2. *Edible Audience*: what about this gastronomic performance translated as sound art?

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Introduction

If new media performance continues to evolve through the convergence of diverse technologies, where does this leave the audience with respect to the creative experience? Is it important for the artist to understand to what extent and how the audience understands the use of technology in their work and how that technology facilitates conveyance of the concept? Should the artist care? This chapter discusses the relationship between artist and audience through an examination of a complex sound-art project and seeks to initiate thoughts from which artists might contemplate the form of future projects and their subsequent performances.

The intention of the *Edible Audience* project¹ was to articulate a concept through the use of an augmented-reality system, which integrated images into live video projection and controlled sound diffusion, all through performer interaction. There was a noticeable absence of the technology during the performance, with the emphasis being on the performers, the sound and the projection. This will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

The concept was really quite simple and straightforward with a humorous, if rather dark perspective on the nature of consumption in contemporary society. The performance action centred on the 'consumption' of images of the audience and body parts and was formally structured as a continuous narrative around the courses of a meal: entrée, main course, dessert and a toast. Although the technical implementation and the performance mostly ran smoothly,² the impression from discussions with a few witnesses raised the question of how unified, clear and effective the event was as sound or data art.³ It was not that the range of comments was so diverse but that few, if any, seemed to concur with concepts and impressions that we, as performers, held as somehow axiomatic or fundamental, and consequently comment worthy.

Almost immediately after the event and a gestation period of reflection, the question arose of whether this was a fundamental point of concern for sound/data media artists in general. Many of these works tend towards an expression of concepts that require, on the part of the audience, critical and reflective

interpretation during and after the event. Undertaking this contemplative process is now more acute in this age of vigorous technical experimentation. Before discussing this in detail, however, let us slip back in time and consider a sound work that contributes to a trajectory of contemporary art evolution under which the *Edible Audience* project squarely lies.

From the past

More than 50 years ago, John Cage composed *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (Pritchett 1993:89–90; Revill 1992:143–4). That it was ‘composed’ set the work in a particular musical context even though the work itself was anything but conventional. The work was scored for 12 radios and two performers were required to change the frequency, volume and timbre settings on each radio while distributed around the performance space.

It is my view that Cage’s precise instructions to the performers establish, in the minds of the audience, a clearly delineated work with a predetermined aesthetic objective and form. That the performers are not necessarily highly skilled at manipulating the radios’ controls is not seen as an impediment to the outcome of the work. In part, the performance relies on the audience accepting a fundamental degree of skill and the ability of the performers to follow the ‘score’. The decoding of this performance information is what sets the performance apart from some kind of random activity. It establishes performer competency with a sound source that is readily understandable.

An important distinction between the ‘radio’ and a traditional musical instrument can be understood from a statement by Fels et al. (2002:110): ‘[o]ne of the key attributes of instruments required for adoption into the literature is expressivity; this is a necessary condition for acceptance’. It is easy to appreciate that the ‘radio’ is not an expressive instrument in the traditional sense but it could be argued that the expressiveness of the radio in a performance such as *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* lies in its ability to effectively articulate the concept. It is clear that in this case a traditional instrument would not be appropriate.

There are a number of Cage’s works that easily raise the question of what musical skills are really required for the performance; 4’ 33” is probably the most widely known example. Such reflection is, however, largely neutralised—at least in retrospect—by the objective of conveying the concept and the exploratory aspirations of the composer. As a consequence of Cage’s works and influence, the remainder of the twentieth century accumulated a vast repertoire in which the question of musical performance virtuosity could be legitimately questioned if it were not for the fact that there was little precedent and the exploratory agenda was in full flight.

Although *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* was conceived as a musical work, it was part of the genesis of sound-art performance practice in which a technological presence was essential to the expression of the concept.

Closer to now

Exploring and experiencing radically new concepts can be seen as the principle objectives of the contemporary artist and something of an expectation for the audience from the mid twentieth century onwards. This, of course, is an agenda that varies. Often in historical examples, the performance practice was transparent, as in *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, and in itself did not cause the audience to wonder too much about how the sound was produced and controlled. The gradual increase in the use of and dependency on technology in performance, however, began to change that. Technology added new layers of abstraction and obfuscation unprecedented in public performance. The audience either had to accept what the technology did or ask questions about how the technology was involved. This dilemma persisted and, over time, it became apparent that works using new technologies were less well received by the audience as the novelty and euphoria of the 'technology revolution' wore off. Something of a catch-22 existed here because many of these performances were predicated on an overt use of new technology. Rendering this issue moot, however, could be achieved in a variety of ways but essentially depended on taking the audience's mind off the question of what the technology was doing and focusing them on the artistic concept.

By the end of the twentieth century, context and spectacle were playing increasingly important roles in the presentation of work that involved technology. It was more and more apparent that if one used technology in a manner that attempted to showcase it or its function the audience was inclined to consider this less artistically significant. The better approach was to integrate the technology into a more complex event. Not all integrations, however, are successfully implemented and the configuration of such events remains an elusive undertaking. Manovich gives some indication of this challenge while attending an event in St Petersburg in 1995:

Under the black hemispherical ceiling with mandatory models of planets and stars, a young artist methodically paints an abstract painting. Probably trained in the same classical style as I had been, he is no Pollock; cautiously and systematically, he makes careful brushstrokes on the canvas in front of him. On his hand he wears a Nintendo Dataglove, which in 1995 is a common media object in the West but a rare sight in St. Petersburg. The Dataglove transmits the movements of his hand to a small electronic synthesizer, assembled in the laboratory of some Moscow institute. The music from the synthesizer serves as an accompaniment to two dancers, a male and a female. Dressed in Isadora Duncan-like

clothing, they improvise a ‘modern dance’ in front of an older and, apparently, completely puzzled audience. Classical art, abstraction, and a Nintendo Dataglove; electronic music and early twentieth-century modernism; discussions of virtual reality (VR) in the planetarium of a classical city that, like Venice, is obsessed with its past—what for me, coming from the West, are incompatible historical and conceptual layers are composited together, with the Nintendo Dataglove being just one layer in the mix. (Manovich 2001a:5)

Manovich acknowledges and attempts to frame, in a positive and compelling way, an event that clearly challenges the audience. Couched in personal nostalgia and historical references, such a description suggests the kind of cognitive engagement needed for events that drive the senses from multiple directions with occasional tenuous connections.

While it might be the case that some performances—and these could be regarded as successful in one respect—appear to the audience as cohesive and integrated in the presentation of the artistic statement, other more experimental works are problematic in this respect. Assuming that the performance unfolds as planned, an initial starting position for gauging external success might consider the points of mutual understanding and the relationship between the performer’s and the audience’s reading of the event. It, however, now clearly extends beyond the presence of performers. Pedro Rebelo offers a way to think about the nature of the space inhabited by the performers and the audience:

The notion of performance itself implies a somewhat nonlinear environment. While the performer has some level of control over the environment and potentially over the performance instrument, it is the uncontrolled, the chance events, the risk, that defines the performance environment. It is the ‘nonlinearity’ that is responsible for the chemical reaction between a performer and her audience. (Rebelo 2003:182)

Interpretation from a basic cognitive state

Given that the performance context can be ‘non-linear’—that is, possessing changing and evolving connections between the parts of the performance—it is important to establish a basic set of criteria from which the audience might initially perceive, question and evaluate the broader structural and configuration elements. Ideally, an audience has a basic level of pragmatic experience from which to assess and understand a concept’s implementation objectively. These experiences would operate subconsciously and go to moderating preconceptions and highly subjective impressions. This might, however, be a conservative and anachronistic view of contemporary audiences.⁴ Given that such a starting point should be more inclusive and should acknowledge the complexity of the

audience's background, here is a simplified mapping of basic referential experiences, which loosely fall under four categories:

1. recognition of expert, skilled or authoritative performers
2. acknowledgment of the function and role of technology
3. understanding of a shifting performance emphasis to spectacle and context
4. ability to perceive combinations of the above categories.

1. Underlying most people's experiences and expectations of sound art are performance expertise, skill and aesthetic authority. All forms of instrumental and vocal music demand that the performer aspires to or has achieved a level of competency that allows them to convey the essential point of a musical work.

In more contemporary forms of sound performance, such as those using electronic and computer-based technology and DJs, perception of skill and expertise is more difficult to assess due to a lack of the codification of the practice and the fact that the dynamics of the art are based on changes in technology and the momentary aesthetics of sound. Even though the DJ might have acquired a high degree of technical facility, the evolution of the music is predicated on learning how to put sounds together to create new genres. The audience, however, knows precisely when a contemporary artist has been successful in performance. In the case of the DJ, there is a collective energy among the audience that identifies success. This 'social factor', as discussed by Winkler (2000:2), is in this instance at its most empowered and expressive, often overriding personal inhibitions and any sense of intimidation among individual audience members.

2. The use of technology therefore does not necessarily diminish competency but changes the relation between the resulting sound and the performer. The use of mixers and sound-diffusion hardware comes at the end of a chain of sound production. Technology can increase the complexity and sophistication of the performance without continuous performer interaction. The performer can concentrate on higher-level aspects of the sound production and performance structure.

3. Manovich's observations in the earlier quote suggest that contemporary performances involving technology are likely to embrace spectacle and context. Whether this is a result of the dilemma between an increased use of technology and a general sense that the audience doesn't want to be a guinea pig for new technology experiments is hard to clarify. Certainly, it is likely that there is a general weariness towards technology brought on by decades of hype and promise, promulgated through the mainstream media. Technology, however, remains a creative incentive but now modulated by a need to direct its potential towards the lucid articulation of creative concepts.

4. The evolution of sound-art practice draws together all of the above points but perhaps is dependent less on the refinement of technical skill and more on

the rapid uptake of new technologies and a necessary grasp on its creative potential. There is no universally recognised standard of skill. Most sound-art performances continue to depend on innovative use of technology and highly creative outcomes.

The question of whether the audience's understanding and experiences should be reduced to such basic criteria inevitably arises and is open to criticism. The intention here, however, is that it initiates an objective starting point for the artist to consider the audience as a whole before the manifestation of the work. In this respect, the artist might ask the question of whether the work meets all or some of these points and even whether there are others that might be crucial to appreciating the performance.

The audience perspective

Performances involving mixed media, interactivity and collaboration, especially those of a distinctly experimental or avant-garde nature, are difficult to articulate or critique for most audiences even though what constitutes the 'audience' today is more ambiguous than in earlier times. One might be advised to consider the entire audience as a collection of artists in their own right, some simply less familiar with the genre or concept.

The *Edible Audience* performance raised the central question of how and to what extent the audience experienced the implementation and interpreted the thematic elements (theatre, image, sound and interactivity). It was assumed, on the basis of the programmatic thread of the 'dining' performers, that the audience would link the event action. It was, in a sense, a narrative structure but the performance resembled that of the early 'silent movies' in which the performers were playing/controlling the sound while providing the source action for the video projection. In reality, the performance probably looked nothing like our collective idea of a 'silent movie' but the analogy facilitates a way of thinking through the network of connections between action, sound and image.

Was the audience able to follow the structure as a singular, brief and complex presentation as theatre, as sound and as projected image? Was the convergence of these parts cohesive enough for the audience to take in the central conceptual point: the issue of consumption in contemporary society? Did we as performers strive to make the concept clear? Given that Liquid Architecture 6 was billed as a sound-art event, was the audience predominantly distracted or confused by the amount of audio/visual information? Did the program promote to the audience and support in practice the ideal of experimental works?

In seeking answers to these and other questions, or an understanding of the performance in retrospect, it is worth considering how the project space impacts on the experience. Rebelo provides a general starting point:

A performance space, in the context of nonlinear digital media structures, implies sophisticated analysis in the areas of gesture, one-to-many communication schemes, individual presence, idiosyncratic action, and instrumentality. The performing body operates in a space of expectation, in a space that tends 'towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs'. (Lefebvre, quoted in Rebelo 2003:182)

The challenge in considering Rebelo's text lies in how to identify and assess the levels of communication, and by whom and when. Some modalities of communication can be considered during rehearsal but optimising these might not make a significant difference under performance conditions. Impressions of success and failure depend on individuals who might or might not be adequately informed about the work. The *Edible Audience* project itself was part of a larger program and the diversity of works presented, contrasted, complemented and possibly clashed, thus making an intelligent, impromptu and comprehensive critique of any one work difficult without substantial qualification and reflection.

Those in the audience familiar with the constituent components of sound-art performance practice were possibly able to navigate the various levels of activity and thus extract from the experience a more positive memory. It is accepted that such a performance, operating under conditions of, at times, randomness and explicit but arbitrary control, will have moments in which the aesthetic flounders, only to be asserted at a later time. This instability, this ebb and flow of cohesiveness, lies at the heart of all improvised performance in which generation and control of events become a moment-by-moment concern for the performers.

Sound-art practice is, by definition, innovative, exploratory and woven into a configuration mapping action data from diverse media systems to a concept. While the data might not be subject to direct human intervention, today it is more common that there is some kind of interactivity or influence over the data that controls, generates or constitutes visual or sonic manifestations. The following comment could apply equally to complex forms of sound-art presentation:

Interactivity may offer an entirely new approach to music-making, and so in order to avoid getting stuck in the current musical paradigms, we should question not only the nature of the system input (such as musical notes, tempi, rhythms, or human gestures, dance movement, or conductor's gestures), but we should pay equal attention to the output of the system, and the qualitative relationship between the two. (Paine 2002:297)

It might be assumed that the question of audience comprehension lies in how they perceive the mappings in terms of action or object to aesthetic results. Can we assume that the more abstract or esoteric the artistic concept, the more the

audience will struggle to engage with the work? No. It depends on the mode of concept manifestation and whether the audience has been briefed on what to expect through other means before the performance.

Categorical overview of *Edible Audience*

Few artists have the opportunity to question each audience member about a performance in a formalised manner. Typically, incidental conversations, impromptu and casual responses vary greatly and often focus on matters that the artist might consider as circumscribing their particular concerns. The audience experiences only a brief moment in the life of the project. The artist, however, will be aware of a general 'feeling' about the success of the performance, usually at its most poignant between the conclusion and the applause.

Irrespective of the outcome of the performance, it is valuable for the artist to review the concept, implementation and performance, not only from their own perspective but what they think it might have been like for the audience. Consideration of a sound-art performance from the audience's point of view, however, invariably leads the artist back to an examination of the entire event.

Before undertaking a more detailed account of the project, it is worthwhile reviewing key aspects of the experience under a number of critical categories.

Concept

- A critique of our consumer-driven society
- the theatre of four diners at a table eating images of people
- use of an augmented-reality system for live performance
- engagement with a kind of sound-art theatre.

Technology

- The use of two networked computers to implement vision, image and sound processing
- multi-channel sound
- deployment of the technology in the performance space
- configuration of the performance props and the camera
- configuration of AVIARy, the augmented-reality software application
- development of SuperCollider 3 audio patch.

Motivation

- Distribution of expertise
- learning experience
- uniqueness of the event
- institutional collaboration.

Agendas

- Performing with AVIARy software
- establishment of performance profile through a new sound-art project.

Performance

- No practical familiarity with the performance space
- lengthy set up
- multiple performers
- restricted but vague performance configuration
- few rehearsals
- no substantial performance training or experience with such interactive systems before the project
- limited understanding of the totality of the project presentation from an audience's perspective
- inability to hear or see what was intended for the audience
- effectiveness of the performance interface.

Context/venue

- Acoustic properties of the space
- image presentation
- stage area
- sound diffusion set-up
- program structure.

Audience

- Comprising those who are:
  - practitioners of sound art
  - familiar with sound art
  - unfamiliar with but interested in sound art
- their seating location in the venue space
- those able to maintain interest through a multi-layered-sound art presentation.

The ordering of these categories might be seen in retrospect as important from an analytical point of view but if considered before the performance they might need to be constantly reordered to help predict and control the outcome.

Performance anatomy

Although as a performer I was not directly part of the audience, an analysis of the structure of *Edible Audience* should provide a way to examine what was presented to the audience and reflect on what was important and was not, from at least one perspective.

The controlling software application was AVIARy,⁵ an 'augmented-reality' system based on the AR toolkit (<http://www.hitl.washington.edu/artoolkit/>). AVIARy analysed live video input and searched for predefined patterns, called 'fiducial markers'. When these patterns were recognised, other images were superimposed on the markers, thus hiding them. These images could be moved around with the patterns and had six degrees of movement: X, Y, Z (height), yaw, pitch and roll.

On recognising a fiducial marker, AVIARy would also output OSC datagrams over a network connection to the audio application, SuperCollider 3, running on another computer. The purpose of this was to reduce the computational load on the machine running AVIARy. The sound—processed audio files and some real-time synthesis—was diffused through an eight-channel sound system, which included two sub-woofers.

There were six performers: four diners and two waiters. Although there were a number of rehearsals and trials with various technical and performance configurations, it was clear that improvements in the performers' roles would be possible only with more performances and rehearsals.

The fiducial markers were handled by the performers who were 'acting' out a dining scene, which as mentioned above, was broken up into several acts (*entrée*, main, dessert courses and a toast). Interludes indicated to the audience what was going to happen next.

The performers were to the audience's left, with the projection screen centre stage. Perhaps they should have been located in front of the screen to enhance the idea of making a connection between the theatrical action and the projected image but that is only speculation. It might have made the experience more confusing or it might have had no significant effect at all. The audience saw mostly the site of the performance with not much detail. The acting deliberately exaggerated gestures but the fiducial markers were small and probably not recognisable from a distance. They were, however, occasionally visible on the main screen. This should have given the audience a clue as to the relation between the markers and the superimposed images.

The performance started with a title screen triggered by a particular marker on the table. This marker was then replaced with an '*entrée*' title marker. The first diner entered and sat at the table. A plate of four *entrée* markers was served and the diner began to move one of four unique markers around. At this point, the audience could easily observe the relationship between the marker, the image on screen and the movement of the sound.

One by one, the other diners entered and joined in the performance, selecting markers and moving them around in the camera space. It can be assumed that not much of the theatricality of the performance at the dining table was visible

to all the audience. What the audience could see clearly was the video projection of the table top, where the markers and the performers' hands could be seen with the addition of the images superimposed by AVIARy (see <<http://www.petermorse.com.au/old/PMcomhtml/petermorse.html>>).

From a visual perspective, then, two points of reference existed but were perhaps not easily correlated due to size, position and perspective. There was also a small delay between the movement of the performers and the image projected on the screen but because both could not be viewed at once, the delay was probably not a significant factor in the visual experience.

The next layer of experience existed between the movement visible in the projection and the sound. Even though the relationship between the performer's movement of the markers and the sound was in real time, to make this explicit, the performers had to know how to optimise their movements to make the spatial movement of the sound very defined. The movement of the performers' markers across and around the table corresponded with the movement of the sound in the audience space. This would have been very clear if there had been only one performer with one sound but there were four and the sounds were not always that dissimilar or always in discrete locations.

In addition, the visual mapping on the screen did not immediately correlate with the audience space. If the audience figured out how to view the screen as compass bearings, they might have been able to appreciate how the sound was mapped into their space. This might have been understood through listening and making connections with certain performers' movements, but could have been difficult and elusive with four active performers and rapid changes in sound.

The question of whether the sound/movement correlation was important for the audience to experience and whether it added anything to their experience would probably be answered in the affirmative from the artist's perspective. Appreciating the mapping strategy (what the performers were doing and what happened visually and sonically—and there clearly was some challenge here) might, however, be argued as simply an intellectual exercise, not necessarily crucial to a full appreciation of the experience. All that might have been required on the part of the audience—thus avoiding the tedium of technical detail—was that they understood that there was a correlation.

The other issue was that the performers themselves were not experienced in moving the markers with a specific understanding of how the sound moved. Even learning how to do that was problematic given the nature of the interface. Talking about the 'Iamascope', an interactive kaleidoscope that uses computer video and graphics technology, Fels et al. (2002:115) state:

The player's movements are unconstrained and the player has to discover the mapping on his own. The closest metaphor is that the interface is

like a ten-string guitar where the computer holds down the chords automatically. The player strums the strings by moving in the bins. While this metaphor helps make the mapping easier to understand it does not help in learning to play the device. This is because the metaphor is not quite accurate.

And later:

In general, this attribute of free hand or free form gesture mapped to sound is problematic. Very few metaphors provide a strong enough link between gesture and output to provide an easy-to-learn mapping. Thus, even if the metaphor and the mapping are easy to understand, they will not necessarily lead to a very expressive instrument. In this situation, other paths to achieve transparency need to come into play to make the instrument expressive. (Fels et al. 2002:116)

The task of mapping gesture to action for the *Edible Audience* performers was made even more difficult because while it was important to try to keep the markers visible to the augmented-reality system, it had to be done without looking at the projection screen. This would have detracted from the theatrical nature of the performance. If the markers were not identified by the system, the superimposed image and the sound were also not present.

Another problem was that the performers were not in the same specific audio space as the audience, so the performers could never really hear the sound moving in response to their hand/arm movements. It was possible to hear changes in some locations of the sound if the performer was concentrating on their sound while moving a marker.

What, of course, would have improved the performance immensely would have been more rehearsals. It is probably symptomatic of many sound-art performances that the performers suffer from a lack of experience, confidence and certainty, which must be conveyed to the audience at the beginning. If the performers know that what they want to convey can be communicated, that expectation must pervade each subsequent performance.

Surveys

Finally, it is not the intention here to critically consider the field of arts surveys, for this most likely substantial research area is simply beyond the scope and purpose of this chapter and is best left to those who understand the specific processes, techniques and outcomes.

The question, however, had clearly been lingering and waiting to be asked: 'Why not conduct a survey, either entry, exit or both?' The logic of this is unmistakably compelling. Surveys are used extensively in our everyday world and, properly conducted, can result in valuable information. Such information,

if properly gathered, would have, at least, the appearance of being frank, objective and reflective within the recent period of experience. In the case of the *Edible Audience* project, a survey would have been an additional burden that none of us would have been able to undertake.

It would have been difficult to structure in light of the fact that we were constantly reworking the performance practice and configuration. The performance was short and likely to happen only once, so we focused on that.

As the *Edible Audience* performance did not go entirely as planned or anticipated and we felt the denouement was somewhat compromised, we as performers might have considered a predefined survey as somewhat invalid, assuming that we had prepared questions on the basis of a flawless performance. The logical thing to do, therefore, in the preparation of questions, would be to accept that the performance might not go as planned. If that is the case, what questions could we ask that we would regard as important to future projects? While it is likely that there are such questions, it would take time and experience to fully appreciate what they are.

If there had been the opportunity to perform the work again with the technical problems overcome, a survey would be more valuable at that time rather than previously. This assumes that what the project is conveying is now more clearly evident. Should surveys be conducted only at those times?

At this point, it is clear that the question of a formal survey for a singular event within a larger experimental performance context can probably be dismissed as unnecessary, distracting and burdensome. A survey conducted independently and inclusive of the larger event is another matter and probably would have a different agenda.

Possibly, of more importance and value would be for the performers/artists to know what questions to ask at those impromptu moments when talking with people who attended the performance. This usually happens some days or weeks later. If, after the performance, the artists were to discuss the performance and collectively arrive at questions to ask at those appropriate moments, this would be the most useful form of information gathering given the nature of the event. An issue that arises from this is that some artists are not always able to accept, interpret or respond appropriately to criticism. They simply lack the objectivity and detachment necessary to appreciate views from a range of audience members, rather than from a select group of friends whose critique might be personally biased or influenced by a priori knowledge.

Conclusion

This chapter, then, constitutes a singular and private attempt to raise one artist's perspective on the reception of a sound-art performance. It should be viewed

as the beginning of a process of self-evaluation of practice with the objective of strengthening the relationship between concept, performance and the audience.

It is expected that under the vagaries of performance, any implementation might be compromised before and during the event but not after. Conveying publicly that the project has been broadly thought through rather than concerned primarily with the performance mechanics should compensate for performance irregularities and hopefully the audience will recognise these for what they are and still appreciate the overall intention in the work.

In the case of *Edible Audience*, was the audience able to navigate and connect the performance as theatre, as sound and as projected modified video? The answer to this is probably a cautious 'yes'. The audience had to at some point make a connection between the performers' actions and the video image then make frequent updates during the course of the event. The question of the perception of the performers' relationship with the sound is more complex because the mapping of the sound to the action was less evident, especially for that part of the audience who could not clearly see the performers. The sound appeared to be understood as somehow separate or with a more obscure connection from later discussions. Even the performers struggled with this aspect of the performance. In addition, from discussions arising after the event, it was clear that some people concentrated on singular aspects of the performance depending on their cultural interests—for example, the visual display or the sound. These were compelling and more easily focused on than the theatrical component for which one had to be closer to the front to see clearly. This raises the question of how perceptually unified the performance was but also suggests that it was flexible enough for the audience to maintain interest and shift their attention across the detail of the performance.

The *Edible Audience* critique of 'consumption in contemporary society' was probably not articulated effectively enough to the audience before the performance but whether this really mattered is unclear. In later general discussions about the performance, it was clear, however, that this could be understood as a subtext or a form of explanation and justification of the performance on the part of the performers/artists. From the audience's perspective, this critique, if it was understood at all, seems to have been viewed independently of their experience. One reason for this is perhaps that the performance did not explicitly or controversially take a sociopolitical stance other than to present, in a surreal context, the idea of consuming fellow humans as a logical consequence of our consumer society.

The achievement of presenting such an experimental project went a long way to creating a sense of success even though there was one glaring problem during the performance and a mild sense of disappointment that real food could not be

used. On the other hand, the audience largely sensed that the performance was cohesive and performed without obvious or disruptive technical problems.

Thinking of how the audience might receive a performance does not mean pandering to them by making the work transparent to the point of shallowness but rather is a way of ensuring that the optimal conditions for concept and performance presentation are achieved. This is by no means easy to understand and even less so if it has not been thought about at all. In developing the *Edible Audience* project, we did from the outset think about the audience. We tried to include them and directly inspire a critical perspective on consumerism, as we are all part of our immediate community and society. That could have been confronting if understood and contemplated throughout the performance but nevertheless was a significant achievement for the project. I personally felt that this was not clearly understood. The theatre and media presentation formats were complex and required constant engagement by the audience. In effect, the performance was too demanding and the concept could be considered only in retrospect.

From the analysis of one sound-art work, it is not possible to generalise exhaustively on the effectiveness or shortcomings of all future performances but there are questions in many forms that can be asked and addressed on the basis of any creative experience when considering undertaking another. The point of formulating and responding to such questions is to accumulate, over time, a body of experience and mode of thinking about a project before any practical undertaking. While the final outcome cannot be fully predicted, understanding and analysing aspects of a project in the very early stages can indicate and highlight issues that might, if acted on, make a significant positive difference.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Professor Stephen Barrass for the discussion that sparked the subject of this chapter. Also, I wish to thank my fellow 'consumers' who performed in the Liquid Architecture 6 Sound Art Festival at the National Gallery of Australia on 23 July 2005: Stephen Barrass, Tim Barrass, Anita Fitton, Peter Morse and Onaclov.

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Endnotes

¹ *Edible Audience* was performed as part of the Liquid Architecture 6 Sound Art Festival at the National Gallery of Australia in July 2005 (<<http://www.nga.gov.au/LiquidArchitecture/bios.cfm>>). I had forgotten until reminded by Alistair Noble at the time of editing this chapter that *Edible Audience* was similar in concept to a performance presented by Cage and other artists in New York as part of the New York State Council on the Arts Contemporary Voices in the Arts series of 1967. He said, 'On stage, a five-course dinner was served, during which the performers' voices and sounds of the silverware were electronically amplified' (in Kostelanetz 1971:55–56).

² There was an unexpected and not hitherto experienced sustained false triggering on a pattern that caused images and sound to appear sporadically throughout the performance. They should have appeared only at the end.

³ I prefer the term 'sound art' as defined by Manovich to 'new media', the former term being more relevant where diverse digital technologies are combined in one performance. Although a 'sound-art' festival in this case, the term emphasises what was important in this project.

⁴ See a later discussion of this in the text.

⁵ AVIARy was written by Tim Barrass.