

# Chapter 18

## Kitchen Confessions: A Photo Essay

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Ingredients:

Laughter

Listening

Sharing

Confessions

Compassion

Imagination

This immersive performance-installation, a collaboration between SOA: Drama (University of Pretoria) and the Department of Performing Arts Dance Stream (Tshwane University of Technology) explores the relationship between food, memory and identity. What we eat, how we eat, when we eat and the contexts in which we eat provide insights into individual and cultural identities (Monterrosa et al. 2020).

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Our remembering is tied to our lived experiences, including food practices. Food preparation and consumption are deeply sensory and embodied acts. Food practices can act as mnemonic devices speaking not only to memory and identity, but also to belonging or non-belonging. The foods people eat likely reflect their cultural background, socio-economic status and religious beliefs, where food plays a role in shaping individual and communal identity (Chee 2024). Autobiographical memory is tied to identity. The connection between food practices and the embodiment of identity, and between commensality (Nyamnjoh 2017) and identity construction makes food practices a performative mode of being in the world. Through acts of commensality, stories are shared, digested and brought into being, which “performs” multiple identities in and through food practices and relational intra-actions in commensal contexts.



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*Kitchen Confessions* explored food as a theatrical device to unearth performers embodied “remembering’s” around food and food practices. Marié-Heleen Coetzee and Nicola Haskins co-curated the creative process and performance. Collectively, curators and performers moulded what surfaced in the creative explorations into a physical, visual performance experience. Food was used to stimulate autobiographical memories that tie to performers’ sense of identity and belonging to create parallel narratives that tie together memories, stories, interactive dialogue, singing and movement as part of the performance. These narratives were part of autobiographical storytelling and partly theatricalised to mediate the immediacy of performer’s autobiographical stories and create aesthetic distance from the autobiographical dimension.



Whilst the key nodes of narrative and performer-interaction were set, audiences were encouraged to respond and engage with the performers through participatory stimuli to respond to the performance and to share their memories and stories surrounding food. This was an unpredictable element around which performers improvised and tied back what surfaced to the central narrative

nodes. The audience and performers thus, co-created the performance. The performance was perpetually morphing and shifting depending on what stimuli audiences provided. As such, this interdependence of performers and “spect-actors” to shape the performance positioned the performance as perpetually “in process” and incomplete.

### Materials

1. Glitterbomb
2. Fairy lights
3. White tablecloth
4. Red and white striped napkins
  5. Red plates
  6. Gold cutlery
  7. Red paper lanterns
1. Music

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Laughter, listening, sharing



Confession, compassion, imagination ...



**THE MENU:**

Pilchard fish cakes

Bone marrow soup with *dombolo* (steamed bread)

Biryani

*Dikuku le gemere* (scones and ginger beer)

*Koesisters* (a plaited doughnut dipped in syrup)



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## DIRECTIONS (the how-to)

### 1. Gatherings:

Welcome to *Kitchen Confessions*, where stories are shared, and memories are simmered ... where every dish tells a story ...



Come in ... explore ... eat ... a kitchen is a confessional of sorts, is it not? Stories are spilt into mixing bowls. Aromatic aromas, sizzling sensations ... memories, motion ...

## 2. First motions:

We dress you; we share, we move ... we eat together.



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Time to confess, to confess, to confess!



Put your taste buds to the test!



### 3. Something fishy



It has been years since I became a pescetarian. I guess I still wonder how different it would have been ...

How many moments were potentially missed?  
But, being served first ...

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### 4. Bones of contention



Teased. Too skinny. So, I ate and ate and ate .... And then I danced ...

### 5. Bite Back Biryani



A comment that wraps itself around you like a Sari, slowly choking you ... if only she'd hid her disgust like they hid the potatoes in that breyani pot.

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### 6. That's how the cookie crumbles



Know your roots. The rhythm of our languages. The vibrant patterns on our clothing, the tales of our ancestors echoing ... Beautiful.

But must I live in a time-capsule? I am a modern, traditional South African girl.

## 7. Cook sisters!



I was always cooking in the kitchen with my family, but on that day, my sister was shouting ... before I knew it ...

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### **Result:**

1. Relationality
2. Mutuality
3. Good-fellowship
4. Imaginings
5. Interdependence
6. Collective creations

## 8. Conviviality



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Through the embodied acts of eating, engaging, and using provocations and invitations in the performer's text, the "spect-actors" offered a "taste" of their performed selves. Sharing stories and confessions became delectable, momentary 'performative acts of self-disclosure' (Lawson 2009), during which "spect-actors" cited titbits of their embodied selves in the process of telling, (re)storying and the (re)embodiment of autobiographical memories related to food and food practices. Through commensality and the stories that emerged, the 'autopoietic feedback loop' between performers and the audience was broadened, shaping 'mutual inter-informing' (Fisher-Lichte 2008: 47) between "spect-actors". The embodied dimensions of this feedback loop delve into affective connections underpinning the moments of selected, performative self-disclosure that surfaced a fleeting recipe for conviviality through commensality. Like the performance, our interpretations, observations, perspectives and perceptions are expressions of our (inter)subjectivity: wondering; incomplete; in process.



## References

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