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# Application of the critique of dispositives to the performative dinner "*El Somni*" by El Celler de Can Roca and Fran Aleu

**Anne-Claire Yemsi-Paillissé** [\[CV\]](#) [\[ID\]](#) [\[G\]](#) Professor of Institut Supérieur du Tourisme de  
l'Hôtellerie et de l'Alimentation (ISTHIA), LLA-CREATIS laboratory - Université Toulouse.  
France - [anne-claire.paillisse@univ-tlse2.fr](mailto:anne-claire.paillisse@univ-tlse2.fr)

**Yanet Acosta Meneses** [\[CV\]](#) [\[ID\]](#) [\[G\]](#) Professor of Department  
of Communication and Sociology Sciences. Universidad Rey Juan  
Carlos (URJC), Madrid. Spain  
[myanet.acosta@urjc.es](mailto:myanet.acosta@urjc.es)

**Monique Martínez** [\[CV\]](#) [\[ID\]](#) [\[G\]](#) Chair Professor of the Department of Language,  
Literature and Spanish civilization - LLA-CREATIS Laboratory - Université Toulouse.  
France - [monique.martinez@univ-tlse2.fr](mailto:monique.martinez@univ-tlse2.fr)

**Elvira Calvo Gutiérrez** [\[CV\]](#) [\[ID\]](#) [\[G\]](#) Professor of the Department of Journalism and New Media  
Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM). Spain - [ecalvogu@ucm.es](mailto:ecalvogu@ucm.es)

## Abstract

From the concepts cradled by the critique of dispositives are discerned and analyzed the technical, pragmatic and symbolic (often overlapping) levels of the gastronomic opera "*El Somni*" (The Dream) proposed in 2013 by the brothers Roca and Fran Aleu. Thanks to this study, we observed that "*El Somni*" turns out to be a transgression of the traditional conception of gastronomy as a tool for obtaining pleasure or happiness through taste and a subversive dispositive that shakes the standard structures and the expectations placed on a meal, with which avant-garde cuisine transcends the merely alimentary to become an artistic language. And despite this, the diner keeps its socialization habits.

## Keywords

Gastronomy; dispositives; art; molecular cuisine.

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Translation of paper by **Yuhanny Henares**  
(Academic translator, Universitat de Barcelona)

## 1. Introduction

This research is part of a French-Spanish project aiming to study the current Spanish haute cuisine from an innovative and transdisciplinary perspective. Our goal is to build a collaboration network between two investigation fields, that are generally apart: food studies (social sciences applied to the food sphere) and artistic and linguistic studies (human sciences with an intercultural perspective). Researchers involved in the project are Spanish and French and this study was funded by ISTHIA (*Institut Supérieur du Tourisme de l'Hôtellerie et de l'Alimentation*) and CERTOP laboratory (*Centre d'Étude et de Recherche Travail Organisation Pouvoir*) of Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès.

This paper's objective is to apply the critique of dispositives (developed in the laboratory LL@-Creatis of Toulouse since 2000) for the first time to an experimental gastronomic project performed in Spain, called "*El Somni*" ("The Dream").

"*El Somni*" is directed by the artist Franc Aleu and the three chefs Joan, Josep and Jordi Roca of "El Celler de Can Roca" (3 stars of the Michelin Guide, and nominated as the World's Best Restaurant in 2013 and 2015 in the magazine *Restaurant*) located in Girona, Spain. This project is part of the creative dynamics of the Roca brothers: it is about experimenting – the concept of experimentation is essential in the gastronomic practice of the three restaurateurs- using an innovative methodology of creation. The immersive and multidisciplinary allow to renovate the cuisine experience and more prosaically speaking, lead to conceive unprecedented meals to enrich the restaurant's menu. The crave for search and the inquiring mind encouraging the three Roca brothers, their will to work in collaboration with other professions and disciplines and their concept of cuisine as a creativity area closely linked to the artistic sphere turns them, partly, into the heirs of the tutor figure of Ferran Adrià (by the way, Josep Roca cooked in the stoves of the famous restaurant "El Bulli" of Cala Monjoi).

"*El Somni*" is a multidisciplinary experiment, which main result is "An opera in twelve dishes, a banquet in twelve acts." This rather peculiar "dinner" was done in Barcelona on May 6, 2013 and there participated 12 dinner guests who savored 12 dishes with 12 different wines in 12 acts (the same

number of an opera). The experiment generated the filming of a documentary, the edition of a book-album and an exposition in the *Centro de Arte Santa Mónica* of Barcelona.

It seems that all media and narrative genres of "*El Somni*" —video art, philharmonic music and singing, culinary arts (design, sommeliers, cuisine)— converge to tell a story with the chronological sequence of an initial or expository moment (the slow sinking of Astrid into sleep), of several adventures or obstacles

(Astrid's metamorphosis into a mermaid, her love story with Adonis, and the death of the beloved) and finally an ending (the glory and waking up from a dream, from *El somni*). The gastronomic menu the Roca brothers imagined not only follows this narrative storyline, but it also complies with the recognizable structure of a gourmet tasting menu, with meals and paired with wines.

The objective is to bring the 12 diners to the climax of emotion, surprise and also fear, by using diverse and complementary media like the opera, poetry, performative arts, singing, philosophy, painting, cinema, music and cuisine. In the creators' mind, cuisine must remain as the core and structural element of the project. According to Joan Roca, the idea is to decontextualize in order to "experience cuisine beyond the restaurant." In a way, "*El Somni*" delves into cuisine's capacity to communicate about the more ontological, the most transcendental aspect of life and human sensoriality, namely, creators are willing to illustrate intangible moments of human experience through tastes, smells and textures, from birth until the death of the opera's protagonists.

The dinner in "*El Somni*" is a multisensorial experience, a sample of a complete gastronomic performance, in other words, an artistic production that is, at the same time, gustatory, visual, olfactory, tactile and intellectual.

## 2. Contextualization

### 2.1. The culinary art in history

The relationship between arts and the culinary sphere is an utterly complex study object, firstly because the concept of «art» is eminently problematic and dynamic. The philosopher Jacques Rancière insists on the relevance of the aesthetic dimension nowadays (from the Greek "*aethesis*"). From his perspective, "in order to be art, there must be a view that identifies it as such" (Rancière, 2004, 27). In such a way that the artistic would not be exclusively defined according to stranded plastic categories (Fine Arts) and by the tidy practice of a know-how (the Greek "*poiesis*"), but instead, especially since the XIX-XX centuries, several forms of creation are being considered as works of art that have as common feature, the fact of suggesting authentic "ways of being sensitive", beyond the mere "ways of doing" (Rancière, 2004:25): cinema, photography, comic, etc. In such a way that the list of arts recognized as such in this era extends until reaching nine or ten categories and have the merit of broadening the view about forms of authentic artistic creation, not considered until then.

However, the expression "culinary art", when used specially to indicate the chef's activity, is quite new and still generates doubts today. This phenomenon is mainly due to the contempt cuisine has suffered in the Western culture. Mainly because it is considered an "utilitarian" practice, since it is "linked to primitive feelings, with animality" (Flandrin, 1992: 155).

In fact, the expression “culinary art” was first used to describe creation forms that still depended on the classical artistic categories such as painting, theater or music and rooted in identified plastic forms, that used food as theme, or as material to convey an artistic message. The still life, a genre that undoubtedly reached its climax through Flemish and Spanish painters of the XVII and XVIII centuries and which is still used by contemporary artists, could be considered one of the first pictorial samples of the culinary art of the earlier periods (Hartung, 2002: 15-22).

So the turning of cuisine into art started outside its own field in the “eat art” with the performances of Daniel Spoerri back in 1960 with his “restaurant-gallery”, or Antoni Miralda, Dorothee Selz, Gina Paine or Sophie Calle, the postmodern “*gastrodrama*” (Saumell i Olivella, 2011) like *Nutritivo* by Sergi Faustino, or Accidens. “*Matar para comer*” by Rodrigo García, the gastronomic novels (novels featured by Pepe Carvalho of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán or the novels of Andrea Camilleri or more recently the novels of Xabi Gutiérrez or Yanet Acosta), who are using food as a material or relevant motive of their creation.

In a parallel manner to the productions mentioned earlier, the conception of Western «culinary art», not only as material for other artistic genres but as an independent genre, is the result of a long process that started with the coding of table customs in the Renaissance, when noble houses put their bodies at a distance from food, using individual cutlery and later, this evolution was illustrated by the generalization of the fork’s use (Neirink and Poulain, 2007: 53). The process continued with the intellectualization of cuisine in the second half of the XVII century, with the disclosure of some documents that conveyed, according to the historian Béatrice Fink, “the fundamentals of a cuisine susceptible of aestheticization through ‘the harmony of flavors’” (Fink, 1995: 19) and the emergence of a “reception field” for cuisine (Champion, 2010: 23). Progressively, with the popularization of the restaurant as insignia of the bourgeois and urban post-revolutionary society in France (in Paris there were a hundred restaurants in 1789 and there were more than three thousand in 1815), the image of the chef evolved to a figure of greater autonomy and authority, as Caroline Champion describes when suggesting an interesting parallelism between the social promotion model and the revelation of artists out of anonymity, from the Middle Age to Renaissance, and the ascent of the great chefs of the XX century (Champion, 2010: 70-80).

Later, thanks to the success of the French Nouvelle Cuisine after 1960 (with chefs such as Jean et Pierre Troisgros, Michel Guérard, Paul Bocuse, Alain Chapel or Alain Senderens), some chefs reached the status of renowned “authors”.

But Spain, with its molecular cuisine and its unprecedented boom since 1994, deeply transformed the status of chef or cook. We cannot talk about this “Golden age” without mentioning Ferran Adrià, about whom we mentioned earlier, “chef artist”, who in 2007 was invited as chef and artist in Documenta of Kassel, one of the greatest world events of contemporary art, an « alchemist » (Le Monde 1) of the stoves and leading chief of a categorically pioneering cuisine. Thanks to this recent recognition of cuisine and chefs, as well as the positioning, in 2013 of “El Celler de Can Roca” as first place among the world’s best restaurants (year of presentation of the project “*El Somni*” before press), such a creative and also risky experiment such as “*El Somni*” was possible. Some of the main features of “*El Somni*” are clearly based on the avant-garde Spanish gastronomic principles. In 2006, a year before presenting his performance in the Documenta of Kassel (Germany) together with other 130 artists,

Ferran Adrià described the baselines of the molecular cuisine. The chef emphasized on the assistance of new technologies (in "*El Somni*" there are 3D images, atmospheres and also music robots), the increasing coding of the culinary language through the collaboration with other arts and media (in "*El Somni*" music, video art, design, poetry and cuisine and enology join together), as well as the deconstruction and flexibility of the classical structure of meals in the tasting menu (in "*El Somni*" the opera-based food includes 12 small dishes that match the narrative progression of the story). Lastly, "*El Somni*" is the result of a research process that started with the collaboration between Roca brothers and Franc Aleu in two previous projects: "*Nauta*", a techno-gastronomic show (appetizers and wine tasting in a scheme of 10 circular screens performed in 2006 in Barcelona), and "*Gol de Messi*", a dessert served in 2014 during the South American tour of Roca brothers), whose challenge was turning an idea (an intense football-associated emotion) into a meal.

## 2.2. The gastronomic dinner as a show: performances in Spanish haute cuisine

In addition to the clear and confessed inspiration in the opera genre by Roca brothers and Fran Aleu, the reader could notice the evident association between the culinary show offered in *El Somni* and, for instance, the luxury banquets organized by Vatel in France in the XVII century. By the way, Joan Roca cites the French Vatel as one of the inspirations for his project: "And with *El Somni* we wanted to get the concept of transversality to the highest level by doing our pending tribute to an admired Vatel, dreamed about off the record up until now." According to the researcher D. Michel, what was described under the term of "*ambigiù*" was a dinner-appetizer, a sort of seated buffet where the whole stage — from the disposition of food to the decorative elements— was conceived as a work of art (Michel, 1999). In the Vaux-Le-Vicomte castle in 1661, Vatel organized a party for the visit of King Luis XIV, a bouquet where the pleasures for the eyes and taste added something to the music of 24 violins and golden or golden silver dinnerware. Later, in August of 1671, when Vatel worked as superintendent of the Great Count in the Chantilly castle, he organized an extraordinary banquet to honor King Luis XIV with the magnificent alternation of live shows (theater, concerts), leisure activities and meals that lasted for several days. Furthermore, in relation to the centuries XVIII and XIX, the French historian Jean-Paul Aron designated luxury dinners as "dinner-shows", where everything, from the table's design, to the disposition of lights and guests and even the composition of menus disclosed a sophisticated dramaturgy (Aron, 1988).

In the last years, only two papers developed the issue of the dramaturgy typical of banquets or gastronomic dinners: one focused on the recent tendency of showing the chef's work to dinner guests, opening the kitchen (Ferguson, 2005) and the other focus on the concept of "stage" to identify the gastronomy scene as a highly theatricalized and ritualized act in Brazilian luxury restaurants (Gómez, 2008).

The fact of conceiving gastronomic food as a show was extended in the most avant-garde restaurants in Spain. Does this mean we are witnessing a sort of "hyperstaging" of the gastronomic dinner? In Ferran Adrià's restaurant, guests entered the kitchen to witness the cooking staff's performance. Chefs Quique Dacosta ("Quique Dacosta" restaurant) or Andoni Luis Aduriz ("Mugaritz" restaurant) state they offer a daily show. In the fusion cuisine restaurant "Diverxo" in Madrid, the show is offered by waiters who give the finishing touch to dishes before the clients on a regular basis. David Muñoz, the young chef who was recently recognized with three Michelin stars, visits the dining room briefly to do



his own performance, for instance, with the finishing touch to the shabu-shabu octopus. In “El Celler de Can Roca”, the show begins with a visit to the wine cellar. During this visit, guests can touch silk before tasting a Burdeos wine in order to recognize this distinctive feature in its density and then get their hands in a recipient full of small metallic balls before enjoying *cava* bubbles.

We are standing before what seems to be an authentic tendency in the different cuisine restaurants of Spain towards multi-sensorial experience and show.

### **2.3. Beyond the show: the relationships between "El Somni", theater and performance**

It is worth mentioning that “*El Somni*” goes beyond the mere culinary show, understanding show as a very wide concept that refers to the “visual representation of all kinds of manifestations” (Pavis, 2007: 14). The experience could be identified as halfway between the opera genre, artistic performance and theater.

“*El Somni*” is a meticulously prepared representation, with a separation of the space inspired in the opera genre where the stage, namely, the table with the dinner guests, is surrounded by what could be perceived as stage sets, from which waiters emerge, to disappear afterwards through the same place.

All protagonists of “*El Somni*” are alternatively actors and/ or viewers dwelling an organized dispositive with a peculiar and studied tempo, with a fixed diegesis narrating a love and death story. Joan Roca defines “*El Somni*” as a “gastronomic opera” directed by Fran Aleu with a fantastic ideology and imagery that elevate cuisine to the performative category or incorporate to the opera, the gastronomic experiences of eating and drinking, sensorial experiences that have been formally excluded from it up until now.

But since it is also a “pop-up” dinner, elaborated *in situ*— with all the risks live cooking might entail—, “*El Somni*” can be also considered a performance, as understood by Joseph Danan: “an act in the present where text is secondary” (Danan, 2016: 8). In the performance, the action can be positioned outside the stage (place conceived intentionally for the conventional representation), in such a way that the concept of mimesis is questioned: “the action is accomplished by the scene, the scene is not necessarily an imitation of the reality” (Pavis, 2007: 14). The most important aspect of a performance is the accomplishment in the present, of an act that has not been either planned nor written precisely and previously to its concretization. A performance is unrepeatable, unique, and often is a means for searching for its creator. The dinner in “*El Somni*” was unique, and made room for unprecedented dishes and pairing for the menu of the restaurant “El Celler de Can Roca”. Considering the relevance of the creation process in a performance, the “work in progress”, and the acting of its public, who becomes co-author of the performance, in the proposal of Roca brother’s viewers influence in the development of food and the story. The diner of “*El Somni*” has a peculiar role, since it is public and performer at the same time in the gastronomic production and contributes to its general construction, at its own pace (depending on the speed dishes and wines are savored). In addition, in this case the public destroys the performative production at the same time it is constructing it.

“*El Somni*” follows two of the five tendencies of performative art, according to P. Pavis in the *Diccionario del teatro*. First, it is about performing a kind of “ritual and mythical ceremony” – and in this meaning there are anthropological and cultural dimensions granted to the performance genre, which goes beyond theater, when including all kinds of rituals: game, sports (Danan, 2016: 7)— and in our perspective, gastronomy. The second tendency of performance where “*El Somni*” affiliates is “body art”, because the bodies of diners-performers are used to incorporate part of the performance (dishes and wines), even these diners are put into emotionally delicate situations of rejection or reluctance before some dishes, as we will see later in this paper.

Therefore, the dinner of “*El Somni*” is an hybrid form, related both to the registry of gastronomy and culinary art, as well as the registry of the theatrical show and performance. Thus, we need artistic analysis tools to better understand the different dimensions of such work of art.

### 3. Methodology

From the theoretical studies of the 60s-70s about dispositives, and especially about Michel Foucault’s thought, a group of French scientists (Stéphane Lojkine, Philippe Ortel, Arnaud Rykner, Monique Martinez, Euriell Gobbe Mévellec, Emmanuelle Garnier) questioned the concept in the fields of literature and art in general. This trend was coined by Bernard Vouilloux, in the journal *Critique*, under the name “l’École de Toulouse” (place where the critique to Foucault’s theory was born). According to this movement’s founders, the use of the concept of dispositive is helpful for renewing the approach to artistic and literary productions, inasmuch as it offers the possibility to combine written arts, image arts, communication and sociology. A dispositive can be defined as a network of heterogeneous elements organized to produce, at a given space, some effects of meaning in the recipient. It is constituted by three articulated and overlapped levels:

- The geometric or technical level (organization of elements in the space of fiction)
- The pragmatic or scopic level (the interaction of several performers under the view of a third party)
- Symbolic level (semantic and axiological values associated to spatial organization).

According to P. Ortel:

“When a dispositive originates from a technical arrangement or from any other reality provided with the same function that regulates relationships between subjects, another two dimensions come into play: a pragmatic dimension, evident in the case of communication tools, since they mediate our exchanges, and a symbolic dimension, in the current sense of “values”, since a dispositive wouldn’t have any meaning nor legitimacy without the semantic and axiological values that impregnate it.”(Ortel, 2011: 207).

The dispositive feeds on often compartmentalized disciplines, even in the century of interdisciplinarity, offering a common space of analysis bestowing its complete legitimacy. The concept also marks art with the seal of variability in a definitive manner, inasmuch as the meaning of the artistic object is built in the intersection between signs and their perception. As Philippe Ortel states, who defines the

"*entre deux*" as one of the key parameters of the functioning of these representations, a dispositive is a "matrix of potential interactions, or furthermore, an interactional matrix " (Ortel, 2008: 33).

Due to the complexity of its reach, the heterogeneity of its genre —culinary art, theater, performance—, and considering that, as we will see later, the context of the experimental is as significant as the experiment itself, the proposal of brothers Roca deserved to be analyzed with a wide and multidimensional perspective. The tools offered by the critique of dispositives is flexible enough as to analyze "*El Somni*" in its culinary aspects, but also as a performance and a sociological object, in order to determine its innovative and transgressive features.

#### **4. Analysis and results**

##### **4.1. The technical level (I)**

The technical dispositive of "*El Somni*" comprises the group material elements composing the experiment. The location of the gastronomic performance in an unusual place, the Art Gallery Arts Santa Mònica in Barcelona, a space usually dedicated to exhibitions, facilities or performances of visual arts, included audiovisual equipment needed for the spreading of images, music and sounds, as well as necessary tools for the gastronomic service (table, chairs, dinnerware).

The space-time concept is the most necessary and essential level in the dispositive. The organization within a space-time of elements is fundamental in the dispositive because without this organization the interaction with the user cannot emerge and neither the symbolic meaning suggested by the dispositive.

In the case of our object of study, the place chosen for "*El Somni*" was the Art Gallery Artes Santa Mònica of Barcelona where there was a space configured in two sections located on different floors: one of them was not visible, the kitchen — different from the usual tendency of exhibiting the kitchen as a show— and a visible one for the experiment's participants: a round table with 12 seats.

Furthermore, the visible area is equipped with high technology gadgets composed by 5 wide screens (4 positioned as a circle right behind diners and one inserted in the center of the table), the music robots of Roland Olbeter reproducing live music of a real strings quartet and many cameras, video projectors and points of light hanging from the ceiling.

The invisible area, the kitchen, is only accessible to the staff and it is clearly isolated from visible scenes. In "*El Somni*", the kitchen is used as a closed secret laboratory, not as a theater stage open to clients' view. During the experiment, chefs remain hidden from diners, preparing the twelve different dishes in their remote kitchen. This discloses the way the Roca brothers conceive their contribution to the experiment: they are reluctant to interrupt the show and breaking the illusion created. Likewise, since chefs are not part of the main setting of the performance, the role of waiters is also very limited in that same staging: they silently bring the dishes to diners. In this sense, without doing finishing touch of the dishes in front of diners, the staff is almost invisible. Everything seems to be made for guests to focus exclusively on the show at the table and behind them, leaving them alone with the disposition.





Fig. 1. Technical disposition of "El Somni"

Likewise, we shouldn't forget that the diners of the experiment are constantly being filmed by different cameras fixed on the ceiling and on the sides. Erving Goffman observed that the quotidian social activities and interactions were really performances where every individual played a role predefined socially, in a framework, or "façade" that same individual establishes (Goffman, 1973: 29). The mere act of sharing a meal around a table already represents a social performance where every guest is interpreting a part of the composition. Thus, when filming this performance and its actors in order to create a film, this performance dimension is being doubled, this "presentation of the self" already exacerbated by the situation induced by food, which is a social event par excellence. While filming, guests are acting a role in their performance as diners, like in a "*mise en abyme*". The fact that the complete experiment is filmed (I) strongly influences actors (guests) and their interactions (II).

#### 4.2. The pragmatic level (II)

Every dispositive has a pragmatic dimension (pragmatics studies the language in specific situations of enunciation) linked to the technical dimension, because it is a matrix encouraging relationships between subjects, exchanges between different actors, either internal or external, internal viewers and experiment's guests or observers and external performers like waiters and the viewers-creators.

The table is a theatricalized microcosmos that synthesizes the social standards and rules of the society in a given period thanks to its design and grammar, for instance like the "French style" service used across the aristocratic Europe of the XVII-XVIII centuries, based on an accurate organization reflecting social establishments. The designation of the places at the table mark a social differentiation, considering that "the central positions give the diners seated therein a higher possibility of obtaining the desired dishes" (Poulain and Neirink, 2007: 58). On the contrary, in "*El Somni*", the perfect roundness of the table —central technical element determining the pragmatic relationships in the experiment—, as well as the accurate simultaneity of the dishes serving (an "American-like" service where the meals are served already presented on individual plates to each guest) seem to establish a strict equality among diners. Who are these 12 guests? Ferran Adrià, famous Spanish chef; Rafael

Argullol, poet and novelist; Miquel Barceló, plastic artist; Joël Candau, French anthropologist; Bonaventura Clotet, doctor expert in virology; Nandita Das, Indian actress and director; Abderrahmane Kheddar, Algerian Engineer; Ben Lehner, British biologist; Harold McGee, United States scientist and writer specialist in gastronomy; Freida Pinto, Indian actress and model; Josep Pons, conductor; and Lisa Randall, United States theoretical physicist. Each one of them is a renowned specialist in their own area and all fields touch one of the artistic genres or media that appear in *"El Somni"*. The meeting of experts of different fields so that the reception and understanding of the experiment could transcend the mere gastronomic field reveals the ambition of Fran Aleu and Roca brothers' desire: not only «total art» but also “total science.”

In addition, the dinner clearly alludes to another founding dinner in the Christian culture: the Last Supper that Christ shares with his apostles. The number twelve is repeated several times: there are twelve guests, like the apostles. Would the guests witness a unique moment, simultaneously symbolic (the accomplishment of the union of many artistic forms with the haute cuisine) and dramatical (this union is a challenge so great that undoubtedly would be the first and last of its kind)? But Where is Christ? There is no thirteenth guest in *"El Somni"*. Therefore, if we are talking about Eucharist, whose “body is being eaten” then?

The Eucharist, which can be considered a way of symbolic anthropophagy, finds an echo in an episode of the dinner that will be mentioned later. After Adonis' violent death, the young and handsome hero, whose image is projected on the dispositive's screens, there is a dish of rare meat, with reddish tones: squab and beetroot, an unsettling and edible metaphor of Adonis' bleeding body.

### 4.3. The role of screens

The main role and the position of guests should not make us forget the great role of the dispositive's material level. *"El Somni"* seems to be a peculiar artistic dispositive where the technical elements are not only visible and extremely significant, but also omnipresent.

Screens are all around in *"El Somni"*: they surround diners in such a way that they cannot stare upwards without finding a screen, and if they want to look below they find another screen inserted on the table. If we refer to the etymology of the word «screen», it originally designates a vertical fixed or mobile partition used to divide a room and protect from air, heat or light, or to provide conceal or privacy. Thus, the origin of the screen consists on an object with the purpose of separating, be an obstacle for view. The fact of finding an obstacle for view unleashes the desire to cross it in order to see either beyond or through it. The opacity of the screen increases the guest's scopic impulse (the desire of looking). In *"El Somni"*, the screens are marking a strange space of representation, because it is made of half bodies (busts and heads) of the twelve guests seated at the table. The design of the screens is cutting guest's bodies, so there is no access to full bodies, in such a way that it can be interpreted that this delimitation makes the biologic dimension of food to disappear to favor a more intellectualized idea of eating.

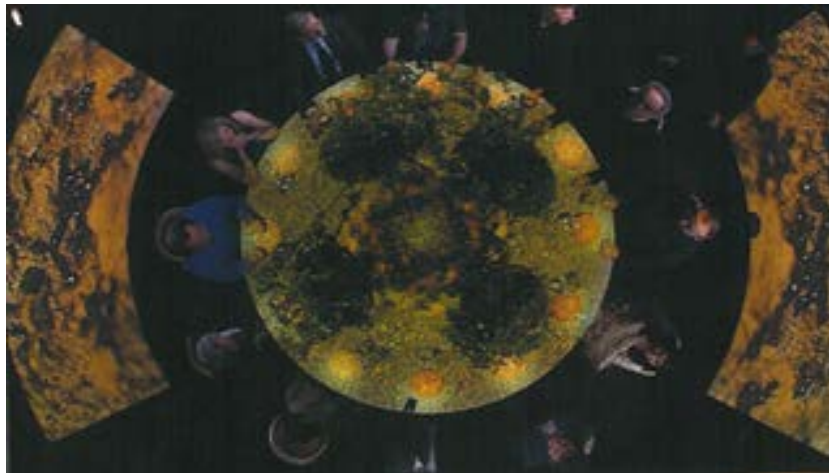


Figure 2. The space of representation

In *"El Somni"*, images and sounds created by Aleu compose a visual poem also illustrated by music, dishes and wines. Each image is strongly linked to other elements of the interpretation. In a way, images that move around guests are explicitly prefiguring the dish that will be served. For instance, when the characters of the story enter the Hesperides garden, abstract kaleidoscopic images are projected with the background music of a Buddhist prayer, thus constituting a multicolored combination overloaded with patterns. Some visual patterns are unsettling, others are surprising, most of them evoke a natural wild life with an Indian aesthetic. The dish served is a main dish, the «mandala» (in Sanskrit the word refers to a symbolic Buddhist circle), a beautiful multicolored plate composed by two main elements: roasted lamb and artichoke flower, as well as many small elements such as sorbets, sauces, several foams with acid, spice and citric flavor. The images and sounds are acting between the mandala dish and the scopical impulse, namely, the diners' desire to see. Therefore, screens have a double role: they are the prominent frame for the experiment and the platform for projected images: show and hide at the same time.



Fig. 3. The «mandala» dish

The prominence of the screen, from the technical to the dispositive, alters the social dimensions of food. We already noticed that the complete dispositive of "*El Somni*" seems to be made to remove chefs and waiters out of the stage and leave only the dinner guest alone in the atmosphere created. Is the experiment reaching the extreme of the logic of tasting as an utterly individual and even lonely activity? Before dinner begins, Joan Roca asks diners to take most advantage of the silences and avoid to talk. "*El Somni*" is not a normal meal, it is a meal where verbal interactions among guests are not welcomed, exactly what happens when we attend to the conventional theater or the cinema. The lights produced by the screens, their size, their circular disposition, as well as the definition quality of 3D images have hypnotic properties for guests. In fact, the omnipresence, variety, complexity of stimuli produced by screens disturb the flow of traditional communication. Watching the different episodes of Astrid odyssey (the main character) requires the dinner guest's complete attention and, furthermore, talking during those moments of action is rather difficult. Is it easier to talk during the tasting moments? At a pragmatic level, beyond the rudeness of talking with the mouth full, tasting can be also considered as a sort of «anti-food». When C. Champion (2010) cites the stories about tasting collected in 2007 in Documenta of Kassel by R. Hamilton and Vincente Todoli there outstands an apparent incompatibility between the collective dimension of food and the practice of tasting. Regarding these giant, almost invasive, screens, we could talk about an internal dissonance of the dispositive (Ortel), that perhaps communicates a question about the discrepancy between reality and fantasy, between carnality and dream. When the augmented, fictitious reality overlaps experience, up to the point of exerting a domination over the real experience: What happens with physical feelings? Are they augmented or, on the contrary, fade away?

But what is most surprising, despite the chef's advice and of all hurdles for the communication between guests, is that through the complete experiment diners generated a «collective whisper like in the Babel tower, where Catalan, Spanish, English, French languages were melting into a unique soundtrack». The verbal dialog did not disappear.

The Roca brothers thought the show would mute viewers, but that did not happen, in such a way that even in the middle of so many diverse stimuli, it seems impossible to isolate the gastronomic experience of what composes commensality, since there are bonds and exchanges established between diners (Fischler, 2012), both in the pragmatic (II) as well as the symbolic level (III).

#### **4.4. The symbolic / axiological dimension: a transgressive menu**

Following the sequence of the fable during the experiment, first there comes the appetizer: «Weeping willow bonsai», which presents different avant-garde appetizers on its base. Then, the starters: "Vegetable broth" announcing the banquet's opening and as a magic potion, the beginning of the dream; "The moon", black and white truffle with anchovy's mousse; "Serpentarium" spiced eels; and "Under the sea", seven varieties of shellfish prepared in seven different ways. Afterwards, three main courses: "Mandala"; "Lamb with artichokes"; "Pigeon's breast" prepared with roses, strawberry and dew drops; and «Goose *à la royale*», elaborated with goose, liver, blood and beetroot juice. In addition, there are two desserts: "Yeast ice cream" with cocoa puree, dehydrated lychee and meringue and "Cotton sugar cloud", a cloud of sugar, sugar thread, flowers, caramels and honey.



In this general and classic progress of food, some dishes come as surprises, inserting playful breaks or puzzling breaches in the menu. For instance, «The apple» —hot apple made with blown caramel and filled with roasted apple— it is an illusion that deceptively announces dessert, thus breaking guest's expectations.

The most transgressor dish is called «Piety/death», served in the tenth sequence of "*El Somni*" because it deals with one of the major issues in Art and Literature: death. The dish arrives right before the two desserts —sweet moment— and corresponds with the moment of Adonis death and his burial as well as the decay projected on screens' images. Since it cannot be categorized under any of the known stages of gastronomic cuisine, this dish is really breaking the linear and narrative progress of the traditional menu. Here is the scene's description just as it appears in the book "*El Somni*":

“Adonis dies; he couldn't survive his own attack. His body lies still on the marble. Bells ring. The air is full of the fragrance of compassion, smell of incense, and flowers wither. Adonis is surrounded by candles and Astrid looks at the corpse with compassion” (Aleu, *El Cellar*, 2014: 135).

This is the description of the dish served following a key idea, piety and death. The dish that allows savoring this idea is a «Purple potato *Parmentier* with marrow and caviar, incense smoke and mallow flowers», accompanied with *Barbadillo*, *Botella Reliquia Oloroso* of 150 years old (C.O. Manzanilla - Sanlúcar de Barrameda). The dish is served in marble and the wine in Nachtmann glasses together with the music from the composer Bernat Vivancos interpreted by the Choir of Letonia Radio and a violoncello quartet: Pau Codina (soloist), Marta Requena, María Bou, Alba Aro and Oleguer Aymamí as voice and violoncello and a video from Aleu.



Fig. 4: The dish “Piety/Death”

When the dish comes, the guest first stares at a cover full of smoke. There is the surrounding music of violoncello and a female chorus and looks at images of candles in the darkness: the corpse of Adonis lies over a gray surface, Astrid like a Piety crying her lover's death and finally 3D images of all kinds of worms. At this precise moment the cover is removed and the scented smoke dissipates slowly to



reveal a small bowl of gray marble containing a pink soup: spherified marrow and gentian ice cream, rhubarb with caviar, black trumpet mushrooms, incense smoke and sagebrush to evoke the scent of cold stone. This dish reminds of a small open grave: it is the idea of death and burial turned into a dish.

All the levels of the dispositive —technical, pragmatic and symbolic— suddenly converge as if crystallized to gain meaning. The narrative, discourse, time and space are defeated while another logic installs: the staging logic (Rykner, 2001). This scene marks the experiment's success, because in that moment all of recipient's senses —taste, hearing, touch, sight, smell— converge to create an intense emotion that diners will recall (not only mentally, but also in their bodies) for a long time after the end of the show.

Furthermore, the tenth sequence has a strongly transgressive dimension, since it shakes the gastronomic experience's standards of happiness, making room for dissonances and awakening primitive «fears» in recipients' minds. When the moment of tasting the dish «Piety/Death» arrives, eating is not the first thing the guest is willing to do at that moment. In reality, some diners might experience displeasure, sadness, fear, grief and other similar emotions, because they have been submerged into a cold atmosphere of death, dust and decay. However, the guest is standing behind this beautiful small open grave, where he recognizes a luxury product acting as bait, the caviar awakening the desire for tasting, therefore the potent vital impulse clashes violently with the death evoked by the dish and all the signals surrounding it. In fact, this scene entails a considerable symbolic opposition: the principles of life against death's.

Here, the dispositive switches, going back to the essential biologic dimension of food: living beings eat to live. Therefore, the circle is completed because the most intellectualized and sophisticated experiment brings us back to fundamentals, to the deepest origins of our food practices.

Since technology produces the conditions for an efficient design (level I, technical), the emotion of the guest caused by the crystallization of his five senses (level II, pragmatic) enables the display of antagonistic values (level III, symbolic). In this moment, we get to the climax of this experiment of “techno-emotional cuisine” or “molecular cuisine.”

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Thanks to the theory of dispositives, we delved into the high level of intertwining of technical (I), pragmatic (II) and symbolic (III) levels of the gastronomic opera *"El Somni"*. We concluded the following findings:

1. The omnipresent technical/ technological component and unavoidable commensality. The screens surrounding diners limit the representation's narrow space, but are also placed between the dish and the guests in order to isolate them into the experiment and modify interactions between them. However, diners around the table continue to behave as social beings willing to interact with others, even talking in whispers. This way, the impossibility of isolating the gastronomic experience of commensality is demonstrated.

2. Artistic purpose. Despite that "*El Somni*" is affiliated in the long tradition of dinner shows, this purpose of the XXI century of creating the total work of art is rather innovative. For Roca brothers, the show "*El Somni*" is at the same time a research and development experiment, and also the fulfilment of a promising and artistic dream of concentrating the whole scope of phenomena linked to gastronomic senses in a single dinner. In fact, "*El Somni*" is far more than an elitist and ephemeral fantasy. This creative laboratory produces unprecedented gastronomic prototypes, elaborates new ways of communication around the cuisine and builds an inspiring model of interdisciplinary collaboration.

3. Transgression. The application of the critique of dispositives to this gastronomic experiment confirms that some pieces (dishes+images+music+scents+staging) not only create positive emotions, but also make room for dissonances, provoke primitive fears or cause considerable cultural oppositions. In the tenth sequence of "*El Somni*", when Adonis dies, all artistic media and genres involved in the experiment —images, sounds, music, design and cuisine— converge to contradict the expectations of guests and evoke an unanimous and unpleasant feeling. Thus, the "Piety/ Death" episode is a transgressive scene awakening biologic and physical impulses in the middle of one of the most sophisticated meals ever prepared. And here is, nevertheless, where the theory of dispositives shows how there is a returning to the fundamental biologic dimension of food: living beings eat to live. Diners are seduced by the dish they taste; despite the opposed emotions they feel.

Therefore, the circle completes: the most intellectualized and sophisticated gastronomic-artistic experiment finally brings us back to the fundamentals of the human being and the deepest origins of our food practices.

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