

**Ramiro Wong**

**Celebrations: A table for one or a table of one's own**

Assemblage/Mixed Media

(An array of digital A/V recordings of a variety of performances and a selection of food)

Variables Measures

June 2020

Excuse my French but I'll tell you a story, I'll tell you a story about loud Americans and lazy African Americans, and how the latter are more prone to crime. A story about stingy Jews and terrorist Muslims, about weak Homosexuals and emotional Women; about angry Arabs, smelly Pakistanis and Indians, dirty Mexicans, greasy Hispanic people and all kinds of tasteless poor folk like the Argentinians who love steak but can barely afford it these days. I'll tell you a story about how Germans drink a lot but no as much as the Irish or the Scottish (who also share this characteristic with the Indians); I'll tell you about the hula dancers in Hawaii, all the gambling in Thailand and the swindlers in Southeast Asia. I'll tell you about a country named Africa and the savage, nude and pagan people that live there. I'll tell you a story about us all, cause we all have told these stories and while the stories and the people they are referring to may change, the odds are that we are not going to, not for all the tea in China.

## 1. Abstract:

Color, gender, race and ethnicity, age, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc., words used to group individuals with certain characteristics while at the same time making a distinction from others. These distinctions often are built upon a system of beliefs about certain common tendencies or virtues within the members of a certain group with particular cultural traits. When these beliefs are assimilated within culture and reinforced through humor or other forms of language by means of advertising, tv, film and social media, the cultural norm becomes to adopt these stereotypes as the standard.

Newspapers, tv channels, film companies, etc., create the framework to which other forms of local media adapt, by means of selecting, controlling and restricting what information goes where, shaping our perception of the world, creating history on behalf of the dominant elite groups in society. "Enhancing" our experience of the world by reducing our awareness of it and in so doing making money from the products (cultural or not) they advertise, a product that modifies the public into a more elite and 'prosperous' audience, or in the words of Adorno and Horkheimer:

*Capitalism does not want to destroy culture, it adores it, it would embrace it, shape it and in so doing it would produce a subject that was homogenous, bland, consumer friendly.*<sup>1</sup>

This picture of the world that we are all exposed to, this idea of society that we all consume and process and accept and/or reject in different ways, a perception that satisfies the needs and interests of the few at the expense of the many is an example of the taylormade cultural products that convey, transport, alter and swallow what Nato Thompson refers to as *identitarian energy*<sup>2</sup> and create the complex layers of what is socially acceptable and excluding whoever does not adjust to what is believed to be the standard.

*"If people try to enter the system, people who don't have that point of view, they are likely to be excluded somewhere along the way. After all no institution is going to happily design a mechanism to self-destruct. Is not the way institutions function. So they all work to exclude, to marginalize, or eliminate dissenting voices or alternative perspectives and so on because they are dysfunctional, they're dysfunction of the institution itself."*<sup>3</sup>

What is tolerable for the few at the expense of the many? The Cambridge Dictionary, in one of its many definitions, refers to society as *a large group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done*. This approach implies that the power to make the decisions that affect the lives of the individuals within a society is democratized, with each member holding equal rights and freedoms as well as responsibilities in the process of decision and world-making. Said definition falls more in the category of assumption or expectation for in reality only a few have an effect on the rules, while the other(s) are not granted the same power or freedoms.

If said power and freedoms are not justly distributed within the members of a society, how can we expect that our social interactions and the relationships that are build upon them are of a fair nature? Is not only possible but a reality that the responsibilities which are intertwined with said freedoms fall

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<sup>1</sup> Thompson, N., *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the Twenty-first century*. Melville House. (2015)

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, N., *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the Twenty-first century*. Melville House. (2015)

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, N., "Manufacturing Consent." (1992) *YouTube*, uploaded by epicQUALITY, 27 January 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnrBQEAM3rE>

on the hands of those who are less privileged? According to ethical and political theory, we as individuals hold certain obligations to society as a whole, to each other and to ourselves; therefore, any form of individual action must not only benefit oneself, but the whole society. This in turn would create an equilibrium between growth and welfare that will simultaneously benefit each individual. When the distribution of power is not make even some members of society are less accountable for their responsibilities and the consequences of their actions, creating an unfair and biased society towards the other(s).

According to Michel Foucault, Othering is *the creation and maintenance of imaginary knowledge of the other in service to socio-political power and the establishment of hierarchies of domination*<sup>4</sup>. The binary relations that come as a result of this and that are still present within society in our times, as well as its cultural representations, comprise what we could refer to as “Aesthetics of Othering”, a practice (sometimes subtle, others very explicit) that perpetuates the stratification of power from the elites to the others.

How can the struggle between a person and society create progress in a context where the aforementioned practices take place? If “the post-modern city is a geographical celebration of difference that moves sites once conceived of as ‘marginal’ to the [social] centre of discussion and analysis of the human relations between the other(s) and the establishment”<sup>5</sup>, then the other(s) are not to be considered as real and relevant part of the society (and therefore its politics) only when necessary or convenient.

## 2. Consuming the other:

Food, as argued by Peter Kubelka, is the first form of cultural manifestation, and cooking is *the mother of all arts*<sup>6</sup>, a form of expression that is imbued with stories and memory, directly connected to the commonality of living and other forms of the dynamics of displacement. What we eat, where our food comes from, where we eat it, how and when, are questions that provide us with enough hints about social status, purchasing power, cultural diversity; in other words: access, agency but also, limitations.

In the corner of a room illuminated only by a small window on the upper corner, there is a woman, due to the aspect of her clothes one could presume that this woman is a maid. The woman is pouring milk from a pitcher to what appears to be a crock pot (probably with the intention of heating it) which lays on a table. On that same table we find a wicker basket, many pieces of bread and a second pitcher of blue color. The rest of the room is almost empty. This small story depicts the painting known as *The Milkmaid (Dienstmagd mit Milchkrug)* by Jan Vermeer. According to Walter Liedtke, the Milkmaid is symbol that had been used through the History of Painting to depict certain cultural beliefs as well as dynamic of power (economical or not) between classes: *Vermeer may or may not have intended his pitcher as such an erotic allusion, but he certainly meant for the sophisticated viewer to recall earlier paintings of comely milkmaids and kitchen maids, and the reputation of milkmaids in particular for sexual availability. In real life, their impromptu suitors were often “proper” gentlemen, not social equals, and of course the intended viewer of this painting (and those by Dou) was not a servant but a man of society and a connoisseur*<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Rieder, John. 2008, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* p. 76., Wesleyan University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Gallagher, Carolyn, Dahlman, Carl T., Gilmartin, Mary, Mountz, Alison, Shirlow, Peter. 2009, *Key Concepts in Political Geography*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

<sup>6</sup> Kubelka, P., “The Edible Metaphor.”, *Berlinale Talents*, uploaded by Berlinale Talents, 12 June 2006, <<https://www.berlinale-talents.de/bt/program/telelecture/158>>

<sup>7</sup> Liedtke, W. 2009, “Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) and The Milkmaid”, MetMuseum, accessed 18 May 2020, <[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/milk/hd\\_milk.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/milk/hd_milk.htm)>





Vermeer, Jan c.1655-58, The Milkmaid (Dienstmagd mit Milchkrug), (Painting) Oil on Canvas, Holland, accessed 28th of May 2020, <[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/20/Johannes\\_Vermeer - Het melkmeisje - Google Art Project.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/20/Johannes_Vermeer_-_Het_melkmeisje_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)>

What one puts on a plate, the plate that is used, the spoons, forks, knives, glasses, cups, the table setting and the table itself (with or without tablecloth), and the decorations (or their absence) have been depicted in many still lifes since ancient times. The objects depicted often carried a symbology

that was linked to a particular society's principles and beliefs and/or wealth. Before the Middle Ages, the Roman upper classes made use of decorative mosaics or "emblemata" to showcase the range of food they enjoyed, but also as *a sign of hospitality and celebrations of the seasons and of life*<sup>8</sup>.

Further in the Renaissance we can find the works by the Dutch painter Jan Davidsz. de Heem, who represented both a lush accumulation of natural objects as well as mundane goods. In "Still Life with Oysters and Grapes" (1653) and "Still Life with Parrots" (c.1648) a number of exotic elements such as non-domestic fruits, rare sea shells, an African gray parrot and a scarlet Macaw from Brazil as well as highly decorated glasses and vases which again are a symbol of class and economical power.

What remains interesting between these two paintings is how the first one seems to be referenced in the second one, as if by including the non-native elements the world had expanded and become more rich by means of consuming the other's culture. Around this time diamonds and other precious stones, foreign goods such as tea and exotic animals came to Amsterdam in the ships of the Dutch East India Company who had just recently expanded their trade zones after the Battle of the Downs. Trading in the East and West Indies increased Holland's wealth which was celebrated by the purchase and subsequent incorporation of ostentatious and offshore goods into daily life, these celebrations are reflected in the still lifes from the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic that included said exotic elements, or as Meredith Etherington-Smith would put it: *Men who wanted to be seen to be fashionable and appear rich had their portraits painted wearing a silk 'Japanese skirt', which featured a long loose-fitting silk coat*<sup>9</sup>.



Davidsz. de Heem, Jan 1653, Still Life with Oysters and Grapes, (Painting) Oil on wood, Holland, accessed 28 May 2020, <<https://collections.lacma.org/node/252292>>.

<sup>8</sup> Ebert-Schifferer, Sybille. 1998, *Still Life: A History*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

<sup>9</sup> Etherington-Smith, M. 2015, *Antenna: Exotic Luxury in the golden age*, Christies.com, accessed 28 May 2020, <<https://www.christies.com/features/Antenna-Exotic-luxury-in-the-Dutch-Golden-Age-6537-1.aspx>>





Dauidsz. de Heem, Jan c.1648, Still Life with Parrots,(Painting) Oil on wood, Holland, accessed 28 May 2020, <<https://deadpaint.tumblr.com/post/70606691912/jan-davidsz-de-heem-still-life-with-exotic-birds>>.

For Vermeer's symbology behind *The Milkmaid* to succeed, the role of the food in the painting is essential, for it not only depicts a contemplation to daily activities but a class dynamic. Nevertheless, we should consider that this painting was made around the same time of "Still Life with Parrots", a time when the rest of the non-european world was being colonized and that for these items to arrive thousands, if not millions, of lives were endangered, enslaved, exploited and lost. Let us not forget that throughout history different kinds of food was not always available in certain places, and that even when it was it did not always belonged to the people that worked the land, that certain kinds of food were reserved for the elites, and that this is also depicted in the *History of Paint*.

We consumed the other, at their own expense.

Eat well, live well. But what does it mean to eat well? Derrida dwells on the question of 'eating well' as communion, sharing and commensality—for 'one never eats entirely on one's own.' Eating well is a matter of 'learning and giving to eat, learning-to-give-to-the-other-to-eat' for 'one eats the other regardless and lets oneself be eaten by him'.<sup>10</sup>

For Derrida, *the very notion of comprehending is a 'kind of incorporation* in relation to the concept of "Erinnerung", which means both memory and interiorization. He argues that the active element of consciousness incorporates history by assimilating, by remembering its own past, with the purpose of knowing one-self. This form of *sublimated eating involves consuming what is external, foreign, and transforming it into something internal, something that is its own.*<sup>11</sup>

If food—as mentioned before—is a means of communication, then it involves an exchange of information in order to create understanding by expressing similar or different opinions, thoughts and sensitivities; needless to say, it involves more than one individual. When the communication is one-sided, when the message is not composed or transmitted acknowledging the other, when we consume the other in spite of the other, it is unlikely that a genuine connection and contact with the other exists.

What could one interpret from these? Is the other a form of food or material good that can be consumed and discarded with no further consequences? Bell Hooks would claim that people of color are certainly a form of food within a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

*Within current debates about race and difference, mass culture is the contemporary location that both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgment and enjoyment of racial difference. The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.*<sup>12</sup>

There are plenty of examples of cultural appropriation, whether it is in the field of music, fashion, decontextualization of traditional tools, in the name of equality and rebellion to the status quo, a stand-in for "I am not racist, I have a \_\_\_\_\_ friend", but this misinterpreted—or rather naive—form of integration through acceptance of diversity often falls into the category of exploitative forms of consumption of the other. These forms of consumption reinforce the norm.

In this respect diversity becomes a commodity, one that is as gratifying as it is profitable, one that adds flavor to the mix but to a certain delimited quota (as in TV-shows, film, advertising and other forms of mass media), a commodity that is acceptable in supermarkets, restaurants and food stands, but not in public life.

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<sup>10</sup> 7. Maravillas, F (2014). The Unexpected Guest: Food and Hospitality in Contemporary Asian Art, In Antoinette, M. & Turner, C., Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and world making, (pp.159-178), ANU Press.

<sup>11</sup> Birnbaum, D. & Olson A. 2009, *An Interview with Jacques Derrida on the Limits of Digestion*, e-flux.com, accessed 29 May 2020, <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68495/an-interview-with-jacques-derrida-on-the-limits-of-digestion/>>

<sup>12</sup> Hooks, B 1992, *Eating the Other, Desire and Resistance*, In Black Looks and Representation, pp21-39. Boston: South End Press 1992, accessed 20th of May 2020, <[https://de.ryerson.ca/DE\\_courses/uploadedFiles/6052\\_Arts/CSOC202/Modules/Module\\_00/eating%20the%20other.pdf](https://de.ryerson.ca/DE_courses/uploadedFiles/6052_Arts/CSOC202/Modules/Module_00/eating%20the%20other.pdf)>.

These processes of exoticization of our bodies and cultural manifestations as objects of desire, create a sense of intimacy but at a safe distance where it is possible for one to reject that which is not of one's interest and to consume without fully understanding, 'marching forward' but without giving any terrain for equality or integration.

*"When I began thinking and doing research for this piece, I talked to folks from various locations about whether they thought the focus on race, Otherness, and difference in mass culture was challenging racism. There was overall agreement that the message that acknowledgment and exploration of racial difference can be pleasurable represents a breakthrough, a challenge to white supremacy, to various systems of domination. The over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten."*

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We consume the other without letting it taint us.

We consume the other by appropriating their culture.

We consume the other by not giving up on anything that is inherently ours.

We consume the other and expect their understanding.

We consume the other and expect them to 'act accordingly'.

### **3. Politically (in)correct:**

Ever since political correctness became standardized most people who still hold such beliefs keep them suppressed or establish a new normality that exempts the few friends that are the "other" from such stereotypical branding; however, only in theory because such categorizations in the light of political correctness are wrong, but what does that say about us in practice? Where does the joke end?

*I will call you heretic, or an infidel, I will call you blasphemous and I will stitch a scarlet letter to your clothes, I will use your services, but you would have to leave, for come Sunday I will call you a terrorist, a liar or a thief. I will talk to you, rather than with you, for I am not bland, for either you are politically incorrect or an ignorant while I...I understand.*

Throughout the course of history there has been a number of terms for "Other", whether we refer to the Middle Ages when the smallest form of gossip about one's morals and virtue that spread like a game of Chinese whispers (which is also a form of ethnic stereotype) could discredit a person, turn them into a blasphemous heretic who had to pay the price for their crime, most often the price was one's own life; or in Colonial North America, and the Salem Witch Trials where often times women that practiced science or forms of medicine were accused of witchcraft. These words have 'evolved' in an array of way, either by discriminating by religious belief (infidel), to address a person's race or skin color (niggers, greasers, injuns, etc.) or to utterly condemn and discredit a person, like in contemporary society with the word "terrorist"; these days –while most of these terms are still being employed in no friendly conversations– there are more derogatory terms as the voices of the 'minority' groups emerge, and although one can be a stranger to what the word would be, there is no doubt that it is just a different word for "other."

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<sup>13</sup> Hooks, B 1992, *Eating the Other, Desire and Resistance*, In *Black Looks and Representation*, pp21-39. Boston: South End Press 1992, accessed 20th of May 2020, <[https://de.ryerson.ca/DE\\_courses/uploadedFiles/6052\\_Arts/CSOC202/Modules/Module\\_00/eating%20the%20other.pdf](https://de.ryerson.ca/DE_courses/uploadedFiles/6052_Arts/CSOC202/Modules/Module_00/eating%20the%20other.pdf)>.



Political correctness cares about being correct, about giving the less amount of offense by keeping quiet or modifying once discourse or beliefs to fit within a context, but contexts change and feelings and ideas gain momentum and can no longer be ignored. Political correctness does not warranty the absence of exclusion, but it perpetuates the problem by making it invisible.

We consume the other in a 'polite' way.

#### 4. Relationality and Connectivity:

On February 2020 The Brussels Times published—amongst many articles—a story on how the Asian population in Belgium was being exposed to increased levels of racism<sup>14</sup>, levels of racism that were linked to the current pandemic we currently experiencing. While ethnic jokes are considered to be funny at times, they are funny only if both sides are genuinely laughing, but not when the same arrangement of words is used as an insult and/or to threaten a person's integrity. Said levels of discrimination are nothing new and not a direct consequence of the crisis, but a reflection on the state of affairs—or awareness—when it comes to discrimination, because as The Brussels Times article's title mentioned, the levels of discrimination within society have increased and they are not a new development.

This has been pointed out as well by their peers in The New York Times<sup>15</sup> and The Guardian<sup>16</sup>, amongst others newspapers and sources of mass media. By Sabrina Tavernise and Richard A. Oppel Jr.

- Published March 23, 2020 Updated June 2, 2020

## ***Spit On, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese-Americans Fear for Their Safety***

As bigots blame them for the coronavirus and President Trump labels it the “Chinese virus,” many Chinese-Americans say they are terrified of what could come next.

The New York Times, 2020, “Spit On, Yellet At, Attacked: Chinese-Americans Fear for Their Safety”,  
Published March 23 2020, Updated June 2 2020.

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>> Screenshot by Ramiro Wong

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<sup>14</sup> February 13th, 2020, “Belgians with Asian roots report increased racism amid coronavirus fears”, The Brussels Times,

<<https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/94859/belgo-asians-report-increased-racism-amid-coronavirus-fears-covid-19-xenophobic/>>

<sup>15</sup> Sabrina Tavernise and Richard Oppel Jr., March 23, 2020, “Spit On, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese-Americans Fear for Their Safety.”, The New York Times

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>>

<sup>16</sup> Sollnit, Rebecca, 2020, “Corona virus does discriminate, because that's what we humans do”, The Guardian, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/17/coronavirus-discriminate-humans-racism-sexism-inequality>>



Köln - Unsere Großstadtliebe 2020, Thinking about Corona, accessed 26th of February 2020, <<https://www.facebook.com/bigcitylove/photos/a.609896362476811/1877345135731921/?type=3>>.

In the same month, during the lockdown phase, amidst increased levels of discrimination towards Asians (as well as other foreigners) a photo became viral on social media. A man wearing a facemask and gloves is at the cashier's desk in the supermarket, putting into his already overloaded cart what appears to be packs and packs of instant noodles. It seems one's mind can discriminate, but the stomach can't, because one can choose how and when one consume the other and to what extent, but from a safe distance.



ASIA Instant Nudelgericht, Hühnerfleischgeschmack 2020, accessed 14th of March 2020, <<https://www.hofer.at/de/p.asia-instant-nudelgericht-huehnerfleischgeschmack.000000000155984004.html>>.

We consume the other, but may the other stay far away.

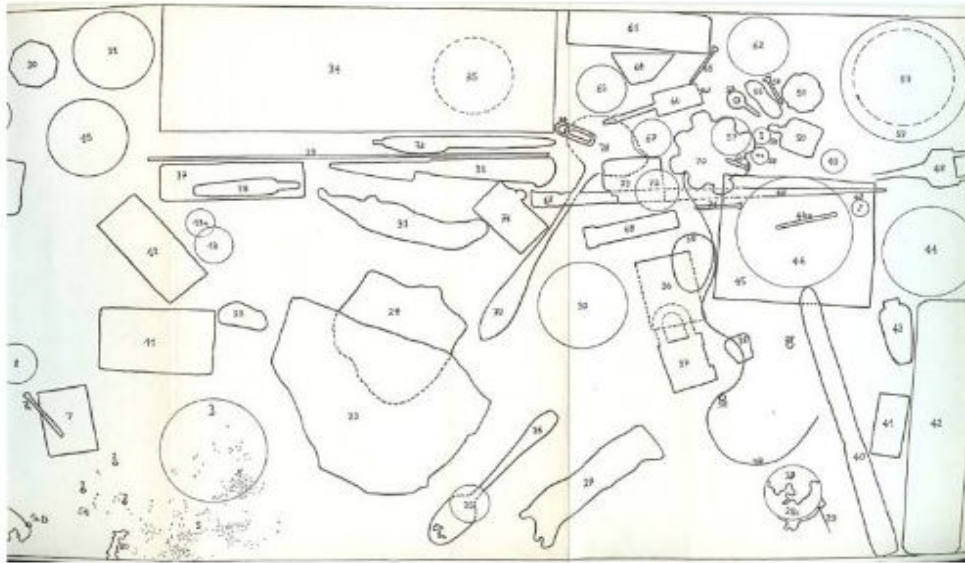
## 5. Celebrations:

What makes us unique? What makes us different? What are the personality traits that unite us and keep us together as well as tear us apart? The American writer Audre Lorde once wrote, “*it is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences*”<sup>17</sup>. In these series of “Celebrations” I want to offer you a series of stories, stories about our differences for they are politically motivated, politically relevant and politically necessary. These series of stories will come in the form of pre-recorded performances in which each of the “selected” guests will receive a box with items specifically assembled for their character and persona, as well as a list of instructions and a script that they should follow during a period of 15 to 25 minutes. None of the participants will know the script for the other nor will they see each other during the event, but the narrative of the individual stories will entangle into a collective one.

In 1962 Daniel Spoerri produced the works about the Topography of Chance, a layout that depicted the position of a number of objects in a given time and place. In *Celebrations*, as part of the set of instructions, the performers are to receive a precise layout for the objects on the table, a secondary reference is the stamping of the boxes with the words: “Careful, this is art!”.

<sup>17</sup> Porter, Lavelle, 2016, *Dear Sister Outsider: On Audre Lorde and writing oneself into existence*, poetryfoundation.org, accessed 26 November 2019, <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/89445/dear-sister-outsider>>





Spoerri Daniel 1962, Anecdoted Topography of Chance, mapbook, index, accessed 21st of May 2020, <<https://www.slideshare.net/lorenmadsen/information-as-art>>.



Fuji Taiyo 2007, Table Setting, digital photography, accessed 21st of May 2020, <[https://www.flickr.com/photos/t\\_trace/425231945/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/t_trace/425231945/)>.





13 Course Place Setting American Overhead View, 2019, digital photograph, accessed 8th of June 2020, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:13\\_course\\_table\\_setting\\_American\\_overhead\\_view.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:13_course_table_setting_American_overhead_view.jpg)>.

By using resources from the language of film and advertising, “A table for one or a table of one’s own” (from the series called *Celebrations*), attempts to call up a reality that is so deeply interwoven with our regular social practices that too many a-times it is not only exempted from judgment, but almost indistinguishable. The installation, an assemblage of a series of short films, displays a discourse scripted from the words and sayings that we as people deem insignificant. Each performance is designed for the narrator, being the narrator the persona that the performers are to adopt, and limited by it at the same time, for people often times cannot see beyond themselves.

In a similar way to the scene where Andy Warhol eats a burger<sup>18</sup> the performances can be read as curated still lifes that are entangled in a commonplace story. These stories are further reinforced with the aid of objects and motifs much like a small series of postcards that depict one reality but not the other. Yet while the performance does not attempt to simply entertain the viewer<sup>19</sup>, it demands their attention to the hints in use and to the topic itself, raising less a question but rather a prayer.

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<sup>18</sup> 66 scener fra Amerika, Jørgen Leth, 1982

<sup>19</sup> Bishop, Claire. “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics”



Andy Warhol eats a burger 1982, screenshot from 66 Scenes from America, accessed 15th of May 2020, <[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0289045/?ref\\_=ttpl\\_pl\\_tt](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0289045/?ref_=ttpl_pl_tt)>.

Furthermore it is important to underline the importance of the fact that this is a series of stories, for, to paraphrase the writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie there is a great danger in a single story that reduces people to a single narrative, told from a single point of view. We are experiencing a form of isolation that brings and breaks, that makes us acknowledge reality while others romanticize their condition. Isolation in an extremely uncertain time, one that is triggering displays of prejudice, xenophobia, discrimination, racism and violence against and between groups of people that we qualify as others. This is because while we sometimes want to tell a story, but are only focused on our own. If we only focus on our story, then culture will be lost along the way.

*What we have in common is that we are different. This is precisely the huge misunderstanding: that everything is conceived as though we were identical. Which, of course, consumer industry is totally aware of, for the more identical we get, the smaller range of commodities we need. In the subjective space, as I would call it, the basis of community is that we each have our opinions which must also be the natural starting point for any equitable social activity [...] there might be a tendency for an illusion to arise regarding community, that we all think the same about something or other, and when something different is encountered, the reaction tends to be negative.<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup>Eliasson, O. and Krogh Jensen, M. 1999, *What we have in common is that we are different*, in Olafur Eliasson: Your position surrounded and your surroundings positioned, Dundee Contemporary Arts, pp14-19. Scotland.

There is a deeper sense of complexity to life than what goes into a museum, an art gallery, or other art-related spaces. Be it performance as protest, performance and protest or relational aesthetics amongst other terms, one thing is very clear: the social role of the artist. This social role exists because as elitist as only art can be (and not democratic as many would suggest), it can not escape one reality: artists are people who live within a society and therefore are not exempted from social responsibility. Moreover, while changing society is not necessarily the artist's job, engaging and responding to current social issues by changing the nature of the museum, gallery, art-related-space into a space of reflection, or bringing political issues into the public space.

## 6. Conclusions:

Can artists spread social utopias or revolutionary hopes? And if yes, should they? To what end? Whether it is Gordon Matta Clark and the restaurant in New York, Rirkrit Tiravanija and the gallery as kitchen and social space, or Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's futurist cookbook that campaigned for experimental dishes that broaden the senses and prepare the mind for a futuristic revolution, are all attempts to take art out of its predetermined space and/or to alter the way art-related spaces are conceived, not with the purpose of decontextualizing but as a form of re-claiming the value of narratives that relationships and connectivity have intertwined into our different cultures.

Relational Aesthetics encompass art projects that are not works of art in the classical sense, such as paintings, sculptures or video installations, but meetings, rendezvous, demonstrations, happenings, different types of cooperation between people, games, festivals, places of conviviality, in short the entirety of the types of encounter and the invention of relationships.<sup>21</sup>

If Tiravanija's art action is an artist's contribution to creating relations, that is, "*relationships between people who are dominated in everyday life by commercialized 'communication zones', anonymous machines or economic interests,*" in my case I want to highlight the underlying truth about the relationships that already exist.

This project attempts to question and showcase the relationship between food and the immigrant experience by reimagining the "other" as a metaphor for one's own story. The relationship between food and art has been terrible since before relational aesthetics. Maybe because food is considered to be the first form of cultural expression, nevertheless the connection between food (even when this means the absence of it) and a sense of home between two homelands is palpable.

By using the elements of comfort and ritual in a meal as both circumstance and place, and food not only as a means for sustenance but as a substance that can reveal truly emotional and psychological responses, *Celebrations* aims to do exactly that, celebrate the individual stories that join us together in order to start the conversation about our differences, backgrounds, beliefs, our migration stories and other dynamics of displacement. These stories are triggered by our narratives around food as shared value with cultural significance, imbued with memory, intimacy, and movements, much like a performance.

If we can consume each other's food, if we can consume each other, how do we relate to each other in a culture that prides itself in its internationality and equality but with life conditions that are radically differentiated? How can we imagine a life together when the sense of togetherness is replaced by lack of involvement in understanding each other?

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<sup>21</sup> Bourriaud, *Artists as cook spoil the broth* by Antje Stah

We should be able to live together in an environment that provides us the same freedoms and opportunities instead of labels that restrain us. It is fair to say that people from abroad with the hope of making a better life have to face a different reality and barriers in order to be considered human. And while many people express their concern it is my experience as well as the experience of many of our colleagues and friends that people will offer help up until the point that their help is needed, people will say things out loud while there is no authority present, people will promise to do things about a situation until the moment the situation comes.

We consume the other, at their own expense.

We consume the other in spite of the other.

We consume the other without letting it taint us.

We consume the other by appropriating their culture.

We consume the other by not giving up on anything that is inherently ours.

We consume the other and expect their understanding.

We consume the other and expect them to 'act accordingly'.

We consume the other in a 'polite' way.

We consume the other, but may the other stay far away.

Because equality when in a world of privilege, feels like oppression.



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