

Dining out as a performative event

John Pløger

To cite this article: John Pløger (2020): Dining out as a performative event, Urban Research & Practice, DOI: [10.1080/17535069.2020.1737726](https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2020.1737726)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2020.1737726>



© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 13 Mar 2020.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 485



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

Dining out as a performative event

John Pløger 

Department of Global Development & Planning, Faculty of Social Science, Kristiansand, Norway

ABSTRACT

Public events are scripted, staged and choreographed. Dining out is a perception-affect experience, but it is rare that the experience becomes a performative event in which guests are actors in the scene. The Madeleine's Food Theatre in Copenhagen created a performative dining-out experience where guests did not have knowledge of the script, stage or choreography beforehand. When people became part of making a space into an event, they entered into unimaginable atmospheres and moods. The article explores the dining experience at Madeleine's Food Theatre as a collage of body-mind impressions affected by different kinds of forces of presence.

KEYWORDS

Presence; event; affect;
Madeleine Food Theatre;
Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

1. Introduction

The event city is crucial to many city economies. The event city is part of a tactical urbanism (Mould 2014) to advance the city's position within the competitive 'economies of sign and space' (Lash and Urry 1994), including experiential consumption with respect to tourism (Urry 1990). The sign-economy includes art events, architecture, and the de-differentiation of experience and urban space; events 'all over'. This makes the affective disruption to a potential experience also part to the everyday use of the city. An event city is a city that promises people atmospheric affective experience spaces, such as pop-up events, street art and site art. Even the mundane lived neighbourhood life milieus is now attractive to urban tourism because it gives the tourist the feel of having a unique experience in the middle of a mass tourism city (Jakob 2012).

Any kind of event may rupture people's sense reaction or values, and it makes the experience 'an experiment' (Foucault 2007) because people must adapt to immediate experiences and unknown effects. The moods and atmospheres as forces to place and street experiences are rarely discussed or conceptualised. The design and formal forces of cultural experiences (e.g., formal and informal cultural codes) are often explored in consumption studies (e.g., Edensor and Falconer 2014; Hetherington and Cronin 2008; Lorentzen and Jeannerat 2013), but not the experience as a presence force for people that displaces personal values, habits, knowledge and former experiences in favour of the force of atmosphere and mood at the place (Gumbrecht 2004). Meaning is based on personal values, habits, knowledge and former experiences, but the sudden affect experience is a deep body experience including the sense of atmosphere from one's

CONTACT John Pløger  John.ploger@uia.no

mood (Stimmung). The feeling of being in a particular situatedness is a presence situation in which people are oscillating between body experiences and meaning (Gumbrecht 2014; Heidegger 2014; Kirkeby 2013).

Eating out is an event and a social space of moods and atmospheres, but normally within known codes and customs. A restaurant is an ordered space and a scripted event, and most people probably do not expect a disruption of these 'knowns' and to experience unexpected and sudden body effects (other than the pleasure of eating food). Guests do not expect to have an intensive and deeply emotional experience (if it is not 'the first date'). Some restaurant concepts try to challenge people's habits and expectations using new design concepts like eating in the dark (Edensor and Falconer 2014), but it is still a rare occasion if dining out turns into a performance scene. It is even more rare if guests themselves at the restaurant become actors in a scene and with a script they do not know.

*Madeleine's Food Theatre*¹ was an event with a frequently changed concept, new interior design, new menu and a new scene. The guests became involved in an affective experience and experiment, whether they desired to be involved or not. Madeleine's Food Theatre wanted 'actively [to] involve the whole body' (Danielsen 2008, 123). The event should provoke people's cognitive predispositions and ideas of a 'normal' dining experience. The dining experience became a collaged body-mind experience that went far beyond the food experience itself. Guests encountered a series of strange dining scenes provoking their prehension (Manning 2009); guests were having an experience that forced them into their affective body and that ruptured their sense habits and other habits. The event became an exploration of how a presence experience is the experience of atmosphere, intensity and effect that ruptures and displaces the 'known'.

This article is *not* about the experience of a meal or food. It is not about the cognitive or affect effect on each guest; it is not about life-style consumption; nor is it a study of the rhythm of dining out. It is an exploration of a presence experience that becomes a displacement experience; the displacement of people's experiences, values, norms, habits or senses giving examples of how people reacted to their presence experience (see section 5). Even though the event may be seen as a de-differentiation of culture and space, the key perspective to the study is to show not only how presence is a crucial force to the experience and how food is an intermediary to the experience but also how presence is an indeterminant force to people's experience at place and Madeleine's Food Theatre event strategy.²

The *next* section briefly introduces the background and context of Madeleine's Food Theatre. As the present experience and the performance experience are crucial to Madeleine's Food Theatre, the *third* section introduces the philosophy of the event and the philosophy of presence to understand these aspects of experiencing. On *event*, the article follows a Foucaultian understanding of events as both experience and experiment. On *presence*, following Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, being at Madeleine Food Theatre was to be part of a series of encounters with the not-yet-known and thus the oscillation between body and meaning effects. Presence experiences have an immediate impact on bodies and sensation and rupture the lived experience, cultural codes and values. The *fourth* section is methodological considerations on using the Internet as an archive. The *fifth* section is a study of Madeleine's Food Theatre as a presence space, staged moments of sensate forces (e.g., the aesthetic of the dining setting) and how the experience is made of an assemblage of

force³ that creates a milieu of event-experience-experiment (an event experience is always also an experiment) (Foucault 2001, 2005, 2007).

2. A short history of Madeleine's Food Theatre

Madeleine's Food Theatre started in 2006 and closed in 2011. A meeting between two friends, one with experience in experimental cooking and dining concepts and the other a film scenographer, resulted in the idea of creating a dining concept that would challenge how people sense food and their conventional food manners. The two friends worked for two years to develop the concept and, during that time, invited anthropologists, psychotherapists and people working with art installations, performance art and music to dinner to hear their comments on the idea and the food they were served. It was an innovative process that may best be described by an experience they had with one of the invited guests:

... We had the woman making performance art, and she described the first kiss she had from the man now the father to her children. I made a dessert of yogurt and geranium. Her reaction was a cry of happiness. There I knew we had a new medium we could work with' (Mette Martinussen).⁴

For the performance artist, tasting the dessert touched a deep embodied memory giving her a sudden, unexpected, affective presence experience (a cry of happiness). Madeleine's Food Theatre was, to Martinussen, based on the idea that people having dinner should have several such deep memory and body affective experiences. Martinussen had already experimented with such experiences at her first restaurant named '1.th' (in Danish). People arrived to a pre-made dinner in an ordinary apartment located on '1.th' (first floor, right). The dinner included cultural events and, between meals and after dinner, people could relax, if they wanted, on the living room couch or chairs. People had to pay in advance because the host wanted them 'to have the time stand still for a moment and to be in present time'. Martinussen wanted people to experience the feeling of being in the events *jetzt-zeit* mood, presence mood. When she re-opened 1.th in January 2015, she added her Madeleine's Food Theatre experiences, focusing more on the meals working as a mediator to people's (un)known past experiences provoked by taste, smell and affects.

The 1.th event had its followers. Cities have also organised gourmet events⁵ and concept restaurants like eating in the dark have become an international trend and a serialised experience (Edensor and Falconer 2014). While eating in the dark is an experience in which 'the essentials are always invisible to the eyes',⁶ Madeleine's Food Theatre not only wanted to challenge serial food and dining experiences but to experiment with both the visible and invisible essentials of eating and dining out. The theme of the dinner and the food and performance concept changed roughly every three months, and each time they wanted to experiment with how people reacted to a performative space of multiple visual sensations surrounding the dining and people's food experiences. The meals were the centre of the experience process people would have, and one of the ambitions was to have people realising how they forget to eat with their whole body. The eating in the dark concept to Edensor and Falconer is a play with one's senses from the perspective of 'what if not-seeing?'⁷ When Madeleine's Food

Theatre used the eating in the dark concept, they forced people not only to experience darkness as a visual encounter of not-seeing, but a sense of displacement affecting the senses of an unprepared body (see below).

Dining out is not only a sensate experience, but a discursive too. At a restaurant, guests enter a scripted space of signs and texts that includes materialities (e.g., design, table), discourses (e.g., the menu, small talk) and (in)formal cultural scripts (e.g., manners, the dining-process ritual, customs). In an interview, Mette Martinussen said,⁸ ‘to me it’s all about the atmosphere around eating’ and to have ‘a story’ circumscribing the meal. At Madeleine’s Food Theatre, people were in a position where they became simultaneously ‘author, viewer and circumstance of perception or a wider discourse’ (Belowa, cited in Biehl-Missal 2013, 358) not only staged by others but also unknown to the person. Madeleine’s Food Theatre forced people to act on unknown and non-prehensible circumstances in which their senses, habits and experiences became, so to say, ‘acting’ forces challenging the subjects themselves. As co-actors in the event, they could not only stay in their ‘embodied and lived experience’ (Biehl-Missal 2013, 358); they had to experiment.

At the event *The 7.th Sense*, people should extend their taste-sense of the flavours salt, bitter, sweet and strong and what affective effect they have. At another event, *From Childhood*, people had food from the 1950–1960 s (‘beard-milk and dessert’) that was supposed to invoke memories to the guest’s from when they were children. In this way, Madeleine’s Food Theatre recalled and ruptured the deeprooted cultural coded eye and people’s life experienced affective embodiments. The experience made people discover that, in fact, it is ‘my body in capacity of [being] a perceptive and practical field’ of acting (Merleau-Ponty 1995, 11) that gives them access to an experience.

To visit Madeleine’s Food Theatre was, thus, to meet more than just an ordered space and a ‘strange’ experience. Food served was a performance medium in itself and dining was a staged scene of visual effects, with the use of performance art intensifying people’s sensory experiences of the event and the meals. Through the intertwining of sense, taste and participating as a co-actor, Madeleine’s Food Theatre wanted to touch people’s unknown or suppressed memories, experiences and feelings and to create (re) new(ed) embodied pleasures of eating. What was unique to Madeleine’s Food Theatre was that they made guests part of the scene and used performance art to allow the experience to become an affective experiment of *jetzt-zeit* effects⁹ re-calling lost memories. Performance was never entertainment or edutainment but a way to make the body a co-actor to people’s experience. Using performance art and other visual forces, Madeleine’s Food Theatre created an experience-experiment in which people had to oscillate between a “presence effect” and a “meaning effect” (Gumbrecht 2004, 2).

3. A presence experience as an experiment

Any public space is an ‘infectious presence’ of socio-material forces (Chambers 1990, 54), including a space of events and chance encounters that fold with people’s sensate, affective and cognitive forces to give meaning to the experience and place. Public space is vitalism (Aspen & Pløger 2015), and the presence experience displaces habits and givens and turns the experience into an experiment for any subject (Foucault 2000, 2007).

All experience is done by a subject that comprises body-mind memories, (dis)beliefs, habits, schemes of signification, lived experiences and knowledge. Any experience will, in its presence power, not allow people to immediately go back to known sense experiences and knowledge; in a presence experience, the reasonable becomes an experiment to people. The rupture or displacement of schemes of signification and experiences that constitute the reasonable forces people to make a re-signification, re-coding and re-territorialisation of the experience. They need to re-sense and re-reason. Madeleine Food Theatre wanted to make a *limit experience* that ‘wrenches the subject from itself’ (Foucault 2000, 241) and to have people ‘test’ their sensory and meaning limits (O’Leary 2009, 77) to test givens and habits.

Any experience has references to a culture’s dominant ways of seeing and a common thinking and doing (e.g., habits). How people experience is thus more or less grounded in collective forms of perception and sensing. Any event can play on or disrupt this collective embodiment. Madeleine Food Theatre wanted to rupture the body pre-dispositions and manners for eating food. When subjectivities become a concomitant to an event and experience, the estrangement of lived experiences can become a transformative experience of ‘what we know, feel, or do’ and the experience potency is that it ‘transgresses the limits of a culture’ (O’Leary 2009, 78).

Madeleine Food Theatre made the presence experience the key to people, and people’s ‘production of presence’ – the ‘bodily being-there’ – is, in fact, according to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht following Martin Heidegger, ‘the experience proper to the life world’ (Gumbrecht 2004). Any presence experience is to the subject a recognition of the contingency and fragility of lived experiences and a challenge to people’s ‘embodied perception’ (Gumbrecht 2006c, 9). The embodied perception covers subjugated emotions, feelings, memories or moods that become actualized by having the experience.

Gumbrecht says presence – nearness, presentness, attentiveness – is an experience that not only has ‘an immediate impact on human bodies’, such as an emotional effect (Gumbrecht 2004, xiii), but is also always ‘in tension with lived experiences’ (105). To Gumbrecht, this means that the presence event shows we have to acknowledge, with respect to experiences, that our lives are more than interpretations. On the other hand, humans cannot escape the fact that ‘we conceive of aesthetic experience as an oscillation (and sometimes an interference) between “presence effects” and “meaning effects”’ (Gumbrecht 2004, 2). In a ‘meaning culture’, we cannot not interpret, or ‘it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – for us *not* to “read”, not to attribute meaning to that lightning or to that glaring’ (Gumbrecht 2004, 106).

The oscillation between presence experiences and meaning is a condition of life. Any everyday being is lived in changing here-and-now situations, and even the most well-known situations have their presence forces. Being present to an event to Gumbrecht has some basic characteristics: *First*, it is an oscillation between a presence experience and lived hermeneutics (‘we cannot *not* “read”’). We must, however, be critical of any language theory that claims we cannot ‘speak or even think’ about anything outside language (Gumbrecht 2006c, 4). Meaning is affected by non-language forces like sensing and the haptic, aesthetic experience and atmospheres together with words (8). *Second*, presence as a ‘being there’ is ‘the navigation through the augmented dimension, in the sense of engaging with quite complicated overlays’. These overlays include material forces, such as a stadium or navigating a city with mobile phones (11).

Third, presence has an effect as an ‘in-between movement for sense-making’ (15, in the words of the interviewer Ulrik Ekman), which points to ‘the limits of human control of appearance’ (21, from Martin Seel). Appearances are ephemeral and an ephemeral appearance turns the experience into an experiment.

There are thus some socio-ontological characteristics to a presence: it is, *first*, an oscillation between body-sense and meaning, and this oscillation is elementary to life. *Second*, a ‘*Stimmung*’, mood, is a presence phenomenon that on one hand ‘affects the surface of our bodies’ (Gumbrecht 2014, x) and, on the other hand, is an aesthetic experience related to appearances. A site, *third*, is thus an assemblage, constellation and configuration of emergent forces producing agency and emotions, and, *fourth*, presence is not only an infectious presence but also a presence of appearances and latent forces (Gumbrecht 2012).

Following Martin Heidegger (2007), Gumbrecht sees *atmosphere* as a key force of life in general and presence experiences in particular. In German, *Atmosphären* is connected to *Stimmung* (mood), and *Stimmung* is a component of one’s *Befindlichkeit* (felt situatedness).¹⁰ Human beings are atmospheres (always in a mood or *Stimmung*), and life is lived in and through atmospheres (Heidegger 2007).

The materialities and occurrences experienced in a sports bar, a shopping mall or a restaurant make a ‘scene’, or better a social field of (inter)action, that is both an affective experience and a presence experience that turn into ‘a signifying event’ from the subject side (Kirkeby 2013, 149). The deep meaning of affect, desire and body memory affect agency, and the signifying materiality – a word spoken, a gesture seen, a behaviour, a symbol – is sensed, according to Erin Manning (2009), from a resemblance to (a body) memory. The colour white may remind one of the taste of a cappuccino (Manning 2009).

Whereas some significations are ‘self-referential and constitutive of reality’ (Kyndrup 2008, 149) from experience, others cannot be put properly into this self-referential frame (lack of words, lack of immediate meaning, lack of body experiences, etc.) (Biehl-Missal 2013; Manning 2009; Massumi 2011; Merleau-Ponty 1995). A presence experience may thus desubjectivate the reason-seeking human body and leave the subject, so to speak, ‘lost in translation’. Michel Foucault, best known for his discourse studies, insisted that every experience is immediately also an experiment. The French word *expérience* implies to ‘make or do an experience’ and to ‘have an experience’ (O’Leary 2009, 88), and an event, to Foucault, is an experience ‘capable of tearing us away from ourselves and changing the way we think and act’ (O’Leary 2008, 14). An event challenges ‘dominant ways of seeing, thinking about, and acting’ (8), and the experience of the event is thus a ‘desubjectivation’ (Foucault 2000, 241) because it makes people uncertain. The subject may then use its lived experience (*Erfahrung*, common-sense, prehension) ‘to grasp meaning’ anew (241), but an event, to Foucault, is more than ‘an effect’ (Foucault 2001, 93): it is fundamentally an *événementalisation* of time (e.g., memory) and space (place of experience).

At Madeleine’s Food Theatre, guests became part of an eventualisation of a presence space that ruptured their senses, experiences and prehensions. Partly because they entered a space in which they became co-actors in a script they did not know, but also because such experiences are not immediately ‘incarnated’, it is first oscillating between body and meaning. As we saw with Gumbrecht, the experience is not ‘unincarnated’ either: it is not a pure body experience nor is it always meaningful (Foucault

2001b, 36–37). Presence and meaning are always in tension (Gumbrecht 2014) because there is this *more*; this potential in a not-yet clarified situation, this moment of ‘tearing us away from ourselves’ to challenge our dominant ways of seeing, thinking about and acting. This was the space and the presence situation that Madeleine’s Food Theatre attempted to make.

4. Exploring social effects using the Internet and blogs

As indicated, we cannot grasp a here-and-now affect experience reflexively; we can only try to describe and interpret the effect afterwards. As the theatre is closed, we only have ‘the archive’ on the Internet to explore the effects of being a guest. Looking at the Internet as an intercommunicative social media, where people interact through blogs, Facebook, Instagram and other platforms, the Internet is now regarded as a ‘lifelogging’ medium (Sumartojo et al. 2016) for self-presentation. Starting out as the communication of personal experiences to a small group of followers (Reed 2005, 2008), social media platforms are now the preferred places to express personal experiences and thoughts to the numerous people who have access to these platforms. The texts and visual expressions on social media have ‘a social efficacy that responds to and anticipates a world of relationships’ that are ‘out there’ (Jiménez and Estalella 2014, 162). There are readers and commentators, and the author becomes a kind of ‘textual subject’ that ‘speaks’ (163) and thus a subject that anchors experiences in a public text. As such, the Internet is an archive of the ‘living memory of urban experiences’ (164) that works as both a ‘methodology and a method of urban life. It is both a kind of documentation and a praxis that elicits new forms of relationship among strangers’ (164–165).

This study of Madeleine’s Food Theatre cannot have a phenomenological approach based on observation or self-experience, but the study is inspired by ‘the urban archive’ methodology (Olsen 2016). The ‘urban archive’, according to Olsen, is an archive that is made from an experimental face-to-face meeting between people in urban space and the discursive and/or visual production of experience and meaning coming out of this meeting. Extended to social media, an online urban archive thus contains an archive of living memory and experiences written in texts and visualised by photo and video. Such an archive is a kind of ‘afterthought’ or, if we are talking about experiences at Madeleine’s Food Theatre, it is an archive of presence experiences remixed and reflected. The Internet archive works as text-based or visualised (photo, video) affective experiences that do or do not express meaningfulness at a distance. The text and the visualisation showed are subjectively experienced but thought of as informative and affective to others. The use of these ‘texts’ – words, short videos, photographs – as empirical stuff ‘allows for the tracing of affective transmissions in language’ (Klausen 2017, 374).

Researchers today see Internet stories and dialogues as ‘augmentations of real-life practices’ (Klausen 2017, 375), including emotions, sensations or atmospheres felt in presence time. It is exactly an archive of stories *ascribing affective signification* to past experiences. Personal blogs, visual presentations, words and texts on the Internet are seen empirically as an act of *inscribing signification* to sensate, affective or social experiences in an attempt to make a past presence experience meaningful to others in another present time (the reading). The archive represents ‘an emergent notion’ (Rao

2009, 374) of an affective touch experienced by others as a ‘here-and-now real’ phenomenological experience to the writer, but it may and is supposed to affect the reader.

The Internet and social media archives are, of course, a contingent empirical source open to a myriad of readings and effects. The texts and visual signs can only be used to find, or to take, a certain approach to a phenomenon. It is, however, possible to generate a composition of problematics on specific socio-spatial experiences by analysing how they are presented in texts, photos and videos. The different stories together also make it possible to indicate or discern what was an immediate sensate experience in its real moment of experience. The use of the Internet archive is thus, *first*, a reading of a ‘staged scene’ of words and images made by an author and, *second*, the wording of what was first a singular bodily experience in presence time. *Third*, the text, photo or video represent a singular experience and an individual interpretation of an experience and, *fourth*, the blogger can only highlight impressions as an aftermath experience. Thus, *fifth*, this archive can primarily be used to trace a problematic and explore how themes emerged and experiences were articulated.

5. Madeleine’s Food Theatre – feel your sensuous body

It has never been my dream to have a restaurant – I want to make stories with food that touches people, Mette Martinussen once said. She wanted to ‘break the predictability – indulging and seducing people’s senses using food as a mediator’.¹¹ To challenge all senses, Martinussen and her event partner decided to use a performance concept in which they wanted to experiment with how dining is a presence situation enhancing the body-sensing experience and challenging prehension, predictions, commonalities and habits. But they also wanted to have guests explore how a performative dinner experience and a new taste experience may touch personal ‘stories’ and deep embodied experiences. Madeleine’s Food Theatre did not work from an idea of social ontologies but staged situations of multiple sensory experiences. The perception-affect-action effect is a process of becoming experiences, and it was staged in Madeleine’s Food Theatre in order to give guests a personal encounter with the not-yet-known of their body-sensing and memory. This evoking of affective memories is called a ‘sensuous sensitivity’:

Madeleine uses the staged meal as a media and a new scene, where we can tell stories that actively involve the whole body ... If we should be able to help our audience have a greater awareness and sensuous sensitivity by a play with the risky – the fear of the unknown – it demands that we do it in the right order (Nikolaj Danielsen, the other founder of Madeleine’s Food Theatre, 2008, 123).

To all guests, Madeleine’s Food Theatre should be an intensification of sensing (perception) that forces guests to challenge their ritual sense of dining (customs, habits, reasoning). The dining concept was, as shown, thought to build on an awareness of food and tasting as linked to ‘the whole body’, and by adding performance as a visual force to the experience, Madeleine’s Food Theatre wanted to challenge the relationship between appearance, expression and signification. They wanted to *touch* people by creating a situation in which people sensed their body-mind memories without knowing it beforehand.

Madeleine's Food Theatre introduced itself as being inspired by Marcel Proust and his novel *In Search of Lost Time*, in which a 'Madeleine-cake invokes memories' of a lost time.¹² Like the Madeleine cake, Madeleine's Food Theatre should invoke deep, subconscious memories. Such memories are grounded on the tangling of sense-feelings and memories people subjugate throughout the course of their life. The Theatre wanted to make people aware of the subjugated memories as potentially related to touch, taste, smell, seeing and hearing. They wanted to make a new kind of experience scene for reaching forgotten memories, and the scene was sought to 're-invent the meeting around the table'¹³ to taste food with the whole body. The Theatre made a presence situation in which people could not suppress their senses and created an event that could lure guests to taste anew:

We put food into a new context and allowed it to meet new artistic expressions. We established a new presence for, in the end, having our guests taste anew. We enticed our audience along the road of the senses and misled them to find the soul of the infinite meal. Welcome to our not always down-to-earth world.

5.1. Photo 1

Being a guest became an experience of much more than one's food-sensing. Fundamentally, Martinussen and Danielsen say, 'it's all about the urge'.¹⁴ According to Madeleine's Food Theatre, the way to reach this urge was to 'introduce the strange within the known' (Danielsen 2008:120&123). On one occasion, the theme of the dinner was 'hunger'. People were asked not to eat on the day of the dinner because 'the play is a travel through hunger. Not only the physical hunger, but also experiencing that the spiritual hunger can only be felt when the physical hunger is satisfied. First then, you can experience yourself' (Schmidt 2009). The guests were guided through three dining rooms, but it was not one room for the starter, one room for the main course and one for dessert; it was three rooms of hunger experience.

In the first room, you had a meal to cover your basic needs, because if you do not feel you have satisfied your basic hunger, you can only think of yourself. In the second room, guests were stimulated to 'turn their gaze inwards and be in their own consciousness' (Schmidt



Photo 1.

2009) and in this way find a surplus consciousness in themselves to enjoy the food. In this room, the first guest in line had the meal served in full light, whereas the second received her or his meal in a black box and could not see the food. There was, however, a small mirror at the top of the box that people could use to try to identify the food. In the third room, the food was served at a long table because people were now expected to have the energy to relate to the other guests rather than concentrating on their own needs. It happened, however, that only people on one side of the table were served with food. This gave people a choice: did they want to share with the guest opposite, whom they did not know, or, as described by one guest, 'do we choose to eat it all ourselves?' (Schmidt 2009). People were given a white box with forks, knives, glasses, plates, wine and bread and had to set the table themselves. As a kind of social 'emergency box', this box was a mediator to spur people to begin talking and socialising. The question remains, however: do people connect and talk 'because we are satisfied, or is it the good wine' that makes the difference (Schmidt 2009)?

At the 'hunger' event, guests explored both their body sense forces (hunger), thing-forces (setting) and social forces (manners) in a way that intertwined with morality, ethics and social character (sharing or not). The food and food-setting of Madeleine Food Theatre were made to make people realise that they have forgotten how to use their senses when they eat. But people do not usually enjoy either the memory effects of sensuous forces like smell, taste, colour and setting or the visual scene of eating. Whereas people usually do not reflect on the social effect of their sensuous mode of being or the atmosphere around them, at Madeleine Food Theatre, they met sense forces activated to have people touch their sub- or unconscious body in a way that connected their presence sensing to deep senses (memories) and desires (first love, first sexual act).

Even if people knew about Madeleine's Food Theatre before going there, they could not imagine how the event would rupture their body-feelings, memories or habitual body-forgetting way of dining and eating. They did not know, either, when or how in the process of experiencing Madeleine's Food Theatre they would use performance art, and how the performance was designed to stimulate or challenge the guest's body and lived past experiences. If the guest expected that Madeleine's Food Theatre wanted to rupture their habits and habitual way of enjoying a meal, they could not control the experience because the event pushed the guests into a position in which they became co-actors in a script that was unknown to them. The guest may have expected affect to be a crucial force in their dining-out experience, but the different performative food-settings stimulated all senses in unexpected ways. Madeleine's Food Theatre wanted people to begin to wonder about eating as a deep sense experience. The banal act of dining out was turned by Madeleine Food Theatre into a kind of detournement; a displacement of manners, values, emotions and dining habits.

The effect was monumental. The concept attracted international attention and a New York-based journalist tried to describe her experience of 'the performance dinner':

I love food, but I never actually wept over a meal until dessert at a former beer warehouse in Copenhagen last summer. I was at Madeleine's Madteater [Danish] – a kind of interactive dinner performance staged every few months in the neighbourhood of Islands Brygge – eating nougat semifreddo while tightly wrapped together with a group of Danes in a stretchy white shroud, behind which waitstaff crept, caressing my back and pressing ghostlike faces through the fabric. There were lyrical strings and a dramatic chiaroscuro and a dancer undulating on the serving dais, and it was all *gemütlichkeit*,

and ritual, and the sadness of endings, and – yes, I know this makes no sense. You had to be there. That is the point. It's art you experience with all five senses, the most satisfying performance in town. Madteater is precisely as its name translates: food theatre. (Kate Sekules, New York Times, 19 January 2010).

5.2. Photo 2

Sekules' memories do not fully inform the performative presencing of the dining experience. The past is not in her mind 'ordered and under command'. It is a presence memory, where 'the mind is a receptor through which images of the past come in to the present' (Scanlan 2013, 61). She experienced a deep, unstoppable, sensuous affect experience ('never wept over a meal'). The dining part of the scenery was, as shown by Sekules, never just 'a coming to the table'. On another occasion, guests were led into a dark room, guided to their tables by waiters with infra-red lights on their heads. They were seated in darkness, not knowing what food and wine they would get, having to eat what they were served with a knife and fork they could not see, and sitting next to a stranger they could not see. This was a fundamentally different sensorial experience from dining in restaurants with 'eating in darkness' as their concept (Edensor and Falconer 2014). It was a presence experience: the guest could not 'prepare' a 'proper' or defensive reaction to the staging and the scenes of the meal. For one thing, people did not know in advance that they had to eat in total darkness and, secondly, they did not know about the dining process or with whom they should socialise. Another event started by having people meeting around tables to discuss food and the world food situation, and then having to decide what they would like to eat before being allowed to go to the table. Yet another event had guests coming to a long table filled with delicious food. People stood around the table waiting to be seated and to be served. However, they had to stand by the table and eat the food with their fingers and without plates.

The New York journalist describes how she felt at the first arrival scene she experienced in this way:

It turned out Act 1 was something called Footbath and Flying Sauces (I'm translating from the Danish). Sixty of us sat in a semicircle with rolled up pants and bare feet in buckets of hot water. Scenes from an idyllic childhood were projected onto virtually every surface: the

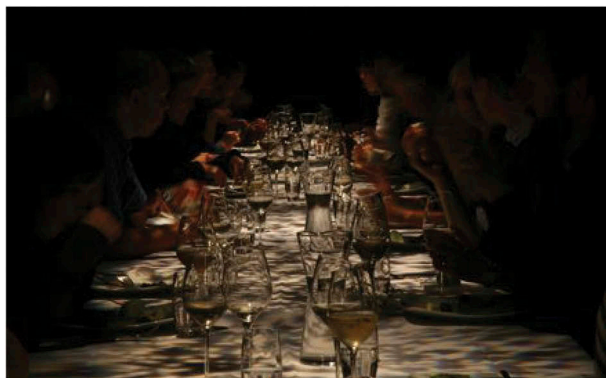


Photo 2.

floor, the Indonesian dancers, the porcelain tulip bowls filled with scallops over raw puréed cauliflower, cured ham, toasted hazelnuts and a local sorrel-like leaf. Once we'd finished that, the bowls were refilled with a creamy soup of Jerusalem artichoke and clams. We were transforming the act of eating into exactly that: an act. I felt equal parts diner, performer and audience member in a restaurant that channelled all at once the opera, an art gallery and a shrink's office. It was strange. It was delicious. (Kate Sekules, New York Times, 19 January 2010).

5.3. Photo 3

Photo 3 shows the event Sekules experienced, which demanded a presence attitude from the visitor that they could not imagine before being placed in the circle. It was a scene intertwining 'the unbelievable', delight, and the monumental strangeness of a foot bath+food experience and its presence perception-affect effect. The guest could not separate the art performance of which they were a part, the gourmet food served, the feeling of personal comfort (or not) and being a performer themselves in this circle of strangers in an unfamiliar dining setting to all. The event became a personal exploration of people's unknown sensuous reaction to an act and experiences that included doing things that they (properly) thought should be done in privacy (an intimate foot bath) or felt did not belong to a dinner. The sounds and visual performance surrounding the act only intensified people's affective presence attention to what happened.

If people did not leave the setting, they became prisoners of instantaneous affect forces and co-actors in a continuous emergence of new moments of sensate and affective ruptures to their lived experiences, habits and manners. People were forced to face the limits of their personal (affect, sensuous, sensual) control of the situation and had to experience the challenge of keeping up appearance despite a lack of inner affective control (crying, confused, excited, exhausted, exhilarated).

The dining at Madeleine's Food Theatre included infinite moments of such challenging presence experiences. Guests could only stay in a presence situation. There were no common rituals, codes, common schemes of signification, personal experiences or



Photo 3.

common culture to refer to or ‘hang your hat on’. To dine at Madeleine’s Food Theatre was to encounter a continuous stream of eventualisation of ‘the scene’ and not-yet known subjective affective responses.¹⁵ The aim was to make people aware of their body ‘tasting’ and evoke embodied forces (may be memories, may be a hunch, may an atmosphere), that may invoke ‘familiar in the unfamiliar’. The event and its scenery only afforded the experiment – ‘to try out’ – to people. The effect was singular and thus included a possible revelation of people’s suppressed experiences, memories and affective forces to a wider audience of strangers. The experience became ‘an exploration of where the divide between the physical hunger and the mental hunger is. People say, you are what you eat, and you will be what you eat; what you eat also becomes you. It is a co-play that is almost sexual’ (Nikolai Danielsen 2008).¹⁶

6. The impossible choreography of presence – but it has effect!

The choreography of a dining process is usually the orchestration of a timeline from the menu of starters, main course and desert, but Madeleine’s Food Theatre wanted to have guests have an experience of indeterminacy by staying in an ongoing presence situation. When eating, people rarely recognise their desire for a pleasurable taste and how the taste may be related to memories from their life. When dining out, people also rarely desire the food to stimulate their out-of-control sensuous body and affective forces, nor do they expect a restaurant dinner to invoke a desire for sensuality. Further, eating together with a stranger also brings the body and senses into the process of experimenting with one’s manners and customs.

6.1. Photo 4

The first three scenes in photo 4 are from the event ‘Top-meeting’, where people first had to discuss ‘the world food situation’ and then make part of the dinner themselves. The fourth scene is from the ‘Innovative Wine and Liquor’ meeting, showing a guest being fed by one of the staff for a ‘blind-test’. These are scenes showing how Madeleine’s Food Theatre staged ‘an art of relations’ and a sense assemblage of food, materials (design of milieu) and affect, but keeping the meaning-effect unpredictable.

When making different situations in which the guest only met unusual choices of action – like people sitting at the same table with only one meal and two plates – they came to explore their own irresolution, anxiety, excitement and intensities emerging out of the contingency of the situation. Madeleine’s Food Theatre scripted the experience from known dining-out rituals (e.g., a menu with a starter, main course and desert), but



Photo 4.

then they ruptured certainty by setting the common codes and rituals into new connectivities of how to dine (e.g., eating from a common plate using your fingers).

6.2. Outlook

Why use a closed restaurant event as a case study instead of going into existing concept restaurants? The reason is simple; it was not a concept in itself, but an experience-experiment presence event. Compared to a ritual dining-out experience, Madeleine's Food Theatre wanted people to explore how food evokes unknown sense and body memories. Eating is – if people are attentive – always a performance of sensuous taste effects, and Madeleine added a visual atmosphere, the affect effect of co-acting with strangers and the emotional effects of experiencing scenes of co-acting with the not-yet-known. The Theatre used a known scene to most people: dining out. However, experiencing a footbath, artist performance, light, darkness or a waiter feeding you were not expected experiences. Every phase of dining at Madeleine's Food Theatre was designed to provoke people's affective certainties and stimulate the sensuous forces of being present here-and-now that ruptured people's past body-mind experiences. Madeleine Food Theatre forced guests to stay in 'the eventness of experience' (Manning 2009, 69) for an entire evening.

As a highly choreographed space, Madeleine's Food Theatre had its lines of stratification (e.g., menu) and sedimentation of (inter)action (tables, courses). Guests expected to meet an ordered space, but the scripts and visual forces affecting the eye and senses were not imaginable. Memory is supposed to play a role in forming praxis and order to the event. Being a guest at Madeleine's Food Theatre provoked involuntary memories to people, that became overwhelmed by images and the strangeness of the 'scenes' of dining. The immediate impact of the presence experience forced the mind to be a 'receptor' (Scanlan) in the 'moment of intensities' (Gumbrecht 2004, 97) or 'lost in translation'.¹⁷

We may thus follow Deleuze and say that, at Madeleine's Food Theatre, guests became part of an ever-changing composition of affective, material, visual and image forces that made the event an experience 'between the real and the imaginary'. Madeleine's Food Theatre wanted 'to break the blissful spell of ready-made totalities' that people are used to when dining out (152).

Madeleine's Food Theatre staged (1) a *porosity* of place. That is, the staging of a known place – dining at a table – with blurred boundaries between food/body, restaurant/theatre and subjective meaning/suppressed body memories. Guests (2) became an active part of producing the *intensity of unpredictable* experience to affect senses, signification and meaning. Suppressed affects and hidden desires were activated by (3) people experiencing the power of the *haptic* from colours, interior, choreographed scenes and dark or light scenes. Madeleine's Food Theatre essentially made an atmosphere of 'what-now' and 'how-to' (Massumi 2011) in a space where moods and one's feeling of *Befindlichkeit* were evoked by how and to what degree the intertwining of people's expectations, past experiences and habits became dislocated. When people's experiences and feelings are disoriented, they are forced to experiment.

Every event has topographic traces – a scene, a script, actors, acts – that people can try to line up and learn from afterwards. The study could not try to identify (closed, no

guest lists available, etc), if people met at the event having an ‘expectation for the unexpected’, a prehension, and how this may have impacted or reduced the affective effect and impact on the experience (suggestion from R1). But being in present time, subjects react by senses before sense. This article has tried to explore how Madeleine’s Food Theatre intensified the effect of being present using shifting performative event scenes. Madeleine’s Food Theatre generated a space that enforced a *Stimmung* of being part of a process that not only affected people’s affective senses and experiences, but also made the experience itself an experiment.

Notes

1. Madeleine Mad Teater (in Danish) had a short history (see later), but after closing the Theater, the idea in 2013–2016 transformed to a project called *madeleine+zonen for madkultur* (madeleine+ the zone for food culture) financed by the Department of Business in Denmark. The project made dining experiments all over Denmark (see www.mmmzonen.dk; accessed 10.10.2013). One of the founders, Mette Martinussen, lately served the food described in Karen Blixen novel ‘*Babettes Gæstebud*’ as part of a performance theater play in Copenhagen in August 2018 (<https://www.osterbroteater.dk/forestilling/babettes-gaestebud/>). She is now back where she started; the ‘1.th’ apartment (see below).
2. The study does not go into the German consumptions-studies at the beginning at the 1990 s. Gerhard Schulze (2005/1992) made a cross-disciplinary reflection on how to study styles of consumption including semiotics, aesthetics, life-philosophy, sociology of knowledge, and theories on distinction and style. He identified aLevel-milieu (Niveaumilieu), Harmony-milieu (Harmoniemiieu), Integration-milieu (Integrationsmilieu) and Self-realization milieu (Selbstverwichtungsmilieu) (Chp. 6). The role of the ‘gaze’ on consumption events (John Urry) and habits and styles of consumption (Alan Warde) may be said to have similar objectives as Schulze. In particular Schulze may be said to study ‘the interaction between the physical (and affective) and the cognitive’ as ‘a fundamental process that is embedded in all forms of experience’ (R1), and he writes 2005: ‘Die grösste Veränderung [since his original 1980’s study] of the Experience society ... [is the] experience rationality’. (2005, viii). The space of possibilities (‘Möchlichskeitraum’) is extended for the many, but in Germany followed by an impoverishment panic (‘Verarmungspanik’) (xi). This perspective on life-style, mode of life, distinction and class vulnerability, this kind of problematization of the semantic and affective sides of class consumption, is highly relevant for a societal study on the role and socio-semantic effect of consumption opportunities (or not). This study has no material to discuss such aspects.
3. Assemblages cannot, if we take the concept from Deleuze and Guattari, be thought of as coming from a kind of assembly. An assemblage is the connectivities of multiplicities that happen by making connections out of the actualized density of forces. An assemblage is a ‘fitting-in’ of forces; not a given structure and has affect-effect as eventualisations. Assemblages are a co-effect as it is “it is symbiosis, a ‘sympathy’. The crucial is never filiations (the heridariaties), but alliances and compounds, never the hereditaries, but the contagious, epidemics, the wind’ (Deleuze & Guattari, from Lopes and Bro 1975, 189, translation from Danish by the author).
4. December 2014 press release when Mette Martinussen re-opened the restaurant ‘e-open which formed the kernel for Madeleine ideas of Theatre’. (http://1th.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/1th_Pressemeddelelse_DetNye1th_041214.pdf) (accessed 18.04.16).
5. E.g., <http://www.copenhagencooking.dk/program/moderne-dansk-mad-p-toppen-af-k-benhavn-udsolgt>.
6. From Nocti Vagus, a Berlin-based eating in the dark concept (http://www.noctivagus.com/english/dark_restaurant.html). This has existed for ten years and is not

- a performance theatre but rather a restaurant with an unchanging concept (i.e., menu, interior.).
7. Eating in darkness, as Edensor and Falconer note, is both a concept that people can join in or, as at Madeleine's Food Theatre, part of a performance dinner. The concept restaurant is 'a controlled de-control of emotions and sensations' that challenges habits, familiarity, and 'sensual dispositions' (Edensor and Falconer 2014, 14), but Madeleine's approach focused on the presence effects of the experience itself.
 8. <http://www.b.dk/kultur/mette-madeleine> (accessed 10.04.16).
 9. The German word *Wirkungs-effekt* is more accurate here, meaning 'have an effect', from forces *configured at place*, and not the causal effect such as the English word suggests.
 10. Humans are thus always in an oscillation and 'conrescence' (Kirkeby 2013, 137) between sense, prehension and meaning. Gumbrecht (2006a, 2006b, 2012, 2014) uses 'Stimmung', or in English 'atmosphere', as a way to understand how aesthetic experiences have a 'conrescence' and body-mind effect. According to Heidegger (2007), being itself is in fact to be in atmospheres and a mood. And being situated is always about a *Befindlichkeit* (Fløistad 1968, Heidegger 2007). A *Befindlichkeit, zu Befinden sich*, is thus a 'mood-wise situatedness' (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2014) based on being as being-in-atmosphere.
 11. I have chosen the English word 'indulging' for the Danish 'henføre', which plays on 'giving oneself over to the senses'.
 12. See e.g., <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIOV75QLdJg>.
 13. If not stated otherwise, all quotes are from www.madeleinefoodtheater.dk (accessed 12.03 2011; see note 5).
 14. This is a translation of the Danish word *ive; pl*, which does not connote 'instinct', but rather 'ather e 'instina 'n her e 'instincttion of the Danish word *ive*; please update or provide archived link.mpliated overlaysildren. I made a dest force.
 15. Looking at different food-consumption experience websites, it is easy to find examples of how people try to rationalise their experience: 'why this?', 'missing that', 'couldn't understand' this or that. Few people, like Sekules, dare to give themselves over to a performance experience from the first moment but 'get high' on the experience in the end.
 16. <http://www.kunsten.nu/artikler/artikel.php?bag+madscenen&print=1> (accessed 01.04.16).
 17. Gumbrecht argues this presence experience is an *Erleben* – 'purely physical perception' – and not an *Erfahrung* (interpretation, meaning making) (Gumbrecht 2004, 100).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

John Pløger  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0861-1220>

References

- Aspen, J., and J. Pløger. 2015. *Den Vitale Byen*. Oslo: Spartacus forlag.
- Biehl-Missal, B. 2013. "The Atmosphere of the Image: An Aesthetic Concept for Visual Analysis." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 13 (4): 356–367. doi:10.1080/10253866.2012.668369.
- Bille, M., P. Bjerregaard, and T. F. Sørensen. 2014. "Staging Atmospheres: Materiality, Culture, and the Texture of the In-between." *Emotion, Space and Society*, no. 2014: 1–8. doi:10.1016/j.emospa.2014.11.002.
- Chambers, I. 1990. *Border Dialogues. Journeys in Postmodernity*. London: Routledge.

- Danielsen, N. 2008. "Man smager da rum? (You Taste Space?)." In *Byens Rum 1 (City Space 1)*, edited by H. Juul, 120–130. København: B.
- Edensor, T., and E. Falconer. 2014. "Dans Le Noir? Eating in the Dark: Sensation and Conviviality in a Lightless Place." *Cultural Geographies* 1–18. doi:10.1177/1474474014534814).
- Fløistad, G. 1968. *Heidegger*. Oslo: Pax.
- Foucault, M. 2000. *Power*. New York: New Press.
- Foucault, M. 2001. "Theatrum Philosophicum." In *Fluglinjer. Om Deleuzes Filosofi*, edited by M. S. Carlsen, 87–114. Aarhus: Museum Tusulanums Forlag.
- Foucault, M. 2001b. *Talens forfatning (L'ordre du Discourse)*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Foucault, M. 2005. *Die Heterotopien. Der utopische Körper*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Foucault, M. 2007. *The Politics of Truth*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Gumbrecht, H. U. 2004. *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gumbrecht, H. U. 2006a. "Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past)." *History and Theory* 45: 317–327. doi:10.1111/hith.2006.45.issue-3. October 2006.
- Gumbrecht, H. U. 2006b. "Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Worlds: Reclaiming an Unredeemed Utopian Motif." *New Literary History* 37 (2): 299–318. doi:10.1353/nlh.2006.0035.
- Gumbrecht, H. U. 2006c. "The Speed of Beauty: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht." Interviewed by Ulrik Ekman, *PMC* 16.3, 1–30. Accessed 11 November 2010. <http://muse.jdu.edu/journals/pmc/v016/16.3ekman.html>
- Gumbrecht, H. U. 2012. *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung. On the Hidden Potential of Literature*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Gumbrecht, H. U. 2014. *Our Broad Present. Time and Contemporary Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Heidegger, M. 2007. *Væren Og Tid (Being and Time)*. Oslo: Pax.
- Heidegger, M. 2014. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. 2nd ed. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Hetherington, K., and A. M. Cronin, Eds. 2008. *Consuming the Entrepreneurial City. Image, Memory, Spectacle*. London: Routledge.
- Jakob, D. 2012. "The Eventification of Place: Urban Development and Experience Consumption in Berlin and New York." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 20 (4): 447–459.(1-13). doi: 10.1177/0969776412459860.
- Jiménez, A. C., and A. Estalella. 2014. "Assembling Neighbors: The City as Hardware, Method, and "A Very Messy Kind of Archive." *Common Knowledge* 20 (1): 150–171. doi:10.1215/0961754X-2374808.
- Kirkeby, O. F. 2013. *Eventologi (Eventology)*. Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
- Klausen, M. 2017. "The Urban Exploration Imaginary: Mediatization, Commodification, and Affect." *Space & Culture* 20 (4): 372–384. doi:10.1177/1206331217720076.
- Kyndrup, M. 2008. *Den æstetiske Relation (The Aesthetic Relation)*. København: Gyldendal.
- Lash, S., and J. Urry. 1994. *The Economy of Signs and Space*. London: Sage.
- Lopes, A. M., and B. Bro. 1975. *Efterskrift (Afterword) in Kafka for en mindre litteratur (Kafka. For a Minor Literature)*, 163–190. Aarhus: Sjakalens Ørkenserie.
- Lorentzen, A., and H. Jeannerat. 2013. "Urban and Regional Studies in the Experience Economy: What Kind of Turn?" *European Urban & Regional Studies* 20 (4): 363–369. doi:10.1177/0969776412470787.
- Manning, E. 2009. *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Massumi, B. 2011. *Semblance and Event. Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. 1995. *Perceptionens Primat*. København: Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi.
- Mould, O. 2014. "Tactical Urbanism. The New Vernacular of the Creative City." *Geography Compass* 8 (8): 529–539. doi:10.1111/gec3.12146.

- O'Leary, T. 2008. "Foucault, Experience and Literature." *Foucault Studies* (5): 5–25. doi:10.22439/fs.v0i5.1407.
- O'Leary, T. 2009. *Foucault and Fiction. The Experience Book*. London: Continuum.
- Olsen, C. S. 2016. "Performing Urban Archives – A Starting Point for Exploration." *Cultural Geographies* 23 (3): 511–515. doi:10.1177/1474474016638048.
- Rao, V. 2009. "Embracing Urbanism: The City as Archive." *New Litterary History* 40 (2): 371–383.
- Reed, A. 2005. "My Blog Is Me': Texts and Persons in UK Online Journal Culture (And Anthropology)." *Ethnos* Vol.70 (2): 220–242. doi:10.1080/00141840500141311.
- Reed, A. 2008. "'Blog This': Surfing the Metropolis and the Method of London." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14: 391–406. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9655.2008.00508.x.
- Scanlan, J. 2013. *Memory. Encounters with the Stange and Familiar*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Schulze, G. 2005. *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursociologie der Gegenwart*. (2. Auflage). Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Schmidt, B. 2009. "Madeleine Mad Teater: rejsen fra sulten til mæt." *Samvirke*. Accessed 06 February 2015. <http://samvirke.dk/mad/artikler/rejsen-sulten-maet.html>
- Sumartojo, S., S. Pink, D. Lupton, and C. H. Labond. 2016. "The Affective Intensities of Datafied Space." *Emotion, Space & Society* 21: 33–40.
- Urry, J. 1990. *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage.