commensality is made explicit. This is further supported by the use of performance strategies which structure and frame interactions with politically, ethically and personally potent themes.

Overall, the commensal performance methodology involves an iterative process intended to magnify commensality itself as well as the varied forms of interaction which occur inside of the commensal experience. Crafting instances of commensality as performance through this methodology allows for heightened awareness of the social interactions, embodied cognitions and co-creative processes at play during the shared meal. This magnification notably distinguishes the particular project of commensal performance from other forms of food performance, where a meal is shared without a particular emphasis or intentionality on the specific phenomena associated with commensality.

Despite the intentionality and purposeful design of commensality within the commensal performance methodology, the point of entry into the CP methodology is lived experience of commensality in a defined context. In the case of with bread, shared meals with other migrants offer a starting point rooted in the accidents of my everyday life. With *Eat the Archives*, the development of the CP project emerges in response to a series of (everyday) commensal engagements with Manchester Jewish Museum in the context of an artistic residency. This latter context within *Eat the Archives* is therefore already produced but not yet intentional as CP. It is from this living and sensory engagement which emerges the first phase of the CP methodology: following an initial curiosity or hunch. This initial hunch or curiosity in the CP methodology echoes what Robin Nelson terms an ‘enthusiasm of practice’ (Nelson, 2020: 123), and the overall CP methodology is built upon the broader PaR processes modelled by Robin Nelson in his ‘onto-epistemological model for PaR’ (Nelson, 2020: 20). The commensal performance methodology is a specific approach to PaR which features social eating in its process as well as its outputs, and is deployed following additional methodological principles.

## Commensal Performance Methodology: Principles

### *Commensality in context*

The first principle to enable the deployment of the commensal performance methodology is for the researcher to proactively experience commensality in the specific context they wish to research. It is from this immersion that the ‘unexamined’ approach to commensality can be magnified through performance. In other words, it is necessary to engage with a rawer form of commensality in order that it can be later ‘illuminated’ and its potential as performance ‘revealed’ through the cooking process of performance.

It is the combination of my lived experience as a theatre-maker / performer and the reflective dialogue which formed the initial interest and starting point to my research in commensal performance.

### *Gathering community*

By definition, commensality cannot be practiced alone and by extension, engaging with a commensal performance methodology is a necessarily social project. As such, the second principle of the commensal performance methodology is that it must involve the gathering of a community. Each commensal performance project will be influenced or ‘seasoned’ (Abarca, 2006) by the people who engage with it. In both *with bread* and *Eat the Archives*, the project was developed within specific communities. *with bread* involved migrant collaborators, and in touring, sought to engage migrants local to each performance venue. *Eat the Archives*, as developed in partnership with Manchester Jewish Museum, was rooted in the organisation’s own local community, which included Jewish people, people with an interest in Jewish culture, and the wider communities who participate in the Museum’s work in Cheetham Hill and surrounding areas.

While the resulting performance output may later be shared with a wider audience (as was the case in *with bread* which involved ‘ticket-buying’ audiences in a range of location and in *Eat the Archives* which was also presented in Leeds, online and captured in documentary), the CP methodology requires a rooting in a specifically designed context.

Practice as Research activities must then be designed and deployed to create a range of contexts, opportunities and ‘routes in’ to engagement with the project. Indeed, as CP relies upon social interactions, the researcher must seek ways to build interest in the project and trust with potential eventual participants. In both *with bread* and *Eat the Archives*, such activities involved in-depth collaboration with project partners namely host venues for *with bread* and the Museum for *Eat the Archives*.

For *with bread*, I met participants who would later become ‘guest-hosts’ by attending events and workshops as an initial point of contact, before publishing an open call for participants, distributed through a range of channels and then hosting exploratory workshops. *Eat the Archives* was developed following a longer period of engagement with the museum’s communities, and the eventual project design was informed by an extensive range of prior activities including creative interventions in local supermarkets; presentation of other performance pieces in the local community; hosting a community lunch event; the establishment of a weekly ‘foodie group’ gathering to share food stories and teach each other recipes; a foodie-film project entitled *Good Appetite* in which I cooked with people in their own domestic spaces (homes and an allotment).

Such an approach is both necessary and intentional. It is necessary in the sense that the participants sought for engagement in *with bread* were not necessarily professional performers and the ‘unrehearsable’ nature of the performance included significant uncertainties, and as such, in order to proactively wish to participate, a gradual building of trust in the project, the researcher and the wider creative team was necessary. In the case of *Eat the Archives*, hosts welcomed me to cook in their intimate, private spaces and this was in part made possible through the longer-term engagement with the community, and my active membership of it.

### *Working with food*

The CP methodology requires careful consideration of how the foods which become part of the project may impact the research output. In deploying the CP methodology, the third

principle to consider in relation to the commensal performance methodology is a consideration of the way in which food performs, and leverage its potential across a range of factors including: storytelling, semiotics, politics. Equally importantly is the consideration of the materiality and practicality of working with food. The CP methodology thus requires food preparation processes to become akin to a studio practice.

In the discussion of both *with bread* and *Eat the Archives*, I have highlighted how each dish came to be selected, and came to provide both context and meaning to the commensal performance. Each dish served throughout the development of my doctoral project was the result of a sustained engagement with desk-based research, extensive recipe testing in my own domestic kitchen followed by making the necessary adaptations to enable the cooking of the relevant recipes in the context for which they were designed: studios, theatres, museums, other people's homes etc.

Just as the dancer's body is prepared to perform not only through the rehearsal process but through a regime of daily engagement in classes, physical training and development, the deployment of a commensal performance methodology is reliant upon a fully embodied engagement with food as living, organic matter in preparation for the research inquiry.

#### *Commensal performance as form*

The fourth and final principle is that the deployment of the commensal performance methodology is practically underpinned by the way in which commensal performance is made. In other words, such a methodology is very much a practitioner's approach. At the outset of the project, I proposed to test the following as defining features of commensal performance:

- An expansion of the conventional commensal circles to include strangers, as well as people who have a pre-existing relationship, in a bodily co-present context



- Elements of *communal doing* prior to eating (preparing, cooking, serving)
- Semi-structured conversation derived from a performative approach to *sobremesa*<sup>20</sup>
- Featuring the inclusion of norms (manners), rules and hierarchies borrowed from theatrical conventions, banqueting and domestic eating
- Featuring food(s) purposefully considered in light of their symbolic and meaning-making dimensions
- Fostering convivial interactions between participants while inviting a questioning of the romantic notion of commensality as ‘the almost magical ways that food reveals identity and creates relationships’ (Belasco, 2008: 13)

At the end of my doctoral research inquiry, the aforementioned features remain significant to defining commensal performance and to distinguishing it from other forms of food-performance practice. However, some adjustments and clarifications are necessary.

While bringing together people who may not habitually eat together is indeed a key distinction between commensal performance and instances of commensality beyond a formal performance context, individuals may attend performances such as with bread on their own and in a performance such as *Eat the Archives*, the artist-host may be the only ‘stranger’ in attendance. Moreover, an *autoteatro* approach to commensal performance may enable the development of commensal performance for a family unit or a group who habitually eat together. As such, while most commensal performance is likely to bring together people across a spectrum of pre-existing commensal relationships, the intentional process of bringing people together for commensality in the context of performance is more significant than the specific nature of attendees’ relationships. However, commensal interactions in this context rely on a keen understanding of what those relationships are, such that commensal engagement takes place within the constructed frame of the performance. Indeed, people who habitually eat together will have developed a range of commensal habits and customs while people

---

<sup>20</sup> *Sobremesa* is a Spanish expression used to describe the time spent in conversation, over and after a meal which does not have a direct equivalent in English.

who are complete strangers may be unsure of how to interact with each other. As such, more than simply featuring the inclusion of norms, manners, hierarchies borrowed and creatively adapted from a range of contexts, commensal performance necessitates the communication of how those norms apply, and care must be taken to offer guests an indication of how they are intended to behave. Such communication may be direct - such as the manner in which I shared the ‘rules of the table’ in *The Midnight Soup* (see Burtin, 2016) – poetic and playful such as the prelude to *with bread* – or informal as in the introduction to *Eat the Archives*.

While facilitated conversation remains a core strategy in my performance practice, in some performances of *with bread*, some tablées’ engagement in discussion in Act II was more limited than others, with companionable silence over shared food taking up more space than the sobremesa of other tablées. While this may initially be perceived as a ‘failure’ of commensal performance in cases where the aim is to facilitate conversation, this also puts into focus the particular logocentricity of shared meals which is typical of my own lived experience of commensality as well as an echo of the idealised image of the shared (family) meal. Further work could take place exploring the relationship between silence and commensality, with close attention being paid to non-verbal modes of communication and being-with others in a commensal context.

Moreover, the use of food in performance also brings into focus the need to consider the wider challenges of global food systems. Indeed, inequalities in relation to access to food are rife, with the global climate crisis significantly impacting production and distribution processes. Food inequality and food poverty are at the forefront of creative food practitioners’ minds, as demonstrated notably by Laurie Beth Clarke and Michael Peterson’s edition of *Performance Research*’s volume ‘On Hunger’ (2024) and their practice (as Spatula & Barcode) on foodways (2022).

Through this doctoral research project, I developed and deployed the commensal performance methodology to conduct an inquiry on commensality in socially engaged practices. In other words, the methodology outlined here was developed in service of a study focussed on commensality. However, there is significant potential in the

application of my commensal performance methodology as a specific approach to Practice as Research to respond to a wide range of research questions and inquiries. In my own practice, I have begun some of this work in collaboration with Cheshire Archives and queer performance company Downtown Pompey as detailed further on in this document.

The commensal performance methodology is particularly suited to Practitioner-Researchers seeking to root their approach in community and interrogate subject matters relating to the quotidian. In this sense, it joins what Holmes and Hall have termed ‘mundane methods’ (2020) by offering a hands-on approach to harnessing the potential of commensality to generate new insights in a collaborative manner, with a range of participants.

## Responses to the research inquiry

Throughout my research project, I led an inquiry on the ways in which commensal knowledge can be developed through performance practice, and how commensal practice might yield new modes of performance making and thinking.

I asked:

- In what ways can performance practice illuminate our understanding of commensality as a social phenomenon?
- In what ways can the potential of commensality as a performance form be revealed through practice?

In response to the first question, the process of developing performance work with the aim to generate a commensal experience revealed the constructed nature of commensality. The processes of performance making contribute to the development of an understanding of how commensality occurs. As a PaR project, *with bread* particularly emphasised the role that hosting plays in the development of commensal experiences.

In turn, this demonstrated the political potential for commensality within the liminal space of the theatre. This political potential was further explored in *Eat the Archives* and introduced a performance approach to commensality within domestic spaces. Performance practice magnifies the processes at play in commensal interactions, demonstrating how social interactions over food are constructed and offer a window into the power dynamics at stake in wider societal contexts. By consciously developing performance-making strategies to generate commensal interactions, commensality is first deconstructed to be re-constructed, allowing a questioning of each of its component parts. Through performance practice, commensality has the potential to be harnessed to generate specific ways to generate social interactions. In *with bread* this involves thinking through the relationship between ‘migrants’ and ‘locals’ while *Eat the Archives* connects a domestic space to historical items which generate an opportunity to reflect on cultural identities and community formation.

In response to the second question, I developed an approach to performance making which centres commensality as both a creative process and a performance form. In the approach I grew through this thesis, an intentionally reflexive approach to shared eating has been central to the making of commensal performance. In gradually moving away from the theatre and into other spaces, I have also discovered the particular efficacy of commensal performance as a mode of community building, social engagement and approach to bringing the particular qualities of the performance experience to a range of contexts.

In summary:

Performance practice illuminates our understanding of commensality as a social phenomenon by:

- Making the processes and features of commensality visible through the construction of performance
- Highlighting and magnifying commensality as it unfolds in time and space

- Facilitating social interactions through shared eating in the context of performance thus rendering power dynamics, and in particular the influence of the host visible

Performance practice reveals the potential of commensality as a performance form by:

- Devising a mode of performance making centring commensality as a strategy: utilising shared meals to generate performance material
- Cementing the role of food as a sign-system to foster embodied interactions with the performance material
- Proposing commensal performance as a specific approach to doing socially-engaged practice

## Contributions to interdisciplinary fields

### *Performance Studies*

My research contributes to performance studies by theorising commensal performance as both a distinct performance form and a methodological approach to Practice as Research (PaR). Through *with bread* and *Eat the Archives*, I demonstrated how commensality—structured acts of eating together—functions as a dramaturgical device that actively shapes audience-performer relations, and reconfigures interaction between participants. In doing so, I expanded the conceptualisation of food as a performance medium beyond its symbolic or representational use, foregrounding its social and embodied dimensions. My work builds upon Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's theorisation of the table as a stage by articulating how commensality operates as both *mise-en-scène* and a structuring principle for performance encounters. By embedding shared acts of preparation, consumption, and conversation within a performance framework, I reveal how commensality can offer an alternative mode of engagement with both performance, and social eating through the magnification of the commensal encounter. Furthermore, my research challenges existing discourse on performance and hospitality by problematising the assumption that shared meals necessarily generate conviviality. Instead, I position commensal performance as a critical methodology for exposing the

politics of social eating, attending to the hierarchies, exclusions, and negotiations that shape communal acts of consumption. My doctoral research offers commensality as a lens to think about food-based social interactions *in* and *as* performance simultaneously.

### *Food Studies*

Within food studies, my research cements the role of performance to developing an expanded understanding of commensality as both an analytical framework and a performative practice, positioning shared eating not merely as a social phenomenon but as a methodological tool for knowledge production. In other words, I bring to food studies the possibility to utilise commensal performance as a methodological approach to topics of interest to the field. existing scholarship on commensality has largely focused on its sociological, anthropological, and historical dimensions, my work intervenes by demonstrating how performance-based inquiry can make visible the affective, relational, and political dynamics of eating together. Specifically, I argue that commensal performance serves as a mode of embodied epistemology—*thinking through commensality*—in which knowledge is produced not only through discourse but through shared sensory experience, material interaction, and performative enactment. By employing commensality as both subject and method, my research reveals how food practices function as sites of cultural negotiation, where histories of migration, labour, and power are inscribed in the act of eating.

In *Eat the Archives*, for example, I examined how archival materials can be digested and incorporated both metaphorically and literally, using food as a vehicle to engage with collective memory and the politics of historical interpretation. This approach extended Claudia Giacomani's model of commensality by demonstrating how its interactional, symbolic, and normative dimensions can be reconfigured in performative contexts, challenging static notions of food as a fixed cultural signifier and instead emphasising its role as an active, generative force within social relations.

### *Socially Engaged Practices*

Rooted in artistic practice, my Practice as Research offers a widened approach to socially engaged practice, offering a mode of interaction across and between fields. Through this work, I offer a theorisation and practical approach to commensality as a

participatory strategy and performance-making methodology that gently and creatively disrupts the assumption that shared meals inherently foster social cohesion. Through my practice, I critically examined how commensal encounters in performance operate as sites of negotiation, where inclusion and exclusion, power and vulnerability, and intimacy and distance are constantly reconfigured. Through the iterative development of *with bread* and *Eat the Archives*, I propose "commensal performance" as an approach that foregrounds process over outcome, relationality over representation, and affective exchange over didactic engagement. My practice seeks to contribute to challenging the notion of 'community' as fixed and resist instrumentalised forms of social engagement. I offer a practical approach to developing socially engaged practice situated within the micro-politics of everyday interaction. My research contributes to the discourse on socially engaged practice by offering commensal performance as a critical alternative to participatory art models, which often assume that social engagement is inherently generative or inclusive. Through *with bread* and *Eat the Archives*, I examined how shared eating functions as a performative strategy that not only facilitates interaction but actively structures power dynamics within the performance event. In *with bread*, the formal structure of guest-host relationships is both reinforced and subverted: while performers ostensibly act as "hosts," guiding audience-participants through the meal, their status is made precarious by the shifting dynamics of participation. My approach to socially engaged practice, offers a framework for participation that is reflexive, and attuned to the complexities of power and agency.

## Forward

The key contribution of this research is the development of commensal performance as a specific mode of Practice as Research. It offers practitioners a starting point for developing further socially engaged projects which make the most of commensality as a methodological approach, a creative process and a formal output. It also contributes to the expanding field of Food Studies, and was developed alongside other scholars pointing to the need for further work to be done on commensality, such as Jönsson et al. who point out that 'regardless of which directions commensality research will take, the point is that although humans may have been a commensal species from the very

beginning, the concept as well as the practice, are constantly open for change as new generations face new realities.’ (2021: 14) I also join Meredith Abarca who points out that ‘micro-levels of social transformation at the personal, familial and community realm take place through everyday forms of commensality’ (2021:678) in continuing to advocate for the politically potent possibilities of commensal practice. With the particular focus on the role of the host within commensal performance, there is ample potential for further exploration of the ethics of commensal encounters, as well as the use of commensality to explore ethics – understood as the principles guiding behaviour – more broadly.

As the practical component of this doctoral project was brought to a close, I have continued to utilise the commensal performance methodology in my professional and scholarly practice, developing new versions of *Eat the Archives* with other archival material on the theme of remedies in 2021 and exploring the foodways of the town of Crewe in Autumn 2024. The commensal performance methodology is also being adopted as one strategy by queer performance company Downtown Pompey in the development of their major *Storming the teacup* project which involves spotlighting ‘the experiences and contributions of LGBTQ+ folks and other marginalized groups’ (Downtown Pompey, 2024). The commensal performance methodology is thus proving particularly potent as an approach to archival engagement, providing a framework for widening access, participation and engagement with collections in an embodied manner.

I look forward to continuing my explorations of commensality across practice, scholarship, community activism and in particular to work to ensure that the performance perspective is acknowledged and valued within the work taking place on commensality across the interdisciplinary field of Food Studies.



## Bibliography

Abarca, M.E. (2007) *Charlas Culinarias: Mexican Women Speak from Their Public Kitchens*. Food and Foodways, 15(3–4), pp. 183–212.

Abarca, M.E. (2021) ‘Commensality: Networks of personal, family, and community social transformation’, *The Sociological Review*, 69(3), pp. 664–680.

Arlander, A., Barton, B., Dreyer-Lude, M. and Spatz, B. (2018) *Performance as Research: Knowledge, Methods, Impact*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

Arranz-Otaegui, A. et al. (2018) ‘Archaeobotanical evidence reveals the origins of bread 14,400 years ago in northeastern Jordan’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(31), pp. 7925–7930.

Askins, K. (2015) ‘Being together: Everyday geographies and the quiet politics of belonging’, *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 14(2), pp. 470–478.

Baker, B. and Whittuck, A. (1999) ‘On Cooking the Sunday Dinner’, *Performance Research*, 4(1), pp. 93–96. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13528165.1999.10871648> [Accessed 14 August 2024].

Barthes, R. (1961) ‘Pour une psycho-sociologie de l’alimentation contemporaine’, *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 16(5), pp. 977–986.

Barthes, R. (2013) ‘Towards a psychosociology of contemporary food consumption’. In: Counihan, C. and Van Esterik, P. (eds.) *Food and Culture: A Reader*. Third edition. London: Routledge.

Batchelor, B., Rackow, H. and Valenzuela, D.R. (2019) ‘Editorial’, *Canadian Theatre Review*, 177, pp. 5–9.

Belasco, W.J. (2008) *Food: The Key Concepts*. London: Bloomsbury.

Bishop, C. (2006) ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents’, *Artforum*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.artforum.com/print/200602/the-social-turn-collaboration-and-its-discontents-10274> [Accessed 14 August 2024].

Bishop, C. (2012) *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London/New York: Verso.

Bourriaud, N. (2002) *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.

Bucknall, J. (2018) ‘The Daisy Chain Model’. In: Arlander, A. et al. (eds.) *Performance as Research: Knowledge, Methods, Impact*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

Burtin, L. (2015) 'Mars Missions and Roadless Trips: Art that Creates its Own Community', *The Guardian*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/jul/14/mars-missions-and-roadless-trips-art-that-creates-its-own-community> [Accessed 14 August 2024].

Burtin, L. (2016) *The Midnight Soup*. Glasgow: InkCONCRETE.

Burtin, L. (2019) *With Bread: We are the People With Whom We Eat*. [Unpublished script].

Burtin, L. (2021) *With Bread: We are the People With Whom We Eat*. Glasgow: InkCONCRETE.

Chansky, D. and Folino White, A. (2016) *Food and Theatre on the World Stage*. New York: Routledge.

Charnley, K. (2011) 'Dissensus and the Politics of Collaborative Practice Relational Aesthetics', *Art & the Public Sphere*, 1(1), pp. 37–53.

Chee-Beng, T. (2015) 'Commensality and the Organization of Social Relations'. In: Kerner, S., Warmind, M. and Chou, C. (eds.) *Commensality: From Everyday Food to Feast*. London: Bloomsbury.

Chowdhry, M. (2018) *What's Eating Our Reality*. Maya Chowdhry dir. Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster. First Performance: 1st December 2018.

Clark, L. and Peterson, M. (eds.) (2018) *Performance Research: On Generosity*, 23(6).

Clark, L. and Peterson, M. (2023) "Ampersand Aesthetics: Spatula&Barcode's *Foodways Philippines*." *Global Performance Studies*, vol. 6, nos. 1 2, 2023. [Online] Available at: <https://gps.psi-web.org/article/view/132/126> [Accessed 5th March 2025]

Clark, L., Llana J and Peterson, M. (eds.) (2024) *Performance Research: On Hunger*, 28(7).

Davis, N. (2018) 'Archaeologists Find Earliest Evidence of Bread', *The Guardian*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/jul/16/archaeologists-find-earliest-evidence-of-bread> [Accessed 15 August 2024].

De Sousa, X. (2016) *POST*. Xavier De Sousa dir. Ovalhouse Theatre. First Performance: 30th November 2016.

Derrida, J. and Dufourmantelle, A. (2000) *Of Hospitality*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Di Benedetto, S. (2010) *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre*. London: Routledge.

Dolan, J. (2005) *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*. University of Michigan Press.

Douglas, M. (1972) 'Deciphering a Meal', *Daedalus*, 101(1), pp. 61–81.

Financial Times (2016) 'EU referendum results', *Financial Times* [Online] Available at: <https://ig.ft.com/sites/elections/2016/uk/eu-referendum/> [Accessed 25 February 2025]

Finkelpearl, T. (2013) *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Finkelstein, J. (1999) 'Foodtainment', *Performance Research*, 4(1), pp. 130–136. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13528165.1999.10871653> [Accessed 7 September 2018].

Fischer-Lichte, E. (2008) *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

Fischler, C. (2011) 'Commensality, Society and Culture', *Social Science Information*, 50(3–4), pp. 528–548. Available at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0539018411413963> [Accessed 14 August 2024].

Gardner, L. (2015) 'Taking Stock: A Cooking Show about Soup, Suicide and Strangers' Kindness', *The Guardian*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/oct/12/leo-burtin-midnight-soup-suicide> [Accessed 15 August 2024].

Geraghty, E. (2016) 'It Happened One Night'. In: Burtin, L. (ed.) *The Midnight Soup*. Glasgow: InkCONCRETE.

Giacoman, C. (2016) 'The Dimensions and Role of Commensality: A Theoretical Model Drawn from the Significance of Communal Eating Among Adults in Santiago, Chile', *Appetite*, 107, pp. 460–470. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.08.116> [Accessed 14 August 2024].

Gough, R. (ed.) (1999) 'On Cooking', *Performance Research*, 4(1). Available at: [http://www.performance-research.org/past-issue-detail.php?issue\\_id=10](http://www.performance-research.org/past-issue-detail.php?issue_id=10) [Accessed 24 August 2024].

Gough, R. and Abrams, J. (eds.) (2017) *Performance Research: On Taste*, 22(7).

Grignon, C. (2001) 'Commensality and Social Morphology: An Essay of Typology'. In: *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages*. Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: Berg, pp. 23–33.

Hall, S., King, J. and Finlay, R. (2015) *City Street Data Profile on Ethnicity, Economy and Migration: Cheetham Hill, Manchester, an ESRC Report, December 2015*. [Online] Available at: <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64799/> [Accessed 15 August 2024].

Holmes, H. and Hall, S. (2020) *Mundane Methods: Innovative ways to research the everyday*. Manchester University Press.

Hankins, K. (2017) 'Creative Democracy and the Quiet Politics of the Everyday', *Urban Geography*, 38(4), pp. 502–506.

Harrisson, E. (2010-ongoing) *The Grief Series*. Ellie Harrisson dir.

Hunt, K. (2018) *Alimentary Performances: Mimesis, Theatricality, and Cuisine*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

Hunter, S. (2017) 'Setting the Table, Setting the Stage: Preparing and Performing Meals for Summer', *Feast*. [Online] Available at: <http://feastjournal.co.uk/article/setting-the-table-setting-the-stage-preparing-and-performing-meals-for-summer/> [Accessed 24 August 2024].

Jönsson, H., Michaud, M. and Neuman, N. (2021) 'What is Commensality? A Critical Discussion of an Expanding Research Field', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(12).

Kester, G.H. (1997) 'Learning from Aesthetics', *Art Journal*, 56(1), pp. 20–25.

Kester, G.H. (2004) *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley & London: University of California Press.

Kester, G.H. (2006) 'Another Turn', *Artforum International*, 44(9). Available at: <http://shakespeare.galegroup.com/shax/infomark.do?&source=gale&userGroupName=leedsuni&prodId=SHAX&tabID=T013&docId=A145872665&type=retrieve&contentSet=IAC-Documents&version=1.0> [Accessed 24 August 2024].

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1990) 'Kitchen Judaism'. In: *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880-1950*, pp. 75–105.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1999) 'Playing to the Senses: Food as a Performance Medium', *Performance Research*, 4(1), pp. 1–30. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13528165.1999.10871639> [Accessed 14 August 2024].

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2012) 'Making Sense of Food in Performance: The Table and the Stage'. In: *The Senses in Performance*.

Kniffin, K.M., Wansink, B., Devine, C.M. and Sobal, J. (2015) 'Eating Together at the Firehouse: How Workplace Commensality Relates to the Performance of Firefighters', *Human Performance*, 28(4), pp. 281–306.

Kulvichit, B. (2019) *Gaeng Kiew Waan*. Ben Kulvichit dir. Camden People's Theatre. First Performance: 13th March 2019.

Lawson, J. (2011) 'Food Legacies: Playing the Culinary Feminine', *Women and Performance*.

Lawson, J. (2017) 'Transformative Taste-Encounters', *Performance Research*, 22(7), pp. 48–56. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2017.1353193>.

Lerman, L. (2008) 'Critical Response Process', *Contact Quarterly*, Winter/Spring, pp. 16–21.

Levant, N. and Mihalache, I.D. (eds.) (2018) *Food and Museums*. London: Bloomsbury.

Lévi-Strauss, C., Weightman, J. and Weightman, D. (1970) *The Raw and the Cooked*. London: Cape.

Manchester Jewish Museum (n.d.) [Online] Available at: <https://www.manchesterjewishmuseum.com/> [Accessed 15 August 2024].

Mars, L. (1997) 'Food and Disharmony: Commensality Among Jews', *Food and Foodways*, 7(3), pp. 189–202. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07409710.1997.9962064>.

Matarasso, F. (2019) *A Restless Art: How Participation Won, and Why it Matters*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

McCormick, S. (2018) *Death, Dinner and Performance Project*. Sheila McCormick dir. New Adelphi Theatre, Salford. First Performance: 31st October 2018.

Meerzon, Y., Pewny, K. and Vannieuwenhuyze, T. (2018) 'Introduction: Migration and Multilingualism', *Modern Drama*, 61(3), pp. 257–270.

Mennell, S., Murcott, A. and van Otterloo, A. (1992) 'Conclusion: Commensality and Society', *Current Sociology*, 40(2), pp. 115–119.

Miller, J. and Deutsch, J. 2010. *Food studies : an introduction to research methods*. London: Bloomsbury.

Mock, R., (2000). *Performing processes: Creating live performance*. Intellect.

Mouffe, C. (2005) *On the Political*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

Musca, S. (2019) 'Theatre and Migration Between Ethics and Aesthetics', *Performing Ethos*, 9(1), pp. 3–8.

Nelson, R. (2006) 'Practice-as-Research and the Problem of Knowledge', *Performance Research*, 11(4), pp. 105–116.

Nelson, R. (2013) *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nelson, R. (2022) *Practice as Research in the Arts (and Beyond)*. Second edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pavis, P. (2013) *Contemporary Mise en Scène: Staging Theatre Today*. London: Routledge.

Pollock, S. (ed.) (2015) *Between Feasts and Daily Meals*. Berlin: Ed. Topoi.

Probyn, E. (2000) *Carnal Appetites: Food, Sex, Identities*. London: Routledge.

Protein Dance (2015) *May Contain Food*. Luca Silvestrini dir. DanceEast, Ipswich. First Performance: 19th November 2015.

Quarantine (n.d.) *Home | Quarantine*. [Online] Available at: <https://qtine.com/home/> [Accessed 11 March 2019].

Reckless Sleepers (2002) *The Last Supper*. Reckless Sleepers dir. Time Festival, Gent. First Performance: 2002.

Schechner, R. (2003) *Performance Theory*. New York & London: Routledge

Schechner, R. (2013) 'Performance Studies: An Introduction'. In: Brady, S. (ed.) *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge

Shah, R., Paterson, M., Lynch, E., Edmunds, B. and Rajni Shah Projects (2013) *Dear Stranger, I Love You*. Lancaster & London: Lancaster University & Live Art Development Agency.

Simmel, G. (1997) 'The Sociology of the Meal?'. In: Frisby, D. and Featherstone, M. (eds.) *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*. London: Sage, pp. 130–136.

Sobal, J. and Nelson, M.K. (2003) 'Commensal Eating Patterns: A Community Study', *Appetite*, 41(2), pp. 181–190. Available at: [www.elsevier.com/locate/appet](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/appet) [Accessed 14 August 2024].

SPILL Festival (n.d.) *SPILL Feasts - SPILL Festival*. [Online] Available at: <https://spillfestival.com/show/spill-feasts/> [Accessed 18 June 2019].

Stourna, A. (2018) 'Banquet Performance Now and Then: Commensal Experiments and Eating as Mise en Scène', 12(1), pp. 10–31.

Tanaka-King, A. (2017) *F.O.C.U.S.* Alisa Tanaka-King dir.: La Wayaka Current, Sørøya, Norway.

Tirivanija, R. (1990) *Untitled 1990 (pad thai)*. Rirkrit Tirivanija dir. Paula Allen Gallery, New York City.

Trimingham, M. (2002) 'A Methodology for Practice as Research', *Studies in Theatre & Performance*, 22(1), pp. 54–60. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/stap.22.1.54>.

Unfinished Business (2012) *Only Wolves and Lions*. Leo Kay dir. Touring. First Performance: 2011.

White, G. (2013) *Audience participation in theatre: aesthetics of the invitation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Whittall, E. (2018) 'Food and Objecthood: Food, Museums and Anti-Theatricality'. In: Levant, N. and Mihalache, I.D. (eds.) *Food and Museums*. London: Bloomsbury.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Documentation of projects

#### with bread

Web page: <https://leoburtin.eu/portfolio/with-bread/>

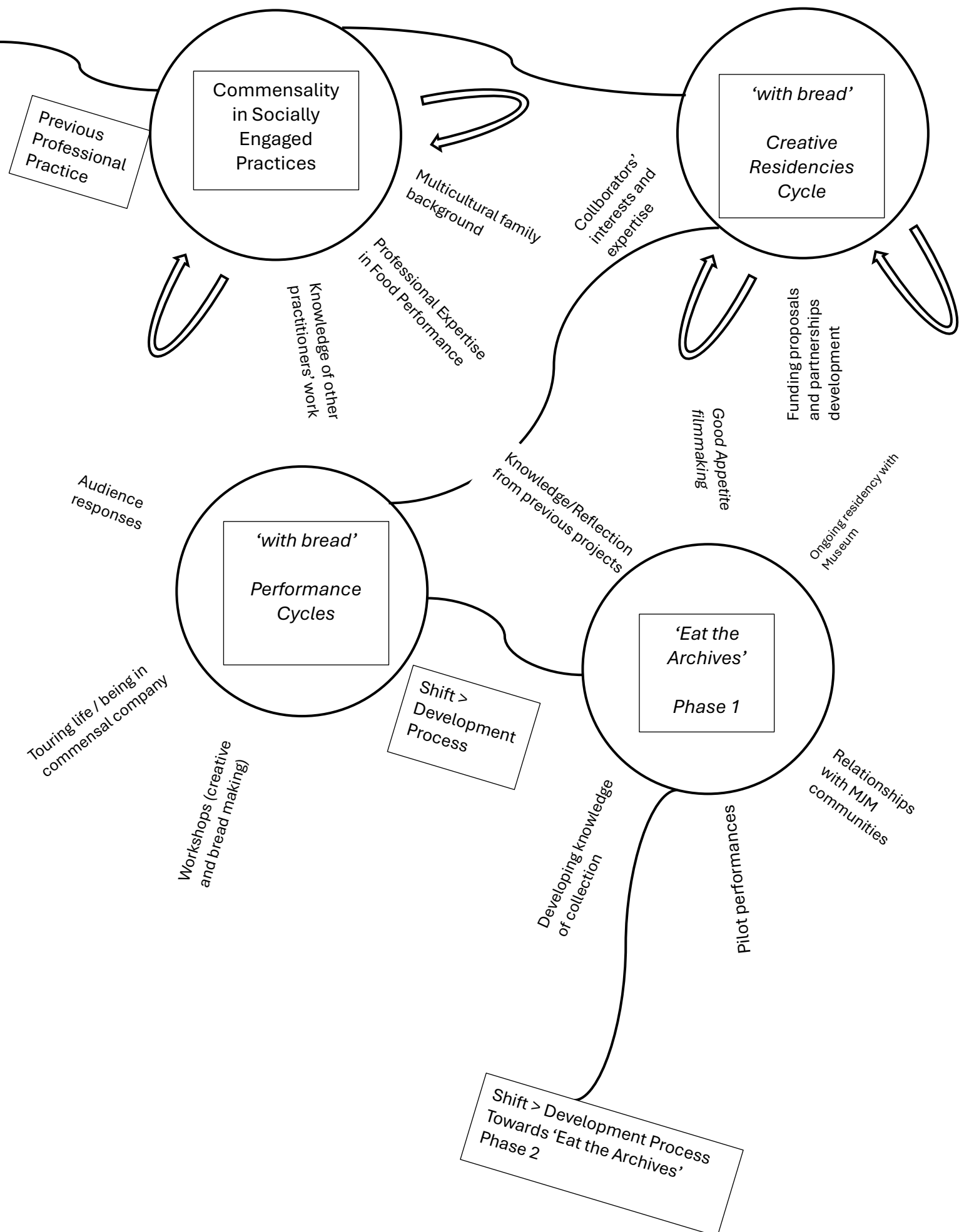
Full performance film: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/u1b3qho8djhd9qwgs3li6/WITH-BREAD-THE-SHOW.m4v?rlkey=am74jjcuv7wfnny7aucfohlm&e=2&dl=0>

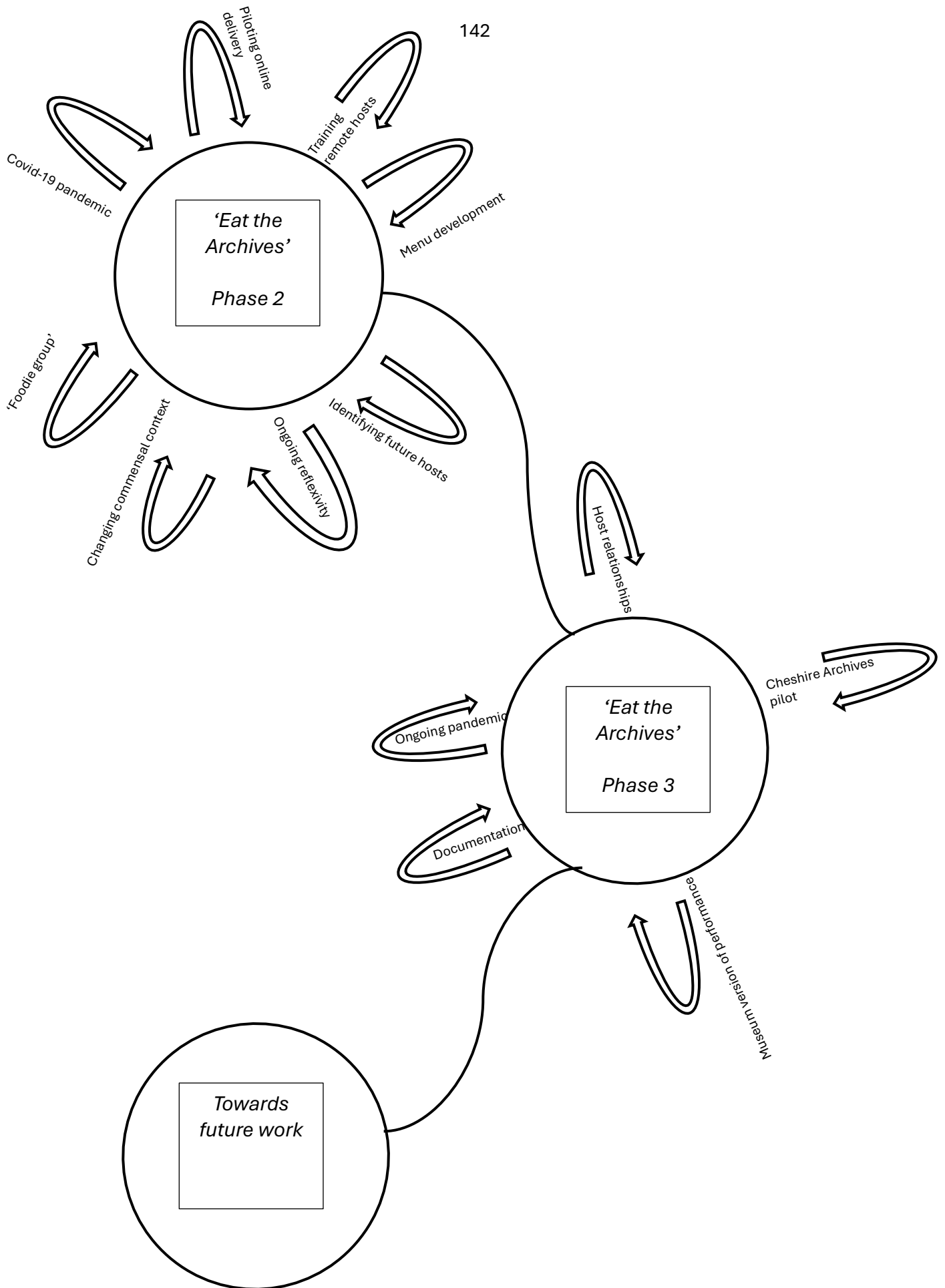
#### Eat the Archives

Documentary film: [https://youtu.be/4p7\\_PrKIGzE?si=y8EA0ZuWaJwx3r1x](https://youtu.be/4p7_PrKIGzE?si=y8EA0ZuWaJwx3r1x)



## Appendix 2: Daisy-chain model for this project





## Appendix 3: Questions to with bread collaborators

Did you have any expectations of what working together might be like prior to our first residency in Stockton? If so, what were they?

How did these evolve over the course of the project?

How would you describe the process of working together? (factually, and in terms of how it felt)

Is there anything that surprised you? If so, what?

How did our work together compare to other collaborations you have experience of?

What is your understanding of commensality as a process? As performance?

Is there anything else you'd like to comment on? (anything you've learned or done differently, maybe?)

## Appendix 4: Menus for Eat the Archives

Journeys		
Artefact	Story	Dish
Hackmesser Chopper Photograph	Irish migrant woman converts to Judaism through marriage and finds her place in the local community through acts of service.	Cheese & Spinach Borekas
Official Letter	Rabbi living in Germany arrives in Manchester just before WWII and is appointed community Rabbi. Organises evacuation of Jewish Children.	Beetroot patties Roasted potatoes Griddled asparagus
Schoolbook/Diary	Young man from Manchester moves to Canada and makes a bet with a friend to journey around the world within a year.	Peach cobbler
Identities		
Artefact	Story	Dish
Black leatherbound diary	Unlicensed midwife helps give birth to hundreds of Jewish Children.	Cheese stuffed polenta balls
Oral history extract Photographs	Middle class young women remember the efforts of their parents to integrate in their new communities.	Cabbage Polow Rice
Photograph	Irish migrant woman converts to Judaism through marriage and finds her place in the local community through acts of service.	Tea-soaked dried fruit borekas
Communities		
Artefact	Story	Dish
Schoolbook/Diary	Young man from Manchester moves to Canada and makes a bet with a friend to journey around the world within a year.	Vegetarian Fish and Chips
Kiddush Cup	Story of the Grand Order of the Sons of Jacob - a Jewish Friendly society set up for mutual aid.	Matzoh Ball Soup
Official Letter	Rabbi living in Germany arrives in Manchester just before WWII and is appointed community Rabbi. Organises evacuation of Jewish Children.	Rhubarb and Custard dessert

## Appendix 5: Ethics Approval

The Secretariat  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, LS2 9JT  
Tel: 0113 343 4873  
Email: [ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk)



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

Romain Burtin  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, LS2 9JT

**Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee  
University of Leeds**

31 March 2025

Dear Romain

**Title of study**                      **Investigating commensality in socially engaged performance practices**  
**Ethics reference**                **FAHC 18-098**

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee and following receipt of your response to the Committee's initial comments, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

Document	Version	Date
FAHC 18-098 0.1 -201255020 ethics application form V2.doc	2	08/08/2019
FAHC 18-098 2. 201255020 GENERAL AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET.docx	1	11/07/2019
FAHC 18-098 3. 201255020 COLLABORATOR INFORMATION SHEET.docx	1	11/07/2019
FAHC 18-098 4 - 201255020 GENERAL AUDIENCE CONSENT FORM (LOW RISK).doc	1	11/07/2019
FAHC 18-098 5 - 201255020 ARTISTIC COLLABORATORS CONSENT FORM.doc	1	11/07/2019
FAHC 18-098 6. 201255020 GENERIC RISK ASSESSMENT.doc	1	11/07/2019

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment>.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation and other documents relating to the study, including any risk assessments. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits>.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to [ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie  
Senior Research Ethics Administrator, the Secretariat  
On behalf of Prof Robert Jones, Chair, [AHC FREC](#)

CC: Student's supervisor(s)/ Faculty Research and Innovation Office

## Appendix 6: Timeline for Eat the Archives

Research and Development Phase 1	Early Autumn 2019	Initial project research & development
	October 2019	Pilot performance at the Lalley Centre, Manchester
	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2019	Pilot performance at a private home in Manchester
	16 <sup>th</sup> February 2020	Pilot performance at a 'Moishe Pod' / private home in Manchester
<b>PROJECT REFLECTION / COVID-19 DISRUPTION</b>		
Research and Development Phase 2	Late 2020/Early 2021	Further project development
	7 <sup>th</sup> January 2021	Work in Progress sharing (online)
	19 <sup>th</sup> February 2021	Eat the Archives: Appetiser – dress rehearsal/hosts training
Online version performances	25 <sup>th</sup> February 2021	Eat the Archives: Appetiser (online event)
	8 <sup>th</sup> April 2021	Eat the Archives: Cook-along (online event)
<b>PROJECT REFLECTION / PREPARATION FOR IN-PERSON PaR</b>		
Reflective/Documentary Activity	7 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> June	Film document: Eat the Archives <i>Identities</i> menu
Practice as Research Performances Phase 3	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2021	Eat the Archives: <i>Journeys</i> at Manchester Jewish Museum (beyond domestic context / test performance)
	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2021	Eat the Archives: <i>Journeys</i> , Leeds. Hosted by Jess Sweet
	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Eat the Archives: <i>Identities</i> , Manchester. Hosted by Sally Halon.
	27 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Eat the Archives: <i>Journeys</i> , Manchester. Hosted by Bethan Ward.
Reflective/Documentary Activity	29 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Eat the Archives: Online film release.
Practice as Research Performance	2 <sup>nd</sup> August 2021	Eat the Archives: <i>Journeys</i> , Manchester. Hosted by Adrian Smith.
<b>PROJECT REFLECTION, EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS</b>		

## Appendix 7: *with bread* book



**Companion**, *noun*.

From the Latin *com-*, together with & *panis*, bread

This publication is a companion to *with bread*, a performance where the History of bread meets personal histories of migration. Over the course of the live performance, audience members take part in making flatbreads which are served, along with a seasonal stew, at the end of the evening.

The story told in *with bread* traces the journey of this staple and heavily symbolic food from prehistory to Brexit Britain, via biblical times and the Arab Spring.

*with bread* is in turn a poetic history lesson, an opportunity to listen to voices from the margins, and a baking class. *with bread* is an attempt to explore what it means to share a culture, to make community and to belong in an ever-changing and globalised world.

In the context of heated debates around identity politics, *with bread* brings people together in a joyous celebration of diversity and difference.

*"Along with his co-performers, Leo tells stories personal and historical that delicately tease out themes of migration and friendship, as we collectively make bread. Then we break and eat the bread together. It's elegant and satisfying, and although we made flatbread, it's still rising"*

Daniel Bye

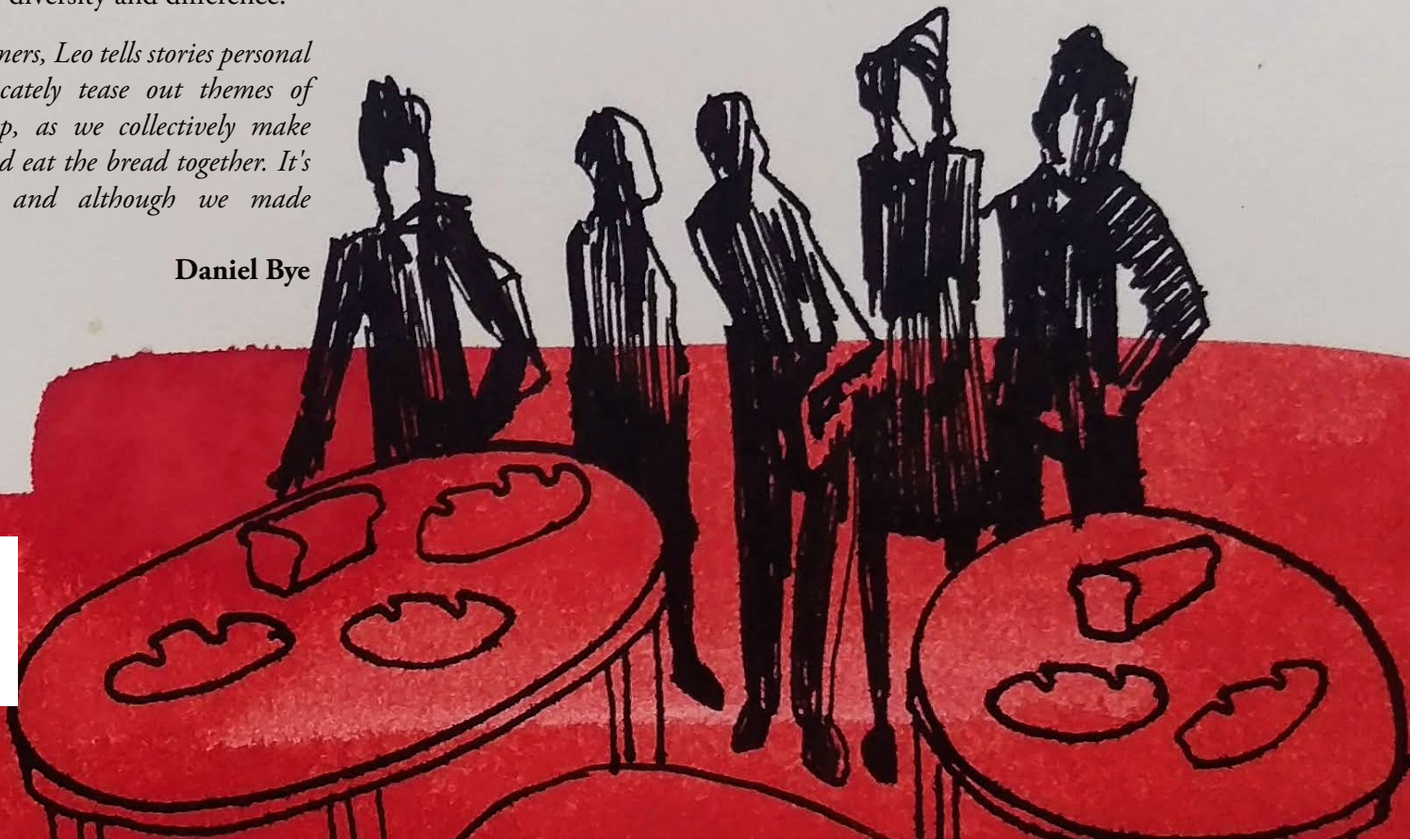
# with bread

we are the people with whom we eat

Leo Burtin  
and guests



[www.leoburtin.eu](http://www.leoburtin.eu)



**with bread**

**we are the people with whom we eat**

Copyright ©2021 Leo Burtin

ISBN: 978-1-8384833-1-9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

# **with bread**

**we are the people with whom we eat**

Leo Burtin  
and guests

with a foreword by Dr Laura Seddon  
ink drawings by Katherina Radeva  
production photographs by Garry Cook

*The consumption of a shared meal functions as a sign, which communicates the idea that the diners belong to a group and are differentiated from those who do not share the same meal. Accordingly, we are not only what we eat; we are also the people with whom we eat.*

(Giacoman, 2016: 461)

*To those prepared to offer a seat at the table*



# Contents

Creative Team .....	ix
Performance Dates .....	xii
Foreword.....	xiii
Preface.....	xv
Entrance.....	1
Prelude.....	3
Beginning.....	5
History.....	9
Show & Tell .....	17
Jane Bizimana.....	19
Manel Zouabi .....	21
Araz Khdir .....	25
Dionysia Bouzioti.....	27
Benedetta d’Ettorre .....	31
Ashish Kumar Sharma.....	33
Leentje Van de Cruys .....	35
Ali Matthews.....	37
Dr Shahireh Sharif .....	39
Michael Norton .....	43
Old Crumbs.....	45
Pain Azyme .....	47
Bread & Circuses .....	51
Now.....	55
After words.....	57
Recipes.....	59
Mairi’s Chickpea Casserole .....	60
Mint & Pea Stew.....	62
Ladislav’s Mushroom Paprikash .....	63
Mametu’s Kozunak.....	64
Jane’s Ugali.....	65
Acknowledgements.....	67
References .....	69





# Creative Team

## Leo Burtin – Artistic Director, Writer, Performer

Leo is an artist, writer and creative producer. Since 2012, he has been developing pieces which gently, poetically and playfully disrupt the overtly familiar act of sharing food. As a writer, he has contributed to publications such as *The Guardian* and *the Sick of the Fringe*. He is co-Artistic Director of Making Room: a producing agency which has worked in collaboration with HOME, BAC, Chisenhale Dance Space among others. Leo is currently a postgraduate researcher at the University of Leeds, investigating the intersection of performance and food studies.

## Aliki Chapple – Performer, Collaborator

Aliki is an actor, writer, and translator. Her version of Lena Kitsopoulou's *M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A.* (dir.: Stella Duffy) is published by Oberon. Her smaller-scale experimental work has been seen at Emergency and other festivals. In 2019, she is touring *666 Comments* (dir.: Daniel Bye), a show she devised based on an Internet comment thread.

## Garry Cook – Production Photographer

Garry Cook is a photojournalist who specialises in documenting arts events and performance. His wider photography work has covered diverse social-issues projects on subjects ranging from religion and people at leisure to war and how we judge others. He also works as an arts producer and is the creator of Lancashire Fringe Festival and Lancashire Photography Festival.

## Hannah Crawford – Production Manager (Touring)

Hannah Crawford is an emerging producer and entrepreneur. She currently produces comedy duo Ladylikes and has recently joined Chol International Arts as General Manager. She has previously worked with independent artists including Louise Orwin and Mark Maughan and held positions in a range of cultural organisations including Soho Theatre, Lyric Hammersmith and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

### **Louise Cross – Producer, Collaborator**

Louise is an emerging artist, dramaturg and producer. She is a founding member of award-winning company Theatre 42, has worked on large scale festival Light Up Lancaster. She has worked as an administrator for Litfest and has recently completed an MA with the University of Amsterdam.

### **Adam York Gregory – Book Production**

Adam is a visual artist and maker. He's a long term collaborator of Proto-type Theater and has a durational live art practice with Gillian Jane Lees.

### **Michael Norton – Production Manager, Lighting Designer, Collaborator**

Michael is a coach and dramaturg, working alongside organisations, artists and creatives in Europe and the USA. He's originally from the Midwest of the United States but has lived and worked in Europe since 2011 where in addition to his support work he makes his own performance work. He is also a producer at Artsadmin, building programmes to support artists across the UK.

### **Katherina Radeva – Designer, Performer, Collaborator**

Katherina Radeva is a theatre maker, visual artist and a set and costume designer. Born in Bulgaria, Katherina has lived in the UK for over 20 years as a first-generation migrant. Her visual artwork has been exhibited across Europe and the United States. Her multi award winning designs have been seen on all continents and her practice as a theatre maker and co-artistic director of Two Destination Language tours extensively in the UK and internationally. She is a vocal campaigner for inclusion and diversity and fair pay for arts and cultural workers.

*with bread* was also made with additional support from:

Alister Lownie & Ali Matthews – Outside Eyes.

Dr Jenny Lawson, Dr Joslin McKinney & Dr Anna Fenemore – Research Supervisors.

Charlotte Mountford & Julie Brown – Producers (Fundraising).

*with bread* featured guest performers (in order of appearance):

Jane Bizimana, Manel Zouabi, Araz Khdir (Stockton-on-Tees).

Dionysia Bouzioti, Benedetta D’Ettorre, Ashish Sifar (Leeds).

Leentje Van De Cruys, Ali Matthews, Shahireh Sharif (Salford).

## Performance Dates

*The shows that were:*

20<sup>th</sup> March 2019 – ARC Stockton Arts Centre [Première]

24<sup>th</sup> + 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019 – Stage @ Leeds

4<sup>th</sup> March 2020 – New Adelphi Theatre, Salford

*The shows that weren't to be:*

20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 – Nonsuch Studios, Nottingham

6<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – Lancaster Arts

9<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – The Gulbenkian, Canterbury

11<sup>th</sup> + 12<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – Theatre in the Mill, Bradford

24<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – The Blue Room, Lincoln

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020 – Settle Stories

# Foreword

Dr Laura Seddon

*“with bread  
com panis  
companions”*

I am writing from an unusually sunny Manchester in late February, as Spring is starting to shyly peek over the winter gloom of what seems an interminable Covid lockdown. It is the morning after a performance of *Eat the Archives* on Zoom, where Leo Burtin and I brought together audiences from across the country to connect over their kitchen tables and eat the same dish in the same moment. The craving for commensality (eating together) is palpable.

Leo has been my culinary guide for the past 3 years since I arrived in Manchester from the south, taking the position of Creative Producer at Manchester Jewish Museum. Our journey started even further north, at an Edinburgh Festival Fringe showing of *The Midnight Soup* where Leo opened a window into his grandmother's life through her diary entries while the audience sat together, made, and ate soup. In the process we had surprisingly intimate conversations about grandparents, death and hope. We audience members were instant companions for an evening and those intense conversations with strangers have stayed with me. From then on, Leo has encouraged this reluctant cook to try her hand at recipes as a new way to access story and meaning.

For museums, bringing archival stories alive through food and hosting communal eating experiences where strangers, who would not normally meet, make nuanced and meaningful connections is ground-breaking. Seemingly simple acts such as making bread together teases out stories of beginnings, childhood recollections, and nostalgia for other lands and eras, by powerfully tapping into collective memory. Leo and I have worked in our museum, in community centres and in private homes bringing with us objects from the museum's collection. Following this, a year of lockdowns

and restrictions has heightened my own realisation of the importance of Leo's works, such as *with bread*. At the start of the Covid crisis we saw a craze for sourdough starters and the sharing of recipes. In the Jewish communities, for example, we have seen digital versions of Shabbat (Friday night) dinners and major festivals such as Passover, including schemes across the world for those in isolation to eat together online. Therefore, creating a space, even a new sense of ritual, as Leo has done in *with bread*, which allows common ground between those of different cultural and religious backgrounds to be discovered, is a vital service which the arts and heritage sector should provide.

I invite you the reader, to delve joyfully into the tactile experience that is *with bread*. You may recognise Leo's excitement, growing up in Lorraine, at the first time he was given a coin and the responsibility to buy his family's daily bread. For me it brought visceral images of being on holiday in France and going with my father to buy bread daily – something that is rarely experienced by those growing up in the UK. You may recognise the figure of Kat's grandmother sending her recipes whose proportions will feed an entire street or Alik's descriptions of pilfering bits of bread in the back of the car on the way back from the bakery in Greece.

I hope you find a universality from these enticing snippets of experiences and most importantly find a companion near or far to break bread with and eat together.

# Preface

Leo Burtin

*with bread* is a piece which begins again and again. You have already read a *foreword*, which has now turned into a *preface*. When this performance-inside-of-a-book begins, there will be an *Entrance*, a *Prelude* and finally, a *Beginning*. A slow and gentle process of arriving which leads to the sharing of a meal.

As with all of my shows, *with bread* always begins with an invitation and always ends with a celebration. Specifically, when you arrive to a performance of *with bread*, you are invited by a host to join their table. As the piece unfolds, further invitations take place, to exchange names, to have a go at making flour from grain, to make bread and eventually, to break bread.

In between each of these invitations, I tell a poetic history of bread into which personal stories of migration are woven – plaited as challah might be. None of the stories you hear in the show are quite finished, they point to a sense of time always in motion. They are told by people always in motion. Still, there comes a point where we, the company of hosts, let words make room for food.

Through shared eating, through the coming together around tables where no one can sit at the head, we celebrate all that makes us different, and all that makes us the same.

This book, for the most part, reproduces the text spoken in the performance version of the show. One crucial exception to this is our *Show & Tell* chapter, which I will introduce in more detail when you arrive at that page.

I do not wish to be too prescriptive about how you might read this book, but I would like to leave you with an invitation. If you can, read our words out loud, while sitting around a table and take pauses to prepare some food to enjoy alongside your reading. If you can, do this with others.



The book will suggest moments to pause, which are the moments in the show where we teach the audience a simple bread recipe. We have also provided recipes for the foods we shared during our travels and which you might enjoy trying your hand at.

*with bread* emerged from a painful yearning for community, and I look forward to meeting you in between the lines that follow, dear Stranger, dear Friend.

# Entrance

We might not live by bread alone

But has there really been a thing greater than sliced bread?

You followed a breadcrumb trail towards us

On a mangé plus d'un pain

Which feels to us like you've cast your bread upon the waters

You can count on us to know which side our bread is buttered on.

Breaking bread with you is our bread and butter

Il n'y a nul pain sans peine, et nous avons du pain sur la planche

Et puisque le pain d'autrui est amer

And that bread is the staff of life

We'll just have to hope this time, it doesn't fall on the buttered side...

Good evening and welcome to *with bread*. This performance will involve handling food – mostly flour and a few spices. If you haven't had the chance to, now is a good time to wash your hands. This performance will involve some conversation, but you won't have to speak if you don't want to. You are more than welcome to chat to your table mates as we wait for everyone to settle, and all the way through the performance, you will be welcome to come in and out of the space as you wish.



# Prelude

*Aliki, standing up*

In one hour and forty-five minutes this performance will end. You will leave through these doors. After you leave, we will take a short break. Then, we will begin tidying up, washing up and packing away.

We will be thinking of you. Our brains will be running at full speed. We will be wondering what you made of it all, what you made of us. We will be thinking about all the things that could have gone differently.

While you are here you will not be an audience. Not a group silently sitting in the dark and whose only purpose is to listen. Here you will not be a spectator. Not an individual seeking entertainment to unfold before their very eyes. Here you will be one of us.

**Kat** Here you will be us.

**Leo** Here we will be one of you.

**Aliki** Here we will be you.

**Kat** Here, together, we begin.

**Leo** Here, together, we begin to change.

**Aliki** Here, together, we begin to transform.

**Leo** We are the people with whom we eat.



# Beginning

*Leo, from a music stand at the centre of the room*

My name is Leo Burtin, and I have recently discovered that the title that may fit me the best at present is that of theatre chef.

Bonsoir, merci d'être ici avec nous ce soir.

Let me try this on, then:

Good evening, my name is Leo Burtin and I am a theatre chef.

Yes, it seems to fit.

The main job of a regular chef is to create nutritious and delicious food for their patrons. A TV chef is all about making things look good for the camera. As a theatre chef, I use food as a means to share stories and ideas, and to provoke conversations.

What will happen this evening is just that, we will share stories, ideas, conversations and we will have food.

This evening is about a group of people gathered in [location] on [date].

This evening is about Alikì.

**Alikì** Καλησπέρα, καλώς ήρθατε, χαίρομαι που σας γνωρίζω. This evening is about Kat.

**Kat** Добър вечер, радвам се да се запознаем. This evening is also about Michael.

**Michael** (in American) Good evening, it's nice to meet you. This evening is about [Guest 1].

**Guest 1** (in mother tongue) Good evening, it's nice to meet you. This evening is about [Guest 2]

**Guest 2** (in mother tongue) Good evening, it's nice to meet you. This evening is about [Guest 3]

**Guest 3** (in mother tongue) Good evening, it's nice to meet you. This evening is about Louise.

**Louise** Good evening, it's nice to meet you.

**Aliki** This evening is about [Audience Member<sup>†</sup>]. I'm glad you're here, thank you for coming.

**Kat** This evening is about [Audience Member]. I'm glad you're here, thank you for coming.

**Guest 1** This evening is about [Audience Member]. I'm glad you're here, thank you for coming.

**Guest 2** This evening is about [Audience Member]. I'm glad you're here, thank you for coming.

**Guest 3** This evening is about [Audience Member]. I'm glad you're here, thank you for coming.

**Leo** This evening is also about Ali, Alister, Argenis, Maja, Moujan, Yvonne. I wish you were here.

At this point, we'd like to invite you to take a moment to introduce yourselves to your table if you haven't had the chance to already. We also have some name tags, so you needn't worry about remembering everyone's names.

---

<sup>†</sup> At this point, each table host names one of their audience-guests.

**Leo** Thank you. I hope this is beginning to feel like we are getting to know each other a little bit better, that we have a sense of who is in the room. This evening, we are going to share a few stories with you.

**Aliki** You could think of these as origin stories. They begin to provide clues for how we – those of us standing on this stage this evening – came to be here.

**Leo** They begin to provide clues as to how bread rose to such prominence in our shared culture.

**Kat** We hope that they might begin to provide clues for what might happen next.

**Leo** We will take a few breaks as our stories unfold, and we will teach you a recipe for a kind of flat bread that means the world to me.







# History

**Kat** Our story tonight is History. It begins in the 1990s in a small town in the northeast of France.

**Leo** Our story begins when my grandmother presses a small leather wallet into the palm of my hand. As I unzip it to reveal its contents, I find two small silver keys attached to a black hoop, and a lonesome 5 francs piece.

Heads. La semeuse. A woman in a phrygian cap sowing seeds. The Republic at dawn.

Tails. An olive branch for peace. An oak leaf for strength. A poppy flower for remembrance, and for dreams. Ears of wheat for prosperity.

I flip the coin into the air.

Heads or tails?

Keys in hand, richer by five francs, my journey begins. It is a journey of trust, a step closer to adulthood. Today, I am given the opportunity to provide for the family, to play my part. I am not 10 years old yet. I run down the stairs from the apartment, not stopping once to catch my breath, not careful to tread lightly so as to not bother the downstairs neighbour, and before you know it, I am standing on the pavement, ready to cross the road. Looking left, then right, carefully stepping onto the zebra crossing and across the road to the *boulangerie*.

Une baguette et demie, s'il vous plaît! I ask politely, and proudly, when my turn comes. Behind the counter, the baker has no doubt recognised me. She has seen me enough times to know my order before I even say it. She knew to wait, and to let me speak. If it had

been my grandfather, she would have barely looked up and simply checked: *comme d'habitude*?

Granddad would have nodded. Yes, the usual. But today... today is different. Today, for the first time, I am the bringer of bread. Not quite the same as the bread winner, not quite the same as the bread maker, but all the same, it is a step in the right direction.



*Aliki      Measuring Flour*

In order to make bread, we're going to start with flour. The first thing we're going to ask you to do is to measure out half a cup of flour. Your hosts will bring to the table a measuring cup and a bowl for each of you.



**Kat** I am seven and I am head queuer in my family. It is the late 80's in Sofia, Bulgaria. The only vehicles on the streets are the UN's trucks. The Berlin Wall has just burst open and everything has stopped. Literally. The city is still busy, but everyone is quiet, unsure.

My mum and dad have only one child: me. So the responsibility for queuing falls on me. Whenever they see a shop that's open, a shop where there might be food, I am the one sent to queue.

As a family, we're lucky. We are allowed three loaves of bread a month. In our predominantly student area of the city, kids are unusual. I am sent, because I will be told to go to the front of the queue. That's why my job is to queue. I will get the bread. I will get all three loaves of bread. And they must last us the month.

Of course, bread doesn't last like that, it goes mouldy after a few days. So each day, my dad scrapes the layer of mould off, cuts a slice of bread and toasts it for me. Once it's been toasted, you can't really taste the mould. Another day and another layer of mould gets scraped off, and another, and another, so by the time the end of the month comes, it doesn't matter how much you toast it: the bread all tastes of mould.

Just a couple of years later, I am now nine, and things are different. We have eggs and we have bread and my great grandmother, Mametu, once again has enough sugar to make jam to put on the toast.

**Leo** *Adding Flavour*

Now that we have measured flour, we can flavour our bread. There are pots of salt on your tables, and I would recommend you add a generous pinch of it to your flour and mix through the flour. If you want, there are also a few herbs and spices on your table. Let your nose guide you and add a pinch of any of those if you would like.

**Kat** They didn't have car seats in the 1970s in Greece, Aliki just sat in the back.



**Alik** My mother would drive to the village in the morning to pick up bread.

On the way home, the fragrant bread, wrapped in brown paper, was entrusted to me, still warm. There was always somewhere on the crust to get started, some curled up edge begging to be broken off. Watching my mother in the rear-view mirror, I chewed only when her eyes were on the road. That was a rule. Another rule was that only one opening could be made into the soft crumb, only one intrusion in the crust. Any bread beyond the first surreptitious bite had to be excavated from that initial opening, mined for. When we got home, my mother would say "A mouse has been at the bread!" We would pretend to look for the mouse. I knew that she knew I was eating the bread in the back seat. She knew that I knew that she knew.

The village had two bakers. You bought your bread from the one or the other. There was no changing your mind. Your baker was like your football team. Inherited, irrationally adhered to, requiring loyalty. If you went to a different baker, he would not sell you bread. For one thing, he knew precisely how many loaves he'd need each day – to give you a loaf would be to stint one of his regulars. For another thing, you were not his customer. You played for a different team.

The two bakers in the village were rivals, maybe even enemies. One was called Hector, the other Achilles. I am not making this up. The bakers in the village were known to dislike each other – Achilles and Hector, Hector and Achilles. I am not being funny. Those were their names.

We bought our bread from Hector. Hector's bread was the best.

I have never tasted the bread made by Achilles.

Hector did not use sourdough starter; he assured my mother. Nor did the electric oven he bought in the 80s to replace the olivewood burning oven his father had used before him affect the flavour of the bread. The secret, he said, was to let it rise. First in the bowl, then after you'd shaped the loaves, let them rise again. A long time, he said. Much longer than they tell you to. There was nothing special about the flour, the oven, the yeast. The secret was time.

#### Leo *Adding water*

We're now going to turn our dry mix of flour and spices into a dough. Your hosts will get you a measuring jug and you will need approximately 50 ml of water. If you accidentally put a little too much water, we can add a little flour. If your dough needs a little more water, go ahead and add it little by little.

Gently mix the flour and water until it comes together into a dough.

Knead lightly until the dough comes away from your fingers and from the sides of the bowl. Be careful not to overwork the dough, leave it to rest once the dough has come together and is soft and lightly springy to the touch.

Kat And now we go back in time, in the decade before Alik and her mother were looking for the mouse that had been at the bread, and a little further south, a little further east to Turkey, or what some people call Northern Kurdistan.

Welcome to the province of Diyarbakir.



Leo All around you, the volcanic hills we have come to know as the Black Mountains. At their foot, you meet a man... you take him to be in his late forties, early fifties.

You meet Jack R. Harlan.  
Jack Rodney Harlan.  
Botanist, and time-travelling explorer to be.

You are both surrounded by tall, wild grass.

Wild einkorn  
Emmer  
Goatgrass

Here, at the foot of the mountain, the land is dense with these ancient plants that we had barely even given a thought to.

It's morning, late August, and the heat is still gentle on your skin. Jack Harlan reaches into the pocket of his vest and pulls out a silver watch on a chain (because that's how scientists kept time in this version of history). You don't have long until the sun is at its peak and the heat not so gentle anymore.

You have half an hour.

In one hand, you hold a brown paper bag. With the other, as you walk, you run your fingers through the grass, stripping the ripe seeds along the way.

**Kat** And in that moment, you travel some twelve thousand years earlier.

**Leo** Your hands are red and raw, but your bag is full, at the risk of tearing even. The archaeobotanist and plant explorer Jack Harlan adjusts his glasses (because that's how scientists thought in this version of history) and examines a fistful of your harvest. Einkorn, mostly. Some overripe, some still green, but most, about half, he tells you is clean grain, fit for consumption.

**Aliki** With half an hour and without any tools other than your own bare hands, you could, perhaps a little uncomfortably, gather 2 pounds worth of raw cereal.

**Leo** Yes. Now imagine there are five of you – your family, say – and that instead of a paper bag, you are using the skin of a pre-historic animal. Let's say that beforehand you spent some time making flint sickles to help you along with your harvest. A kilo soon becomes 5, soon becomes 10 and you gather enough food to last you through the winter months.

**Aliki** In the centre of each table, you will find a small pile of grain. This is modern wheat. Take a single grain in between and pinch it between your index finger and thumb. See if it is easy to break it down. What if you were to use a rolling pin? Try to roll it over the grain. See if you can crush it with your rolling pin.

**Leo** Wild Einkorn is much tougher than the wheat you have on your tables, and you would still need to process it to make it fit for human consumption. You have to help it along the way with a kind of ancient transformative magic, one that most of us practice every day and think of as banal... cooking.



From his own kitchen experiments, Jack Harlan tells us that wild einkorn doesn't mill or bake very well, however... so no bread for our twelve-thousand-year-old ancestors just yet.

What our expeditions with Professor Harlan tell us though, is that as far back as twelve thousand years ago, hunter gatherers could harvest wild cereals quickly and easily. Aliko, take it away.

*Aliko, as Jack Harlan*

"We cannot with certainty reconstruct the whole story of wheat domestication, but the fact is that tame wheats were developed from wild ones. Someone must have made a start by harvesting wild cereals." Harlan, 1967

Leo And with this, we come to understand that as hundreds and thousands of years come to pass, we learn to tame these cereals, and that in doing so, we begin to settle. We begin to build our entire lives, to gather our families, to grow our communities where the wild grasses are. For survival and for comfort, we stake a claim in nature, and we stay close to our own kind. What was there for any and all is now there for us, we are taking control.

*Each hosting performer cups the grain mound at the centre of the table and slowly pulls it towards them.*

Leo I could end our story here. I could tell that it is all there, written in the stones of History. I could tell you that we are what we eat, and that there, right there in History, right there in the natural order of things, it says so – it says that to settle and to keep to one place is and has always been the key to comfort and survival.

*Aliko Rolling*

In order to roll our flatbread out, we will need to dust the surface of our table with flour. When you're ready, divide your dough into 2–3 balls and roll each one out into a disk.

# Show & Tell

When *with bread* is a performance outside of this book, the audience sit around one of five large tables. At each table, there is a host. Performers Alik and Kat are two of those hosts, always.

In each village, town or city the show is performed, we seek to meet local migrants, to become hosts to the three remaining tables. We search for people who enjoy meeting new people, sharing stories and who enjoy lively conversations over good food. Beyond this, we do not ask for anything in particular. People may have experience of performing or it may be their first time on stage.

Once people have responded to our call, we invite them to meet us for a workshop, where we make some bread, have some conversations and do a little bit of creative writing together. At this stage, people who might become hosts are getting to know us. They are invited to consider whether they think becoming a host at a *with bread* table is something they would like to do.

If they decide this is the case, we meet them again to tell them everything they need to know about this role. I should add that at that point, they become a member of the company, and are such are provided with remuneration for their time, and any expenses they may incur as a result of their membership of the company are taken care of.

We also let each of our guest hosts know there is a moment in time and space, within the performance that will be theirs. You might think about it like a guitar solo, or a while on top of a small soap box. We invite each of our guest hosts to take centre stage to do whatever they might like to do.

To help them think about what this could be, we ask them three questions:

- How did you get here?
- What have you brought with you?
- What are you taking away?

They are at liberty to answer these questions as they wish, according to their own interpretations of their meaning. They can also choose to ignore them entirely. We have a stage, a microphone, lighting and an audience and for a moment (for which we do not prescribe a length of time), they can do whatever they would like.

Our guest performers have variously, chosen to answer our questions directly; to be interviewed by other members of the company; to teach the audience a song; to share a photo album; to read something they had written; to promote an event they were involved in and a few other things.

In the pages that follow, we re-iterated the invitation to each of our guest performers. Only this time, rather than a moment on a stage, we offered them pages in a book.

Some of our guest hosts have reproduced elements of their original contribution to the show, while others have preferred to share new material...

Joining them is also Michael Norton, who collaborated in the creation of *with bread* as a Production Manager and Lighting Designer as well as to the overall devising of the piece.

I will now leave you in their care.



# Jane Bizimana

How did you get here?

Well, I'm going to talk about how I got into this theatre, right? Yeah. So, um, I've been trying to challenge myself to speak in a public place, because before I had my daughter, I used to be very quiet.

And English is my second language, so I don't find it easy to communicate in many words. So, once I started talking in English, I cut my sentences short.

And, um, but the reason why I challenged myself to come here is: when Emma was a baby, I used to be very quiet in the house. So, if you're my neighbour, all you could hear is a baby crying. Yeah. And she'll be, you know, maybe when she's hungry or whatever, I will just touch her but not communicate because I didn't know. I didn't I didn't know how to do it.

And then a friend of mine once came and visited me and she observed how I was communicating with Emma. And she just told me to stop whatever I was doing.

I had to talk.

She told me what you're doing, it's wrong. You cannot be in the house by yourself with a child and not talk. So, I realised that I had to start slowly. But at the moment this is like my highest. I'm trying to challenge myself to speak in a public place, and this is why I ended up in this theatre with you.

What have you brought with you?

Well, I brought my baby girl, Emma.

What will you be taking away?

The confidence of speaking in a public place and the pleasure of meeting everybody here. That's what I'll be taking with me.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Yes, uh, it's about bread. So, I just realised when we were rehearsing yesterday that in the part of the world I grew up from, we don't have wheat... It's not common. So, wheat was kind of imported. It's not something that we grew.

So, we don't have that kind of, um, connection with wheat as something that you make bread with.

But we have other things that we share as a community as part of East Africa. That is maize, maize flour. So, we just make the maize and make... It's called sadza or ugali in Swahili. And then we eat it with maybe tea or spiced tea or something like that.

# Manel Zouabi

## Part 1

Over a wooden table full of flour containers, water jugs, salt and spice tins, old friends, and new companions, colourful stories about our lives had come out spontaneously with the flow of our little friendly chats. We spoke about our favourite dishes, hobbies and communities when the way that we ended up meeting over bread at ARC was brought up.

Oh! How did I end up in Stockton-on-Tees and then over this table with bread? I asked myself...

Stockton-on-Tees? I never heard about this town before getting a letter instructing me to move there! By that time, cities became mere names to me. For instance, I had already moved three times in two weeks. The sound of packing suitcases, all the banging of stuff and buzzing of packers no longer scared me as it used to do before...

This time, I felt that I needed to give myself a chance of thriving somehow- some way in one of these towns that I passed by as a 'short-time stayer', and it was Stockton-on-Tees. I wondered if I could pause not only my suitcase but also my thoughts about what my next station would be. Why not make friends even if we were going to part? Why not create things even if they were to stay behind?

All started there, and then here I am participating in with bread and enjoying making bread, making friends, sharing food and stories about our lives.

I attempted to remember what I brought with me to this town...

Certainly, my small black suitcase. It was meant for short trips. It contained my 'must-have' clothes, a bundle of colourful pieces; the way I like my clothes to be. The suitcase also contained my best books, several of which (if not all!) were about women struggling all over the place.

I had a cheese gift box. An unusual gift that I dared to carry all the way from down south. It got rotten on the way, such a shame! I thought that the trip

was short enough and that the weather was cool enough for the gift to survive. Alas! I was wrong: time and circumstances were not OK.

And what will I take with me? I wondered...

Certainly, my suitcase again. It is still the same small black one: as practical as a suitcase needs to be for a traveller like me. But I have more to carry this time!

The one thing that I say to myself now: 'Do not be deceived by the smallness of a town for big stories happen in small towns'. The community at Stockton-on-Tees is deceptively large, multicultural and have loads of warmth and support to offer to newcomers. One good example is ARC, where we met. Such an unbelievable venue for entertainment, learning, mingling and engaging with the community. I will always cherish and carry with me, among other things, the memories of performances I attended and enjoyed, projects I had the pleasure of being part of and little chats I had and friends I made there.

## *Part 2 Waiting for Bread*

I was the youngest of sisters: an unfortunate ranking for someone like my old-young self who disliked nothing in the old days more than these never-ending, rather daily, light shopping trips to and back from the market...and all the hustle that came with crossing through a curious place such as 'our' market where all smells, goods, loud crowds, dust, humidity and sun intertwine everyday...

I was told that I was light and fast and therefore sent to queue in the only bakery in town for a mere couple of baguettes and a small mbeess every single day often for long hours... A small child in pink school dress with all sorts of pen and chalk marks surrounded by these tall impatient men waiting for bread...

They all looked like my father, but unlike them, my father could not queue, and I understood that...

My bread, now in my hands, smelled fresh and was steaming hot like every time...too hot that it would burn my yet small fingers... It was only then that I realized that I forgot my bag for bread and all at home were too busy... too mindless to remind me of my bag... After all, waiting for bread was my task alone...

Should I just get rid of my bread in order to save my fingers? No way for this was said to be among the worst of human sins. Bread is a holy bless from heavens; this is what adults kept repeating in our town. Whoever mishandles bread ends up exiled in the moon or disfigured into a monster from fairy tales. At that time, I did not think that I would love to dwell in the moon...

One of the tall impatient men in the queue would approach me:

– ‘Child!’, he would first address me...

The man releases me of my burdening bread, his enormous hands holding together my baguettes and mbessess as if it were not steaming hot. He puts my bread in his own woven grey bag and hands it back to me with a faint, rather reproaching, smile...Was that really the shadow of smile?

Me, embarrassed more than grateful, I would say:

– ‘Thank you, Sir...Uncle Man... Thank you...I am sorry...But what about you?’

The man ignores me...Wordless, he would head back to his place in the queue. Men in my childhood town, unlike women, were meant to be stern and wordless. Men, and unlike women, were also meant to queue for bread...and unlike me, men in our town were meant not to get their fingers burnt...





# Araz Khdir

*Seeking sanctuary or asylum is not an easy option. Obviously, it's a kind of force, escaping and fleeing from your country of origin then finally settling down in another country. There are so many reasons behind it: political, social, religion and economic.*

The journey from your **own country** to the second country is full of catastrophic disasters due to experiencing incursion, family separation, killing, human trafficking, and dying due to a lack of food or water. In order to arrive at a safe shelter (another country), we have to pass through several countries dependent on brutal agents (smugglers), never knowing your final destination. However, staying in jungles and hiding in lorries, and then the last step, being under the control of the agents, arriving at the pre-determined area. On arrival in the UK, we found numerous examples of love, compassion, sympathy, embracement, hospitality and welcoming, which is hugely appreciated. On the other hand, we are facing racist views, harsh political rhetoric and stereotyped ideas about migrants. For instance, seeing us as beggars and thieves, looting this country. Instead of this, let us join and make a positive contribution with you all, in all aspects of life, such as: engaging and integrating with your culture, language, work and academic institutions.

Furthermore, I am a migrant and qualified social worker. I have brought my skills, experience, and qualifications offering my best to this country beside all of you indiscriminately. The three years waiting for my asylum appeal to be heard have been spent volunteering with several charities in different ways, for instance: interpreting.

I'll be taking away new ways of working, exploring new skills and experience, dealing with diversity, independence, memories which thrill me with kindness and tolerance from people, charities, churches and loving animals. In summary, living away from your family, relatives and friends is not easy and simply can't be explained. It takes so much effort and we face so many challenges, and some of us can't cope facing different types of mental, then physical issues. I hope everyone can at least understand, how frustrating it is, managing to get used to a new culture, language and lifestyle.



# Dionysia Bouzioti

## Welcome (Home?)

My memory is reluctant to shed a light on the words I put together for Leo Burtin's show on the two bready evenings of the 24th and 25th October 2019. I will greet and leave you with a prose instead, written almost a year ago in the first lockdown Easter. I was a foreigner in a ghost city isolated from any familiar human trace and unable to go back. From those evenings *with bread*, I can only recollect a few analogies that portray my fermentation during life's attempt to ruin my romance.

*This town is a train station or even, a harbour. People come and go with their suitcases, they never stay. Relationships are wasted in an ephemeral temporality just like a theatrical performance. That's beautiful and sad. Years of concentrated 'Hi!'s and 'Goodbye!'s. Leeds is the lover whom I want to get married to, but he wants to remain a casual.*

Indeed, life is a journey. It is a performance, a love affair and for some a quest to finding our own home. Once you cross the borders of your birthplace you suspend; you are torn and free.

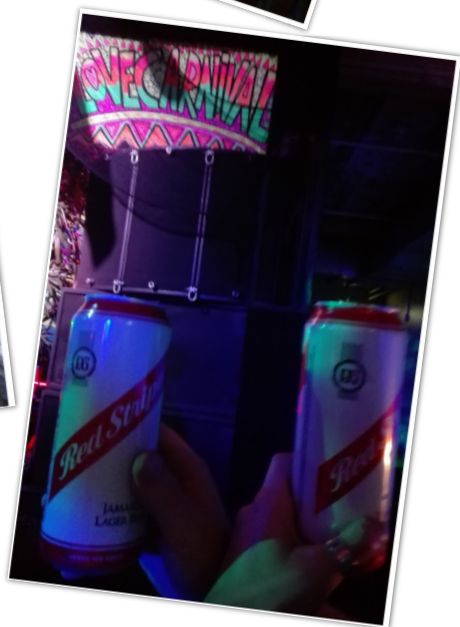
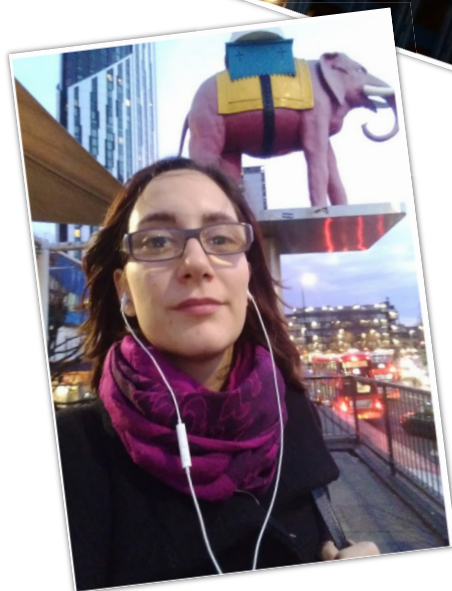
## Traces of Salt

*I miss you  
Sometimes I blame it to the distance  
A distance most craved in my young imagination  
Repelled by the grey colour of your skin  
The dryness of your hair  
still waving  
in a subtle memory of olive's scent  
The lockdown.  
It's watering the weak lips of desire  
The Prohibition  
sticks a sting in nostalgia's bee  
incessantly tracing quantum orbits around my body  
I am the nucleus of a forgotten individuality  
Outside the window it is snowing white almond petals or something similar  
They dance unorthodoxly in an Orthodox sunshine  
Sometimes, I cry secretly  
from myself  
in the reflections of your memory  
I saw your concrete body dressed up in the lights of the night  
and in the silent entropy of my daemons  
my knees bent  
Like my sister's baby  
as it strives to stand on his illiterate feet  
holding her thumbs  
Almost.  
A minute in its wholeness.  
A Caryatid, my sister,  
wavy hair  
and marble -makes her essence-  
withstanding  
time, eras and people,  
Pain.*

*I miss you  
And I change  
My chest petrifies inwardly  
Keeping another sprout in its soft heart  
What we are living now is nothing.  
Only a pause.  
A silence heard by your skin, your immaterial bones and heavy mind  
She screams,  
for you never sat and listened  
What we are living now is not.  
A thing.  
Others lived through worse.  
Others. Still. Live  
Worse  
Eyes with pupils melting while anchored in rusty wires  
Hands nourishing rust and mud with tears that have lost their salt  
Emaciated  
Like bread that dries out in an unfriendly sun of another Land  
Extinguished Passions  
Above those clouds,  
the sky is always blue and waiting  
I miss you  
Umbilical ghosts  
Traces of a barefoot father uniting two lands  
A mother's mother wrapped up in a carpet in '22  
secretly thrown in a Turkish hold*

*The bee is tightly trapped among my fingers  
Its buzz exhausts me  
My tears  
Rare  
Saving the sea salt you gave me at birth*





# Benedetta d'Ettorre

When I was a child, I moved around my home country quite a bit, so my accent does not really match expectations in my native language. I belong here and I have assimilated the culture, I even think in English, but I do not want to make an effort to change my accent; I became similar but I remain different. That's ok. Actually, it could not be better. Since I present this mix of languages and disperse sense of belonging, I came up in English with – what I think is – a clever way to answer the question “where are you from?”: I was born in Rome, I was raised in Milan, I grew up in London. There is a lot more, but I can tell you more about me when we're going meet somewhere in the world.







# Ashish Kumar Sharma

The human race has been moving, settling, unsettling and moving again from one place to another for years. Wars, conflicts, money, disasters, performances are some of the reasons which make humans move and migrate. Nonetheless, Bread is what matters at the beginning, middle and end of every good or bad story. We all need to move our bodies to get that piece of bread for us which is essential for living.

Well, I moved because of theatre or I would say theatre moved me so much that I decided to travel for more than 4000 miles to a different culture altogether to learn and explore my creative design skills. Theatre is my Bread and Butter which brought me to Leeds. I was fascinated by one of my previous dissertation supervisors' (who is a University of Leeds alumnus) creative work in the field of performance and that's how I got to choose the same place to study. Within 20 days of my arrival, an invitation to be a part of a performance in which Bread played the protagonist got me to the performance space of *with bread*.

This Bread was not a stranger to me. It was, in fact, the same round bread which I had been eating and making it in that way for a long time now. We call it *Roti* or *Chapati* in India. Other than my experience of making that round bread I brought a small local Indian perfume bottle and my socio-cultural past with me to Leeds and to the performance space which helped my guests in performance to make a nice dough out of flour. I brought some strangers with me to the performance space who were my guests on my table to share thoughts, emotions, vibes and most importantly the 'Bread'. This time the performance and the Bread became the mediator which made all of us get settled for some time and then we moved again.

The performance ended with a nice supper which all of us had together. I took away some leftover breads with me and a ring which one of my classmates gave to me when she was preparing dough for the bread. The usual Uni life got started again before the pandemic hit the world. It made humans not to move unnecessarily. Even in such a circumstance, people had to move

for some or the other reasons and so did I. I came back to where it all started from. I took away some sweet and sour memories of Leeds, cards (given by my friends on Christmas), the ring which I had with me since the performance and a large Hearth Bread (a friend of mine gave it to me to have it during my journey from Leeds station to London airport so that I won't die starving). Didn't I tell you; it is all about Bread.

# Leentje Van de Cruys

The deadline to write this chapter has passed now. And I've missed it. On purpose.

It was on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, which was a few days too early for me. I wanted to write these words today – the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, precisely 15 years after my arrival here.

On this day 15 years ago, my boyfriend drove me all the way from Belgium to England in a campervan, together with a new-born baby, a big blue fluffy hippo and my vast collection of shoes. Only the essentials – leaving all the rest behind.

We'd only just met, but somehow it felt like the right thing to do (oh yes, and we'd had a child together, that too).

We arrived very early in the morning at my boyfriend's flat. I'd visited him there once when it was his 30th birthday. We carried the baby upstairs, and the bags of shoes, and had a coffee. Then my boyfriend handed me two keys – one to the flat and one to the front door of the building, in case I wanted to go out and explore the town. I'll be back around six, he said. Then he went to work.

Some days I wake up thinking – how on earth did I end up here, playing this part in someone else's life?

Fifteen years later, I am still here, with more babies and less shoes. I'm fine with that.

I've been busy here – I've lived in 6 different houses in 2 different cities, cleaned, tidied, washed, ironed, cooked, sat on benches in parks, talking, stood in silence in playgrounds, pushed swings, sang songs, read stories, ran for miles, danced for hours, taught dozens of students in 3 different universities, worked with some of my favourite UK based theatre companies,

made my own shows, dressed numerous customers in Manchester's finest clothes shop, wrote book chapters and monologues and contracts and receipts and shopping- and to do lists and instructions for babysitters and notes for the postman and the window cleaner and birthday cards and thank you notes and letters to Belgium that said –

How are you?  
When will I see you again?  
Will I see you again?  
I miss you

I've missed hundreds of friends back home, but I also made a thousand new ones – imagine if I hadn't come here, I often think, and then list in my head the names of all the people I would never have met. Crazy stuff.

When I first lived here my English wasn't very good.

When I met new people, their first question would always be – where are you from?

And I'd say – I'm from Belgium.

Then they would ask – why are you here?

And I'd say – for sex. I didn't mean it like that. What I meant was – because of sex.

As in: I had sex, then I got pregnant, the father is English, now I'm here.

Crazy stuff.

I came here because of love. And by accident. And I stayed.

And today we decided to leave. Soon. I'll miss it here.

# Ali Matthews

I got here on a plane from Boston Logan airport to London Heathrow. I got here on a winding train to West Wales, hopelessly naïve, carrying two suitcases. I got here on a boat from Dublin port, clutching the same suitcases, over and over again. I got here on a Ryanair flight, and I got here on my rusty 1980s bicycle. I got here on foot, slowly, looking at the daffodils as they sing through the soil. I am so happy to be here, to share a table with you, to offer you what's mine and welcome what's yours.

I brought a song with me. My grandparents taught me a lot about opening your home and arms to people from across the world, about generosity, about patience and kindness and the power of a shared meal. They are Christian, but not in a particularly bible-thumping way – more in a way that prioritises social action and quiet compassion. Though I am personally not Christian, I often think back to sitting around the long dinner table in their lakeside summer cabin in rural New Hampshire, surrounded by pine trees and a dirt road and the sound of boats puttering on the water. I think of that table as brimming with arguments and mirth, with boiled lobsters and hot bread rolls, with blueberry buckle (a Southern specialty from my Virginia-born grandmother) and freshly shucked corn. Tables are not always one thing – they are stubbornly pluralistic. They can hold the weight of everything from strife to celebration.

Every night at dinner, without fail, we sang this song before eating. Now that my grandparents no longer come to the summer house, I realize that the song stays with *them* wherever they go, meal to meal, table to table, but as a child I thought of the table, the meal, the house and the song as one thing, really. The song is in that table.

We're going to change a few lyrics tonight to make the song more secular and inclusive.

Evening is here, the board is spread  
Thanks be to God [or whatever it is]  
That gives us bread.

Amen [And I thought instead, together, we could sing 'Oooven']

Thanks for singing that with me. From our time together *with bread*, I take away renewed pleasure in shared fellowship. I take away the satisfaction of brushing off someone else's crumbs from the table into my hand, of clearing their plate. I have welcomed them into my home, and they have welcomed me into theirs, both of us, on this transient and beautiful table-island.

# Dr Shahireh Sharif

I am an orange dot

*Spring:*

*Blossoms set in chain*

*Rows of wounded men in pain*

*Hate is all they gain*

*Summer:*

*Feverishly hot*

*Eyes speak for lips a lot*

*Corpses left to rot*

*Autumn:*

*Conkers in a fight*

*Sky rains deadly gifts at night*

*Hope's rationed for sight*

*Winter:*

*Trees in cold sleep*

*Kids' voices already deep*

*Nightmare's theirs to keep*

I started life as a human. Back then I believed that the missing fifth season will eventually catch up and with its arrival, life would no longer be a burden. But the smell of oil, the twinkle of diamond, the prospect of owning someone else's underground wealth provokes the normally subdued beastly nature of humans. When the beast is aroused, it needs to be feed. Its food: oppression, suppression and repression.

This is how tangled red and white sirens replace the chirping of birds and life reduces to a collection of rushing in and dragging yourself out of underground shelters only to deal with the guilt. The guilt of not being fast enough, not being strong enough to help everyone unable to walk themselves to the shelter on time. But advances in science and technology have helped.



You see, shelters no longer provide immunity against more advanced missiles or chemical weapons. Yippee! No need to rush out to shelters anymore. This is good news for us, no?

Where were we? ... Yes, when the beast is awakened!

When the beast awakes words carry blades that rip open the inner layers of your throat and saturates your memory with the taste of blood. When the beast awakes the horizon is no longer a line but a wall that is built as high as the sky and too close. When the beast awakes even vultures are too scared to fly over the wretched bodies dangling from the hanging ropes. When the beast awakes, the only time you are considered as human is next to traffickers. When the beast awakes you must run.

RUN! Run to the end of the road and beyond. Run to the ocean. There are still unclaimed spaces there. Unclaimed because not that many people remember to tell you to go back where you come from.

There is a greater chance of survival in deep blue. Sure, there is a chance that it all ends in water, too. But a new life is also a possibility even where your unauthorized and unregulated heart beats are not tolerated, after all these are desperate times. The pandemic of political insanity strips every one of their most basic human rights, freedom, democracy and love. Demanding human rights is a punishable crime. In some places it is punished by torture and death and in more civilized places by acts such as suspending the parliament!

Wondering on the surface of the cold, heavy, deep blue is scary, but it is also liberating following a lifetime of forced fed lies, forced to dress in a particular way, forced to think uniformly and come to the same and only permitted conclusion. Your loved ones and belongings are left behind. You feel venerable yet light. You close your eyes and remember when your father pretended to be a horse and let you ride on his back, when your mother rocked you in her arms; now in their absent the ocean takes over.

As a child I sat in many history lessons, but I now chose to ignore the most important lesson that history can teach: It is easier to lie down and die than to live ... I might be too greedy I am not sure; you tell me. Is failing to let go of life greed? Lying down and dying doesn't work, I have tried.

Oh look! Dolphins swimming next to our boat. Everyone says 'THERE!' in their own language and points. Despite not understanding each other's words, we all look in that direction and even surprise ourselves by realising that we still are carrying our smile. Yes, we are still hanging to our smiles and hopes and despite having nothing we still can sincerely share our moment of joy.

No, I couldn't just give up and die. I chose the path that many had taken before, not all made it, and for those who have made it although the pain eventually goes away, its marks remain visible in their nightmare.

The ocean is a way out. Maybe because death in water usually remains unaccounted and unannounced, but there are lots of lifeless bodies hanging on to their torn orange life vests even long after life has been brutally rubbed away from them,

Small orange dots on the surface of the vast blue ocean are orange pixels that long after the sun draws back its rays, courage shrinks and willpower dampens they still shine. As long as the ownership of human suffering rests with no one, more and more clusters of orange dots cover the surface of this blue planet. Maybe that is what Hafez saw, as about 700 years ago he wrote:

بیا تا گل برافشانیم و می در ساغر اندازیم  
فلک را سقف بشکافیم و طرحی نو در اندازیم

Let's sprinkle flowers and pour wine in goblets  
Let's tear up the heavenly sky and make a new destiny

It is cold and scary on the surface of cold blue. This tailor-made faith that politicians are mass producing is too tight, it cuts the blood supplies and burns but won't keep you warm. I won't be wearing it any more. Somewhere, someday this ocean will join to a land. Then I can stand tall, I can stand proud, and I can change my destiny.

I started life as a human and became an orange dot only to remain human.



# Michael Norton

## How did I get here?

*The sound for 'with bread' should feel like it is coming from everywhere and nowhere, much like the experience of migration.<sup>†</sup>*

I started working with Leo in 2018, touring Midnight Soup and developing *with bread*. I was around for most of the development, working to manage a show which, at first glance, was a simple technical production.

During the production I kept asking myself 'how did I get here?'. I was an American performer, freshly in London via Berlin, who had never run tech outside of a few technician-by-default positions and the odd heated dispute about fog machines and colour gels with German technicians. I didn't know Leo very well and we worked mostly in The North, far from my home in London.

When I left Home in America, I felt disoriented and disillusioned. It was only in leaving that I could see there was a force, a kind of current, that most Americans think is The Truth about how to live a life, what to care about, what to ignore. And I started noticing that same current in other people who hadn't moved from one place to another.

Migration is a way of being more human. It is the grief as we let go of one identity and assemble another in a new place.

So, suddenly, I was the tech guy. And I was great with that.

## What have you brought with you?

*The difficulty for this piece is that it will be presented in a multitude of spaces that will not be able to accomplish all of the design elements. This is acknowledged with the fact that the design appears very simple and can be shifted in slight ways to accommodate the presentation space. To this end there is an ideal setting for the lighting but also an acknowledgement that it all might not be possible.*

---

<sup>†</sup> All italics are from Michael's technical notes for *with bread*.

I brought my migrant's energy to a project. I have worked on projects with very little, with no community, with no network of support, with no audience, no understanding of where to get supplies, and with no space. But usually, at least in the beginning, I had lots of time.

Being time rich allows me to see, investigate and dream. And sometimes, it was only through time that I realised I could let perfection go. Leo often said, 'I don't really care about how it is lit,' but I did.

Eventually, I learned to listen. The show's beauty is in its flexibility, like a good dough, and that means sometimes, the lights aren't that important.

### **What are you taking away?**

*The lighting concept for With Bread is that of celebration, subtlety and precision. The piece itself deals with the personal and the academic in a very lively setting. There is no distinction between the performance area and the audience area.*

Today I'm locked down at home during a pandemic and making and performing any show is slipping into abstract memory, like an old favourite recipe long forgotten. It's been over a year since I've worked on a show. Today, I take away that this show existed, that at one time there was 'no distinction between the performance area and the audience area' and that it's possible to just gather people, generate ideas, and make things. So many areas are distinct these days: barricaded cues at the supermarket, distance markers on sidewalks, my home, my 2-metre circle of safety. I'm taking away that 'no distinction' was more radical than any of us knew.

*The audience lighting/house lighting should always be low enough that the space surrounding the performance area disappears.*

# Old Crumbs

**Kat** History spends most of its time re-writing itself. Long after Jack Harlan had suggested that our ancestors had begun to settle so that they may harvest grains from which to craft a reliable food source, just a few months ago, in fact, what we know of the history of bread was written once over.

In the Black Desert of Northeast Jordan, last July, a group of archaeologists found tiny charred breadcrumbs. They weren't so different to what you can find at the bottom of your toaster only they are about 14,000 years old.



**Leo** What this tells us, is that we began to make flatbreads long before what we know as the establishment of agriculture. Grinding and baking came long before farming, owning, settling. We had bread, but we travelled with our bread.

The bread we have been making is a fast bread. It is a bread that travels well and that doesn't need all that much of your time or effort.

You can call it pain azyme, chapati, or tortilla depending on your choice of flour, liquid and fat... This simple bread also stands as the foundation of the culture we share here... It was also the first bread I ever made myself, from start to finish, under my grandmother's watchful eye.

**Kat** I remember years ago, not that many though, it must have been 2011 or 2012 calling my great grandma, who passed away last year at the age of 97 to ask her for her recipe of Easter Bread. Kunka was her name, but we used to call her Mametu, which vaguely translates as older mother, or the mother of the extended family.

Easter Bread in Bulgaria is a sweet dough, and you can put jam inside it, or some raisins or simply make a nice crispy top with crushed walnuts on it.

So, anyway, I called Mametu and she gave me her recipe. I followed it strictly, down to the detail and half way through me kneading this crazy amount of flour she had told me to use, I realized that actually, she was making Kuzunac – Easter bread – for the whole street and I was making Easter Bread for me and my partner. Needless to say I ended up making new friends along my street by trying to desperately distribute this insane amount of delicious Easter Bread I had made.

# Pain Azyme

Leo      There is one story that many of you know. Whether or not you believe this story to be true does not matter.

It is a great story, the foundation of a common culture in a large part of the world. This story features a group of people, not unlike us, in many ways.

We might call them a people – a people who shared a land, a language and traditions.

Recipes, also, until the day that their land, their beloved home ceased to provide them with what they needed. Nothing would grow anymore. No cereal, no flour, no bread...

They had heard of the abundance in a neighbouring land; a fertile promise.

They began travelling until indeed, they found an abundance of food.

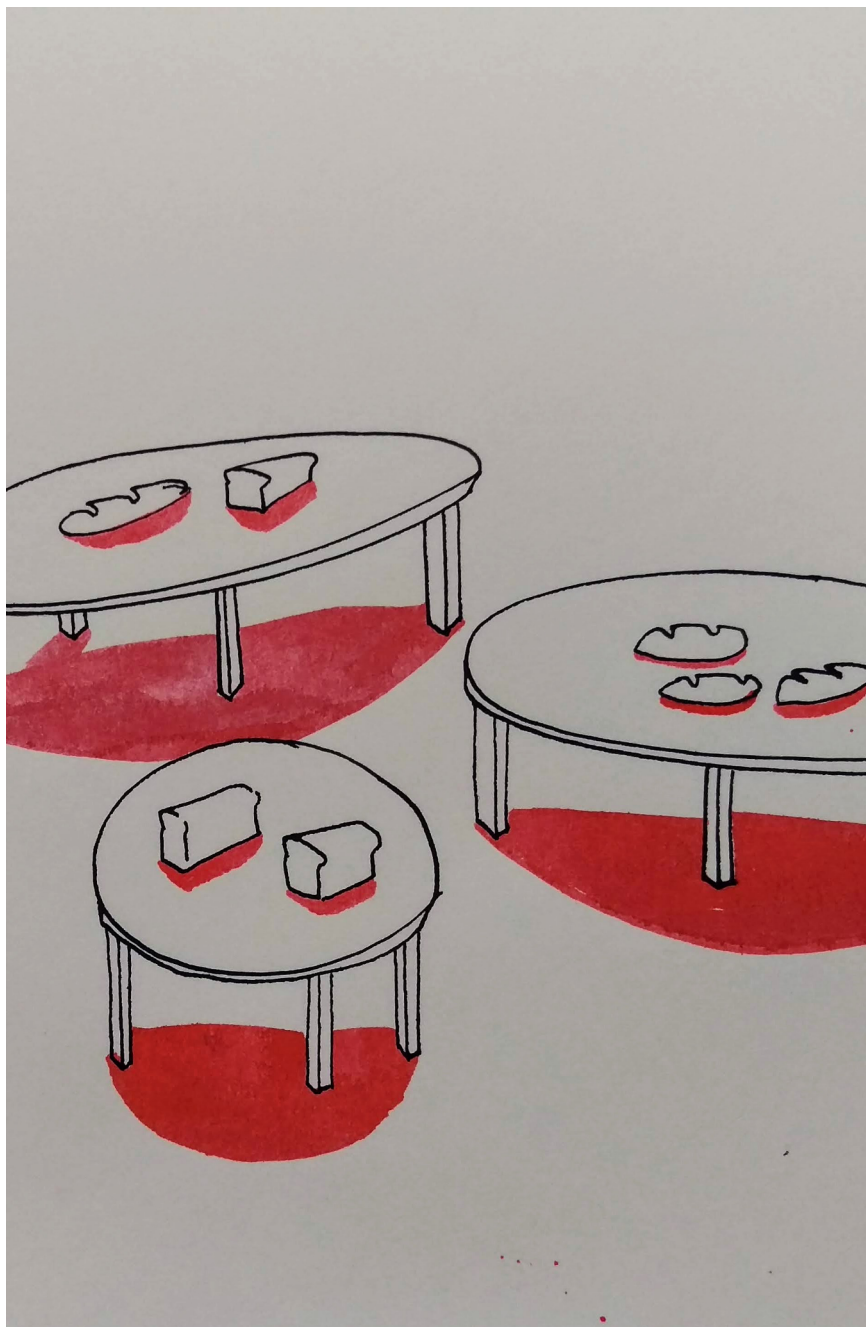
Its price, however, was their freedom and for centuries they lived as slaves and on little more than bread and water.

For them, just like for us. Each of us whose voices you hear, their journeys were propelled by promise... by the hope to find a place to settle, to rest, with others, alike.

The bread of exile was bitter and so they made their own.

Together they folded the water into the flour, a sprinkling of salt and the oil from sun ripened olives... This time, their bread did not have the proper time to rise before they had to begin walking again.





This story continues for centuries.

For centuries to come, we up and go, we walk and go.

For centuries the accidents of life make our daily bread rise or fall...

### Recipe for Pain Azyme, reconstructed

#### Ingredients

½ cup or 70 grams plain flour  
1 pinch of salt  
Herbs and spices, to taste  
50 ml. approx. water  
A drizzle of olive oil, to taste

#### Method

Mix together the flour, salt and spices in a bowl.

Create a well in the middle of the bowl and pour the water.

Mix the flour and water until it comes together as a dough.

Add a drizzle of olive oil, if desired and knead lightly.

Once the dough comes away from the sides of the ball and is soft and springy to the touch, let it rest for a few minutes.

Divide the dough into 2-3 equal balls and roll them out on a floured surface using a rolling pin into thin disks.

Cook in a frying pan over a high heat. You will know to flip your pain azyme when bubbles start to form on one side and a nice lightly golden colour is visible on the other.



# Bread & Circuses

Leo      We are almost back, back to here and now.

There is one more journey for us to take, one more story for us to tell. Let us call it Bread & Circuses. In part this story is about chaos theory, about the butterfly effect. About how a small change can snowball into having grave consequences. The change in question is nothing small, however.

Kat      We are in the northeast. The northeast much, much further east than here. Welcome to China



Leo      It is Autumn, and you can already feel the chill that announces the turn to a harsh Winter will come soon.

You are surrounded by dry, barren land.

The harvest should have begun, there should be tall grass all around you. You should be able to run your fingers through the field, and collect the seeds which will feed you, your family and countless others through the winter months.

You should be hearing the hubbub of machinery getting closer as production begins, and this grain is sorted, weighed and packed to be sent away. Because you live in a land of abundance, you have plenty, plenty enough to send some of your harvest away.

Or you would but it is 2010 and you are experiencing the worst drought in your lifetime... We could stay right here in China, and I could tell you this story ends less than a year later, with artificial clouds and then natural floods. I could tell you that with time, strong will and resilience, you and your family recover. That things slowly go back to normal.

If I did, I wouldn't be lying. I would only be telling you one side of the story.

**Kat** Because you see, miles away from here, in North Africa, we rely on your grain for sustenance, too. Welcome to Egypt.



Leo        Here, the bread we make is called *aish*. Here *aish* also means life.

This is the fertile crescent, this is the cradle of agriculture, this is the birthplace of bread.

As the price of wheat rises faster than dough ever could, so does the heat of social and political tension. This is the eve of what we will come to know as the Arab Spring.

This is a story of now, a story that barely feels like History... and yet...

Take it away Alik.

*Alik, as an Ancient Roman*

“Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses.”

Leo        These words were written in 140 BC, and they resonate today louder than any bell could.



# Now

**Leo** So here we are. Here we all are. On [date], in [location].

Together we have travelled from my native France, to Kat's motherland of Bulgaria, to Alik's fatherland of Greece, to Turkey, to Egypt, to China and to Egypt again and now we find ourselves in [location], among strangers and among friends.

Together, we've made and will share the bread of exile, the bread of travellers, the fast-paced bread you can take with you wherever you go.

*In the following section, each performer takes a moment to tell the audience what they will do next, where they might go, or what they might be looking forward to. The lines below change with every performance.*

**Alik** In a little while, this performance will end. I will...

**Kat** Next, I will...

**Leo** I will be going to...

**Guest Performers ...**

**Leo** When this performance began, we had some flour, some water. A few other ingredients. A few things to say.

In the time we spent together, there was a transformation... from grain, to flour, to food. From next to nothing, we are now *with bread*.

Com panis.  
Companions.

This kind of transformation calls for celebration.





## After words

As I pronounce the word *celebration*, the very last word in the formal part of the show, music begins to play: The joyful trumpets of *Algo está pasando* by La Pegatina and Rozalén. Soon we hear the chorus:

*Algo está pasando en mi interior y no sé  
Qué yo! se va y qué yo! se queda  
Hago de trizas corazón y en cada rincón  
Aprendo a ser como quiera*

As the music resonates, coming from every corner of the theatre, Louise and Katherina carry to the back of the stage two gigantic pots of food. One always filled to the brim with Mairi's chickpea casserole, the other with a dish made with local and seasonal produce. Eating seasons and geographies as we tour.

To me, this is when the show really starts. I sometimes think about this moment as Act II, or as another show starting.

This show sees us lay the tables with a mismatching set of bowl and cutlery as we take turn sharing out the food we had prepared earlier and as people begin to eat together.

Sometimes, this eating happens in silence. Sometimes, we all excitedly talk over each other. Almost every time, I regret not choosing to play another song by La Pegatina.

*No som d'aquí, no volem anar a dormir  
Ens ha atrapat la màgia del camí*

I'll break my own rule just this once to offer you a translation of this refrain.

*We're not from here, we don't want to go to sleep  
We've been caught by the magic of the road*



# Recipes

Documenting live performance is always a challenge, and although I love discovering shows inside of books, and love making books about shows, they can sometimes feel a little bit trapped.

The words might seem a little bit too fixed, a little bit too written. In some ways, this book is a performance of *with bread* in its own right. One flavoured by your thoughts and interpretations, dear reader. I wonder what my voice might sound like in your head.

If this book is a performance of *with bread*, then it ought to end with spending time sharing food with others.

In the pages that follow, we have provided recipes for dishes we cooked for the audience in the show, as well as some bread recipes which we mentioned in the performance.

I hope that you will enjoy trying them. As you taste each of these dishes, you will notice the stories that have seasoned them...

I have not been told the secret ingredients for every recipe provided here, but I suspect that they all share one.

Bon appétit!

# Mairi's Chickpea Casserole

A chickpea dish from Sifnos by way of Boston

By Cali Doxiadis (Alikì's mother)

Whenever people compare cooking to love, my mind is drawn to the suburbs of Boston and to the warm, sun-filled embrace of Mairi's kitchen. No Greek student can have attended any of the city's multiple universities without being nourished by her hospitality and the apparently endless supply of wonderful Greek meals. I hesitate to call it a culinary experience, because in the end, the food was only the means; no matter how delicious it was, what lingers in the mind is the warmth and abundance of love.

Mairi is one of those rare women who really did manage it all: She raised four children, all grown into wonderful adults, she reached the top of her profession, teaching at a prestigious university, training dedicated teachers in Greece and the United States, she has had a long, challenging, and happy marriage with my cousin Dimitris, a prominent academic and a charming if difficult man.

Her house is always open to everyone, not only at the unforgettable Greek Carnival costume parties, but weekends and every day. It's always a hub of conversation and laughter, music and dance, always with something simmering on the stovetop or roasting in the oven, filling the house with its fragrance. And there she is, talking to you about Garcia Marquez and the achievements of her grandchildren, and the latest sale at Filene's as she hand-folds three hundred *dolmades*.

From her beloved Sifnos, the island where she and her family have spent their holidays for the past fifty summers, she brings back and hands out clay cooking pots and traditional recipes. This Sifnos chickpea dish which I've been making for years and my friends love so much is one I've never tasted on Sifnos... only in Boston.

## Ingredients

1 lb dry chickpeas  
3–4 tbsp Bicarbonate of Soda  
5–6 large onions, thinly sliced (it sounds like too many, but it's just right)  
1 cup olive oil  
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste.

## Method

Soak the chickpeas overnight in 2 quarts of water in which the soda has been dissolved. Choose a deep bowl as the chickpeas will double in volume. Four hours before serving, preheat the oven to 200°C/390°F. Rinse the chickpeas thoroughly in plenty of running water, drain and put them in a lidded casserole dish, preferably ceramic. Stir in salt and pepper to taste. Add enough water that the chickpeas are 2–3 cm below the surface.

Spread the sliced onions on top, they should form a layer 4–5 cm deep. Add the olive oil. It should cover the onions completely. Cover with the lid and cook for 15 minutes at 200°C, then lower the temperature to 160°C/320°F. In about 2 and a half hours, lift the lid to see what's going on. Every oven has its own peculiarities, so it's a good idea to check.

Most of the liquid should be gone and the surface beginning to brown. If there is still a lot of water, raise the temperature and finish cooking at 175°C/345°F. If the water has all evaporated, add half a cup of boiling water. Cook for another hour. It is done when the onions form a caramelized crust and there is only a bit of liquid left. Goes well with a sharp, acidic salad, such as cabbage and carrot, on the same plate.

Also highly suitable for a slow cooker or cast iron stove.

# Mint & Pea Stew

## Ingredients

- 1–2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 2 large cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 800 grams green peas (podded or frozen)
- 100 ml water (or stock)
- 30 grams fresh mint leaves, finely chopped
- 30 grams curly leaf parsley, finely chopped
- Juice of half a lemon
- Salt and pepper, to taste

## Method

Soften the sliced onion in the olive oil, in a large pot on medium heat. Take care they do not take too much colour.

Meanwhile finely chop the mint and parsley. Add the garlic to the pot and cook for a minute or two.

Once the onion is translucent, add the peas and season. Pour in 100 ml of water and lower the heat to simmer for about 5 mins, or until the peas are cooked through but retain some bite.

Off the heat, stir through the freshly chopped herbs. Squeeze in the lemon juice and adjust the seasoning.

This is best served immediately and will feed 4–6 people as a generous side.

# Ladislav's Mushroom Paprikash

## Ingredients

200g oyster mushrooms  
1 medium onion, diced  
Salt and black pepper, to taste  
2–3 tbsp paprika  
1 medium potato, peeled and diced  
Water, to cover

## Method

Soften the diced onion in a little olive oil, on a medium heat. Roughly chop the mushrooms into bite sized pieces.

Once they are translucent, season cracked black pepper.

Add the paprika and stir to coat. Do not overcook the paprika or it will risk becoming bitter.

Quickly add the mushrooms and stir to coat with a generous pinch of salt.

As the mushrooms begin to soften, add enough water to cover.

Add the peeled and diced potato and simmer on a low heat until the potato has softened.

Serve with sourdough bread and sour cream, to taste.



# Mametu's Kozunak

## Ingredients

1 kg flour  
1 cube of live yeast  
6 eggs  
250 grams of sugar  
300 ml milk  
1 lemon and its zest  
Pinch of salt  
Half a mug of oil  
125 grams of butter

## Method

All the ingredients must be room temperature or lukewarm.

Mix the yeast with the milk (the milk must be lukewarm) a little bit of flour and sugar.

Mix the eggs with the sugar, lemon zest and lemon juice. Add the oil slowly, bit by bit.

After you mix the ingredients, make a dough that feels nice on the hands, knead the dough and throw the dough 100 times on the table.

Leave to rest until it rises, then split the dough in two and make two long plaits.

Leave one egg yolk to brush the kozunak before you bake it. Sprinkle with sugar and walnut chunks.

Bake for the first 10 mins at 190 degrees, then the rest of time about 20 mins at 170 degrees.

# Jane's Ugali

## Ingredients

4 cups water  
2–3 cups maize flour

## Method

Bring the water to a boil in a saucepan and gradually sprinkle the maize flour, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon.

After two and half cups of maize flour, the mix will thicken to the consistency of mashed potatoes.

Continue stirring for 3 minutes

Cover and lower the heat. Let the ugali simmer for 4–5 minutes.



# Acknowledgements

*with bread* is a project which had a slow and sometimes complicated gestation period. It is also a project which was born out of both friendship and community. A great many people contributed to making it possible in a myriad of different ways and for this I am ever so grateful.

Let me begin by thanking Rajni Shah – a dear friend and mentor who is a constant source inspiration, lighting the way ahead and challenging me and countless others to think, be and do in radical ways. By extension, I would like to thank the community of people who were involved in the making of Rajni Shah Projects' *Glorious*. Without *Glorious*, I couldn't have even imagined *with bread* to be possible.

Thank you to Alice Booth, to whom I owe my involvement with *Glorious* and who, alongside colleagues at Lancaster Arts was one of the first people to provide me with the time, space and resources necessary to build the show. From the Lancaster Arts team, particular gratitude is owed to Alix Medlyn-Davies, Phil Dunn and Liz Duggan.

Thank you to my PhD research supervisors, Jenny Lawson, Anna Fenemore and Joslin McKinney. Your mentorship, insights and the rigour you bring to our exchanges are beyond compare. To my friends and colleagues at the School of Performance of Cultural Industries, University of Leeds – thank you for being the community which made this work possible. Of course, I owe a debt of gratitude to the School for its generous funding of the research work which underpins this project.

This project would also not have been possible without investment from Arts Council England, fundraising support from Julie Brown and initial commissioning support from both Lancaster Arts and Arts City. Thank you to the University of Salford and New Adelphi Theatre for enabling an early work in progress sharing of the piece in partnership with the Lowry. Ta, too to my 18–19 Performance Project students, who were game for experimenting with the ideas the show is built on.

Thank you to Annabel Turpin, Daniel Mitchelson and the team at ARC, Stockton Arts Centre where we made the show in what felt like our home away from home. Thank you to Charlotte Mountford, Tom Barnes and the team at Lyth Arts Centre: you provided an exceptional environment to hide away and finish this script and hospitality of a rare quality.

Thank you to the team of collaborators who worked with me to make this project happen: Aliko, Kat, Louise, Michael, Ali, Alister, Adam: we're family now, whether you like it or not. Thank you to our guest-hosts: Jane, Manel, Araz, Ashish, Denny, Benny, Ali, Leentje, Shahireh. Thank you to those guest-hosts who were here before this show even had a name: Yvonne, Moujan, Maja. Thank you to Garry and Elvis for the gorgeous documentation of the project.

Last, and by no means least, the most heartfelt of thanks to Argenis – cada día, descubro el poder de compartir una mesa de una nueva manera, gracias a ti.

# References

*with bread* is a performance as well as the book you are holding now. *with bread* is also a Practice as Research project which forms part of a PhD thesis which I am currently developing at the University of Leeds, under the supervision of Dr Jenny Lawson, Dr Joslin McKinney and Dr Anna Fenemore. As such, a wide range of sources have inspired and guided the development of the piece in indirect ways.

As you will have noticed, the text you have just read takes a poetic approach to the recounting of historical events related to bread. Below, you will find a list of sources which have directly influenced the writing of *with bread* or which are cited within the performance text. Additionally, these sources make for excellent starting points should you wish to delve further into the rich and delicious history of bread.

Cherfas, J. 2018. Our Daily Bread (multiple episodes). *Eat this Podcast* [Podcast]. Available from: <https://www.eatthispodcast.com/bread/>

Davis, N. 2018. Archaeologists find earliest evidence of bread. *The Guardian*. [Online] 16 July. Available from: [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com).

Giacoman, C., 2016. The dimensions and role of commensality: A theoretical model drawn from the significance of communal eating among adults in Santiago, Chile. *Appetite*, **107**, pp.460–470.

Juvenal, 2004. *The Sixteen Satires*. London: Penguin Classics.

Harlan, J.R., 1967. A wild wheat harvest in Turkey. *Archaeology*, **20**(3), pp.197–201.

Zurayk, R. 2011. Use your loaf: why food prices were crucial in the Arab spring. *The Observer*. [Online] 17 July. Available from: [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com).



**ARC**  
Stockton Arts Centre

**LAC**  
LYTH ARTS CENTRE

**Lancaster  
Arts**



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**