

IATL PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL BURSARY FINAL REPORT

Sentient/Spitting at Kondenz Festival 2014 (Belgrade, Serbia)

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Copy & Paste link into browser to view project video documentation:

<http://youtu.be/C5IA6hzSEmk>

See Appendix A for a sample participant response, Appendix B for Photographs and Appendix C for Budget Report (with receipts following).

Project Abstract

The everyday act of eating assumes an additional veneer of performativity when it is staged as an eating performance or edible artistic in(ter)vention. This paper analyses my practice-as-research project *Sentient/Spitting*, a gastro-performance that translates gustatory narratives into food-art, and stages it's serving with small interventions to eating rituals. Performed at a wall of shooting windows (arrowslits or loopholes) at the Belgrade fortress, the project attempts to reframe the act of spitting as an act of blessing rather than one of hostility. The performance questions to what extent culturally-specific eating rituals which are woven into the everyday, are able to be reshaped when food-consumption is reframed as an opportunity for sensorial and social-aesthetic contemplation. I also reflect on how the extended art of eating functions in everyday life and in projects involving food-art (where art and audience become contained within the same body when the work is literally consumed).

Summary Report

Sentient/Spitting is a practice-as-research creative project stirred and moulded by my social, cultural and gustatory immersion in the city of Belgrade. Participants were invited to eat seven specially-curated food-art that each contain a seed or object which they are able to spit out through the shooting holes (loopholes) at the walls of the Belgrade Fortress. Each of these foods were displayed at the windows with instructive wall text to indicate what they contained to be spit out. Participants were both invited and incidental (passers by walking through the fortress grounds, which is now a public park space). This performance was presented with and co-produced by Kondenz Festival in Belgrade, Serbia.

Participants in *Sentient/Spitting* become performers – active agents who decide what to accept/reject/eject, physically delivering the potential of change to their environment. By inviting social participation from viewers, and inserting an edible idea into the equation, eating/spitting becomes framed as a type of embodied knowledge, a playful way to retell a story through food metaphors, and a ritual that meditates on forward projection and transgressing norms.

IATL funding enabled me to hire and pay honoraria to my creative collaborators, including a scenic designer, a graphic designer, an audio engineer, two participant facilitators and a videographer who filmed and edited a documentary video. Funding was also helpful for public transportation and communication with my collaborators, as well as some team meals and of course, raw materials of food and printing for my main medium.

The research process began in Feb 2014, with a test version of *Sentient/Spitting* conducted in June 2014 at the Mikser Festival. Work for the Kondenz Festival iteration began in September, and while the project was performed in October, video editing as well as post-project analysis went well into November. The video was completed late November, and my final dissertation submitted December 18, 2014. I apologize deeply for the late submission of this final report to the IATL Festival Bursary Committee.

Impact on Subject Knowledge

My research questions behind *Sentient/Spitting* swivel around Dwight Conquergood's three 'pivot points' of performance studies that pull together 'disparate and stratified ways of knowing' (152):

- What new knowledges can come from eating/spitting? (Accomplishment)
- Could the performativities of eating/spitting become "a lens that illuminates the constructed creative, contingent, collaborative dimensions of human communication," particularly in the dimension of the everyday? (Analysis)
- How can the aestheticized performance of eating art reveal existing symbols, temporalities, and structures/rituals that are also common (or disjointed) within participants' individual performances in the everyday? (Articulation)

Through the project I began to view eating/spitting as embodied performative metaphor for (1) an act of forward projection and everyday futurism (eating to sustain life); (2) a potential positive subversion of an act, commonly associated with spite, hostility and contempt, by linking it with the ritual act of blessing and protection (spitting three times to ward off evil); (3) a means to engage social play within a public space (a game of aiming and spitting as a test of skill); and (4) an internal, practiced decision about acceptance vs. ejection/rejection (where standing behind the Kalemegdan fortress walls heightened the notion of what is worth defending by metaphorically being enacted against an undefined abject enemy).

By highlighting the performativities of eating/spitting (using methods of staging to depict food as not merely to be played with or thoughtlessly eaten but, rather, viewed as responsive materials that contain and ignite ideas and metaphors, or re-contextualizes symbols), I had the sense that I was able to align the eater more

closely to a specific sensory connectivity and experiential awareness. Participants picked up themes within my research and beyond (the concept of “being taken care of” was a unexpected reflected response that I was pleasantly surprised by).

New Connections and Networks

I elected to apply to Kondenz Festival, a small-scale festival that curates interdisciplinary live art works. Their penchant for “smaller, experimental productions, critical towards their specific environments, or questioning certain aspects of performance” made it a perfect fit for my experimental, socially-engaged hybrid arts project and processes, where I felt comfortable soliciting/receiving feedback, not only from participants but also from a group of festival theoreticians who attended all performances and gave person-to-person feedback. I got to know other festival participants, curators and my collaborators within the project were definitely people I would love to work with again.

Learning Experience

I learnt a lot about my own creative and research processes and how they combined to create *Sentient/Spitting*. The piece underwent several phases that began with informal conversations, then structured interviews, and a process-based test performance at the design-based Mikser Festival in Belgrade, June 2014. At each point I was able to collect and document participant responses and to test the production and creative logistics to understand whether a small act of eating/spitting could be re-perceived from an act that could range from rude to hostile, to a more playful act that could invoke protection and blessings.

I was even able to play within the concept with a demonstration performance in July at an open-mic session at the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR). This time with a small adaptation to the food (so it was British-based) catering to a much smaller conference group, I was able to observe how the process of adaptation could work (and where it lacked and where it harmonized). The most valuable lesson was in working with the audience. By inviting social participation from viewers, and inserting an edible idea into the equation, the act of eating edible art and spitting out inedible materials becomes framed as a type of embodied knowledge, a playful way to retell a personal/cultural story through food metaphors, and a ritual that meditates on forward projection and transgressions of norms.

Works Referenced

Conquergood, Dwight. “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.” *The Drama Review*. 46.2 (2002): 145-156. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.

Appendix A: Sample Feedback from a participant

I enjoyed the unusual use of Kalemegdan's loopholes that have probably never been used for spitting, except maybe by some bored sentry munching on whatever seeds he could have had in his pockets back in the day.

As a proud local, I was imagining myself being a city defender throughout the duration of the performance. I'm keeping whatever is edible (and therefore, good) inside me (and therefore, the fortress), and I'm spitting whatever is bad and useless at you, the enemy, the attacker, the sieger. If you don't give up from the bits and seeds I'm spitting at you, you'll surely give up from my inner strength because all the good is now in me. My body is the fortress, my city is within me, and none shall pass.

On the other hand, the physical act of spitting, of aiming the spit at this narrow opening made me think how easy it is to eat, and how difficult it is to give something out. We should all practice sharing, giving to others a little bit of what we have. It doesn't hurt us and it might help others immensely. As usual with the good things in life, it's all about practice, it's about hitting that tiny opening that people's hearts are offering us. Once past that point, the seed of love has no obstacles. Just like those spitted bits flew absolutely freely once past the loophole.

It was fun, cathartic, and thought-provoking.

Appendix B: Photographs from *Sentient/Spitting* at Kondenz Festival



(Top to Bottom)

Plate 1: Sunflower Seed window, with accompanying audio of military shooting. Instructions are located in the placard above the headphones

Plate 2: Participant (after receiving greeting from a facilitator) interacts with the window.





(Top to Bottom)

Plate 3: Facilitator surveys participant post-performance on what associations and thoughts were made during spitting

Plate 4: Public participants (passers-by) interact with the Coffee window, after carefully reading instructions.

Plate 5: Participant in mid-spit.



(Clockwise from top left)

Plate 6: Stone/Rakija window

Plate 7: Corn window (corn kernel embedded in paprika proja or cornbread)

Plate 8: Coffee window (coffee bean inside ratluk lokum/Turkish delight in individual boxes)

Plate 9: (raw/cooked) Beans window

Plate 10: Banner to indicate event

Plate 11: Wheat window (three wheatberries wrapped within žito paste)

Plate 12: Wrapped dried plums (handed out to participants after they have been greeted and handed a program)

