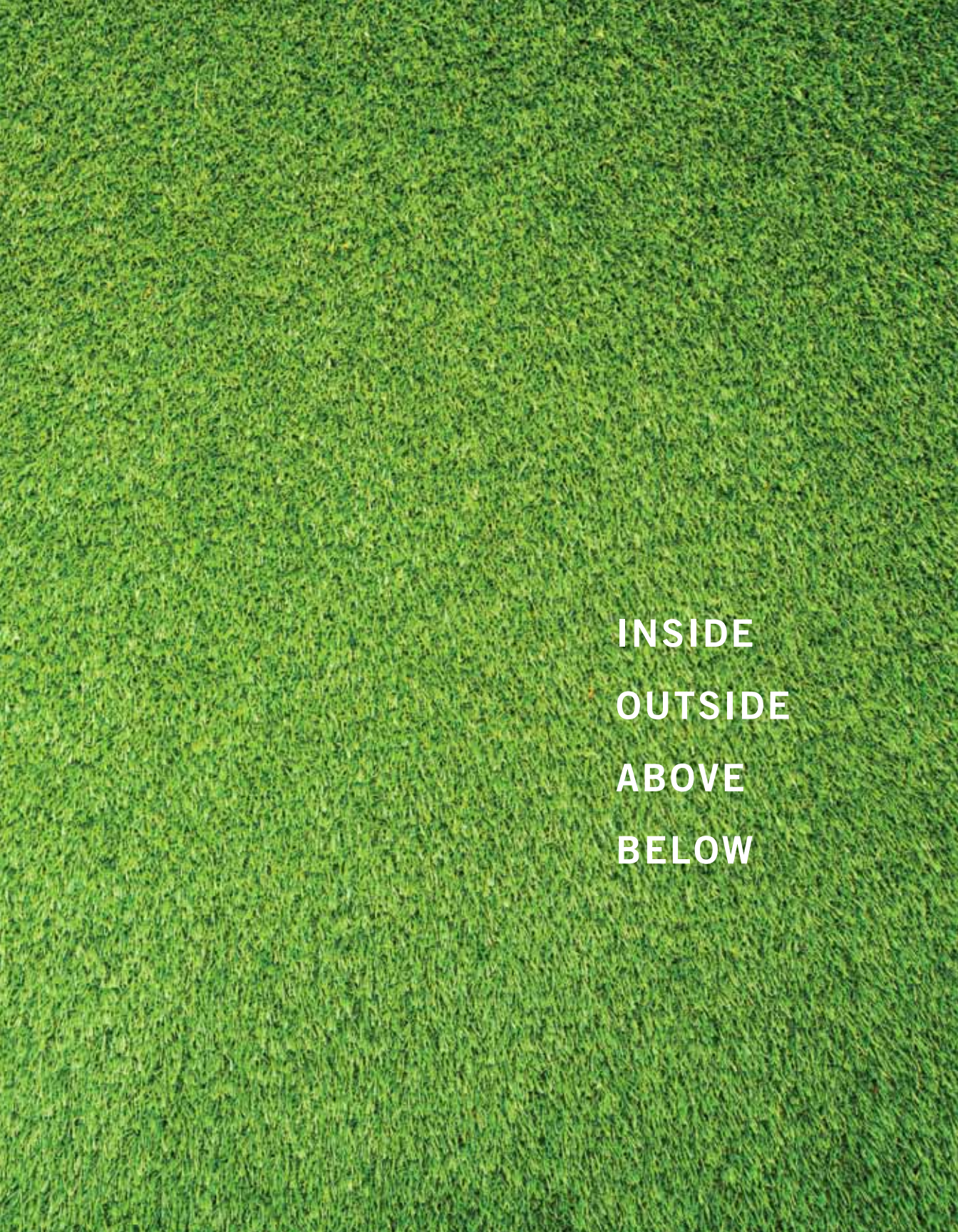

INSIDE
OUTSIDE
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AARON T STEPHAN

LAUREN FENSTERSTOCK

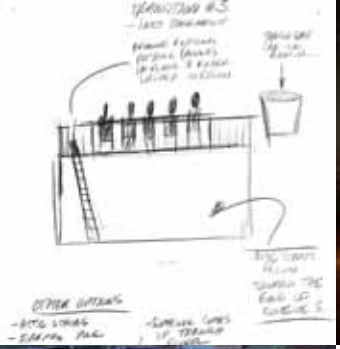
MASA MIYAKE

September 2015

Portland, Maine


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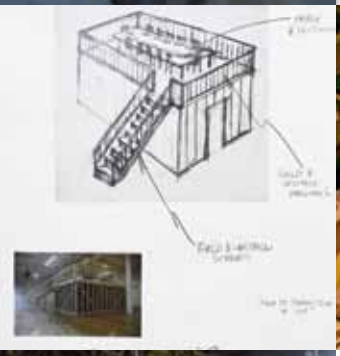










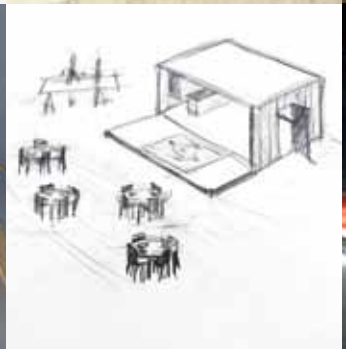








LAUREN


SCRIPT

7:00 PM: 20 guests arrive at a large warehouse. They are led to a small, uncomfortable room lit by glaring fluorescent lights. A muzak composition is playing on repeat. People talk awkwardly and wait.

7:35 PM: Lauren and Aaron welcome the participants. They use two house jacks to lift the ceiling and push down one of the walls in a cloud of dust. An extravagant picnic scene is revealed beyond. The visitors are led into the picnic.

7:40 PM: A large patch of real sod is surrounded by trees and flowers. Simple benches, a picnic blanket, tree stumps, and baskets are positioned throughout. The visitors casually arrange themselves as if in a park.

7:50 PM: The fallen wall is lifted back into place, stairs are built to the top of the structure, and a railing is installed. A table is constructed on top.

8:05 PM: Visitors climb to the top and are seated at a table set with a white tablecloth, candles, and flowers. They now overlook the vast, empty warehouse and can glimpse Masa cooking below.

8:45 PM: Aaron unseats a guest to reveal two hidden doors, creating access through the table and floor beneath. A ladder emerges, and visitors are invited to descend into the space below.

9:00 PM: This room has been transformed into a lush speakeasy. The walls are patterned in a rich red and silver. Visitors are seated at a variety of small tables and live musicians perform.

9:30 PM: A large antique mirror on the wall is removed to reveal a hole. Visitors climb through the wall into the warehouse.

9:35 PM: There is a large movie scrim showing a video of the sun rising. Simple benches face the screen, an urban coffee cart serves coffee and whiskey with doughnuts. Placed throughout the space are newspapers published for the event.

10:00 PM: Lights are turned on and visitors can walk back through all of the transitions as they exit.







MENU

Poached Lobster Tail with Sendai Miso and Summer Truffles
NV Baudouin Champagne

Tonkatsu Sando with Pickles

Chicken Karaage with Nishiki Tamago
2014 Grand Rouvière Rosé

Scallop Carpaccio with Cherry Blossom Salt and White Sturgeon Caviar
Wakatake Daiginjo Sake

Grilled Rack of Lamb with Parsley and Garlic
Miso-y Eggplant with Katsuobushi, Tomato Confit, and Pickled Spigarello Greens
2013 Eric Texier St. Julien en St. Alban Syrah

Passion Fruit Chocolate Sesame Bars
Chocolate Dipped Grapefruit Peel and Candied Ginger
Candied Almonds
Corpse Reviver Cocktail

Satsumaimo Sweet Potato Doughnuts in Cinnamon Sugar with Crab Apple Syrup
Tandem French Press Coffee with Whiskey







Anyone who has spent even a small amount of time with Aaron and me has likely noticed that we are obsessed with food. Every vacation we take, every social engagement we plan, and every moment we venture outside the studio is generally organized around eating. I keep a spreadsheet of all my favorite restaurants, which is heavily annotated and organized by location. Aaron will frequently call me from a job site in a distant state to help him find the best lunch spot. We agonize over the regular weekday meal and savor every snack. We always eat too much.

Despite our passion—or perhaps because of it—these activities seem tinged with guilt. “We shouldn’t spend the money.” “I should be getting work done.” “I can’t be hung over tomorrow.” In the studio we both apply a no-holds-barred determination. There is no amount of labor too tiresome, no expense too great, no feat too extreme to deter a studio project; the greater the obstacle, in fact, the greater the desire to meet it. We began to wonder what would happen if we applied that mixture of license and dedication to a dinner.

As visual artists, I think of us as traditionalists. We make objects by hand. Our processes are slow and often meticulous. Being a full-time studio artist means spending countless hours alone in a room, but the goal is always to create dialogue with others. We make things to start conversations. We make things to find connections.





Luc Demers

LAUREN FENSTERSTOCK

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS





A dinner is strikingly similar to a studio project. You make a plan, you gather materials, you work, people come, you pour the wine, and then see what happens. Like a response to an artwork, sometimes a meal is filled with polite conversation and sometimes things get downright nasty. Many artists have used food and social gatherings as medium, particularly as relational aesthetics has trended through the art world. Diverting from these social practices, we wanted our event to be more structured and more sculptural. Our emphasis was on physical elements as the catalysts for an experience. Rather than create a platform for completely open group authorship, I would say that here a writerly eater experiences and co-authors a specific text.

Performance has often been a part of Aaron's practice. He created several performances, some involving dining, between 2003-2011. In 2014, we collaborated as a team on nine events for which we created elaborate settings and meals in our home. Shortly after this, we were sipping sake at the bar at Miyake Fore Street in Portland, when Masa Miyake asked us if we would like to collaborate on a project. We jumped at the chance to work with such a talented chef, and were intrigued by his ability to elevate the food components beyond our own conception and execution. We invited Masa to our house to talk about ideas, which prompted a horrible anxiety about what we would serve him (we finally settled on beer and cheese). Over eight months, we tossed around ideas and planned. We all had strong opinions and pushed each other places I don't think we could have anticipated. In the end, Masa's food was magnificent and his impact on the physical elements was significant. He was the perfect creative partner—challenging, open, and intense.

Masa brought on board Courtney Packer, Miyake's General Manager. In many ways, Courtney was the hidden fourth collaborator. She played an integral role in all of the logistics, including the dreaded permitting process. We secured the gloriously massive space at Thompson's Point with the help of Chris Thompson and Jim Ahearne.

Musicians Jerusha and Jeremy Robinson of South China created a original set of music and performed live for our guests. Their appearance facilitated a dynamic that fully bonded our diners in a shared experience. They also composed the truly awful elevator music that tormented our guests in the first room. On several nights Eric Schwan joined Jeremy on stage and also performed as a solo act.







Luc Demers (both photos to right)



Building and unbuilding a two-story house in three hours is a daunting feat, especially when you are being watched. Artists Brendan Ferri, Michel Droge, and Kavi Montanaro donated many hours to the project. Knowing that we had a trusted team behind us was a lifesaver in those moments when we doubted that this could all come together.

Miyake's team created a sophisticated experience with little more than a grill and knives under a single light bulb. Masa had expert help in the kitchen from chefs Rusty Packer, Reo Miyake, William White, Josiah Bartlett, and Ken Hashimoto. Courtney orchestrated a team of servers who provided a seamless experience despite the challenging and constantly changing setting. Servers included Anne Esguerra, Emily Phillips, Lydia Anderson, Shea Donovan, Katie Keister, Sarah Salisbury, Kelsey Ketchum, Kristen Ellis, Stephanie Goodrich, Frederica Crafts, Eileen Hopkins, and Kathryn Soule. Thank you to Anne Riesenberg and Andy Graham for letting us dig up your yard for pine trees, Maine College of Art for the loan of a projection scrim, Minot's Flowers and SPACE Gallery for the





loan of chairs, and Nathaniel Meyer for the loan of his Scarborough beach pass, where we filmed the sunrise over the ocean. For this event, we published a limited edition newspaper, which served as a takeaway for guests. It included submissions by Jeff Badger, Adam Chau, Jon Coleman, Jim Flahaven, Avery Yale Kamila, Simon Mee, Anna Potter, Anne Riesenberg, Juile Poitras Santos, Christopher Michael Sullivan, Sheila Wellehan, and Chris White.

This catalogue serves as a lasting document of a fleeting event. We are honored and thrilled to feature the essays that follow by Roger Conover, Darra Goldstein, and Jessica May. Thank you to Heidi Dikeman/GoGo Design for her stunning catalogue design, and to Luc Demers for contributing beautiful photographs despite shooting in a strange, dark, and chaotic setting.

Finally, our deepest gratitude goes to all of the guests who supported our event and shared in this experience. Jon Coleman, Melanie and Eliot Cutler, Cyrus and Patty Hagge, Alison Hildreth, Portland Museum of Art, and Michael Zilkha supported the event by purchasing blocks of tickets, both for themselves and as donations to others. Each night was unique because of the participants. You put up with a lot, and we thank you for your good humor, your fearlessness, and your lack of litigiousness.







Luc Demers (both photos, left page)













Transportation is an apt trope for *Inside Outside Above Below*, held in the industrial wasteland of Thompson's Point, once the southernmost hub of the Cumberland and Oxford Canal, down which timber was shipped to Portland's harbor. After trains displaced barges in the late nineteenth century, huge brick buildings were constructed for railway repairs. From the very beginning of its industrial use, Thompson's Point looked outward to distant places, beyond its immediate locale.

Inside Outside Above Below plays on this awareness of what lies beyond. After entering the vast, hollow space of an abandoned depot, we were ushered into a cramped foyer that had been hastily constructed of rough boards. There we enjoyed an oxymoronically luxurious first course of champagne and truffled lobster tail, with bossa nova rhythms from the Portland band South China guiding our bites. Reproductions of old paintings adorned the walls, including Henry Nelson O'Neil's 1857 *A Picnic*, once dismissed for its central focus on an occasion as quotidian as a meal. O'Neil's painting inevitably evokes Manet's more famous picnic rendering, and my mind wandered to my own picnics past. These al fresco imaginings suddenly took on material form as Aaron and Lauren knocked over one of the walls, reminding us of the event's theatricality. With the fourth wall now broken, we were transported into a fantasy garden bordered by trellises and trees,



Luc Demers (all photos, both pages)

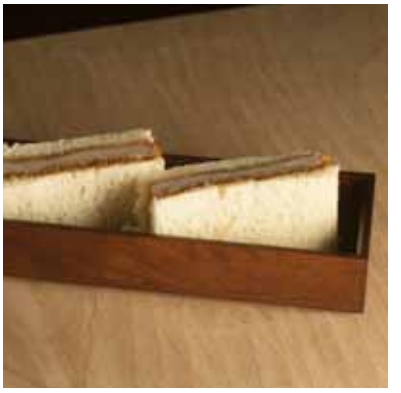
DARRA GOLDSTEIN

WHAT LIES BEYOND

Darra Goldstein is the Founding Editor of *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* and the Wilcox B. and Harriet M. Adsit Professor of Russian at Williams College.









Luc Demers (all photos, this page)

with romantic lighting foregrounding pink hibiscus and golden rudbeckia. Graceful servers poured glasses of summery rosé to accompany our picnic fare of *tonkatsu sando*—a pork cutlet sandwich—and *karaage*, the Japanese take on fried chicken. Here was a Foucauldian heterotopia in which intrinsically incompatible spaces, eras, and foods became one: Victorian England coexisted with post-industrial America; autumn merged with summer; Japanese and American kitchens blended with a hint of French terroir.

We were soon called to dinner and asked to climb makeshift stairs to a balcony above the original foyer. Here the stage set was still under construction, leading us from perfection to incompletion, past endpoint back into process, but ultimately depositing us in the transcendent space of the meal prepared by chef Masa Miyake: scallop carpaccio with cherry blossom salt and white sturgeon caviar, followed by grilled rack of lamb with miso eggplant, katsuobushi,







Luc Demers (all photos, this page)

tomato confit, and pickled spigarello greens. I gazed at my plate, pondering where I was. Surely Japan—where else is eggplant treated so lovingly with fermented soybean paste and bonito flakes? But France lurked in the confit, and Italy in the greens. How could these disparate culinary cultures unite? I needn't have worried. Miyake's genius turned potential mishmash into something sublime. As we sat at the edge of the North American continent, alternate mouthfuls transported us now to Europe, now Asia, reminding us how each place can simultaneously accommodate many worlds, especially when we access them through memory.

Dinner over, the tables were dismantled, revealing a trapdoor. We gingerly climbed down a ladder, wine glasses in hand, to find ourselves once again enclosed in an intimate space, now transformed into a cabaret. Dishes of chocolate-coated ginger and grapefruit peel, candied almonds, and passion-fruit-sesame bars made us swoon. Only a stiff Corpse Reviver of gin, absinthe, and Lillet could jolt us out of our reverie.

The evening's final transport carried us from the cabaret back "outdoors," onto a simulated beach at sunrise where we sipped coffee and nibbled sweet potato doughnuts. Through the various stages and stagings of the dinner we experienced a kind of sensory travel that upended conventional notions of time and space, creating alternate zones of discomfort and delight. Like ephemeral street fairs and carnivals, *Inside Outside Above Below* disappeared after only a few evenings, but its memory lingers on. For me, the taste is embodied in Miyake's brilliant *momoko*—a single tiny, green peach, a perfect sphere. This sake-pickled orb burst in my mouth like a revelation, laying bare the evening's play between apprehension and perception. In the end I succumbed to sensory delight, leaving analysis behind. In its movement between surface and substance, illusion and reality, *Inside Outside Above Below* created a universal place, one that managed to link and respond to different moments in time while itself remaining outside of time. Transportation indeed.











We met in a warehouse at the water's edge, early in the evening, with the sun just starting its descent. We entered the massive, not-quite-abandoned building, and then into another structure (room isn't quite the right word, for reasons I'll get to in a moment) inside the warehouse. We talked. The drinks were excellent. Some of us knew one another, but no one knew everyone, and as our hosts brought out the first bites of food, the temporary social alliances of the dinner party began to emerge. Some of us knew well that our hosts were artists, but others perhaps did not. Then the walls came down around us, literally, and a scene of splendor-in-the-grass emerged. Out came the bento boxes, the white wine. We talked of what we had read that summer, and then one companion mentioned having known the great ballet impresario and art collector Lincoln Kirstein, so the conversation veered back some thirty years, to Kirstein's midtown Manhattan brownstone, and we stayed there for awhile. We were oblivious to the labor around us—at least I was—as food arrived, the interior structure nearby reconstituted with walls and a staircase to an upper floor, and then the table aboveground was set and waiting. Conversation continued; like the labor to make this evening possible, it was seamless. The light was flattering, soft. I was my best self. After dinner we returned to the inside of the table, now a jazz club filled with breathy song and red velvet walls. There was some debate about whether we ought to quietly listen to the music or whether we ought to converse





Luc Demers (all photos, this page)

JESSICA MAY

SOCIAL ALLIANCES

Chief Curator, Portland Museum of Art.



freely and drown out the music; there was no middle ground. It was mildly divisive in the way of disagreements among purposefully amiable strangers. Our hosts did not provide instruction in this, or anything else in the way of comportment. As the musicians' set ended, a new door appeared and we ventured back outside, the in-the-warehouse outside, and were met by a massive screen that beheld the image of the shore at dawn. Fortified, we slowly made our way back out of the mirage of daybreak into the real night. I had made a friend, shared a confidence with another, and stolen a moment of friendly banter with Lauren. Lauren compared our group to another dinner, earlier that week, in which the conversation was focused and rigorous, and yet another dinner, in which hilarity and transgressions were the order of the evening. We had been a polite group, seeking order and observing rules that were nowhere in evidence. "Every group makes its own community," Lauren said, and shrugged.

Flash back to some months earlier, when Aaron and I made the decision that we would abandon ship on the artist opening for his exhibition at the Portland Museum of Art, *To Borrow, Cut, Copy, and Steal*; instead, we used the money for groceries for a set of eight dinner parties staged by Lauren and Aaron at their home. The agreement was: I invited three guests to each; he and Lauren invited two. Eight people total, and the goal was to unite artists from the community with patrons from the museum. We wanted to bring together perfect strangers whose passions were not strange to one another. The trick was that the invitation list was tight, which meant—in perfect mimicry of all museum affairs, access was strictly limited. Each dinner was built on a theme: still-life, of course, was the first; but then came an extravagant riff on the polarity of Duchamp and Beuys, complete with precisely measured one-meter pasta. You see. By way of introduction to one dinner, Lauren and Aaron said that they posed themselves the challenge of pouring as much focus and energy into a dinner party as any other work of art, and had been systematic about choreographing each moment of the meal as an opportunity for thought and experience. (I had lunch just last week with a friend who came to the "Duchamp" dinner party; so on fire from the experience, a year later he had read every bit of writing he could find on Duchamp and spoke about the artist with the pleasure of newfound authority, and with wonder.) I had asked aloud whether the point of a dinner party as an extension of the exhibition, as performance, would be to foster a sense of dislocation, yet the answer is just the opposite: community, Aaron says. The goal is to use art as an opportunity to foster community.







Course 1: Inside.

We enter a room.

Two men who have not seen each other for a long time meet at the Café des Artistes in New York to share their very different perspectives on the meaning of life and art. The men had become friends through theatre work, and decided to collaborate on a project in which they could play themselves. That wish became a reality when the 110-minute conversation they had over food and wine became the 1981 art-house hit, *My Dinner with Andre*. The film was not actually shot at the Café des Artistes, but on a set constructed in an abandoned hotel made to look like a chic dining environment. Andre and Wallace do not actually play themselves; they play the characters they wrote for themselves, and that the film's director, Louis Malle, encouraged them to be.

Upon entering the restaurant, Wally Shawn says to himself, "the only way to make this evening bearable, would be to ask Andre a few questions. Asking questions always relaxes me." Thus the dinner between the struggling playwright and theatre director gets underway. Almost immediately we realize that the dinner itself is theatre, and that it is not just two men playing their parts, but that we are a third guest at their table. The conversation lives because we witness it. As the camera pans back and forth between their faces, mirroring the movement of our eyes, the waiter occasionally makes an appearance. We are reminded that Wallace and Andre are not just talking, they are having dinner.



Luc Demers (both pages)

ROGER CONOVER

MY DINNER WITH AARON AND LAUREN

Roger Conover is the Executive Editor of the MIT Press where he established the publishing program in art, architecture, and visual culture.







Luc Demers (photos at left)

The menu and the setting are probably the least memorable details of the film, but there would be no film without them. For the main dish, both men order *cailles aux raisins* (roasted quail with raisins). Andre starts with *terrine de poisson* (fish pâté) and Wally with *bramborová polévka* (potato-mushroom soup). Each entrée comes with bread and a small green salad; they agree to drink red wine. Andre finishes with espresso, and Wally with a shot of amaretto. That's about as much of the outside world as is visible on the screen—that and the table at which the conversation is staged—the table on which plates, silverware, water glasses, napkins, wine goblets, and a bread basket appear and migrate as time passes.

Course 2: Outside.

We change position.

There is a clearing. Something has opened. "Near" and "far" elements release themselves from the places they had been assigned; inside and outside now commingle as guests adjust themselves to one another and to new perceptual structures. As figures and grounds reverse position, and verticals go horizontal, our perspective shifts from enclosure to disclosure. We are outside/inside: we have been *scened* into a picnic-like setting. The party has been shown outdoors, we have entered an alternate state: a state of garden. We sit where we sit, next to whom we find. People try to speak together. Sometimes it works. Someone comes near. Someone moves away. Some are on the ground; others stand. There is clustering. There is positioning. There is border and center. Some circulate. Some stay planted. Some say it is interesting. Some are bored. Some say nothing.

Kafka wondered at what moment and how often it is appropriate to speak if one does not wish to be considered silent when eight people are seated within the horizon of a conversation. How does a conversation begin? What is a conversation?

Maurice Blanchot suggests an answer:

> The definition of conversation (that is, the most simple description of the most simple conversation) might be the following: when two people speak together, they speak not together, but each in turn: one says something, then stops, the other says something else

(or the same thing), then stops. The coherent discourse they carry on is composed of sequences that are interrupted when the conversation moves from partner to partner, even if adjustments are made so that they correspond to one another. The fact that speech needs to pass from one interlocutor to another in order to be confirmed, contradicted, or developed shows the necessity of interval. The power of speaking interrupts itself, and this interruption plays a role that appears to be minor—precisely the role of a subordinated alteration. This role, nonetheless, is so enigmatic that it can be interpreted as bearing the very enigma of language: pause between sentences, pause from one interlocutor to another, and pause of attention, the hearing that doubles the force of locution." [1]

Wine and time are passing. Interruptions are being served. We move from interval to interval.

Course 3: Above

We sit together.

Anything could happen now, and anything did. As I made my way up the stairs to the rooftop dining space that the Stephan/Fensterstock/Miyake team had prepared for 20 guests that night, September 11th, someone dropped a word of Italian as she stepped onto the landing: "odori buono" ["smells good"]. Minutes before, in the *giardini*, we had been discussing how the first Italian diners might have felt when entering The Holy Palate, the Futurist restaurant that Marinetti and the "Aeropainter" and diet theorist Fillìa opened in Turin in 1931. There they staged a series of culinary events and happenings that not only anticipated the much later restaurant projects of artists like Gordon Matta-Clark and Daniel Spoerri, but advocated for a more advanced and civilized eating culture that in many ways has come to pass. The Futurists placed great emphasis on the design of their restaurant, believing that the space in which one eats is just as important as how the food is prepared and presented. Through their restaurants and publications,[2] they launched the first systematic attempt to create a practical and performance-oriented aesthetics

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[1] Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

[2] Particularly Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's "Manifesto della Cucina Futurista" ["Manifesto of Futurist Cooking"], first published in *Gazzetta del Popolo* (Turin) on 28 August 1930; and Marinetti's and Fillia's *La Cucina Futurista* [The Futurist Cookbook] (Milan: Editrice Sonzogno, 1932).

of food. Many of the recipes and utopian meals they conceived were never executed; I would not put it past Aaron Stephan to make some of those Futurist recipes and utopian ideas edible. After all, didn't he build the first North American model of Vladimir Tatlin's unbuilt tower (*Monument to the Third International*) for his *Secondhand Utopias* show (2014) at the DeCordova Museum? This is a script for the unrealized Futurist *Tactile Dinner*:

> *Pajamas have been prepared for the dinner, each one covered with a different material such as sponge, steel wool, cork, sandpaper, silk, felt, aluminum. As each guest arrives, s/he is asked to strip down and put on a pair of the pajamas. Once the guests are all dressed in pajamas, they are taken to a dark room. Without being able to see each other, each guest chooses a dinner partner relying only on their sense of touch. They feel each other. The guests then enter the dining room, which consists of tables for two, and for the first time they are able to see the partner they have selected.*
>
> *The meal begins.*
>
> *The first course is a 'polyrhythmic salad,' which consists of a music box containing a bowl of undressed lettuce leaves, dates and grapes. The box has a crank on the left side. Forbidden to use knives or forks, the guests eat with their right hand while turning the crank with their left. This produces music to which the waiters dance until the course is finished.*
>
> *The second course is 'magic food,' which is served in small bowls covered with tactile materials. The bowl is held in the left hand while the right hand picks out balls made of caramel and filled with different ingredients such as dried fruits, raw meat, garlic, mashed banana, chocolate, pepper. The guests have no idea what flavor they will encounter next.*
>
> *The third course is a 'tactile vegetable garden,' which is a plate of cooked and raw green vegetables without dressing. The guests eat the vegetables without the use of their hands, burying their face in the plate of vegetables, feeling the sensation of the greens on their face and lips. Waiters spray the diners with perfume each time they lift their faces from the plate.*
>
> *Between each dish the guests stroke the pajamas of their dinner partner.*

I imagined something like this was being concocted for us at Thompson's Point. And it was.







Luc Demers (all photos, this page)

Course 4: Below

We reassemble downstairs.

Much has been written about the conversational and the culinary in connection with contemporary art, but much less has been written about the construction of tables and settings where talking and tasting take place. When we dine, our enjoyment is supposed to have less to do with room (except temperature) and equipment (placemats, cutlery, and glasses) than food. The "service" of the setting is ambient; the meal is dominant. Likewise with furniture: the tables and chairs are there to support the guests, but not to be talkative. It is the food and the company that matter; the set is background. Le Corbusier compared architectural settings to domestic servants: best unnoticed when performing tasks.

All of this gets reversed in *Inside Outside Above and Below*, as it did in Aaron Stephan's earlier project, *Another Night of BS with Aaron T Stephan* (2011), where the presumed authority of the artist's voice relinquished itself to the visual and aural articulations of carpentry in a space alive with discursive and performative disturbances. Before, during, and after the prepositional meal (inside, outside, above, and below) at Thompson's Point, guests experienced a setting that was animated, unstable, and active; during each interval or stage of meal, we were acutely aware that the stage was being restaged, that walls were being repurposed, that every frame was subject to reframing. The spaces were constructed like the dishes, each one a piece of social machinery, complex and effective.

The civilized meal, we are conditioned to think in the West, is a smooth unfolding, one dish leading to the next. My dinner with Aaron and Lauren was anything but that. It belonged more to the realm of Blanchot's infinite conversation, dependent on constant interruption.

Espresso?









Luc Demers (all photos, both pages)



Luc Demers (both pages)













Luc Demers

Luc Demers (left page)





