

Orchestrer la perte / Perpetual Demotion

Simon Laroche & David Szanto

Orchestrer la perte / Perpetual Demotion is an interactive installation comprising a feeding robot, human eaters, bacterially activated foods, a refrigerator, and a human slave.

OLP/PD draws attention to the systemic, performative nature of eating. At a broader scale, the project deals with the relations of influence and dependence between human actions and technologies, their residues, and the 'natural' world. The pivot point of fermented and pasteurized food constitutes the pretext on which to center questions about humans and their social, economic, gastronomic, ecological, and political relations.

Few occasions exist when our psychological defences allow our bodies to be penetrated. Acts of romantic and parental love, medical and geriatric care—these are the rare and intimate times when we let ourselves be fed by another. Private spaces, however, are increasingly being probed by external bodies, particularly in the digital realm; our metadata is mined, our movements are tracked, and our socioaffective and psychological oscillations are analyzed, all thanks to social media and our 'intelligent' portable devices. For better or for worse, the capacity of individuals to self-determine finds itself affected and infected by technologies both omnipresent and obscured.

Through the aesthetic renderings of OLP/PD, these human-technology dualities are made apparent. Eating is seen as a sensitive, sensorial, and above-all performative process, implicating preparation, observation, olfaction, tasting, and eventual ingestion. The OLP/PD robot presents its chromed, shiny face to the human visitor, reflecting back to them their own visage. Deformed in the hemispheric surface that obscures the robot's 'eyes', the visitor's face redoubles the intimacy of the moment; as the food-laden spoon approaches one's waiting mouth, so does the warped sense of self-penetration. One of three anonymous pastes is offered, each of which is also unknown to the human slave who refills and resets the spoons: she is not allowed to taste them herself. The eater is left to fend for himself, passive and infantilized, the object of other visitors' attention that is both critical and bemused.

Within the beige-orange pastes (supported by spoons that themselves rest on small agar agar pads), an invisible dynamic of dominations plays out. Each edible is composed of a mixture of bacterially stabilized and heat-stabilized ingredients. Live cultures meet deadened substrate in a microbial battle royale; will the former reanimate the latter, or will it succumb to the neutralizing effects of industrial processing? And in the mouths and stomachs of its eaters, what will take place—ongoing cycles of human-bacterial-technological disempowerment? Or something else?

Eating is a relational act, in which eater and eaten play variable roles. Incorporation and digestion reconfigure matter, rearranging our sense of self and other. Digital and bacterial technologies, social and architectural environments, even empathy and affect become processes of blurring the divide between bodies. While humans put ever more extensive synthetic and autonomous systems into the world, we also put them into ourselves, transforming matter, manipulating information, constructing cultures and biomes. Certain transhumanists have expressed hope for an eventual harmony among we cybernetic hybrids, but the future is unclear. As visitors eat from the robot's spoon, perhaps it engenders a time of reversals, when we have become food for the machine itself.



Simon Laroche

Artist, teacher and interaction designer, Simon Laroche creates installations, audio and video performances, robotic and body art works. He develops a critical point of view on the hybridation and development of various biological, artificial and social systems. Co-founder of art collective Projet EVA, he creates critical, experimental and transgressive artworks that focus on problematics related to relationships between individuals, computer systems and their physical extensions. Simon Laroche teaches Electronic Arts at Concordia University in Montreal and collaborates on theatre, fashion design, dance and cinema productions. His installations, performances and collaborative works have been presented in Asia, Europe, South and North America and in the Middle East.

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David Szanto

David Szanto is a researcher, artist, and teacher, taking an experimental approach to gastronomy through design, ecology, and performance. Past projects include: *The 'Main' Dish* and *A Tranche of Berlin*, meal performances focusing on the representation of urban foodscapes; *Displace (Mediations of Sensation)*, an immersive sensory environment co-led by Chris Salter, TeZ, and David Howes; and *Orchestrer la perte/Perpetual Demotion*, a food-and-robotics installation developed in collaboration with Simon Laroche. Having previously taught at Concordia University and l'Université du Québec à Montréal, he is currently acting director of the master program in Representation, Meaning & Media at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy. David has served two terms as Vice President of the Canadian Association for Food Studies and is an Associate Editor of its peer-reviewed journal, *Canadian Food Studies/La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*.

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