I, Claire G Shafer, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of).

It is entitled:
Making Place For Ritual: Creating Connection Through Communal Meals

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Making Place for Ritual

Creating connection through communal meals

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abstract

Historically, in many cultures around the world, large communal feasts were enactments of narrative through ritual dining experiences that passed cultural values from one generation to another. These feasts were ritual acts that united communities by requiring everyone to sacrifice commodities and work towards a common goal. In American culture today however, many of the benefits of rituals that once surrounded food and dining have been adapted and broken down into other sectors of society. Our food culture is undefined due to this lack of structure and meaning around dining.

Because of there is no societal structure, we are at risk not only physically and financially, but also culturally. The lack of value placed on rituals and food challenges the practice of maintaining personal connections to the family and community through food. With a culture that does not emphasize the significance of shared meals that are connected to certain values, our society has lost these moments of potential connection and understanding.

This thesis explores the relationship between place and components of ritual that can be utilized to create an environment that evokes a feeling of belonging and community. Four aspects in creating a ritual—phenomena, narrative, interaction, and reflection—are examined independently through a series of communal dining events to further understand the nuances of each component. Implemented in a variety of spaces and contexts, these meal events provide opportunity for research and experimentation with how the design of the space affects the dining atmosphere. Diners experience these effects during the meal, while participating in ceremonial activities that encourage interpersonal connections. Drawing from these investigations, the spatial qualities are categorized to create a framework for future designs. A new building typology—a place for meals—is needed in order to understand the effects of these qualities over a period of time, not just in one instance. The design of a place for meals in Cincinnati embodies the learnings from the dining events and explores how space can evoke a change in consciousness in a permanent structure.
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The deep connection I feel towards food and architecture was planted in my early childhood when my parents insisted we eat dinner together as a family at the kitchen table. They cooked for us almost every night, exposing us to new ingredients and different cultures, and we enjoyed, or at least tried, their efforts around the same round table. Their emphasis on this moment of pause and sharing transformed this mundane task of eating into an experience of dining. As I begin to shape my own life with other people in different places around the world, I have found that food is one thing we all have in common; everyone has their own traditions and food practices. Although for me, it not just the food. It is also the space in which the meal takes place. Sharing food with family and friends are some of the most pleasurable moments in my life because it creates unique memories and connection during our busy days. As I have traveled around the United States, I have discovered that everyone does not have the luxury or the desire to have such a positive outlook towards food. Many people also do not have an embedded awareness for where and how food is eaten. If the appreciation of ritual dining and the environments that stage these meals can begin to be part of our culture, we will be a healthier, more prosperous society, while also developing better relationships with each other and our community.
illustrations

*All photographs, drawings, and collages included in the document are the author’s unless noted here.

Page #. Image #

84.01  Shafer, Mac. *Shipping Container Meal 1*. 27 Nov. 2011. Digital photograph.
abstract
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nature of ritual
Currently, in the United States, the word “ritual” is often used in place of the word “habitual” or “routine”, implying a common, everyday occurrence. Historically, however, a ritual was defined as an act to disturb the habitual, routine actions of life. According to former Professor of Literature at Sarah Lawrence College and leading mythologist, Joseph Campbell, “… the function of ritual is to pitch you out, not to wrap you back in where you have been all the time” (Campbell 106). Michael Dietler, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago explains that rituals are “in some way symbolically differentiated from everyday activities in terms of forms of action or purpose” (Dietler, 67). Because of this separation from self and removal from the commonplace, participants in rituals are able to develop and learn the guidelines of their society. “The main theme in ritual is the linking of the individual to a larger morphological structure than that of his own physical body” (Campbell, 90). Understanding how space can encourage these types of connections is the goal of this thesis project and is investigated through a series of communal meals.

Drawing on several theories in the fields, including anthropology, mythology, phenomenology, sociology, and psychology, the creation of a ritual develops through a four step process that includes a narrative, incorporation of phenomena, interpersonal interactions, and active reflection of the events. As Campbell and others state, rituals are intended to communicate a narrative or lesson to the participants. The society then incorporates phenomena, symbolic atmospheric elements, around the narrative in order to reinforce the intention. This aura of a common goal encourages interactions, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, between the participants. The interaction is the purpose of the ritual that connects the individual to the greater whole of the community. Lastly, the final stage of reflection is essential to understanding what effect the event had and solidifying the connection with others.

The current detrimental issues that the American culture has with food are due to a combination of many complex factors. This thesis cannot solve or even assuage many of these factors because of the massive scale of cultural renovation needed to make change. This thesis does, however, encourage conversation and thought about what role food has in our lives and the meaning of sharing that food with others.
Through the design of the spaces and a series of ritual activities, the events encourage guests to make connections to the food and with other diners. The events are not attempts to instill archaic rituals back into our society, but instead, are exploring whether contemporary contexts can provide a stage in which these connections can be made.

**rituals & dining**

Throughout history, large communal meals have served as one of the main ritual acts, alongside religion, that brought individuals in a community together. These feasts required the group to sacrifice time and resources by sharing food and working together to celebrate a monumental event. Collecting and preparing food to share with the rest of the community made food the main priority of the feast. As modern technology and economies developed, the reliance on other members of the immediate group decreased. These ceremonial feasts were no longer central to uniting the community. In modern society, a progression towards habitual, often solitary, eating routines inversely correlates with the expenditure of time and resources required to obtain and prepare food. Due to this shift in cultural focus, communal dining ritual experiences have evolved into routines that no longer serve their original goals of communicating a story or uniting a community.

With the loss of communal ritual events surrounding dining, some people find similar connections elsewhere by identifying with a specific sports team, religion, or popular culture icons. These associations pull the participants out of their daily lives and focus their attention towards a common goal and purpose. With the breakdown of overarching, communal food traditions, many of the common everyday practices are affected. Social scientist Janet Flammang studied the effects of eating together as a family on society. “Between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s, the proportion of married Americans who said that their family usually ate dinner together dropped by one third: from about 50 percent to 34 percent” (Flammang, 17). Having a significant proportion of the population not interacting with others during meals significantly decreases the society’s priorities about food and communal dining.

It is difficult to separate food from rituals because the two have been so intertwined throughout history, from animal sacrifices for the gods to communion in religions today. Many cultures around the world derive
meaning and lessons through the food, cooking, and meal sharing that provide a common cultural structure. An American woman living in Japan shares her observations of how school lunches for young children are used in school as part of the Japanese education, not just curriculum in the classroom.

Obentos are boxed lunches Japanese mothers make for her nursery school children. Following Japanese codes for food preparation—multiple courses that are aesthetically arranged—these lunches have a cultural order and meaning. Using the obento as a school ritual and chore—it must be consumed in its entirety in the company of all the children—the nursery school also endows the obento with ideological meanings. Allison, 221

The children learn discipline, appreciation, and their society’s values through participating in this ritual of eating lunch. This everyday, habitual activity of eating lunch is transformed into a ritual because of the cultural values and lessons it instills. But our contemporary American culture does not have these universal guidelines integrated into our perception of dining. We are left with a meaningless food system that is quickly becoming a severe epidemic. This thesis is not advocating for a revolution in what we are eating, but instead it is calling for an examination on how we eat. In turn, with this raised awareness of the context in which we eat, there is a possibility to view the content of what we are consuming from a different perspective.

**rituals & architecture**

Architecture is the physical manifestation of a concept, one which can be inhabited and experienced. When a ritual is created or acted out the space can play just as much of a role, if not more, than the actions of the people participating. For example, the layout and composition a Japanese tea house has to conform to strict guidelines that determine the sequence of experiences during the tea ceremony, which enforce and help carry out the tea rituals. In this thesis, this connection between ritual and architecture using food is divided into four stages of developing a ritual. The ritual can then be analyzed in terms of how architecture plays a role in creating and carrying out the narrative, conveying meaning, connecting people to each other and the universe, and creating memorable experiences.
“Any architectural sequence includes or implies at least three relations. First, an internal relation, which deals with the method of work; then two external relations—one dealing with the juxtaposition of actual spaces, the other with program (occurrences or events).”

Tschumi, Architecture & Disjunction, 154
According to Joseph Campbell, historically, societies were defined by the myths that were passed down through rituals, creating common traditions and memories to unite the members. These myths were then acted out through rituals. “A ritual is the enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual you are participating in a myth” (Campbell, 103). This narrative component of ritual is the genesis for all the acts to follow. Without the initial narrative of the myth, the rituals would have no significance or cultural meaning. Shaping the narrative and its intentions for the society is the initial step in developing a ritual.

A narrative typically has a structure in order to engage the reader and express the intended meaning. This sequencing is essential in order to carry the reader through the story. This sequencing and structure functions similarly in architecture as it does in literature, providing a pathway to follow. In *Architecture and Narrative*, Associate Professor of Architecture Sophia Psarra relates architecture to literature by comparing the maker/user relationship of the experience. “A narrative requires a narrator and a reader in the same way architecture requires an architect and a viewer” (Psarra, 2). These dual perspectives of the maker and the user exposes the possibilities of different interpretations. Often, the challenge for the designer is to decrease the gap between the intended vision and the actual perception of the experience by the viewer. Architects often utilize the narrative in built form in order to create a connection between the viewer and a larger concept.

Architect Bernard Tschumi connects ritual, narrative, and architecture by explaining that in architecture “an implied narrative is always there, whether of method, use, or form... Such, for instance, are rituals and their routes of initiation where, from points of entry to point of arrival, successive challenges await the new candidate. Here, the order of the sequence is intrinsic. The route is more important than any one place along it” (Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, 163). The role of narrative in ritual and architecture is to provide a structure in order to gain meaning from the entire experience, not any one individual event.

Psarra supports and expands on Tschumi’s argument by concluding that cultural meaning is embedded in architecture through narrative and perception. “Narrative enters architecture through the ways in
which space is structured to achieve specific effects of our perception” (Psarra, 2). In a narrative work that is comprised of individual frames, the pieces need to be structured in a way that express or create a particular meaning. Psarra categorizes meaning into two types: configuration, as in relationship to architectural organization, and signification, in terms of meaning beyond architecture. These two components of architecture, the physical and the mental, are often examined independently. Psarra, however, argues that they cannot be separated because they create a unified, cohesive experience of space and meaning. The two elements of meaning, configuration and signification, are intertwined using the sequence of architecture.

The sequence has an inherent quality of temporality. The viewer cannot experience one individual frame forever; they have to be experienced as a whole to serve their intended purpose. Tschumi compares the temporality of his drawings and sequences of a narrative in the *Manhattan Transcripts* to cinema in that each frame of a film cannot act by itself. “The relationship of one frame to the next is indispensable insofar as no analysis of any one frame can accurately reveal how the space was handled altogether. The *Transcripts* are thus not self-contained images. They establish a memory of the preceding frame, of the course of events. Their final meaning is cumulative; it does not depend merely on a single frame (such as a façade), but on a succession of frames or spaces” (Tschumi, *Manhattan Transcripts*, 11).

The individual components are part of the collective whole. Professor of Architecture Thomas Barrie explains how this architectural path is the manifestation of the hero’s journey in a myth.

The path to the sacred place, today as in the past, often re-creates the pilgrim’s journey and its three components of preparation, separation, and return. Typically there is a clear delineation of entry, a place of decision as to whether to start the journey or not... The entrance gains access to the path or to an entire enclosed scared precinct. Typically following the entrance there is a sequence of defined spaces, places, or events along the path that grow increasingly more sacred, often including a number of choices. A spatial sequence provides a symbolic narrative as one travels along it and increasingly anticipates the arrival at and attainment of the sacred place. Barrie, 55

The separation from the reality through a designated path is the architectural translation of this journey that can define the narrative of the experience.
phenomenon

The situation and location in which a ritual takes place has as much of a role in informing the meaning of the act as the act itself. The qualities of the atmosphere surrounding a ritual are described as “phenomena.” A phenomenon is not solely an event; it is an aspect that engages all the senses and provides deeper meaning to an experience or place.

Phenomenologist Christian Norberg-Shulz defines “place” as the summation of both the character (the atmospheric qualities) and space (the three dimensional organization). The combination of these two elements, character and space, expresses a “‘total’ phenomenon, which we cannot reduce to any of its properties, such as spatial relationships, without losing its concrete nature out of sight” (Norberg-Shulz, 414). The phenomenology of space often occurs in designated spiritual places. Joseph Campbell describes the time he spent in Chartres Cathedral, in Chartres, France. “The cathedral talks to me about the spiritual information of the world. It’s a place for meditation, just walking around, just sitting, just looking at those beautiful things” (Campbell, 119). Those “things” provide a greater understanding of the ritual occurring in that place. “Phenomenology is conceived as a return to things as opposed to abstractions and mental constructions” (Norberg-Shulz, 415). Examining the physical qualities of the environment leads to a greater understanding of the meaning and symbolism that they carry.

The details of the space are often what manifest the intended phenomena. “The things thereby ‘articulate’ the environment and make its character precise. That is the basic function of detail in our surroundings. The details ‘explain’ the environmental character, and thereby become meaningful…The interaction between man and the environment, therefore, consists of two complementary processes which are directed inwards and outwards…” (Norberg-Shulz, Existence, 32-3). This duality then creates a conversation between the space and the viewer, connecting to a larger phenomenon. If all of the viewers experience this same conversation, it has the potential to unite them as a group. Investigating phenomena in relationship to space provides a set of techniques and methods about how details can create a complete sensorial experience, which can convey messages of ritual.
In order for rituals to be effective and convey their intended meaning, the community in which it is enacted needs to act together and cooperate in a similar manner. Although many rituals are individual acts, the repetition throughout a community “...promote[s] togetherness, reinforce social bonds, and foster a sense of belonging, creating preconditions for civil exchanges in a structured context” (Flammang, 100). In our society today, more often than not, there is no immediate group to which to belong. Campbell believes that “one important part of ancient ritual was that it made you a member of the tribe, a member of the community, and a member of society. The history of Western culture has been the steadily widening separation of the self from society. “I” first, the individual first” (Campbell, 105). This issue of the rising “I” and fading “We” has left many people in our culture without the feeling of belonging to a group that has a common goal.

One intent of this series of meals is to provide unique interactions for the diners, which would not occur in the day-to-day habitual eating. It is the out of the ordinary feasts that allow this to occur. Professor of Architecture Kent Bloomer explains how this is an opportunity for heightened awareness and interaction through evocative architectural spaces. “...People and their paths spin out a somewhat frenetic and highly energized spatial configuration. The potential disorientation forces on us an awareness of our own movements as well as our spatial relationships to one another...One’s senses are heightened and one’s bodily responses are quickened” (Bloomer, 67). These ritual dining experiences are not the routine meal of everyday, but instead, these unusual circumstances throw people out of their comfort zone and into a higher state of awareness.

In order to become more aware of one’s surroundings, there needs to be some element that connects or has a relationship. Pallasmaa argues that the space and the body can become one cohesive experience. “The percep of the body and the image of the world turn into one single continuous existential experience; there is no body separate from its domicile in space, and there is no space unrelated to the unconscious image of the perceiving self” (Pallasmaa, 40). Creating a comprehensive
and complete architectural experience can encourage blurring this line between body and space. The interactions of participants are going to be heightened if they are forced to engage all their senses.

“...‘It is not enough to see architecture; you must experience it.’ And it is important to note that architectural form and space is not apprehended by sight only. The smell of materials, inhabitants, food, surroundings; the feel and texture of materials and surfaces, the sound of echoes and footsteps, all are part of the complete architecture experience” (Barrie, 47).

This comprehensive approach to the design ensures that it is not a typical situation. During daily routines, the body becomes numb to these other sensory inputs that are not necessary because our bodies could not receive such large amounts of data input. However, when heightened awareness is required or desired, it essential to engage all of the senses.

The design of a place encourages this heightened awareness by being the stage for the movements of these interactions. Whether it is affecting one’s understanding of the architecture, interactions between other people, or oneself, the design is the host for the performance that takes place inside the space. “All architecture functions as a potential stimulus for movement, real or imagined. A building is an incitement to action, a stage for movement and interaction. It is one partner in a dialogue with the body” (Bloomer, 59). This conversation allows for direct interaction with space. Not only is there an intended interaction from visitor to building, but also from visitor to visitor. Bloomer states that “…buildings can encourage a choreography of dynamic relationships among the persons moving within their domains” (Bloomer, 66). The space then comes alive through these interactions, while also connecting the participants to a common experience of place.

How significantly can the individual personalities of the event change the atmosphere and outcome?
The fourth step in the cycle of ritual—reflection—is the point that turns the ritual back to the beginning and the narrative. Reflection is a critical component of ritual because without remembering the methods to pass on cultural values and lessons, culture itself would vanish. Philosophy professor Robert McCauley states that “non-literate cultures bring these issues into high relief, but ultimately, even in literate cultures the transmission of rituals often rests not on consulting texts but on participants’ memories of their ritual actions.” (McCauley, *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, 38). At the same time, each ritual is unique and personal because of the basis on memory.

According to McCauley, there are two types of memories connected with rituals: memories gained through repetition and “flashbulb memories.” These types vary in terms of what type of information is recalled and the significance of that information. For repetitious rituals, the meaning of the enactment of the myth is often not understood or directly experienced during the act. This separation of self from the act taking place can occur in any type of ritual due to the emotional involvement required to undergo the necessary transformation of consciousness of a ritual. The latter type of rituals—those remembered by “flashbulb memories”—are experiences of extreme emotions and sensorial awareness; “…The study of extraordinary recall for specific episodes and the relevance of so-called ‘flashbulb memories’ to rituals that are performed quite infrequently. Flashbulb memories are memories for particular episodes that seem startlingly vivid and accurate…” (McCauley, *Ritual in Mind*, 116). The memories of feasting rituals could fall under both of these categories depending on the type of meal and meaning that it has for the participants.

Carl Jung describes this memory and repetitious process as a way of absorbing rituals into a society. “When I was a child I performed the ritual just as I have seen it done by the natives of Africa; they act first and do not know what they are doing. Only long afterward do they reflect on what they have done” (Jung, 23). This method of passing on culture would lead to an event that had stronger impact on the participant through the memory of the meal rather than the actual experience.
When designing space, architects are creating the stage for performance, awaiting the actions of the people that occupy the space. The design can either encourage this theater or it can hinder the flexibility within the experience. In the design of this series of dining events, the architecture is the set in which the meal takes place. Depending on the success of the design, the architecture determines how the meal is enacted. If successful, the meal and the architecture provides the participant with a cohesive experience that explores one component of ritual. If the event is a failure, it provides valuable information about the disconnect between the design and the performance.

This relationship between architecture and food is a natural combination due to the similar processes in making and the multi-sensorial experiences that they both evoke. There is wide range of comparisons that can be made in order to gain a deeper understanding of this relationship. However the comparison between these two fields of study is a relatively recent development. According to architectural historian Peter Collins, architecture has long been integrated into other disciplines, such as music and history; where as the analogy to food is relatively recent because of the recent invention of the idea of gastronomy in the early 1800s (Collins, 167-8). Since then, the two disciplines have been compared because of their similar processes, approaches, methodologies, and requirement for survival. Collins states that gastronomy “artistically, ...goes far beyond the dictates of scientific analysis, for gastronomy, like architecture, requires intuition, imagination, enthusiasm, and an immense amount of organizational skill” (Collins, 168). The ease of the comparison between the two disciplines provides a rich backdrop for development and opportunity for intricacies.

In “Cooking an Architectural Happy Cosmopoiesis” in the journal *Built Environment*, architect and architectural theorist Marco Frascari elaborates on the comparison of gastronomy and architecture. He introduces the views of three scholars, Fergusson, Collins, and Price, who argue that the process of turning a hut into a temple or meeting room is the same process by which regular food becomes a unique dish (Frascari, 31). Frascari, however, believes the transformation is more complex: “Dishes and buildings can be constructed through a tectonic
mosaic by which any dish or building results from the assimilation and transformation of other buildings and dishes through a complex sensorial process” (Frascari, 32). He concludes that the merging these two artistic disciplines allows for an easier path to a happier, “beatific” (Frascari, 34) life. By engaging in these two media of buildings and meals, the participant is completely immersed in exercising all the senses and becoming more aware of the surroundings.

Not only can the all the senses be exercised for the individual through these experiences, but it can also lead to engagement with others. In the essay “Food,” in Lucy and Jorge Orta’s Food Water Life, Ellen Lupton, curator of contemporary design, explains how the Orta’s artwork is sometimes categorized as “‘relational aesthetics,’ a term coined by Bourriaud to describe anti-monumental art practices based in everyday social activities” (Orta, 20.) In one of the largest projects depicted in this monograph, “70 x 7 Meals,” seven guests invited seven other guests to a community dinner in an urban environment. The Ortas utilize graphic-print tablecloths, individually illustrated plates, and locally made food to connect all of the guests to each other and the identity of the unusual site.

In order to incorporate meaning back into our dining culture, it is essential for the participants to identify with the experience and have it resonate with them. Without this identification, the ritual can become obsolete. By making a place, rather than just a space, and the understanding the phenomenology of existing architecture, the experiences will allow people to identify with the space. “It is possible to feel at home without being well acquainted with the spatial structure of the place, that is, the place is only experienced as a gratifying general character” (Norberg-Schulz, 424). This fine line between comfort and surprise is essential to the success of the dining events. If the environment and experience are completely expected and typical, the guests will not be forced to reach out beyond themselves. But if the event is so shocking and surprising that the participants become fearful and scared, they will not break out of the shell to engage with others.
the table

For a feast, the table becomes the primary focus of the diners. The form organizes people in space and orients them towards each other. Placing this object within an environment designates the function and purpose. In some cases of significant feasts, such as in the Last Supper, the building can become the housing for the main event of the meal. It provides a framework and an existing atmosphere for the event.

However, the setting does not necessarily need to be man-made construction. Typically for large feasts, the size of the home would not be sufficient for all the invited guests, requiring the meal to take place outdoors. The landscape then becomes the setting and inspiration for the event. Then, the table shape, size, and configuration are not constrained to certain room dimensions.

From medieval feasts to religious celebrations to culturally specific events, the table design varies. Typically, one consistent element is that one table unites everyone together. Professor Emeritus of Archeology Brian Hayden would say this element has both functional and symbolic reasoning. The singular table allows food to be passed more easily and people can be accommodated in one area. But it also symbolizes the equality of the group and reinforces the solidarity that feasts usually feature. This consistent pattern of a unified table helps our culture identify with the ritual of communal dining and the importance that it has in maintaining order and unification of our society.
ritual meals
The research and analysis of the nature of ritual comes to life through a series of ritual meals. Constructing this series of meals serves as an experiment in social interactions, food experiences, rituals, and phenomenology. Each of the four categories of ritual directed one or more events. The design of each event began with the site: the Guildhaus in Over-the-Rhine, a shipping container as art installation in Northside, and a warehouse in Lower Price Hill. These sites functioned in the same way for these meals as a site does for a building project. Understanding the context, history, and current environment of these three spaces was essential in designing an experience with meaning and unique identity.

After grasping the qualities of the site, a chosen text and a found image provided structure and context to the design of the meal. These precedent images introduce each meal in the following pages. The existing site, narrative, and photograph provided direction to which component of ritual each meal would explore. This component then guided the menu, table design, and experiential sequence to create a cohesive meaning for the meal.

The physical manifestation of the thesis question allows people to participate in experiences of combining food and architecture to create a societal conversation. The individual events achieve this by examining the components of ritual as the common thread through all the events. The design of these experiences encourages guests to be more aware of the dining setting and the typical perspective of interacting with other people through food. The meals also serve as research and design guidelines for the next step of exploration.
dia de los muertos meal

The inspiration for this meal was the location—an abandoned brewery cellar in Over-the-Rhine in Cincinnati. The building is now called the Guildhaus and is currently used as a residential building, but it has had a long history of industry in the city. In 1888, John Kauffman continued to expand his brewery complex by constructing the building at 1622 Vine Street, further increasing his capital as one of the largest breweries in the country. The brewery closed in 1919 due to Prohibition and was never reopened for its original use (Cahal). Many modifications were made to the existing structure, which included sealing off the three room vaulted cellar in the sub-basement. This space was only recently discovered when examining the plans for the renovations. In order to bring forth all these layers of history, the holiday of Dia de Los Muertos was chosen to highlight these changes. Mexicans that celebrate Dia de los Muertos believe that on these two days at the beginning of November, the spirits of the ancestors come back to visit the families. Many preparations and decorations are required in order for the dead to find their way and feel welcome in the home.
setting the scene

In order to celebrate the day the meal took place, the traditions and practices of Día de los Muertos and a short story by Italo Calvino called “Under the Jaguar Sun” guided the design of the event. In the story, a couple takes a vacation to Oaxaca, Mexico and the narrator explores his relationship with his wife through Mexican food and learning about Mayan culture. To invite the guests to this dining experience, the digital invitation consisted of a still image with the details of the event and a collage video. The video used Día de los Muertos imagery spliced with views of the brewery cellar (opposite page). It created an atmosphere of drama and ambiguity before the guests even arrived at the site. The design of the meal attempted to express the mythical qualities of the story, while creating a sense of the “spirit” in the underground space.
Abstract drawing of the entry sequence to the underground space.
setting the scene

Upon arrival, the guests entered through the front door of the building off of Vine Street. As they passed through this threshold, they were compressed into a short corridor with stairs to one side. This corridor then released the guests into a large, open room scattered with miscellaneous items leftover from the years of residents in the building. At the opposite end of the room, another corridor compressed the pathway down again and led to the first stairway. After being compressed down this stairway, the first basement opens up the pathway again. The designated path in this space was solely marked by the void of items in the room. A small rough hole cut into the concrete floor contained a very narrow stairway, switching back a quarter of the way down to reveal the first view of the brewery vault. The tall, narrow steps required a slow pace and concentration while walking down. At the end of the stair, the low ceiling of the stair stopped and opened up to the wide vaulted ceiling. A large mound of dirt peaking at the ceiling prohibited a complete understanding of the depth of the space. Guests then walked around the holes in the dirt floor, and ducked under the first archway. In this vaulted room, the guests were able to feel and occupy the grandness of the space for the first time. The archways connecting this vaulted room to the dining room provided yet another moment of compression and release.

The long journey of alternating compression and release prepared the guest for the final grand, open space at the end. It allowed for an elongated transition from exiting the real, known world into this underground, unreal environment. Unfortunately, due to a lack of organization in the hours before the meal, the entry sequence was not as orchestrated as was designed. This was a missed opportunity to place the guests in a particular mindset before entering the space and creating their own idea of what the evening would entail. Nevertheless, the physical experience of walking underground, losing sense of the depth and orientation, strengthened this change from reality to fiction.

"The architecture of the spiritual path and place also concretized existential questions and concepts. The built form symbolized the rite of passage and spiritual transformation" (Barrie, 54-5).
Placing only candles at the focal wall of the first room and removing some light bulbs highlighted the texture, material, and form of the space.
Before the meal began, the table was ordered and designed. During the meal, guests moved food, plates, and candles around, creating their own space at the table.
sequencing of the meal

As guests filtered in from their entrance journey, they were able to explore the space and mingle with others. An appetizer of chips, salsa, and guacamole indicated the style of the rest of the Mexican meal. One guest also noted that because everyone was wearing a costume, it broke down the normal barriers of interaction between strangers. Each person was already in a different mindset than his or her daily lives, and the costume provided a starting for conversation.

For the first course, a bowl of pozole soup was given to each guest. This simple chicken and hominy soup provided a transition from the appetizers with the garnish of tortilla chips on top. After people finished the soup, the next course of tacos created the most movement and interaction during the meal. Because of all the condiments and components necessary for the main course were scattered throughout forty feet of table, guests were required to pass plates, bowls, and even stand up to find more food. Guests reached across the candles to snatch the last bit of guacamole, while others tapped the shoulders of their neighbors to ask them pass more tortillas. Others got up from their seat and went to the other room to refill their drink or use the restroom.

As the main course was winding down, the dishes and leftover food was slowly removed from the table. Guests remained seated at the table, but only because they were told dessert was coming next. The hot chocolate was served in individual cups, while the tray of Mexican wedding cookies was passed around both sides of the table. While the guests enjoyed their sweet end to the meal, I began reading the first passage of the story “Under the Jaguar Sun” that was written on all the candles on the table. Guests then continued reading the story aloud by the numbers marked on the candles. This group activity encourage guests to stay seated longer than normal. After the story had ended, guests slowly trickled into the larger room to enjoy the music, stood to talk to other people on the side of the table, or just remained at the table for more intimate conversations. The host announced the end of the evening and the guests slowly filed back up the stairs, exiting back into the known world.
In order to receive the rice and beans that were in the larger containers, guests passed plates in all directions.

Before the meal began, all the guests stood on one side of the room because the passage way at the end table made it difficult to migrate to the other side.
Reading the second passage of Under the Jaguar Sun, the curved shape of the vaults bounced voices all around the room.
sound

The shape of the vaults projected the voices all around the room, creating a constant background of whisper and chatter. While reading the Calvino story, this quality was especially useful in projecting the readers voice to both ends of the table. It also kept the chatter to a minimum because it was amplified just as loud as the reader. This unexpected quality of the space helped to reinforce the narrative of the spirits being present during our celebration. The ambiguity of the where the voices were originating caused people to become more aware of their surroundings and its affects on the dining experience.

Guests heard entire conversations of other guests sitting at the other end of the table because of how the sound bounced throughout the space. This effect allowed the forty-foot long table not to feel as distant and provided a greater connection of diners to each other even if they were not sitting right next to one another.

light

The electric lighting on the walls were already in place, but some of the light bulbs were removed to allow the flickering light of the candles to illuminate the space. The candles reinforced the idea of spirits being in the room because of the movement of the flame. But they also marked the passage of time as they melted. Throughout the meal, they slowly dripped down, falling off kilter in the uneven dirt. Once the candles touched the dirt they created this green-blue flame that made us wonder what might be in that dirt pile. Just as the meal finished and people started to move from the table, the long candlesticks that continued the table up the pile of dirt had gone out. These candles further emphasized the temporality of the meal: our short-lived costumes, how perishable the food is, and how short a time period we can all spend together.
Standing here during the reading was the only time I could stop and take in the entire experience. It was the first time I noticed how much the sound changed.
Candles completely melted by the end of the dinner.
The other rooms of the cellar provide space for people to move around after dinner, leaving places for moments of quiet conversation and reflection at the table.

The variety of condiments needed for the main course of tacos required the guests to cross the threshold of the candles in the middle of the table.
**analysis & reflections**

Narrative within a Narrative
When reading “Under the Jaguar Sun” aloud, the guests were reading a narrative while participating in a different narrative. The story of the night began when the guests first received the invitation and watched the accompanying video. Each guest then determined their role in the narrative by choosing his or her costume and creating a unique appearance. When they arrived at the building, they entered in a collaborative process of developing the narrative. While many of the events of the evening were designed and constructed, each guest had their own viewpoint and perspective of how the experience unfolded.

Sequence and Structure
Just as Bernard Tschumi describes narrative in space, the guests’ perception of the event consists of a collective whole of the entire experience, not just individual frames. The sequence of the meal was also part of the over all narrative. When people that did not attend the event view the project, the experience cannot be completely understood with one image. It is the collection of images that describe the sequence and the video that captures the light, sound, and movement of the evening.

In a similar a location to the Banquet in the Thames Tunnel, the event for the Dia de los Muertos meal needed to respond the proportions and structure of the space. The Brunels placed one very wide table in the center of the tunnel in order to occupy more of the space. For this meal, the dinner was located in the center vault, which was smaller in floor area because of the large dirt mound in the center of the room. This allowed the dining space to feel more intimate and occupied with the fifty guests, while the first vault allowed for a transition space from entrance to appetizers and then to the main meal.

Ritual
Although the “Under the Jaguar Sun” story had inspired the design and sequence of the event, in the end, the content of the story was not important to the significance of the experience. The time required to read the story was too long to understand the story in its entirety. Therefore, the act of reading something as a group became a ritual...
act. Various words or phrases stood out because they were in a different language or because they were comical, but the majority of the passages acted solely as parts of a whole. It allowed each guest to participate in an act that was different from the typical sequence of a meal. It allowed the guests to be connected something greater than themselves: the unique environment, the other guests, and the omnipresent spirits.
a winter meal

phenomenon in ritual

The next site for a meal was discovered by our professor, Vincent Sansalone, who rented one floor in an old factory located in Lower Price Hill, Cincinnati. The building currently houses artist’s studios and offers a large open area to experiment with full scale art installations. He invited us to use this space as a laboratory for testing new ideas for materials, construction, and space. In order to initiate this process and introduce everyone to the workshop, we began as we always do with a meal. Because the architecture of building has so much character and history, this meal focused on the phenomenon stage of the ritual in order to explore these nuances in more depth. Working in a group students, we created a light installation with a ring of fluorescent light fixtures that allowed us to manipulate the space with objects and better understand its characteristics. After the installation was completed, the design concept for this meal focused on the layers of light, shadow, and gray created by the light installation within the space.
setting the scene

In addition to the concept of using shades of gray, the meal was also inspired by a poem by Georg Trakl called “A Winter Evening.” The poem captured the feeling of the vast studio space and the cold January weather outside. It also determined the design of the tablescape to include the loaves of bread and bottles of wine.

the meal

This meal relied on the food to carry the story and the theme, but the connections may have been too subtle to catch all the eyes of the diners. The soup and serving style were carefully crafted to convey the sense of depth, layers, and texture of a winter meal, while at the same time responding the light installation in the workshop.
A Winter Evening
By Georg Trakl

Window with falling snow is arrayed,
Long tolls the vespers bells,
The house is provided well,
The table is for many laid.

Wandering ones, more than a few,
Come to the door on darksome courses,
Golden blooms the tree of graces
Drawing up the earth’s cool dew.

Wanderer quietly steps within;
Pain has turned the threshold to stone.
There lie, in limpid brightness shown,
Upon the table bread and wine.
meal reflection _ bradley cooper

“The table’s location in the studio made the meal feel like the center of the universe because of how spacious it was. The thin table helped create a more intimate atmosphere compared to the number of people and the length of the table.”
During this time after the meal is finished, everyone at the table is still and focused.

The discussion about the art installation after the meal provides an opportunity for reflection, while creating a feeling of connection between all the guests.
The light installation created a contrast of light and dark at the table. Those that were facing the installation were illuminated, while those with their backs against it were in shadow.
Senses
The food for the meal was strongly connected to the contrast of the light and dark in the space. The soup was assembled in the bowls in layers, using a variety of cream, brown, and gray foods. When the guests were seated, we poured the clear broth into the bowls, one by one. This broth then revealed the layers of the soup, as the ingredients started to disperse throughout the liquid. The dill on top provided an element of freshness to the heavy soup. There were also two types of bread on the table, a white rustic loaf and a dark brown rye with caraway seeds. These two breads provided another layer of contrast through taste and appearance.

Orientation
Within the grid of the workshop, the table was in-line with the door, but it was visually obstructed by another suspended installation of small pieces of wood. This forced the initial view to the circle of lights, and then as the guests moved farther into the space, the table was revealed in the adjoining bay. The contrast between the light and the dark side of the table also created a sense of orientation in the space.

Shadow
In this meal, shadows were explored through layers of gray, white, and black. The various layers of ingredients in the soup created texture and depth resulting in an imaginary shadow. The dried flowers on the table complemented the meal with soft, white textures and various browns and grays added dimension to the arrangement. Having the lights in one bay created a flood of light that left shadows from the columns and the table.

Ritual
Phenomenon as the second stage of ritual explores how the characteristics of place assist in conveying the narrative. The details of the environment convey meaning through history, context, and associations. All of the elements that go into the existing site—plates, silverware, glasses, candles, flowers—all work together to tell a story. The structure of the meal is the vehicle that carries all of these
elements throughout the experience. The general experience of the meal is universal enough that people know that basic process. Guests come to these events to enjoy a meal with friends and meet new people in a known environment. But the unique diversions from this typical structure is what brings meaning and significance to the meal. The discussion at the end of the dinner about the art installation or the purpose of the workshop space is the element of the event that ties all of this together.

meal reflection _ bradley cooper

“My main memory is of the light behind me. I really wanted to see what I looked like because those across from me were in basking in the full light, and the wall beyond them was also illuminated. This starkly contrasted the table setting which was subtle and elegant.”
dinner in the dark
phenomenon in ritual

For some of the other meals, light played a significant role in creating the desired atmosphere within the space. The light was a way of directing the visual emphasis in the space, giving your eyes a place to rest and telling them when something was important. But for this meal, dinner was in the dark. Shutting off lights in the workshop for the evening meal allowed the small amount of light from streetlights to fall softly through the windows. After the eyes adjusted to the darkness, there was just enough light so as not to bump into something or someone. Each window let in a frame of light that highlighted the workshop tables—still and occupied at the same time. The boundary between the areas that were lit and those that were not became the stage for the dinner. When you stepped away from the windows and went deeper into the space, all detail and color disappeared. You could see the outline of someone’s body, but not the details of his face. Moving away from this edge of light towards the table forced us to rely equally on our other senses, bringing forth qualities and nuances of the space that sight tends to override.
setting the scene

When the guests arrived at the workshop, a sign on the door instructed them to leave their telephones behind before entering the space. Although this was only intended to reduce unintentional light exposure, consequently, it enforced a physical change between interior and exterior that left many feeling vulnerable without the technology they are accustomed to having so close.

The lights were turned off before the guests arrived to ensure that diners did not see the table in light, as the image to the right appears. The bright colors of the food would have distracted from the overall experience and automatically revealed the ingredients. It was also crucial that the meal be plated before the guests arrived so that the focus would be on eating the food and viewing the surrounding space, rather than trying to serve food in the dark.

the meal

With everyone seated at the table, blocking any light that might have snuck through to illuminate the table, I explained that there were three dishes—a piece of bread with a topping and two small salads. The food made a shadowy darkness on the plate, but there was no way of identifying what the food was until diners picked it up with their fingers and it was in their mouths.

Diners tried to identify the individual ingredients and discussed what they thought they tasted. By removing the sense of sight and engaging all of the other senses, the food was able to come to the foreground of the dinner. Without needing to see or be seen during the meal, people could just be—listening, tasting, smelling, and feeling the food and the space around them.
The light from the windows and the darkness from deeper in the workshop created a space within the space for the table.
The long shadows created by the lights outside revealed texture and layers to the otherwise dark environment that was void of details.

The highlighted windows became the dominant focus in the space, revealing new views to the outside that went unnoticed previously.
As cars drove by on the street below, their headlights added to the performance as the curved around the ceiling and disappeared into the darkness.
analysis & reflections

Senses
This meal was a complete exploration of the senses, emphasizing taste and feel. I expected the conversation to focus on the qualities of the space because of the darkness, but people were more concentrated on the mystery of the food. The three parts of the dinner provided enough variation to keep people guessing the entire length of the meal. The texture of food often gave away the ingredient, such as the mozzarella or the tomatoes. After I revealed the different dishes at the end of dinner, some people questioned whether they even had some of that food on their plate. It was surprising how simply prepared the food was and how indistinguishable the tastes still were to many people.

Orientation
When experiencing the workshop for the first time without the lights, the first observations I had were the musty smell and how much the repetitive columns stood out as markers within the space. Working with these qualities, I chose to cut raw beets into matchsticks to create a simple salad with mint and lemon juice. This contrast between the musky taste of the beets and the freshness of the lemon juice and mint oriented the diners within the site, breathing new life into an old space. The surrounding environment became the backdrop, the stage for the event. However, when all the lights were off, new qualities of the workshop came forth, which created an even more unique spatial experience.

Shadow
Because the space was blanketed in shadows, the highlights from the windows pierced that solid darkness. The shadows that resulted from elements within the space, such as columns and tables, added another depth and richness to the space. The author of In Praise of Shadows explains Japanese food’s connection to shadows. “Our cooking depends on shadows and is inseparable from darkness” (Tanizaki, 17). Although this meal did not consist of Japanese food, it was intended to function in a similar manner. It allowed the darkness to bring out the intricate qualities of food, relying on the atmosphere to convey the narrative.
Ritual
When the lights were turned off in the workshop, the guests were no longer expected to act or be seen in a certain way. This allowed people to interact with the space more intimately and slowly. In the forward to *In Praise of Shadows*, architect Charles Moore explains why this opportunity is so primitive. “One of the basic human requirements is the need to dwell, and one of the central human acts is the act of inhabiting, of connecting ourselves, however temporarily, with a place on the planet which belongs to us, and to which we belong” (Tanizaki, Forward). The combination of the characteristics of space and the experience of the food created this type of connection. “In the cuisine of any country efforts no doubt are made to have the food harmonize with the tableware and the walls; but with Japanese food, a brightly lighted room and shining tableware cut the appetite in half” (Tanizaki, 16). Although each meal varies in the manner in which this connection is developed, the omnipresent relationship of food and space is universal.
For the Northside Factory Square Arts Festival in Cincinnati, Par Projects, a local arts organization, placed thirteen shipping containers in an empty lot for a two month long festival celebrating the arts. They curated various artists from around Ohio to create installations that explored the word “kinetic” in these containers. Five Master of Architecture students worked with professor Vincent Sansalone to create a “kinetic” installation by constantly changing the form and concept each week. The first week introduced 121 salt blocks and collection of wooden shims, which all came together to create a curved wall blocking access to the inside of the container. After the first week, the container would change, inspired by the previous week. Each week was directed by an individual in the group and executed by the entire team. At the end of each segment, the director of that week would host a meal to review the installation and pass it on to the next person. As the project evolved, the group acknowledged self-imposed, unwritten rules that help to determine the direction of the next installation. The materials were kept to a minimum and only new ones were introduced when necessary.
1 121 salt blocks
wooden shims
metal bolts
white string

2 121 salt blocks
wooden shims
lamp oil (fire)
canvas

3 121 salt blocks
wooden shims
16’ wood board

4 100 salt blocks
wooden shims
rubber
water
ratchet straps

5 100 salt blocks
wooden shims
rubber
ratchet straps
16’ board
metal bars
metal bolts
white string

6 88 salt blocks
wooden shims
rubber
ratchet straps
16’ board
metal bars
metal bolts
white string
candles
food
setting the scene

The final week of the installations responded to all the previous weeks by following the rules about limited material usage and method of modifying the salt blocks, while still progressing the design and adding selective new elements (previous spread). The final week also fell on the same week as Thanksgiving, which inspired the installation to be the meal, not just the object. This holiday has many typical foods, but the this meal attempted to address the basic rituals and purpose of Thanksgiving: to bring people together and to be thankful for the abundance of food through a feast.

In the previous week, the eroded salt blocks were displayed as artifacts (see page 76), focusing the viewer’s experience on the installation as a beautiful object. For the final week, lowering all the blocks to one level allowed people to interact with the blocks and feel their weight and shape. The salt block table utilized most of the existing materials and introduced two new elements—candles and food as a tool for modification. The form was derived from the previous week’s design, only simplified to make a place for eating.

This spatial design set up the opportunity for a wide variety of interactions. Diners sat directly side by side to support each other because of the small size of the salt blocks. Their legs stretched almost to the other side of the table, interlocking with the person directly across from them. People also interacted with the food because they were required to pass the food with large utensils around the table to serve others. The food interacted with the blocks by absorbing the salt depending on the water content of the food. Through this process, diners had a direct interaction with the blocks because they were literally ingesting the salt.

For every installation, the stability of the blocks was tested. The blocks were arranged to defy gravity or to be changed by other added elements, such as water or fire. The salt block “plate” experimented with the stability of the block and how the food can modify the salt. Guests quickly became aware of how easily it was for food to fall off the blocks, which changed their interaction with the table. The hanging glasses also tested stability and gravity because there was a certain amount of liquid that it could hold before it tipped and spilled.
meal reflection _ amy gultice

“The first impression of the space was that it was a glowing altar, a light in the center of darkness. A closer look revealed the hanging candles, the suspended salt blocks, the shining utensils, and the carefully aligned seats, and this elicited the question of the inspiration. Was it a homage to the light, to the earth, to the meal, to the gathering, or to the magic of physics?”
meal reflection _ amy gultice

“It was a unique experience to have an empty spoon passed back down the table, with the request for ‘more potatoes’ or ‘more pork.’ Filling it up and passing it back, its contents often overflowing onto the table and onto our laps, required some finesse, but we quickly learned the choreography. With the rhythm of the food traveling from place to place, the table dancing from its strings, and the glasses and candles swirling in space, we were part of a small, beautiful ballet of balance and sharing.”
The juices and food remnants of the dinner that were placed right on the salt blocks stained and transformed the block. This concluding dinner allowed us to ingest the very material we had been working with for six weeks.

The density of the strings between the diners on either side of the table created a threshold that obscured any oblique view to other people. The candles flickered throughout the whole dinner, creating movement corresponding with the swaying blocks.

The horizontal wood beam supported the fifteen rusted metal rods. The spacing was predetermined by the previous week’s design. This rhythm created a threshold right above head height when standing inside the container.

The shipping container was the site for this installation and many qualities of the construction, such as the corrugation and the welded interior hooks, that allowed us to create richer installations by working with these nuances.
components of ritual & interaction

form

For every meal, the atmosphere of the space and the layout of the table determine the perceived formality of the meal, such as fine china for a special meal or a picnic table for an informal gathering. The appearance of meal in the shipping container seemed ritualistically formal because of the repetitive candles and silverware designating each seat. However, as the meal began, the prescribed interaction of passing the food back and forth at the table immediately broke down the formality that the structural form imposed. The mood became more relaxed and unexpected because this technique of serving each other was a new experience for most people. The diners did not feel as if they had to behave in accordance with the perceived formality because the actual experience was not typical and did not match the appearance.

The proportions of the table caused the walkway between the seated guests and these corrugated walls to be very small. There was also a row of candles at head level so people would have to duck to walk behind the seats. Similarly to the Dia de Los Muertos meal, candles were an essential ingredient to create a complete dining experience. The flicker of the flame during dinner mimicked the swaying motion of the blocks as people moved about the container. The candles were placed close to the top of the table in order to light the color of the food and to uplight all of the guests’ faces. The lights hanging on the sides bounced off of the corrugation and illuminated the opposite row.

views

The repetitious strings and candles reinforced the corrugated walls of the shipping container, while obscuring the oblique view of the other diners. This created a barrier that could be penetrated physically to pass food through, but forced a direct view forward.
meal reflection _ meghan plichta

“The whole thing was like a dissection of a traditional American meal. Certain elements remained or exemplified a ‘rich’ meal, such as candlelight and sitting in long, axial rows. Other elements were modified so we would become more aware of them, and they would actually transform the experience. Some seemed drastic, such as creating a surface out of the salt blocks suspended from above, but it essentially acted as a flat surface on which to eat.”
After the meal, the blocks did not move for a couple days. This allowed the food to further transform the blocks. The water in the beet was absorbed into the salt block and left indentations where the beets were left.
The composition of the food on the table was essential in creating the unique interaction between diners. Nine individual, monochromatic dishes were laid out from end to end, creating a color spectrum on the table. This was intended to add to the palimpsest of the blocks that had developed over six weeks, similar to the stains and marks on a tablecloth after a meal.

This chromatic composition made it difficult to obtain all of the food because the diners were only able to reach what was directly in front of them. During the meal, the conversation consisted mostly of people asking to pass food from a different end of the table. Diners would also discuss how to pass more food to others because the utensils were difficult to maneuver. This was a very successful method to control the type of conversation during the meal. But if the dinner invited strangers only, would they have an opportunity to get to know each other as they might at a typical dinner party?
The strings suspending them individually don’t have a large presence, but they drastically changed the social dynamic, by creating just enough of an implied blockade from the other side of the ‘table’ that I pretty much only had conversation with those directly next to me.

Mason jars were held of the unstable table in rubber slings (using the rubber from week 4 installation). The glasses hung right at head height so that diners could easily drink from them without removing it.
**analysis & reflections**

Narrative
The reason that Americans celebrate Thanksgiving Day has varied throughout history, but one constant is the focus on the feast, to display the abundance of food, and the gathering of friends, family, and sometimes enemies. In an anthropological study about Thanksgiving rituals, Wallendorf and Arnould explain this variation and its effects. “Thanksgiving ritual is guided by no written liturgy; the details of its celebration, like the past and future, are actively negotiated among participants and not always harmonious” (Wallendorf & Arnould, 17). As a society, we are in constant flux about these rituals because there is no guiding narrative; to the point that the meanings that are sometimes associated with the rituals are often false or misunderstood. Then why do we continue to practice this ritual feast?

Interaction
As the shipping container meal has demonstrated, it is not the understanding of the narrative that informs the rituals, but it is the opportunity that it provides for participants to join together in celebration of one common goal. This holiday is an opportunity for everyone to contribute to the feast, to sacrifice something individual for greater good of the whole. In many celebrations of Thanksgiving, it is important many people take part in the preparation of the food. Although this was not possible at the shipping container meal, the interaction necessary to serve the food to all the members of the group created the same feeling of participation.

Form & Stability
The repetitive ritual of the Thanksgiving meal provides a constant for our society because of its perceived stability as a staple of the end year celebrations. But just as the salt blocks were perceived as a stable object suspended from a stationary structure, the only stable aspect of Thanksgiving is that we continue to celebrate it. “Emic understandings revealed in depth interviews gloss Thanksgiving Day enactments as stable over time. Yet active negotiations of change and variation over the lifecycle as well as across historical epochs (Appelbaum 1984) in making ‘the plans’ and celebrating the holiday are apparent in the participant-observation notes” (Wallendorf & Arnould, 17).
It was necessary for each of us to maintain a keen awareness of our movements, lest we utterly disturb the balance. Yet, at the same time, we were intimately interacting with each other as we passed food and drink up and down the table, using only the utensils. Although few of us had prepared the food, each of us was responsible for helping to distribute the food in front of us on the table. As we enjoyed the delicious, savory, bitter, and sweet flavors, we were also cognizant of our role in sharing with the far reaches of the table.
meal of memories
reflections in ritual

For ritual, reflection is the crucial step in passing traditions and beliefs throughout societies. The ritual experience of food relies heavily on memories “because cuisine lives in memory. The beauty of the art is the temporality of food.” (Dornenburg, 4) according to Chef Dornenburg. After a meal, the remaining element for diners is the memory—each one slightly different than the next. The manner in which the memory is constructed determines the content and meaning of the experience for the participant. “Food memories are activated by as many senses as possible” (Dornenburg, 19). This meal focused on an art installation that spoke about the mark of time, the memory of the place. A layer of tape and paper was laid underneath the table during the Dinner in the Dark. After the meal, the layers were suspended directly above the table from a grid of strings. Displaying this remnant from the last meal as the art piece began the discussion of the connection between memory and food in relationship to space.
setting the scene

During the Dinner in the Dark, diners consumed the meal very quickly because they were trying to guess what the ingredients were and could not see how much they were eating. For this meal, the focus was on how the dining experience could be intentionally elongated through individual courses. These courses also provided an opportunity for a journey through various memories. Because food memories are so personal and unique, the courses did not attempt to speak to diners as a whole. Instead, each person from the group of six that worked on the shipping containers made a course that related to their memories of food and place. The cooks did not know what the others were making, only the number of the assigned course, creating the potential for an incohesive meal. There was also a music pairing for each course to reinforce the experience of the individual’s memory. This was the first time that music was used as a medium in the experience of the dinner. During previous meals, there was sometimes background music to enliven the space. Attempting to combine three different time of media—food, architecture, and music—in one dinner created an experience with greater depth.

the meal

The first course of chips, guacamole, and tequila was eaten outside of the installation, viewing the space within a space from outside. The soundtrack of the The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly elevated the drama. The next course of fried yams and sausage was a bold kick for the first dish at the table, accompanied by a rumba version of a song from the movie 2046. The Velvet Underground & Nico album set the tone for an elaborate presentation of a banana, plantain, and sausage coins drizzled with honey and topped with a banana peel referencing the album art. Cat Stevens sang accompanied the next course, which focused on just potatoes, roasted to perfection and accompanied by some fancy ketchup and mayo. With the Beatles to move the next course along, a tomato-based Thai soup with rice, beans, and lime burned diners’ lips and filled the air with ginger. For the final course, a Spanish guitar album by Tony Mottola accompanied a traditional Colombian arriquipe pastry dessert that referenced the layers of the installation suspended above.
We placed the table diagonally in the bay so that people seated at the ends of the table could be underneath the canopy.
meal reflection _ ashley bryan

“Having been raised in a family that came together religiously for meals, the setting was familiar, although the faces were not. In unfamiliar company, food became the great equalizer. Collectively, we participated in the event of the meal, aided by the systemic phasing of its courses.”
The height of the installation created a threshold above without creating a horizontal barrier. This caused diners to duck down into the space, using the movements of their bodies to determine the change between exterior and interior. The pink paper suspended above cast a warm glow over the dinner table which was accentuated by the movement of the candle flame.

“Experiencing each course, which alluded to a particular memory, allowed the individuals to taste and then collectively share in the singular memory. This conversation, physically bracketed by the plane of the table and the suspended ‘horizontal threshold,’ was immediately (both spatially and socially) intimate. While I had not thought of communicating through food before, I am convinced of its community-building relevancy and look forward to sharing more meals in the future.”
Because the table was diagonal to the bay, all of the views out from the table were blocked by a column. This further scaled the focus to the size of the table, not the vast space of the workshop beyond.
This meal was structured by courses that were prepared at a table completely separated from the dining area. The food was plated in one bay and then served three bays over, emphasizing the interstitial space of service and served.
**Analysis & Reflections**

**Perception**
The element of perception is crucial in the understanding of memories and ritual because it determines the individuality of each experience. When people arrived at the workshop, the first understanding of this meal was the visual perception of the installation through the doorway. The installation appeared as an object, floating in space, while also defining a different area of space within the larger context of the workshop. In addition to the physical perception of how the dinner occupied the space, the diners also perceived the progress of the courses and the type of food that they were eating. As the meal came to a close, the hosts explained their dishes and the memories that inspired them. The focus of the evening then shifted from the individuality of each course to the memories that each of us shared with each other.

**Threshold**
In a similar manner to the way the shipping container defined the boundary of table space, the suspended installation marked this bay for dining within in a void. However, this distinction was made vertically so not to interrupt the views into the dining space and out to the workshop. The paper blocked the light from above and created a square ring of light on the floor, further defining the threshold. This vertical plane also modified the experience during the meal because the “ceiling” was much lower than a typical ceiling height. This simple gesture created a more intimate dining area that encouraged hushed voices and subdued actions. Unfortunately, this intimacy also decreased the quality of the discussion at the end of the meal. The small scale environment made the diners feel too vulnerable to open up and speak to the group about their perception of the event. The scale lent more toward intimate conversations between small groups.
Texture
Texture played a key role in this meal through a variety of different media. The selected music provided a texture of sound, a layer of background noise that added to the sequence of courses. The installation provided a visual texture, modifying the shadows and color of the table environment. Physically ingesting the various types of food during the courses created a tactile, ingestible texture.

Ritual
As another meal in the series of dinners that focus on art installations as the driver, the Meal of Memories was an event than began to tie all of these elements of communal meals and ritual dining into one experience. The installation is the temporary element, while the table and the dining environment becomes the constant. The guest list changes for each meal, which creates excitement and provides new perspectives. However, there are those whom are constant and provide a sense of stability with the meals.

- Ryan explains the memory behind the music selection and the correlation the course of banana, plantain, and sausage drizzled with honey.
how can space create RITUAL dining experiences that connect people?

{ NARRATIVE ........
  PHENOMENON ......
  INTERACTION .......
  REFLECTION ........

a place for meals

dining / gathering / preparing food / participating in rituals / transitioning from daily life to ideal / digesting / reflecting
a place for meals
a place for meals
experiencing rituals through space

All of the meal installations were temporary experiences; the permanence lived on only in memories and photographs. For the next step of the exploration, the thesis is exploring how these same experiences could take place in a permanent environment. The place for meals is a place where the design of the space plays a role in carrying out the ritual and uniting people. In the same way that the architecture of a Japanese tea house is part of the ritual, this small space in Over-the-Rhine in Cincinnati will be that type of place for dining. A church for meals, a temple for meals, a dining house....a place where the design of the space plays a role in carrying out the ritual and uniting people
setting the scene

The twelve spatial qualities that structured the meals and the dinners themselves defined the design criteria and priorities for the place for meals. Three qualities—sequence, shadow, and threshold—appeared to make the greatest experiential impact in the space, therefore, making these three factories the most dominant in the design. The separation from the outside was significant to delineate the boundary between reality and ritual.

the meal

Although the place for meals is primarily focused on the dining event, the entire sequence of the building is important to the experience. From being in the mindset to participate in the ritual meal to remembering the experience in the building, the total sequence is important to reinforcing a message of unity and community within the space. The project is developed with a series of eight steps that connect an act with a physical space, which then can be isolated to specify the correct spatial qualities necessary to reinforce the ritual. The first step is sensing, becoming aware of the place and the necessary steps needed for preparation. The next is approaching the physical building, followed by entering through the threshold of the exterior wall. At the end of the ramp, there is an opportunity for cleansing with the water in the wall.

The first indoor space is the area for preparing the food for the meal. This space then leads to the transitioning area that allows for peace and focus on the meal ahead. The dining space is long and narrow, accommodating just the table for eating. Continuing in a spiral movement out the other end of the room, leads to the reflecting area, allowing for a moment of pause to remember the significance of the events that occurred.
When you first catch a glimpse of the place, the place for meals, it seems similar to its surroundings. But on a second look, its form, orientation, and details are unique. It is monumental but not ornate—differentiated but not contrasting.
sensing, approaching, entering,
cleansing, preparing,
transitioning, dining,
reflecting
The light from a single skylight signifies the passage of time against a blank wall.

Diffused light through a triangular opening creates a sense of depth and verticality in the same small space.
The lights holes that hold the grid of string create a field of light, while a small slit along the edge creates the dynamic highlights in the space.
site selection

From the twelve spatial and experiential characteristics derived from the series of dinners, three elements — sequence, shadow, and threshold — were the most prominent and effective strategies to create a ritual meal. Sequence is used as a technique to organize the programmatic spaces and defines the type of experience the diners will have. Shadow informs the quality that the space will embody, while threshold determines the physical form that the building will be within the site.

These qualities became the framework for site selection for the place for meals.

sequence

opportunity for the experience to start before the enclosed space to develop the narrative informing the ritual

light

access to western light for lighting effects during dinner
access to southern exposure to create contrasts between light and dark

sound

away from loud noises to create a serene environment
minimizes direct connections with exterior

threshold

separation from street front/heavy traffic/daily activities in order to create a separation form the everyday, contrasting reality with the idealized ritual

orientation

in community that could benefit from a formal gathering space/ connected with nature/on the edge of the community

perception

accessibility for user in order to create ownership within the community/hosting themselves and their neighbors in this space

12 qualities from meals

light
sound
senses
orientation
form
composition
views
perception
texture

sequence
shadow
threshold

light

sound

orientation

perception
View of entrance ramp through heavy threshold division between inside and outside
Transition from hand cleansing to kitchen area along raised exterior courtyard.
Transition from kitchen to dining area with views and access to outdoor space.
View of dining area and the ramp leading back towards the kitchen.
View looking north on the roof towards the exterior dining space and garden area beyond.
works cited


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