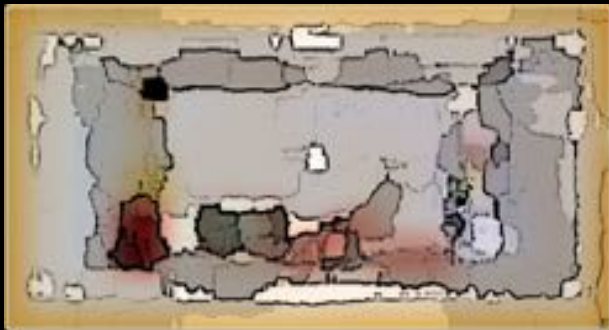


# David Szanto, PhD Icebox | Studio

research-creation documentation  
2011–20



art/design  
performance  
public scholarship  
curation



## *Ecstasies of Influence*

in collaboration with Sandeep Bhagwati & matralab



Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2020)  
Concordia Fine Arts Black Box, Montreal (2018)

*Can we transfer creative strategies from other artistic domains into music creation? The "Ecstasies of Influence" research-creation project explores inter-artistic ways of conceiving, creating and composing musical performances and productions, influenced by dialogues with and transfers from other artistic practices.*

*(matralab.hexagram.ca/eoi)*



What a performance is food. It performs itself, it performs us. From its smallest scales to its largest, food is a material ecology in movement entangled with meaning. Microbial beings, micronutrients, and organelles perform what I call *me*, an eater. Kitchens and cooks and undocumented choreographies perform what I call *meal*, a thing to eat, sustenance. Histories and landscapes, technological and political powers, taste and hunger perform *milieus*, societies, their cuisines, our identity. Together, and apart, these are all food ecologies, and they perform us just as we perform them.



When a man, my friend, Gigi—who has made bread all his life—dies, not just his memory, but also a very material part of who he was lives on in the yeast of his sourdough starter and in the attitude with which he used it. When we make bread with that starter years later, and then eat it, we ingest a part of his humanness. We are performed by him and who he was, what he did.

For me, that is the starting point for this performance. We all perform. We are all food for each other.

**online documentation**

[vimeo.com/314367709](https://vimeo.com/314367709)

## *Orchestrer la perte/Perpetual Demotion*

in collaboration with Simon Laroche

Emerge, Mesa Arts Center (2020)

Mirage Festival, Les Subsistances, Lyon (2018)

Mois Multi, La Méduse, Québec (2018)

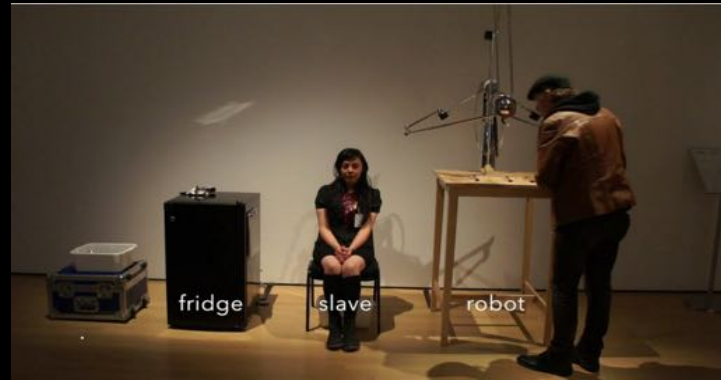
Elektra, l'Arsenal, Montréal (2016)

Biennale WRO, Wrocław, Poland (2016)

Ailleurs en Folie, Mons, Belgium (2015)

Maker Faire, Art Engine, Ottawa (2015)

BIAN, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2014)



This multi-phase installation/performance manifests the relationships of domination and nurturing that are always present in the act of feeding and, more broadly, throughout the human-food-technology assemblage.

Motion-sensing and facial-recognition software enable the robot to pick up one of nine food-filled spoons and bring it to the mouth of a human visitor-participant.

A human 'slave' tends to the robot, cleaning and re-filling the spoons, while ignoring the human eaters and keeping a roster of her/his duties. The robot, based on open-source designs, is a pick-and-place delta robot, a model used in many food-processing contexts. The foods in the spoons symbolically and biochemically represent additional relationships of nurturing and domination: fermentation microbes and industrial preservation techniques; Indigeneity, colonialism, and migration; tradition, stagnation, and innovation.

With each iteration of *Orchestrer la perte/Perpetual Demotion*, new performativities emerge. Slaves self-empower, children teach adults how to eat, galleries change food policies, health inspectors become artists, laundries become staging sites.



***online documentation***

[vimeo.com/120492254](https://vimeo.com/120492254)

[youtu.be/LI7BzESgv\\_k](https://youtu.be/LI7BzESgv_k)

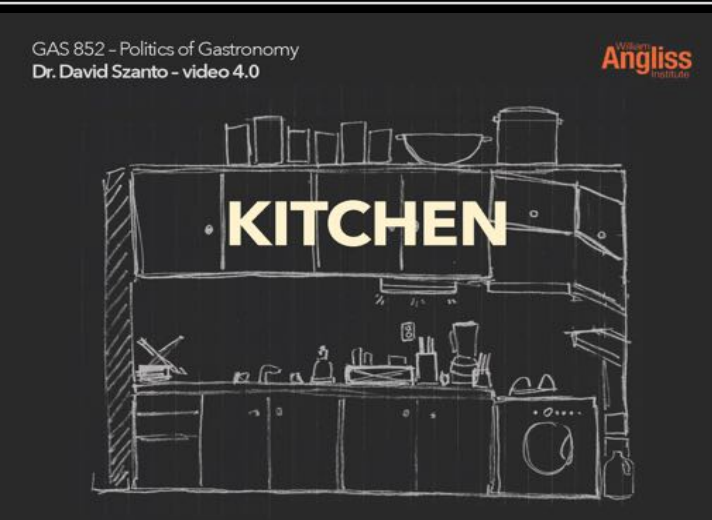
*Politics of Gastronomy*  
in collaboration with Lilly Cleary

Melbourne and Montreal (2019)

*The field, the garden, and the table are the material, social and symbolic spaces in which different living and non-living things gather around (and become) food. But they are also intersections in which we interact with systems of power—whether ecological, economic, or ecosophic. In this sense, gastronomy is a relational and performative practice that confronts critical questions about the political qualities of culture and cuisine, nature and society, technology and discourse. This course will critically engage with gastronomic texts and media to analyse different understandings of power at various scales, both temporal and spatial. Through this gastronomic lens, students will come to understand how contemporary food systems are negotiated, contested, adaptive, and extensive.*

This master-level course, developed in collaboration with Dr. Lilly Cleary and William Angliss Institute, was delivered as a team-taught, multi-modal, and atemporal experience (for students and teachers alike). Each week, the class met face-to-face in Melbourne, critically discussing the assigned topics. This was followed by a group ideation session to raise additional questions and issues. I then replied to these responses over the course of the following week, shooting and producing a video that was uploaded to YouTube for viewing in the next class. As the videos progressed, questions emerged relating to media, digital presence, and performance, including the power relationships embedded in these themes.

**online documentation**  
[youtube.com/playlist](https://www.youtube.com/playlist)



GAS 852 – Politics of Gastronomy  
Dr. David Szanto – video 2.0

GAS 852 – Politics of Gastronomy  
Dr. David Szanto – video 4.0

GAS 852 – Politics of Gastronomy  
Dr. David Szanto – video 6.1

## *Timor-Leste Food Innovators Exchange*

in collaboration with Agora Food Studio and TL-FIX

Manukoko Rek, Atauro, Timor-Leste (2018)

Increasing calls for the decolonization of research methods have brought attention to the risks posed by academic work involving Indigenous communities and traditional knowledge. This is of particular relevance for food scholarship, in which land-based practices and embodied ways of knowing—both frequently connected to local and first peoples—often intersect with Western methodological conventions. Imposing ‘external’ models of knowledge making may tend to reinforce problematic power relationships, including those related to native-settler dynamics. Moreover, questions of accuracy and relevancy may arise, when objective and/or scientific methods are not appropriate tools for the context. Nevertheless, multiple frameworks of knowledge are both valid and valuable—whether Indigenous or outsider—and whereas the domination of one by another is not appropriate, excluding a framework altogether is also not practicable.

This project centered on some of the contemporary and historic foodways of Timor-Leste, including the challenges to health, national identity, and sustainability brought about by centuries of colonial and transnational influences. Diverse research methods were brought together, including market surveys, storytelling, ethnobotany, and culinary innovation. The work was carried out by a team of collaborators who themselves represent a range of Indigeneity and other, including native Timorese, Timorese Hakka (Chinese), Australian, and Canadian.

***online documentation***

[youtu.be/7MqTJa53GHk](https://youtu.be/7MqTJa53GHk)

[ixc.dfat.gov.au/things-change-quickly-in-timor/](https://ixc.dfat.gov.au/things-change-quickly-in-timor/)



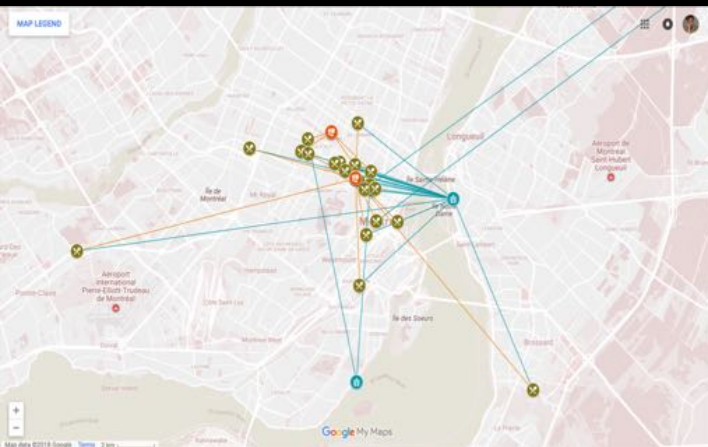
photos: Crystal Chiu

## YUL Forage: Visualizing Human-Food-Computer Interaction

in collaboration with Natalie Doonan & Pamela Tudge

CHI, Montréal (2018)

CAFS Exploration Gallery, Regina (2018)



The common milkweed plant has been ambiguously and variously characterized as both a toxic hazard and a crucial eco-friend. *Asclepias syriaca* is the sole source of sustenance for many eaters in nature, including monarch caterpillars. It is also considered a delicacy by many human foragers. Its status is currently threatened, however, both by over-foraging and policy makers (who often label it *noxious* and *invasive*). This in turn threatens monarch butterflies, an important vector in the pollination of wild plants. Milkweed is thus linked to a larger set of biogeophysical ecosystems.

YUL Forage was a paper-making workshop that incorporated milkweed seeds, food waste, and paper waste gathered from 23 venues in Montreal (airport code: YUL). Venues were selected as examples of Markéta Dolejšová's Digital Food Tarot Cards, elaborated for the Parlor of Food Futures (Emerge 2017).

Workshop participants each took home a piece of handmade paper, embedded with milkweed seeds, one of the 23 themes of the Digital Food Tarot Cards, paper waste from the associated venue, and the geo-coordinates of that venue. After being stored in the refrigerator for a month, the paper was ready to be planted in the earth, wherever the participants found themselves at that time.

The paper thus contained organic matter, human agency, and digital data. Through online mapping, a pattern of human-food migration was constructed, a visual residue of human collaboration with other species, both edible and not.

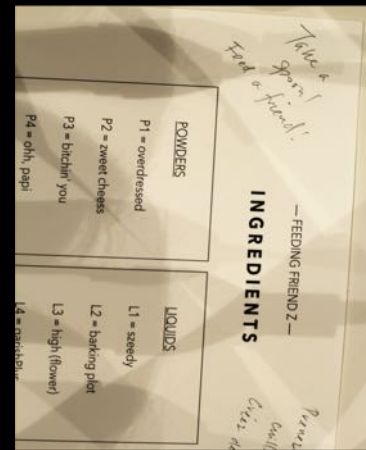
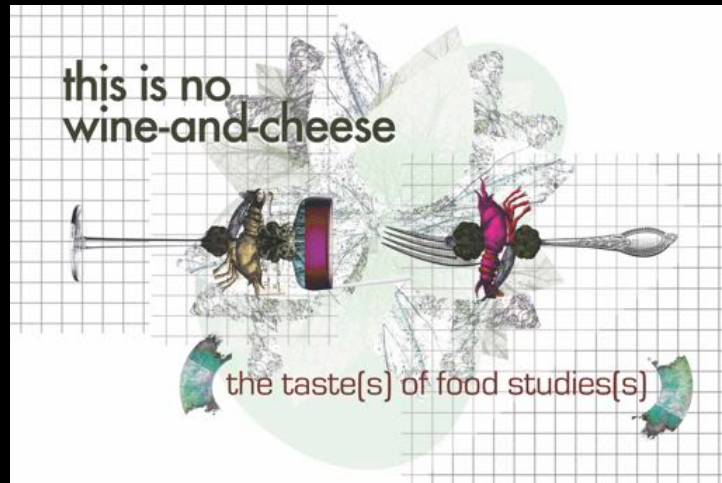
## *This is No Wine and Cheese*

CAFS Exploration Gallery, Regina (2018)  
4<sup>th</sup> Space, Montreal (2018)

Stable definitions of concepts such as *taste* and *food studies* can be problematic, given the power and authority implicit in naming things that are both contextually framed and relationally performed. Taste, for example, varies from person to person, as well as from moment to moment. Variations in physiology, cognitive expectation, sensory formation, and emotional state produce disparity among individual tasters, while material-discursive makeup, atmospherics, and combinatory effects imbue tasted things with difference. Similarly, as students, teachers, researchers, and administrators engage in food studies practices, we bring our assumptions, training, motivations, and funding imperatives to bear on the field. By doing scholarship on food, we also 'do' food studies.

This installation invited participants to taste a number of comestibles, both liquid and solid, and then link their sensorial experience to one or more aspects of food scholarship. Does Powder #4 taste of food security? Or is that a hint of permaculture? a note of fat-shaming? a lingering bite of gastronomic rhetoric? What about Liquid #2? Do you get rural sociology on the nose, but packaging design in the mouth? What about when it's paired with Powder #1?

Through conceptual and literal translations of taste, participants came to reflect on how interpretation becomes reified, both in the mouth and in the mind. How do we construct our sensorial and professional environments? How have we developed our taste(s) for food studies?

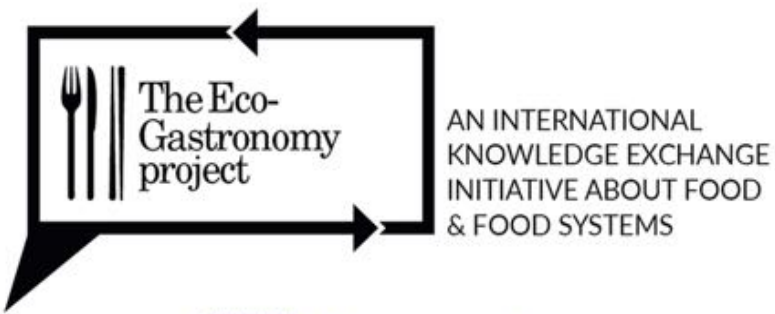


photos: Christine Swintak

# The Eco-Gastronomy Project

Seoul, Mexico City, Singapore, Dili, Edinburgh, Wrocław, Oslo, Ås, Copenhagen, Dublin, Toronto, Quito, Torino, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Portland, Melbourne, Montreal (2015–17)

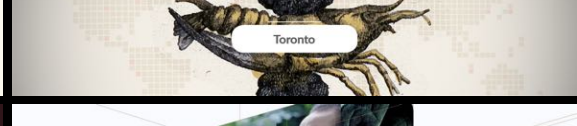
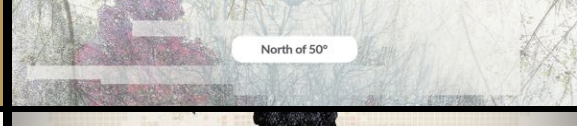
Comprising over 30 events in 14 countries, the Eco-Gastronomy Project was a community-centered knowledge exchange initiative about food, food culture, and food systems. Events ranged from a panel discussion on entrepreneurship in Mexico City (ending in a *fiesta de Navidad*) to a science communications workshop in Ås (complete with locally sourced lunch). A tale-telling circle in Dublin paired well with Irish whiskey, and a week of sustainability events in Minneapolis-St. Paul included fermented dandelion roots and ginger drinking vinegar. Throughout, stories and reports were generated and left in the hands of those who participated, an effort to keep the value of the work locally grounded and meaningful to the collaborators who inspired and created it.



14 Countries  
2015–17

Seoul . Mexico City . Singapore . Dili (Timor-Leste) . Edinburgh  
Wrocław . Oslo . Ås . Copenhagen . Dublin . Toronto . Quito  
Torino . Minneapolis-St. Paul . Portland . Melbourne . Montreal

**online documentation**  
[unisg.it/ecogastronomy](http://unisg.it/ecogastronomy)



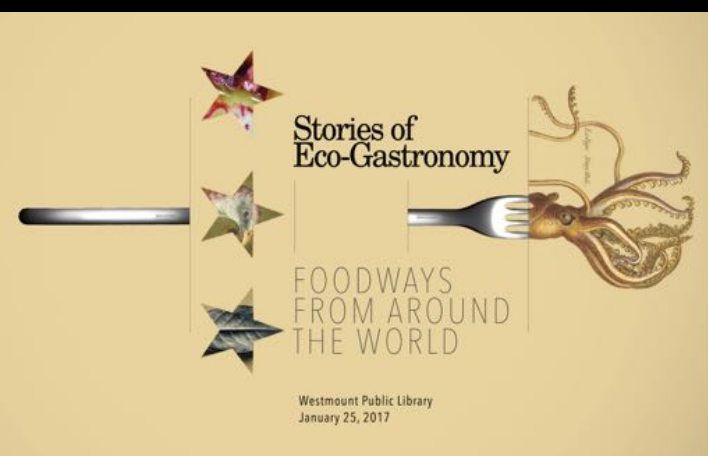
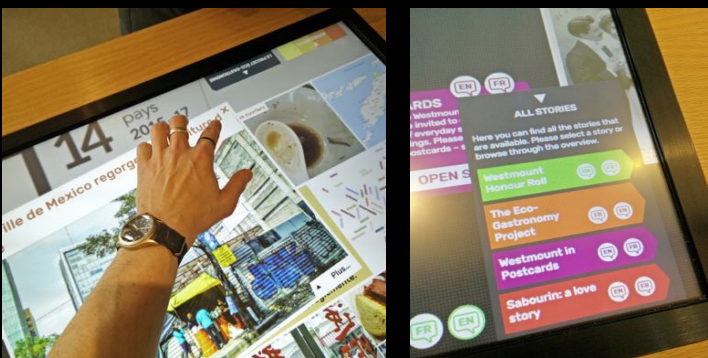


## Stories of Eco-Gastronomy: Digital Archive in collaboration with the Westmount Public Library

Westmount Public Library, Montreal (2017)

From Quito to Edinburgh, Singapore to Oslo, Mexico City to Seoul, the ways in which people practice their food habits are both unique and universal. From 2015 to 2017, the Eco-Gastronomy Project visited fourteen countries, exchanging knowledge about food and food systems. In January 2017, the project took form as a series of narratives and pictures, stories from the previous eighteen months that embodied the ethos and objectives of the project. Through these stories, borders and boundaries blurred, while connections among culture, ecology, philosophy, politics, and eating were redrawn.

The accounts took the form of a real-time, multimedia presentation, complemented by a publicly accessible digital archive. The archive's interface, an oversized digital touch screen, features interactive images, texts, questions, quizzes, and polls. This work was produced in collaboration with the library, and supported by the Dutch software developer Doklab. As a non-linear story, its users can play with, examine, and share the various multimedia elements according to their own interests and experience.



**online documentation**  
[youtu.be/hNlyatHx1o](https://youtu.be/hNlyatHx1o)

# Interdisciplinary Sandwich

U Mass Dartmouth, New Bedford (2017)  
OCADu, Toronto (2016)  
Concordia University, Montreal (2014)

A short-form encounter for interdisciplinary students and scholars, these workshops provided an opportunity for material engagement and academic reflection through performance and speculative design. Riffing on the *bánh mì*, a multinational hybrid sandwich, participants constructed their own edible piece, one that embodied a research question, thesis conundrum, or other discursive challenge that they were currently facing. In the debriefs that followed, new insights emerged about each participant's theme or question, as well as the role of material practice in translating and re-perceiving more theoretical problems and issues.



# The Gastronome in You

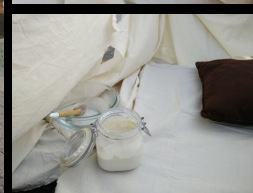
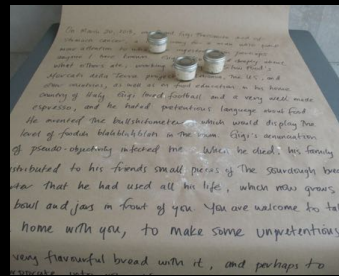
in collaboration with Gigi Frassanito

Kneading Conference, Skowhegan, ME (2017)  
Capital Fringe, Washington, DC (2015)  
Brock University, St. Catharines, ON (2014)

*On March 20, 2013, my friend Gigi Frassanito died of stomach cancer, a cruel irony for man who paid more attention to what he ingested than perhaps anyone I have known. Gigi also also cared deeply about what others ate, working tirelessly for the Slow Food Mercati della Terra project in Lebanon, the U.S., and other countries, as well as on food education in his home country of Italy. Gigi loved football (soccer) and a very well made espresso (no compressing), and he hated pretentious language about food. He invented the bullshitometer: his own body, enacting a visual and sonic performance, in order to display the level of foodish blahblahblah in the room. Gigi's denunciation of pseudo-objectivity and celebration of heterogeneity infected me, as well as many of his gastronomic collaborators and colleagues around the world. When he died, his family distributed to his friends small pieces of the sourdough bread starter he had used all his life, which now grows in the mason jars in front of you. You are welcome to take some home with you, to make some unpretentious and very flavorful bread with it, and perhaps to incorporate into yourself a little bit of Gigi's remarkable and uncompromising spirit.*

This multi-phase project focuses on the persistence of humanity through the interconnectivity of memory and bread making, narrative and the microbiome, eating and touching, and the translations of emotion, affect, and proximity.

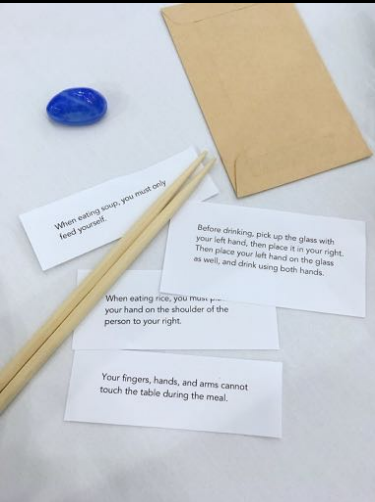
**online documentation**  
[youtu.be/qTYplmkTbLI](https://youtu.be/qTYplmkTbLI)



## Lunch by the Rules

Symposium of Australian Gastronomy, Melbourne (2016)

Just prior to a simple, Buddhist-style meal, participants were each given a different set of 'rules' that imposed certain guidelines for eating. Would they obey or rebel? Remain silent, place their hand on their neighbours' shoulder, only eat rice with a spoon? Or would they reinvent, bend, and reinterpret the rules provided?



## Show & Tell (Me What You Know)

Symposium of Australian Gastronomy, Melbourne (2016)

An interactive performance engaging speculative remembering, sensory restrictions, and drag, this performance wove together reflections on invisible labour, diasporic food, feminist fermentation, and gender identity. It aimed at undoing academic expertise and refocusing attention on the materially messy realities of research.



photos (top left, bottom right): Lisa Vockenhuber

## *PDX Heritage Recipe Slam*

in collaboration with Ursula Barton, Libby Clow, Jessica Pierce, Kusuma Rao

Old Salt Marketplace, Portland, OR (2016)

This collaborative, multi-modal performance featured eleven 'recipe-tellers' recounting the story, preparation, or recipe for a personal or family dish. At the same time, two professional cooks and one mural artist riffed on the narratives they were listening to in order to create their own visual and edible 'scapes.'

Treating the themes of making and identity at the scale of both individuals and communities, the recipe slam was an experiment in sensoriality, commensality, and representation. The format has now been adopted by other community organizations and will be reiterated at future gatherings.

***online documentation***

[flic.kr/s/aHskLJWB8u](https://flic.kr/s/aHskLJWB8u)



photos: Sam Park

# *Tactile Eating Performance Workshop*

in collaboration with Carmen Wong

Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore (2016)

This workshop on performance and sensory storytelling was a collaboration with performance maker and scholar Carmen Wong. Students were facilitated through a process of sensory exploration and experimentation, attuning themselves to food, their own bodies, and the environments around them. A two-day showcase was organized the following day, featuring four solo and group performances.

***online documentation***

[flickr.com/photos/78108880@N00/s59Gqb](https://www.flickr.com/photos/78108880@N00/s59Gqb)



## Where OÙ Firma?

Salon Merlimau, Singapore (2016)

*Where OÙ Firma?* offered a series of responses to the question of origins and belonging with which newcomers (and not-so-newcomers) are often confronted. Gestural, verbal, and comestible, each response entangled and muddled the others. A layering of truths was produced and, perhaps, an occasion to turn the question back on the interlocutors—including their reasons for asking it.

As a pop-up performance following the delivery of a two-day workshop at Lasalle College of the Arts, this work served two purposes. The first was to provide students in the earlier workshop with the occasion to reverse roles, from performers to audience members, while also reflecting on how that division is constructed, both formally and informally. The second aim was to embody, through verbalization, gesture, and food matter, the tensions inherent to the question, *Where are you from?*



**online documentation**  
[youtu.be/BHipQXVM5pl](https://youtu.be/BHipQXVM5pl)

photos: Sam Chow

## *Tipping the Scales*

CAFS Exploration Gallery, uOttawa (2014, ongoing)

Scale plays an important role in the way we understand things, including our food, the places it comes from, and the places it goes. Pull back on a foodscape and we see how matter and meaning fit together with image and interaction. Zoom in and the context is destabilized, queering our sense of the normal, the aesthetic, and the edible. These images are drawn from a number of different projects over the past six years, including two performative meals, a food/bacteria/robotics installation, an immersive sensory environment, and a few meals out. Individually, they are intended to invite speculation about the relations with food that we take for granted, as well as the possibilities that exist for alternate foodish perspectives. Collectively, they might suggest a broader time scale and a trajectory of exploration, including images that are yet to be made.





## CAFS Exploration Gallery

in collaboration with the Canadian Association  
for Food Studies

Université d'Ottawa, ON (2014)

University of Victoria, BC (2013)

University of Waterloo, ON (2012)

Inaugurated in 2012, the Canadian Association for Food Studies' Exploration Galleries create opportunities for food scholars and artists to present research-creation content in visual, installational, and performance formats. The Galleries also serve as hubs for pop-up events as well as more formal programming, and have sparked ongoing collaboration among members of the CAFS community. In 2015, the curatorship was handed off to other members of CAFS, while I have remained in an advisory role on the subsequent Galleries.

Starting in 2016, seeing the value of such a space at academic conferences, the U.S.-based Association for the Study of Food and Society adopted the model and has now launched their own annual Gallery.



## Performative Meals

### *Dissertation Dinner*

Lofts St-Paul, Montreal (2014)

The research-creation component of my dissertation, the meal both embodied the thesis and became a focus of analysis and discussion within the written work. A video interpretation, prepared by a collaborator, later became a 'co-performer' during a conference on gastronomic representation.



### *A Tranche of Berlin*

University of Victoria, BC (2013)

UferStudios, Berlin (2012)

This dinner served as the culmination of the 2012 DesignInquiry: Berlin gathering, and focused on the temporal-spatial frameworks of site-specific research and performance. The image at left is a photo mosaic of metonymic documentation: the tablecloth, in its residual state, the following morning.



### *The 'Main' Dish: Boulevard St-Laurent as Meal*

Concordia University, Montreal (2012)

A research-creation performance, this meal was an investigation of more-than-text representation, a translation of an urban thoroughfare into a material-discursive-gestural event. Through food, it proposed a 'panarchic' and 'fermented' character for Montreal's boulevard St-Laurent.



## *Displace (Mediations of Sensation) v1.0 and v2.0*

in collaboration with Chris Salter, TeZ, and David Howes

TAG Gallery, The Hague (2012)

Concordia Fine Arts Black Box , Montreal (2011)

An immersive sensory installation that re-figured the audience member as the site of performance, *Displace* featured a series of moments that stimulated and blurred the senses. The digital sound, light, and haptic stimuli were infused with taste and olfaction triggers that I conceived and produced. These sensorially displaced "gustibles" included multilayer agar gels, liquid extracts, green sponge toffee, edible paper, and salt candies.



## *A Polyvocal Ethnography of Land Stewardship: People, Place, Process*

in collaboration with The Gabriola Commons



Gabriola, BC (ongoing)

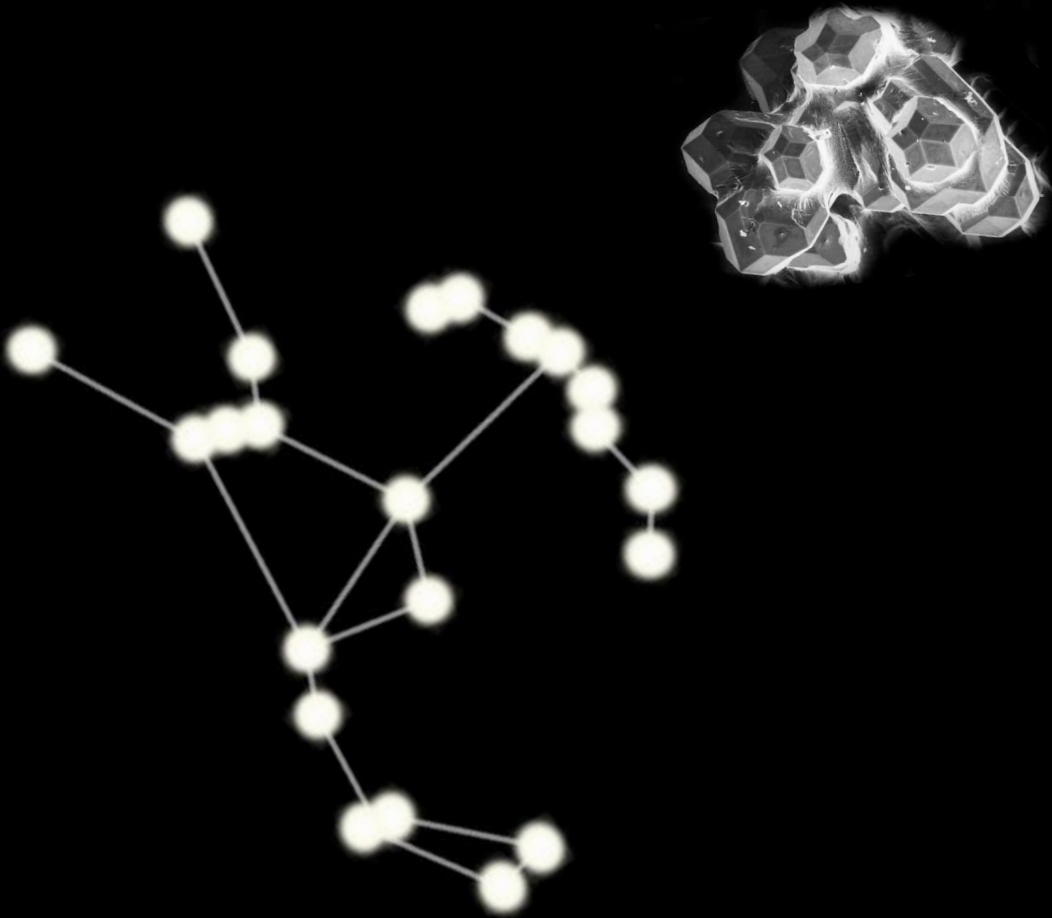
*Trying to describe the Gabriola Commons, I find myself describing its physical spaces: a piece of land, a number of buildings, several gardens and allotment spaces, an orchard, a marshy area, trails. The commercial kitchen is sometimes rented out, and a wood-frame structure is used for a mid-week farmers' market. There is also a yurt, used as a dance studio. While a physical inventory suffices in some ways, it elides how the Commons to be, including the so-called 'tragedy' that should have prevented its existence in the first place.*



*After spending time in close relationship with this un-common Commons, however, a better description arises from the interactions of the community of people within and around it. Most of all, perhaps, the Commons is a process. While there are many physical bodies, as well as meeting minutes, document archives, photographs, and a website, it is in the weeding, discussing, construction, eating, frustrating slowness, setting up and taking down of tables and chairs, cleaning of bathrooms and floors, playing of boules, and myriad other negotiated activities that the Commons seems to come to be itself.*



This ongoing project aims to portray a sense of *humans in process*, through the voices of those same people. It is a slow project, one that may take years. It may also never be finished: just like the subject it aims to describe, it might be forever in progress.



[davidszanto.com](http://davidszanto.com)