PANDEMIC KITCHENS IN A DIGITAL AGE: an anthropological study of Commensality

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ABSTRACT

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Cooking and eating together provides an immersive opportunity to share and develop food knowledge. In a public place the activities of making and eating food together are socially endorsed as a learning opportunity which '… communicates meanings, values, and identities …' as part of the skills, techniques, and practices of a meal (Williams-Forson and Counihan, 2012, 4). My research interest of social firsthand learning was situated in the touristic – or leisure – experiential 'lessons' adopted by freelance food professionals of varying skillsets and food cultures. My participants illustrated this type of informal culinary education with their individualized mix of culinary and educational skills and qualifications. Their precarious work was founded on the ability to market – through various online platforms such as *Instagram* or *Airbnb* – in-person experiential offers to paying 'students' looking to submerge themselves in social and multi-sensory learning.

However, my participants established in-person work was abruptly and uniquely prohibited when virus mitigation restrictions of the *SARS-CoV-2* pandemic (2020-2022) made public social activity illegal. Forced out from physical fieldwork I examined how and what happened in a mass transition from in-person to online social learning through the impact this had on my focus group of freelance food professionals and their online students. My ethnography was framed by compounding elements of the pandemic restrictions, which created an environment of physical isolation with extensive use of the internet to accelerate the a-material interactional practices of culinary education. So, my eleven diverse chef-educator participants spent the pandemic forging previously untried types of online social learning interaction, and their enforced transformation allowed me to observe and analyse the nascent online qualities of reimagining the shared physicality of social and multi-sensory immersive learning. My thesis discusses the challenges and opportunities for culinary education in the digital age, with a proposition that anthropologists, educators, and computer engineers work closely together for a more human-centric food future.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION
'Don't tell me what you ate, tell me who you ate with'[1]

My research discusses conversations about the persistent practice of being online and contributes to debates that seek to understand socialisation and human agency in the digital age, and ultimately as cyborg artist and trans-species activist Neil Harbisson describes below, the omnipresence of becoming a technologically defined species:

> *In a way we are ALL consciously or unconsciously in transition of becoming biological cyborgs. You can notice it in language. Before, one would say "my mobile phone is running out of battery" now most people would say "I'm running out of battery" or "I have no reception" instead of "My mobile has no reception". We are already talking about technology as if we were technology.*

> Harbisson, N., 2017, 26

My fieldwork was situated at the beginning, and throughout the first year, of the *Covid-19* pandemic in Europe (2020-2022), and my purpose was to investigate a small but significant element of the pandemic's accelerated online social dependency as an antidote to the enforced physical restrictions to control the *SARS-CoV-2* virus. My research explored – through online and auto-ethnographic fieldwork – comparative and conversant analyses of the social processes of cooking and eating together. I focused on the multi-sensory ways we understand and respond to physical and non-physical contexts, and the work of anthropologist David Sutton, on the forms of agency, cultural value, *embodiment* (bodily experiential processes to generate understanding), and management of everyday risk, that are taught and enlivened through meal sharing practices are foundational to my interpretations (Sutton, D., 2016, 353-366).

From my participants' experiences the aim of my study was to extrapolate what the role of being social means to food education, and I implemented this through ethnography of

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[1] A Greek saying presented on Anthony Bourdain's Parts Unknown television series.

online freelance food educators and their students to explore the tensions of a particular kind of being social, of being 'tethered' within contemporary online connectivity during an acute physically asocial time. So, what I explored was transformation and re-situation of the physicality of social learning inherent in making and sharing a multi-sensory meal (Turkle, S.,201).

I identified tensions of what being social around food means, between three perspectives, firstly the sensorial and reciprocal modelling of knowledge transmission at the commensal physical meal. Secondly the oral and visual substitutions for embodied learning performed on-screen. Thirdly, and perhaps most relevant to the coupling of a pandemic and internet use acceleration, was a state of being 'alone together'. Of individually going through the motions of shared sensory empathy online yet simultaneously experiencing intense sensory stimulation whilst cooking and eating in individual physical kitchens – a context that of the interface between materiality and a-materiality.

To anchor such exceptional phenomena I needed to establish grounding constant enough to navigate and assess the stark novelty, and its impact upon anthropology's work of interpreting social culture. A sub-discipline of anthropology, the anthropology of food (which I had studied at masters' degree level), offered me the foundation needed to illuminate the tensions of the day-to-day local butting up against online time-zone travel in a unique moment in history. It was a wise choice, as anthropologists Sidney Mintz and Christine M., Du Bois confirm below, as an anthropological sub-discipline food studies' approaches offered the insight needed (P.23-26) on positions of the debate to how the repercussions of a pandemic impacted on societal processes.

> *... the study of food and eating is important both for its own sake since food is utterly essential to human existence (and often insufficiently available), and because the subfield has proved valuable for debating and advancing anthropological theory and research methods. Food studies have illuminated broad*

societal processes such as political-economic value-creation, symbolic value-creation, and the social construction of memory.

Mintz, S., and Du Bois, C. M., 2002, 31

The pandemic upheaval resulted in transformational measures upon the social meal, from its preparation to consumption, contextualised by the impossibility of being physically social around food in public (due to distancing guidelines to keep one or two metres apart from anyone other than those in household groups), against the presumed easy hospitality of the online social space. Thus, I argue how the physically asocial pandemic time afforded the simultaneity, and consequent agitation, between these two realms to change how food knowledge was produced and reproduced.

I use the term commensality for a shared meal and its preparation, and my interpretation reflects the bold position 'food is more than feed' (Douglas, M., 1997, 7). Thus, I hone-in upon a facet of commensality suggested by anthropologist Harry G., West, of the '… human inclination to share company in preparation and consumption …' and the resulting collective sensory empathy that informs and re-informs the skills and information of food work. (West, H., G., 2021). However, an attempt to define through ethnographic study a stand-alone feature of commensality is unfeasible (particularly against the restriction of pandemic regulations). So even though my research included a small aspect – its social learning role – it was always situated in wider discourses of health emergency social restrictions. These include the tensions inferred in the subtitle of this chapter 'don't tell me what you ate, tell me who you ate with' which touches on commensality and the forming and reforming of identity and social distinction; whether there is unity and inclusion; an atmosphere of trust and mistrust; moral dilemmas of food choice or social status and cultural etiquette of a meal and its consumption (Bourdain, A., 2016). I expand on these thoughts within the context of my

methodology in the following chapter titled *My Methodological Approach* (P. 51-103) to place them within the aims, objectives and research questions I held (§2.4; §2.5).

I looked at the transformation of a particular public-facing type of commensal practice, i.e., of informal, touristic or leisure experience of online food education, at a time when governmental restrictions had closed all education sites and hospitality venues. My interpretation of the conceptual term commensality explored how ethnography can test or subscribe to the notion that it can 'suggest social relationships without defining them' (O'Connor, K., 2017, 202). Although I found conflictions in this exploration, because the accessibility and gathering of my participants was significantly pre-determined by how we had already identified as a social group of online affinity, my focus is offered as a study that defined the online relationship between food educator – or knowledge holder – and student as they socialised around cooking and eating a meal together online.

However, what my pandemic-framed fieldwork unexpectedly did was allow – in an acute time when being social meant being online for the majority of the world – was my and others' viewpoint of being simultaneously internetworked globally and physically local (e.g., figure 30; P.47; 209). So even though we were in the same online space our seemingly congruent realities were markedly different, and therefore the differing anticipations and contributions to the potential learning inherent in a commensal meal was already defined by a strong individualised viewpoint.

Years before the pandemic I had a feeling borne from my work as an *Airbnb* food 'experience'[2] guide work (2017 -2018), of the simultaneity of co-authoring narratives with my tour guests, and I observed that we were complicit in curating food knowledge and the

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[2] *Airbnb* food experiences aim to understand culture through the culinary practices of locals.

togetherness of social media affinity. The tours were essentially a leisure or touristic activity, yet they were also an informal element of food education by sharing or modelling knowledge on the work practices and values of artisanal bakers in the bakeries we visited.

Join me for a taste tour of an eclectic mix of five central London top food places to taste and buy amazing bread and pastries. We'll explore a fashionable and colourful square mile of central London visiting cafés, restaurants, bakeries and a central London garden square along the way!

Figure 1: 'Visit bakeries with a food writer', Airbnb website, [2017] accessed 2022

Figure 2: My *Instagram* post on bread, 2017

Figures 1 and 2 show how I colluded in the fictionalisation of artisan bread through my *Airbnb* website online profile where I had succumbed to using marketing words of foodie togetherness that married with my synchronised and staged *Instagram* photos of beautiful bread. The ways we communicated were shaped and restrained by the standardising format of the online filtering software of social media and restrictive website template design.

So, what intrigued me the most with my tour group activity was our hybrid relationship with social media and the online platform *Airbnb,[3]* whilst we were physically on a food walking tour. I wondered how machine ways of thinking, Artificial Intelligence (AI), efficient, linear, and bi-sensory (visual and auditory) were perhaps irrevocably altering aspects of food education –

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[3] *Airbnb* is an online marketplace that brokers holiday accommodation and on and offline experiences.

particularly knowledge sharing through bodily and emotional 'tools' of sensory stimulation and response. A relationship that bonds us with one other through a shared multi-sensory and memorial process, which anthropologists might describe as 'embodied sensory knowledge' (Sutton, D., 2013, 300), or 'an ecological understanding of the reproduction of knowledge' (West, H. G., 2013), or 'embodied knowledge' (Ingold, T., 2019, 7).

Ultimately, I wondered how an aspect of the reproduction of food knowledge – which I argue is embedded in commensality – was being re-defined and valued now that machine designed software shaped, filtered, memorialised, and imagined cooking and sharing a meal. For millions the pandemic years of a social life on-screen provided an intensity that exposed the already ingrained shift for commensality, as pre-pandemic the transformation of food knowledge, within meal making and sharing, had shown online entanglement. A duality which eased in an increasingly normalised interface of being simultaneously online and offline – a state of *bio-digitality* – a constant fusion of biological, physical and sensory (offline) context with a digital, a-physical and machine programmed (online) dimension.

My enquiry magnified and escalated at phenomenal scale and speed when the pandemic of 2020-2022 ruptured through the perceived normality of daily life. The narratives of 'gastro-tourism',[4] and the socio-cultural activity of extra-domestic commensality were hushed into enforced silence by governmental distancing regulations and travel bans. And against the new quietness for hospitality on the streets of towns and cities came the hectic public sharing of homebound food activity for those with a device and access to the internet. My thesis is a tale of two spaces wherein one – extra-domestic, of eating outside the home – was largely absent during the pandemic lockdowns[5] and two years of physical-restrictions. The

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[4] Tourism that focuses on the culinary culture of a holiday destination.
[5] *Lockdown*-UK, *Confinemen*t- France and *Rest in Place*-USA were governmental regulation to stay at home.

other – intra-domestic – ranged from lone diners (the likelihood of this made possible because 30% of Europeans live in single households),[6] to the other extreme of overbrimming family homes jostling for privacy, variety, and physical space at home.

Reflecting on the work of sociologist Paul Connerton (1989), on the creation and recreation of social memory 's 'inscription and incorporation' of knowledge, my discovery was of the irreplaceability of the physical commensal experience as a powerful assimilating force that moves abstract detail to bodily embeddedness through sensory and memory filled practices (Connerton, P., 1989, 73). I saw how the absence of extra-domestic commensality hid – or even temporarily forgot – the nuances, intricacies, and cultural rituals of publicly making and sharing and re-sharing food memories and knowledge.

This was set against the online bi-sensory replacement of physical extra-domestic commensality – akin to a simulation of offline social interaction – that wearied to tired boredom after two pandemic years, when those who had flocked to online food gathering experiences early on were increasingly absent. My research was framed by a simple tenet, public-facing cooking and eating physically together, which I define as an aspect of commensality, matters to the immersive group experience in the transmission of knowledge particularly found in food education. This argument I hope to prove with the use of my ethnography, and the scholarship and theories of anthropologists and anthropologically minded, such as David Sutton or Sherry Turkle and others whom I describe in the literature review (P. 14-28).

Our relationship with food – and with each other through food – significantly rests on the socio-political decisions made by someone else, e.g., supermarket buyers or local

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[6] https://www.sociologylens.net/article-types/opinion/rise-single-households-european-union-impact-housing/18676

education authorities, and their decisions influence the cultural practices of eating together and become embedded within commensality. These decisive forces are paralleled by the power of screen-mediated representations of what we eat, who we eat with, and the reproduction of food knowledge, and evolved from cookbooks into television programmes, before the interactive space of online co-authorship of the past twenty years. Within two decades the state of persistently being embedded in networks of mobile data exchange – akin to a cog in a machine – could be described as being *internetworked*, a channel of experience that defines humanity as complicit in making the illusion of 'a boundless, borderless digital universe', whereas it is our constant networking on the internet which allows our data to be made, remade, moved, and stored (Tarnoff, B.., 2016).

These evolving representations have notably revealed, and contributed to, a historic shift in our relationship with food and eating, and, as I argue in my research, with each other when we gather in commensal moments to learn from one another. I felt motivated to present a case for offline commensality as a social encounter that primes and produces relational skills, because of the collaborative processual work of shared practices in the multi-sensory aspects of cooking and eating together (Sutton, D., 2013, 299-320). The collective experience of the transformation of ingredients, within cooking and eating, are vital to group dynamics that engender knowledge, trust, reciprocity, and creativity, because the chemical, metabolic and sensory changes have an unpredictability that requires expertise gained collectively.

I sought to question the acceptance that *digital commensality,*[7] social media objectification of food, e.g., 'food porn,'[8] and the internetworked dominance of individuality is unequivocal societal progress. But I do not intend to wipe the benefits of the internet aside as

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[7] 'Eating and Drinking in the Company of Technology', Spence, C. et al, 2019
[8] Food porn is akin to sexual porn, a visual abstraction of an intimate and sensory relationship that intends a compulsive interest.

clearly during the quietened extra-domestic years of the pandemic being online was a socially supportive and oftentimes transformative space to be, at least at first. Plus, there are plentiful examples of how slower paced pandemic lives saw millions taking their kitchen online as a place of camaraderie and solace. I am not attempting to negate this positive step for taking time to share cooking and eating but wish to highlight how very different the online experience is in its sensory and technically defined ways. That there are online challenges – i.e., the objectification of food, the absence of multi-sensory experience, and the behavioural adaptations practiced online – to human agency around food, which need consideration when optimistically heralding the online space as an easy, inclusive, and instrumental place to learn and socialise, because the experience is so totally different offline.

Yet, for many months the pandemic restrictions continued, with public facing socialisation around food framed by online context, thus cooking and eating together was increasingly technically defined by social media and video conferencing platforms. What I undertook in my fieldwork was an exploration of the detriment to food and sociality – because of the absence of shared sensory empathy embedded in a physical meal. However, it is important to note that this was not a universal pandemic experience – nor continues to be so – but relates to significant number of the population, particularly solo-households with no-one to physically share meals with. My research stands in contrast – though not in opposition – of a popular research finding cooking during the pandemic, that for millions it allowed a slower pace of life to prioritise home cooking, and mindfulness whilst eating.[9] However, much of this opinion is based on the premise that online is universal, and is without significant challenges

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[9] e.g., https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0963996921006529

to our sensory relationship with food, and with each other as a social species which relies on communal multi-sensory response as foundational to trust, affinity and identity.

One of the outcomes of my research process was an invitation from Dr. Alexandra Covaci (2017; 2018; 2019), from the Computer Engineering Department at the University of Kent, to contribute to her co-design workshops in 2022. These workshops considered the material – actual or physical – features of ingredients, the memorial or imagined sensory responses and the virtualised possibilities. This led to my being a co-author for a conference paper with Covaci (September 2022), 'No Pie in the (Digital) Sky: Co-imagining the Food Metaverse'[10] that focuses on the medical, emotional, ethical and knowledge sharing potential of virtual[11] and augmented[12] dining. It is early days in the research relationship but already we are benefiting from the different perspectives of the two disciplines – computer science and anthropology. It feels heartening and relevant that software design can be interdisciplinary work, and that some of the issues of online human rights and 'warm technology' i.e., computer software design that does not aim to replace basic physical human wants and needs.[13] Additionally the role of 'digital humanities', which analyses and communicates 'how computation is being incorporated into arts and humanities and social science practice' is significant to anthropological study.[14]

My argument evolved throughout my fieldwork, which I introduce here and later return to in more detail (P. 246; 271), of the potential within computer software design for an anthropological perspective – particularly one focused on the irreplaceable multi-sensory,

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[10] Paper submitted to *CHI* (Computer Human Interaction) for a conference 2023.
[11] Virtual Reality is using technology to experience a simulated experience.
[12] Augmented reality is using technology to enhance reality.
[13] https://research.tue.nl/en/publications/warm-technology-a-novel-perspective-on-design-for-and-with-people/fingerprints/
[14] https://profiles.sussex.ac.uk/p125219-david-berry

intimate, and ethereal features of physical food relationships. If this trajectory becomes the norm online could be healthier, more inclusive, and less passive because 'digital literacy', one which nurtures critical awareness and understanding, will be empowering, and so Computer-Human-Interaction (*CHI*) literacy and *CHI* food literacy sit side-by-side as urgent education.[15] Discussions with Covaci centred on how *CHI* food literacy promises the skills and knowledge to maintain humanness in a technically defined time, and to expect online equity and question its absence. Only then, I think, will the ancient-held mealtime rituals of relationship-making and re-making continue to nurture the social and biological knowledge of food, and therefore build a healthier relational connection with food, each other through food, and the planet.

Eating socially together can be, as Professor Paul Rozin, who studies food choices from an anthropological perspective, describes, '… fundamental, fun, frightening and far reaching' (Rozin, P., 1999, 9). And so, the impetus for my research, framed by the authority of external decisions, was to explore, interpret and understand how extreme that far-reaching was for sociality, in terms of geographical distance and amount of change around food in the online pandemic framed space. The fun and frightening elements of Rozin's comment are relevant to Sherry Turkle's dilemma, '… that [the] question is not what will the computer be like in the future, but instead, what will *we* be like? What kind of people are we becoming?', which considers how hybrid commensal encounters, and their inherent reproduction of food knowledge, may offer the fun of limitless imagination, but an abstraction that might distance us from embodied ways of learning (Turkle, [1984] 2005, 13).

To further these thoughts I investigated how commensality adapted to an intense time of being internetworked and pandemic restricted, when the transformation of food knowledge

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[15] [(PDF) Information and digital literacies: a review of concepts (researchgate.net)](#)

reproduction through informal practices of learning from one another was massively constricted by pandemic distancing guidelines and shuttered hospitality venues. I used mixed ethnographic methodology of, observation and participant observation, sensory, illustrative, digital, auto-ethnographic and visual approaches to examine and interpret the modelling, reciprocity, and mimicking activity in a private space in a public place – the kitchen – domestic and 'professional', both on and offline. My core group of participants were eleven chef-educators (P.38; 62), all successful freelance or business owners in their off-line culinary professions offline until the pandemic hit. From July 2020 until September 2021, I recorded and analysed how they transitioned to the online space for work, the difficulties, and opportunities they encountered throughout the pandemic, and their coping strategies in modelling and sharing teaching food skills and dining etiquette, and these I expand on in section 2.1 (P. 52-56).

They all had a connection to French cuisine – yet were spread from Bogatá, Colombia, to Ubud, Bali – many with two-year lives in unexpected places due to the sudden pandemic restrictions on travel. Some of the connections made between the chef-educators and French cuisine were linked to colonial times when cuisine fused the style and traditions of the coloniser and colonised as it adopted, adapted, and assimilated new techniques and ingredients e.g., the Cameroon chef whose prize meatball dish incorporated a baguette. The inclusion of chefs from Vietnam, Cameroon, Morocco, and Bali were the result of my intentional subversion of finding French chefs though hashtag filtering 'French cuisine' or 'French chefs' because I was frustrated by the results of these term predominately presenting white men. I spent some time struggling with the reality of how French cuisine was presented online (and offline) against the knowledge of the quiet work done by female and non-white chefs, a theme I consider later in sections *Inequity and Risk* (§4.6) and *Inequities and Divisions* (§7.9). I wanted to widen the

perception of a classic and traditional cuisine to recognise that it has a long history of authority that has neglected many of its contributors.

I participated in fifty of the chef-educator online cooking classes and undertook forty-five themed semi-structured interviews with most of my participants, and extended my critical observations, which anthropologist Katharina Graf aptly describes as 'participant perception' in her study of solitary cooking and culinary connectivity, by examining chef-educator interactions with their cooking class students – akin to their guests – when they were welcomed into the chef-educator's online kitchen (Graf, K., 2022,4). In my home kitchen I undertook autoethnographic methods, wrote copious notes, and made illustrations that describe my sensory relationship with the physicality of meal making and its adjunct – the internetworked on-screen kitchen, explored in detail in *Transition of the Sensorium into the Online Space* (§3.2) and *Hybrid Kitchens* (§3.3). In many ways the immersive 'taste of place' championed by gastro-tourism's informal food knowledge sharing experience had to abruptly shift to private indoor kitchens, which were simultaneously online and public. The synchronicity of the commensal gatherings, as opposed to asynchronous television or *YouTube* programmes, continued a touristic model of leisure learning yet now saw a disjointedness in the immersive experience – as the multi-sensory and embodied moment for learning together happened online behind each individual closed pandemic door.

I also produced analytical commentary gained from observation fieldwork on thirty food themed webinars, *Instagram*[17] activity – particularly of the chef-educators and their regular guests – and I interviewed a handful of food writers and project managers working in food sustainability or community health. The different forms, arenas, dialogues, and

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[17] *Instagram (2010)* is an American photo and video sharing social networking service.

temporalities of these fieldwork experiences and observations offered a broader framework to understand the transformation of food knowledge during the pandemic's online hecticness.

The *Literature Review of Anthropological Perspectives* considers the first of three key frames of the thesis, anthropology in a digital age during an intense global health emergency. The human entanglement with computers is a constant perspective throughout my research and is explored in more depth in chapter six *The Affordances and the Allure of the Online* (P. 204-235), thirdly the dominant context of the *SARS-CoV-2* virus that caused the *COVID-19* pandemic[18] is raised in §1.3 (P. 33), and returned to in chapter four *How Togetherness Adapted to a Pandemic* (P. 136). After the initial consideration of anthropology in the literature review I briefly introduce the chef-educators in §1.4 (P.38) and outline the chapters in §1.6 (P.41).

1.1 Literature review of anthropological perspectives

The overarching consternation of ethnography in the social mediated data age is the relationship between an online transient, ethereal and a-material existence that co-exists alongside physical multi-sensory experience. The former is a juncture where there are no rigid geographical or temporal boundaries or chance meetings with anyone who is not performing (Turner, E. & Bruner, V.W., 1986). The interpretative skills I needed were formed by established and sub-disciplinary anthropological lenses, and interdisciplinary scholarship. My literature review was inspired by anthropological scholarship that fell roughly into five fields.

Firstly, the classic themes of kinship and social organisation, hegemony, reciprocity, and material culture were foundational to my interpretation and understanding. From that position I turned to literature from four anthropological sub-disciplines: food, visual and sensory, health emergencies and medicine, and digital. Each of these fields was not exclusive and there is

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[18] https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/covid19-national-project/research-themes/sector-specific-studies/cross-sector-study/

plenty of porosity in their boundaries. I also incorporated interdisciplinary work by authors with either an explicit anthropological stance or that I found anthropologically relevant.

Anthropological and sociological approaches to networks offered me highly insightful interpretative understanding of socio-cultural relational structuring. Authors such as Bruno Latour (1947-2022), Erving Goffman (1922-1982), or Manuel Castells (1942-) each notably added to the foundational literature review. Substantially pertinent to my exploration are the classic anthropological themes of kinship and social organisation, and my research was fundamentally shaped by authors such as Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955), Evan E., Pritchard (1902-1973), Marshall Sahlins (1930-2021), and Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009), as each informed and anchored my analysis of what makes kinship and how this was embedded within practices of structural organisation. Their decades-old insight is the crux of the formation and reformation of relationships, of practices that shape cultural currency of exchange. In the twenty-first century their work steadied my focus of an otherwise impenetrable circulation of affinity making 'kinship' networks typical of the digital or information age's predilection to exchange information and knowledge as reciprocal 'currency' is theoretically situated (P.17; 23-29; 80) with the findings of relevant ethnography presented in the sections *Hybrid Kitchens* (§3.2), *Connoting Messages* (§4.3), and *Alikeness and Affinity* (§5.6).

I also significantly reflected on more recent scholarship on the ways that kinship is formed in the twenty-first century, so Janet Carsten (1995; 2000), Marilyn Strathern (1992; 2020), and Arjun Appadurai (1990; 2001), amongst others, inspired my notions of what makes kin. They offered concepts beyond ancestry, for example of 'fictive kinship' (Carsten, J., 2012, 136) or 'communities of sentiment' (Appadurai, A., 1990, 6). Their work allowed me to decipher kinship structures, and practices that straddle the gulf between the private intimacies

of forming a relationship in a performative online public place, and the modelling activity alive in sharing skills and knowledge as an experience of trust and affinity. They helped me interpret the concurrency of my observations of fieldwork participants' ties of online affinity in the company of 'friendly strangers', ties which in many ways represented the intimate relationship of apprentice and mentor.

Added to this foundational list is the work of Professor Michael D., Fischer (1994; 2006; 2013), whose span of work, authorship, co-authorship and directorship of the *Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing* (CSAC) based at the University of Kent, was at the frontier of exploring the computer through an anthropological lens. He saw that it could be an ethnographic tool to explore the complexity and scale of contemporary networks of knowledge sharing and kinship, but Fischer also explored how the computer itself became part of this discourse, perhaps a function akin to mentorship practice (Fischer, M.D., et al, 2013,13). Fischer's research and scholarship with his then PhD candidate Sally A., Applin between 2011 and 2016 powered my considerations of complex and mediated relationships that are simultaneously of the 'here and there'. Of the possibility for blended realities that function through simultaneous engagement in 'interrelated systems' (Applin, S. A., and Fischer, M. D., 2015, 102), with an '…interoperability between virtual, physical, ideational, and material representations and objects and culture', an existence enabled and defined by the omnipresent hand-held computer (Applin, S. A., and Fischer, M. D., 2011, 1).

Applin and Fischer (2011; 2012; 2013; 2015), introduced many concepts and terms that informed and resonated with my pandemic framed fieldwork i.e., 'mixed, dual and blended reality' and 'polysocial reality'. Their work preceded the premise of bio-digitality presented in my thesis by foregrounding mixed, dual, and blending channels as practices of 'compounding' offline and online encounter. The assertion in 'A Cultural Perspective on Mixed, Dual and

Blended Reality' (2011), that, '[A]s people use the Internet, they are increasingly mixing their online behavior with their 'real life' behavior' (Applin S. A., and Fischer, M.D., 2011,1) propelled my investigation into what that mix of behaviour looks like when it focuses on commensality's role in reproducing food knowledge. I also had the fortune to have inspiring discussions with Professor Fischer early on in my PhD research that shaped the direction of my bio-digital ethnography, and stimulated my constant questioning the perception that digital, or indeed the synthesis of human and machine, were novel states.

Their concepts and definitions were key referential starting points to investigate the fragmented, synchronous, and asynchronous, '… multi-channelled network interactions' that were rife during my pandemic framed fieldwork (Applin, S. A., and Fischer, M. D., 2012, 2). Additionally, their work on our complicity with machine surveillance, and its impact on human agency, which reflects on Sutton's earlier comment (P.1) regarding knowledge and agency was interesting to consider at a pandemic-framed time when sharing personal information was social and political currency, and the transference of food knowledge was an example of this reciprocal information sharing activity – a theme expanded upon in *Connoting Messages* (§4.3). Commensality was spotlighted in the mistrustful online years of the pandemic, because making and sharing a meal together require trust for it to be a time of kinship building, and this was still true – though was distorted by the lack of sensory empathy and addition of technical interference – of the chef-educator online classes in my fieldwork.

Many anthropologists of food proved instrumental to my understanding of the tensions of commensality as both an exercise in trust and a vehicle for transmitting food knowledge in the digital age. Established anthropological scholars such as: Maurice Bloch (1989; 1998), Mary Douglas (1972), Claude Fischler (2011), Alice Julier (2004; 2013), Harry West (2013), Jacob Klein (2014; 2016), Sidney Mintz (1986; 2002), Melissa L., Caldwell (2012), and David Sutton (2001;

2010, 2013, 2016), all offered valuable perspectives. Their work endorsed how commensality

is a paradox of fragility and power – that eating in the company of others is never neutral nor

unaffected by context hence its fragility. And conversely the social act of sharing a meal can

forge and maintain allegiance, or not. As Douglas wrote, '… if food is code, where is the pre-

coded message?' is of how commensality's message includes the multi-sensory features as key

to learning about food (Douglas, M., 1972, 61).

Commensality is defined by multiplicity, and is embedded – amongst other variables –

within gender politics, identity, inclusion or exclusion and trust, symbolism, and ritual, and, as

Claude Fischler expresses:

> *… commensality is not necessarily associated with ceremonial occasions; it actually is an essential dimension of the common meal, and it could even be said that it finds its most salient expression in that particular, daily social occurrence. Above all, it counteracts the essential, basic, biological, 'exclusive selfishness of eating' and turns it into, at the very least, a collective, social experience.*

Fischler, C., 2011, 531

Anthropologists who focus on food consider many reoccurring themes such as the social

construction of memory, the valorisation of food as material culture, and the role of the senses

as instrumental communal practice to shared knowledge of food through the cooking and

eating experience (Mintz, S., and Du Bois, M., 2002, 100). Sutton's work informed my focus on

collaborative process and his observation of the '… sensory production of the social', and how

learning is social, is particularly seen within chapter three (P. 105*) The Internal Human Compass*

to the Sensory World:

> … the sensory production of the social in the case of commensality is not to suggest that it is an automatic process, but rather that it *takes work* to create consensus and conviviality through commensality…

Sutton, D., 2018, 1

Anthropologists of food listed above explore the bio-social, educational and economic

dynamics of a shared meal. Douglas, Fischler, and Sutton particularly go beyond the sole

function of eating as nutrition because they consider that there is complex relational knowledge reproduction work at play. The relational complexities are neatly described by anthropologist Jakob A., Klein who, in his co-editor role, wrote the introduction of *Food Consumption in Global Perspective* (2014) with a critique of Jack Goody's seminal book, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982).

In the book Klein describes his interpretation of Goody's themes as firstly the relationship between production and consumption, secondly the hierarchies of culinary practices and thirdly globalisation of food choices. Klein's questions below helped to anchor my investigation, one where the promise of speed, scale and uniformity were embedded in the tensions for both food and internetworked practices:

> *… how should we approach the relationship between changes and continuities in food consumption habits on the one hand and, social boundaries, roles and relationships on the other? And in what ways is our understanding of the recent decades illuminated by comparative perspectives and an attention to wider, even 'global' processes?*

Klein, J. A., 2014, 4

These questions of the changes and continuities, framed by global practices of eating together, such as gastro-tourism, reaffirmed for me that the pandemic's a-commensal years offered an illuminating comparative perspective on commensality and food education. What I investigated was food and eating's transient embeddedness in 'social dynamics', and how ultimately, as a cultured 'productive process' of knowledge and kinship, although defined by production and consumption, it is intimately felt through the experience of personal everyday lives (Klein, J. A., 2014, 6).

It is a bio-social function whether in reference to how food is grown, distributed, prepared, eaten and disposed, or, as within the context of my research, when it is materially and a-materially – bio-digitally – produced, transformed, and consumed. On the one hand the online context of cooking and eating is structured by machine ways of operation – which

problematise what and how food knowledge is preserved or alternatively disregarded – whereas in the biological context – when there is a materiality to cooking and eating – is an example of knowledge being materialised, it can be tasted, smelt, held, heard, or seen, so these sensorial experiences are shared as group exploration of familiarity, pleasure or distain. These claims are situated theoretically in Taking Food Online (§2.10) and ethnographically detailed in pages 109-112.

The age-old social construction of the convivial space (temporally and ritually demarcated) continues into the digital-age, and much is still relevant now as decades ago. Increasingly there has been more anthropological and interdisciplinary scholarship that investigates how food knowledge when online shifts its character to the spoken word instead of using bodily movement and sensory empathy to share and teach food practices and customs. Recent scholarship with an anthropological twist such as *Digital Food Cultures* (Lupton, D., and Feldman, Z., 2020), *Cooking, Eating, Uploading: Digital Food Cultures* (Lupton, D., 2016), *Reflection: Airbnb's food-related "online experiences": a recipe for connection and escape* (Cenni, I., and Vásquez, C., 2020), or *Gastrophysics* (Spence, C., 2017), all contributed greatly to my investigation. The cross-fertilisation benefit of multi-disciplinary scholarship felt relevant and important within anthropology's broad scope because so much of the shared meal is psychological and political, and ultimately is about communication.

Food and culture scholarship reflects on visual and sensory anthropology which looks at the role of embodiment, liberty, safety, and 'critical reflection on the ethical aspects of all scientific practices that concern human beings' when the intimate workings and encounters of literally ingesting food knowledge is a vulnerable activity (van Ede 2009, 61). My literature review includes anthropological scholarship that investigates the dominance of the visual alongside the submissive work of the other senses such as work by Brillat-Savarin, JA., [1825]

(1970), Yolanda van Ede (2009), Annemarie Mol (2011, 2021), David Howes (2010), David Howes and Constance Classen (2014), and Le Breton (2017). Each offered comparative insight based upon the relevance of a multi-sensory-filled material existence compared with the bi-sensory dominance of online commensal cooking and eating and are embedded in theoretical exploration in *The Language of Imagery* (§2.9) and in ethnographic descriptions throughout the thesis, particularly in *Simultaneity of Here and There* (§6.1).

Much of my fieldwork evolved into critique and evaluation of the internet in material everyday lives and the technically applied (both intentional and non-intentional) simulations that compensated for the multi-sensory and multimodal ways that knowledge is shared, understood, and assimilated. The concomitant distorted activity of the sensorium – our individualised bank of senses – was hyper-active as it made sense of an a-material online world through sensory association (P. 43-44; 85; 91; 106; 184). The inclusion of my autoethnography ensured that 'using my body as an instrument of research', enabled me to consider aspects of spatiality and proximity, reflexivity, phenomenology and synaesthesia – the ability to experience one of the senses through another – in how I experienced the learning process of food traditions, and kitchen science (Longhurst, R., et al, 2008, 208).

The anthropologies of health emergencies and medicine played a significant role in my exploration of how the consequences of a pandemic on social cohesion – particularly the 'togetherness' of learning communities. Although much food or sensory scholarship welcomed by anthropologists contain many elements of the tensions of health and wellbeing, by authors such as Robert Albritton, Professor of Political Science (2010), Paul Stoller, Professor of Cultural Anthropology (1997), or Professor of Anthropology Michael Jackson (2017; 2018), anthropologies of health emergencies, and of medicine are distinct sub-disciplines. The

Anthropological Responses to Health Emergencies (ARHE)[19] is a *Special Interest group of the Society for Medical Anthropology*, as such it makes explicit – as did the rupture of the pandemic – how medical anthropology has a wider perspective of health and wellbeing, one in which '… political contexts and consequences … may feed back to shape the dynamics of disease itself' reinforced for me how the enforced mitigation approach of isolation – which increased online dependency – normalised individualistic learning (Leach, M., 2014, 250). A state that education in food could boldly display as problematic because of its reliance on the processual and communal activity of the reproduction of food knowledge, which is a theme I return to in the conclusion chapter in the section *The Future of Social Food Knowledge* (§7.11).

Medical anthropology is entrenched in socio-economic and cultural discourse on the divisiveness of access to good health: how preparedness for disease is socially defined, biosecurity and its politics, global narratives and the interrelations between humans and other species. Thus, I found the medical anthropological perspective – one framed by a health emergency – as a constant and powerful perspective, because making and taking a meal involves ingesting the products of other – increasingly stressed species – and the pandemic revealed massive health divisions within and beyond countries. Medical anthropologists such as Dr. Paul Farmer (2001; 2013), Professor Christos Lynteris (2014; 2018), Assistant Professor Branwyn Polykett (2018), health and social policy Professor Deborah Lupton (2018; 2020; 2021), and social anthropologist Dr. Melissa Leach (2014) were key to understanding the complicated and multiple workings of food sharing a medicalised society experiencing the global pandemic's impact on physical commensality due to virus mitigation approaches to keep us physically apart.

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[19] https://arhe.medanthro.net

Additionally, I became aware, because of the impact on mental health resilience beset by the challenges to share a physical convivial meal beyond the front door during the physically-distanced pandemic, of the critical issue of loneliness and social disconnection, as described in chapter five The Pandemic's Epidemic: *The Silence of Loneliness* (P.174). Although the fundamentality of commensality as a social encounter is referred to anthropologists such as Robin Dunbar (2017) the lack of scholarship on loneliness within anthropology was a challenge to my research. I turned to insightful and interdisciplinary psychologists such as John T. Cacioppo (2008) or Nahathai Wongpakaran (2021), because as anthropologist Michelle Anne Parsons (2020) notes, '… despite anthropology's rich engagement with emotions and experience, the anthropology of loneliness is still scant' (Parsons, M. A., 2020, 635).

The computer, until the turn of the millennium, was essentially still an object – albeit one that worked in ethereal spaces. It enhanced the physicality of life by removing the onerous task of creating, storing, and moving data, or added a new dimension to the playfulness of games. It remained distinct as an object, a tool to be used when needed. The practice and role of the anthropologist remained largely about forming cultural understanding of human interaction with materiality, of how a physical object can shape perception of the world experience (Miller D., et al, 2016, 112).

But then social media began in earnest in 2006 with a mandate to co-create and share news or updates through *Facebook* (2006)*, Twitter* (2007), and *LinkedIn* (2007) it effortlessly linked news items so that followers could build western networks of affinity embedded in the process of diffusing information (Irribarren, J., L., and Moro, E., 2011). These changes forged anthropology's perspective on cultures of networking into understanding internetworked story-making, and as anthropologist Professor Michael Fischer projected a decade ago, of

anthropology's 'orientation and practice' toward '… an increasing emphasis on complexity in anthropology as a discipline' (Fischer, M., et al 2012, 3).

Complexity in anthropology means that the classic theme of material culture had become simultaneously material and a-material culture in the form of bio-digitality – the interface between human (bio) and machine (digital). Bio-digitality has become embedded in many established anthropological themes – from kinship to ritual – and changed the way ethnography is understood and undertaken. Throughout my fieldwork I began to see connections between anthropology's age-old fascination with the ethereality of magic, myth and religious ritual, and the online abstraction of cooking and eating together being a symbolic representation and emotional crux that worked to satisfy the imaginings and fictionalisation of commensality.

Many anthropologists, e.g., Daniel Miller or Sarah Pink or anthropologically inclined academics, e.g., Sherry Turkle or Lev Manovich (introduced in this section, pages 27; 28; 30), studied the online move from news-making as a connective practice, toward the introduction of impermanent making and sharing visual – photo and video – stories of the everyday in an online 'library' of shared information and knowledge. A development that offered the possibility of everyone being both the news story and presenter of fast-moving temporary image-led broadcasts. And with millions able to do this broadcasting quickly and responsively the rapidity – with the heightened pressure to respond because of the ephemerality of image – of sharing became akin to an overly excited conversation.

The intense social networking practice of news-making as conversation began with *Snapchat*[20] (2012) and then *Instagram Stories*[21] (2016), which led the way before *Messenger*

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[20] *Snapchat* is a mobile App that allows messaging that disappears after 24 hours.
[21] *Instagram* videos, photos and messages on an Instagram profile that disappear after 24 hours.

rooms,[22] *FaceBook* (2020), *Twitter's Fleets*[23] (2020) *and LinkedIn's*[24] (2020) group video chat

icon button (2020) joined the cacophony. And with these changes the decades' long research

and scholarship by anthropologists, on collective online endeavour and co-production,

spawned digital ethnography with authors such as Daniel Miller (2006; 2012; 2016; 2017; 2018;

2019), Sarah Pink (2006; 2009; 2012; 2015) and Heather Horst (2012; 2016). Their and their

colleagues' work was a mainstay in my anthropological processes of configuring a fieldwork

methodology that acknowledged the social construction of, on and offline networks. Yet they

also contemplated the visual-story interactivity of social media enabled with the hand-held

computer, the smart phone which globally had, by 2018, become ubiquitous in daily lives with

ownership increasing from 17% in 2008 to 78% a decade later.[25]

My research reflects on Miller and his colleagues' insights and questions the inroads he

made in opening-up the validity of the anthropological perspective. Until summer 2022

Professor Daniel Miller of *University College London* (*UCL*) led an ESRC[26] funded research 'The

Anthropology of Smart Phones and Smart Aging' (ASSA).[27] He states his research interests as

smartphones, ageing, mHealth,[28] digital anthropology and social media, material culture and

consumption, clothing and housing, and transnational domestic labour and motherhood,[29] and

developed his expertise in digitality of the human experience through his previous work on

material culture. Thus, his perspective is a fascinating and illuminating opportunity to reveal

the tensions between material and a-material interfaces and relationships, and the materiality

and a-materiality of food. For three decades his collaborative research practice has produced

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[22] *Facebook's* video conferencing feature that allows large group instant chat.
[23] Instant messaging, *Tweets*, that disappear after 24 hours.
[24] *LinkedIn* is an American business and employment-oriented online service.
[25] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/decade-of-digital-dependency
[26] Economic and Social Research Council
[27] ASSA https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/assa/about/
[28] *mHealth* is mobile health, supported by being online and apps.
[29] Prof. Daniel Miller: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic-and-teaching-staff/daniel-miller

and edited numerous books and articles, such as 'How the World Changed Social Media' (Miller, D., et al, 2016), 'Tales from Facebook' (2011), and 'The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication' (Horst, H., & Miller, D., 2006).

The double whammy of a pandemic coupled with the third era of social media – of storytelling in the form of moving image – via, for example *TikTok*[30] *or Instagram Reels*[31] was where my fieldwork began. Framed by hyper-online social activity that co-narrated the pandemic years I was drawn into contemplating the human in the human-machine relationship. A fascination triggered by the impossibility of being a social human without a smartphone in hand for 66% of world population in 2020.[32] A figure that continued to notably rise throughout the pandemic as I studied how algorithms and software impact on a particular aspect of sociality, commensality's role in transmitting food knowledge. And to do this I focused on food and togetherness narratives and activity on *Instagram* and *Zoom* video platform.

Although not officially a social media platform I argue that my fieldwork experience observed how *Zoom*[33] was used as 'social interaction technology' (Flisfeder, M., 2020). Akin to physically-distanced continuance of visual story-making as conversation, the everyday stories of not-so-everyday people, as discussed earlier in *How is it someone else's story becomes one's own* (§2.8) , *Instagram Reels* or *Twitter's Fleets,* for example, enabled millions to publicly gather for work, play or education. And notably, during the pandemic time of physical-distance and closed extra-domestic spaces, gathering online around cooking, and eating socially together. My fieldwork activity bore many similarities to social media apps[34] modus operandi of

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[30] *TikTok* is an *App* that enables sharing of self-made 15 second videos.
[31] https://contently.com/2021/09/24/3rd-era-social/
[32] https://financesonline.com/number-of-smartphone-users-worldwide/
[33] *Zoom* is a video conferencing platform.
[34] App is abbreviation of application and refers to a software program designed to perform a specific function.

relationships built on sharing information and knowledge, a practice that increased exponentially during forced isolation in lockdowns.

Within human-computer entanglement – bio-digitality – there are two professors, who are interdisciplinary authors with anthropological perspectives, with significant influence on my research, Sherry Turkle (1984; 2011; 2022) and Donna Haraway (1985; 1991; 2016; 2017). Both informed my thinking and reassured me that my research resonated with their themes of equality, wellbeing, and human rights in the social media age. The *prosumer* culture, one of endlessly and simultaneously producing and consuming snippets of news, is information that bonds. A collective practice that is of analytical interest to anthropologists who straddle other disciplines such as communication studies or psychology, and of transdisciplinary scholarship. The co-presence[35] – of the dual activity of online and offline experiential channels – of the computer in daily physical life, as Professor of Social Sciences and Technology at MIT Turkle eloquently describes in her book (2011) *Alone Together,* is an integral part of this co-joined making and the commodification of online 'prosumption'. It encourages and needs a constant mass of people, traffic, to be committed to continual online human-computer engagement (Widiastuti,T., 2021).

The pandemic's social dependency with being online – both in my autoethnographic accounts and within interviews and observations of my participants – observed a state of co-created fictionalised and actual being during fieldwork. My participant interviews gave opportunity to see behind the scenes of their online food education as social persona – with many enlighteningly honest descriptions of the strategies and tensions of the incongruencies

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[35] https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/co-presence/4115

of online fiction and offline fact. It was of the construction of the everyday, 'life as improvisation' as Lev Manovich digital culture author and Professor of Computer Science explains of his prolific study of the imagery of *Instagram,* where he describes the visual construction with attention grabbing short text of the everyday as a collective endeavour of escapism to the online marketplace of the 'attention economy,'[36] driven by 'comms' (communication industry) and marketeers with ramped up visions of daily life as the commodity (Manovich, L., 2016, 12).

1.2 Bio-digitality

I intentionally demarcate that my research does not rest on the theory of technical determinism. As an established theory in discourse on human and machine, technical determinism suggests that culture is defined and determined by technology. I felt the reductionist application insufficient in capturing the social collusion of the online space, yet I do not believe in social determinism as relevant to my thinking either. The tension between whether a machine makes society or society makes a machine is too binary for the digital or information age. It is particularly too limited for the third age of online social media framed by two plus years of a pandemic. The interdependency I observed in my fieldwork between human and machine technology allowed me to explore the notion of bio-digital determinism and its link to knowledge – particularly of culinary and commensal practices, mores and norms.

The concept of bio-digitality helped me to define a state of being with blurred edges as to what is human and what is machine – a biological being who is digitally defined. The idea includes how the workings of a computer-machine is shaped by its usage, in many ways the relationship is a co-dependent one between human and machine, as each has an impact and

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[36] https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/opinion/michael-goldhaber-internet.html

a need for the other. It is an interdependency for 4.5 billion online users as part of everyday life – social, educational and work-based.[37] A state of being that is forever in transition, unfixed and malleable. There is not a separation between relating through internetworked channels or offline interaction, but a symbiosis that has formed a new condition, a new perspective. Not one solely as an interface between the dimensions of on and offline, but a formation of a distinct channel became a foundational concept throughout my fieldwork and plays into conversations of the tensions between human and machine agencies.

The position of constant action and reaction stimulated by the visual and auditory activity on the smartphone goes beyond the aforementioned broad-brush usage categories of social, education and work. Individualised management of an internetworked tool of information demands committed and habitual user-practices that create a synergy so great that life without a smartphone or social media is now largely unthinkable, and for millions undoable. The complicity with humans and the smartphone has created a new world in which to inhabit, one that shares the same material time and space, yet uses different channels and practices of communication with a consequential impact on physical context, and the social and communicative channels and practices therein.

The rationality for the need for information and connection 24/7 is so normalised that smartphone usage is critiqued as, '… maladaptive dependency on the use of technology' (Bernroider, E., et al 2014, 1). Yet its omnipresence seemed welcome and integral to understanding and forging selfhood, intimacy, and identity, and thus the smartphone became a relational interface. Emotions and closeness were tested or acted out online to make sense of feelings, with response from an online community significant in each relational construction.

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[37] https://wearesocial.com/uk/blog/2022/01/digital-2022/

As Turkle describes on 'the betwixt and between' of human and computer in her foundational book *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* ([1984] 2005), '[F]or me, one of the most important cultural effects of the computer presence is that the machines are entering into our thinking about ourselves' (Turkle S., [1984], 2005,29).

Objectification of the individual was rife on screen, of watching ourselves as we interact with others on social media or video conferencing platforms, or being abstracted from physical semblance by our placement on the screen to create a detachment, a sense of being both here and there, formed by the parallels of being simultaneously material and a-material. An abstraction that fills the insular bubble of an individual with smartphone in hand, there is fictionalisation at work, and a complicity in being an objective viewer who intensely interprets subjective existence and identity as viewed on their smartphone screen. The bio-digital state of detachment defines the experience of life as one of the human-emotional and the non-emotional machine merging:

> *… in order to think about our immediate experience of being-in-the-world we need to have recourse to images, concepts, and practices that appear to be objective—not completely of us yet not entirely unfamiliar to us.*

> Jackson, M. 2018, 7

As Jackson explains there is an interdependence between familiarity and the novel, one that works to attest the boundaries within the constructions of identity. Who are we and who are we not, where is inclusion and where is exclusion felt, and what is real and what is fictional are questions considered in more detail throughout the thesis, particularly in chapter five subtitled The Silence of Loneliness (P.174), and chapter six The Affordances and Allure of the Online (P.204).

However, there is an increasing amount of counterculture to the normalisation of being only social online that questions the internetworked space as potentially damaging to mental

health, such as in the short film *What's on your mind?*[38] The film is of a 40-or so year old man living one life of relationship break-up, eating ready meals and of losing his job yet narrating a fictional interpretation – his other life in a parallel perspective – on his *Instagram* account. A colourful and empowered imagined life which receives increasing positive follower feedback (shown by the software design of heart icons and quickfire messages filled with emojis), the happier he appears to be. Referring to Jackson's quote the double-life of the man in the film is of the complicity he has with fictionalising his life to a point where his bio-digital life is simultaneously what he is, what he is not, and what he would like to be – the synchronised contexts of fiction and non-fiction, and their merging together to curate plausible impossibility.

Yet most relevant to my fieldwork was the online motivations of identity making that fit with online communities of affinity and kinship, a kinship that is of acceptance and inclusion if you either have an offline life of carefreeness, or purport to online dimensions to communicate the ideation of such a life. This motivation is not novel nor only found online, indeed my ethnography found that the search for culinary identity was well established offline, it is just that the online space can mask and fictionalise quality of life and popularity with ease. I used the conceptual lens of bio-digitality within my ethnographic methodology to help me to see the boundary-making and remaking of the interdependency practices of the eleven chef-educators, and their followers, in their social internetworked spaces, a theme focused on in section *Transition of the Sensorium into the Online Space* (§3.2), and in the ethnography of *Performance* (§5.5), and *Alikeness and Affinity* (§5.6). The bio-digital lens provided a tool to examine the making of social structure within an acute time – a pandemic coupled with mass smartphone usage, and my belief allowed me to explore the dimensions of individual and

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[38] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxVZYiJKl1Y

collective humanness (bio) held within enforced isolation and social restriction immersed in online (digital) spaces.

My participant observations of fifty of the chef-educators' online cooking lessons, their one-to-one thematic and semi-structured interviews, and concurrent analysis of their social media activity on *Instagram,* plus auto-ethnographic practice, provided fieldwork that constantly examined and compared the interaction between inner and outer worlds – imagined, fictionalised, and performed, (online), against sensory and intuitive (offline). As proposed with the description of the short film *What's on your mind* (P. 37) these worlds, of bio, digital and bio-digitality, seemed like three dimensions of the same happening, or '… different categories of the [same] relational activity' (Fischer, M., January 2023). Of the spectrum of lived twenty-first century experiences, with interactive porosity between them, which, because of the extremes of the pandemic (in terms of the newly distorted offline context twinned with increased dependence on internet channels of experience), seemed more distinct during my fieldwork, and presented in chapters two (73; 91); three (P.134); four (particularly P. 138-143); and seven (P. 238-239; 240-246; 267), because material perspective, was put on pause.

I discovered that my analytical immersion gave insight into bio-digitality as cultural norm, and fulfilled my aim to live within that culture to explore its features, opportunities, and tensions as inspired by Turkle whose own research goal was:

> *… to study computer cultures by living within them, participating when possible in their lives and rituals, and by interviewing people who could help me understand things from the inside.*

Turkle, S., [1984] 2005, 20

In the fieldwork months and thesis writing I felt empowered by the anchorage that my auto-ethnographic physical cooking and eating gave to the abstraction of communal 'digital commensality' – of the online gathering around food to cook and eat 'together' in cooking

classes (Spence, C., et al 2019). I had heeded advice to examine the internetworked context of connectedness by starting with the biological physical perspective rather than dive in and examine the representation of food online. My research is about comparative encounters with cooking and eating, which made constant encounters within a spectrum of channels where I found both tensions and harmony of how culinary knowledge is shared and developed under the sway of sociality.

I explored different categories of relational interaction with food along a spectrum of channels, at times my encounters were purely offline – when alone eating the meal cooked at an online lesson – but were predominately bio-digital—when online and communal (digital) was contextualised by the physical distancing of pandemic disrupted materiality (bio). The immensity of the pandemic in the everyday meant that my fieldwork was a fascinating glimpse at how normalised the unfamiliar of physical distancing became. Of how my participants adapted their social and work lives as they stepped into the online context as the only permissible public-facing interactive space allowed, and how this began with optimism and after two pandemic years finished with weariness.

1.3 The Pandemic

The impact of the pandemic needs attention as the unexpectedness and enormity of *COVID-19* distinctly framed my fieldwork approaches and consequent analysis and interpretation as the routines, structures, and systems of being in the world fell away. *SARS-CoV-2* (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-2) was a typical virus, a continuance of many that humankind had experienced for thousands of years since animal husbandry began. Yet the *COVID-19* pandemic was unique in that it was the first one to happen with prolific use of social media enabled by the smartphone in hand with its range of apps. It was this combination that marked 2020-2022 as a unique time to constantly examine and profusely discuss pandemic

everydayness. A relentlessness of being internetworked connected that began with enthusiasm and relief that was some semblance of being social and of daily life continuing as 'normal' after all.

The reconfiguration of being social, of its transience, serendipity, and unpredictability, regardless of a pandemic, is foundational to my thinking, as these elements speak of communicative channels of relational activity that are far-reaching and multi-sensory. However, the pandemic times challenged these features to abstraction when social gathering was structured by the pandemic, and the pandemic was defined by being online. This challenge for anthropological fieldwork and the practice of the ethnographer, is usually particular to times of conflict and disruption, when routines and perceptions of daily life and stability are lost. This was what the pandemic felt like, and so I found Zerrin Özlem Biner's 2020 book, *States of Dispossession* a parallel with the pandemic years of my fieldwork. Primarily this was because she embraced the tensions of being a researcher when nothing is certain and so much is fearful, when participants are elusive, and there is constant duress managed by vertical systems of power.

There were five notable pandemics in the twentieth century, the *Spanish Flu* (1918), *Asian Influenza* (1957), *Hong Kong Influenza* (1968), *Russian Influenza* (1977)[41] and *Avian Influenza* (1997). In this century there already has been a regularity in outbreaks of influenza type pandemics, *Avian Influenza* (2003, 2018), SARS (2002) and *A (H1N1) Influenza* (2000-2010).[42] All of these running alongside constant epidemics of, for example, *Malaria, Ebola, Aids* or *Polio* that complicated and challenged affluent society's notion that severe illnesses were just something for the poor in poor countries. The most recent pandemic of 2020-2022 held

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[41] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3291411/
[42] https://www.atlas-mag.net/en/article/20th-and-21st-century-s-major-pandemics

all the markings of globalisation, online collective and selective news-making and the 'HyperNormalisation' of what was happening in the world (Curtis, A., 2016). My fieldwork activity of participant observer was strangely mirrored by the online prosumer endeavour to make collective and universal pandemic news. A narration that was of endless reaction to reaction that engineered the solidarity of living in precarity.

Yet pandemic uncertainty was not a new state of being as The *World Health Organisation* noted seven years before the *SARS-CoV-2* virus:

> *All experts agree: changes in the way humanity inhabits the planet make the emergence of more new diseases inevitable. Constant mutation and adaptation are the survival mechanisms of the microbial world.*
>
> *World Health Organisation*, 2015

The global pandemic acutely impacted Europe from the middle of March 2020 to at least January 2022 with varying mitigation strategies used – including physical distancing, vaccination programmes, masks, travel restrictions and quarantine – to curb the virus spread. Foundational to many illnesses and ill health socio-economic division affected millions disproportionally – from illness and death to quality of life, as the government of the United Kingdom recorded, 'COVID-19 may have a disproportionate economic, educational or emotional impact on people from ethnic minorities.'[43]

My research is of a particular section of affluent society, those that were distinct in their coping and transformative strategies because they were able to work, socialise and continue informal education online during lockdowns, and more easily and comfortably adhere to physical distancing measures. A continuance made possible in large part because the work and study population of affluent countries, approximately 60%, were primarily desk-based and online during pandemic lockdowns.[44] The divisiveness of the pandemic's impact on life

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[43] https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/covid-19
[44] https://www.finder.com/uk/working-from-home-statistics

reflected the existing socio-economic inequalities due to age, education, work type (manual or desk-based) and ethnicity.

COVID-19 also shed light in a time of rupture to the status quo of the differences between homes and communities that ranged from solo households to family homes, or supportive neighbours to dysfunctional communities. My participants illustrated many of the differences that home made in the pandemic, and the essence of a positive home life. Through the lens of commensality, I learned from the chef-educators in Morocco and France about the cultures of care through communing to eat (P.66), for example as chef-educator Kiki shared in an interview, no-one in her Rabat community eats alone – a practice made notably supportive during the pandemic lockdown isolation and issues of loneliness and disconnect.

My participants were connected in some way to France, chef-educators of French cuisine or that they were French (P.94). Yet framed by globalisation they lived throughout the world, an affluence defined further by their ability or aspiration to choose to live somewhere other than their childhood home. The pandemic normalised the narratives of this, and online social gatherings often began with flurries of chat-box[45] sharing of location e.g., 'hello from New Zealand' or in more intimate *Zoom* 'in this together'[46] times of comparing notes on what was locally happening the world over.

During *lockdown* (*confinement* or *rest in place)*[47] internet reliance and socially mediated activity was plentiful. Forcedly being physically at home in a private offline space with online world news and public stories of inequality and risk unfolding 24/7 on personal computer screens the familiar and the unfamiliar merged. A fictionalised fusion that fortified notions of

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[45] Chat boxes are complementary dialogue systems that allow text conversations on video conference platforms.
[46] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUByP-L59dY
[47] *Confinement* is the French and *Rest in Place* the American term for UK's *Lockdown* term of staying at home.

solidarity through scenes of neighbourhood residents singing together from their balconies in Italy to British scheduled mass rounds of applause of 147k 'clap for carers' and 855k for 'social justice' (*Kantar*, June 2020). Physical distancing measures accelerated the culture of online so there was more clarity of the transparent reliance on being internetworked. The state of food during the pandemic was highly unusual, cooking and eating together was of the home, intra-domestic commensality with the potential of food democratisation – food of the people regardless of gender, colour, or class. Yet the external realties of food shortages, massive increase of 88% in food bank use in 2020[48] and 15-20% increase in food eating disorders[49] proved otherwise for millions.

My fieldwork started in the first year of the pandemic and its height was an intense and surreal time that I now reflect upon with incredulity. My memories are of the dependency upon my research practices to offer stability, purpose, and a daily routine at a time so distorted and insular that I clung to the activity of socialising around food online as if it were a life buoy. My research on culinary knowledge or education sees cooking and eating together as social learning. My fieldwork experience (e.g., particularly pages 99-103; 111-112; and §3.3), saw how that learning became translated and transformed when the pandemic forced extra-domestic commensality from a private physical space into a public online place. I was immersed in examining what this enforced internetworked acceleration of being together between 2020-2022 meant to social eating and its food knowledge reproduction, and wondered about the pandemic-online perspective's impact on the future of food education.

Framed by the impact of governmental enforced social limitations and living with the sudden shift of familiar physical routine to insular and regulated existence, I aimed to be

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[48] https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8585/

[49] https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(21)00435-1/fulltext

responsive to the stark novelty of my enforced isolation to better understand the practices and consequences of food education's pandemic transformation. My objectives were to 1) describe how hospitality and culinary education work adapted to a pandemic to illustrate the tensions of the acceleration of internetworked social learning, 2) analyse the role of the senses to wellbeing in food sharing and its education, 3) critique 'digital commensality' in the pandemic, and 4) incite awareness of the benefits and challenges afforded by internetworked relational channels with food. Within chapter two, the methodology chapter subtitled *Serving up Bio-Digitality* (P.51), I will describe in more detail how my aim and objectives and how they were managed, challenged and instrumental to my findings.

1.4 The chef-educators

Here I briefly describe my participants as a community of affinity, virtually held together in their work of social food education with their online students. Although I have worked as a chef-educator myself, throughout my fieldwork I easily assumed the role of student, and the relationship between myself and participants was one where I was the student or novice and they the experts. The easiness showed a reverence marked by the expertise of the chef-educators and their committed transformation to online culinary work because of the pandemic. Before the pandemic I – like many others who I met in the online spaces of culinary 'togetherness' – had never even entertained the idea of being a participant of an online cooking lesson and my fieldwork was both of a novel and analytical experience of a pandemic coupled with social media and video conferencing platforms, and of investigating the online activity of the chef-educators informal food education work. My chef-educators were globally situated – from Denmark to South Africa to Bali and were an international group whose defining linkage was teaching French cuisine (P.94). They were not a geographically demarcated group, but one defined by the educational, taste, technique, and etiquette of a

rooted culinary culture. A cuisine's roots challenged − and altered − by war, colonialism, migration, and the internetworked freedom to be anywhere and nowhere simultaneously.

In the methodology chapter *Methodological Approach* (P.51) I describe the selection process of my participants as I adopted and adapted the snowballing method[50] in the online space, where existing acquaintances were fashioned by the linkages made by *Instagram* activity and/or *Airbnb* profiles. There was a fluidity between *Instagram* and other social platforms as if *Instagram* were the calling card, one type of relational channel, and the repository, yet also a 'library' of connection and re-connection that built affinity through their compatible aesthetics and storytelling. There were eleven core chef-educators who each made the sudden and enforced transition to the online food education with varying degrees of skill and enthusiasm when pandemic mitigation regulations shut down their well-established and lucrative offline teaching and entertainment work in the markets, semi-professional home kitchens, workshops, restaurants, and professional kitchens.

The chef-educators are anonymised with pseudonyms that are, in the main, a playful use of personality adjectives e.g., Franchement (French for frankly), Charisma or Wori (worry). In a variety of ways from monthly themed one-to-one semi-structured interviews, frequent participant observations of their online cooking classes (except for Franchement and Maverick), observations of their social media activity (particularly *Instagram*), and website (*Airbnb* and their own) presence I gathered a range of fieldwork material. Wori, One, Precarious and Calm were all participants that I loosely included under the umbrella of French cuisine as theirs was a culinary history shaped by 19th and 20th century French trade and Colonialism.

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[50] A sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances.

My fieldwork investigated the rapidly made new identities of these chefs-educators, at an abrupt pandemic time, when their professional food work identity had been forced to transition online from their normal public facing offline work. I aimed to gain an understanding of their experience of the pandemic and some insight into what bio-digital life looked and felt like. In the next chapter (in §2.4) I go deeper in detail about each participant and their affinity as chef-educators, who although were a disparate group, held the commonality of food education, and chef-educator – student relationships with online guests. And so, they and I were drawn together, our affinity was the predicament of the pandemic's physical distancing measures and its upheaval to how food knowledge was transmitted and assimilated.

Before the culture of online cuisine (i.e., on *Zoom, YouTube,*[56]*Skype* and *Instagram*) the physical journey of ingredients and culinary knowledge holders were instrumental in the movement of food knowledge and culinary influence. The chef-educators were typical of people who 'carry' their interpretations of cooking and commensality's transformative and disseminating food cultural practices with them (Ben-Ze'ev, E., 2004). Physical interaction of a visitor to a place then being inspired by a cuisine was also significant – at its height called 'gastro-tourism' – in a model of borrowing and customising food knowledge in a multi-relational interaction choreographed by 'informal' food educators. During the pandemic years of hyper-online social culinary learning, I observed how French cuisine education continued – for those with a device and internet – by being internetworked however problematised by the bi-sensory – visual and auditory – limitations of life on screen.

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[56] YouTube is a free video sharing site.

1.5 Chapters

My Methodological Approach, chapter two (P.51-103), presents my fieldwork as being simultaneously online and offline – hybridised – examined using ethnographic methods of social anthropology. I treated the discipline's perspective as a means to understand the cultural practices of being socially online and expanded my anthropological research position with reflection on its philosophical core – the philosophy of the everyday, when the daily relational interactions form an enlightening realisation of the individual's significance in collective response. Anthropology is perfectly suited to the complexities of exploring and understanding the scope and spectrum of relational contexts and the material and a-material – the concrete against the abstract or indeed philosophical – experience and the interface between them. The relational channels are biological and digital – and their interface bio-digital and my research proposes themes and interpretations of the bio-digital perspective as experienced by millions during the pandemic.

The new wave of discourses on how different the future looks like for a human defined by a machine has seen a surge of post- or trans-human scholarship. This was exemplified by the online *Royal Anthropological Institute's* 2022 annual conference 'Anthropology, AI and the Future of Human Society',[57] at which I was convenor for a panel entitled, 'The Digital Architecture of Kinship in Hybrid Spaces of Togetherness: Are Anthropologists Critical to the 'cultural and not technical' Dilemma?', which invited an exploration of whether:

> *Hybrid machine/biological interfaces are filled with dichotomies of realities and simulations of togetherness. Internetworked spaces of affinity nurture emotional bonds through prosumer practices, digital activism and digital nomadism. But are these spaces meeting human or machine-made objectives?*

> Farrell, M. B., *Royal Anthropological Institute* website, accessed 2022

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[57] https://therai.org.uk/images/stories/Conference/RAI_2022_Conference_Book.pdf

Figure 3: 'How do you picture being connected?', Farrell, M. B., 2021

I presented 'Pandemic Kitchens: A study of online commensality and the acceleration of digitised togetherness', which responded to my panel description of bio-digitality as a hybrid interface between the different channels of context (e.g., P.24), during the restrictive time of pandemic physical distancing regulations of 2020:

> *The transformation of physical and relational activity into the virtual space revealed digital wayfaring; hierarchies of control through software design features: a new digital lexicon; blurredness of time; the tensions of asynchronous interaction; human-machine synthesis and how the physical absence of togetherness impacted on mental health and wellbeing.*

> Farrell, M. B., *Royal Anthropological Institute* website, accessed 2022[58]

I also shared illustrations such as 'How do you picture being connected?' (figure 3), that aimed to communicate the permanence of the flotsam remnants of communication in a-material online communities that continued into channels of reality in daily lives. An existence that I felt

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[58] https://www.therai.org.uk

could be likened to the saying, 'in my mind's eye'[59], when different perspectives become enmeshed in imagination.

The organisation, culture, and structure of the online conference, like so many of the pandemic years and ensuing year 2022, exemplified the tension between offline and internetworked togetherness. In many ways my research could have used the lens of academic discourse instead of social culinary knowledge to unravel the bio-digital practices framed by pandemic dislocation. The conference was functional, seemingly efficient in machine objective terms and demarcated a social gathering to discuss innovative ideas. My panel speakers, *Linda Ma* whose presentation was entitled, 'Who's watching? Theorising an anthropological approach to digital value in the household via a case study of shared streaming service subscriptions' spoke of how her ethnographies explored consumption and value negotiation when the 'goods,' in the form of abstracted services such as home-based online subscriptions, are embedded within digital relational practices. And *Arian Bagheri Pour Fallah,* who used his creative work to explore the role of the artist in network society through his presentation' 'Spiel, Kunst, Computation, Consciousness: Beyond the Creator Economy'.

The Internal Compass to the Sensory World, chapter three (P. 105-134) presents the work of the senses and the abstraction of this work in the bio-digital channel's encounter. The sensorium is the result of the ongoing sensory work of collecting, making associations and interpreting material activity. Keenly attributable to the act of eating – as once the only way to collectively assess the safety and cultural relevance of food, it is a practice of great relevance to social learning and food education. The ways the chef-educators transposed to the screen their tangible practices of smell, touch (haptic, textural passive and active), taste, sound,

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[59] 'In my mind's eye' is saying that refers to being able to hold an imaginative thought that projects beyond the thought.

movement (bodily internal and external materiality) and sight form the chapter's core. It includes the tensions of entanglement with online technology when the chef-educators adapted their sensory educational practices to circumnavigate the limitations of an a-sensory online space, resulting in an inventiveness that was impressive and relied heavily on metaphoric language and visual cues, described in §3.4.

The popularity and ease of visual food co-making narrative is key to the screen's success – whether on television or computer. The screen has abstracted food to such a degree that the multi-sensuality of cooking and eating is negated to trigger visuals. I contend that this negation impacts on various themes discussed in the chapter such as agency, identity, language, embodiment and cultural memory found in the tensions between the social material and a-material dimensions of 'how a cook knows' (Graf, K., 2022, 2). Presently the computer screen, in the bio-digital relational channel with food is a tool defined by its ability to simulate by association. My research participants – the chef-educators (hosts) and their students (guests) worked in collaborative endeavour using visual and auditory cues to replace the explorative learning work of senses. However, in Covaci's collaborative work and co-authorship (P.10-11; 44; 208), she investigates and challenges the limitations of the screen in multi-sensory arenas of social learning. She explores how stimulation of the sensorium using multi-media technology[60] can be a useful tool and process to aid meaningful and accessible culinary learning:

> *Out of the insufficiently explored senses, stimulating the olfactory channel can be a powerful learning tool because it is linked to the limbic system, the part of the brain that processes feelings and emotions. Indeed, studies have shown how multisensory learning experiences that involve the sense of smell can lead to high levels of Quality of Experience.*

Covaci, A., et al 2018, 21246

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[60] Multimedia technology consists of interactive elements and applications of the computer that might include VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (Augmented Reality) to simulate and actualise multi-sensory experience.

I learned of her research after my fieldwork, and I am now excited about investigating further how a more human approach to computer software design and application could provide more inclusivity in food knowledge reproduction, and champion the educational value of commensality as an example of a frequently experienced vehicle for learning (§3.1; §7.10).

How Togetherness Adapted to a Pandemic, chapter four (P. 136-173) is about how togetherness adapted in a time of a pandemic, a pandemic understood through the co-authorship work made on the internet, particularly on social media. I also play with the relevance of the role of host – both as being the carrier of disease, and of someone who can engender welcome into a space – on and off-line (Visser, M., 2017). There is also the intriguing adoption in the internet's lexicon of *Host Server* that provides the technological centralised access to the internet when not connected through the locally wired (*Local Area Network*, LAN) ethernet – as in the case of smartphones.

The use of the term and concept of host relates to a shared meal and hospitality – a gathering filled with rituals that cement or antagonise affinity. It is a word with a root in the word hostility. In a contorted similarity the human body can host a hostile disease, and so in both concepts there is the potential for hostility in hospitality. My fieldwork was a time to explore and interpret the relevance of hostility within hospitality at an acute pandemic time when home – both offline and internetworked – held an intense role for millions enforced to stay out of or be guarded within the public space. Many foundational and anthropological themes are drawn out in the chapter (§4.1; §4.2; §4.6) such as trust, reciprocity, power, identity, inclusion/exclusion or 'othering' and agency (Rivers, J.P., 2017).

These themes are framed by larger conversations on equity and the ethics of an unhostile food system (for the animals we rear and a significant hungry population). My research argues how hospitality changed because the online space of visual abstraction and

representational channels, presented in a guarded pandemic framed existence when the online space at home was deemed a safer, and a more connected place, than off-line and out of the home. I saw a massive shift to what being social around food meant and consequently the disruption to commensality became a more abstracted, disembodied, and therefore I judge less physically bonded learning encounter.

Chapter four leads into *The Pandemic's Epidemic* chapter five (P.174-201), with a focus on how the pandemic revealed the societal structure of loneliness and the need for social connection, which I argue relates to solo-meals (P. 9; 36; 46; 50; 119; 176) and the tensions for commensality during the pandemic (Ozawa-de-Silva & Parsons, 2010, 614). I looked at how social (and work) connection – for those with a device and the internet – meant an enforced life on an interactive computer screen. What was pertinent to my investigation was that my focus on how public-facing physical commensality was deeply contorted by the pandemic's physical restrictions, i.e., the solo eater who might have found company (albeit sitting at different tables) had nowhere to physically eat in the company of others during pandemic lockdowns and restrictions. The virus mitigation control, which governments initially described as 'social-distancing' rather than 'physical distancing', took its toll on being social, so I looked at how loneliness was curated by bio-digital, human-machine structured social frames of disaggregated physical communities, internetworked remote working practices, socially mediated digital lives, and the pandemic's reconfiguration of physical hospitality.

I considered the relevance of loneliness to anthropological understanding of what it means to be human – a social species – in the twenty-first century. It is not about solitude or being alone, I feel it is the enforced political socio-economic architecture of a digital society that frequently doesn't cook and eat together. The chapter discusses themes of mutuality of experience, performance, alikeness or affinity, presence, and co-presence as determinants to

understanding this social epidemic. The fieldwork observed how loneliness touches the discipline's classic themes of identity, the sensory experience, temporality, positionality, performance, kinship, and globalisation.

The Affordances and the Allure of the Online chapter six (P.204-235) considers the affordances and the allure of the internet, i.e., the 50-year-old promise to make life easier and sharper, against the increasing concerns of its power. A domination that speaks of human compulsion to being machine defined. In this chapter I consider themes of being *'here and there'* (§6.1), of simultaneously being a local and a foreigner, or physical as well as abstract. This was particularly vivid during the pandemic lockdowns, and continued distancing measures, when the online space felt like a substitute for tourism and travel contorted by the reality that the foreign was an abstraction and the local a shadow of its pre-pandemic self. *Lives on screen* is discussed next (§6.2) as a fictionalisation of life, one co-narrated with copious response and counter response to the sound and visual presentation of a curated life.

The laminated array of temporalities, as explored (§6.3) in each video call – from the transformation of raw ingredient to cooked, to socialising across time zones – opened up how vastly different time was experienced because of the internet. The human entanglement with a machine that can shape-shift seconds, minutes, hours, and days was a nagging monotony during *Groundhog Day*[61] lockdowns. Then there were the (§6.4) *distractions* that plagued the bio-digital encounter relational encounter with the often comedic struggles with maintaining more than one perspective at once, when online was problematised by the unpredictable workings of the internetworked machine's frequent loss of connection or hiccups in to

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[61] *Groundhog Day*, a 1990's fantasy comedy film with the star sentenced to repeating the same day ad infinitum.

functioning as programmed, and the offline activity of over-brimming non-professional kitchens being defined by the hecticness of everyone being restricted to home.

My thesis finishes with chapter seven *Conclusion: 'Negotiating between Alternatives'* (P.238-263) with a reiteration of how the acute time of the *C*OVID-19 reign (2020-2022) allowed a unique examination of informal food education as an online social endeavour. An unpeeling of intimacies normally hidden behind closed doors, were rampant online when the physical extra-domestic space was shuttered and closed due to physical distance measures to contain the spread of a deadly virus, so the private space – the home kitchen in a public place – vicariously lived on *Instagram and Zoom* 'togetherness' platforms. I looked at the broad scope of what food knowledge as social practice – when cooking and eating together i.e., commensality – looked like in an internetworked relational point in history. A time when the acceleration of human entanglement with computer machine, forged by the pandemic's social restrictions, seeped into imagination, memory, identity, response, and relationship with food, and one another.

1.6 Conclusion

I saw the tensions and contradictions of transferring a multi-sensual tangible activity into the online space by examining and interpreting the transformative experiences of chef-educators (e.g.,P.35) Their enforced transformation, due to the pandemic lockdowns and physical distancing, illuminated the discrepancies between what was hoped for, i.e., online commensality as a social learning place and, the actuality that computer software design can only provide a simulation of a such a complex and multi-sensory ritualistic practice of relational interaction.

But I also found that the urge to be commensal – or at least share elements of the togetherness that eating arouses, such as sharing and developing food knowledge – flourished

within internetworked abstracted channels. This compulsion was particularly rife when extra-domestic commensality was eerily absent or virus cautious for two-years. But as the fifteen-month fieldwork moved along the key finding was how unsatiated the urge felt to be online, to such a point that many of the chef-educators and their numerous guests became agitated or disenchanted with the bi-sensory, centralised and flat rendition of a tactile, raucous and idiomatic social learning experience.

Figure 4: 'Distantly Connected', Farrell. M.B., 2021

My fieldwork site was the kitchen, in both its offline and online forms, which I introduce in chapter two section 2.1, *The fieldwork site*. Considering the role of the kitchen, both before and during the pandemic years, is foundational to my research. It is a space framed by the rituals of hospitality – particularly the welcome, inclusion, and hierarchies of making a meal and dining together that rely on multi-sensory channels of physicality. My research is on the distortions and revelations of these intimate and commensal rituals when practised 'alone together', which I refer to throughout my thesis (particularly in chapter five *The Pandemic's*

Epidemic) and review in the concluding chapter (§7.8), which problematises the spontaneity of shared empathy of the meal, in kitchens and their potential for food learning connected solely by the bi-sensory internet (Turkle, S., 2011).

An efficient internetworked connection that my research found belied the humanness of gathering around food, and of commensality's contribution to cultural, social, and individual knowledge. I highlight the incoherencies of heralding online commensality as a solution to the challenges of solo-eating, of being 'distantly connected' (figure 4), because it lacks the bodily and intangible elements of food which physical commensality affords with relative ease after millennia of its' practices. There are elements of meal making, and taking, that are hard for machine-thinking to project or replicate, described in chapter *four How Togetherness Adapted to a Pandemic*. So therein lies the shortfall, the gap in a fundamental relationship that my research explored, (particularly chapter three *The Internal Human Compass to the Sensory World*), the educational gulf in food knowledge reproduction because it needs a context that is informed by customs, rituals, and empathy made by multi-sensory empathetic encounter.

Serving up bio-digitality

Online, we perform a self because we always imagine ourselves being seen.

Turkle, S., 2022, 196

I argue that the language used to describe the online space is markedly defined by performance. Firstly, the internetworked space is often described as an environment of networked tech platforms (e.g., *Google[62], FaceBook[63]* or *WordPress[64]*) where computer software programs – such as social media, video conference and website services – are hosted. The word platform as a noun describes a place to stand out or to view clearly, a stage or a space to perform. As a verb to platform means to give opportunity or raise awareness. In both senses of the word there is an interesting play on its use online – a tech platform is a stage to give opportunity. It sounds very empowering and democratic yet are the positives are laden down by companies who are intent on monopolisation? The reach of their intent seems to be largely achieved by platform-users being enthralled by being on screen, because, as Turkle suggests above, being a performer is now entangled with understanding how we are viewed and ultimately selfhood.

Turkle's comment resonates with how the bio-digital existence magnifies, and distorts everyday social behaviour, so much so that the theatrics of performance become embedded in acts of the everyday, and of understanding selfhood. It is a performative practice that looks to understand identity, emotion and relationship through frequent internetworked public-facing activity. The online space provides a reflection and explanation of how to feel, it engenders practices of reflexivity that see who we are, '… in the mirror of the machine' (Turkle,

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[62] An American multi-national technology company with an online monopoly on search engine capability.
[63] *FaceBook is* an American online social networking website.
[64] *Wordpress* is a website creation and management platform.

S., 2011, xi). The constant flux of, 'performing in [the] everyday life …' constantly demanded my attention during my fieldwork as I observed the constructed and performed everydayness of online professional chef-educators interacting with their guest students and wider socially mediated public (Schechner, 2002, P. 143). Their networks of affinity were made up of a group akin to an epic cast of centre-stage main characters and animated extras.

2.1 The fieldwork site

It was performance, entanglement, and flux that framed my digitally wayfinding my way through juxtapositions of digital architecture and human outpourings of activity. The ethereal online space produced and consumed – *prosumed* – representations and stories, arguably only by anticipation, by intention (Heidegger, M., 1977). Instead of immersive material fieldwork shaped by the possibility of concreteness, and responsive and embodied work of the senses to entice, lead or provide association and connectivity, my online fieldwork was a fusion of the analytical human mind toying with imagination and memory (Sutton, D., 2013, 299). It was more subjective, preordained, and projective than objective, attuned and responsive because I was in a silo of bio-digital contemplation.

Additionally, the numerous frictions that nagged me were framed by the acceleration of the hybridisation of humanness with computers as I researched in an unfamiliar time of enforced physical distancing due to a pandemic when life for millions seemed inseparable from their smartphone (Haraway, D., 1985). The dehumanising elements of abstracted relationship gnawed relentlessly in the busy internetworked space during this time. The incongruencies that an acute time of a global pandemic gave to physical anthropological fieldwork was an important aspect of my research as it highlighted the stark and rapid change to how anthropologists could conduct ethnography. It was a time that saw empty streets, isolated families, and shuttered public places (figures: 5 and 6), set against the 70% rise of global

residential internet use[65] and so the age-old perception of a fieldwork site melted away to leave me staring at a screen of hyper-social activity.

Figures: 5 and 6: Photos taken of pandemic London streets, Farrell, M.B., Winter 2021

My thesis describes the angst and realisations of a tentative step into online ethnography when physical fieldwork was made impossible by the pandemic. An exploration that leaned heavily on twenty-first century development and authorship on digital ethnography contextualised by humankind's long relationship with technology. A relationship that encouraged not what is seen, but how it is seen (Narayan, K., 2012, 23). So, I suggest the online and internetworked is the space, the virtual and digital is of the online practice and, the bio-digital is the simultaneous existence in both the biological (offline) and in the digital (online) worlds. I will expand on these ideas in § 2.2 *Theoretical Influences*, later in this chapter (P.56-59).

The internet of the twenty-first century magnifies the predisposition of internetworked humankind to datafy and store information. It is the abstraction of digital endeavour experienced in internetworked spaces that is new. Social science scholarship on the human in the internetworked space and, of digital ethnographic methods to study this, gained

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[65] https://www.forbes.com/sites/markbeech/2020/03/25/covid-19-pushes-up-internet-use-70-streaming-more-than-12-first-figures-reveal/?sh=33a419dc3104

exponential traction in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Notably forged by aforementioned (P.16-17; 23-26) anthropological or sociological authors such as Applin, Fischer, Horst, Lupton, Miller, Pink and Turkle in the English-speaking parts of the world. They contemplate themes of bio-digital existence, internetworked relationships, and digital cultural contexts. Plus, they and others work to create and develop new ways to understand the complexities, challenges, and opportunities of these themes.

I conducted my research in a time framed by the acute and unfamiliar *COVID-19* pandemic rupture to society (2020-2022). Eating outside of the home, as a means of social connection (extra-domestic), was eerily absent, whilst inside dining (intra-domestic) was intense and unusual as it dominated spatial and relational activity all day, every day. These polar opposites to commensality (what cooking and eating as being social or asocial means), harnessed the unique time of a pandemic to examine tensions through the undiluted lens of the internetworked space. A combination that complemented foundational scholarship and developed unique themes framed by the physicality of food in online encounter. Themes under the auspices of commensality and the transmission of food knowledge that looked at the intersection between anthropology of food and anthropology of the internet.

The physicality and sensuality of food constantly clashed against the a-sensual hard edges of computer-mediated activity. Of course, there are the trails of ancient visual representative work of food, from cave drawings to twentieth-century television and media advertising lingering, but there were notable differences in the bio-digital experience of food. An existence intensified by stay-at-home pandemic guidance, when for many people who lived alone (33% of the European population), 'stay-at-home' pandemic guidance meant the

internetworked space was their only social place.[66] It was a time when commensality was reconfigured and spat out by algorithmic coding because we were all stuck indoors and online was the only extra-domestic space of public facing hospitality and food education.

I felt this acutely in my research as I stood alone in my kitchen with my fingers reaching for the potential warmth and humanness of commensality through the flat screen of my computer. Some days the sadness at the absence of conviviality was too hard to bear. Yet in the internetworked space I could simulate a connectivity with others who maybe felt the same. Others who were on my *Instagram* account, and with my participant chef-educators and their guests on *Zoom*, who all worked to engage in sharing and learning food skills, were my chosen family, my community – as well as my fieldwork participants and I was immersed in the field-site for my research and for my mental health wellbeing.

Figure 7: The staged activity of gathering ingredients for Kalm & Kiki's lesson, shared on my *Instagram* post, Farrell, M. B., 2021
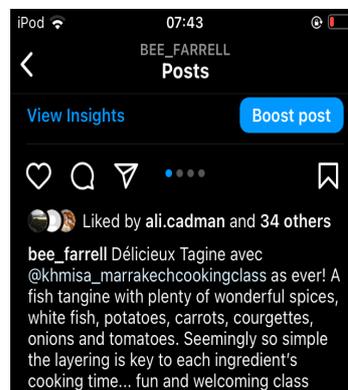
… with wonderful Kiki and Kalm
#morocco #tagine #curcuma #cumin #paprika #gingermbre
André Yum!
Kiki and Kalm: It's always a pleasure to share our Moroccan Cooking experience with you and cook and try new Moroccan recipes everytime ❤️❤️❤️ waiting to welcome you in Morocco

Figure 8: The Instagram text accompanying the post and its continuation with anonymisation showing Andre's comment and Kiki and Kalm's response (to which I responded to with a love heart).

[66] https://www.euronews.com/2017/09/05/people-living-alone-europe-solo-living

The gathering of ingredients for the online classes were done on my once-a-day permitted outings (figures: 7 and 8), and my total daily routine was shaped by my bio-digital food preoccupation.

It was akin to a coping strategy to ward off feelings of the loss for physical social connection and identity by sharing my activity in the online social space of my *Instagram* account. I admit that without this social and nurturing activity the pandemic isolation would have been much much harder emotionally. Food brings us together and I needed that togetherness, particularly in a time of fearful uncertainty held in the grasp of a novel virus.

2.2 Theoretical influences

I expand on the distinctions for computer-mediated research that can be *on, of* or, *in*, the internet to describe *On* the internet is the home of quantitative research that uses filters, software, and algorithms to gather information of human-computer activity. *Of* the internet as largely the domain of communication and media studies, and the interactivity of human with computer mediated design and *In* the internet is the focus so pertinent to anthropology – with its specialism in fieldwork ethnography – as it explores the cultural activity of an online perspectives from the inside. The anthropological frame contemplates an intimate place, one that watches, listens to, and considers the hybridised bio-digital human, as introduced in §1.1. It holistically reflects on what the *of*, *on* and *in* means for the structuring processes of the parallel channels of the physical, a-physical and their formation of the space of bio-digitality.

The theories that frame the research harness elements of multiple disciplines and integrate them to provide a research process that enabled the intention of the project to investigate the sensorial, imaginative, social, and representational experiences of bio-digital commensality. I turned to twentieth century anthropological (P.14-15) and cultural theorists

such as (1980) Stuart Hall (P.91; 142; 195; 223); (2018) Michael Jackson (P.28; 86; 161); (1988; 2005) Bruno Latour (P. 18; 61); (1969) Victor Turner (P. 18 ; 203); and (1959; [1974]1986),Erving Goffman (P. 21; 65; 165) who amongst others offered foundational wisdom on communities of communication as a social structure. Particularly pertinent to my deep sense of being a subjective researcher *of*, *on* and *in* the internet were insights gained from Özlem Biner's book *States of Dispossession* (2020). A book which I introduce (P.34), it portrays the everydayness of protracted conflict as experienced by Kurdish and Turkish people. For me it confirmed the ethnographic author's role of moving through spaces of time, place, and memory to give a deep sense of the tensions between flux and stability. This precarity felt relevant to my bio-digital ethnography in a time of a pandemic. Although my far shorter ethnography was on a completely different topic the dispossession Biner experienced somehow rang loud in my studies of the transience and detachment from the anchored strength of familiar physical social life.

The 'discursive production' of more than 50% of the world population co-making and circulating a *COVID-19* narrative stressed the urgency for anthropology to realise its validity in the twenty-first century internetworked spaces of social contact (Hall, S., 1980, 118). The hybridity of the offline and online is a constructed social space of fictionalised communities. It is a space that retains many classic anthropological themes such as kinship, power and control, myth, identity, crisis, performance, tourism, gender, truth and authenticity, power, linguistics and ontology, alongside more recent and relevant anthropological studies.

Anthropological sub-disciplines that include sensory, visual, digital and food expand the analytical influence of anthropology of the internet. The breadth of expertise enabled the interpretation of, '... social interaction [that is] increasingly occurring online' to answer some,

'important questions [that] emerge about the ways in which identity … and sociality … is structured by the architecture of online spaces' (Baker, S. A., and Walsh, M.J., 2018).

My fieldwork aimed to contribute a methodological approach of different perspectives of the pandemic through the lens of the transformations my participants experienced. One that fused together off and online ethnography to benefit from multimodal research to further the understanding of human entanglement with computer-mediated technology. This approach considered how to explore the bio-digital features of a perceived socially inclusive place, the context of being online. I used research methods that relied on discursive language, memorial re-enactment, observation, auto-ethnographic diary entries, illustrations and participant observation to focus on the combination of pandemic rupture with the acceleration of internet use due to lockdown life. Within this frame I explored changing relationships to food – socially, emotionally, sensorially and philosophically.

Ultimately, as described in the section *Seeking out the Unfamiliar* (§2.7) I continued the discomfort of Writing Culture's (1980s) subjectivity-objectivity and othering dilemmas of ethnography into bio-digital ethnography (Clifford, J., and Marcus, G., [1986] 2010). Later in this chapter, (§2.8) *How is it that Somebody's Else's story becomes One's Own*, I explore the manoeuvring practices I undertook to find and populate my fieldwork site. My explorations were rooted in discussions with Professor João de Pina Cabral, whilst he was at the University of Kent. He opened up the possibilities of attesting to authentic research to 'find' a group – on the internet – and follow them wherever they went, as a means to study a, 'bounded community' and so I reflected on selected aspects of classical and foundational anthropological work to greatly assist in my exploration of transient social dynamics.

I particularly looked at the individual, the collective, political, hierarchical, and ritualistic practices that benefit from work and theories on functional structuralism, social organisation

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within social structure, social action theory, phenomenology, and habitus. (Weber, F., 2005; Durkheim, E., [1895] 1950; Bourdieu, P., [1997] 2013; Heidegger, M., 1977, and Pivčević, E., 1970, on Husserl, E.,). My approach first listened to the theories of networking by eminent authors such as Bruno Latour and Erving Goffman (P.58-59), particularly Latour (and his colleagues) *Actor Network Theory* (1988). But I found them teasingly problematic to the internetworked experience of my project, because although significantly foundational to considering relationship building in the processual negotiation between 'actants' – whether technical or human – I felt there wasn't enough wiggle room for the cyborg tendencies of the hybrid experience of bio-digital context. So, although I greatly benefited from such theories, I needed to springboard into an approach that examined fused yet parallel contexts, particularly congruent to a time of intense internet-based existence for 60% of the world online,[67] whilst I lived alone with intense offline worldviews, a lopsided-existence accelerated by the *COVID-19* stay at home governmental guidance.

2.3 Authors and co-authors

I now move onto the formation of the research and the selection of the research participants and how this process was a testament to the ways in which the internet is used. Far from a liberated and boundless place of interaction it remained as closed and discriminatory as many spaces in the physical world. Section (§2.10) *Taking Food Online* tries to rationalise and justify, but also disrupt the discomfort with my ethnographic process. A process that struggled with the absence of the public politique in physical arenas because in the offline spaces, where cooking and eating together outside the home normally provide daily rituals of conversation and debate, there was largely silence.

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[67] https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/

However, the ongoing propensity to share and bond was, in-essence, an online exercise in storytelling. Thus, much of the intention and traits of story-sharing and performance were alive and kicking, and kicking ever more forcibly on the internet (e.g., §4.3 in chapter four, *How Togetherness Adapted to a Pandemic* P.136-173). A space – in theory – that can absorb and disseminate at scale and potentially democratically. My fieldwork focused on the blended work of 'authors' and 'co-authors' and their stories of French cuisine and so explored how French cuisine was communicated by, and of, eleven online chef-educators and their online guests during an enforced time of transition from offline to online work and social practices.

In some ways my participant selection ran parallel to 'snowballing techniques' and recruitment was made indirectly by association and introduction, though not subjectively as I was guided by the compass of algorithmic filtering. My methodological approach drew upon, and used an investigative framework applicable to internetworked spaces, online practice, and bio-digital experience. Daily I explored the abstraction and simulation of sensorial relationships with food, which was an exploration of, 'Virtualizing of Our Mouths' (P.91; 128), of segmenting and distorting the biological and ethereal relationship with eating (Farrell, B, 2020). An endeavour that for me was enabled by *Instagram* and *Zoom* video conferencing platform, I harnessed the role of *Instagram* and its hashtag search function as gateway, a space for promotion and invitation, a place for collective memory, and a repository for experiences that functioned to externalise memory.

This approach worked in simultaneity with *Zoom* cooking lessons in a constant collective story-making effort and it became increasingly clear that *Zoom* was of itself a form of social media – one that has boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in its technical and cultural

architecture. Therefore, the distinction of needing an invite (e.g., *Zoom*, *WhatsApp*[68] or *Facebook*) is different from social media's supposed inclusivity (e.g., *Instagram*, *Twitter,* or *TikTok)*. This antithetical model is relevant to my research framed by commensality and community of affinity, and the tensions within this activity for host and guest – and the practice of invitation. Social media mirrors and reasserts the inner and outer circles of physical inclusivity in its two forms – invitation needed and open house with no invite needed.

In the section *The Internetworked Space as Forum* (§2.11), I smarted from the uncomfortable perspective staring at me through a computer screen. French chefs were predominately represented as white male and this exclusivity plagued me, subsumed me into the rawness of social media's hashtag movements that had highlighted inequality again during the summer pandemic lockdown 2020. My participants were eleven highly individualistic chef-educators, and as such the sort of culinary professionals who use *Instagram, Airbnb*[69] (an online marketplace for 'experiences' and holidays), and *Zoom* as their professional means to forge reputation and drive income. Of course, there were many chefs and chef-educators working for organisations who might have playfully used social media, but the 'lone' self-employed chef-educator relied on internetworked channels to create and endorse themselves as a 'brand' to reach customers. My participants were, in the main chef-educators pre-pandemic to increase the repertoire of their freelance or small business chef income, and so the lockdowns and physical distancing of the pandemic completely challenged their established food work.

This point is particularly relevant to their pandemic years, as hospitality shut down due to efforts to curtail the virus spreading. Most of these individualistic chef-educators, who had

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[68] *WhatsApp* is an international instant messaging and voice cross platform.
[69] An online marketplace that brokers short-term homestays and experiences.

been making a living catering for events, facilitating gastro-tourism businesses and/or running small restaurants, had to rely heavily on building their online food-education persona during the pandemic. Thus, their social-mediated performance exploited trends, allowed simulated travel (through cooking and tasting world cuisines), and battled competition with their 'brand' distinctiveness.

My search for participants with some commonality or affinity was an endeavour that used filters and hashtag on social media platforms. I looked for chef-educators who were dominated by their educational and touristic work in French cuisine and culture – and were promoting this explicitly to gain consumer attention. They were in fact the only group of culinary professionals I could get easy access to in an online pandemic time – their kitchen door – albeit representational – was always open, unlike the physical doors to restaurants forced to close for lockdowns months-on-end.

2.4 The research participants

I now describe each chef-educator, including their contextual home – a group geographically and culturally different, who did not know each other on or offline before the pandemic hit (except for Flash and Sweetie), but were all under the same umbrella of being freelance-chefs or chef-educators dependent on culinary education and/or gastro tourism. In some instances, their knowledge of each other was through minimal interaction as an *Instagrammer* who kept a following eye on their chef-educator competition.

André was in his mid-thirties, a male French Colombian professionally trained chef who was propelled to media notoriety by his appearance on an international cooking competition television series. A considerate and skilful chef, food-educator and activist for sustainable food practices, and better working conditions for the hospitality sector, he had published peer-reviewed papers particularly as guest chef in residency at Oxford University. He regularly spoke

publicly (off and online) and taught at international culinary institutions. In 2019 he started his 'Patreon' (*a* micro patronage website that financially supports creators) venture and had almost three hundred patrons.

With over 90,000 *Instagram* followers he frequently connected on forums that ranged from monthly *Zoom* cooking lessons to Q&A on *Instagram Live* [70] to consistently drive forward his message of ethical eating. André equally divided his time, even throughout the pandemic, between a rural family smallholding with an outdoor kitchen in France, and when in Colombia in the kitchens and food gardens of various friends and family members as he seamlessly continued his mission's work. André projected a digital nomad lifestyle with stylish ease and being online seemed natural and a preferred option as the pandemic eased. He was a prime example of an icon of the social media age with engaging on-screen presence that exuded a mix of academic and NGO association and professional chef experience.

Another classically trained male chef, this time in French patisserie was **Charisma**. After many years travelling around Europe, after leaving his Venezuelan homeland, he and his sister settled in Paris, France. A patient chef-educator, particularly skilful and practiced at teaching cooking to children, he exceled at technical culinary expertise in sweet baked treats. Before the pandemic he and his sister had set up a small cookery school, which had playful and flamboyant appeal with quirky murals painted on kitchen walls and pantomime inspired costume wigs he and his sister wore whilst teaching. The pandemic hit them hard, and thirty-year old Charisma was left to run their business alone and online. Being selected as an *Airbnb's* online experience pilot chef-educator in early 2020 encouraged him to connect with online tourists ever optimistic that his beloved cookery school would survive the pandemic.

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[70] https://buffer.com/library/instagram-live-video/

Charisma re-invented his offer numerous times and he spent lockdowns teaching patisserie online throughout the day and night to suit different time zones. But when the world became increasingly *Zoom* weary, he was forced to take on supplementary office work. Lockdowns dwindled in summer 2021 and he again welcomed tourists to his in-person classes, but the restrictions were problematic as only a small number of students were allowed (to ensure two-metre distancing measures) and copious amounts of his time were spent on extensive sanitary protocol for very few international travellers that made it to France. It became economically impossible for him to continue as a chef-educator.

Elicit was a classically trained female chef in her early sixties who had been a chef and chef-educator for decades. It was her second career and a successful one pre-pandemic with a restaurant and cookery school in the south of France, and plentiful gastro-tourism appeal on an international level. A French-Dutch forceful business woman she displayed technical expertise with old-school style of food education, that of top-down, vertical, teaching. In the early months of the pandemic Elicit had been travelling in Japan, learning its cuisine, before a planned return to Amsterdam to live closer to her daughter and grandchildren. Throughout the pandemic her French restaurant remained closed; a reminder of her life pre-Covid-19 ease when she was effortlessly in demand as a chef – one who also specialised working on southern riviera yachts.

Like many other freelancers working in gastro-tourism the pandemic restrictions impacted enormously on her livelihood, identity, and mental health. From her small smart Amsterdam flat Elicit reimagined her culinary work into chef cooked meal deliveries in the city, and also ran some online cooking classes for those who found her website via *Instagram.* Her optimism faltered after a year of restrictions and roller-coaster changes to the hospitality sector, and increasingly she became despondent with how the pandemic was being handled

and the impact on her livelihood. However, toward the end of 2021 her personal project of writing a self-published cookbook reached fruition and she proudly had something to show for her pandemic time – an educational cookbook.

An energetic German business and family head **Flash** had been involved in gastro-tourism dining as a passion project. His home was Perth, Australia, and this is where he retreated during the pandemic longing for his quirky Parisian apartment that had been used for culinary photo-shoots and gastro tourists wanting to privately dine à la Française. His line of work was entertainment, particularly technical curation, which manifested itself in online marketing campaigns or events – on themes of food and drink, and his business had been lucrative and international. Because Australia adopted an isolationist approach to curb the virus spreading with two solid years of travel bans and closure of the island nation borders[71] Flash, and other Australians were in a different pandemic predicament to rest of the world.

To soothe the frustration of separation from the international culinary world of his beloved touristic French kitchen of entertainment Flash held three online *cookalong* – a more informal lesson of cooking alongside – extravaganzas. They were held from his large self-built Perth kitchen or his spacious garden and were epic – each lasting three hours or more. Flash hosted his international food events, crossing time zones between America, Australia, and Europe with music, animations, and shared camera spotlight moments for all the amateur guest chefs, which provided plenty of French and German food reminiscing.

Franchement chose to turn her back on the screen and focused on making home-cooked meals using the organic produce from her partner's French smallholding where she lived. For twenty years she had lived in London, England, where she had specialised in teaching

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[71] https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20220221-australia-fully-re-opens-borders-after-two-year-covid-19-closure

and cooking microbiotic[72] cuisine. Then, with a move back to her homeland of Normandy, France, three years before the pandemic she had been educating institutional chefs – in schools – how to cook vegetarian meals. I met Franchement in 2013 as we were fellow masters' students on the *Anthropology of Food* programme at *SOAS, UoL*[73] and her food work was quietly yet firmly shaped by her political leanings and knowledge of nutrition and wellbeing.

For her the option of online cooking education was the anthesis of her previous food workshops, and she openly expressed her frustration with *Zoom* technology, internet connection and the lack of repartee with her student guests. Additionally, because her style of cooking and teaching was sensually led, she found the online space too unfamiliar to drive forward online lessons, and so her food education during the pandemic was an infrequent and uncomfortable exercise. Instead, she used *Facebook* and local food producer networks to promote her organic ready-made meals to 'stuck at home' diners waiting for the pandemic to end.

Kalm was a trained professional chef who had once worked in a hotel but had turned – with the aid of her young adult daughter Kiki – to gastro-tourism pre-pandemic. Theirs had been a highly successful *Airbnb Experience*[74] model, of touristic physical immersion in a host's home area when a group of tourists would begin with local fresh food market shopping, then cook and eat in their colourful Moroccan family home. They described their hometown of Rabat as a friendly and caring community, and at a local-level life continued around communal food making to ensure neighbours had meals or that they were invited for meals during the pandemic. Kalm's twenty-year-old daughter Kiki was part of the double-act that made the most

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[72] Microbiotic cuisine is drawn from Buddhist beliefs and focuses on reducing animal products and eating food whilst in season.
[73] Anthropology of Food, *SOAS, UoL*, https://www.soas.ac.uk/study/find-course/ma-anthropology-food
[74] https://www.airbnb.co.uk/help/article/1581/an-introduction-to-airbnb-experiences

of her fluency in English, whilst her fifty-year old mum Kalm spoke French. Both seemed very relaxed and confident in their educational entertainment abilities and appeal as Kalm happily taught a range of well-tested dishes with homely flair.

However, despite a competent transition to *Airbnb Online Experience*s their daily offer of cooking classes joined thousands of others struggling to gain and keep attention from the online scrolling masses. They frequently opined how they missed their offline days and longingly described the camaraderie of cooking and eating together with guests in their home and offered me many invites to visit them when the travel bans ended.

Another chef-educator I met through the brokerage of *Airbnb Online Experiences* was **One**. A home-trained Vietnamese cook she had moved from her touristic cookery workshop and hometown in Vietnam pre-pandemic. Her move to Copenhagen, Denmark, was to be with her Danish fiancé and they lived in a small flat where she spent evenings teaching Vietnamese cuisine online after a day working in an office. With a quiet yet distinct presence her daily online lessons welcomed guests the world over at her regular early evening slot. One's kitchen was small yet photogenic, always had dimmed lighting, a big bunch of flowers on her worktop and she often sat to prepare ingredients.

Her daily changing menu was simultaneously the family supper, which emphasised the voyeurism I felt. It was not like any of the other chef-educator's lessons in that it was not social or instructional but was of voyeuristically watching a soothing scene of a beautiful kitchen. I suppose, like *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response* (ASMR)[75] film clips, the effect of her lessons felt socially undemanding and relaxing. After about three of her lessons, I noticed that she was heavily pregnant, and although she never drew attention to this it seemed particularly

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[75] ASMR: https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-asmr-4582673

pertinent to her quiet and unhurried kitchen. Her lessons stopped suddenly, I presumed because the baby was born (which was confirmed by her *Instagram* account being filled with baby instead of food photos), and as quietly as she conducted herself in her kitchen she slipped out of her private space in a public place – her online kitchen – into motherhood.

Nicé was a thirty-something self-taught chef and chef-educator from Northern France living in Cape Town, South Africa. Her lessons were a time to wallow in dreamy French-ness as she frequently would interject stories of her homeland's cottages, regional ingredients (such as *Espelette Pepper* from the Pyrenees area) and food traditions. Her kitchen, with lots of light streaming in and a large island workshop, had a screen-professional look. Organised and knowledgeable she efficiently ran her lessons on a winning formula of a warm welcome, culinary historical background, a methodical working-through the making, and then baking the dish after the lesson had finished.

Pre-pandemic her in-person Cape Town classes were annually put on-hold when she returned to Normandy, France. These visits to her family included a time to run food tours that culminated in cooking local fayre using her dad's smallholder produce. In a pause to pandemic travel restrictions in summer 2021 she made this annual trip home and entertained her small group of faithful online students with a cooking lesson from her parents' homely pinewood furniture kitchen wearing what looked like a childhood homemade apron. Additionally, to her *Airbnb* brokered on and off-line lessons Nicé ran a mini freight business transporting local food produce abroad – something that continued during the pandemic to give supplementary income to her lessons.

Originally from Cameroon **Precarious** had been forced to leave her homeland and arrived in England as a migrant. Unable to legally find work she joined an organisation that helps migrants to transition into their new life by utilising their traditional cooking skills in

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public facing cookery classes. Precarious was a chatty chef who laughed a lot even when she struggled with the technology – despite the training and the interjection of her lesson tech-support Helen. Hers was not a natural presence on the screen, and there were many times of confusion for her online guests as to what was happening as she moved around her basic modest home kitchen moving things off packed surfaces to find room to cook.

It seemed like everything in the online cooking process was alien to Precarious – from publicly sharing her kitchen, to the need to keep propping up or angling her smartphone so her online guests could see what was happening. Each lesson she made the same dish, *Boulettes et Fromage* (cheesy mincemeat filled baguettes), *Cameroonian Salad and Caramelised Peanuts.* There was little or no connection displayed between Precarious and her guests, and although we all were willing her to do well it felt a strained well-meaning coloured by the exoticism of the white gaze on African cuisine.

An American in Paris **Sweetie** had lived in France for over twenty years. Her home-taught culinary skills had been 'topped up' by working alongside her meticulous French mother-in-law home cook. An experience she proudly regaled in her lessons to give authentic French flair. An extrovert and natural, albeit slightly nervous on-screen, chef-educator Sweetie worked hard to promote and teach French cuisine to ex-pats, particularly Americans in Paris. Pre-pandemic hers had been a busy and social work life defined by gastro-tourism, private catering and of culinary workshops and food tours in Paris – many of these food experiences had been held in Flash's professional kitchen. A single mum in her early sixties her on screen energy and coquettish looks belied her age as a working mum of two young adult daughters all living in a small suburban flat with the tiny kitchen venue for her numerous online cooking classes during the pandemic.

Both her children were integral to Sweetie's transition from offline to online chef-educator. They helped with the fast-track adoption of *Zoom* software needed in the early lockdown days, the frequent reconfiguration of her galley kitchen into screen-time professional kitchen and behind-the-scenes technical support during Sweetie's cooking lessons. For the first year she took her classes very seriously and put significant effort into researching and curating packages of French cooking lessons promoted through *Instagram*, *WICE*[76] and local networks. However, as the pandemic groaned onward her enthusiasm, energy and monies dwindled as she stoically tried reinventing her offer with ideas like home delivery baked treats. But she became very disillusioned and cautiously yet enthusiastically welcomed the in-person lessons as the final months of pandemic restrictions eased.

Wori was a professional Balinese chef with a restaurant in Ubad, Bali after ten-years working in Asian restaurants in Northern France. He, his French wife, and their daughter had moved to his homeland two years before the pandemic where he had opened their small bistro style restaurant that aimed to appeal to Australian and international tourists. A serious and dedicated chef his *Airbnb* brokered online classes celebrated formal cooking lessons and were a technical rather than a social experience that he increasingly seemed uncomfortable with as fewer and fewer online guests arrived with the world becoming '*Zoom* weary' by early summer 2021, hungry for physical interaction.

In his chef whites he would stand awkwardly in his professional kitchen clearly wondering when Asia and Australia might follow Europe in ending travel bans. His wife and daughter would also be at the lessons, his teenage daughter behind the camera, and his wife, in her role as English speaking intermediatory to his French-spoken methodical lessons, would

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[76] W.I.C.E (Where Internationals Connect up in English) run courses and events in Paris, primarily for women.

frequently jump in front of the camera to nervously invigorate conversations into a more social experience. In his one-to-one lessons, with me as sole student, he would sometimes perk up when we talked of how Europe was 'getting back to normal' and tourism was returning, and I could feel his sigh of relief at the possibility of his pride, identity and income returning.

Collectively my chef-educators demonstrated cultural fluidity and super diversity,[77] something that had been quietly active before *COVID-19* yet saw greater normalisation throughout the pandemic living in their boundless online context (Berg, M.L., 2022 1). This was a particularly true of the online lessons and experiences I observed and how my participants had taken their French cuisine out of France, yet online could still be in France. I felt intrigued by the continuation of their French-ness online, and the circulation and mobility of their food practices in an internetworked space as a channel of malleable and constructed reality. Regardless of enforced isolation and travel bans the sharing of food knowledge was still a formative element of the resilience of cuisine. Its adaptation, adoption and assimilation, key to survival of offering more than industrial food, took on a new turn when the online space transfigured the global and the local. The pandemic kitchen was a space that stirred together interpretations of cuisine to make an individualised dish of simultaneous 'here and there', a bio-digital recipe for cultural and temporal fusion.

2.5 Aims and objectives

The aim of my research was to contribute to anthropological understanding of the acceleration of bio-digital existence through the lens of commensality and food education. The quickening provoked by a pandemic regulated or stopped extra-domestic physical sociality saw a turn to online social spaces to gather around food, and what I found, and want to

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[77] https://www.diggitmagazine.com/articles/superdiversity-changes-world

communicate in my research, were the tensions to how we gather to share, as important to anthropological discourse on the reproduction of knowledge.

I deem commensality's supportive role in food education is an emotional, physical and a social encounter, which is intuitive, spontaneous and multi-sensorial, and so a physical channel can offer this effortlessly, unlike the online space. The internetworked context is but a place for simulation, a bi-sensory channel which changes how we understand food because of the limitations and substitutions made of a shared intimacy in a multi-sensory experience. This may seem evident, but it took a pandemic, one understood and encountered by being online, to value the offline extra-domestic shared meal as a prime moment for a multi-layered experience.

To find what was' hidden in plain sight', the multifarious value of a social meal and what this looks like in the bio-digital age, my three objectives were to explore: bio-digital relationships to eating and food knowledge; how the pandemic and accelerated internet use impacted on commensality, hospitality, and food skills and, to contribute to the development of an ethnographic approach to fulfil anthropological needs of bio-digital identity and sociality. An important absence now rears its head, a gap that will be investigated in more detail in chapter three *The Internal Human Compass to the Sensory World* (P.105-134), but it needs a little explanation now because it formed much of the activity of the research investigation.

The missing sensory aspects of food and eating in the online and abstracted mouthful was a rich lens to view the role of social media and video conference platforms. Hence the marriage of Anthropology of Food and Anthropology of the Internet seemed an illuminating partnership. A coupling that anchored, because eating is so embodied, yet also imagined and co-joined with the weightlessness of the internet. Within the methodology the tools were focused on exploring the online-offline sensory experience, and my 'toolkit' rested heavily on

autoethnography, sensory, and visual anthropology (Ben-Ze'ev, E., 2004; Pink, S., 2009; 2012). In this chapter's summary I consider the inescapable presence of pandemic physical distancing as a barrier to sharing the sensory aspects of culture and community and begin to contemplate the future for commensality and food education.

2.6 Research questions

The questions I asked and the associated prompts I considered were characterised by the stark changes to commensality and, of disfigured temporalities actioned by *Covid-19* pandemic guidance (2019-2022). Regulation that magnified the presence of bio-digital existence framed by human-computer entanglement, and my research questions focus on themes of individuality and collectiveness in times of social rupture; the bio-digital features of commensality and the embeddedness of the metaverse[78] in daily lives. To answer the research questions (P. 80 figure 9), I observed bio-digital transformation, absences and substitutions in commensality conducted via a computer screen and examined how culinary knowledge transformed from a deeply embodied and sensory practice to one that rested on visual cues and metaphoric language in internetworked kitchens.

The pandemic absence of extra-domestic commensality, of not explicitly eating socially together, highlighted the importance of the multi-sensory ritual and rhythm of publicly eating together as a signifier of the value of community affinity in the commensal meal. A practice embedded in kinship and trust making ritual. Within a time of accelerated dependence the bi-sensory (auditory and visual) practices of the internet both maintained and contradicted sharing food knowledge and eating together as 'social glue' that felt like mimicry, of 'going through the motions' of the physicality of commensality.

Research Question	Research Tools	Literature	Resources	Ethics

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[78] *Metaverse* is a network of online worlds focused on social connection.

What are the contrasts between offline & online commensality's role in food education? *Instagram & Zoom* visual/auditory narration of food & eating-technical & cultural. The simulated, additional & absent aspects of online commensality. The senses & sensorium. The role of autoethnography in the time of a pandemic.	*IG*: photos text, stories, hashtag tracking, Interviews with chef-educators: *Zoom*, participant observations & autoethnography of online cooking classes via *Zoom* autoethnography	Social, food, visual, sensory, digital, & medical anthropologies, Interdisciplinary with anthropological perspective. Bio-digital & auto-ethnographies	Smartphone, *IG* app/ account. *Zoom* software, Transcribing software, computer, kitchen with equipment/ ingredients.	Anonymity of participants & businesses, data rights
How is culinary knowledge dissemination transformed in an acute time of pandemic physical distancing? Embodied & sensory encounter vs online visual cues & metaphoric language. Examples of adaptations, challenges/changes. Co-authoring of culinary knowledge online in a pandemic.	*Instagram*: chef-educators' portrayal of their cooking Interviews with chef-educators Participant observations of online cooking classes.	Social, sensory, visual, food, medical & digital anthropologies. Bio-digital & auto ethnographies	As above	As above
How trust & commensality is networked, structured, & performed in spaces of 'public intimacy' on the internet? The senses, trust & affinity with others through mealtime etiquette. The impact of technical affordances of software on human-food interaction.	Chef-educators' *Instagram* activity & linkage to their classes/physical activity.	Social, visual, sensory, digital, medical, food anthropologies. Bio-digital & auto-ethnographies.	As above	As above
Does the internet offer or contradict eating together as social bonding around food knowledge? Representatives of culinary culture. Sharing food knowledge. Living & adapting the architecture of the online	Observations of Webinars Interviews with chef-educators, participant observations, autoethnography of online cooking classes	Social, visual, sensory, medical, digital, food, kinship anthropologies, Bio-digital & auto ethnographies	As above + cookbooks	As above

Figure 9: Table of Research Questions

2.7 Seeking out the unfamiliar

I sought to examine the relationship between the offline and online kitchen – my kitchen – material and a-material – was my fieldwork site. It was a place where others' kitchens – namely the chef-educators – entered mine and I theirs. And so, the fieldwork site was a bio-digital one in which my kitchen could simultaneously be intimate and public, and concurrently experience the same synthesised private and performative space of hundreds of friendly

strangers' kitchens (e.g., §3.3; §6.1-6.3). Arguably the online space is a porous place that can solidify the rumblings of social ordering yet also spur the possibility for novel community making. Alterations to democracy do exist in the online space. Yet I judge the perceived democratic online space is obtusely able to regurgitate the age-old structuring of exclusion and limitation rather than effortlessly enable opportunity.

I wanted 'bio-digital ethnography', as a new methodical approach, to harness foundational insight that could contribute to greater understanding of commensality and its role within food education in the bio-digital age. My motivation was shaped by acknowledging the subjectivity of digital ethnographic methodology because from the get-go the immensity of possibilities – geographically, temporally and culturally – predetermined that my participants were not a fixed physical community where I could observe the serendipity of everyday chance encounter. My ethnography was deeply immersive as bio-digital existence was inescapable 2020 – 2022 in a world framed by a global pandemic coupled with the bedfellow of the internet set within the magnified and hectic fieldwork site *in* the internet I needed to build and rebuild my own boundaries to demarcate a minimal and intimate study.

To reflect again on In *States of Dispossession* (2020), (P.34; 57; 75) Biner establishes her identity as a researcher within a layered blend of ethnicities and experiences, and these layers are absorbed, embodied, to increase the author's receptivity to identify, interpret and associate as she moves through the physical and temporal spaces of her fieldwork site. Biner's book mirrors and absorbs then interprets in an ongoing auto-catalytic and freestyle choreography of her fieldwork, that in some ways resonates with the poly-mediated and globalised internet inhabitant to give credence to the value of being a multi-faceted and fluid researcher.

This fluid and ethereal approach gave understanding to the layered and transient bio-digital embeddedness in multiple verses – offline and online – of a hybridised metaverse. Biner's book is of ten-year long research across geographical and temporal boundaries and this longevity gives a sense of authenticity of the encounters experienced and therefore the inferences made. Something that my fifteen-month fieldwork lacked, partly because of its boundedness as Ph.D. study, and partly because the intensity of the pandemic was but two-years set in aspic.

But her transient ethnographic process is different from the intentionality of digital ethnography's decision-making skew from the reflexive, subconscious and memorial, the humanness of investigation. Instead, it has been relegated by algorithmic code that does not relate to the urgency of physical response. To compensate my analytical mind guided me to seek out the unfamiliar online rather than the traditional responsive work of senses and memory in material fieldwork. In addition, I tried to disrupt the pull of analytical code that favoured my historic filtered choices and online usage, and I questioned whether digital ethnography could achieve such liberation and naivety. How could human interaction with computers be investigated by a multi-sensory human researcher, one who delved into the bio-digital interface between food and the internet. Food and eating, so embodied and sensorial, is so personal and intuitive, which contrasts with the online bi-sensorial (visual and auditory) programmed space. A place of representation, a two-dimensional space where three dimensional lives are co-narrated through internetworked activity (Hall, S., 1980).

The internet does not create a democratic space because analytical coding makes it hard to change one's mind or 'profile', and too often we are tempted to follow the loudest online voices. Our online usage defines who we are and are not, and I see it more problematic to believe it to be a space where the potential for the infinite global masks the likelihood that

it is as politically and ethically restrictive as the physical space. More treacherous is the promise of democracy.

Software and algorithms predominately designed by white men are structuring a parallel world for us to step into. The filtering options that discriminate – active through search engines that void diversity by preferencing the loudest languages and cultures on the internet are just a peep into enmeshed layers of the creation made by human design and human use (Noble, S., 2012). Just like the structures of the material world, be they institutions or familial networks, the anthropological tense arguments on structuralism, poststructuralism, kinship, and hospitality have transitioned to the virtual space (O'Farrell, C., 2005; Pitt-Rivers, 2017; Radcliffe-Brown, A., [1952] 1965).

As referred to earlier (P.58), anthropology of the internet's ethnographic confusion, is in many ways a continuance of 'writing culture' dilemmas of 'post-modernism' or reflexivity from the 1980's (Clifford, J., and Marcus, G., ([1986] 2010). It is reconfiguring how ethnography of social computer-mediated lives deals with enmeshed machine-human thinking. Can an ethnographer be reflexive and attuned to literary communication as a portal to understanding and interpreting culture when the social language is a hybridised human-machine activity? It is a challenge when bio-digital society is shaped by machine-human language that not only guides by inclusion or exclusion, but alters the perceptions of material worldviews:

> *The relationship between language and the internet is a growing area of policy interest and academic study. The story emerging is one where language profoundly affects your experience of the internet. It guides who you speak to on social media and how often you behave in these communities.*

> *Young. H., 2015[79]*

The classic anthropological issue of colonialism – from origin stories to globalisation – and conversant themes embedded in hegemony, are particularly potent when considering

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[79] https://labs.theguardian.com/digital-language-divide/

digital division and computer programming language (Rand, A. [1957] 2007). Online is a cyclical round-a-bout of impeded turnings constructed by cloaked hierarchies of power and knowledge. There is the tendency to believe that technology is unbiased, democratic, and inclusive, and thus the computer-mediated researcher must be so too. In digital ethnography who and what is speaking, and what and who is listening, are each bounded by the colonial and gendered architecture of the internet.

Unless the researcher actively seeks out and constantly questions the unfamiliar the infinite web remains akin to the limited material world. There was a normalcy in seeking out what and who was familiar when sat in a lockdown home staring at a frantic screen populated by all the internetworked friends, interests, and colleagues you could ever wish for. The inclination – or habit – after a year of the world population experiencing continual restrictions to liberty and social encounter was to seek the reassuringly familiar in a time of bewildering disconnect. However, the silenced unfamiliar voices resulted in the loss of human and cultural diversity in conversations and encounters that are algorithmically filtered to determine – although arguably our historic online choices are complicit in this representation – of what we view each day.

But what was involved in the process of seeking the unfamiliar? The process could be either pre-determined by the researcher – which questions the subjectivity of the seeking – and/or is sacrificially offered up to the algorithmic channelling pathways of search engines and notifications. A process, a methodology, which mirrors the inconsistences and limitations of the subjective researcher yet applauds the necessity of illustrating that struggle as it grapples

with the uncomfortable knowledge that coding is in charge, and that the submissive mind is now the target of power rather than the docile body (Foucault, M., [1991] 1995).[80]

I used a mixed methodological toolkit of participant observations and observations of the internet (*Instagram*, 50 x *Zoom* online cooking lessons, and 30 x food webinars), 100 semi-structured interviews with the chef-educators, an interactive *Instagram* project account, and auto-ethnographic notes on the embodied physicality of cooking 'with' the online chef-educators and their guests. In essence my fieldwork site was fictionalised in my mind with an abstraction of communities of affinity. Many communities were small, such as Sweetie's (and her two young adult daughters in their lockdown apartment), who connected up a handful of online guests to cook and eat 'together'. The largest gatherings were Andre's 'Patreon' community[81] of three hundred, with twenty or so core members, who met frequently for invite only online gathering.

My methodology recognised the impossibility of representing the three-dimensional world in a two-dimensional space, particularly the sensorial aspects of being in the world (Hall, S.,1980). However, I as a bio-digital Ph.D. researcher, explored a hybridised fieldwork site in a lockdown existence with no physical other than me. So, the intention of bio-digital ethnography, in an extreme asocial time (of physical distancing governmental guidance), was choreographed to try and find humanness within the internet dominated day-to-day. I became increasingly reminded, because of its absence, that being human is the ability to be sensorially responsive and vulnerable to the unfamiliar. A difficult endeavour when serendipity is algorithmicised and *Covid-19* restrictions challenged human rights of liberation.

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[80] https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/disciplinepunish/section5/page/2/
[81] *Patreon* is membership platform subscription service for creators and artists to earn a monthly income by providing rewards and perks to their subscriber.

Before moving on to the co-construction of stories on the internet here I discuss an ethnographic account of an online seminar, a webinar I attended (P.80-81). Key to the areas discussed by the female presenters was the framing of their black voices within the white male dominated architecture of the offline and online space. They had harnessed the social media driven #blacklivesmatter summer 2020 highlight on racial inequality to realise a space to draw attention to the hospitality sector they worked in where '… access has only been through the white gaze' and of '… white men [as] the gateways to finding true and authentic chefs' (ET)[82].

Undoubtedly the internet has the potential for democracy, seeing the unfamiliar, listening to the quietened voices, but it is an act of intentionality by the internet-user to take that out-of-habit step to see discrimination. Additionally, the functionality or software feature choice of their webinar meant that I, alongside others in the 'audience', was a muted and invisible observer of *Black Book* webinars (2020). I acutely felt the paradox of not being seen or heard in discussions that highlight the inequality of not being seen or heard (e.g., Figure 37 P.280). But on reflection this experience resonated with the dailyness of the impotence of the black female voice, that I, as a white female, can only estimate.

2.8 'How is it that someone else's story becomes one's own?'[83]

It is not novel or unique to computer-mediated communication to adopt a narrative. In fact, it is deeply rooted in the muttering and musterings of humankind sharing information that works to bond and distinguish communities. But as anthropologist of philosophy Michael Jackson posits above this question is particularly emblematic of the socially mediated age of chatter (Jackson, M., 2018, 3). The co-authorship of stories harks back to early-human collective sound making as communication, followed on with plentiful pioneering work by

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[82] ET – lead webinar host 2020
[83] Jackson, M., (2018, 3)

many in the study of language and linguistics from, for example, Plato (400's BC) Johann Gottfried Herder and Immanuel Kant (1700's), to Noam Chomsky (1900's).

I worked with a flint-knapper some years ago, John Lord[84] in Norfolk, England, who shared with me his belief that grouping together to knap flint (to hit a piece of flint with stone or bone to shape the flint ready for weapon or tool use), forged the practice of social gathering, as the sound of the tap-tapping of flint shaping was early communication that seeded language. Alongside basket-making, flint-knapping as socialised technology compelled structured and animated storytelling. Likewise, ancient (and modern) aboriginal paintings map the story of a place, and the human within that landscape hunting for food and safety. The symbolic representations are coded messages that communicate time and place to others who use the same symbolic representation. Not that different a practice from algorithmic computer coding that creates maps for others to follow, though the social politics and intention are quite different.

The politics of collaborative story-making and telling began when the oral story-telling tradition – in the early-industrialised countries – was usurped by the written word. The written word distanced the author from others, and demarcated a gap between the listener, turned reader and storyteller. However, it is true that the printing press and the massive quantity of books, magazines and journals that came thereafter have democratised (access to) knowledge. For many centuries the co-authorship of oral stories have been absent in many western cultures, though still alive in children's games and imaginative play and song. The ability of oral storytelling to embellish, tweak, pass-on for another to personalise, and the dynamism of the spoken story is how '... somebody else's story becomes your own'. The collective activity breeds

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[84] http://www.flintknapping.co.uk/aboutus.html

a democratic story. But the co-authorship in social computer-mediated story-making and re-making cannot be easily likened to traditional oral story-telling democracy. The 'discursive production' of co-making and co-circulating narratives made of fluid dialogue is undoubtedly liberating and inclusive, but is under duress of algorithmic selection, which manages diversity (Hall, S., 1980, 18).

In my fieldwork I studied two arenas of co-authorship, the stages are co-joined in my research (as much is on the internet) but, are separable too. *Instagram*, the social media photo-sharing platform, a place where I was an observer, participant observer, storytelling author, co-author, and co-dependent doctorate researcher. And secondly, though entangled in the first space, were the real-time, live spaces of online cooking classes enabled and structured mainly by *Zoom* video conferencing platform. A place where I was participant observer, observer, and an auto-ethnographer. The experience of being 'in' an online class solidified the perspective of a pandemic framed time when physical solitary coupled with the internetworked social became the norm.

However, story-making jarred against the reality that the online social was far removed from my solitary physical-self. A bio-digital existence that potentially was the same for many others involved in online collaborative authorship. The dislocated boundaries on the internet, of time and physical place, proffered both freedom and entrapment, and nodded toward bio-digital acts of regularisation in a hybridised existence of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, [1991] 1996, 135). My ethnographic experiences often felt passive, docile, and constructed, but rather than reject this as unsatisfactory ethnography I sought its relevance to the actuality that since the birth of smartphone (2000's), had merged with social media activity (via present-day apps of

2003 onward)[85] the egalitarianism of co-making stories was structured by biological and internetworked existence. A voyeuristic existence magnified and accelerated by a global pandemic and its physical distancing rules.

The everydayness of seeing internet images, when '… around 70 million photos are posted daily on *Instagram*, 300 million on *Facebook*, and 700 million on *Snapchat*' meant that '… we live in an entirely different world' to pre-social media days, before 2004, only eighteen years ago ('Why We Post', *FutureLearn* and UCL, 2020). The combination of social media and the smartphone for just under 60% of the world population (*World Economic Forum*, 2020) propelled visual images to '… forms of expression and communication' that are '… both ordinary and ubiquitous' ('Why We Post', *FutureLearn* and UCL, 2020).

It feels obvious that the magnitude of images meant that we were producers and consumers – *prosumers* – of collaborative denotation and connotation of the language of imagery. The images created through 'participatory culture' – prolific and characteristic of the internet – narrated the local and intimate butting up against the global and distant (Jenkins, H., 2006).

Figure 10: A typical gastro-porn Instagram image that shows great culinary skills

Figure 11: An update and solidarity building Instagram photo sharing news of free meals made in lockdown

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[85] https://www.future-marketing.co.uk/the-history-of-social-media/

The language of imagery is a key tool for exploration, particularly for research that included a focus on social media's *Instagram* photo sharing platform. An abstracted food marketplace, that ranges from gastro-porn to charity calls for volunteer help on food poverty projects, some examples are above in figures 10 and 11.

2.9 The language of imagery

There is no degree zero in language.

Hall, S., 1980, 481

Cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall (1980) outlined the creation and consumption of television images, in a time before social media, to highlight the participation and role of the viewer as an interdependent relationship structured to form ongoing interaction. The audience, in a communicative dance of movement and counter movement, constantly travel through processes of decoding performed encoded messages. The physical experience of watching television converses with looking at or 'checking' social media, although there is a sematic difference between watching and looking that revolves around passivity and interaction, to consider the denoting and connoting work of the representational image (Hall, S., 1980).

During the intensity of pandemic lockdown, the blurring of the finite and infinite spaces of experience seemed boundless in online spaces. The acute time of a pandemic, of simultaneous everywhere and nowhere, could be likened to the 50-year-old global sprawl of industrial food when it was increasingly difficult, '… to see where the transnational ends and the local begins …' (Watson, J. L., 2005, 79). These aspects of the scalar representation of communication relate to the work of Charles and Ray Eames (1977) discussed later in *The Delamination of Time* (§4.4). The constant bio-digital practice of movement between the virtualised representation, the physical experience, and memory coalesced to provide the

cultural information needed to interpret the online world. Far from hypo-sensorial encounter, was the internet triggering hyper-sensory activity via the sensorium seeking meaning of billions of visual images (Bourdieu, P., [1997] 2013; Brillat-Savarin, JA., [1825] 1970; Rozin, P., 1999 and Wilson, B., 2019)?

Paintings, photographs, and social media posts share images, viewed with eyes that see with embedded cultural knowledge, are contingent to the working and re-working done by other senses. Anthropologist Janet Wolff gives a powerful example of how the workings of the senses, culture and memory inform visual acuity, and how this can misfire when confronted with unfamiliar imagery. In her chapter 'The power of images, the lure of immediacy' (2016, 189-201), She describes a piece she read in an art textbook by E.H Gombrich [1950] of a disturbance in South Africa when the local supermarket stocked foreign food tins with pictures of a smiling boy on the packaging. The shoppers were in horror believing that inside were tinned slices of small boy. The tins possibly looked like the 'Bare Foot Boy' tin (Figure 12).
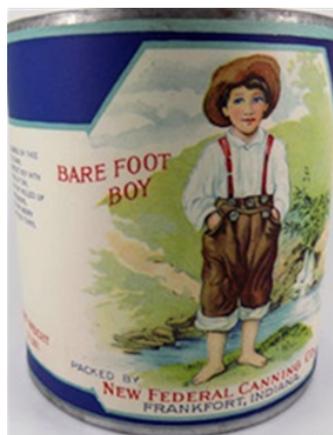
Figure 12: *Bare Foot Boy* tin of undisclosed food, twentieth century

As introduced earlier (P.24; 28), one of the key theorists of digital culture, who focuses on *Instagram*'s language of imagery, is researcher and author Professor Lev Manovich. His on-going analytical work is characterised by large-scale tagging of global images of 27 cities and 16 million images between 2012-2016, and he describes the participatory culture as one of '…

aesthetic workers and aesthetic society' (Manovich, L., 2016, 5). I responded to his method of analysing *Instagram* imagery as one that regards the images as oxymoronic, largely staged and convey '… life as improvisation' (Manovich, L., 2016, 12.

    Instagram images that stylistically correlated with the aesthetics of marketing – both of food and lifestyle – were rife during my fieldwork. I observed how the construction of the everyday aesthetics of *Instagram* bled into the *Zoom* spaces of conviviality. Utilising Manovich's knowledge and approach some *Instagram* images, (e.g., below) of pre, during and post confinement from chef-educator Charisma's *Instagram* profile (figure 13), were analysed.

    As introduced (P.63-64; 86), Charisma lived in Paris, France, with his sister (who was co-director of their baking class company), and their mum. Originally from Venezuela, he worked and trained throughout Europe as a pastry chef and baking teacher. Their *Instagram* profile began in 2015 with the birth of their business – anonymised as Macaron – and in 2020 it had almost seven hundred images, which averaged at two posted images per week.

Figure 13. Macaron Instagram selection with most recent date order top left to right, Farrell, M.B., 2020

Instagram images, seen as individual posts on the 'home page' and on the profile account page, can viewed as either a grid or a continual gallery. Photos that are normally taken in a square format lend themselves to grid aesthetics and can have a range of changes made to enhance the image.

Although there is nothing explicit regarding the impact of *Sar-CoV-2* virus on Macaron's *Instagram* account conveyed the pandemic shift is notable through the absence of offline baking class photographs. The typical album type 'gathering' photograph posted pre-pandemic (9th February 2020) contrasts with the surreptitious arrival of online images with his lockdown participant/s on screen (27th April 2020). The narrative of baking classes being French Parisian, social, fun, and quirky remained constant throughout the profile account, regardless of the global pandemic.

Reflecting on Manovich's formulaic analysis the staged photos narrate how the impromptu blends into the aesthetics of marketing. In the images from Macaron's profile there was a typical *Instagram* image that posed food in a Parisian street to offer authenticity and gastro-tourism. There was also use of parts of the body to give scale and intimacy, and spreads or flat layout of food that ape magazine and cookery book layout. The group 'one for the album' photo is an attention grabber for those seeking a social experience (pre-pandemic) and echo the baking experience as playful, social, and original. Conversely the photo of the online class focuses on the proud amateur solo-baker holding a successfully baked product.

The language of imagery, as seen in the exploration of *Macaron's Instagram* presence, steadfastly continued to communicate food, and making food together as social despite the rupture of a global pandemic that necessitated physical distancing. My auto-ethnographic research led me to adopt a relationship of complicity with the practices of preparing

Instagram-able photos of the results of my online cooking lessons (appendix iv, P. 289). I took pleasure arranging the meal and its close surrounding with an eagerness to please the chef-educators with my efforts and share the ongoing narrative of my pandemic kitchen 'theatre'. Through the pandemic reliance *of* and *on* the screen the language of imagery is complicated because as Hall succinctly observes, '[S]ince the visual discourse translates a three-dimensional world into two-dimensional planes, it cannot, of course, be the referent or concept it signifies' (Hall, S., 1980, 120).

So where does that situate images made and viewed, and the 'translations' made during an acute time of social isolation and its reliance on the 2D, the computer or smartphone screen? The tensions between visual literacy and illiteracy are not new, the language of imagery is not particular to the internet. It has a long lineage of practice from cave wall paintings 28,000 years ago to television from the twentieth century to *Instagram* posts of the early twenty-first century. It is the proliferation of the language of imagery that the internet, particularly of social media practices, which are key to the intention of the 'attention economy', a hyper-stimulated activity that is questionably more about marketing than communication. This idea will be discussed further in chapter six *The Affordances and the Allure of the Online* (P. 204-235).

2.10 Taking food online

Taking Food Public: Redefining Foodways in a Changing World (2012) edited by Psyche Williams Forson and Carole Counihan is about the 'on-the-ground', of the people, endeavours to bring awareness to issues of food. It is a book about the work of public anthropologists, authors, campaigners, politicians, health specialists and folklorists who all take the discussions out of institutional settings into the public domain. I changed the *public* to *online* to recognise the dominant role of the internet to make public (for the 60% of the global population with

access to a computer and internet), stories of relationships with food and eating. The internet was a particular force of public prosumer work in a time of a global pandemic. A time when the physical places of sociability and work were largely empty. A time when the everydayness of political group discourse was physically, and significantly absent due to the heavily regulated social distancing guidelines set by governments the world over.

If anthropology of food's mission is to investigate the, '[P]ractices of Eating as an Entanglement of Biology, Culture and Society all together' what do its classic anthropological themes of investigation in reciprocity, hospitality, intimacy, assimilation, vulnerability, strangers and liminality, fear, trust, performance, power and etiquette look like *on*, *of,* and *in* the internet (Niva, M., Sandell, M., and Kirvennummi, A., 2009)? How are these themes perceived, enacted, connoted and denoted, and how could an ethnographer explore them during a pandemic when most of the world was online? Was it simply by transitioning classic methodology of participant observation, observation, interviews, surveys and auto-ethnographic writing to the online space as described earlier (e.g., §2.8, and returned to in §6.2), I decided to use both a sensory and visual anthropological toolkit, with a slant that leaned toward the investigative value of comparability between the offline and online encounter as a bio-digital ethnographer. As a digital ethnographer I investigated the dichotomy of the sensorium *of*, *on,* and *in* the internet in my research (see P.56).

In the tussle to explore lines of public and private in a computer-mediated space I considered the public life of the virtualisation of food education. A practice embedded with the trickiness of demarcating the lines between private and public, performance and everydayness, and publicity and sociality. The ethnography *of*, *on,* and *in* the internet stepped deeply into considering phenomenological work by classic philosophers who considered existential themes and theories such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Edmund Husserl

(1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and I had no qualms with this as a colleague once described anthropology to be the subjective 'philosophy of the everyday' (Ries, N., 2002, 725). A definition that sits very well with studying twenty-first century's human entanglement with technologically-driven abstraction and egotism (Dorfman., E., 2009; Heidegger, M., 1977).

The problem rattles when the lines between performance and non-performance are insignificant, meaningless in a time of individualism, social media, and screen togetherness. The pandemic physical distancing regulations disconnected us from being a part of physical social groupings. A material togetherness embedded in serendipitous communication of gestures, discourse and ethereal (temperature, weather, aromas, touch et al) components of being physically social. Online and *COVID*-indoors encouraged and allowed an individual's private and intimate to become publicly performed as part of being social – as long as there was internet connection. Internetworked togetherness rapidly changed the way we thought about what being social meant (Turkle, S., 1984). The intensity of individual online performance, to an abstracted online 'audience', was a concentrated subjective experience that had little dilution from pre-pandemic physical interaction within a group.

These opposite sides of the same coin were fluid and continually worked to shape what was seen and what was prepared to be shown. In many ways it could be a truly dynamic mode of collective storytelling, of influences and intentions bouncing about together to form the once unthinkable, live public stories on and of the everyday. In my exploration of *Instagram* and *Zoom*, particularly the activity of the chef-educators to unpack some features of construction and reconstruction by these online 'authors'. *On*, *of,* and *in Instagram* my ethnographic method was one of observer and of participant observer when I added

comments to their photo or story post or *IGTV* or *Instagram* Live.[89] On *Zoom* I was also observer and participant observer using auto-ethnographic study and interviews to garner, gather and interpret material.

The 'fictionalisation' of human-food relationships e.g., on *Instagram* and the online social nature of eating is rampant on the internet. In my thesis I describe the public and the intimate, and the socially mediated and the embodied, of a hyperreal fury of activity on many media platforms. As introduced (P.65), I authored for *The International Journal of food Design* (2020), 'The 'Virtualizing of Our Mouths: Instagram and the Sensorium' describes some of the intimacies of being in a private space – our *Instagram* accounts – in a public online place:

> *The constant virtual lifeworld practice of movement between the virtualised representation, the physical experience, and the memory of eating coalesces to provide the cultural information needed to interpret the virtual world through the processual activity of the sensorium. Far from hypo-sensorial encounter, the internet could actually be triggering hyper-sensory activity via the sensorium seeking meaning from billions of virtual images.*

Farrell, M. B., 2020

Again the online life of food in the public space resonates with *Instagram's* style of storytelling as 'life as improvisation' (Manovich, L., 2016, 12). The *Instagram* photographs, films and presentation mainly begged to appear natural and unrehearsed, yet actually required intentionality through curation and stage setting of the post. The lockdown interdependence between public and online life confirmed the dominance of media in lives, and the race to *prosume*, to produce and consume, in never-ending cycles of aesthetic consumption. The virtualising of food in the public space was made in the imagination and memory. An endeavour curated in quietude with the spectre of performance watching that significantly altered relationships to food and eating, and to each other, through the missing rituals of physical commensality.

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[89] https://about.instagram.com/features/igtv

To investigate some of the features and practices of a more intimate public space my ethnography turned to the participants' online *Zoom* cooking lessons. Here I was grounded by the actuality of the senses at work as I cooked in my own kitchen, and simultaneously took part in the abstracted kitchens of the chef-educator host and frequently fellow student guests. This investigation was of deeply auto-ethnographic experiences that looked to sensory anthropology (Pink, S., 2009; Howes, D., & Classen, C., 2015) and 'Gastrophysics'[90] to help with the analysis and interpretation of my encounters (Spence, C., 2017, Velasco, C., & Obrist, M., 2020). Food was abstracted in a public space as computer-mediated interaction discombobulated the sensory and convivial into metaphor. The turn here, as opposed to *Instagram* sociality, was the fittingness of the term 'host' and all the connotations that hospitality brings (Pitt-Rivers, J., 2019).

The '… homogenisation of perceptual experience' and the collapsing of time and space with daily internet usage both romanticised and standardised the challenges of cooking and eating 'local' cuisine, which could relate to the ongoing and inescapable frame of truth, what is 'authentic' food, where is the 'real' representation of local commensality, and who makes the fanaticised attractive, and what and where is the mundane?

Lastly, but by no means least, there was the dichotomy between eating as a deeply individual act of sensory foreplay, ingestion, digestion and excretion, that was also an established public spectacle, a social media performance, that was presented as an 'attraction' in the marketed 'attention economy'[91] of the 2020's (Crary, J., 2013; Manovich, L., 1995; Kelly,

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[90] *Gastrophysics* is the scientific study of how our experience of food and drink is affected by our senses and our surroundings, not just the food itself.

K., 2010). I considered these conundrums throughout my PhD research to offer responses informed by my bio-digital ethnographic fieldwork.

2.11 The internetworked space as forum

My participants gave a voice of diversity, a challenging task in the white male dominated world of French cuisine. I had actively sought out how to explore the white male French chef narrative, the elephant in the room of the gendered and racial imbalance of the identity of French cuisine. I wondered if in finding rare examples of non-white French chefs they would act as a smokescreen or a siren to the discrimination on and offline. I pondered on whether my participants highlighted the imbalance by absence. Could imbalance give a balanced view more clarity, would looking at the negative image reveal the gap in equality?

The quieter and less institutionalised, yet all-pervading underground work done by the freelance, self-taught and/or activist culinary professionals are a disruptive social mediated community that urge the democratisation of food – and the internet. I admire the skills and dedication to formal French cuisine immensely, but my research looked at the food in everyday lives and not formal dining particularly because all hospitality had shut down due to pandemic physical distancing rules, so it would have been an impossibility to do otherwise.

Although algorithmic biases and software design, from filtering to embedding cultures of invitation only, solidified many aspects of discrimination and stereotyping the pandemic years' online solidarity revealed, and then challenged, inequity. Hashtag and other social mediated 'campaigns' were ignited because online was the only social place (for the 60% of the world population with a device and the internet)[94] to screen-view share global stories of

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[94] https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/

on-the ground realities of hunger, vulnerability to the virus, homelessness, 'just in time' i.e.,

no-storage long chain food operations, and zero-hour contract work culture.[95]

So, I investigated a new vanguard of social-mediated French chefs and explored the

colonial history of French cuisine reimagined in countries such as Vietnam, Cameroon, and

Britain and indeed of France itself (figure 14). I saw how these centuries-old histories were

being re-told and reimagined on the internet. There seemed both a magnification of racialised

and gendered identity – a boldness of the silenced – that ran alongside a homogenisation of

cultural cuisine to trigger a new and globalised material food landscape.

Recipes and ingredients that online migrated mirrored the porosity of my methodology

as I took a bit of this, added a touch of that and finished off with a sprinkle of finale. My research

looked at how both food and the internet adopted, assimilated and absorbed – acculturated –

culture and how they synergistically communicated the on-going process of cultural change. I

highlight how food migrates, because it is dynamic material culture and a powerful signifier in

our memory and collective imagination, and as it travels – whether literally, virtually, or

symbolically – it fuses an individual's cultural past, present and future (Ben-Ze'ev, E., 2004).

Core group of participant chef-educators:

Pseudonym name	Gender	Cuisine	Location	Country of birth	Ethnicity
Charisma	M	French	Paris, France	Venezuela	Venezuelan
Sweetie	F	French	Paris, France	America	American/Jewish
Nicé	F	French	J'burg, South Africa	France	French
Franchement	F	Plant-based	Brittany, France	France	French
Elicit	F	French	Amsterdam, Holland	France	French /Dutch
One	F	Vietnamese	Copenhagen, Denmark	Vietnam	Vietnamese

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[95] https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/supply-chain/food-security-do-we-need-to-rethink-our-just-in-time-supply-chain-post-coronavirus/604872.article

Precarious	F	Cameroon	London, England	Cameroon	Cameroon
Flash	M	French	Perth, Australia	Australia	Australian
Wori and his French wife	M	Balinese	Ubud, Bali, moved from Northern France in 2019	Bali	Balinese
André	M	Ecological	Bogotá, Colombia	Colombia	French/Colombian
Kiki and Kalm	F	Moroccan	Rabat, Morocco	Morocco	Moroccan

Figure 14: Table of participant chef-educators

A meal is an heirloom and a re-invention, and as such it is a co-narration of identity and values. A dish of food can tell a story of a place and its people through the choice of ingredients, the variety of cooking processes used, the utensils for cooking and eating it and the etiquette of dining (Visser, M.,1992). No single meal is the same as another (clearly, I am not including industrial and processed food here, the anthesis of individuality), and a chef can personalise a dish by incorporating food cultures from 'far and wide' (adopt), then substitute ingredients and/or cooking techniques determined on availability and whim (adapt), and then serve the dish to others who may then go on to replicate the 'new' dish (assimilate).

This process can be gradual over many years – through the work of colonisation – or abrupt caused by war, famine, homelessness, forced migration, and as became clear in my fieldwork, through a pandemic framed by physical restrictions and online liberty. It can be a mixture of both, a stark initial shift (invasion, war, famine, or pandemic) followed by years of more enduring activity (economic migration, refugeeism or online dependence). Conversely, as pertinent to traditional French cuisine, food can hold-fast to tradition, and resist change in order to retain a symbolic identity, and thus French cuisine typically seen as a clearly defined style of cooking, upheld by a forceful and hierarchical structure of chef training, culinary

institutions, local ingredients in food markets, food rituals (e.g., the midday meal or the piece of bread on the edge of the plate to mop up juices) and gastro-tourism. Here I also looked to notable food writers and chefs to help understand French cuisine and food culture, such authors of food culture and cookery writers such as Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher - M.F.K. Fisher (1908-1922), or Elizabeth David (1913-1992) who were insightful on the technique, culture, fascination, and admiration of French cuisine.

The internet is a place of migration, nothing is fixed as the global and the local butt up against each other in co-created stories of the everyday (de Certeau, M., [1980] 1984). The online space can create – within the structure of algorithmic architecture – an objectified identity (Wang, X., 2013). One that plays with the notion of the porosity of boundaries and their ambiguity on the internet, and its conundrum of the bio-digital space that synthesises bio-technological construction, explored later in chapter six *The Affordances and the Allure of the Online* (P.204-235). It is the distancing from the physical self, the othering, created by the act of fictionalising biographies in the online space that arguably causes the frictional distance in the relationship with food – does the abstracted perspective impact on the tangibility of food knowledge and taste choices?

A dilemma that anthropologist Daniel Miller and his colleagues in *How the World Changed* (Miller, D., et al, 2016) explored pre-pandemic as how, '… most people now engage(d) with a multiplicity of on-line and off-line communications and identities with no clear boundary between them' (Miller et al, 2016, 112). Online food communities often welcome physically displaced peoples into a space where the familiar stories of food from home are shared and re-formed. A memorialisation that can fictionalise heritage, yet the internet, and in the case of my PhD research field of social media's *Instagram* and *Zoom*, can allow the seepage of cross pollination of the physical and the abstract experiential contexts.

The internet allowed many chef-educators and their cuisines, and far-flung fellow foodies, to interact in online encounters that the physical world could not achieve during the pandemic. Everyone who was active on *Instagram* and participated in *Zoom* togetherness shaped and reshaped the malleability of cultural cuisine. The porosity and transitory nature of the internet, embedded in hyper-active bio-digital existence, manipulated how cuisine reconfigured itself. Food and the internet are extremely volatile and dynamic material (and a-material culture) that are simultaneously the subject and conduit of cultural biographies. They were omnipresent features in lives, e.g., surfing the internet and eating, that demarcated a shift in the ways the everyday looked and felt like. A pandemic framed existence, that for millions was dominated by intra-domestic mealtimes, which punctuated carbon-copy days of connecting with others more-or-less solely via the internet.

2.12 Discussion

Like a meal 'à la Française' – on-going dining on communal plates of food with little demarcation of courses – my research was shaped by repeating fluid patterns of interaction. It dipped into the participants' social media activity, and at the same time experienced participant observation of their *Zoom* online cooking classes that sat alongside interviews and surveys, a style defined by the internet-scatter as opposed to linear ways of thinking (Carr., N., 2010). It was a methodological approach that studied internetworked relationships in an acute time of physical distancing coupled with the togetherness that the internet seamlessly provided.

The internet in pandemic-ised lives was deemed essential. It provided connectivity with friends and family and allowed work and study to continue remotely by linking up groups and

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individuals from educational settings and offices on video platforms such as *Teams*[96], *Slack*[97] or *Zoom*. It accelerated shopping from the 'comfort of home' to such heights that Jeff Bezos, owner of *Amazon*, was set to become the world's first trillionaire.[98] Online food deliveries profited as home diners munched their way through meals ordered on apps such as *Deliveroo* (2013), *UberEats* (2014) and, forcibly closed restaurants struggled with many turning to 'ghost kitchen'[99] work to prepare meals for diners they never physically saw.
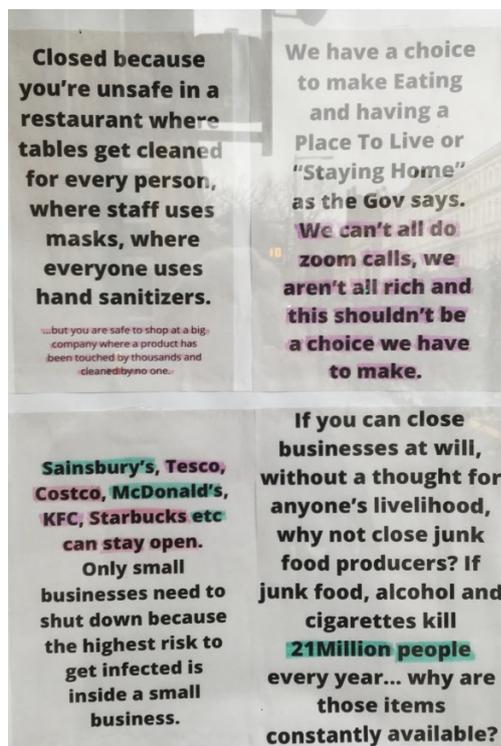
Closed because you're unsafe in a restaurant where tables get cleaned for every person, where staff uses face masks, where everyone uses hand-sanitisers. Sainsburys, Tesco, Costco, McDonald's, KFC, Starbucks etc. can stay open. Only small businesses need to shut down because the highest risk to get infected is inside a small business. We have a choice to make Eating and having a place to Live or 'Staying Home' as the Gov says. We can't all do zoom calls; we aren't all rich and this shouldn't be a choice we have to make. If you can close businesses at will, without a thought for anyone livelihood, why not close junk food producers? If junk food, alcohol and cigarettes kill 21 Million people every year … why are those things constantly available?

Figure 15: Sign in a London independent restaurant window and text, February 2021

Many independent places of hospitality suffered economic and emotional hardship, and the governmental decisions to close them wreaked havoc, as expressed, by a restaurant owner's frustrations at the inequality of the pandemic decisions (figure 15). The owners' well-

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[96] *Microsoft Teams* is a proprietary business communication platform developed by Microsoft.
[97] *Slack* is a channel-based messaging online platform.
[98] https://www.businessinsider.com/jeff-bezos-on-track-to-become-trillionaire-by-2026-2020-5?r=US&IR=T
[99] Virtual delivery only restaurants which exponentially in the pandemic using kitchens of closed hotels/ restaurants.

thought through opinion was displayed in their London restaurant window visible for the passing trudgers who were taking daily exercise from home isolation and social life online.

My research communicates greater understanding of the bio-digital world we are in. That the conversations and observations of the intimacies, performances and the representations of food and eating in bio-digital lives shout of the importance of cross-examining the embeddedness of internetworked affiliations. Ultimately that unless aware of the powerful pull of being online, blatantly viewed in a pandemic framed time and described in my thesis, docility could become the norm. Eating is social, sensual, cultural, and political. The internet cannot match the nuances, intimacies, and ancient ways we gather to cook and eat. What is timely and relevant about my research is that it consecutively examines the very physical and the very abstract, particularised through the pandemic, through the thread and lens of food and eating together, commensality's role in sharing food knowledge.

Rather than a technological, computer science or media studies' viewpoint anthropology can employ its qualitative, quantitative, and ethnographic skills to find and interpret the cultural life *of*, *on*, and *in* the internet. The research used the sociality of online brokered and commodified cooking and eating together, i.e., 'digital commensality',[109] as a catalyst to examine modern conundrums, and the cultural manifestations of physical distancing due to the pandemic. These might include discussions of cultural hybridity, inclusion and exclusion, culinary elitism, knowledge exchange economy, loneliness and solitude, online ethics, socially mediated connectivity, consumption and corporate power, food activism and democracy or, the threat of the 'serality' of a culturally homogenised culinary landscape (Crary. J., 2013, 116).

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[109] Spence, C., et al 2019

All my participants used a range of social media communicative techniques. Yet harking back to the acknowledgement that a digital ethnographer is irredeemably swayed by algorithmic filters in conjunction with ritual use, the 'attention economy' of social media worked by showing more of what had been seen, the familiar with subtle differences. Much like a cup of coffee in a café, it's just coffee, yet the myriad of tweaks to the size, toppings, flavourings and types of milk makes it a comfortable step away from the unfamiliar, the safe unexpected. Just enough difference to keep happy. Just like time spent on the screen scrolling through *Instagram* posts, the 'lizard brain'[110] addictive visual and emotional activity of dull monotony piqued with the odd rush of excitement enraptured the one-billion monthly global users of *Instagram.*[111]

The hosts (teachers), guests (students), and their social media communities acted as, '… aesthetic workers … in an aesthetic society' creating clusters of visual narratives that constructed identities and affinities. I examined who constructed such narratives, and how their visual narratives of commensality could be viewed as social cohesion (Manovich, L., 2016, 5). The style of *Instagram* as 'life as improvisation' allowed daily authorship from the chef-educators of their captioned scenes of aesthetics (figure 16), knowledge (figure 17), and sociality (figure 18), surrounding their food and eating experiences (Manovich, L., 2016, 12; Karayev et al., 2014).

I followed and analysed my participants social media activity and connectivity on *Instagram,* particularly the ways it endorsed their identity as experts in culinary knowledge and functioned as a gateway to their online classes. The visual construction of food as togetherness was a socially mediated practice that heralded solidarity between chef-educator host and

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[110] https://www.neurosciencemarketing.com/blog/articles/reptilian-brain-2.htm
[111] https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-statistics/

guest student and fed the need to gather in communities of affinity in pandemic distanced times.

Figure 16: *Instagram* aesthetics of conviviality and pleasure
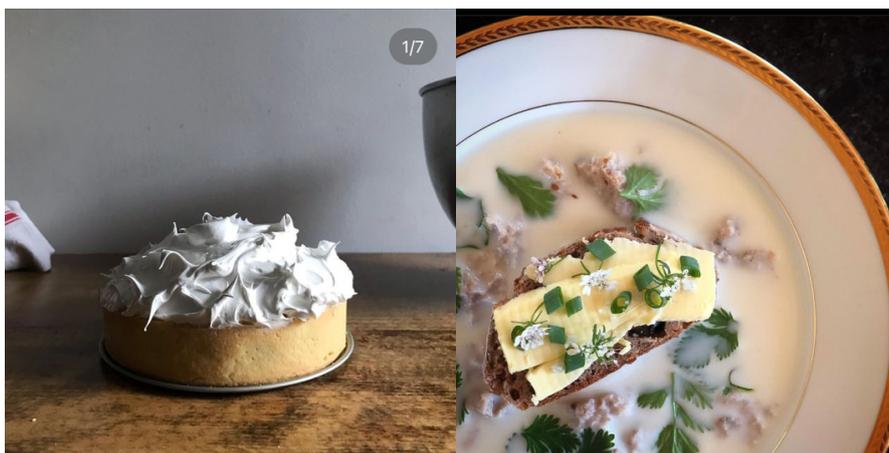
Figure 17: *Instagram* aesthetics of food knowledge and skills

Figure 18: *Instagram* aesthetics of sociality and reciprocity

Most chef educators' online classes, and their concurrent foodie imagery on *Instagram* felt like a marriage of marketing – the product and its performance. There were exceptions – particularly from André who also used his *Instagram* presence in live *Q&As* and 'reels' to push ever forward his sustainable and food education mission, and interestingly his *Instagram* profile looked different as it was him and his values, rather than the food, that was the message.

The online classes were an opportunity to study another sort of performance, more interactive yet still with the construction of everyday aesthetics at play with their Instagram imagery work. In the one-to-one semi-structured interviews I held – one per month throughout 2020-2021 – I focused on the chef-educator's reflections of being active, present, and reliant on these two spaces (*Instagram* and *Zoom*), and what this felt like in their bio-digital lives. Throughout the thesis I refer to these elements of *Instagram* activity, online class events and the content of online semi-structured interviews on the topics listed:

1. Their experiences of the acute transformations to culinary work due to the first *COVID-19* lockdown in March 2020.

2. How they incorporated technology into their work and changed their home spaces to allow the shift from offline to online work.

3. Their relationship with the senses (taste, touch, sight, hearing, smell), plus how movement, memory and room temperature 'perform' in physical and online cooking lessons.

4. Their feelings of a private space in a public place: how the intimacy of their and their guests' home kitchens (and members of the family within them) are made public.

5. What do they miss and what do they gain from moving their cooking lessons onto the internet?

6. The global influence of French cuisine and the role the internet plays in challenging or championing it.

7. Their experiences of being an individual or within a collective during the lockdown and who and what supported their work after lockdown two, winter 2020.

If they encountered moments of loneliness in themselves or others, and their reflections on the role of both food and being online after lockdown two winter 2020.

2. 13 Conclusion

Instagram imagery and its co-authorship beckoned powerfully at the beginning of the *COVID-19* pandemic lockdowns and saw an 17% increase in Western Europe from 2018, an increase greater than that of *Facebook* or *Snapchat*.[112] Undoubtedly lockdown combined with burgeoning trends, and new social media add-ons, which could explain this great increase of people using *Instagram* and video conferencing platform *Zoom.* My ethnographic fieldwork sought to investigate and interpret the practices, rituals, and networks *of*, *on* and *in* an immersive social and social-business space.

Much as a physical site, where the ethnographer may go to distinct locations within the larger field-site, I went to the socially mediated spaces on social media platforms – *Instagram* and *Zoom* – to observe and be a participant observer. I utilised *Instagram* as part of my methodological arsenal in my ethnography toolkit to gather research material. It is important to note that I used *Instagram* as a gateway to connect with chef-educators when setting up the participant group, and as a connective space to observe and interact in the co-narration of their stories.

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[112] https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-statistics/

It was also a live space that functioned as a repository for memory and experience that I used as a form of visual research library to store and analyse the chef-educators' memorialisation alongside mine. As a researcher *of*, *on* and *in* Instagram I tried to disrupt the enticing urge to only scroll through *my* algorithmic spoon-fed familiar, yet I fell in line with the coding filters just enough to be partisan but retain some objectivity to explore as an ethnographer. There is a need to be as immersed in the online fieldwork site as an ethnographer would be in the physical site and throw caution to the wind to being a pawn of computer-mediated sociality.

CHAPTER THREE: THE INTERNAL HUMAN COMPASS TO THE SENSORY WORLD
Making sense with the sensorium

To eat is to be vulnerable. The essential nutritional act of ingesting external substances is laden with potential changes to life both positive and negative, and everything in between. The navigation to safety, both physical and social, is primarily done with the culturally learned ways we comprehend the world by using our senses. The collaborative creation of the sensory praxis of eating, through gestural, linguistic, reflexive, or performative bodily responses is constantly and simultaneously internally charting, and externally communicating the safety, pleasure, or danger of food. This everyday practice is a cornerstone of moving through the world as we ingest and excrete its materiality, an 'analytical ability' of biological and sensory function that is additionally wrapped up in the formation and re-formation of the social political issues that frame it, which Sutton describes as *gustemology* (Sutton, D., 2010, 215).

This extraordinary activity is eloquently described by chef-educator André in one of his online cooking lessons when he spoke of the power of food and food making as '… gestures that are very ancient', and of, '… the molecules that are in the food going to be in my body and brain tomorrow' (André, observation notes, December 2020). The understanding of the sensory-filled places we inhabit is undertaken by transactional processes. Ones that deposit, save, and withdraw from the bank of our senses, the endless fusion of collaborative or individualistic work-in-progress of the bank teller – the sensorium managing our sensory knowledge resources.

My ethnographic methodology sought to examine the abstraction of the sensorium through observations, participant observations and interviews in online spaces, and auto-ethnographic examination within physical spaces. This approach produced opportunities to examine comparative endeavour in offline, online and hybrid spaces. Thematic interviews

(P.102) with my participants produced fourteen that were specifically focused on the senses, and bio-digital transformation into the online kitchen space. These interview sessions provided a time for the freelance chef-educators to reflect on the transition and transformation of the sensorium in their cooking education work. My fieldwork unravelled physical and spatial practice from its technological ally to identify the absences, substitutions, and add-ins for sensory navigation. This chapter examines the charting and communicating necessary in the permanently ongoing construction of the sensorium in everyday hybridised lives – through the lens of human entanglement with computer-mediated intelligent machine in my fieldwork site.

Firstly, a reflection on the physicality of the multi-sensorial experience of sharing food, which is an interactive act vital to the making and remaking of the sensorium (P.21; 43; 85; 91). It is the co-construction of an analytical interface that allows the external world – in the form of food – to vigilantly enter the body through the age-old practice of eating together. An activity that informs a lifetime's work of culturing tastebuds (P.108; 115). This leads to an examination of how the pandemic's physical distancing measures abruptly shifted the work of the freelance chef-educators, of how they had to adapt their physical relationship with the sensorium, and imagine, curate, and manage the transition of their physical sensorium practices into the online space (P.12). Consideration is then given to how the chef-educators hosted the sensorium, in their newly constructed online food work set in their hybrid kitchen spaces. Plus how the physical practices of sensory integration showed signs of dysfunctionality and imbalance, yet also creativity, in the internetworked spaces of collaborative sensorium-making (P.185).

Online sound and vision heralded as dominant aids to gain sensory-meaning is an illusion because, I judge, it is the quiet multimodal work of the hybridised sensorium – in

conjunction with mirror neurons[113] – that is at work (P.107; 126; 147; 185). Through cultural and memorial association, and a readiness for an abstraction of food, the ability to virtualise our mouths, (P. 60; 91; 127) in increasingly internetworked ways was, perhaps, shaping modern eating behaviours, and relationships via sensory-filled associations with the physicality of food (P.43; 107; 177; 157). It also vastly reimagines how learning happens, and the drive behind the culture of the knowledge economy and intellectual capital. Attention is given to multi-modal, representational, linguistic, bodily, cultural and abstracted practices observed in fieldwork and discussed in the chef-educator interviews on the virtualisation of the senses, sense-making, and the sensorium (§ 3.4). The interviews worked alongside observations and participative observations of hybrid-kitchen practices that brought another layer of understanding to the chef-educators' sensory dilemma of enforced transition to working online during the pandemic.

The human-technological hybridised affordances given to trans-human[114] co-construction of the sensorium (intimated in observations of 100 chef-educator and participants' kitchens) suggested a new human-machine sensory lexicon, one framed by the hybrid channels of knowledge-transfer and exchange that were rapidly evolving during my fieldwork. Some final thoughts for this section pivot around the spectrum of opportunities and challenges for a human-machine made sensorium because, '… we may sense and experience more than what makes us human today' in the visual and auditory hyperactive online food space of machine learning (AI) managed possibilities (Velasco, C., and Obrist, M., 2020, 69).

3.1 The multi-sensory experience of sharing food

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[113] The field of neuroscience discovered that humans react to the actions observed in others.
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3510904/
[114] Trans-human resembles a human but with abilities beyond a human with use of emerging technology.

Eating together socially, commensality, as a social act rooted to instincts of being in a group for security has developed over millennia (Jones, M., 2007). It has become a signifier of kinship and thus a deeply cultured performance of structuring borders and identities. Boundaries that demarcate how gender, culture and status inform inclusion or exclusion meet acts of biological and social need that revolve around sharing. The reciprocity of the gift, whether that be a bowl of rice or a nugget of intimate data manifest notions of solidarity, and the sharing of substances, physiologically, and socially – embedded in the continuance of transmitting food knowledge – create and regulate ties of affinity through encultured choreographies and rituals of belonging. Gathering to eat together is an opportunity to inform and re-inform the sensorium, through exploring unfamiliar and revisiting familiar tastes, in repetitive and frequent moments of co-learning. This key aspect of the rituals and etiquettes of gathering to eat are alluded to by Kalm, the daughter of a mother-daughter cooking experience double act in Morocco with:

> *We used to do cooking classes in person, we receive people in our house … go to the market together… then back home we share minty Moroccan mint tea ceremony … and start cooking together, then we enjoy the meal all together.*

Kalm, interview, November 2020

It is an example of cultural learning that processes perceptions and reactions as a collective endeavour, as Kalm repeatedly says, 'together'. It structures mutually beneficial practices of training the senses as chef-educator Charisma believes, '… your mouth is more or less … a sort of library' (Charisma, interview November 2020). A library that works by, '… oral referral, we think we are tasting with the tongue', but it is actually the mouth and nose acting together as joint librarians to give sensory information in the mouth (Spence, C., 2017, 21).

In addition, because tastebuds (gustatory cells) only have a life cycle of 10-14 days, it is an on-going process – one of repeatedly returning to exploring and re-affirming the emotional-sensory practice of understanding food to benefit new taste buds. As a shared communicative

and learning encounter, the culturation of taste buds from birth (and arguably in utero), and throughout life, signpost what is safe and appropriate to eat. Unanimity, or cultural diversity of interpretation depends on internalised sensorial memories learned, or not learned, as part of social groups.

The co-construction of the sensorial methods of, '… eating bodies', which concentrates on 'human metabolic engagements with the world'[115] could be heavily weighted to the senses of sound and vision (Mol, A., 2011, 470; 2021, 102-125). However, that bi-sensory assumption does not account for the life-long cultural memory-building through flavour – taste and smell together – and touch that imprints emotion onto the visual image. The collective urge to physically bond together to eat safely and pleasurably includes seeking individual meaning from flavour in unified taste and smell – *Retronasal Olfaction* – as well as using sound, touch (haptic, textural, or passive), temperature, movement (internal and external) and vision to create cross-modal sensory review. A total sensorial experience that chef-educator Nicé alluded to when she described her physical face-to-face lessons of pre-pandemic social distancing, with:

> *In my place, I always ask people to remove their shoes … it's also being more grounded to the floor, it's the whole culinary experience, you have to work with your senses … people need to test before they can season, they need to listen, they need to smell before, for example, when you fry, before you lift up any pieces from the pans, the smell tells you when to do so before watching. It's super important. Some people hate touching, but I try to invite them to do it, because it's also a way to connect with the food.*

<div align="right">Nicé, interview, January 2021</div>

Chef-educator Franchement, from her northern French farm co-operative home, confirmed the importance of how physical touch works to understand the processes of cooking with, '… there's a transformation in the consistency, perhaps that you can indicate by touch' (Franchement, interview, January 2021). Professional kitchen owner Flash elaborates on the

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[115] https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2021/09/24/book-review-eating-in-theory-by-annemarie-mol/

quiet work of touch with his assertation that cooking is tactile, and includes intentional active haptic touch, to discriminate and identify as part of the food and eating 'toolkit' of food knowledge:

> *… touch is very important for me for cooking. I actually don't like cooking with gloves on and stuff because it feels weird for me. I know a lot of people think it's more hygienic and better way to cook, I just feel awkward because I do touch the food. I do like to check how hot the steak is … a lot of decisions, whether the food is cooked or not, is made by touch.*
>
> Flash, interview, January 2021

Ultimately the cultural work of mirror-neurons allows the sharing of the experience of another's mouthful as we watch the expressions, responses and actions of others' enjoyment, displeasure, recognition, and surprise. The importance of this is alluded to by anthropologist David Sutton when sharing the tastes of food is, '… a key component of ritual, which has typically been understood as heightening or stimulating sensory experience to instil social or cosmological values' (Sutton, D., 2010, 209). A theme of solidarity taken up by community food project co-founder Maverick who pointed out:

> *It's to create a common atmosphere we can all enjoy at the same time, so it's a shared experience. Yes, exactly, the experience, you share the experience with your nose and your ears and your eyes and then you communicate…*
>
> Maverick, interview, November 2021

The notion of the importance of atmosphere highlighted by Maverick reveals the often forgotten, sometimes ethereal, spaces of cooking and eating as having a deeply multi-sensory ambience. The lighting, temperature, exterior noises, combination of odours, movement of people and objects, and so much more provide comfort or discomfort.

The meshing together of tiny detail, large activity, the variety and dynamics of gathering personalities, and sensory interaction make gathering around food – commensality – potentially full of spontaneity and serendipity. Project engagement manager Mims complements Maverick's view on the atmosphere or ambience that is human-made and comforting in its simplicity and sensory familiarity:

In the physical space where you're really engaging … I mean, it's not just the voice, it's the visual, it's the exterior sounds, it's so much else that goes on when you're sharing the same ambience or environment … you can kind of comment on the kind of lukewarm tea together and things like that…

Mims, interview, September 2020

So, presuming – with the technology available at present – the answer to whether the 2D online kitchen space can have the same collective or shared ambience as the offline is no, then can ambience from another's kitchens be felt? Is multi-sensory ambience transferrable, communicable, or indeed appreciated and acknowledged in the online space, and is it deemed necessary or relevant to more than-human lives when the screen's absence of multi-sensory filled interaction with food negates our sense making skills such as touch (P.43; 90; 109-111; 259).

Physical lack of touch, notable in the pandemic's time of online sociality that abstained from touching others, is examined in chapter five *The Pandemic's Epidemic* (P.174-201) as, '… food may be necessary for survival, but touch is what sustains us' (McNichols, K., 2021). To unravel further the conundrum of physical collective and social sensorium construction I looked to chef-educator Sweetie's recollections of her use of smell to highlight the embodied sensory navigation of her physical kitchen (Sutton, D.,2010):

… you get to learn smelling things while they're cooking. Smell that, you know … caramel is not just a visual, it's a smell … maybe like it's burning, or that's when you know, it'll change rapidly. They might have a timer on and I'm in the living room, 'you guys need to check' your whatever it is and 'no, no, I have a timer'… but no, I can smell from here that it's ready. I'm always right.

Sweetie, interview, January 2021

It was clear that in her compact Parisian kitchen Sweetie competently deciphered the sensory-loaded transformations of cooking, but was it impossible for her to decipher another's kitchen in their online cookery lesson space? The closest she came to it was to describe, and guide in words the informative smells to pay attention to because there was a disconnection and a delayed reaction between a sensory trigger and its collective reactive response. A

temporal estrangement that Nicé highlighted with a comment made from her large South African kitchen with light streaming in through the windows. She spoke of an email communication she had received a day after her cooking lesson, '… my client wrote me and she said, '… my house, I've never smelled so-much spices'…' (Nicé, interview, January 2021).

The lack of immediacy defaulted to verbal description that diluted what the sensorium's instantaneous work did so effortlessly in a physical kitchen. Of course, '… we all live in very different taste worlds … so our lifetime sensorium work is highly individualised' making a uniform response to sensory ambience impossible without the individualised nuances developed through commensality's interaction (Spence, C, 2017, 16). I responded to Sweetie's comments on caramel making, from my quirky work-in-progress French home with my own words of:

> *Yes, I think you're so right, I think we do have this way of reading or understanding a dish of food because of the way it looks. And the way it triggers a lot of our memory, our sensorium our bank of memories, our bank of cultural knowledge, etc., as to what it might taste like. And I think smell, like you very rightly said, is so key to that extra layer … cultural, so cultural. And the nose is the closest organ to our brains. There's a lot of crossing over, of triggering something that's almost subconscious …*

Sweetie, interview (my response), January 2021

The '… almost subconscious' of the sensorium is a dense and huge theme to consider. Undoubtedly there were connections to sensorial triggers for memory and association, as alluded to by Flash from his spacious Australian self-built home, '… most memories, I think are triggered by smell. More so than visual things, I think. People get memories or flashbacks more by smelling things than necessarily seeing them …' (Flash, interview, January 2021). The theme of the subconscious relationship to food is an important aspect to consider in the unravelling of ambience, and it is a relationship returned to in greater depth in chapter six on hybridity (P.208-242).

The sensory limitations of the online kitchen seemed to propel *Ocularcentrism*, the linear stratification that heralds the hegemony of the eye, to a magnified status. The endeavours to represent food visually and aesthetically has a long history of practice, signifying that, '… our seeing is always motivated by desire', a desire built on dependency on getting enough daily calories, yet sensually enjoying the process of eating and its role in status. Yet, as anthropologist Paul Rozin continues to reflect upon the conflictions of eating viewed as, '...a situation that is rich with potential disgusting events', with saliva-filled mouths open wide revealing the start-point of a process of great transformation (Rozin, P., 1999, 11). What is culturally desirable or disgusting to eat, and the uncomfortable knowledge that eating, even the most appealing of meals, ultimately results in, '… our moist and messy transformation of identifiable forms into a disgusting wad', provoke deeply conflicting sensorial emotions for both the physical and the internetworked aesthetics of eating (Rozin, P., 1999, 2).

Figure 19: 'Seeing a fish, seeing a fish, seeing a fish', Farrell, M.B, August 2021

The awareness of the viewed is so definable, in comparison to the other more inconspicuous sensorial provocations embedded in a tactile world, as we physically inhabit a place of odours, sounds, flavours and movement. But vision can dominate the other senses because it is ably independent, the only sense with shutters, eyelids that can close and so filter the outside world. With sight we generalise, as opposed to personalise, the world. The co-joined offline-online kitchens and their activity of cooking and eating takes on performative qualities of viewer and viewed, indeed of performer and audience (P.90-92; 98; 158; 169). Does this abstraction of eating in the online space relegate food to voyeuristic visual entertainment as represented in figure 19, 'Seeing a fish, seeing a fish, seeing a fish' where the layers of online relationship include seeing the physical fish, seeing the fish as through the smartphone camera's eye, and then seeing the photograph image as a piece of shared visual data, is a more complex multi-sensory practice being stimulated, one that depends on the competences made in the physical space but operate in abstraction in the online one.

3.2 Transition of the sensorium into the online space

This section considers two key aspects – technical and spatial – in the conscious transitional work undertaken by the chef-educators in setting up the bio-digital stage for their online lessons. An undertaking necessitated by the unexpected and heady response to a pandemic that raged throughout the world (2020-2022) caused an abrupt move of food work from the offline to the online space, which had consequences for sensorium co-creation. A once predominately physical practice accelerated in line with the pandemic's shift to dependency for millions on computer-mediated communication into the internetworked kitchen. The chef- educators' construction of their new way of working were acts of structure (technical and spatial) and culture (practice-based efforts to navigate emotions, identity, and camaraderie). Both the architecture (i.e., the structure) and the activity (i.e., culture) aimed to

convey professionally led food-making togetherness but was this an illusion because in doing so they had to grapple with the sensorium's separation from its physical impression and expression, something fundamental to the physical kitchen space.

These tensions were examined in fifteen-months of ethnographic fieldwork May 2020-August 2021, and gave insight into individual and generalised responses and realisations. Questions such as, did the focus group of chef-educators imagine and actualise their role as host, and were they able to facilitate collective participation in their online lessons, felt important to me. Did they factor in the instrumentality of the sensorium to allow opportunities for co-culturing taste buds, and if so what were the preparations, adaptations, and connective tools they utilised?

The chef-educators hurriedly took their deeply physical work into the online space during the pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, with the technical side primarily the laptop and handheld (smartphone) computers, microphones, lighting, and a variety of video conference platform apps, as the essential everyday toolkit for the chef-educators. A startling change from the pre-pandemic workshop kitchen filled with hand-tools, electrical appliances, plenty of hand and body work, and perhaps the occasional smartphone food order, recipe check-up or *Instagram* photo. Aged between early thirties and early sixties, my participants spanned thirty years of living with the internet and were all pre-pandemic internet active – to varying degrees – on social media, search engines, email and computer mediated social platforms. In one-to-one interviews and *Instagram* activity I was able to answer some of the questions posed in the previous paragraphs through analytical comparisons of the participant's computer savviness or their receipt of support from techie others. Chef-educator Sweetie admitted that:

> … if my kids hadn't been out of school, because of the whole confinement thing. I don't know that I would have started this [*Zoom* cooking classes] because it requires so much figuring out … the light started in the summer and then … oh, crap, the light changed. We needed lights … where to get the lights?

<div align="right">Sweetie, interview, November 2020</div>

Their technical skills ultimately determined the ease, or otherwise, of a successful computer-mediated technological shift to viable online work. During lockdowns (and in the interim lifting of pandemic restrictions of summers 2020 and 2021) all of the participants increased their online presence – whether that was on one or multiple social media channels. *Instagram* became a constant gateway to their online persona and link to their other social mediated activity. It was an easy-to-access (no sign-up required) place for information about their online classes, food home deliveries, and sometimes a space for solidarity in a time of pandemic and identity crisis.

I decided to use *Instagram* (IG) as my gateway channel to predominately focus on the human-technological entanglement of the video conferencing platform *Zoom* – a virtual space where all the chef-educators conducted their online cooking lessons. The curation of a 'perfect' food story was easier to stage on *IG*, as posts were made by an individual, in their quiet aesthetic moments of solo-focus, as part of co-narrated story-making, unlike in their live and public-facing *Zoom* space of distraction. None of the chef-educators, barring Flash, had prior technical knowledge or had used *Zoom* before the pandemic and they all were self-taught, shared tips in small online networks, or attended another's *Zoom* lesson to help them prepare the cameras, computers or microphones and hone their presentation style. As Sweetie (September 2020) explained of her choice, '… it [*Zoom*] wasn't expensive to have your own account, how efficiently it worked, how easy it was for people that weren't very techie …'.

Being the solo host for *Zoom* cooking lessons needed the chef-educator to be video platform technician, camera operator, narrator, cook and performer all at the same time, an

exasperating challenge for nearly all participants – unless family members pitched in to help.

Difficulties such as those observed in a lesson with Parisian-based Cynic were common:

> *It may be because I was using my iPod (though I don't 100% think so) that the camera angles he uses are a little skewed. He has the overhead one and the full frontal very close up to him and I can only see from his nose upward…*
>
> Cynic, observation notes (cooking lesson), February 2021

And similarly, with observations of a Nigerian chef based in Paris, Oblivious and how his co-staged cooking encounter suffered from maverick sounds in both online (his) and offline (my) kitchen because:

> *… my focus was on two things, listening to Oblivious and my chopping and stirring … it helped to calm and make sense of an experience where the sound quality and discontinuity was abrasive. I was happy doing my own thing … but other participants messaged in the chat box that they needed Oblivious to angle his camera, so we didn't just see his head but see inside the pot to understand better what to do. I wasn't actually able to hear him too well either over the noise of my food bubbling in the pot.*
>
> Oblivious, observation notes, (*cookalong Zoom* event), October 2020

Figure 20: Cooking lesson with Charisma, October 2020

Charisma also suffered at times from technical hitches beyond his control that required him to resort to a repertoire of solutions with his participants as one observation of a family choux-pastry making lesson (figure 20) illuminated:

> *We four logged in on one laptop [as Charisma had requested to prevent feedback noise], but the sound was poor. So, we switched to my iPod to complement the sound, but keep the laptop visuals. But again, the sound was too low, so we then switched to an iPhone for the sound. This worked. So, we had two devices after all but only one with the sound on.*

Charisma, observation notes, (cooking lesson), October 2020

What became noticeably clear was the amount of extra work – invisible work – that had to be undertaken by the hosts – the chef-educators, to 'put on' a cooking lesson in the online kitchen. Lessons inadvertently demanded a repertoire of quiet dishes so that the host could be heard clearly. The struggle to hear because of the noise of cooking in host and guests' kitchens was common as noted in observations of an online cooking lesson with Cynic:

> *I too am on mute at this point as the frying noise is quite loud and I don't want to be annoying to the others. I wonder if my screen has frozen (it has done this twice in the lesson - I am never too sure if it's me or the others' internet as the 'problem') with a 'I'm back' as the frozen screen melts backs into technical connection …*

Cynic, observation notes, (cooking lesson), February 2021

And these technical demands shifted the mindset and focus from sensorial to technical because so much time and effort was spent by the hosts preparing, practising and ensuring that the 'show' was technically on. The tech became high maintenance and the intimacies of the senses suffered because of the trickiness of not having '… a point of reference for it [the sensorium's work] via *Zoom*. The visual works better. But the smell, and taste is really hard' (Sweetie, interview January 2021). The causal disconnecting impact of technology – in the form of a camera – trained on a commensal table at one of Flash's virtual-physical food gathering events showed the contagiousness of feeling stripped of intimacies of the sensorium, and the abiding feeling of being deferential to technology:

The physical guests (sat around a dining table viewable in an on-screen guest box) seemed subdued at the table and were clearly very uncomfortably aware of the camera at their dining table. As they came to sit at the 10-seat table no-one wanted to sit near the camera.

Flash, observation notes, (cooking and gathering event), July 2020

Now to consider the spatial aspect of the transformation. The participants had to make similar contortions moving plenty of large and small furniture plus technological devices. There were a few instances when the chef-educators hosted their lessons in somewhere other than their kitchen, and this was usually because the bedroom, someone else's kitchen or garden gave more atmosphere or space to move and position two cameras and lighting, or sometimes it was because the house was shared with others also trying to manage new work practices from pandemic framed home too.

All the chef-educators were valiant, pro-active, professional, and imaginative in their endeavours to adjust and then confidently and publicly display and share their food education skills. They had to completely adapt to new and unanticipated internetworked ways of engendering the sensuality of food in their food education work. Their professional and personal struggle moved from their habitually noisy, smelly, hot, kinaesthetic, and social physical kitchen, to the online kitchen one, a place defined by the distinct disenfranchisement of the sensorium's role in navigating food and eating.

3.3 Hybrid kitchens

Screen-based activity can produce a hyperactive and voyeuristic online relationship with food, and ultimately a detachment from the often messy and unglamorous context of food making. There were online differences observed between group and solo kitchen guests, with the group lesson a more orchestrated and restrained interaction mindful to the demands of quantity or scale (as in amount of people and their activity and resultant increased sensory stimuli). The solo guest student revelled in liberal noisy excess without impacting on anyone

else in their hybrid kitchen. But compare this to the physical group kitchen space, such as a professional workshop kitchen filled with the combined efforts of bustle, the physicality of a solo kitchen is stark in its one-dimensionality. The hybrid kitchen seemed the latter for most solo guests (which were the predominant type during my fieldwork) as they relied on the host to play with the imaginings of kitchen communality to bridge the estranged divide made by lives on separate screens. Oftentimes this felt a challenge for all concerned:

> *If I was with her in the physical space, we could communicate through the language of the senses as our skills as women in our 50's in the kitchen. This is 'stolen' from us and I feel thwarted and incompetent.*

<div align="right">Kalm, observation notes, (cooking lesson), April 2021</div>

But for the host their physical kitchen could be virtually active in their guests' online kitchens as often their watchful presence added to the feeling of connection – or their efforts to make connection were sufficient enough to feel extant to the guests. However, many factors plagued this potential when the lived experience of physical togetherness could not technically be transported, as described by Sweetie:

> *But you're having to monitor the backs of people turned working at their worktop or as they disappear into the kitchen, and then I try and understand by their movements and their actions. That's trickier than you … actually, that takes skill to be able to gauge what someone's doing.*

<div align="right">Sweetie, interview, January 2021</div>

And by Nicé who added to my understanding the difficulty many chef-educators had with non-communicative participants or those who struggled with poor internet connectivity. Oftentimes guests made themselves visible to the camera eye or were 'hiding behind' equipment in an oblivious or inhibited way:

> *… the most challenging sense to use on the online is the touch. Because I don't necessarily see always what they're doing … They can hide behind the equipment online … So, touch is probably the sense that is the more difficult to use to develop online …*

<div align="right">Nicé, interview, January 2021</div>

The lesson host had to work hard to simulate a sensory-rich interactive 3D experience in 2D, frequently with guests who were hard to reach or unpractised in online interaction. Often as not this endeavour failed or struggled, which an examination of temporalities, movement and agency undertakes in this section are the three key features of the hybrid or bio-digital kitchen were contextualised by idiosyncratic creation and the on-going curation of co-joined online and offline kitchens.

The screens of television and computer are cronies in their narrative-making existential experience of learning to cook as a commensal activity. Journalist and media academic Gilly Smith in her book 'Taste and the Television Chef' (2020) describes the, '… slipping from reality and its representation on screen', and how the, '… symbiotic relationship between production and audience creates the image, the investment both ways suspend the disbelief' to give weight to acknowledging the ingrained cultural ability to abstract and fictionalise food both on television and computer screens (Smith, G., 2020, 100).

Images made through acting as prosumers, denoting and connoting the language of imagery (§2.9; §4,3), sidestep sensory provocation as key to human bonding, though that said about the abstractions of food, in my interview with Smith (July 2020) she asserted that the internet, akin to social glue, has connective ability. She also believes that it is human behaviour that shapes computer-mediated technology (and not vice versa) and responded to my summing up, '… so technologies are being shaped by humans' with a confident 'completely'.

The online symbiotic relationship recognises the producer (host) and audience (guest) as characters cast in online co-joined roles, the producer as the software, the culture of human-machine entanglement the director. The hybrid-kitchen is a synthesised bio-digital space, not integrated or amalgamated but a novel creation, neither one or the other or borne made of both. There are definite issues with guest passivity and host dominance in their internetworked

kitchens, as relationships enacted in hybrid-kitchens are of a host-controlled space, and the guest's passivity works in tandem with host dominance to shape the experience and ultimately the culture of the online. The uneasiness of being a chef-educator in a hybrid- kitchen, one that had so rashly 'colonised' the physical kitchen because of the pandemic, was dejectedly viewed by most of the participants, '…because if you're not in the place with me to actually smell it, I don't know if that gives you the experience necessary to want to learn …' (Sweetie, interview, January 2021).

Or of Franchement:

> *… one-to-one contact when you are with someone over the same pot or over the same chopping board showing them something, even simply the presence of each other …I don't think you get that [online]. I don't think I've got even remotely present to that …*
>
> Franchement, interview, January 2021

There were two strands of complications for the chef-educators and their guests to navigate in hybrid-kitchens – one machine-made and one human made. Throughout the thesis I describe this endeavour as the transfer of the sensorium, from offline to online work practices and then back again post lockdowns, as embedded in the architecture and activity of bio-digital experience. The difficulty is that the definition between the two strands is framed by beyond-human daily lives embedded in the prosumer project – so where is the distinction between human and machine activities? Case in point regarding the presumed reality of the hybrid-kitchen, it is a novel place made from the machine culturing of human propensity to gather around food. But is there still the opportunity, for bio-digital experience in hybrid-kitchens, to share taste experiences not solely of and for individual perception?

The experience of physically eating together can reveal the act of 'co-tasting', as described by scholar Jens Sejer Østergaard Rasmussen in, 'Sharing and Transmitting Taste in a Professional Danish Restaurant Kitchen' (2018). Rasmussen ponders on whether an '…indubitably social phenomenon … binds people to each other and the environment' through

sensorial and empathetic interpretations (Rasmussen, J.S.O., 2018, 136). My research explores what the boundedness, which Rasmussen talks of, look like in-and-between the hybrid kitchens. Can the socially ingrained practices that foster interpretations and embodiment of taste – through multi-sensorial experiences both passively absorbed and actively sought – translate to practices in the hybrid kitchen?

One of the chef-educators with television experience is André who blurred the boundaries between host and guest, and poetically utilised language to trigger the sensory playground in his cooking lessons. He used the terms 'here' (his kitchen) and there (guests' kitchens) in a way that somehow personalised as it clarified the distance and differences, rather than maintain an illusory notion of uniform experience, as most of the other chef-educators did, maybe because for the other chef-educators the online lesson was easier to handle if differences were limited? In a lesson making pasta in homemade sauce André offers optimism for the hybrid kitchen's potential for co-imaging sensory food togetherness in the online space:

> *… stop kneading when it feels nice, your dough is different from mine, it depends on the energy you give it, when it's nice (a very vague term but it seems to fit here with the sensorial and pleasing feel of my smooth dough) and homogenous. In the chat-box Jay echoes this with writing, '… cooking is a somatic act and, your body knows …'*

And:

> *'I'm hearing, I'm listening here, it's boiling right to the top, the aroma here is really getting amazing, the tomatoes are giving away all their juices' as he presses the tomatoes firmly down with a wooden spoon.*

André, observation notes, (cooking lesson), January 2021

Temporality significantly influenced how the sensorium navigated transference from the physical to the online kitchen. The blurring of time-zones, as the world-wide-web was a deeply global interface met the technological 'glitches' of buffering (e.g., figure 35), time-lapses and catch-up fast motion on video-call platforms, the disjointedness of experiencing transformation in cooking through micro detail rather than holistic viewpoint, and the disparity

in pace between chef- educator and students all challenged the sensorium's work, and so I observed how laminated and chaotic online and siloed gathering around food could be.

An example that communicated this frenetic human-technological symbiosis was with Flash, who longed to visit his Parisian professional kitchen – an impossible journey amidst pandemic lockdowns and closed borders. In his large – ideal for a party – family-kitchen he led a tri-country online food experience for about fifteen participants to socialise and cook together in an unstructured way. However, for me the fast pace of the event via *Zoom* video conference platform, '… felt like being on a fairground roller coaster charging along trying to keep in the moment absorbing all around as you cling on …' (*cookalong* event, observation notes, July 2020).

Figure 21: Layers of Zoom togetherness, Farrell, M.B., July 2020

The 'Layers of *Zoom* togetherness' (figure 21), of the offline, the bio-digital and the online experience, with its embeddedness with design code, were seamlessly bound up in temporal moment. What would it feel like to be a slower experience, a mindful experience? My

experience of Flash's gathering – as the sole non-German – was of voyeuristically watching others in motion and jangled sound, their voices jumbled in amongst a loud soundtrack of Flash's 80's music hits.

Agency was framed by the communication architecture of *Zoom* technology. A framing that separated into short-comings, on-line etiquette, technical problems and the hybrid skills of host and guests. These four elements added or detracted from host and guest human agency in a machine-made encounter. Questioning how human could participants be when the relational interface was so dominant yet illusory. It was often something simple like camera angles, e.g., for a guest or the chef-educator to see more clearly what was happening in each other's kitchen. There were many examples such as, '… I couldn't really see it very well … and it was just so frustrating. If we're in the classroom I can fix that for them …' (Chief, interview, June 2021), or in one of Sweetie's lessons when a guest had technical problems at 'her end':

> *There are a few problems with sound for the NY woman, she cannot hear Sweetie. Sweetie's daughter (her tech and general help) tries to sort it out from their end, whilst the rest of us bandy tips like, 'leave and come back in again', or 'use the chat-box'. It is sorted out but, there is a definite disgruntled feeling from the woman, and it has put a jar in the smooth process. Sweetie seems ok about it though the technical hitch breaks her momentum …*

Sweetie, observation notes, (cooking lesson), August 2020

Or there could be unspoken etiquette of video conferencing platform's mute and unmute:

> *Everyone was on unmute, but as I thought I wasn't going to speak German (and spoil the atmosphere with a booming English voice), I'd stay on mute. Now and then I got a pop-up message saying I was 'spotlighted to unmute' and then I was unmuted, though I kept quiet and eventually and shyly putting my option back to mute …*

Flash, observation notes, (cooking event), *November 2020*

Movement – and the watching of people and objects in the act of moving revealed an unexpected aspect of the hybrid-kitchen as a space, party to or not – togetherness. The essence of movement is tactile and kinaesthetic, and so problematises the understanding of

the viscosity in the way ingredients move, or how the intricacies of a hand cradle and shapes a lump of dough. I refer to mirror neurons (P.107; 126; 147; 185; 290), first investigated in primates as to the learning made by watching another 'in action' in their environment, which places understanding of the ecologies of moving elements as key to ecology of humanness. Being in tune with the causal activity of movement is profoundly physical, and the sensorium works to navigate the reasons and responses to movement in a myriad of ways.

The hybrid kitchens, of hosts and guests, were spaces of contention because technical time-lag and buffering, and then speeded-up viewing disfigured understanding and jarred the flow of continuity of the cooking processes. Then there were also the regular adjustments to the chef-educator's camera/s, e.g., the physical moving of cameras to ensure a better view of the ingredient's activity. An action intended to aid an understanding of transformational movement in cooking, yet often had the unintended reminder of the limitations of online togetherness:

> *Nicé has two cameras, one on her, the other on the worktop, which she has to move mid-way through to show the pan of caramel cooking. Because she is talking, and the camera over the food is not picking up any noise, the screen is small, not on speaker view. I peer to see what's happening on the worktop and in the pan.*
>
> Nicé , observation notes, (cooking lesson), November 2020

3.4 Human-machine sensory lexicon

To suggest a new and evolving human-machine lexicon (in and of the kitchen and dining space) recognises the interplay with television, radio, and in many ways the age-old identity of the teacher or presenter. What is attempted here is to present observations of new language formations, and the consequential realisations made *in* and *of* the online pandemic kitchens. I reflected upon established scholarship such as anthropologist Mary Douglas' pivotal work 'Deciphering a Meal', of how, '… food categories encode social events' (Douglas, M., 1972, 61). Her work made me think about the shift for food categories because of the internet, and of

social events framed by the pandemic-distancing measures. Ultimately physical distancing measures accelerated and normalised the culture of online and so there was more clarity, an obviousness of being an internetworked society.

The pandemic's acute rupture gave stark contrast to physical interaction, and provided a unique time of a highly-viewable tipping-point in the human-machine lexicon shift. The daily rhythms of online life experienced an increase of three-hundred and seventy-six million new users during the first six-months of 2020,[116] and the pandemic years finished with 59%[117] of the world propelled into online-practices to suggest '… experiencing has been replaced by watching', particularly whilst physical distancing and travel restrictions continued into 2022 (v. Ede, Y., 2009, 62). The passivity of the viewer and the impact they created whilst 'at' an online cooking class was described by Sweetie:

> *A couple of people just watching are talking about whatever else because they're not actually in it and it's distracting and they're not actually part of what's going on, kind of creepy. It's kind of voyeuristic and weird. Yeah. I don't like it. And I didn't realise I wouldn't like until after it happened a couple times … This is so uncomfortable. Please, if you're going to come, please cook because it's just too weird for me and for everybody else that's involved.*
>
> Sweetie, interview, January 2021

A bowlful of food (whether actual or represented) can provoke anticipation of satiation, potential commensality, and pleasure, but in which ways does a bowlful of 'virtualised' food trigger such responses? There were numerous times in fieldwork online lessons where the food-making was abstracted from human interaction with the camera only trained on centre-staged ingredients. For example, Precarious' lesson (observation notes, January 2021) when, '… most of the time we can't see what Precarious is doing as the camera is pointed at her hands horizontally, we can't see what she is doing to the food', or of a lesson with Wori:

> *He has two cameras and he asked if I could see his board and worktop, I say yes and look at the view of worktop camera. This is a strange idea that I need to think about more … food as the object to connect*

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[116] https://datareportal.com/reports/more-than-half-the-world-now-uses-social-media
[117] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-july-global-statshot

with, with hands but no face visible. A disjointedness that polarises the activity and creates a duality with the chef-educator, a duality that feels voyeuristic.

<div align="right">Wori, observation notes, (cooking lesson), June 2020</div>

What were the additional feedback-loops at play beyond data gathering and algorithmic filter responses that fed more and more and more of the same repetitious virtual mouthful? Anticipation can promote the experience of perceiving and interpreting the world through the senses and the '… memorisation of the senses', but what is happening to this relationship when memories are externalised in a hand-held omnipresent computer (Le Breton, 2017, 136).

Maybe there is the potential to embed new learning and consolidate old through the visual that written or spoken words fail to do, as highlighted by Elicit (interview, January 2021), '… and I know that very often people forget what you told them. But what they don't forget is what they've seen'. My fieldwork risk was to completely demonise the visual power of the internet's social media and video-conference platforms, but this was not the intention. Rather it was to champion anthropologists as critical to the dilemma of bio-digitality and machine intelligence symbiosis with human.

Bio-digitality relies on representations of sensorial experience, dominated by the hegemonic eye. As anthropologists Howes and Classen indicate, '… modern media of communication such as film, television and computers bring both sight and sound together to present sensorial limitations but culturally and psychologically powerful representations of the world' (Howes, D., & Classen, C., 2014). As previously described in §2.3 and §2.10, in 2019 I authored an article, 'Virtualizing Our Mouths: The Sensorium and *Instagram* Imagery' that paralleled my Innovation Workshop 'Burgerness and Power' at the *Creative Tastebuds* symposium, Aarhus University, Denmark in 2020 (Farrell, M. B., 2020). Both were wrapped up

in exploring the '… mediated foodscape' of our lives, and how this can result in fetishization of food that magnifies individualistic pleasure (Lupton, D., 2020, 35).

My research for the article, and the workshop itself, focused on the power of the visual message, and what other sensory and memorial practices were firing whilst viewing. In the workshop I used an extreme example of online abstraction, objectification and sexualisation of eating when I shared a *Mukbang*[118] film-clip of an over-indulgent eater. With eyes closed the noises could easily be of simulated sexual activity, with eyes open the young female stimulated intimacy further with mouth, hand, and eye gestures. The ensuing discussion from the participants was of fascinated bewilderment at the gratuitousness of the easily accessible *YouTube* film of 'food-porn' that was not simply the objectification of food but the sexually suggestive activity of eating as of the intimacy of internalising the outside world.

Considering the multi-modality of eating Franchement highlighted the limitations of the computer's central eye by simply saying, '… the camera is not enough' (interview, January 2021). The chef-educators were all acutely aware of the visual narrative of their online food work and spent much time communicating the aesthetics of their food world on their *Instagram* posts. But less so in their cooking lessons when the practicalities of being live – often in small home kitchens – proved secondary to the spoken word as descriptive tool. The metaphorical and heavily repeated verbal descriptions and instructional tone was common – a necessity that referred to the chef-educator's physical culinary experiences as commented on by Ferment, a British-based nutritional chef-educator:

> *I know how things take shape when I'm cooking and preparing foods, so, then I can kind of explain it and pass on that visual image, that other sensory element, because people obviously can't get that online … I have to explain to people what things should look like and what to look for, the signs and those properties that would indicate to me that something's done …*

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[118] *Mukbang* or *Meokbang,* also known as an eating show, is an online audio-visual broadcast in which a host consumes vast quantities of food while interacting with the audience.

And Charisma:

> *It reminds me … of watching a film in a language piece you don't know 100% and there are subtitles underneath. You are kind of step by step. This is how it should taste. That's how it should smell. It really gives you that next layer of being able to do this.*

Charisma, interview, January 2021

The entanglement between human and machine magnified an integration of embodied and imagined 'encoding and decoding' to navigate a new hybrid space for the chef-educators (P.136). The layering of creating and curating experience was immense and precariously reactive to human, human-machine and machine affordances and limitations. An example of the imagined – or projection – undertaken by the chef-educators (hosts) in their efforts to connect to their participants or guests was reflected upon by Sweetie's awareness of the need to change her habitual style of physical movement in the kitchen that focused on, '… what you're doing … you're concentrated on watching me. I have limited my movements as much as possible …' (Sweetie, interview, January 2021). And of Charisma in his compact Parisian bedroom flat turned workshop kitchen when leading an online choux pastry lesson:

> *Now and then we would show him the consistency of our dough and hold the pan or bowl up to the camera. He would look avidly and then say, '… add two more tablespoons of milk' or '… stir more briskly'. I remembered what he said in an earlier interview about how watching the way mixtures move/fall is a cue to their consistency but also that with technology that sometimes freezes, it makes the movement out of synch [so his judgement] wasn't fool proof…*

Charisma, observation notes, (cooking lesson), January 2021

The human-machine sensory lexicon was obtuse because of its complexity, yet the chef-educators were valiant and imaginative in personalising their individualised professional online knowledge practices and explorations. Most heavily relied on their embodied culinary physical skills to understand – and thus convey to others – what their practice looked like in an abstracted and internetworked space. It felt like the lexicon was evolving and there was a distinct change from the first online lessons in June 2020 compared to August 2021. Gone was

the hesitancy and feeling of impotence to be replaced with a sense of weariness and disconnect for most of the chef-educators, an understandable disaffection after 15-months of challenge to their work and identity wherein simple chef-educator practice felt constantly under threat from the internet's technical unpredictability (e.g., P.212; §7.8). However prepared, skilled, and enthusiastic there were frequent difficulties, such as the one made in observation notes January 2021, in a time when enthusiasm had worn down:

> *Consistency seems a key marker of the success/failure of a recipe and the virtual lesson demands ways in which consistency is described (like cream etc.) or by the chef-educator peering into a bowl or pan as the guest moves the mixture around-it is a bit like a guestimate. Though the delayed time and any buffering etc., changes the seen flow and movement of ingredients …*

Observation notes, January 2021

Timing and keeping time felt more pressing in the online space, five minutes late in a physical space is barely commented on, whereas even a minute late to join a *Zoom* meeting is filled with apologies and frequently of explanations of technical problems 'getting in'. A common practice for many of the chef-educators was limiting the cooking together time to 90-minutes maximum. This practice, of limiting time together, evolved over the fifteen-months as it became clear from the early relaxed days in summer 2020 that the intensity of online togetherness spilling into hours was exhausting for all involved. Plus, the chef-educators were probably factoring in their time as a cost to be added to the many hours of furniture moving etc., beforehand. Ultimately, for most of the chef-educators the lessons had become dominated by their pre-lesson preparation. So the actual lesson sometimes felt wearied from their hidden efforts, and consequently resulted in a hurry toward the 'end' without finishing the dish 'together'.

In observations I noted that, '… frequently food was cooked after the lesson finished so there was not the time for smells and transformations of cooking to be discussed or the sharing of dish flavours afterward', a practice that made a dramatic impact on the sensorial shared

experience – because there wasn't one. Instead several chef-educators would cheerfully default to, '… take a photo and post it on *Instagram*'. My mind bulged with what this was actually communicating about the expected a-synchronicity and abstraction of food from shared experientiality and learning.

3.5 Opportunities and challenges

My research looks at knowledge transfer, the health-giving work of commensality, inclusion, and exclusion in the form of hospitality, and food agency in a bio-digital society. Although the focus is of food educators and their work, much of the material and findings could relate to a broader study of twenty-first century offline and online spaces and activity of learning. A culture of human-machine entanglement in the ways we discover, share, remember and utilise knowledge. In numerous instances there was the notion of the internetworked space being more democratic, and less party to hierarchies of teacher-student as described by food activist workshop leader Karma:

> *There's a difference between teaching and facilitation. And I think the setup for this [workshop] was very much about creating a space for the group to learn, the group to process, the group to share. So rather than me being at the centre, the … holder of the space, it was very much about me creating a space for other people to contribute.*
>
> Karma, interview, June 2021

But 'the space' was biased and it would be foolish – and dangerous – to think otherwise. I am not necessarily asserting conspiratorial forces are at play, though it is definitely important to be aware of. The hand-held computer has made human-interaction, thought processes, and connection between one another vastly different from pre-smartphone and pre-acceleration of internet dependency that steam-roller-ed in with the pandemic. Imagine an illuminating example of human-machine entanglement, the car. Undoubtedly the car – over the last 150 years – has changed our daily lives, primarily related to our relationship with time, distance

and ease of connectivity (though shadowed by the negativity of air pollution). What if it was in our pocket, beside our bed, in our hand 24/7.

Instead of a technological development to make life easier it would be an extension of ourselves, and it would be embedded in everything we did (or imagined doing), where would human end and car begin, and vice versa. Now relocate the preposterous image to one replaced by the hand-held computer and perhaps a clearer glimpse of what human-machine entanglement means to beyond-humanism. The omnipresence, the co-presence, and the myriad of ways that the hand-held computer (and increasingly the smartwatch) detaches and replaces (i.e., memory, linear thinking, and agency) as it provides instant gratification (i.e., connectivity, layered thinking, or global perspectives) is profound because it significantly alters how we make sense of the world.

The positives for the internetworked sensorium could be a wider access to champion greater diversity of ingredients in diets, and thus perhaps contribute to more sustainable food choices. The negatives could look to increased obesity and overeating activated by, 'online grazing' on food images that may stimulate feelings of hunger and the distortion made by the normalised absence of multi-sensory physical commensal eating (Spence, C., 2017, 64). The sensory element of, '… eating with your eyes first' could dominate to objectify food – and the anticipation of eating – to visual abstraction (André, April 2020). The extremes and performative practices of this include *Mukhbang*, 'gastro- 'or 'food-porn', (objectified food photographs posted on social media, usually *Instagram)*, *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response* – ASMR[119], known affectionately as 'brain massage' with short-loop visuals of hands touching food etc.,), or *Skeating* (*Skyping* and eating at the same time with another doing

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[119] Also see pages 62, 126 and 210.

likewise). The negative trajectory was already very clear, as pointed out by Professor Charles Spence introduced in §1.1, and of his collaborative research (P.177), that researches the integration of information across different sensory modalities '… restaurants are preparing food that is going to look good on Instagram', the positives need highlighting (Spence, C., 2017, 51).

This chapter, though very mindful of the online tensions between consumption or community, and human-made or machine designed, aims to present the challenges to sensory interaction with food. It holds to knowledge being powerful, and therefore wide-spread understanding of human-machine interdependence is essential to regaining the human in human-machine symbiosis. In this way my research considers a case for the internet as a potential place for positive change, a change driven by the awareness needed for consciously taught 'sensorium and food literacy', embellished by the world-wide-web. An education that could run alongside new technology, as shared at one of Andre's community cooking events described below (observation notes, December 2020). 'In the chat-box someone writes, 'I wish we had taste-o-vision'…' (figure 22). I smile but feel disturbed by the bewildering likelihood of this'.

3.6 Conclusion

The perceptions of the sensorial and emotional practice of the physicality of eating, a permanent work in progress effort of cognition and memory, is actually achieved through the quiet work of the ears, nose, tongue and mouth, body, and skin. The internet and the world-wide-web magnified these perceptions to a degree never seen before. It is then relevant to discuss how the abstracted context of the internet relates to eating and food choices, as the truth is not so much that the, '… first bite is with the eye in the globalised, consumerist world, [where] the visual image dominates' (Farrell, B, 2019). But that the eye is the most lauded and

unrightfully so as the sensorium is as multi-sensually active, and as needed in the a-material world as in the material world. So, the ways we experience eating and share food knowledge have adapted to the machine intelligence, as expressed by applied anthropologist Dan Pojed of a,'*... a new wave of automation and machine intelligence … predicted to change the ways we experience many aspects of our lives'*, relates to the triggers of bi-sensory communication that stimulate all our senses to co-create a simulation of multi-sensory encounter (Pojed, D., et al 2021, 56)

Figure 22: 'I wish we had taste-o-vision', Farrell, M.B., 2020

CHAPTER FOUR: HOW TOGETHERNESS ADAPTED TO A PANDEMIC
When hospitality becomes hostile

… diseases represent evolution in progress, and microbes adapt by natural selection to new hosts and vectors.

Diamond, J., 1998, 209

SARS-CoV-2 was an all too familiar example of when, '… viruses and humans interact in a shared ecology …' as, '… part of the human condition' (*Anthropological Responses to Health Emergencies*, April 2020). It is a relationship over 10,000 years old. A liaison since humankind first practised husbandry, and largely left hunter gathering and proto farming to farm animals (Tudge, C., 1998; Diamond, J., 1998; Sahlins, M., 1972).

The accumulation of extenuating socio-biological features welcome guest microbiological disease because humans are omnivores. Nearly every infectious disease transfers from animal to human or is a parasitic relationship between human and other species. As American disease ecologist Dr. Richard Ostfelt believes on the subject of *Covid-19*, that:

> *… antibiotic resistant bacteria are globally perhaps the most important source of disease emergence. When we grow livestock and poultry in very crowded conditions, we are providing an advantage for various microbes to transmit, and some of those, a small fraction of them, have the potential to jump to us and make us sick.*

Ostfelt, R., 2020, *Cary Institute.org*

The warm-blooded human body likes to be socially intimate with human and non-human others, move in large and transient groups, and then grow and eat meat. We are a supersize host who can spread microorganism life to perpetuate the contagion of disease, so however unintentional, human hospitality always turns hostile. I apply a broad definition of hospitality, one of the human body hosting disease (i.e., when hospitality became hostile), paralleled by the tensions to commensality which I observed between hosts and their guests in online spaces. The scholarship of Stuart Hall, (1932-2014), particularly of 'encoding and

decoding' within his work on cultural studies (P.84; 136; 189;217), gave me insight into social media's, 'discursive production' of constant interaction that gels the creators together by the very process (Hall, S., et al, 1980, 18). His work helped me to understand the narrative of the health emergency, the 'event' of the *COVID-19* pandemic. A rupture that had to become a 'story' before it could become a communicative event (Hall, S., et al, 1980, 117-125).

My fieldwork research was situated in the particularly acute time of the phenomena of the *Sars-CoV-2* (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2) virus, which resulted in the declared *COVID-19* pandemic on 11 March 2020 by the *World Health Organization* (WHO). My investigation of the pandemic reflected on *Syndemics Theory,*[120] introduced by medical anthropologist Merrill Singer in 1996, as I learned from Singer, and others, how important it was to reflect on the bio-social interface of historical, environmental, and economic features as key to understanding social conditions for contagious disease. As Singer et al explain, '[A]lthough *COVID-19* is global in its impact, its on-the-ground expression is defined by local social, political, economic, demographic, and health conditions' (Singer, M., et al, 2021, 51).

With learned anthropologists at the fore of these discussions, I too considered anthropology instrumental to observing and interpreting the epidemiological precipitations and responses to *COVID-19* (Zuckerman, M, K., et al 2014; Singer, M., 2009, 2016). Additionally, and conversant, the work on *Situational Analysis* by anthropologist Max Gluckman (1911-1975), and the Manchester School of Anthropology (1947-) felt important to reflect upon because it champions an anthropological perspective of examining the processual. It felt fitting to try and understand *COVID-19* through a lens that valued how the pandemic developed, and to investigate using methodology that could, '… look at cases over time' or events, in order to

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[120] The Syndemic theory focuses on the adverse interactions between diseases and social conditions, specifically drawing attention to the mechanisms of these interactions.

build an incremental picture of pandemic framed social change (Falk Moore, S., 2009, 727-736). That these cases or events are typically centre-stage in times of crisis is particularly pertinent to my exploration of the character and features of *COVID-19* as seen through a bi-focal lens of commensality and internetworked sociality, i.e., the online social world.

This dual lens afforded me a 'near and far' – a here and there – view of crisis and its consequential rupture in two ways (e.g., p.47; §6.1). Firstly, through contrasting primary and secondary sources I investigated the fiction of consistent normalcy against the pandemic (e.g., §4.6-4.7), typical of, '… a world in turmoil' (Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., F. 2019, 1). Secondly, I analysed the practices and messages surrounding hospitality and commensality situated in my physical home kitchen (near) whilst I internetworked with global others in their online kitchen spaces (far). In this chapter I expand on a significant element of my research that relates to the tensions that reside in the spatial and conceptual dimension of hospitality as home. A private space (offline kitchens) in a public place (online kitchens), that was filled with intensity in UK (March-June 2020 and December 2020-April 2021) and French (March-May 2020 and October 2020-July 2021) national or regional lockdowns of four billion people[121] due to 'stay at home' governmental guidance (§1.6; P.136).

The commensal lens of my research looked at intra-domestic and extra-domestic practices that encompassed the intensity of the pandemic home as it examined the ecology of home, the universal place that had to adapt to meet the rupturing demands of disruption. It was an acute time that reconfigured the space, identity, and role of home, and laid bare the dilemmas of a place to call fortress or sanctuary whilst in the depths of a highly contagious virus and livelihood precarity. I examine and interpret the paradox of the underlying hostility

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[121] *Airbnb*, accessed July 2020

of hospitality through a syncretic lens that attempts to merge three aspects of an acute moment in time, in an approach that draws a thread through the hospitality inherent in contagious disease, at the physical meal, and in the online spaces of commensality on the internet. Thus, themes of reciprocity, intimacy and assimilation, vulnerability, strangers, fear and trust, performance, power, etiquette, and invitation are key and compatible signifiers to tease out some of the complications and fascinations of hospitality in the 2020's (Visser, M., 1991; Pitt-Rivers, J., 2017).

As Margaret Visser (1991), author on subjects of history, anthropology, and mythology of everyday life explains, the Latin root of host, *hostis,* means stranger, an enemy, hostile. She also makes clear the deeply processual and temporal nature of the cultural performance of hospitality, seen in the French word hôte that denotes the interdependency of guest and host, '… the bond that unites them' (Visser, M., 1991, 97). As anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers (1919-2001) reveals the, '… law of hospitality, [is] in other words, the problem of how to deal with strangers', whether that is a guest at the table, follower on *Instagram,* or a *Sars-CoV-2* pathogen, as the overarching meme (Pitt-Rivers, J., 2017, 163).

I firstly discuss (§4.1) how anthropological work and ethnographic inquiry on crisis and rupture is established, active and effective at interpreting the cultural patterns within, and of these times of change and adaptation that follow (Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., eds, 2019, 13). As the *Anthropological Responses to Health Emergencies* (ARHE) group point out, 'COVID-19 is new, but human responses to epidemics are not' (ARHE, 2020). Secondly, (§4.2) I reflect on the significance of multi-species anthropology, a, '… more-than-human approach to ethnographic research', as clearly the disease-human relationship is determined by the animal-human relationship that includes animals as food (Locke, P., and Muenster U., 2015).

Next, in §4.3 the myriad ways of communicating, in offline, and online spaces, is explored by looking at some practices that make the '… maps of meaning' (Hall, S., et al, 1980, 122), of the internetworked space of communicating 'othering', cognisant with narratives of material inequity. These accounts were illuminated and heightened by the pandemic, seen through the lens of the internetworked space and the physicality of food. Fourthly, in §4.4, the delamination of time is considered as a porthole that opened up into how 'events', from pandemics to a meal within an internetworked community, communicate the stories of hostility and hospitality.

Leading to the conclusion (§4.8) are questions that surround the ebbing away of social aspects of eating together, of the *Othering, Boundaries and Borders* (§4.5) and I*nequity and Risk* (§4.6) that were magnified by divisive physical distancing guidelines that had bidden containment of the pandemic. With the a reflection *Food-steps* (§4.7) on the activity that paints optimism for fairer and cleaner food systems, the conclusion then comes full circle, to confirm how anthropology has the potential to be a dynamic, intuitive, and inclusive discipline to understand the complexities of bio-digital life, an existence magnified and accelerated by the pandemic (Petrini, C., 2005).

4.1 Ruptures

> *… the temporal 'elasticity' of rupture is related to specific experiences of reconstitution, of re-encountering something previously known, and perhaps purposefully forgotten or taken away …*

Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., F. (eds) 2019, 14

The response to epidemic and pandemic, historically informed and commonly viewed, takes the form of quarantine, vaccine, or vector control via fumigation methods (Lynteris, C., and Polykett, B., 2018, 433). The perception of pandemics is typically set within an historical frame to ensure that political and economic power set the tone for an ongoing dialogue of control,

'… re-encountering something previously known' (Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., F. eds, 2019, 14).

Nature, marginalised people, and rhetoric are the key and unwieldy constants that reframe a pandemic as political, manifested in a power struggle between socio-economic preparedness and disease prevention (Lynteris, C., and Polykett, B., 2018, 434). In other words, *COVID-19* was not a surprise, in fact, it was wholly expected and, the rupture felt roars of unpreparedness. Not just in the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), or available tracking and testing or equitable vaccine programmes, but in the vulnerable fragility of divided social groups caught up in the narratives of the politico-economics of science and technology trying to control nature. Particularly visible early in the pandemic were the risks of industrial meat production, and the uninvited – yet ever-present – guest, the *Ribonucleic Acid* (RNA) virus (e.g., 146-147).

'Purposefully forgotten' as Holbraad et al (P.140) declare could be applied to much of the *COVID-19* pandemic as a stage that showcased rupture as a means to uncover, to see through newly revealed cracks what lay under the surface, i.e., the intentionally neglected (Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., eds, 2019, 14). The enmeshed infrastructure of systems and expectations teetered on shaky ground, and as a prime example the globalised food system made clear that ignoring the complications of food, from obesity to insecure long food chains, allowed a space for vulnerability. This impelled social unpreparedness of a world where, '… for the first time in human history, the number of people who were overweight exceeded the number who were underweight' (Fresco, L., 2016, 21).

However, out of the fire was a phoenix of food activism in middle to high-income countries. It was seen in global volunteer school food campaigns (some working from unused hotel kitchens, i.e., dark or ghost kitchens), in the surge of home cooking, and food chain

localism such as greengrocer and farm box-delivery schemes. The internetworked spaces of social media and communication platforms indicated and garnered solidarity. Metatag data, in the form of hashtags on *Instagram* revealed by a marketing company *Kantar* (June 2020), show 424% increases in tagging for #vegbox (vegetable box), 360% #raisedgardenbeds (raised garden beds), 205% #kitchengardens (kitchen gardens), and 226% #chickencoops (chicken coops). The interest perhaps indicated a positive ray of change that glaringly shone on social awareness of the power of food activism. Other examples of online food activism that were less biased on middle-class romantic notions of self-sufficiency (and the privilege of having access to a garden) contributed to discussions in the later section (§4. 6) *Inequity and Risk.*

Ferment is one example of the chain reaction of social unpreparedness-rupture-activism in culinary work. Of American-Caribbean descent, she lived in London and was active on *Instagram* social media (under her full and real name), to promote her freelance nutritional culinary business and to connect to others she found of interest. Ferment had over 3,000 *Instagram* followers and followed approximately 2,000 (exact numbers are not given as these figures could identify her). The ratio of followed and followers defined her as a food professional who valued community because she was overtly interested – or wanted to project this as her identity – in what others are doing. However, there are more unintentional reasons too of course. *Instagrammers* with more individualistic personalities can and do intentionally limit the numbers they follow – the high figures of followers and low figures of following conjure up an image of desirability and nonchalance.

For Ferment the pandemic and its physical distancing measures had a mixture of advantage and disadvantage in her work and home life. Like many she had transitioned her once 100% offline culinary teaching totally to the virtual space, a feat aided by her previous managerial career in public health consultancy (e.g., 142). However, during a 30-minute

telephone interview (8th, July 2020), she admitted to spending, '… time learning new stuff' (Ferment, 2020) in the early weeks of lockdown one, to help with the reconfiguration of using a video conference platform instead of a physical demonstration workshop as a focal point of her teaching, and so the technical aspects of *Zoom* and reimagining the content and style of her culinary teaching were a notable transformation for her. The abruptness of the clamp down on physical interaction severed her established rhythm of working in schools, museums and health care centres that had communicated her commitment to challenging, '… modern society raising children who don't understand because they have had no hand in making' (Ferment, 2020). A relationship with meal-making she interpreted as indicative of social unpreparedness due to the correlation with ultra-processed food and obesity, and obesity and higher pandemic mortality numbers.[122]

Her commitment had not waned and her concern that people would not be able to feel connected during her workshops was proved unfounded in her view. Ferment saw (after adjustment and three months in lockdown), opportunities and benefits for her not working in the offline spaces of culinary teaching. These included easier practicalities for her as she did not have to carry lots of ingredients and equipment to physical spaces, her overheads of venue hire were non-existent, and thus she could charge students less. In addition, she believed the new online lessons gave an enhanced experience for her online students.

Here I discuss how Ferment identified noteworthy features of bio-digital discourses that recognised how mirror neurons gave meaning to the cultured emulating of bodily movement (e.g., P.214). Ferment believed that by 'virtually' watching another cooking in their physical kitchen space we might transpose the internetworked physicality to a new material

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[122]https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/obesity andmortalityduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicengland24january2020to30august2022/24january2020to30 august2022

context. Ferment explained that the online lesson gave an opportunity for the student to personalise their learning, and to centre, whether aware or not, their muscle-memory as they experienced her lesson in the everydayness of their own kitchen (Ferment, 8th July 2020). With their familiar pots and pans, and individualised interpretations of being in their home kitchen, and simultaneously being in Ferment's online kitchen via her cooking class. Students felt benefits too as there was potentially a relaxation of the hierarchies of culinary teacher-student dynamics as each were in their own physical space, and the 'territories' of host and their guests – a familiar dynamic in the kitchen – were blurred.

The tensions of how these blurred is considered more fully in *Othering, Boundaries and Borders* (§4.5) , with a focus on reciprocity and acts of transfer that Marcel Mauss in *The Gift* [1925] (1980) skilfully interpreted as the creation and recreation (or not) of social ties, which ultimately returns to the premise of the ever-lingering hostility of hospitality. The guest's kitchen was a familiar space for the learner to embed new skills and Ferment described this as beneficial to healthier eating (particularly fermented and plant-based foods), more realistic and more doable. In lots of ways, the online-offline kitchen model was ideal for someone like Ferment whose motivation was making healthier eating an everyday possibility in individual kitchens. This approach propelled her freelance business by shaping paid lessons that felt bespoke as student guests stood in their familiar kitchen space.

However, this model changed for Ferment after the first pandemic lockdown and she spoke of three online lessons cancelled after 'unlocking'. She was not, '… expecting this shift', though within the context of it turning to summer, and the liberation after three months indoors she felt an understanding that potential students were hungering to get away from the screen-based home isolation (Ferment, 8th July 2020), but she was concerned about returning

to pre-lockdown rhythm as she believed that physical venues were still places where the virus could easily pass on.

Offline workshops returned when restrictions were lifted in Summer 2020 but necessitated massive hygiene protocol of masks, gloves, and thoroughly sterilised surfaces before and after classes, something that the online workshop did not need at all. In a weird paradox it looked and felt more naturally social (without the gloves, masks, and smell of sterilisation), in the internetworked space than the sterile and physically distanced culinary space. The aftermath of the intense rupture to physical distancing lived on in the 'new normal' of sterile physical social spaces (focused on ensuring hostility to the Sars-CoV-2 virus), that in turn meant being social felt hostile too.

Ferment's internetworked kitchen allowed her food activism to reach those she wanted to reach, and students were in a space where they felt comfortable and confident where they more easily adopted healthier eating habits because they were in their own kitchens. She supposed she was more able to chat to her students, sometimes whilst not actually cooking herself, and could gauge the pace of the cooking in the lessons, particularly with her child classes of five pupils. Her embeddedness in her physical local community also lived in her kitchen, in a significant recognition of the finite (local) operating alongside infinite (the global internet). In August 2020 she organised and ran a weeklong *cookalong* (a more relaxed version of a lesson, as in cooking alongside) programme with guest chefs that aimed to raise £4000 for her children's local school. The rupture to British free school meals for low-income families had been of particular activism intensity with numerous volunteers working in loaned catering kitchens to supply meals with donated ingredients, which is discussed further in (§4.6) *Inequity and Risk*.

The model of online-offline worked well in the two *cookalong* sessions I joined and although I was in an internetworked space with strangers who knew each other from the physical school space, there felt a welcome for me. The boundaries and etiquette of commensality proved a fascinating tension of simultaneously being in a private place (that would analogically require a welcome, an invite) and in a public space (where the neutrality of the space negates such etiquette and ritual). The virtual welcome into one another's homes was by default, a key issue in bio-digital lives that will be discussed more in the next chapter five, in *The Death of Hospitality* (§5.1)

4.2 Hosting and feeding disease

> *The major killers of humanity throughout our recent history are infectious diseases that evolved from diseases of animals …*
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> Diamond, J., 1998, 196

Many writers, anthropologists, health specialists, activists, chefs, farmers, retailers, educationalists, and others are concerned with the modern intensification of food production. They see food's transportation, retail and consumption as dysfunctional and damaging to personal, animal and environmental health. A food system potentially primed to host disease and poisoning, balanced precariously within the perception of safety, which uses growth, preventative and treatment use of micro-antibiotics with animals, and plant pesticides (Shingler, S., 2019). A comment written by environmental and scientific researcher Professor Louise Fresco in 2016 introduces how meat-eating practices and their consequences welcome disease through the long-chain transportation, mass-storage of live animals, inorganic feed treated with a lengthy list of additives, antibiotics and the human-animal contact from field to abattoir, to marketplace to meal,

> *… transportation over long distances of feed and animals, the conditions in which animals live, and the effects on the environment that give us, in the rich countries at least, more and more reason to stop and think about the consequences of our liking for meat.*
>
> Fresco, L., 2016, 124

The vulnerabilities, inequalities and consequences of trans-national industrialised food inspire a long and notable list of researchers and authors. These include anthropologist Jack Goody [1982], investigative journalist Joanna Blythman (2015), political scientist Robert Albritton ([2010] 2013) and anthropologists Marion Nestle (2003) and Sidney Mintz (1985). Significant authors on the subject of industrialised food production include Eric Schlosser in his 2001 essay on the abattoir, *The Chain Never Stops* as, '… faster means cheaper and more profitable'. Also, as introduced on the previous page authorship from an environmental and scientific perspective by Professor Louise Fresco in her book (2016) *Hamburgers in Paradise: The stories behind the food we eat,* complements books by anthropologist and primatologist Richard Wrangham and his 2009 book *Catching Fire: How Cooking made us Human*, and *Feast: Why Humans Share Food* (2007) by archaeologist Martin Jones.

Wrangham and Jones share knowledge of the intricacies, challenges, and changes of how feeding socially together has developed over millennia (Jones, M., 2008). Humans caught or gathered food in groups, and then cooked and ate together, so there was safety in company that included the mindful watching of what others in your group ate (Jones, M., 2009). From tentative bites of unfamiliar plants to eating roasted meat, human mirror neurons, first studied by primatologists, were key to re-affirming eating as pleasure, though also ultimately survival – from starvation, disease, or poisoning. Fresco's work shines a light on contemporary lack of group meals with the lone diner eating a one-person portion of burger that I suggest negates the need to watch others for reassurance. The commercial branding of a familiar company has replaced the age-old commensal trust that used gathering around food as a food-safety exercise when eating together.

There are ample ways that humans have learned to make food, particularly meat, safe to eat. The challenge for pandemic preparedness highlighted the industrialised meat practice

of antibiotic use that masked the health of animals, and in turn depleted human antibiotic resistance because we constantly ingest the antibiotic-treated meat. The food illiteracy is inherent in the disconnect there is with the extraordinary relationship humans have with eating another living creature. A creature that we live alongside and predominately keep in mass storage units. The equation is simple to see in the past and future spectre of living with pandemics of zoonotic – jumping from species to species – disease. The primary exposure of humans to resistant bacteria occurs in farms and slaughterhouses where there are cases of human-animal contagion too.[123]

At the beginning of the pandemic social media and news were awash with stories of wet markets, Asian food markets, that sell fresh produce, and sometimes live animals slaughtered at the market for the customer, spreading notions of the first host of the new virus being snake, bat or pangolin (*National Geographic*, April 2020). *Covid-19* was the first pandemic framed by the smartphone (i.e., the iPhone 2007-8), and social media, and so the local and global fused in real-time in an intense narration of tensions, solidarity, othering and boundaries. The 'othering' of cultured ways of treating animals and eating their meat were sown early in the *SARS-Cov-2* virus origin stories and blame politics.

4.3 Connoting messages: information, misinformation and compliance

… it is at the connotative level of the sign that situational ideologies alter and transform signification.

Hall, S., 1980, 122

Social media platforms with apps are predominantly American or Asian platforms with large numbers of users (*Wikipedia* accessed 2020).[124] American *Facebook* (2004) had 2.7 billion users in 2020, Chinese *QZone* (2005) 2013 figures of 623.3 million users, Chinese *Weibo*

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[123] Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html#:~:text=We%20do%20not%20know%20the,virus%20that%20causes%20COVID%2D19.
[124] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

(2009) had 413 million users in 2018, and American *WhatsApp* (2009) two-billion users in 2020.

American *Twitter* had 321 million in 2020, and launched in 2009 *Instagram,* an American

product (2010), had one-billion users in 2019, with Chinese *WeChat,* (2011) 1.1 million users

in 2018. The *Swine Flu* (SIV virus) pandemic (2009) was at the cusp of social media and

smartphone twinning that by 2020 saw 56% of the world population with access to both a

smartphone and social media accounts (*International Telecommunication Union*, ITU, 2019,

accessed 2020). The pandemic seen through internetworked channels exponentially co-

narrated stories of cultural identification and othering through the lens of food as nutrition and

food as medicine practices framed by a relatable belief that, '… self-knowledge, knowledge of

others in the world, others in oneself…' would build connected communities (Holbraad, M.,

Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., eds, 2019, 15).

Examples of social media's messages that made the pandemic 'event' into a 'story'

revealed a poly-mediated human relationship with technology. The pandemic story co-

creation hopped from film, to photo, to written text and emoji, to spoken word, to

performance on video conferencing platforms such as *Zoom*. The offline physical distancing

rupture of the first lockdown or confinement (UK and France: respectively March-July and

March to May 2020), was felt in food systems and co-narrated on platforms *Instagram* and

Twitter to provide a public lens to school food provision during lockdown (P.156-160).

Characterised and communicated through channels of 'polymedia' I paid attention to

the online messages of school-dinner urgency in France and England and their online narratives

and activism in Spring 2020, as an example of pandemic rupture and response felt physically,

and critiqued and communicated online (Miller, D., and Madianou, M., 2012)*. Instagram,*

Facebook, and *Twitte*r became informal channels of urgent communication. The UK

governmental strategies of feeding hungry children unravelled in lockdown Britain because

schools and holiday clubs were closed, and there was not a back-up system to deliver food to hungry children in their isolated homes (P.156). The vital need to collaborate and distribute food in the UK became the work of volunteers and school staff who adapted the pre-pandemic school food supply-chain and turned to *Facebook* and *Instagram* as grass-roots communicative work (figure 23). This somewhat happened in France, but she retained more formality with the activity of mayors as part of this reactive response and a more public information approach using *Twitter* (figure 25). The first lockdown focused on the narratives of informal initiatives that used social media as a channel for organisation, awareness building and solidarity.

Social media activity highlighted the harshness of ongoing austerity measures, because through the rupture to everyday life of the pandemic, food insecurity was visibly writ large. I undertook the activity via the following approach:

1. I searched for hashtag #schoolmeals which revealed 16.4k posts that *Instagrammers* linked to their profile post. (Hashtag meta-tag data practice creates a collective open storage of linked subject matter and is a well-used tool in spurring activism).

Figure 23: British #schoolmeals on *Instagram* 3rd May 2020
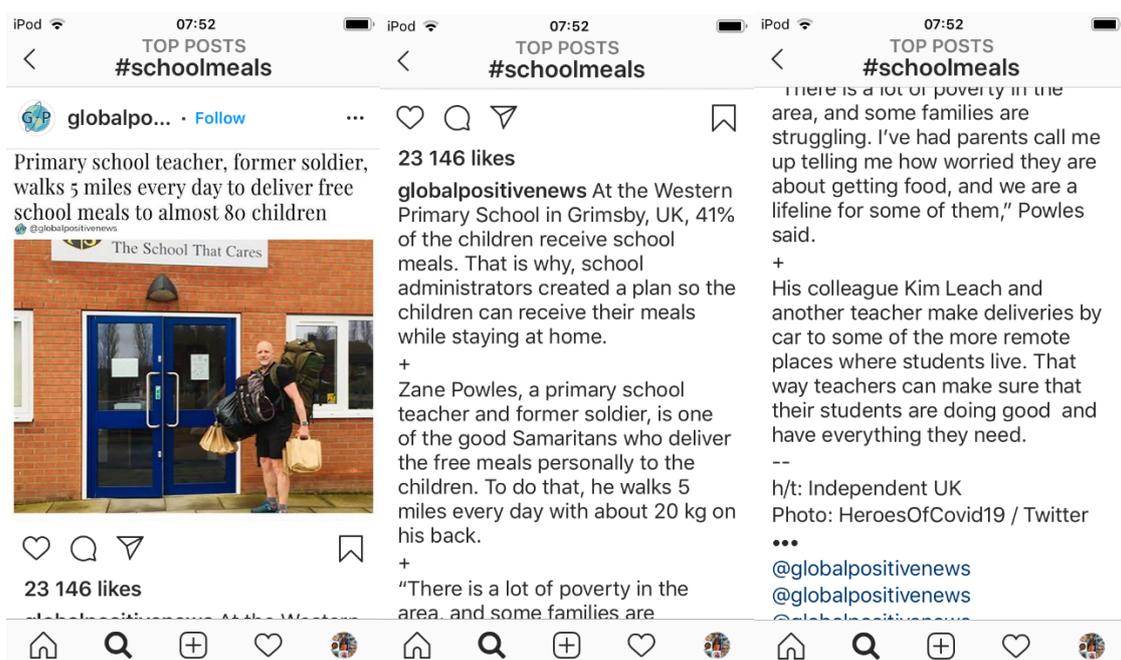
Next, I found two-lockdown #schoolmeals' *Instagram* posts (P.156; 157) one British (figure 23) and one American (figure 24) that highlighted the British and American volunteer, individualistic grassroots initiatives, as compared to French government-led collective solutions (figure 25) that helped to feed millions of children during lockdown (confinement).

These two stories communicate the volunteer and 'heroic' altruistic response to feeding hungry children, many of whom are on low income free school dinner schemes as grassroots and localised initiatives. The British post was tagged by @globalpositivenews (Global Positive News 228k followers/ following 53), the American by @chefniki (a personal chef, 3 306 followers/following 1 855), a volunteer in the 'story'.
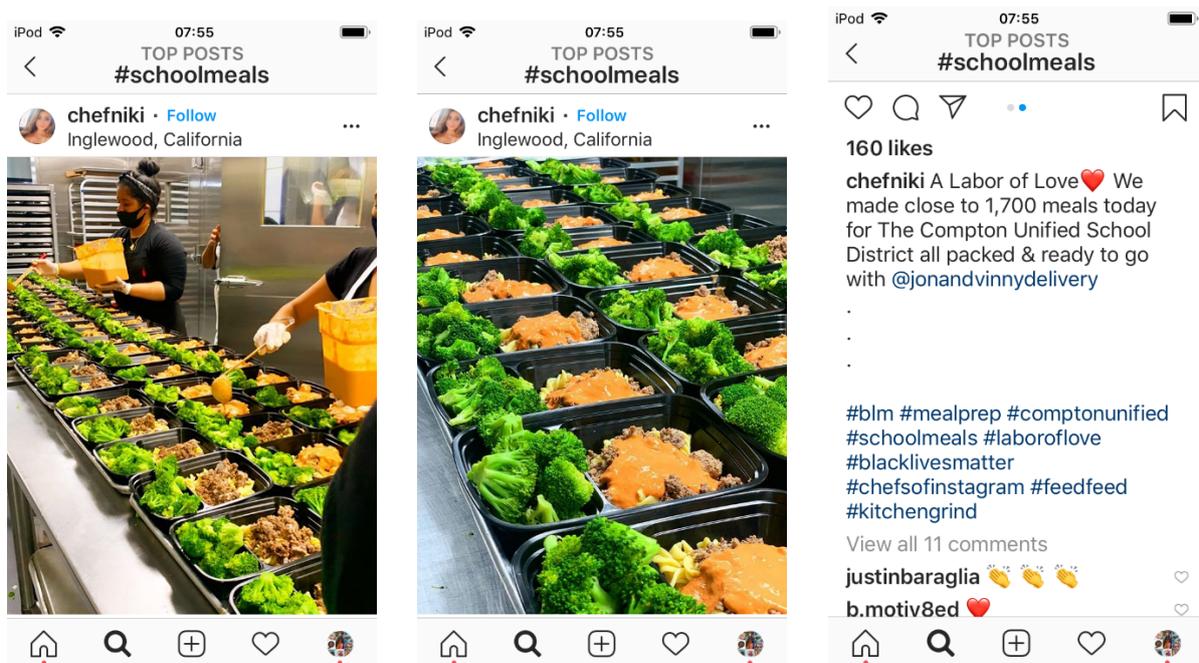
Figure 24: American #schoolmeals on *Instagram* 3rd June 2020

The internetworked channels and the infinite ripple-effect these had added more voices to the story. It was alive in poly-mediated-gatherings on *Instagram* and *Twitter* and linked up individuals, communities or groups who connected in individualistic pathways. Such as @jonanvinnydelivery (Jon and Vinny delivery, followers 96.9k followers/following 655), who

delivered the school meals, @globalpositivenews (Global Positive News), #blacklivesmatter (Black Lives Matter, #4.7 million posts) or #comptonunified (Compton Unified, #500 posts).

In comparison, the hashtag exploration of the French school meal, one that is means-tested for French families, (similar to other countries it includes free lunches for the poorest), saw that the response during confinement (via *Instagram* with #repasscolaires i.e., school meals) revealed only #100 hashtags. Maybe this was because of different structures for meeting the needs of the hungry (during confinement) of French schoolchildren (and the poor and elderly). The French seemed to have a more centralised and government–led response that, '… mobilized to manage its resources as efficiently as possible and redeploy them towards actions of solidarity and support for the hospital, medico-social and social sectors' (Agriculture.gouv.fr, the French government site for agriculture and food).[125]

I reflected on how to observe and interpret the socio-political cultural frame to the 'stories' on-the-ground. Social services were challenged during lockdowns as they were unable to easily support those in need. It was not business as usual, and structures and processes of food – from growing to delivery to access – became online activity to bolster activism to address urgent need. My investigation of the French response to the demand for school meals (set within 'just in time' food logistic systems) predominately discovered that communication presented a centralised and governmental co-ordinated response that was localised and led by Mairies (Mayors).

The French Government's *Instagram* profile, *@gouvernementfr* had 193k followers/following 48 and had no posts directly related to school meals but felt like a public information platform. Figure 25, *Instagram* post (9th April 2020), communicated the political-

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[125] https://agriculture.gouv.fr/covid-19-la-restauration-collective-se-mobilise

cultural response, 'ACTING in the face of crisis, the state is mobilizing. Together, let's block the #lecoronavirus', with tags of #coronavirus (30.2 million posts) #tout-mobilisés (1000 posts) and FranceUnie (1000 posts). Tapping on the #coronavirus hashtag on the post triggered a pop up from the French Government with options to, '… see the latest information from the French Government so you can help prevent the spread of novel coronavirus (Covid-19)' (*Instagram* #coronavirus, August 2020).
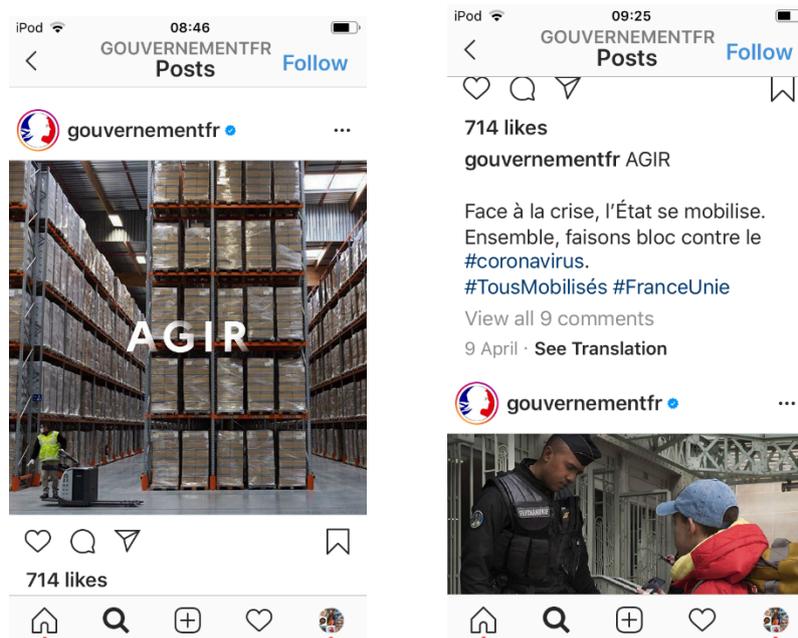
Figure 25: French *Instagram* account @gouvernmentfr, 9th April 2020

The hashtags #toutmobilisér (mobilise everything) and #FranceUnie (United France) showed a few small businesses using the hashtag to keep their customers updated. However, *Twitter*, used extensively for local government and for the Mairies, Mayors (of villages, town, and individual districts of large cities), was a key platform for school meal information. During lockdown, called confinement in France, Mairies sent out information that aimed to support low-income families. Figure 26, (P.160) 'les paniers solidaire' (solidarity baskets) was an example posted by the Mairie of the 15th arrondissement district of Paris. It had an accompanying message that translated, '… to support low-income families and offset the rise

in the prices of fruit and vegetables, the Town Hall of # Paris15 and the City of @Paris are organizing the 2nd edition of the Solidarity Baskets this Thursday April 30 from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Pre-order on cabma15-contact@paris.fr #alimentation # COVID19'.

Figure 26: French *Twitter* post by @mairie15, 30th April 2020

The message of inequalities – such as children dependent on free school lunches – and the solidarity raised by social media to challenge this vulnerability showed how the rupturing, the seeing of forgotten or hidden in the freeze-frame 'moment in time' of the pandemic, was made publicly visible. Through social media co-narration, the connotations of a dysfunctional food system, one that creates both excess and shortage of food, made visible collective responsibility.

4.4 The delamination of time

If time were like a passage of music, you could keep going back to it till you got it right.

Joyce Johnson, 1983, closing line

There were different ways to view the passage and spaces of time peculiar to living with *COVID-19* pandemic typical of the, '… critical power of rupture as a concept of and for our times' (Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., F. 2019, 2). Seamless visual and emblematic commentary without geographical boundaries gave unprecedented global virtual empathy as the rhythms of the everyday – via social media – shared the performative stories of the

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intimacies of experiencing time subjectively and encouraged philosophical relationships with the passing of time. In a bio-digital lifeworld that resonated with the theme of the film (1993) *Groundhog Day,* i.e., of living the same day repeatedly, the repetitive uniformity of the lockdown magnified the omnipresent yet overlooked demarcation of time through individual daily activities. The ability of the internet to provide both a timeless, and timed space of existence, for more than half of the world population, cut across time zones, and enabled conversations and stories that would otherwise be problematic.

Anthropologist, Michael Jackson (2018) asks, '[H]ow is it … that someone else's story becomes one's own?' (Jackson, M., 2018, 3), and ethnographic account follows (P.158), of a three-time zone *cookalong,* which occupied public and private spatial time, to resonate with Jackson's quandary. The *cookalong* was an example of the dualities and process of making collective live stories on the internet grown, of internetworked communities, and the social urge to represent and identify (Gourlay, L., 2020). Another important sphere of time to note is the narrative of historicity that frames *Covid-19*. The 2020-2022 pandemic, lived alongside on-going epidemics and disease outbreaks, as referred to earlier, of *Malaria, Yellow Fever, Measles, Aids, MERS-CoV* and *Ebola,*[126] sat within a long lineage of pandemics.

The most relevant and widely discussed in the first six-months of *Covid-19* was the *Spanish Flu* (H1N1) of 1918-1920 that decimated populations post World War I as it infected 500-million people and caused fifty million deaths. The *Sars-CoV-2* virus entered centre stage with pandemic legacy in the wings, to add to a general feeling of how forcibly, '… the world around us is changing,' according to anthropologists, Martin Holbraad, Bruce Kapferer and Julia F. Sauma, who as editors of *Anthropology of Discontinuity in Times of Turmoil* (2015), unravel

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[126] *World Health Organisation*, February 2020, https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/en/

discourses on rupture pre-COVID-19 that bore much relevance to my fieldwork during the pandemic (Holbraad, M.; Kapferer B., and Sauma, J. F., 2019, 5). They acknowledge the foresight of Gluckman and the Manchester School, as aforementioned (P.137), links to the following perspective on:

> *… process as the centre of [their] methodological innovations, developing around the concept of situational analysis, which concentrated on events or moments of rupture, disruption and disturbance in the ongoing activities of everyday and not so everyday life.*

Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., F. (eds) 2019, 12

The methodology I used was an integrated tri-pathway model that related to and disentangled firstly the 'recording and analysis of events of practice', and secondly objectively formulated, then conferred and deepened understanding through, 'theoretical abstraction' (Kapferer, B., 2005, 90). The thesis reflects on the methodology both in the process of research and of the processual practices observed. So, it is an analysis of the parallel existence (figure 27) of a segmented yet collective narrative on food, of cooking and eating, juxtaposed with an estranged, '… fragile point in time' characterised by the manifestation of pandemic heightened internetworked-connectivity and decreased physical contact (Pritchard, S., June 2020).

Temporalities of time zones
Temporalities of the pandemic
Temporalities of social media
Temporalities of the everyday
Temporalities of the 'event'
Temporalities of cooking

Figure 27: The Parallels of Time, Farrell, M.B., 2020

An ethnographic example of the fractural and transient spaces of time was a *Zoom cookalong* event. As a participant observer in June 2020 I viewed the framing architecture of time as characterising 'events of practice'. The virtual gathering existed in three time zones

EDT (Eastern Daylight Time), *CEST* (Central European Summer Time), and *AWST* (Australian Western Standard Time). The idea, proposed by the host Flash, was that the intended participants of three continents could cook and eat online 'together'. Flash planned the gathering so it would be a traditional mealtime for everyone regardless of time-zone. For me in France it began at 13:00 (lunchtime), those in northern Australia it would be 19:00 (evening meal) and for the east coast Americans 7:00 (breakfast). Already here was an example of parallel passages of the experience of time existing in the same space. Of the scalar, the mealtimes that punctuate the day, the partitioning presence of divisions made up of imaginary meridian lines, and the melding together of the these, i.e., time-zones, through internetworked technology.

The delamination of time in the *cookalong* can be pulled apart further by a more intimate examination of the three-and-half hour-long event. The process of examining the online gathering from concept to temporal planning to the intimacies of time I feel resonate with the Charles and Ray Eames film (1977) *Thinking in Powers of Ten.* The film takes the viewer on a scalar journey of a picnic in the park scene that travels or delaminates from macroscopic to magnified then microscopic to understand better the 'relative size of things' (Eames D., 2020),

> *[We] hear about scale every day, whether it be supertankers, stars burning thousands of lightyears away, the study of microscopic viruses, or global warming. Understanding scale, or as the Eameses said, "the effect of adding another zero," has the power to make us better scholars and better citizens.*

Eames Office.com, accessed 2020

Because '… big and small are always connected' (Eames D., 2020), it felt overwhelming to be in an internetworked space, choreographed by Flash, one that was rolling through many different scales. The notes I wrote immediately after my participation in the *cookalong*

describe the setting aided my reflection on feeling overpowered by collisions of scale and delamination of time:

> *There were ten screens attending an international cooking and eating together experience. At each screen there ranged solo guests to Flash's group of ten. There is an intriguing doubling for them (Flash's guests) of being both physical and virtual guests and hosts. Screen (virtual) hosts dipped in and out of also being physical hosts, a sort of simultaneity was happening. Yet the physical guests were more connected and visibly (through the screen) connecting to one another. Flash seemed adept and relaxed about the fusion of the virtual and physical worlds and chatted continuously in a narration of his internal thoughts in-dispersed with instructions and requests (particularly to his wife to find things), to those people physically with him. He rarely engaged through the screen with us other than as a 'presenter', it seemed like a performance of which we were participant audience, yet the participation was superfluous to the food story he was curating. The other virtual guests, viewable in the gallery were all busy cooking in their own kitchens (either solo or in pairs) or watching the hosts' performances*.

> Flash, my observation notes (*cookalong* event), November 2022

Re-reading through my notes of the experience feels rather like a ball in a pinball machine waiting for the machine operator to propel the ball (me) into a frenetic space, which at the time left me feeling nauseous with all the technical and virtualised physical motion. After one hour, the virtualised cooking together experience was neither performance nor participant interaction. It was dominated by discordant sound and blurred images of the activity of cooking, and became an exercise of trying to make sense of the rush of information.

Of course, cooking itself is a narrative of transformation and time, so the additional layers of a) watching others embedded in the temporalities of cooking and b) physically experiencing them in my own kitchen felt surreal and unanchored to familiarity. At one point the chaos of not 'being in time' with the online chef-educator hosting in their kitchen stimulated deep senses of being in a hostile place as described in my notes:

> *The pasta chef Penne, who, when he and wife went to eat their dish at laid table (as Flash had done, cooking-eating with physical guests/at physical table), left the camera running focused on his worktop surface. It was not cleared up after his cooking and felt like looking at an unloved space and was uncomfortable and disorientating. The visuals were of the empty messy worktop, the music playing (from Flash's kitchen) had become louder, as had the distant disembodied voices of physical guests eating together, and it felt like I was intruding. More and more I felt like an uninvited guest at a dinner party.*

> Flash, my observation notes (*cookalong* event), November 2022

I felt that the tensions between technology and humanness, like being at an, 'all you can eat buffet', the online buffet table simulates overindulgence and loses sight of meeting healthy sociological and biological need to communicate and share experiences.

4. 5 Othering, boundaries, and borders

The notion of belonging through curated boundaries, as a fundamentality of the culture versus nature definition of kinship (e.g., P.15-16; 31), was pertinent to an exploration of the social frame of the internet (Carsten, J., 1995, 2000; Goffman, E., 1956; Weber, F., 2005). The internet – both envisioned and operated – is humanmade, culturally designed for connectivity by algorithmic coders who design the boundaries of who belongs through the '… building blocks of the other world of the internet' (Wu, T., accessed 2019).

Kinship and group boundaries formed and reformed by social groups operating within on-line communities of affinity are structured by algorithmic codes, *if* designed by the few for the many reveal prejudice through gender and racial boundary making of filters, language used and preferencing the activity of an engaging performer. (Cohen, A. P., 2000; Wachter-Boettcher, S., 2017). The bio-digital existence I observed was the presence within the blurred boundaries, between life on the internet and material life as an increasingly habitual way of living accelerated by *Sars-CoV-2* virus governmental physical distance orders, that invited online 'othering' activity simply due to the scale of activity of those 'privileged' and practiced on line (Bourdieu, P., 2013; De Certeau, M., 2011).

Framing an exploration of the rumblings of internet activity on boundary making and unmaking recognises the 'digital divide', of the gaps between those with easy access to computers and the Internet, and those without access. *The International Telecommunication Union* (*ITU*) founded in 1865 to, '… facilitate international connectivity in communications networks' urgently highlight that the reasons for the absence, of almost half the world

population, was due to economic, gender, educational, generational, and living in conflict as perhaps the biggest example of boundary making in 2020 (*ITU* website accessed August 2020).

Added to those left out of access to international communication is internet censorship, from pervasive to suspect, of countries such as China, Syria, Bahrain, Iran or Vietnam. Exclusion (pervasive or suspected) is informed by the, 'enemies of the internet' list, compiled by *Reporters Sans Frontiers* (*RSF*), an international non-governmental organisation who focus on, '… countries [that] mark themselves out, not just for their capacity to censor news and information online, but also for their almost systematic repression of Internet users'.[127] The *RSF* includes countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and India on this list too, as to whether this is due to censorship or repression is an issue to reflect upon.

During my fieldwork there were some different aspects of online othering, and its boundaries and borders, which melded together. They created a synthesised online space of performing lines of distinction of the internetworked authored self with the capacity of technological software, online habitus, and social control through human-computer data filtering to inform surveillance. Firstly, the online space can create, within the structure of algorithmic architecture, an objectified identity, one that plays with the notion of the porosity of boundaries and their ambiguity on the internet, a conundrum of the bio-digital lifeworld that synthesises human-technology construction explored further in chapter six *The Affordances and the Allure of the Online* (P.209-242). It is chiefly about the distancing from the physical self, the othering, created by the act of fictionalising biographies (e.g., P.31).

The technological aspect of computer-software, that allows inclusivity or not, and the algorithms, language and coding that filters or selects the dominant – or even nurtures the

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[127] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_censorship_and_surveillance_by_country

emergence – of online nations.[128] Unlike on-going and creative human learning machine learning typically, '… stop[s] learning once out in practice' (Brown, J., & Duguid P., 2000, 8), unless algorithmic coders design, '… digital architecture that forces people to operate on the terms of another culture', and create a co-dependency wherein the machine uses massive amounts of human fed data to solicit software adaptation – aka learning (Kornai, A., 2013).

These discriminatory factors, and the concern for gender and racial equity, are expressed by educationalist and writer Safiya Noble (2012), as in her description of her college lessons with young black women in America, and her introductory lesson on Black history that requires an on-line search for examples of black female activists and leaders. Each year she and her students experience the same disbelief when search engine result is something like 'sugaryblackpussy.com' to their search for black women as leaders and achievers. Then there is the human choice made in daily social media activity that incrementally builds or dismantles boundaries of hospitality and hostility. This is done through approving or disapproving, welcoming or rejecting the identity, status, culture and activity of quasi-fictional public others existing in an intimate and private online space.

As *Anthropological Responses to Health Emergencies* (ARHE)acknowledge (P.162), the fifth aspect is the power and division of surveillance which reflects again on Fischer and Applin's work (2013) introduced (P.17) and discussed (P. 265) of the restrictive qualities of data software in its mode of collection, biased filtering and consequent decisions made. Initiated by governments and corporates to form othering made on the internet by algorithmic filtering and analytical codes, that then allow the storage and retrieval of transnational data,

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[128] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/220414/online-nation-2021-report.pdf

the restricting limitations of who can travel, particularly notable during the pandemic, has become part of the political information economy, as expressed by *ARHE*:

> *… social surveillance and political exclusion will intensify stigmas associated with domestic or international border/boundary crossers, migrants, immigrants, refugees, and tourists.*

> *Anthropological Responses to Health Emergencies* (ARHE), April 2020

In addition to the fluidity of these transnational online narratives is the paradox that many countries closed their physical borders and/or imposed travel restrictions on 90% of the world population during lockdown one (*Airbnb*, March 2020). The global lockdown accelerated internet use and magnified the role of social media and video conference platforms, with a 98% rise in residential internet usage.[129] The reliance on the internet to stage and perform a fused-blend of leisure and work, share opinions, seek knowledge, or act out welcome or rejection within virtual communities of affinity was exponential. Some internetworked activity saw into the cracks that were created by *Covid-19*, and the epidemic of 'otherness' boundary-making of gender and race (e.g., P.164-165).

4.6 Inequity and risk

> *Unequal social structures produce unequal disease exposure and treatment, especially during an outbreak when all resources become constrained.*

> *Anthropological Responses to Health Emergencies* (ARHE), April 2020

In consideration of what these resources might have been during the pandemic, this section tentatively looks at key features of discriminatory boundaries, and therefore the inequalities and risks felt more acutely due to *Covid-19*. My research peered into the pandemic ruptures to everyday life in terms of socio-economic features, and experiences in middle and high-income countries contextualised by the impact of global and on-going narratives (Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., F. 2019, 12). The fieldwork explored the key and

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[129] https://www.nexttv.com/news/internet-traffic-surges-98-amid-covid-19-related-social-distancing

constant ever-changing tense narratives of access, inclusion or exclusion that were centre-stage on the internet during the pandemic.

Thus, offline dichotomies of empowerment and disempowerment were viewed because millions shared their 'lived realities' of access to food, outdoor space, guaranteed income, childcare, healthcare, private physical space and 'safe' physical contact. Online was a platform for voices to question and challenge the risks, discontent and solidarity felt. Within the parameters of my research on food on the internet, narratives of hierarchical lines between host and guests were drawn in an online space heightened by the constancy of bio-digital experience in everyday lives.

Arguably the internetworked spaces animated the empowerment and disempowerment of the physical experience questions *of*, *on* and *in* the internet (e.g., P.56; 103), particularly social media and video conferencing platforms, revolved around inequality and risk, and straddled the platform design or content dilemma ('Why We Post', *UCL* and *Futurelearn*, 2020). Ultimately was it the context or the content of communication that formed the online culture? Or perhaps more astutely for the research, in which ways did the context and the content form, and reform, the hierarchies and expectations of hospitality, and thus the lines drawn between equality and inequality to summon who is, and who is not invited?

As observed in the previous section the 'digital divide' (first coined by Lloyd Morrisett, of American technology charity foundation *Markle* in 2003),[130] of almost half of the world population with no internet connection and/or access to a computer, framed the quietened voice of inequality and risk. If you are not there (online) your voice is absent and your material life is affected by this 'non-existence' in the internetworked metaverse, conversely, there may

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[130] https://www.markle.org/sites/default/files/sesame_street_at_ten_1977-78.pdf

be liberation by being disentangled from the hold of internetworked disciplinarity. But nevertheless, the significance disconcertingly arises that the divide is more than digital. The rupture of *COVID-19,* '[P]andemic [is] Forcing Everyone to Face the Digital Divide' (*Wired* magazine, accessed 2020), as unequal access to resources can:

> *… highlight the critical importance of ICT in the wake of COVID-19, address the stark inequalities of access and adopt concrete, urgent measures to accelerate digital transformation across all sectors and to connect all global citizens to digital services.*

<div align="right">

*The International Telecommunication Union (*ITU), accessed 2020

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The following timeline, of selected dates and occurrences, aims to present context to situate the connections between the online, *Instagram's* social media and *Zoom* video conferencing platform, and the offline events that occurred during the March-July (2020) initial measures of limiting the spread of a novel virus. This minute glimpse at the political frames of repression and protest acknowledges it's limited viewpoint which sits amongst many decades of protest. Three of these protests were very active on social media pre-pandemic, firstly (2013) *#blm* (black lives matter), with 6.4 million tagged posts (22/8/20), then (2014) *Black Lives Matter*, the official *Instagram* account calling for action and response to anti-Black racism *@blklivesmatter* with 3.9 million followers (22/8/20), the *Me Too* anti-sexual harassment hashtag movement (2017) and, the anti-global warming environmental school-strike protest movement (2018) led by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg (10.6 million *Instagram* followers 22/8/20).

Contextual timeline that framed #blm:

These are predominately American dates triggered by the death of an unarmed black citizen, George Floyd, by an on-duty white policeman in Minneapolis, USA, which resulted in social media response and protests.

March 13th-14th 2020: United States closed its borders to those coming from countries/regions that included Europe (Schengen area), Ireland and United Kingdom.

March 19^{th,} 2020: Citizens of the United States of America advised against international travel.

March 19th-24th 2020: State and city wide 'shelter in place' (stay-at-home) orders are put in place in the United States of America (This includes New York city but not Minneapolis or Minnesota the city and state where George Floyd lived)

May 25^{th,} 2020: George Floyd, an unarmed 46-year-old black American man killed by an on-duty white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during an arrest for allegedly using a counterfeit bill. His filmed and photographed death, taken on bystanders' smartphones, was 'posted' on social media and then became viral (shared and reposted by many people) on social networking platforms.

Late May 2020: Sixteen cities in the United States introduced curfews as a direct result of 'calming' the protests of the killing of George Floyd.

May 31^{st,} 2020: The United States of America's President Trump used social media *Twitter* to state he believed that *Antifa* (an ant-fascist political movement with no central leadership who communicate via the internet) be declared a terrorist threat. Below is his tweet in response to an Antifa protest in Minneapolis:

> *Congratulations to our National Guard for the great job they did immediately upon arriving in Minneapolis, Minnesota, last night. The ANTIFA led anarchists, among others, were shut down quickly. Should have been done by Mayor on first night and there would have been no trouble!*

President Trump, 31/5/20, *Twitter*

June 2^{nd,} 2020: *Black Out Tuesday Instagram* pledge, a solid black square to indicate social - media silence as protest against systemic racism (August 2020: 22.6 million hash-tagged posts).

June 10^{th,} 2020: *Instagram's* hashtag campaign *#ShareTheMicNow* (*Share the Microphone Now*) launched with the *Instagram* post (figure 28) by an American media company co-

founder, Katie Couric, gathered well-known white female personalities to 'hand-over' their *Instagram* account for a day to successful black women. The original American group of 92 women (46 swaps) rippled out from the United States of America into swapping on English language *Instagram* accounts of Britain and Australia.
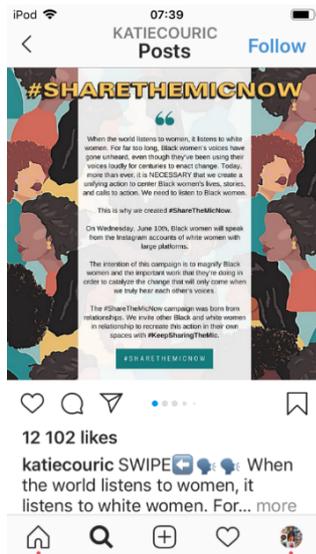
'*For too long, Black women's voices have gone unheard, even though they've been using their voices loudly for centuries to enact change*'
'*Today, more than ever, it is NECESSARY that we create a unifying action to center Black women's lives, stories and calls to action. We need to listen to Black women*'.

@katiecouric, *Instagram*, June 2020

Figure 28: *Instagram* post @katiecoric, June 2020

July 2020: Hashtag campaign *#challengeaccepted* with 6.3 million posts in August 2020 worked as a social media chain letter. Reinvigorated from its March 2020 launch, and part of *International Women's Day* publicity, it linked with *#womensupportingwomen* (women supporting women) with 8.7 million posts of August 2020.
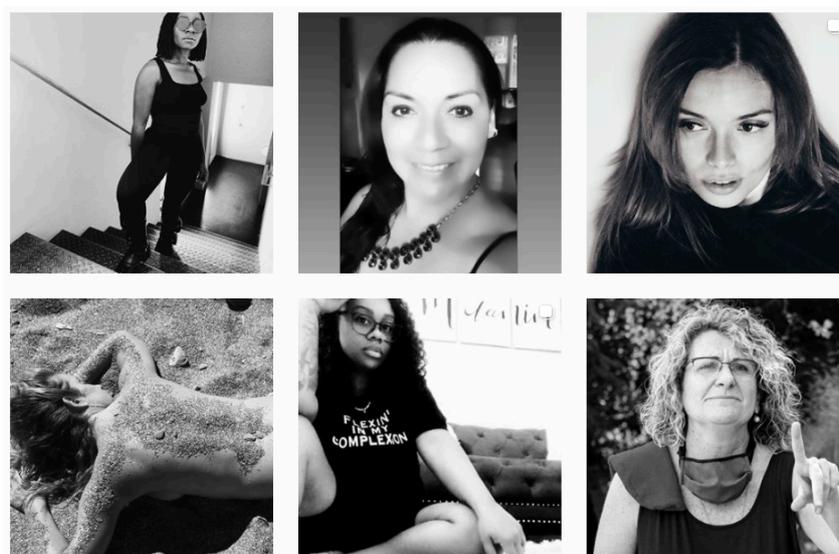
Figure 29 #challengeaccepted image post from *Instagram*, *Kapwing.com* accessed 2020

Too often, some women find it easier to criticize each other or themselves instead of building each other up. With all the negativity going around, let's do something positive! Upload 1 picture of yourself...ONLY YOU. Then tag 10 more women to do the same.

Instagram text post for #challengeaccepted, July 2020

Like the black squares of *#Black Out Tuesday*, the representation of solidarity received some criticism as to the vagueness of meaning, and in the case of the *#challengeaccepted* campaign (figure 29) accusation of encouraging posting, described by an American television writer, as 'hot selfies' (Blackett, C., in New York Times, 27/07/20).

Instagram's hashtag busyness rippled back-and-forth between video conference platform activity. Examples of this are three ethnographic accounts of eight 90-minute *Zoom* panel discussions on *Black Book's* webinar programme 'Decolonising the Food Industry' (Summer 2020). The aim for the platform, was, '… a global representation platform for Black and non-white people working within hospitality and food media' (*The Caterer* magazine, 7/7/20). The programme, inspired by American food and hospitality internet platforms, intended to give voice to POC (People of Colour) in the food and hospitality sector.

Zoom, founded in America in 2011, and launched in 2013, a service of cloud platform connectivity via video conferencing, which included webinars. Usage escalated from ten million in December 2019 to 300 million daily meetings in July 2020.[131] The architecture of the *Zoom* software – originally set up for businesses rather than individuals to connect – enabled silent or vocal presence. This characterises the experience along a spectrum of *prosumer* (producer + consumer) activity with assorted options to use/not use microphone intermittently, to a digital-hands-up to ask a live question, to blocking a profile photograph in a live webinar, conference or private direct chats. It also returns to thinking about host, hospitality and hostility, and the mechanisms of control and cultured online etiquette (e.g., P.125; 220; 266).

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[131] https://teamstage.io/zoom-statistics/

As social anthropologist Lucy Lowe and medical anthropologist Alex Nading commented it is, '… who gets to spin the web', referenced in *The Anthropology of Epidemic Control: Technologies and Materialities* (2018), is about the materialism of marginalisation and control, in having a voice, and in this case a technological one empowered by the pandemic 'pause' and rupture (Lynteris, C., and Polykett, B., 2018).

The *Black Book* Summer 2020 webinars were of the silent but present kind for the online guests, akin to being an audience member at a physical panel presentation (12/7/2020). The opinions of six women from minoritized ethnicities in the hospitality sector considered the inequalities found on Cookery Shows and Online Cookery Platforms. After introductions, the panel responded to the chair's prompts, and to each other, and agreed on their experiences of non-white stereotyping as exotic and argumentative women. Personalised with an account by a speaker who shared her experience of a production assistant's comments, '[D]o you get angry in the kitchen? Have you a fiery temper because you are a Latino?' To which the other panellists (all unmuted) laughed with recognition as one of them added how the assistant was, '… trying to see if you will perform as stereotype', of a Latina television chef.

Thus, started a discussion on whether to use stereotyping as an inroad to work, a few agreeing that it had been necessary, especially in early days in their careers, but also that it was additionally problematic when it dumbed down the audience's grasp of human diversity. The panel presented their experiences of how to challenge the racially discriminatory systemic operations of the food broadcasting industry, of a 'very white world' a presenter stated, one that revolves around culinary authenticity, performance and audiences, hierarchies of cuisine and the power and elitism of knowledge – and who is 'qualified' to share that knowledge.

The key areas discussed by the women, framed by the white male dominance in the architecture of the online space, were in the main personal accounts of experiences that

revealed the inequality between cultural identities seen through the bi-focal lens of food and media. The plentiful anecdotes conveyed how they worked in a sector where, '… access has only been through the white gaze' and of, '… white men [as] the gateways to finding true and authentic chefs'. (*Blackbook* webinars),[132] and I observed in the webinars (2020) how the host (chair of the panel discussion) and co-hosts (the panellists) performance, mindful or not of their mute and invisible audience which included myself, danced highly structured movements of inclusion and exclusion.

Their selection of software functions to 'manage' webinar and meeting participants had the paradoxical impact of not being seen or heard in discussions that highlight the inequality of not being seen or heard. The selected *Zoom* option enabled:

> *… the host and any designated panellists … [to]share their video, audio and screen … view-only attendees …the ability to interact via Q&A, Chat, and answer polling questions. The host [to] … unmute the attendees.*
>
> <div align="right">*Zoom* Help Centre, accessed August 2020[133]</div>

To conclude this brief look at the context and content of inequality, one that Daniel Miller and his team (2020) explored in the four-week long *Futurelearn* e-learning programme, which I e-studied their programme 'Why We Post' in August 2020, I learned how offline and online lives do, or do not reflect each other, and explored whether internet presence challenges inequality or not, i.e., does it make inequality more vivid because of the constant ability to see 'how others live'? The risks of inequality, such as low and uncertain income, multiple occupancy housing without gardens, lack of medical insurance, underlying health problems and poor access to nutritional food rang clear in the rupture of pandemic divisions that reported that, 'Black Americans continue to experience the highest actual COVID-19 mortality rates nationwide, more than twice as high as the rate for Whites and Asians, who

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[132] https://www.thecaterer.com/news/zoe-adjonyoh-launches-black-book-representation-platform
[133] https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115005474943-Meeting-and-Webinar-Comparison

have the lowest actual rates' (*American Public Media* (APM) research lab, accessed August 2020).[134]

Many essential 'frontline '– i.e., key workers – had hospital, supermarket, cleaning, food processing, haulage, public transport or childcare jobs, and the figures were disproportionately non-white and female. The complexities of the narratives and manifestations of inequality and risk echoed the premise that the *Covid-19* pandemic, a time of, '…emergence and negation in times of rupture…starkly revealed' (Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., (eds) 2019, 1). The risks of being invisible and mute and the online tools of control inherent in discrimination contrasted with the opportunities given by the intensity of pandemic driven mediatised voices that imagined a '… space out of the white gaze' where, '… we can bring each other up'.[136]

4.7 Food-steps

In a digital world ideas are everywhere.

Kantar, webinar series, 2020[138]

Many countries and regions had been working to challenge the wide-ranging health repercussions of industrial food for years but the compliant trust in science, standard use of food plastic packaging, and the first industrialised country expectations of plentiful cheap food remained dominant. That is until the pandemic food-shortages in supermarkets, virus clusters in meat industry workers (the meat industry deemed essential work), farmers who suffered cancelled orders, and the glaring issue of how to respectfully and safely feed and care for the elderly, particularly those living in enforced isolation due to attempts to contain the pandemic.

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[134] https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race
[136] 'Blackbook' a global representation platform described in The London Economic
[138] Kantar UK market research company

And shamefully millions who turned to food banks with a 153% increase of need in the UK during 2021.[139]

The rupture of industrialised food normalcy tore open, and the view of many of the problems was like a '… flood rushing through a valley' commented a *Local Trust* organiser in their webinar *How can we build resilient food systems in the COVID-19 recovery?* (26/6/2020). A flood co-narrated on the internet that garnered local yet also global relativity, i.e., the internetworked perception of making and sharing ideas and concerns. The '… missing links in the food system' characterised by, '… systemic racism in the system of land discrimination' were the foci in the fifth *Black Book* panel webinar *Decolonising the Food Industry: Farming and Agricultur*e (ZA, 16/8/20).

These and other issues frame all the discussions on food knowledge and the relationship with eating together. They have done since the first (sugar) plantations were planted almost four-hundred years ago (Mintz, S., 1986). The *Black Book* panellists (made up of chefs, farmers, and writers) conveyed their personal experiences of, '… fighting the same battle' of access to good food, '… on different grounds' (ZA, 16/8/20). The grounds, actual and metaphorical, were in the offline and online, abstract and concrete, visible and invisible spaces of contestation that see only 1% of growing land in America owned by farmers, waterway and land-grabs,[140] the 'whitewashing' (ZA, 2020) of superfoods and cash-crop practices (Mintz, S., and du Bois, D., M., 2002; Steele, C., 2020). The 'pause' of *Covid-19* aligned with the ability (for just above 50% of the world population), to communicate on the acute immediacy of historic food inequalities and dysfunctions. Webinars such as *Black Book* were timely. Receptive audiences had the time and motivation to welcome discussion that nurtured impressions of

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[139] https://www.niesr.ac.uk/news/covid-19s-shocking-impact-people-need-food-banks
[140] https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/issues/food-farming-and-hunger/land-grabs/

solidarity in internetworked spaces of co-narration. The authoritative hospitality of the *Black Book* webinar invited guests to enter an online space that paradoxically was about the hierarchies of hospitality and inherent hostility.

Food, as an every-day necessity, was a global commonality, a material, or a lens through which to feel and see into the ruptures of the pandemic:

> *Familiar distinctions between past, present and future [are] compressed, collapsed or suspended in different ways, and people's historicity... connect[ed] with scales of experience that may in ordinary times feel removed.*
>
> Holbraad, M., Kapferer, B., and Sauma, J., F. (eds) 2019, 13

The consequences of living with the fragmentation of the food system, of the rupture to the perceived constant made by *Covid-19*, saw the demand forecasting of, 'just in time logistics', particularly for the extra-domestic hospitality sector, laid bare. The practice of supermarkets and the hospitality sector to create food excess, food waste (albeit given to charities to feed the hungry but not actually adjusting the industrial food model) catapult the disparity between food waste, and the scenes of dairy milk being poured away (Parasecoli, F., 10th August 2020). Milk, the only food product that Britain has been self-sufficient in since 1939 due to the industrialisation of the dairy business, was excess to need when we were at home taking tea and coffee breaks, begs the question, did we drink less of it in lockdowns, or was it thrown away pre-pandemic too, albeit with less attention given (Steele, C., 2013)?

The rupture allowed the every-day of individuals to be socially communicated in a collective online activity. The coupling of dysfunctionality of the global food system, and the hectically active convergence of social media stories of this dysfunctionality, perhaps allowed time to concentrate on food and eating values. In-fact, everyone online was, '... the source and the receiver' of a unique and co-narrated rupture to business as usual (Hall, S., 1980, 118).

4.8 Conclusion

> … grounded ethnographic data can help generate pandemic responses that are sensitive to injurious social contexts … generating knowledge about internal vulnerabilities within systems.
>
> *Anthropological Responses to Health Emergencies* (*ARHE*), April 2020

The 'discursive production', by more than 50% of the world population, of co-making and circulating a pandemic narrative stressed the urgency for anthropology to realise its validity in the twenty-first century's bio-digital lifeworld existence (Hall, S., 1980, 118). The hybrid of offline and online space, constructed and enlivened by classic anthropological themes of study, and the fusion of the anthropology of food and the anthropology of the internet allowed a valuable bi-focal lens. Anthropology of food has many decades of robust scholarship on key, '… internal vulnerabilities within systems', to competently and palpably unravel some of the abstract and concrete complexities of power, trust, reciprocity and hospitality, kinship, cultural identity, and beliefs (Brown, J., 8th June 2020).

With the emerging work on bio-digital existence, anthropology came into its own during the pandemic. Physical, bio-digital and digital approaches in my fieldwork observed and interpreted the acuteness and intensity of rupture through the stark contrasts of intra-domestic and extra-domestic practices, adaptation, and absences (Applin, S., and Fischer, M. D., 2012; Horst, H. A., & Miller, D., 2012).

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PANDEMIC'S EPIDEMIC
The silence of loneliness

I would have been lost without my MacBook, which promised to bring connection,
and in the meantime, filled the vacuum left by love.

Laing, Olivia, 2016

The uncomfortable reality of loneliness came into stark focus during *COVID-19.* The '… social, cultural, and relational' parameters that determine loneliness became more active and overt in a socially isolated time (Ozawa-de-Silva & Parsons, 2010, 613). For millions the acceleration of more-than humanistic[147] online communities were embraced because the 'COVID-19 pandemic [has] highlighted our need for social connection' (Ozawa-de-Silva & Parsons, 2010,614). Framed by the intensity of a physical home in juxtaposition with the internetworked space, for those with limited relational access to physical or cultural connection, it meant a life on *Zoom, Instagram,* and other socially mediated platforms.

Franchement suggested that the oppression of solitude, due to the pandemic social distancing measures, meant, '… it feels like it's imposed somehow and especially in the context of COVID' (interview, November 2021), to differentiate between the choice to be alone, and the pressure of loneliness. The acute force of legislature and digital reaction, intensity that aimed to limit the pandemic's impact on national healthcare services, provided the perfect climate for loneliness. Did the pandemic's '… psychological and social effects of prolonged dislocation and social isolation', a time of '… ongoing lives [are] put on hold' underscore society's trajectory toward disparate communities of loneliness?' (Ozawa-de-Silva & Parsons, 2010, 617)

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[147] Relationships between human and non-human i.e., human and other species or human and machine.

Also, pertinent to my field of study as an anthropologist of food, could commensality as a physical daily and universal '… social exchange practice' be the antithesis and thus a possible antidote to loneliness (Parsons, M., A, 2020, 635). The amplification of loneliness during the enforced socially isolated time of the pandemic, coupled with the dominance of computer-mediated social and work lives, gave opportunities to question and disrupt perceptions of loneliness. Franchement's comments are important to reflect upon as particular to fieldwork conducted through the time of a pandemic. It was the imposition that made the difference because it was not choice to be alone or seek solitude. The absence of the freedom to be physically social had detrimental consequences for loneliness because it bred a sense of powerlessness and acceptance.

Foremostly, this chapter explores narratives and ethnographies of loneliness in a bid to deflate the narrative of individual mental health as solely causal. Thus, I propose a recognition of its structural, societal, cultural, and technological underpinnings because '… loneliness should not be pathologized as a disorder, but rather seen as a natural expression of what it means to be a social being' (Ozawa-de-Silva & Parsons, 2010, 614). I saw how loneliness was curated by bio-digital, human-machine structural social frames of disaggregated physical communities. Ones that were internetworked, working and studying remotely, in socially mediated digital lives reconfigured by the pandemic. The ultimate question rests on whether the '… compensatory internet use theory', thought to allow users '… to use Internet to fulfil unmet real-life' was exacerbating loneliness (Wongpakaran et al., 2021, 4). During the pandemic online 'togetherness' may have met the participants social learning needs, but was it a simulation that dramatically changed – and normalised – the bi-sensory reproduction of food knowledge?

5.1 The death of hospitality

… most people (93%) … have meals with family and friends at least sometimes. Even so 15% said they hadn't had a meal with another family member in the last six months.

<div align="right">Dunbar, R., 2017, 4</div>

The function of eating together is nutritional, social, therapeutic and helps us avoid harmful ingredients (e.g., P.147; 185). Anthropologists, historians, writers, archaeologists, and psychologists all document this – from gastronomic writer Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in his book [1825] (1970), *Physiology of Taste,* to anthropologist Mary Douglas' (1972) *Deciphering a Meal* introduced on page 17, to sociologist Deborah Lupton's *Digital Food Cultures* (2020), introduced on page 22. They and plenty more illuminate and confirm the vital continuance of commensality into the digital age, into the internetworked context. What did commensality look like in online and hybrid spaces during the pandemic with its startling increase of internetworked reliance, coupled with stay-at-home guidance? How did the acuteness of this pandemic narrate commensal materiality, in contrast with the online dimension of cooking and eating 'together'?

Many, such as anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar (P.23), present the waning of gathering to eat pre-pandemic – due to factors such as work, single-occupancy households, family commitments, finances, food skills, the commute, time-poverty, and the distances lived between families – as challenging to eating and bonding together in 'kinship' groups. Pre-pandemic the culture of extra-domestic solo-eating as a vulnerable 'choice' was familiar in several countries e.g., the Japanese trend of eating in public with soft toys as companions, and often posting photographs of their cuddly dinner date onto their social media accounts, or the established Danish restaurant with only sole diner tables, are interesting practices to consider, particularly when set against the subsequent physical distancing enforcement of *COVID-19* (P.184, figure 30).

Research and scholarship by Spence (P.20; 32; 134) – a psychologist, Mancini – a digital scientist, and Huisman – a communication scientist (2019), and similarly by Beulah, Sung and Lee – all market consumption researchers (2019), highlight this tension with their vivid accounts of how social eating has intertwined with the internet, and question what being together and what being alone means, specifically in the context of commensality. I reflected upon their research when I learned about 'Mukbang', also known as 'Eating Show', part of internet eating culture of watching another eat via an online streaming platform e.g., *YouTube* or *TikTok*. Mukbang is a global phenomenon that began in Korea (2009) and now has global appeal that claims to stave off feelings of loneliness whilst eating alone but has been criticised as fetishization of women eating, and possibly instead elevates the disconnection from physical socialising and food.

I highlighted these tensions in a workshop I co-designed with Professor Fischer and facilitated online in 2021 at the *Creative Tastebuds Symposium,* Aarhus University[148] (P. 290, appendix v*).* It focused on the bio-digital interplay of multi-sensory eating and played with notions of representation, association, and the internal-external, abstract-concrete dichotomies of eating. The 40-minute hybrid workshop included time for the audience to experience a *Mukbang* recording with their eyes closed, to explore the evocative sounds, and consider how the aural associations, could perhaps, simulate a multi-sensory eating experience, and how this might alter sensory perceptions and gratification.

Other pre-pandemic examples of internetworked reimaging of solo-eating include 'Skeating' (*Skyping*[149] and eating at the same time) and, the familiar scene since 2009 of lone public diners who are 'together' with others via their smartphone as passive or active inhabitants of their

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[148] https://creativetastebuds.dk/contributions-ct2021
[149] The verb Skyping is done using *Skype* video conference platform and was popular pre-Covid-19 but was soon overtaken by *Zoom.*

online context. Many of these groups of diners smartphone photograph their convivial meals as an act of collective memory-making for themselves, or to connect with absent others. During, and for a short time after the self-isolation and physical- distancing of the pandemic (2020-2022), it seemed that some of these types of experiences – the physical solitary coupled with the online social – become more normalised (figures 30 and 31). The pre-pandemic photographs in figure 30 show the faint imagery of extra-domestic solo or asocial eating that became boldly imprinted on pandemic commensality (figure 31).

| Japan, 2014 | *Mukbang Korea*, internet streaming , 2009 | Holland, 2015 |

Figure 30: Solo eating images pre-Covid-19

Solo-eating was not a new extra-domestic phenomenon before social media or the internet, indeed it had been a practical necessity for hundreds of years, yet had it become about simultaneously being physically solo but 'together' online. The images above were taken since smartphone and social media began its reign (2008) and convey a familiar message since the globalisation of cities, working too far from home to eat a midday meal there, tourism for the masses, rising incomes in wealthy and emerging economies, lifestyle aspirations and the birth of the middle-class.

Post lockdown there clearly was a recognition of the need to gather to eat, as seen in the huge efforts to adapt the offline spaces of social eating into places that conformed to 'safe' physical distance (P.185, figure 31). The distancing was already faintly familiar, due to pre-pandemic tendencies toward solo-eating, which meant the pandemic every-day familiar of sanitised physical-distance was perhaps not so unknown. The hospitality-hostility dilemma felt

strained during the lockdowns and outrightly confused after them, perhaps due to how

physically distancing problematised the trust-building potential of a social meal.

Figure 31: 'Safe' distance dining' *Culture Trip* newsletter, 9/8/2020

5.2 Loneliness is a special place[151]

I aim to give a definition to the term loneliness by situating it within the context of my

ethnographic work. So it is a particularised understanding framed by the duality of an acute

time of a pandemic, one that necessitated enforced physical distancing coupled with the

increased dependency on internetworked sociality. Experts in neuroscience in the field of

loneliness, American Professor John Cappacio and Dr. Louise C. Hawkley believe that,

'[P]erceptions of social isolation, or loneliness, increase vigilance for threat and heighten

feelings of vulnerability while also raising the desire to reconnect' (Cappacio, J. and Hawkley,

L.., C. 2010, 218). Thus, the pandemic years of no, limited, or restrained social interaction,

linked with increased time spent in an online context, felt the social impact of the pandemic's

acceleration in a social petri-dish filled with previously unseen signs of a social epidemic, an

epidemic of loneliness.

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[150] https://theculturetrip.com/newsletter/
[151] Olivia Laing, 2021

In this chapter I describe how my ethnographic fieldwork led me to respond without preconception to a subject I had previously been unaware of. And that I now view loneliness as an issue of great enormity and relevance to anthropological understanding of what it is to be human in the twenty-first century. Firstly, I consider *mutality of experience* (§5.3) and the bio-digital practices of connection observed in an intense year of a pandemic. Next, in *The sensorium* (§5.4), which builds upon chapter three *The Internal Human Compass to the Sensory World* (P. 105-134), I focus on the role of the individualised sensory memory 'bank' within commensality, social-bonding, and sense-making of the world – the sensorium. A cultured psycho-social embeddedness that feeds on collective response, and thus offers insight into bonding and sharing mechanisms of intimacy and relatedness – and conversely their absences.

A focus on *performance* (§5.5) allows an analysis of a private space in a public place (e.g., the video conference platform *Zoom)*[152] with aspects of inclusion and exclusion, the transference (or not) of hierarchies of hospitality, and the tensions between introvert and extrovert. *Alikeness and affinity* (§5.6) draws upon geographical local narratives of cuisine as a signifier of identity able to embolden a sense of belonging, or of othering, which is key to discussions on loneliness. Next (§5.7), the hybridised spaces of *Presence and co-presence*, of how a hand-held or worn internetworked device created omnipresence, and practices of 'absent presence'[153]considers representations and tensions of belonging (or not), through having immediate influence (or not).

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[152] *Zoom* is a cloud-based video communications app that allows you to set up virtual video and audio conferencing, webinars, live chats

[153]https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095344811;jsessionid=55003588E7D1B5FD06641FD05E8D39D1

Finally, *Being needed* (§5.8) leads to the exploration of the complications for the participants, who throughout my fifteen-month fieldwork struggled to transform and maintain their work and social identity of host, in an acutely inhospitable time of physical distancing. Through reflection on 'participant perception' – multi-sensory embodied rather than purely visual accounts – of live online cooking classes; relevant participant interviews with seven chef-educators (plus a handful of one-off interviews with others involved in online food or health education); and auto-ethnographic study, this chapter aims to explore the role of commensality, through the lens of anthropology (Graf, K., 2022, 4). Thus I aim to reveal some of the lonely intricacies of everyday hybridised life in a 'hidden' everydayness, which came into full view through the *COVID-19* pandemic times of private spaces in public internetworked places.

What I discovered May 2020 to August 2021, in a spectrum from the negative and absent to populated and present, revealed the experiences of bio-digital, physical, and online sociality, through the lens of loneliness. Additionally my autoethnography provided many reflective instances on the subject of loneliness, as I experienced times of escapism in the panacea of online cooking lessons, for example with Nicé when it felt like I had , '… escaped into another place, a more romantic one where *COVID-19* cannot touch me, a place full of old-fashioned goodness wrapped up in a simple farmhouse French dish'. The online lessons ranged between extremes of trust, connection, and purpose – belonging – to disconnection, liminality and being unneeded – i.e., loneliness, dependent on the following factors of mutuality of experience; the sensorium; performance; alikeness and affinity; and being needed.

5.3 Mutuality of experience[154]

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[154] Giddens, A., (1991) The Consequences of Modernity, 94

The physical confines of fieldwork set within twenty-two months of European physical distancing restrictions ranged from staying indoors unless completely necessary to go out, to keeping one or two metres from others. This roller-coaster of ever-changing physical-distance guidelines produced an ethnographic process of intense autoethnographic, which 'pushed against' online observations, participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. In all these the '… reflexivity project of the self' was a dominant feature '… monitoring [of] behaviour and its contents, during a time of mass isolation from physical encounter of the tangible collective experience (Giddens, 1991, 36; 52-55). The acceleration of living through the internet during a pandemic – particularly on social media and video conferencing platforms – magnified the individualistic temperament of digital societies entangled with technology.

Gidden's *structuration theory* in *The Constitution of Society* (1984), is as relevant today as it was 40-years ago, as human and machine continued to structure the interplay of 'social practices ordered across space and time' (Giddens, 1984, 2). 2020-2022 was an acute time of internetworked technology use, pandemic framed years that honed a digitally defined connectivity between millions of individuals who '… face the burden *and* the liberation of constructing their own identities' (Adams, M., 2003,222). One that could be viewed as empathic, voyeuristic, collective, or self-promotional, or indeed all of these in a confusing 'hyper-normalised'[155] point in history. To explore narratives of the burden and liberation of the individual, my fieldwork instances are of co-created experiences that offered a 'mutuality of experience' (Giddens, A., 1991, 94). Instances that were all situated in home kitchens used to cook a dish of food.

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[155] A word introduced by anthropologist Alexei Yurchak in his 2006 book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* and the theme of a 2013 film by Adam Curtis *HyperNormalisation*

What my studies revealed was the disruption to individual and group social motivation, made by the limitations of internetworked technology to connect in humanistic ways, that nurtured a 'permanent state of distractedness' (Carr, N., 2010, 109). And that however open and able to co-produce an encounter – through social media or video conference platforms – the elusiveness and transience of mutuality of experience was inflated by the physicality of separation. The promise of togetherness, of a mutuality of experience in cooking 'together' in separate kitchens, was constantly challenged in the fifty online cooking lessons I attended:

> *It feels a lonely place in my kitchen as I watch Chris and Doug together in theirs and One in hers with a baby in her tummy and the distinct feeling of someone else in her kitchen with her. I feel excluded and the 'oddity'… saddened by the distance and lack of interest. I reflect on how this way of relating would be very hard to do in a physical kitchen all together, it would appear rude to not chat openly to all in a group and not only to the person you 'came with'. Of course, that would happen too, but the intensity of division might not feel so acute.*

One, observation notes, (cooking class), February 2021

What became increasingly evident was simultaneity, the feeling of being in two spaces at the same time within the emplacement-displacement spectrum, agitated by lack of synchronicity between those involved – which included the computer's presence (Moghaddari, S., 2018). The pursual of keeping in simultaneous temporal step was key to mutuality of experience, it felt like the online space was distorted, and enlarged the common haphazard and disjointedness of human interaction to a point that my participant observations often left me confused and excluded in situations associated with hospitality, welcome and inclusion:

> *I felt tired by the three-hour experience and went outside to just sit quietly. I actually left at what I thought was the end, there did not seem to be a formal end or goodbye. I began to feel more and more conspicuous and voyeuristic as Flash's tableful (and some of the other's tables of guests) were chatting amongst themselves and I was just watching after having done my cooking and eating …*

Flash, observational notes, (cooking lesson), July 2020

Often, not experiencing mutuality in spaces of commensality was unintentionally exclusive, and it confirmed the difficulties of human-machine led sociality in ways touched upon by Mims (June 2021) and her public engagement work when there is, '… a wall of faces staring at you,

which is totally artificial. So, you've got to learn a completely new way of how to communicate …' (June 2021*).*

There are two questions that beg for attention, pertinent to identifying the need and displacement of the mutuality of experience in commensality. These relate to loneliness via reflecting on Mims' comment about having to learn a new way to communicate. Firstly, is a new way to communicate human or machine led, and secondly, should the trajectory to learn relevant skills to communicate with a wall of faces be challenged? Maverick, a community chef-educator, dashed the conception of internetworked sociality as the only future because she believed, '… to connect people and to easily organise a meal, … the idea is for you to get to spend less time on the internet and more time in sharing reality …' (Maverick, March 2021).

5.4 The sensorium

… sanitary rules to wear masks and not kiss and hug and all of that, God is this the new civilization?

Interview, Franchement, October 2020

The acute time of *COVID-19* social distancing, coupled with hyper-active (leisure and work) internetworked communication, made for plentiful online fieldwork opportunities. My issue was how best to capture and use the immensity of the wave of online information, and how to stay rooted to, or at least reflect upon, the original intention of a project of comparisons (i.e., offline versus internetworked), to investigate the hybrid life of computer co-presence and bio-digitality. The aim to explore human entanglement with technology, using the sensuality of cooking and eating as a lens, engorged to investigate the senses (internal and individual), sensory (external, physical, and social) and a-sensory (individual and online). In March 2020, I turned to exploring the senses through the workings of intimate internality – through autoethnographic study, semi-structured participant interviews on the theme of the senses,

and fieldwork observations of online cooking classes, and this approach gained insights into sensory or simulated internetworked commensality.

As first introduced (P. 107), and threaded throughout my research, the sensorium relates to studies of human mirror neurons, originally investigated in studies of primates, now explored in clinical psychiatry. Researchers in the fields of neurophysiology lent credence to the study of the co-construction of sensory empathy, amongst other collective behaviour, as '... our brains are all quite similar, so we can use them to simulate – to experience, if you will – the mental and emotional lives of others' (Russell, S., 2019, 98). Thus, through mirroring the action of another eating, both in physical actions and/or in our 'mind's eye', we consolidate ways to identify pleasurable food, introduce unfamiliar food and avoid disgusting food (Wilson, B., 2015; Jones, M., 2008; Rozin, P., 2009; Visser, M., 1991; Wrangham, R.W., 2009). The ability of the 2D screen to make absent or present the sensory mirroring of responses to smell; flavour; temperature; movement (internal and external); effortlessly compounds loneliness because it can dilute, forget, or rationalise the multi-sensory experience and the memories which the senses trigger. Online relationships with food and eating can only be highly individualised, and so not a connective social activity because the mirroring is distorted and is wholly about interiority.

My research looked at the presence and absences made by the restrictions of technology and physical distancing regulations. Throughout it felt like it was a study of an odourless, flavourless 2D representation of a smelly, flavourful 3D existence. An internetworked sterile place in a unique time that found that:

> ... the smells of the spices and herbs in my kitchen keep me fully engaged and happy, maybe happier than if One had been chatting the whole time and expecting it to be a social event rather than a practical and enjoyable way to relieve the monotony of home cooked meals.

> One, observation notes, (cooking class), March 2021

I found that many of the online cooking experiences heightened my feelings of disconnect if the chef-educator made no reference to the sensory activity – particularly of smell, flavour or temperature of the cooking (and tasting) process. By ignoring the presence of the sensory stimuli that dominated my kitchen, and presumably the kitchens of online others, pangs of loneliness were exacerbated because pleasure – a key sensory inspired emotion and reaction – and the collective ambition to reach pleasure, was denuded. The opportunity to virtually bond and share mechanisms of intimacy and relatedness often felt thwarted by the quietening of sensory pleasure.

Occasionally however, when a chef-educator piqued the communal sensory experience with a few well-chosen descriptive words, it could uplift and add a feeling of togetherness. Examples of this include One's lesson in January 2020 and a class that culminated with a '…meal [that] is wonderfully warming and filled with tasting new connections to a previously unknown cuisine' (observation notes, February 2021). Also, in interviews some of the participants were prompted to share their thoughts on how they wove-in sensory focus, such as Charisma who explained (interview, January 2021) how he encouraged his students with the challenge of '…once you place food inside your mouth…explain every single detail of it' – though he didn't feel the need to expand on what these detailed explanations were – which was confusing because it seemed key to his efforts to demonstrate how he communicated his teaching practice.

Numerous fieldwork examples were of secondary, rather than primary sensory response, and so relied on literary and metaphorical imagery. A detached, often culturally exclusive, means of naming and labelling rather than human gesturing, noises of appreciation or silent acknowledgement of a collective experience. Much of the sensory experience was about categorisation rather than community and its unspoken communication. Another

absence is the sensory understanding of the transformative principle of cooking when language cannot convey, capture, or explain the nuances of the changes in consistency, temperature, shape, colour, or size that raw ingredients take on in the process toward being edible or ready to eat.

This aspect was a focus for Franchement who shared how she felt about her struggles with the online cooking lesson reliant on language and visuals:

> *But then I think the difficulty was to really see what they were doing when the camera wasn't on them in the same way as it was on me. And I feel I couldn't interact enough even from a visual point of view to see how they were cooking things…or cutting things. So, I was checking up on them saying, Hey, guys…tell me where you are with it. Oh, you're waiting… doing this …or… or this …*

Franchement, interview, March 2021

She went on to describe how the temporality and position of students and their devices, and the motivation of joining a group class was problematic. Unable to gauge students' interest and progress she described the difficultly to invigorate and connect to a 'wall of faces':

> *That's what I'm trying to do here. It seems to be about getting a recipe done. Rather than sharing the experience of cooking, because there are loads of recipes out there. So why would we spend time making a recipe together?*

Franchement, interview, December 2020

So, had the online absence, or at best the online simulation, of the sensory relationship and connectivity of cooking widened the discord in communal encounter. It had direct corollaries to feeling discontented, and thus a lonelier experience than ever, as an online promise of sensory-filled commensality agitated the reality of absent physical-togetherness.

5.5 Performance

Commensality necessitates and evokes vast amounts of performative practices within the arenas of etiquette, traditions of cuisine, host and hospitality or celebration. It is a social and performative activity that nurtures – or not – agency within a community and the animation of self-expression. There is something about the performativity of cooking and

eating – particularly using hands or hand tools that use a '… complex sequences of actions' that become '… a single action in more complex processes' that lend itself to an online uncomfortable easiness (Russell, S., 2019, 263). Dealing with complexity, sequences and processes are a machine's raison d'être and its goal of efficiency. Yet for countless human hands it is the physical rhythm of actions in the kitchen that connects, both human-to-human, and human to the ingredients on a plate or in their bowl. Although efficiency is valued so are the ethereal aspects of ingredient transformation and sensory stimulation.

So clearly performance has relevance to loneliness because it signifies social inclusion, confident cultural knowledge, and committed connection to protecting or evolving cultural mores – such as the partaking in the sensory processes of food transformation. To perform as guest or host at a meal – including preparing and cooking together – denotes an understanding of what is socially and culturally expected, and so generates a public-facing pride in this competence. Precarious, a Cameroon chef-educator conveys her pride as distinctly Cameroon on her website profile:

I'm from Cameroon. I grew up within a very modest family, but I had a happy childhood. Our house was always full of joy, laughter, good conversation and squeals of delight. Cameroon has a reputation for being a very sociable country, so it's very common to see neighbours and relatives sharing a meal on a regular basis. I developed an understanding of the importance of creating bonds and happiness through good food from a young age… I'm very happy to be able to share some of my cooking knowledge but more importantly, to be surrounded by the joy, laughter and conversations that surround a good meal …

Precarious' website profile, accessed January 2021

However, her online cooking class was complicated by her unconfident screen presence, the conditions in her home kitchen when she needed to, '… move the camera around because my kitchen is small', and her poor technology skills. These challenges all added up to an uncomfortable feeling of separation between Precarious and her twenty online guests with little joy, laughter, or conversation:

Precarious has to take the camera down (it is on a ledge, and it keeps falling off throughout class) and then holds the camera above in bird's eye view style of her pan, bowl or chopping board. Each time she does this we catch glimpses not of the intended preparation but of her sink filling up with dishes and bits of discarded vegetables etc, It is disconcerting to see this and, I feel for her trying to cook, move the camera and narrate (happily) what she is doing. Precarious carries on marching through her recipe and we all are following quietly in our own kitchens.

Precarious, observation notes, (cooking lesson), January 2021

It was the confusion of the online class in a hybrid-kitchens that caused the biggest rift, as the access points for conversation (joy or laughter) were inaccessible because technology did not enable her to perform and we, her 'audience', were 'left outside looking in'. The disconnection resulted in the audience reverting to separate and exclusive muted conversations between couples in their virtual kitchens, and for those cooking alone the spectre of loneliness crept in:

[A]part from the introduction at the beginning to our name and where we are, there is no banter or connection at all between the guests and I begin to feel decidedly alone, the odd one out, and that the couples in their kitchens are talking to each other (on mute) or each busy doing something.

Precarious, observation notes, cooking class, January 2021

Stuart Hall (1980) recognised in his twentieth-century studies on television, the tensions (e.g., camera-operators' perspective and the absence of the quiet), of transference of the 3D performance onto a 2D screen. But unlike the television the smartphone or computer problematise who the performer and audience are because the camera and the screen are on the same device, and so confirm that prosumer work can be done.

There were instances and individuals who managed to create a space of interactivity that primarily held to the model of performer, and audience, yet brought in moments of interactive inclusion and co-performance. One example was André, who openly aligned himself with more traditional performance when he described the friend's kitchen he was 'appearing' in as, '… more TV than his mum's' (observation notes, April 2021). There were two main reasons for this closeness, firstly his overt commitment to

create bonding relationships, and secondly that he explicitly gave his 'guests' agency in online meetups.

Figure 32: 'The Love Language of Food', Farrell, B., M. April 2021

As described earlier (P.62), André had formed a *Patreon*[156] community of three hundred members who each paid a monthly subscription so they could be involved in his food education project. A sustainability and ethical mission that viewed culinary professionals as pivotal to change towards conscious eating, e.g., 'regenerative gastronomy'.[157] The individuals in this community were committed to regular financial payments to meet online six or so times per month in 'behind the scenes' level membership that included a monthly cooking class. André's performance was tempered by opportunities for interactivity, and although unquestionably the central performer the regularity of semi-structured relationship-building

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[156] An American membership platform that providers the tools for creators to provide a subscription service.
[157] Influencing what is grown and caught by what is on the menu.

encounters brought familiarity and trust – relational bonds. 'The Love Language of Food' worked its charm online with effortless repartee (figure 32).

Secondly, André's manner and language were respectful and calm with frequent use of 'I invite you to …' that play on the host and hospitality dynamics yet allows the guest agency. Although André was the performer (or performance) with 30-60 regular attendees, he connected to his community individually and collectively. He was an artist with patrons and so complicated the host-guest dynamic with one that is about mutual investment. A mission – as he himself verbalised – that actively enabled, through money and relationship, a mutual bond, a bond that alleviated loneliness.

5.6 Alikeness and affinity

Continuing with André and a typical comment to his patron community of '… we mustn't forget to shine a light on what makes us human, music and food and that the hearth is the home, as is the kitchen'. The use of 'us' and 'we' shine a light on the need to feel a likeness and affinity – a likeness that bonds. It was the repetitive and culturally attuned nature of commensality, particularly the associated curated boundaries, which convincingly communicated the sense of belonging. The language of familiar flavours and odours, or the ease of involvement with the traditions of a cuisine, each contributed to a sense of affinity. Participant Flash and one of his online cook-a-long gatherings bridged the separate online kitchens because they were filled with co-created narratives of the co-planning of a meal together with a focus on German cuisine or food traditions.

This commitment to preparation bolstered the alikeness and affinity between established friends living in his native Germany:

> … the whole group started by trying to organise the dinner in the physical space. And then we just kept on sending each other whatever everybody was cooking at the moment. And so, it's like a story. Yeah, there's I would say there's, daily, at least like some… like at least like five things come in daily.

However, outside of the established physical social groups re-grouping online, solely internetworked 'friendships' were tempered by the difficulties of feeling an alikeness and affinity. They were challenged by the tangibility of geographical, temporal, and cultural differences, visible and viewed during the accelerated internetworked bio-digital life of being local yet viewing global. Oftentimes the physical places inhabited by some of the participants were aesthetically or textually curated, '… celebrating the place where I am and connecting with it' (André, February 2021), to enhance the chef-educator's story.

It was a story hard to swallow if celebration and connection were short on supply in cramped and cold lockdown kitchens. Examples of this disparity between local and global, of the trickiness of feeling alike when the immediate physical is so distinct, different, or alien, include a partnered online cooking lesson between André and some of his associates:

> *Rena is in Mexico and outside in a sunny place with the sound of chickens clucking in the background and a group of people (mainly women) milling around busy in an outdoor kitchen. I feel so sad trapped in my four walls and long for nature, being outside and being with people doing things together. It's becoming so very oppressive being in lockdown in the winter. It's so hard, so lonely, alien and disempowering.*

André observation notes, ('A Little Piece of Home Community Meal'), February 2021

Additionally, from Paris-based Sweetie who, whilst she chatted to her online guests also in Paris said, 'I didn't know Sue before doing online classes', which spurred a conversation between Sweetie and Sue (prompted by Sue) as to physically meeting up with a bottle of wine and sitting on 'a really nice wide bench I have seen where we would be able to have a big gap between us both' (so keeping to the two-metre distance rule). I felt the odd-one-out not being in Paris where Sue and Sweetie were, and their chat about the different arrondissements and their nearest metros left me feeling distinctly unalike with a polarisation of the conversation mitred out by the camera eye and on-mute button. My presence, devoid of odour, movement, sound, or temperature made me invisible and my sense of an affinity with others with it.

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The bio-digital relationship, one of life on the internet co-joined to relationship in offline life, became even more active during computer-mediated entrenched lockdowns. The physical neighbourhood became an invested-in place, and the internet was filled with international narratives of the local that created both a generalised and notional alikeness that problematised affinity. Clearly neighbourhood is a universal concept and so curates an alikeness, yet each is unique and thus affinity with its particularities becomes problematic. Undoubtedly, the internetworked space, particularly the platforms of social media and video conference, enabled existing kinships groups to nurture their relationships, such as Flash and his friends in Germany, and could generate new relationships of 'fictive kin' (e.g., P.15; 31), such as Sweetie's Parisian 'friends' (Schneider D., 1984; Carsten, J. 2000). It was also a place as complex and socially structured as the physical social world, as alluded to by anthropologists Daniel Miller et al:

> *From the maintenance of intimate relationships to the possibility of forming relationships with strangers, social media can be seen as a form of 'scalable sociality' enabling people to better control their social lives.*

Miller et al, 2016, 109

Challenging Miller's comments are the instances described earlier with Rena and as a non-Parisian bystander 'in' Sweetie's lesson because there was no sense of having control or agency, instead was '… outward harmony masking inner misery…' (Russell, S.,2019, 106). The combination of physical distancing measures and being in a globally connected space that was anchored in the physical local, magnified feelings of being unalike, and of an animosity agitated by being left out.

5.7 Presence and co-presence

Distance is inevitable and lonely.

André, observation notes, (cooking workshop), May 2021

With a multitude of interconnected tools and apps, the smartphone provides '… the *iPhone* Universe of reference' (Chesher, C., 201, 2). In the 'age of constant connectivity' the connective space of immediacy and convenience in contemporary social life has little separation between 'online' and 'offline' (Carr, N., 2010, 222). S*martphones* (the generic name that includes *iPhones*) are omnipresent, used by 56% of the world population (2020-2022), as a portable external memory (Mayer-Schönberger, V., 2009), a constant communicative link with others, a life manual and a technical toolkit they '… promise to more deeply integrate the worldwide web into our everyday activities, making our universal medium all the more universal' (Carr, N., 2010, 92).

The possibility of local-global 'everyday belonging', created by the internet's portal to co-presence was made possible by a hand-held or worn device to allow an accessibility at all times. Of always 'being there' but not necessarily 'here' (Weber, F., 2005). Anthropologist Xinyuan Wang's *Social Media in Industrial China (*2016) is a study of intense manufacturing areas in China where numerus migratory workers live away from their physical home. She considers that '… the online has become the 'real home' for most migrant workers who feel they do not belong in either villages or factory towns' (Wang, 2016, 185). Their 'on-line' or internetworked cultural belonging is a reassuring constant in their transitory and culturally infertile off-line 'daily belonging' and relatedness (Weber, F., 2005).

The omnipresence and the representation of presence – co-presence – through internetworked meeting platforms complicate loneliness because the promise of online closeness undermined and replaced the physical reality of immediacy. The convenience of an ever-present online community created a disconnect, a life as perpetually co-present. The practice of being 'there but not here' was frequently experienced during my fieldwork. The reasons ranged from the muddled inconsistency of host and guest etiquette, technological

problems with internet connection and/or sound, and how the online meeting was technically structured, e.g., enabling the mute button or using the exit-button labelled 'leave' rather than a humanistic 'goodbye'. Additionally, the reality of home-life demands, of the physical activity encroaching into the online space, or into different time zones, impacted on the ease of involvement (e.g., P.228; 249).

Throughout the fieldwork there were notable instances of bio-digital entanglement that bolstered machine-led structuring of the internetworked asocial space. These included mute on or off (when hosts could enable or disable their guests' ability to be heard). Likewise a guest could sometimes opt for mute/unmute and camera on or off if the host had allowed them that function (e.g., P.118; 125). In both situations the technical control – with human intention behind it – created an uncertainty of presence with a blackened screen, or one with a static photo/image. Or there was the more extreme 'bombing' when an uninvited guest would sabotage the event or lesson, as chef- educator and food writer Chief described of one of her lessons when an unknown 'guest' took over by 'bombing'[158] her online lesson:

> *… my mouse kept moving. And I was like, Oh, my God. And my phone was also joined in on the meeting, because I think I was doing some overhead stuff. This changed everything… I managed to end the meeting on my computer, and then finish it on my phone that was already joined in. And then when I look back later, it was all fine…it's just very strange …*

Chief, interview, June 2021

An example of the way physical home tugged at online-connectivity coupled with the coldness of technological togetherness etiquette is '*Zoom*-ification' of English, French or Irish non-goodbye or leave,[159] of slipping away with no farewell made, which I observed in a cooking lesson with Sweetie:

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[158] Videoconference Bombing — the screen sharing of inappropriate content by an online intruder.
[159] https://qz.com/quartzy/1163220/tis-the-season-for-the-irish-goodbye-the-french-exit-or-to-leave-the-english-way/

One in the group, the American lady in New York, had a constant yet silent presence of a man (her husband?) walking in sight of the camera. She had quietly left the group before the last session. This slipping off had been unannounced and strangely unmentioned by all of us.

Sweetie, observational notes, (cooking lesson), August 2020

The co-presence at mealtimes of the smartphone has been habitual practice for over a decade, a cause of disagreement for mealtime 'rules' at the table, and a panacea for the millions who select, or otherwise, to eat alone. Some like Maverick, rail against the smartphone whether eating alone or together as she expressed in an interview:

Because if you eat with a screen, you are more, you're more directed, attracted to the screen. And when you are sharing a real moment it is a different view. You're more concentrating on what you are doing and what you are speaking with people.

Maverick, interview, June 2021

The combination of abiding physical distancing rules and the acceleration of smartphone usage 2020-2021 increasingly normalised the co-presence of online others at mealtimes with pre-pandemic smartphone usage in 'out of the home' meal settings common. Europe is a continent with a demographic of increasing numbers of single households,[160] from single occupancy households that compound female retiree poverty with twice as many sixty-plus year old women (42%) as men (24%) living alone, to the century's increases in the numbers of single-parent homes that now making up 14% of all European family households.[161] The 'there' but not 'here' for millions during the pandemic, builds on a growing trend of the promise of being distantly united, or perhaps *Alone Together* as in Turkle's book (2011).

Convergent with the disparity between acting and feeling present, co-present, or absent present is the synthesis with technology, with its ability to give and receive reminders, connect anywhere and at any-time; invite or be invited; record and share within social

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[160] https://www.mynewsdesk.com/eurofound/news/one-in-three-households-in-eu-are-now-single-occupancy-394453

[161] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20210601-2

networks or instigate and animate networking pathways via the smartphone, smart watches and laptop. But do these technological functions, and their embeddedness in millions of our lives, actually make us more connected – and challenge loneliness – or the opposite?

One positive example of the potential of doing this was through preparations for a *British Sociological Association* (BSA) presentation (June 2021) which I co-led. It focused on the activity of André's patron community and presentation and explored digital community and solidarity. For our *BSA* conference submission: 'Distantly United: Resilience of Digital Food Activism during Covid-19', our preparation included a workshop for patrons to visually represent how their relationship with communication technology that they felt enabled or complicated relationships, and the need for a sense of purpose in virtual presence (P.204, figure 33).

Much of my understanding on the important nuances for digital activism was informed by the research of an interdisciplinary group of academic scholars in science, technology, and anthropology. The collective work of Associate Professor of Technology Studies Tanja Schneider, Medical Anthropologist Dr. Karen Eli, Professor of Anthropology at SOAS, UoL Catherine Dolan, and Professor of the Anthropology of Nutrition at the University of Oxford Stanley Ulijaszek were valuable in navigating the hyper-online hecticness of online activism during the pandemic. Their book, *Digital Food Activism* (2017), explored the embeddedness of the internet in mediating, building solidarity, and demanding transparency for food systems and practices. My understanding was developed further by my attendance at a number of *Unit for Bio-Cultural Variation and Obesity* (UBVO)[162] webinars during the pandemic, hosted by

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Ulijaszek, which offered connection with topical food-related ideologies in a time stripped of academic discussion.

Darling, (patron)   *André*, founder

Figure 33: Patron workshop question, June 2021

There was tension between internet-enhanced existing physical relationships that transfer to the virtual space, and internet-based practices of 'friendly' strangers, e.g., André's patron community of three-hundred adults who were predominately in their late-twenties to mid-thirties (Schneider, T., et al, 2017, 14; Eli K., et al., 2016). His patron community came together online with a shared purpose of collective digital activism to enhance and herald the offline activism of the individuals of the 'Patreon' community, and these opportunities lightened the feeling of loneliness, made by the 'here and there' dichotomy, as the 'mission' of a collective motivation was the dominant reason for presence, rather than individualistic emotional need.

5.8 Being needed

Always moving, like in a bowl of soup, different elements dance, and exchange. The glue is the mission.

André, *British Sociological Association* preparation workshop, May 2021

For the young adult patron community at the workshop there was a positivity in the internetworked community's welcome and opportunity to feel needed. There was an informal hierarchy – with André as 'the leader', the 'flag bearer' – and the patrons as members of a club, his club.

André, founder   Darling, patron
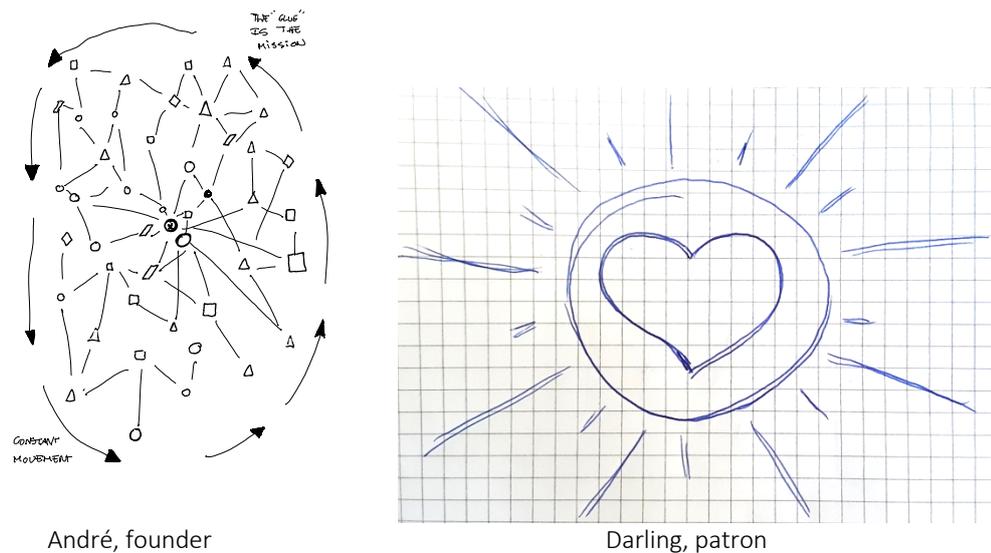
Figure 34: How do you picture yourself within the community?

Throughout the fieldwork there appeared to be a huge spectrum of 'being needed' and one of the interview themes (P.105) with the chef-educators was 'the individual and the collective', which generated stories and experiences of extremes. From ones of being distinctly being needed, purposeful and embedded, to the liminality of an impotent observer (Turner, 1969, 359), the spectre of loneliness was ripe for growth because, '… our need to connect with others is the very thing that creates the potential for loneliness' (Ozawa-de-Silva & Parsons, 2010, 614). The patrons, under the auspices of André's activity, self-organised and self-designated themselves in voluntary and transient roles to organise an online *unconference*[164] (May 2020), helped by social media activity that championed 'his' food message.

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[164] A loosely structured conference emphasizing the informal exchange of information and ideas between participants, rather than following a conventionally structured programme of events.

Then there was Elicit who dominated a solo cooking lesson I had booked and paid for, with an hour of sorrowful complaints of not seeing her teenage grandsons or meeting a new baby grandson for over a year. She topped this up with, '… we've just had lockdown extended another three-weeks, we can't plan, so many of us in the food world are going to go under and the government just don't care' (interview July 2020) She and the other more individualistic chef educators – with many lucrative years as freelancers playfully using the social media as a means to connect to clients and customers – were suddenly overtaken by out-of-work hospitality multitudes pinning their hopes on being needed when they transferred their culinary work to the connective channels of the internet.

I wasn't prepared for the whole hour to be Covid-filled angst, particularly as I was paying for the lesson. But as Elicit seemed so stressed, I listened, advised, chatted and tried not to mind. I am finding this with the participants, a growing discontent, verging on panic. Clearly their finances are suffering very notably now, and they seem to be floundering in a situation where they don't know how to adapt anymore.

Elicit, observation notes, (cooking lesson), March 2021

This feeling of being abandoned, of 'diminished ability to offer goods and favours' as described of mid-life Muscovite women, relates well to all the individual and freelance chef-educators bar one, Nicé who had a secondary food business in freight to support her financially and emotionally (Parsons, M.A., 2020). The pandemic revealed a rawness in the vulnerability of those whose food work is their identity of provider, both economically, relationally, and socially. In the depths and darkness of winters 2020 and 2021 being needed seemed an impossibility with out-of-home food places shut, and minimal customer interest in home delivery that saw the brunt of cost-cutting and a weaning off from the food home delivery novelty in the second lockdown. One fieldwork instance that mournfully encapsulated the loss of identity, topped up with fear of being un-needed becoming permanent, was a lesson with

Asian based Wori. He was typical of tourist-dependent culinary professionals in countries on the 'red travel'[165] lists, waiting without any idea when borders would open, and travel would start up again.

> *With just me on the lesson call each time it is clear (like many online chef-educators now) that 1. People are bored with the idea and 2. The market is flooded with culinary professionals (who normally would be doing face-to-face with tourists) looking for income. Where to now for all these online chef-educators in places in the world which are more 'difficult' to travel to (Asia and AU). I feel his frustration of only me being on the call. In many ways my having a solo lesson reminds him (almost in public) that he isn't doing culinary work at the moment and their business is suffering*.

Observation notes, Wori (cooking lesson), May 2021

5.9 Conclusion

The online pandemic community evolved from networks of individuals with common interests and profiles meeting online from 2007, which then evolved into media-centric relationships that shared and re-shared information on social media. *Zoom* is an internetworked gathering space not necessarily fixed to membership, digital profile, or social media sites, and so it concretises the possibility for anonymity and lack of identity into its structural architecture. The pandemic time of accelerated *Computer Mediated Communication* (*CMC*) invigorated information-driven usage to add to earlier online motivations of interest-driven and friendship-driven usage. It heralded a shift from, '… online forums that are organized around topic or interests that can be reasonably understood as a discrete group' to, '… networks of people connected to disparate others [are] not as easy to categorize' (Ellison, N. B. & Boyd, D., 2013, 151-172). Throughout the ethnography I felt a call to pay attention to the wheels of data-driven connectivity, because machine driven bonds of 'affinity' are functional and technically unpredictable which highlight isolation and may agitate, if not create, loneliness.

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[165] A UK governmental traffic light system of banning flights to and from countries if on the red list.

Commensality is formed and re-formed by nuances of reciprocity and hospitality of the shared meal – mutuality of experience; the making and re-making of the sensorium; presence,; alikeness and affinity; and being needed. The shared physical meal is one of mutual sensory encounter, the shared online meal is an encounter that relies on narration and visual storytelling. If '… social dining typically has beneficial effects on both a diner's nutritional status and their social/emotional well-being' the evolution of commensality – framed by solo-households and digital sociality needs urgent attention (Spence, C., et al, 2019, 4).

As '… we seemed to have arrived…at an important juncture in our intellectual and cultural history, a moment of transition between two very different modes of thinking' (Carr, N., 2010, 10), the benefits of the internet to create and nurture relationships has to take note of the importance of being '… good at being human' (Russell, S., 2019, 121). The greatest danger to internetworked commensality is the online architecture of loneliness that escalates human social passivity (Russell, S., 2019 148-160).

> *Loneliness is contagious, heritable, affects one in four people – and increases the chances of early death by 20%.*
>
> Adams, T., on Cacioppo, J., 2016, *The Guardian*

It is clear that the past years of an enforced physically isolated time – that aimed to thwart the *SARS-CoV-2* virus from spreading uncontrollably, and thus threaten national health services – laid bare a multitude of realisations and questions. I explored what this acute and alien time meant for commensality, and how its public role in the reproduction of food knowledge was transformed because its physicality became internetworked.

I question the expectation and perception of the internetworked commensal space as a place – particularly of the *Zoom* video conferencing platform – to alleviate loneliness. Perhaps the internet, when used as a 'coping strategy' aggravates, stimulates or creates a fear of loneliness (Wongpakaran et al. 2021). The social bonding complexities of commensality can

only be simulated because machine intelligence obligates with the foundations of loneliness –
of distance and exclusion. Ultimately online commensality is not possible if the aim of machine
learning technology remains the efficacy to reach objectives of convenience, rather than to
reach human objectives that embrace serendipity, sensory pleasure, and empathy. The poetics
of a physical meal do not easily translate to the online meal, so social bonding is problematic
when sharing a 2D meal when humanness is 3D, multi-sensory and unpredictable (Russell, S.,
2019, 204).

I suggest the 'way forward' for bio-digital experience needs to be '… cultural and not
technical' (Russell, S., 2019, 255). So, it is clearly time for anthropologists to '… step up to the
commensal table …' to give understanding to internetworked 'socio-technical systems, in
which social and technical factors shape one another' (Ellison, N. B. & Boyd, D., 2013, 151-
172), and work with agencies,[167] and governments' *Ministers for Loneliness* (e.g., UK and
Japan) to ultimately disrupt the social structures – be they physical or internetworked –
which 'support' systemic loneliness.

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[167] https://mytrusense.com/2018/03/28/the-surprising-effects-of-loneliness-on-your-health/
https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/blog/the-psychology-of-loneliness-why-it-matters-and-what-we-can-do/
https://www.gov.uk/government/news/loneliness-minister-its-more-important-than-ever-to-take-action
https://together.org.uk

CHAPTER SIX: THE AFFORDANCES AND THE ALLURE OF THE ONLINE
From enchantment to enhancement

I saw an easy shift of welcome in the surge from 498 thousand to over thirteen million

Zoom UK meetings over the course of just four months in 2020 (O*f*com, 2021, 152). The result

of an internetworked time filled by the stark social absence of physical togetherness. An

unnatural time that aimed to stem the contagion of thousands dying from the pandemic virus

with a demand to stay at home 24/7 – unless deemed essential to do otherwise. In my field

work site, which included *Zoom* video platform, I saw a thousand faces and interacted with

hundreds. It was a digital channel of engagement that was a socially mediated space,

algorithmically structured to broker internetworked social and work connectivity, and for my

study, examples of online commensality.

Throughout the critical time of the global pandemic between 2020-2022 the

affordances of being on the internet outshone the mundane and enabled a semblance of

routines, work, and friendships. The inevitability of the increased dominance of the world-

wide-web in our lives was bold and assuming. It was a venture of the collective urge to continue

being social, and my fieldwork reflected the narratives of this urge and the reality of

detachment. A detachment soothed and agitated in equal amounts by logging in, switching on,

accepting *Zoom* invites[168] and scrolling, scrolling, scrolling.

This chapter starts with *the Simultaneity of here and there* (§6.1) where I examine

private spaces (our homes) in public places (globally connected computer screens), framed by

the reality of *COVID-19* physical distancing restrictions and their impact. I describe the

pandemic distortions of the global and the local, as experienced through the butting up of

infinite global reach against deeply embedded localised physical lives , as introduced page 1

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[168] A link, message or calendar notification, from the host to guest, that opens up into a scheduled conversation..

and throughout the thesis (e.g., P.36; 71; 148). And through the lens of cooking and eating –

in offline bio-digital and internetworked ways – I held a unique view of the geographies and

temporalities at the height of the pandemic years. I investigated simultaneity in my fieldwork

intrigued by the seeming freedom of contact with the far-away – shaped by algorithms that

determine where we 'go' and what we see – against the physicality of being stuck indoors. My

participants' distant, wide-spread, and unfamiliar voices, and my habitual bedfellow of

autoethnographic expression, were anchored by our regular online cooking and eating

togetherness (introduced P.12).

Next, *Lives on screen* (§6.2) recounts what I observed and analysed in the construction

of the everyday in the homes of the research participants and their online guests, and how the

performance of this ordinariness belied the efforts made in the reconfiguration of their homes

into professional chef-educator spaces (e.g., P.119; 130). I repeatedly saw their urge to curate

'spectacles', that nurtured their online persona to maintain guest ongoing commitment (e.g.,

P.127; 155; 192). Their commensal events were, in the main, focused on the cultural identity

of French cuisine, and its culinary assimilation and reinvention. However, over the course of

the pandemic many of the chef-educators increasingly side-stepped this focus to assimilate

the culture of online commensality e.g., doable recipes within manageable time slots with easy

to replicate ingredients wherever the student was logging on from, instead (e.g., P.225).

My research sits between the material experience of eating and the online space of

technically enabled commensal togetherness. I encountered how the 2D objectification of food

and eating twisted a biological and social necessity with voyeuristic pressure. *Temporalities*

(§6.3) is then considered in reference to the themes I found most illuminating in the pandemic

acceleration to an internetworked defined species. It was an acute and unfamiliar time when

bio-digital daily lives, enhanced by the pandemic dominance of the online, sped to near total

enchantment with all that internetworked life offered. Embedded in this shift commensal rituals, and knowledge sharing opportunities, of cooking and eating together fought against tensions of apparent togetherness that forged distinct online social norms (§3.4; P.183). The online practices and rituals I investigated include patience and its pariah of intolerance, the tendencies of technically induced rushing or waiting, the agitations and awe placed on gaining and keeping attention and the allowance and propensity of multi-tasking (e.g., P.67; 87; 183,226). Relational juxtapositions stimulated by the architecture of online togetherness defined by synchronous and asynchronous encounter (e.g., P.13; 17; 222).

Distractions (§6.4) consolidates my interpretations of enchantment with computer-mediated sociality in a time when fieldwork was ostracised to intense digital ethnography. Observations of these disorientating happenings were formed by technical hitches and the loss of internet-connectivity, the technical vulnerabilities of sound and vision, and the invisibility of physical others in the virtualised gathering space, were all constantly embedded into online experience (e.g., §5.7). They were framed by the formidable and unconstrained work of algorithmic coding that shaped who was included, what we saw and heard, and where we performed and actualised our computer defined selves.

In *Discussion* (§6.5) my thoughts of the importance of becoming better educated at the technical changes to human selfhood, and the need for more preparedness for bio-digital lives is presented. I feel an attentiveness is needed in the online space of commensality for issues of ethics, inclusivity, social and mental health, and diversity. An ideal, if indeed we are fundamentally in the process of becoming a machine intelligence defined species, would be that computer mediated design is made with human and moral objectives rather than computer-led design for efficiency over all else (e.g., P.10; 45; 271). *Conclusion and afterthoughts* (§6.6) put forward how this belief was formed by the unsettling incongruencies

of working with a multi-sensory material – food – in an a-material context, and I conclude (§6.6) with suggesting it to be a particularly important ideal. One that became clear through studying the social, mental and physical health predicaments of bio-digital commensality thus holds an urgent message for future healthy and harmonious relationships to food – and consequently geo-political and environmental dilemmas.

6.1 Simultaneity of here and there

Anthropology is a discipline that studies human entanglement with material objects, it is of, '… how things make people as with how people make things. We understand who we are in the mirror of a material world within which we are born and socialized' (Miller, D., 2018, 3). This fundamentality offered both challenge and opportunity to my fieldwork. There had been much personal wrangling over conducting anthropological fieldwork *in*, *of* and *on* the internetworked space (introduced P.89). In essence the setting of parameters – geographically, culturally, and temporally – were problematised by a space of everywhere and nowhere as my fieldwork site (introduced page 30).

The digital ethnography I incorporated worked to suggest a fluidity, and an unboundedness, which could have made the fieldwork so untethered from material commensality as to be meaningless. On its own digital ethnography was a 'here and there' perspective of a 'here and there' community separated from the physicality of the material world. Yet my conversant auto-ethnographic approach allowed the field site to offer greater understanding of emerging aspects of bio-digital ethnography, through my investigation of the duality of an a-material perspective in parallel with a material one (introduced P.24-25).

Community food educator Maverick believed the computerised human experience is of, '… a parallel lot of worlds where you're in it, but you're viewing it' (Maverick, interview June 2021). My home-kitchen was an auto-ethnographic and bio-digital fieldwork site, and the

internetworked spaces of my eleven chef-educators were my online fieldwork site for digital ethnography. A triangulated fusion, a synergetic blend of an internetworked web of bio-digital community affinity tied together by commensality. As Parisian professional kitchen owner Flash asserted in an interview, '… if you know someone who is interested in food, you can almost feel that you've got that affinity, you've got that common love' (Flash, interview May 2021).

I wanted to know how French food, characterised by a physical place and its material food culture, manifested itself in the work and online identity of the participants. French chef -educator Nicé voiced, '… in Cape Town I become more French' (Nicé, interview March 2021). So did her self-proclaimed and magnified French-self transfer to her online globalised French cooking lessons? In France she was of the culture, in South Africa a bold contrasting depiction of her home culture, online seemed to allow a commodification of her French-ness in the globalised online marketplace of cultural identity.

Did the chef-educators manage – if indeed they felt they could or should – to transfer the integral food culture rootedness into the online universalised experience with guests. Were the participants, and their globally spread guests, able to embody what it feels like to be cosseted by the very tactile and sensory intimacy of physical integration? Here I reflect again on how there is potential to gain from investigating commensality's future, if 'warm technology' (introduced P.10) through for example, 'mulsemedia' (multisensory media) '… makes possible the inclusion of layered sensory stimulation and interaction through multiple sensory channels' (Covaci, A., et al 2018, 1). So, could 'warm technology' give access to a more inclusive and meaningful food literacy experience? Covaci presents it as a positive, that human-machine interaction will,

… meet[s] a new technological dimension that enables real-time tactile control of remote objects. So-called tactile Internet applications find their usefulness in many domains such as health care, sports, entertainment, gaming, or …

Covaci, A., et al, 2019, feature article

One online guest expressed her cultural food connection when physically far from home with, '… Italian people travel with their parmesan, parmesan cheese takes you home'. But how did this continue online through a pandemic when the global food chain had shuddered to a halt and the non-local ingredient was rarely on the shopping list. Was the online experience of storytelling of the 'here and there' a neutral setting for conceptualising narratives of the local. It was a pandemic framed time that offered both relief from the mundanity of hyper-local lives in lockdowns and curfews, and bore a reminder of the universal understanding of what makes local unique.

During fieldwork I constantly reflected on the participants bio-digital lives, of their local physical every-day, as it felt foundational to framing the experience of being simultaneously 'here and there', whether the physical is the 'here' or the 'there'. Chef-educator Cynic determinedly shared with his online guests – though it felt more like validation at the time – his Parisian lockdown local as I chipped in a little about my London one,

> *Cynic says that he has had a lot of people from England over the last weeks, 'it's probably coz we're in lockdown and it's winter' I say. During the cooking time he takes us to look at his view from his apartment (to prove he is in Paris maybe) and we chat a little about the curfew and the streets being empty at five-minutes to 18h (the time at which curfew starts).*

Cynic, observation notes, (cooking lesson), February 2021

The chef-educators and their guests were not a-physical, they existed in their day-to-day physical, in their phenomenological encounters. Their online interaction with their guests was not one of living in sterile isolation. What is particularly intriguing is how the internetworked disparateness of 'here and there' felt more acute during the socially distancing of pandemic lockdowns because physical and social and work interaction was absent or deeply restrained.

Nicé was adept at 'drawing in' her guest students as she stimulated an empathy when she conjured up her two local 'homes', her French family home where she holidayed after lockdown one and her South African home:

> *Nicé is in her parents' kitchen which looks typically 1970's French, filled with pale wooden style furniture with a room layout that has the dining table in the middle. It is dimly lit by natural winter light coming through small windows. She is wearing a vintage apron with ruffled trim that looks homemade that is perhaps her mum's or maybe hers from teenage years. She wears a big jumper underneath as it must feel cold compared to South Africa I project. As she introduces the ingredients we will be using, she dreamily says, '... these are eggs from my dad's chickens', at which the other student Clara and I both cluck with pleasure and Clara says '... that is so wonderful' revelling in the romantic escapism of simple lives.*

Nicé, observation notes, (cooking lesson), November 2020

Storytelling continued with Nicé once back in Cape Town, with a wistful recount of her picture-postcard childhood memories:

> *... of the red pimentos of this Southwest village with white '... how do you call the wooden screen at the windows?' 'shutters' I say quickly so she can continue with the idyllic picture of red pimentos drying outside against the white wooden shutters. 'I go there on my food tours' she says wistfully since there has been no tours since 2019 due to Covid-19.*

Nicé, observation notes, (cooking lesson), March 2021

Another key aspect highlighted by food in the 'here and there' conundrum is sourcing ingredients – particularly the same or comparable ingredients when guest students were possibly thousands of physical kilometres apart but only millimetres away from their screen togetherness. Pre-pandemic offline touristic and leisure cooking classes, colloquially called in-person, were organised so that the guests simply paid and showed up and the chef-educators would source and buy ingredients, provide equipment and a smooth working kitchen. Normally the guests were passive with little or no preparedness, and the chef-educators honed their class provisions with certainty. However, online classes meant that the chef-educators' expectation that their local availability was the same as their guests became a problem (e.g., P. 211; 245), and they increasingly deliberated on recipes that had universal ingredients, belying the very notion of culturally significant, 'a taste of place' style cooking classes.

As Sweetie noted, '… it has been a bit difficult to engage with groups, when you expect them to buy their own ingredients' (Sweetie, interview January 2021). And so, she – and her adult helper daughter – became adept at preparing for lessons by trolling through the internet looking for ingredients or close substitute availability in the countries of her booked-in attendees. Most of the participants struggled with a baffling array of substitutes made by their guests who were limited by the physical restrictions of *COVID-19* and could rely only on their very local. Cameroon chef-educator Precarious (settled in London) struggled herself to get ingredients for her class due to lockdown, 'I couldn't get red peanuts we use back home because of the Covid; I've just got normal peanuts, all the exotic shops are shut' (Precarious, January 2021). Indeed, my ingredient list for a Vietnamese online lesson for dried banana leaves (Lackadaisical, June 2021) was met with French market-town cabbage leaves. Nicé incorporated the challenges of the global butting up against the local in an estranged pandemic-filled time, into her lesson introduction:

> *Nicé asks how we faired with getting the ingredients, one of the other guests says 'good' though she had problems with getting the herbs. 'I couldn't get Dill' to which Nicé replies, 'that's ok, the herb list was just an idea, others can be used instead'. I say the same but that I got fresh Parsley and Thyme. I explain that in lockdown England I am only going to local food shops and they are sometimes limited seasonally for all fresh food. Nicé understands, maybe because France is in lockdown too.*

Nicé, observation notes, (cooking lesson), November 2020

Oftentimes it was an anthropological exercise at discerning if the online space for gathering would-be strangers was a culture of 'we' or 'they' as anthropologist Marilyn Strathern describes of proximity:

> *Parties in the 'we-relationships' think of themselves as sharing a community of time, a simultaneity of consciousness, each in the spatial proximity of companion others, in 'they-relationships' people remain abstract and anonymous …*

Strathern, M., 2020, 119

There were tensions of the simultaneity of 'here and there', of the dichotomies of relational proximity in the physical and internetworked spaces of gathering to cook 'together' because

the transformation of ingredients to meal is such a temporal and multi-sensory endeavour that collectively cooking demands multifarious cues. These markers of change and creation of flavourful pleasure go beyond words and image, thus the challenge to the 'here and there' screen togetherness was that the embodied intimate relationship with food (and eating) could only be simulation. An enactment, an abstraction referred to by chef-educator André with, '…the recipes are not gospel they are an expression of where you are' (André, fieldnotes December 2020). However, during the physical restrictions 2020-2022 I saw a great hunger to be part of that simulation, an online connection that provided relief, as described by Kharma:

> *So obviously during COVID times for me, but also people who are coming to the classes…we weren't seeing people, interacting with anybody. And this was the first interaction lots people had, first time people saw multiple people in one space, and I think it was a real mood booster, an uplifter, for a lot of people just to kind of be able to kind of interact and engage with other people.*

Kharma, interview June 2021

Perhaps the internetworked gathering to cook and eat, and its broader association commensality, was cogent of the impending technically designed human. During the *COVID-19* lockdowns social display 'outside' the home was predominately accessed and presented online. Over the span of two pandemic years the emotional, spontaneous and unpredictable commensal physical cook, and diner, seemed like awkward and submissive carbon copies. Considering the work of anthropologist Edward T. Hall on proxemics (1963), I think the increasing weariness and disinterest I observed was a response to the lack of the non-verbal ways of communicating through active physical engagement.

The sense of touch (haptic,[169] thermal, and tactile) was, for many, missing, and its absence or awkwardness was still felt in 2022 when touching another was viewed as a cautious intrusion. But the need to get a sense of what was happening 'on the ground' by convening

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[169] The feedback from touch, now 'employed' in haptic technology to create the experience of touch.

with everyday people (e.g., on *Zoom*) in various places gave a glimpse at the perspective being lived, rather than relying on the tsunami of mediated news and personal stories. In a way the online food space was a place of solidarity making through finding affinity, a continuation of its physical practices from early human onward. Commensality adopted and adapted during 2020-2022 physical distancing measures to herald the strong human propensity to gather around food. A time of socialisation, a means to forge identification and communality. As chef-educator Ferment shared in an interview:

> *… it [online cooking classes] was great … people were not seeing anybody, not being able to go anywhere. Even just being able to see other people on the screen and interact … was invaluable for me… a sense of you all doing the same thing…*

Ferment, interview, May 2021

Proximity, particularly when framed by the pandemic narratives of risk management, became a troubled aspect of the intimacies of the public sharing of food. The animation of the very 'here-ness' of food was kept at arms-length, which made the ritualistic display of cooking together and commensality, one of a technologically defined 'there'. There are ethical questions to ask on this commensal separation particularly when transmission of virus infection due to hospitality was questioned,[170] as echoed by Strong et al:

> *People everywhere are asking themselves about the moral meanings of physical distance – or are actively avoiding such questions. One might say that the ethical significance of proximity – that is, closeness or farness as ethical qualities of relations is being newly troubled across a range of habits, practices, and personal relationships: sex, care, kinship.*

Strong, T., Trnka, S., & Wynn, L. L., 2021, 341

6.2 Lives on screen

> *Interactive and reactive the computer offers the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. One can be a loner but never be alone.*

Turkle, S., 1995, 30

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[170] https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ukhospitality.org.uk/resource/resmgr/2021/data/reopening/UKH_Safe_Reopening_of_Hospit.pdf

Turkle's decades' long insight felt evermore acute during 2020-2022 (described P.27; 30). Her early influential observations were made twenty years before the hand-held computer, the smartphone a device of extraordinary significance to every aspect of contemporary life. The span of internetworked time since 1995 has concreted dependency on a machine that professes to be, not an appendage that offers networking, but a subliminal entity in human – human and human-machine relationships. I acutely felt the omnipresent power of the subliminal in much of my fieldwork because the intensity of a screen-life was the boldest offer during lockdown. The governmental physical distancing measures, from the perspective of solo-household life, meant enslavement by a computerised concubine.

Life on screen, during the height of the pandemic-filled fifteen-months of fieldwork, observed the 'beauty and beast' of the blurredness of private and public. Of the private space in the public place experienced through the interface of the computer screen. My study of commensality gave exceptional insight because the tensions of biological, social, and ethereal intimacies of food wrangled with the sterility of an artificial device. Yet I slipped into its easy technical bed and succumbed to a simulation of machine-made shaping of a smelly, warm, and emotional being into a pliable abstraction of my selfhood. In an interview Ferment described the tensions she felt because her food work as chef-educator were abstracted to such a point by her student guests being on screen it necessitated alternative – machine defined – ways of interacting that are solely auditory and visual:

> In a physical kitchen we can gauge if someone's anxious or relaxed or whatever by the way their body moves. Whereas on the screen, you're trying to gauge whether they're keeping up … that they've given up, or not frozen…you really are having to rely on them speaking and hearing you.

Ferment, interview June 2021

The disruption to physically 'reading' each other off screen heightened the machine designed individualisation within social gathering. Rare were the times of easy spontaneity and empathy.

There felt an intensity of horizon scanning to make sense of commensality and Sweetie echoed Ferment's observations:

> *Sometimes I do glimpse a [on screen] gallery... people have got their camera on, and their kitchens aren't set up... sometimes there's nobody there. You just catch somebody's back obviously busy doing things. But you just carry on, I suppose you just sort of gauge by the mood. I still tried to scan to see what people were doing.*

<p align="right">Sweetie, interview, December 2020</p>

But some of the participants expressed the positivity of their work on screen exactly because there were less moments for spontaneity. As Charisma shared, '... so they [guest students] pay a little bit more attention once you're doing an online experience ... they are more aware of every single word that I'm telling them ...' (Charisma, January 2021). Guest students were more focused on the chef-educator's 'presentation' of gathering to cook, yet within this online focus of teacher-student dynamic the sensuality of food often evaporated as the technical and instructional crept into the kitchen (e.g., §3.1; P.212).

In contrast chef-educator Sweetie aimed for socialising in the online gathering space. She described her machinations with mixed feelings for life on screen as, '... the personal interactions I get to have with people, it's like, it feels rare and so even *Zoom*, to me, it's personal these days ... (Sweetie, interview December 2020). Undoubtedly much relief and joy were felt because the screen interface offered a means of staying connected and cooking 'together'. The urge to recognise and animate commensal bond-making and re-making was evident, '... it's [online cooking lessons] brought a lot of closeness between people who are physically apart, who are connected through family, culture, through friendship ...' (Nicé, interview, August 2021).

It became clear that there were screen personality styles, one as a presenter akin to television cooking shows (e.g., Nicé and Flash), and one with more social intent, of a friendly teacher (e.g., Sweetie and One). But regardless of screen style all chef-educators expressed

similar accounts of how they gauged guests' screen activity, one of reading verbal and visual cues, in an abstraction of the rumbustiousness of a kitchen apprenticeship. What piqued my observations was scholarship on *FaceBook* by anthropologist Daniel Miller and his *Why We Post* project team,[171] particularly the parallels between the 'friending' on *FaceBook* that similarly thrived in *Zoom* rooms (P.25-26; 149). I increasingly considered *Zoom* as a form of social media – because it intended to network and mediate sociality. The activity an idiom of commensality, embodying an ideology that responded to, '… the ideals represented by the supposed voluntarism and authenticity of friendship that has now come to dominate the way people view kin relations' (Miller, D, 2018, 377).

There were enormous differences between online and in-person relationship making and re-making. One that loudly shone throughout the pandemic time, of a fixed gaze at the computer screen that offered the uncharacteristic experience of intensely seeing oneself and watching how we interact with others. A life on screen that negotiated physical identity and abstracted selfhood into a broadcast image. Narratives of performance ran rife as Sweetie alluded to in her 'preparation' for an online interview with me:

> *…raise this up [the camera angle] a little bit, so we're not looking at my neck if I can. No, that didn't work. Hold on. Maybe that's a little better…There's light coming at me …*
> Sweetie, interview June 2021

During the fifteen-months of my fieldwork she became uncomfortably aware that some of her mannerisms, ones that make her unique, felt increasingly negative for her. Habitually viewing these movements on her computer screen challenged her naturalistic selfhood toward an urge to tone down, to homogenise herself. In many ways she was physically becoming a machine defined version of her material self. Sweetie's self-critical comments reiterated the prosumer (producer and consumer) culture of social media and the propensity to project into

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the vision of another what will be seen, e.g., 'I also realised I touched my hair way too freakin' much ... I'm a little fidgety ... it's kind of distracting to watch somebody who's fidgety ...' (Sweetie, interview, June 2021).

Her words felt as if mimetic work was being done, prosumer conceptualisation of her screen self – and the ultimate reimagination of her off-screen self. The two collided into an objectified negative view of lifelong embodied intimacies. It reminded me of the aforementioned scholarship and editorial work (P.84; 136; 189) by Stuart Hall (1980) and his anthropological and cultural communications studies on different viewpoints of identity and public representation of self and how this is encoded and decoded as part of the screen performance. Perhaps Sweetie is aware of her hair twisting as stereotypical sexualisation of the female and the screen blatantly proffered her this vision. Or maybe as independent American single parent living in Paris her discomfort was the realisation that the screen-space coverts '... our daring, after the grounds of 'femininity' have slightly shifted' and, '... continues to place us firmly within the conventional bounds of patriarchal relations' (Winship, J., 1980, 217). Had '... the narcissistic ways of relating to the world' been claimed by the misogynistic architecture of virtual space (Turkle, S., 2011, 179)?

The interview conversation continued with my thoughts stimulated by Sweetie's comments on gestural communication, 'I've really noticed that people, when they're sitting and talking, they use their hands a lot' (observation fieldnotes June 2021). The movement of hands are cultured and gendered too, so it felt an appropriate comment in the context of deciphering social meaning. The hand is, '... an organ of performance ...', and its life on screen was the only visible part of the body, apart from the animated face, as we endlessly sat and stared at the computer screen (Alpenfels, E., 1955, 15). The activity of hands seemed magnified and prone to distractedness – particularly if the hand movements were fast and/or there was

online time buffering, which somehow disjointed the hand from its body and felt deeply discordant with humanness (e.g., P.127-128).

However, as the pandemic marched on and hand-held screen interaction grew increasingly normalised there was a rash *of Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response* (ASMR), or video clips (2015) filled with only hands, (for example cooking or stroking cats), which became popular to purportedly induce 'brain massage' or feelings of relaxing and pleasurable sensation. The popularity of such an individualistic and relationally disconnected pleasure seemed pertinent, in a time when touch was hugely restricted due to managing the pandemic from spreading. It caused intrigue by its abstracted ability to promote emotional response and it felt like life as screen abstraction when, '… people look at you, but you don't always have as much seeing …' as Franchement summarised (interview December 2020), was seeping into what being together looked like both on and off screen. An abstraction echoed by Ferment as she found it:

> *… even difficult to remember their names because I couldn't put a visual to who they were. Yeah, I couldn't get a sense of them. You know, it was just this like faceless, nameless.*

Ferment, interview, June 2021

The technical ability to be present but visually absent was a ghostly reminder that the online space welcomed disconnect. With a click of an on-screen selection icon the video camera could be off and the microphone too if a guest so chose (e.g., P.169). *Zoom* had been designed to let users engage with distorted simulations of being together through blackened silent screen presence (see figure 37).

There was power and control in this manipulation of gathering. More cogent of hegemonic bordering activity of inclusion and exclusion was the host's technical option of keeping guests invisible and mute (e.g., P.220). A crowd control tactic accepted by the masses because the turn-taking etiquette in communal discourse felt alien, new, and deeply muddled

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– vulnerable to noisy cacophony the dampened-down interaction seemed logical. And so, the technical software defined the choreography of togetherness with unquestioned aplomb. As succinctly described by Sherry Turkle, introduced in the literature review (P.24), and discussed throughout my thesis (1995):

> A 'place' used to comprise a physical space and the people within it. What is a place if those who are physically present have their attention on the absent.

<p align="right">Turkle, S., 1995, 155</p>

During the hyper-frequent daily pandemic experience of *Zoom* communion's blackened and silent screens of anonymous others, easily and constantly viewable whilst in online 'gallery mode', left the human out of the social equation. Most of the participants commented on this in their interviews as demanding a sensitive dance of non-engagement in a collective experience – the acceptance of disconnect normalised, as described by Ferment:

> So, they had their camera off, it was really hard, because I've never had a conversation with them. And there was eight of them. And I often kept forgetting about them, because I couldn't see them on the screen. And obviously, I could see the black box [gallery screens], but it was also kind of in the bottom corner. So, you can't … they kind of got lost. And then I remembered … to kind of keep checking in on them to see how they were doing.

<p align="right">Ferment, interview, June 2021</p>

Respect was always shown to cameras being off and was a nod to the ethical reality that the camera projected a private space (a home) into a public space (the socially mediated video platform). The intrusiveness of the camera's eye revealed the inner workings of a hitherto intimate space in hour-long plus concentrated detail. Ferment continued to describe her understanding of cameras being off with:

> I understand sometimes why because obviously, some people don't have the surroundings … obviously, it's a bit unsettling for me, because I don't know who's behind … It's a bit sad for them, I think …

<p align="right">Ferment, interview, June 2021</p>

Although there was the option to use a virtual background to '… provide you with more privacy or a consistent and professional look for a presentation',[172] few chose this in the online cooking and eating gathering sessions – most likely because the option works best if user is still and seated and cooking rarely allows that. Technically too the camera off was an option that helped with internet connection if network bandwidth or internet speed was problematic. The 'digital wayfaring' tactic of dipping in and out of visibility with the camera on-off-on proffered a clumsy and non-committal feel to online gathering that has little equivalence in the physical commensal space.

'You're on mute' was a familiar poke of a cry in pandemic *Zoomland, as t*he software functionality allowed the host to keep their guests on mute, or allow guests to unmute, as necessary. The latter was most dominant in the comparatively small gatherings around food as expressed by Ferment, '… it just made it easier initially to mute everybody and set up a rule that if they need to ask a question, they just unmute' (Ferment, November 2020). The software default to centre-stage the speaker meant that the noisiest on the call – whether vocally or their external kitchen sounds – would be made 'the speaker', and their screen largened to be the central focus (e.g., P. 117-118). An unnatural element of gathering with others that problematised the one-to-one quiet chit-chat that runs alongside the flow of physical group discourse. My fieldwork notes describe one typical occasion of these observations:

> *The camera view kept flicking off the chef brothers to a woman in her kitchen, because she was unmuted but making a noise. A question or thought to consider … there is a subversive element at play. If the guests have sound and are on unmute the software designates them as the host … it works on sound recognition. Those speaking are to be listened to … quiet chat is not allowed for.*

Ferment, observation notes, (*cookalong* event), July 2020

Sometimes noisy domestic appliances and kitchen clatter harshly engulfed the sound and caused a discordance to engagement with one another.

As Flash noted, '… unfortunately, the online you always worry about sound' (Flash, interview January 2021). This could mean the accumulated background noise of many kitchens blasting out, and Nicé referred to managing this with, '… they switch off the microphone, they don't want me to hear them, which is nice … it's important to switch off your microphone …' (Nicé interview January 2021). I related to this challenge and frequently noted my observance of taming my unwelcome noisy activity in lessons, 'I too am on mute at this point as the frying noise is quite loud and I don't want to be annoying to the others' (fieldnotes March 2021).

Additionally, the quality and consistency of technically mediated sound, challenged by bandwidth and internet connection, caused unnaturalness and a disconnect. This happened for all the participants, although the time André cooked in his second homeland designer stylish kitchen in Bogotá, Colombia proved memorable as he stood with professional grace in a sunlit photogenic room with the visuals of Zoom buffering and cutting out, 'you sound like a robot André' opined one of his guests (André, observation notes, January 2020).

Spoken and written presence, or absence in the online space has transported itself into offline conversational encounter in practices that manifest in the structures and rituals of etiquette, such as announcing and ending presence with others This theme also includes the analysis of various engagement styles of the chef-educators – and their guests – from extrovert instructional presenter mode to informal social interaction, or of passive to animated guest. The numerous online spaces I visited were offline, bio-digital and internetworked in their routine sharing or performance of everydayness. The kitchen was often a refuge from the intensity of socially rupturing pandemic confusion. A space that offered offer equal measures of empowerment or disempowerment dependent on economic, health and familial situations.

6.3 Temporalities

COVID was a strange time, together still, but also was a sort of a no time.

Ferment, interview, October 2020

The virtual seepage of *'Zoom*-land' narratives of time into physical everydayness were particularised by the machine programmed march toward efficiency. An efficiency framed by neo-liberal politics of time-labour-power surface in the hand-held computer that propel prosumer work (Marx, K., 1867; Ritzer, G., 2015). As art theory professor Jonathan Crary illuminates, '… it is impermissible for there to be credible or visible options of living outside demands of 24/7 communication and consumption', which begs the question if the manufacturing toil of Marxist focus has now found an employee conveyor-belt of trudge endlessly moving information around (Crary, J., 2013, 50).

The activity of the mediated social platform was framed by smartphone time watching culture consisted of a disparate blend of exactness and infinite. Two minutes late to join a *Zoom* room resulted in plentiful apologies whilst time vast time zones were crisscrossed with frequent ease. A routine practiced by chef-educator Charisma:

… normally my slot is from 2 am to 4 am, Europeans, and then I have from 6 am to 9 am people from GST, which is America, Miami America. Then also … I am able to do other people in Australia…

Charisma, interview, November 2020

The pandemic lockdown lent itself to explore time travel. And on these localised kitchen journeys of global distances the screen played tricks with relationships to natural time that were virtually practised, and physically honed (see §4.4).

Convenience of recording and re-playing at a time to suit an individual shifted the dynamics and mutuality of experience. Synchronous and asynchronous screen-time possibilities muddled the intention and role of commensality and sociality around food. There were asynchronous benefits that enabled the individual to stay informed and in synchronicity

with discursive co-production, e.g., the photographs posted on *Instagram* after the cooking lesson but as Mims describes there were negatives too because of the lack of collective emotional display being problematic. Here she describes an online cultural event she organised during a pandemic lockdown:

> … we didn't get a huge number of people coming to see it live. But then if you look on the *YouTube* site, you can see that many tens of hundreds of people might have seen it. So, I find that quite difficult, because to me, it would mean more if people actually turned up and watch the live event and watch the conversation live … but of course to the public viewer, that's irrelevant. And they can dip in whenever they want and turn off as well.

Mims, interview, June 2021

Only one of the chef-educators entertained the option to record for later viewing, the rest held similar thoughts as Sweetie:

> *… some people have asked, if I video record … can you just send me that record? I'm like, no. Because if you're not there hearing other questions it's like a simulation … the whole point of online live cooking classes is that you're in the moment, you might not be in the same kitchen. But you're in the moment. And I think to be in the moment, you want to see people doing the same thing …*

Sweetie, interview December 2020

The 'real time' distinction was an important and defining feature of the fieldwork cooking classes that separated them from some other socially mediated platforms such as *YouTube* or *Instagram Reels.*[173] The endeavour to share time by being present, in the same moment, was magnified during lockdowns when time felt more plentiful, and the screen was used as an interactive interface to give relief to the endlessness of limited physical encounter. So, these synchronous times, when viewed particularly in the pandemic years, confirm the urge to share lived experience as a bonding exercise. But conversely I also saw how synchronous online togetherness could agitate tensions between patience and impatience, tolerance and intolerance whereas asynchronous connection was attractive because it was socially undemanding and individualistic (e.g., P.196; 215).

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[173] https://about.instagram.com/features/reels

The screen interface demanded empathy with other screen users in a computer-human dance of navigating workable sound and visuals – amongst many discreet social operations – to convey presence in humanistic terms. Rushing or waiting seemed a frequent and magnified discordance and oftentimes was led by the online chef-educator in a bid to regulate and compress the unpredictability of their guests into a neat 90-minute slot. There were numerous times when the informal friendliness fell away with the realisation that time had vanished:

> *Sweetie patiently waited whilst I caught up each time. Then after almost 2-hours it suddenly changed feel and tempo and the chitchat turned to a very quick look at what we had made. Then a bye and the Zoom meeting ended quite abruptly.*

> Sweetie, observation notes, (cooking lesson), February 2021

The likelihood of an online gathering gaining tempo, ominously framed by the time-set by *Zoom* software, was led by the host 'conductor', and these experiences were due either to their skills in pacing and corralling a group lesson of unbounded informal social encounter.

Or there was, in many ways, an unavoidable speed because there was only one guest on the call, and so the urge, or consequence, of this was to motor through regardless – though there seemed a logic that was framed by the chef-educator's economics and time. The following two extracts from fieldwork notes and an interview show the latter:

> *Kalm seems keen to chat to me at a more intimate and deeper way, yet Kiki is definitely watching the clock and speeds through the lesson today in under an hour. It is really too fast and although I can understand the economics of longer than an hour for one person who only pays $22, I feel cheated and overwhelmed.*
> Kalm and Kiki, observation notes, (cooking lesson), February 2021

And:

> *... it isn't as easy [as in person] to have conversations ... with Zoom my time is limited, it's more structured. So, you go also a little bit faster as well. Last week, I had a lady, she complained because her experience only lasts 45 minutes. And I told her like you were the only one in the class.*

> Charisma, interview January 2021

The effect of a quickening myself, studied through the lens of autoethnography, was one of impotence and disconnect, both from social bonding though learning together, and from the food itself. The following fieldnotes extract had 'give me your time, the gift of time' helplessly

scribbled in the margin whilst at an online class with young Vietnamese host Lackadaisical and his silent chef mum:

> *It was a crazy roller coaster ride of a lesson that felt like it was the first time for them to have a lesson. Happy and energetic there was a distinct feeling of a huge disconnect. No-one else was on the call/lesson and I could taste Lackadaisical's inexperience. He spoke in a way that seemed desperate to connect, …'when you come to Vietnam' with an innocent and casual but slightly hyper feel. I rushed through the preparations and interpreted as I went along as I wondered what other people would make of this lesson. How it was so confusing in all ways – language, the jerky smartphone camera as the only 'eye', the speed and the unfamiliarity of the dish - I felt very alone in my confusion.*

Lackadaisical, observation notes, (cooking lesson), June 21

The role of the visual dominated to a frequent crescendo that I feel reverberated in the characterisation of what it means to virtually gather around food. An example of this was captured in an interview with chef-educator Elicit who spoke about a lesson that ran over time. Of the all too familiar online resort of finishing the lesson before the bake had time to start, with the meal was eaten as a separate often solo encounter – socialised and memorialised with a smartphone photograph.

> *I was waiting until she [the guest student] cut everything up… because I have everything cut-up [already]. I told her … you know what was done. So, I said this is my dish I would like to ask you, can you take a picture once you have served it and then send it to me? She sent me a picture. And it looked really nice.*

Elicit, interview, January 2021

Over the course of fifteen-months of fieldwork these hurried and harried social encounters fed my feelings that the speeding up afforded by computer efficiency had negated the vital art of listening to one another. A bonding practice that was being relegated to a growing scrap-heap of humanistic traits because it was deemed too time consuming. There were notable exceptions however and some chef-educators sensitively worked to respond to their online guest students. Chief, who teaches families and children expressed awareness of her online relationship with time:

> *… the pace is a lot slower for a start because you have to wait for everybody to have caught up to the same point … I try not to get frustrated … having to be really, really patient, when you've got two people on the screen who have finished or waiting for the next step. And then some others who are way behind.*

However, the urge of efficiency whispered naggingly of a dead-end to sentient group experience in favour of individualisation, something alluded to by author Crary (2013), in his observations on online blogging:[174]

> *The phenomenon of blogging is one example—among many—of the triumph of the one-way model of auto-chattering in which the possibility of ever having to wait and listen to someone else has been eliminated.*

Crary, J., 2013, 124

The time and attention given to listening – and being fully with another – is wrapped up in the narratives of gaining and keeping attention, multi-tasking, and commitment. The fellowship made by 'giving time' to listen resonates with giving time to eat socially. The bright star of efficiency dulled by increasingly prolonged periods of time spent in the online space of two-dimensional friendship. A taste for automated connection gave instances that confirmed the social tensions between digital ease and digital cul-de-sac.

Chef-educator Sweetie described this when waiting for a guest student to 'arrive' on the call:

> I'm still waiting on this one person. And then I didn't hear anything. So, I pulled away from camera, and I went and called her. And she didn't answer her phone. But she quickly sent me a text like, 'oh, something came up' and I was like, 'yeah so'…

Sweetie, interview, September 2020

I argue that there is detriment to both physical and social health of manipulating time until it becomes a maladaptive element in physical lives, and the fear of losing time drives a culture of multi-tasking, that lives in reverential plentiful use. The online space magnified the allure of doing numerous things at once because it became so embedded in the culture of what it meant

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[174]Blogging is writing a discussion or informational website that is published on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete, often informal diary-style text entries.

to be 'together'. Public engagement manager Mims reflected on how being together on-screen concedes to the panic of time slipping away and its concomitant tense ally of distractedness.

> *… from a human perspective … people now multi-task … watch an event but also be checking their emails on a separate screen … checking their phone. You wouldn't go to a launch event and get your phone out and start going through email … [maybe you would now though]. A lot of people I work with say that they're going to dip into a seminar and have it running on one side, but then carry on with working.*

Mims, interview, September 2020

There was an increasingly widespread practice for desk-based workers, who worked totally at home during 2020-2021 (*McKinsey Global Institute*, 2020), to return to a blended home-working model and multi-task whilst in conversation or listening to others. A culture honed during lockdowns that clumsily reconfigured physical convivial encounter as a repackaged product.

In the acceleration toward machine designed intelligence there are capitalist agendas afoot in the lived experience of time. As art and theory essayist Johnathan Crary highlights:

> *24/7 capitalism is not simply a continuation or sequential capture of attention, but also a dense layering of time, in which multiple operations or attractions can be attended to in near-simultaneity, regardless of where one is or what one might be doing.*

Crary, J., 2013, 87

6.4 Distractions

Distractions were part of everyday offline relational encounter. The differences between the physical sensorial, online enhanced and bio-digital enchanted spaces are characterised by tensions of collective and individualistic endeavour. The act of sharing offline space – temporal, physical, emotional, and intellectual – promise communality of sensorial togetherness. The distractions are a shared experience because the collective workings of causal interpretation, is at play. In an interview with seventy-year-old food writer Awe, she reminisced on the physicality of the cookbook in comparison with sharing a one dimensional screen:

… you can share a book together, sitting together and look at a book and talk about the recipes…the screen is much more individual. If you're looking at a screen, it's hard to share anything.

Awe, interview December 2020

During fieldwork 2020-2021 the intensity and range of screen-time distraction both increased and diverged. Initially when the pandemic homebound isolation began, I viewed a commitment to honouring the possibility of social connection through internetworked spaces of affiliation. The dedication from the chef-educator hosts, and their guest students, was revealed in the countless ways the chef-educators' physical inhabited home space was transformed into a public facing arena defined by the demands of *Zoom*-land. Flash gave an example of how he navigated his way around his busy family home in sunny Perth, Australia, that butted up against the demands of his professionalism. Oftentimes he would be connecting up with Europeans and Americans time- zones where his evening was their morning:

… when I did my zoom events … actually it works pretty well for me because kids were in bed like everybody else was … it gives me a bit of time to prepare before people get up …

Flash, interview, June 2020

Or Ferment also living in a family home who needed to block out noisy distractions by wearing headphones to help her focus and reclaim her pre-pandemic expert identity, 'I use these [headphones] to teach so that I can hear without having the distraction of the children upstairs or around the house' (Ferment, interview September 2020).

Flash and Ferment described to me the ways that they navigated their homes made into workplaces, when all public teaching places were closed. They had to pay acute attention to the ways that homebound physical distraction felt inhospitable on-screen, and so they developed practices that kept the non-actors silent in their culinary online lesson performance. The guest students also had plentiful unexpected distractions in their homes that collided with attempts at a pristine technologically-held space which the participants had to manage. Akin

to dealing with a heckler in the audience the chef-educators used tactics of dis-engagement or reprimand, as they either ignored their guest's kerfuffle, or reminded them about the use of the mute button (e.g., P.195). Of course, there were some guest students who were nonplussed by their personal home life distractions, and I felt soothed when normalcy of these reigned:

> *Eva has young children and mid-way through the lesson I can hear them in the background. 'They are returning from the park as it's pouring with rain'. She seems relaxed about their return as the dad is taking care of them, 'he'll give them a bath soon'.*

Sweetie, observation notes, (cooking lesson), October 2020

When homely distraction seeped in with such casualness it felt like a reassuring nod to the familial physical back-and forth, as in a lesson I had with Kalm and Kiki:

> *During the lesson the landline phone rings, I faintly hear a young male voice (maybe 11-12 years old) talking in the background, Kiki is talking to him and Kalm is slightly distracted I see her staring fixedly at someone off-camera in a way I recognise (as a mother) of trying to continue to work when a child is making demands.*

Kalm and Kiki, observation notes, (cooking lesson), November 2020

Another aspect of distraction particular to screen-based togetherness was the experience of an obscured other in the physical room. Unseen and unheard there seemed an ethereality in their abstracted presence in a disconnected place. At times, the experience of this verged on comedy – a comparison I feel fits well as humour recognises alternative dimensions of the same lived experience, for example when, 'Sweetie handed a cream covered spatula to her unseen daughter behind the screen, and I laughed and asked if it was a 'payment' to her assistant, to which Sweetie giggled 'yes' (participant observation fieldnotes, February 2021).

Or when a previously hidden student explained his sister's sudden screen disappearance from their *Zoom* kitchen when, instead of her, it was he who suddenly popped up in front of the camera, akin to a puppet show performance. He responded to Ferment's, '…

are you there?' by coming up very close to the screen to explain that his sister had nipped out,

'oh, she's gone to the loo' (participant observation fieldnotes, October 2020). Other times the

ghostliness of the hidden other felt unnerving like Wori's online lesson, '… there was a sneeze

and I said 'a tes souhaits', ('bless you') he said it wasn't him that sneezed, but his teenage

daughter who was invisibly in the room too …' (participant observation fieldnotes, May 2021).

Or cooking in *'Zoom*-land' with Vietnamese chef-educator One:

> *When we chat about the tapioca, I again bring up the frogspawn pudding memory and she looks nonplussed but then looks up and seemingly across the room. I get the feeling someone else is in there (her Danish husband?) and he has responded?*

One, observation notes, (cooking lesson), March 2021

But there were also more ominous examples of the quietened 'others' as alluded to by Sweetie

of her hidden assistant, '… my older daughter will quietly mute so you guys can't hear her telling

me and then she'll say to me, … check on Mary, she's, oh, you know …' (Sweetie, interview

February 2021).

However, what I felt most ethically taut were the unacknowledged children with no

agency, for example in Charisma's online class:

> *Raquel's four-year-old son was in her flat, she explained she was a single mum, and the boy came to smile at us through the camera. Again, I wonder about the small, the under 5's, in these Zoom calls, often 'there' too but with no real power over this.*

Charisma, observation notes, (cooking lesson), January 2020

The loss of sound and vision frequently caused an irritating lump of distraction and evoked all

kinds of hectic response that illuminated the disempowerment that online mediated interfaces

of togetherness offer. From the oft-heard cries of, 'I've lost you, you're frozen … hello'

(Franchement, interview October 2020), to 'I can't see you … that's probably because of your

connection. So, don't worry … that's okay … yes … hello' (Franchement, interview, April 2021).

Or the panicked and impotent wrangling when a guest student lost internet connection:

… then poof like a flash Carri disappears and it's just me and Nicé (this is very strange and happens a fair bit on Zoom, think about reasons and our reactions, it's very unlike the physical experience!). Nicé looks confused as they were in mid-conversation and I say, '… her battery probably ran out, she'll be back' (there was a little tell-tale sound I heard that a computer does just as it runs out of battery). Nicé and I chat slightly awkwardly as I am not doing the flambé or livers and I've been a little passive the last 10 minutes. Then Carri is back with, 'I'm very sorry I ran out of battery' (note use of cyborgism), and with more questions from Carri we continue…

Nicé, observation notes, (cooking lesson), June 2021

What always impressed me was the humanistic determination to continue despite technical failings and that machine-coding for efficiency was precariously balanced on the clunky and oversaturated infrastructure of the internet (e.g., figure 35, page 238). It reminded me of the modern world operating with old plumbing, the inventive urgent fixes to stop leaks causing layers of problems for the future, but never really address the underlying problems with the foundations of the infrastructure.

The chef-educators regularly experienced technical faults and frustrations, '… oh, no, my light went out. Oh, damn. That's okay. After I'll recharge it, recharge before my next meeting, you're gonna have to see me in the dark for a bit' (Flash, interview, January 2021). Or '… we were really aware of trying to really slow down and make sure that the microphone was really close to the mouth' and '… oh, that's it can you hear me now … can you hear me, no … yes, that's good now you can hear me, yeah …' (Franchement, interview, March 2021).

Lastly in this focus of distractions I consider the formidable and unconstrained work of algorithmic coding that shapes who is included, what we see and hear, where we perform and when we actualise our technically defined selves. Computer mediated togetherness is a collaboration between human propensity for efficiency – because we are prone to laziness – and lack of fortitude to the agendas of digital architecture that promise less effort. Machine intelligence is duping the creative, sensual, and social and there seems little time – or inclination – to pause to consider that key features of humanness are ebbing away.

During fieldwork I spent significant amounts of time – as did the chef-educators and their guest participants – pinned down by the muscle of algorithmic coding. The procedures involved in order to gather over food online were both protracted and impersonal. I engaged in so many different and ever-changing digital pathways of searching, contacting, booking, confirming, paying, entering, participating, leaving, and thanking that the long digital wayfaring (introduced P.42) trails of my coded endeavours seemed endless and disempowering. One example of many was mid-way through fieldwork when I was drowning in the vast and repetitious automated messages from individuals or brokers of commensality such as *Airbnb:*

> *I couldn't find the zoom link to 'get into' the class as there are so many mails from Airbnb, receipts, confirmation, message from chef etc. There had been a new feature of a pop-up message from Morgan (whoever he/she is) of an automated message saying welcome to the waiting room and to listen to music whilst getting ingredients prepared. I missed this music time with all the fumblings with finding the zoom link. I Airbnb messaged him [Charisma] with my quandary, and he messaged right back. In the meantime, I had tracked down the right email and was joining. With all my ingredients ready, but not weighed out, I was almost ready, almost mise en-place.*

<div align="right">Charisma, observation notes, (cooking lesson), January 2020</div>

The constant fumbling, contradictions, and adjustments to the frequent changes in design encouraged plentiful wayfinding tactics. There grew a collective understanding of how to circumnavigate technical dead-ends. Chief alluded to this with her description of the familiar dance of connecting and re-connecting when technology would have done otherwise, '… people get lost and then they have to go out and come back in, and then you have to let them in'. What does all this uncertainty, exclusivity, and hegemony (of the host and the software function) mean for gathering with others?

Figure 35: 'You Froze', Farrell, M. B., January 2020

André inadvertently captured the mood of living with distraction, which manifested in the language of being 'lost', 'losing you', of, '… go out and come back in' or 'you're frozen' (figure 35) in one of his 150-minute online gatherings:

> *Cutting out of the Zoom begins to happen and I turn off my camera momentarily (something that can help with internet connection quality), but it is not too bad, so I remain with my video on, dipping in and out of turning it off when André 'freezes'… 'There's going to be a moment when I'd like you to pay attention', my ears prick up with his tone/words of authority and instruction that are not common in his lessons. 'After the cooking of the pasta the magic happens …' but then internet cuts out he 'freezes', then his voice and body 'come back' as he says, 'think I lost you again' (think about these terms, being lost) and again it happens and he says, 'I lost you again, it's ok we're back'.*

André, observation notes, (cooking lesson), January 2020

Much of the distracted behaviour, caused by wrestling with the uncompromising coded software and its reliance on perfect bandwidth, internet-connectivity and savviness with computer-speak, was experienced in lonely places of confusion. During the pandemic lockdowns, the acuteness of the brusqueness of the staid screen felt de-humanising to me. A

feeling exacerbated by technical help being supplied by a 'bot.'[176]   Two of my fieldwork

examples that reflect on this are with Flash and his struggles with his *Instagram* account being

blocked and the impotence he felt of not being able to rectify this:

> *Because it coincided with a day where I got a lot of news on the internet side, I think that's what brought down my Instagram account … 'Can you get me back up?' and I get a message every time I tried to log in … Thank you, we received your information will get back to you in 24 hours, but that has been for like four months.*

<div align="right">

Flash, interview, March 2021

</div>

Or Charisma who passed onto his bewildered guests his tactics of personalising what he

needed from the *Airbnb* booking software:

> *Once booked I got an automatic message with ingredients and link for the zoom enabled class. My sister-in-law had problems booking after me as the website indicated full, so Charisma advised that she book for a different day but come to the same day as me in actuality.*

<div align="right">

Charisma, interview, October 2020

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Of course, unexpected happenings are familiar and seen as distractions when an interruption

to a flow of encounter. Distractions can be fortuitous and the navigation around them an

opportunity for bond-making and remaking or not. What my fieldwork observed were

humanistic wayfaring strategies to handle being in the internetworked space that was

embedded in technically defining operations.

6.5 Discussion

Food and eating relational activity – ritual, biological and sensorial – is filled with the

ongoing drama of identity making and re-making through the dynamics of intimate

internalisation of world externalities. A process done as a collective exercise, which embeds

and frames a connectivity with the natural world. It is only through eating and sexual activity

that humanness proves untenable to machine-led connective ability. Fractured sound and

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[176]A bot or internet bot, web robot, robot or simply bot, is a software application that runs automated tasks over the Internet, usually with the intent to emulate human activity on the Internet, such as messaging.

vision – notable in their sensory online dominance – has seeped into the expectations of the building blocks of relational activity. The fluency of interaction jarred by the chalice of convenience over emotional depth is led by machine designed coding for efficiency rather than multiplicity.

In this chapter I aimed to show a seepage of online technically defined bonding into the offline spaces of togetherness. What I clearly saw evolve in my fieldwork of hyper entanglement, between on and off screen, was that life online has the potential to irrevocably change our social behaviour off-line. Most of the world was predominately seeing, feeling, experiencing and navigating the physical world through a relationship with the 2D – a lens that asserts life with 'absence presence' – a fusion of representations of participation, prosumer activity, the rise of the attention economy and externalising memory (introduced P.8; 27-28; 194). One that accepts the togetherness of being fiercely individualised as we caress and interact with our constant, attuned and specialised best-friend, the internetworked smartphone. The themes of inquiry I uncovered in my fifteen-month fieldwork particularly relate to, question, and describe tensions of human and machine hybridity (introduced P.17 and §1.2).

I considered scholarship on the nature-culture divide and cultural narratives of what is natural, to conversely ponder on what is deemed 'unnatural' (Haraway, D., 1985). Within this acute physically asocial time of a pandemic I watched and analysed the visible shift to a species defined by a technological device (introduced P.47). My interest in the discussions of 'more than human anthropology' acknowledge the ancient dualism of human and machine, and as an anthropologist I wanted to interpret and not demonise the world-wide-web and its affordances. Yet during my fieldwork my concern was piqued by our complicity in the acceptance of opaque technical design for a 'machine-made bio-digital human'.

6.6 Conclusion and afterthoughts

I conclude with thoughts of the importance of being better educated, and more attuned with the technical changes to human selfhood. That the human complicity in that sublimation sings loud and clear through an anthropological study, one that used the lens of food and eating together – a biological and social endeavour. Such a lens effortlessly and illuminatingly questioned technically defined togetherness. I judge that, if indeed we are fundamentally in the process of becoming a machine-intelligence defined species, then collaborative design, made with human and natural objectives rather than computer-led design for efficiency over all else, is urgently needed (introduced P.10).

Either we accept how our deeply three-dimensional relationship-making is machine coded out of the human species, or the design of machine-human activity is a collaborative endeavour with the goal not of efficiency but of sentience. I seem to be swimming against the current much of the time, particularised by the pandemic surge of internet usage of a culture where less is more (O*f*com 2020). I think the disconnect is relevant to the vast and rising obesity figures and mental health issues because it is conversant with the decline of physical commensality and its role in teaching an practising sensory empathy (introduced P.20). The 'cooking from scratch' that needs the time and effort to cook and eat together – and the food and health literacies that are embedded in the process – ones that challenge ultra-processed food's target of speed, scale, and uniformity.

Maverick, French food community project founder living in Toulouse, France, believed that there is correlation between a life of internet immersion and social and bodily health. Compared to the French, who are online over an hour less each day,[177] and spend twice as long

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[177] Figures taken from *Online Nation 2021*, page 10, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/220414/online-nation-2021-report.pdf

eating meals, perhaps the tragedy of the United Kingdom's obesity rate being the highest in Europe is perhaps due, in part, to the limited value given to commensality (*National Food Strategy, 2020, 32*). Ultimately, as Maverick so clearly states, there is a need for commensality to maintain relationships with food and with each other through food because it creates and re-creates food knowledge:

> *… it's good to be with people…you will wait that everybody stop, and as you are speaking you're making some break … you are more conscious about what you are eating if you eat slowly than if you eat very quickly … when you are with people, you're more enjoying it. And it's also a way to be more aware of what you are eating …*

<div align="right">Maverick, interview, September 2020</div>

Additionally, and pertinent to the framing of the pandemic the UK Government expressed concern in 2020 about the link between obesity and being more vulnerable to the Sars-Cov-2 virus:

> *Living with excess weight puts people at greater risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19, with risk growing substantially as body mass index (BMI) increases. Nearly 8% of critically ill patients with COVID-19 in intensive care units have been morbidly obese, compared with 2.9% of the general population.*

<div align="right">*Department of health and Care, July 2020 (accessed 2022)*[179]</div>

As chef activist and restaurant chain owner Henry Dimbleby,[180] leader of the independent report *National Food Strategy* commissioned by the *UK Government* echoes, '… the pandemic provided a teachable moment' for food and health (*The National Food Report*, 2020, 14).

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[179] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-obesity-strategy-unveiled-as-country-urged-to-lose-weight-to-beat-coronavirus-covid-19-and-protect-the-nhs
[180] https://www.gov.uk/government/people/henry-dimbleby

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION
'Negotiating between alternatives'[181]

The situating of my ethnographic study, and the corresponding literature and theories I explored, and was informed by, focused on a very particular group of people, self-employed food professionals (and their online students), contextualised by the relative wealth of the global north. My participants' ability to transform their livelihood in a pandemic – albeit in awkward and anxious ways – was enabled by their access to the internet (and other relevant technology) and an internetworked device. Here I pause to reiterate that along this spectrum of transformative practices I found marked differences in their commitment and methods of embedding the internet into life and livelihood (e.g., P.66; 68; 118), framed by the large-scale processes of sociotechnical change. However, I increasingly felt – as I engaged and observed with my participants – that the pandemic's asocial time was primed for welcoming the persistence of being 'together' online (e.g., P.198).

The constant 'negotiating between alternatives' flux and flow of being in different contexts (to meet differing access, needs, demands or interests), was shaped by the hierarchical structuring of being social online, offline, and in the bio-digital space – oftentimes in simultaneous encounter. There was an enormous range of *where*, *how* and *who* to be and *who to be with* alternatives, as online and pandemic lives normalised the curation of shared life on screens, filled with imagined, or far-away others' possibilities and perspectives (e.g., P.31; 43). Each participant went through roller-coaster shifts to how they negotiated time and space in a range of concurrent alternatives – local, globally online, or homebound – each framed by enforced physical distance tensity with online adaptation. I undertook bio-digital ethnography (introduced P. 17 and expanded P.75; 79) to study the fused and simultaneous

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[181] Graeber D., and Wengrow, D., (2022, 118)

dimensions of the same event (e.g., the cooking lesson which culminated in a meal), and so I was constantly observing and analysing the differences and similarities between online and offline social learning around food. What I realised was the vital role of physical extra-domestic commensality to food knowledge production, because of its multi-sensorial and collaborative process, which when made public could symbolise and animate sociality (e.g., P.72-73). A central aspect of my ethnographic research, at a time when for millions being social meant being online, was how the practices of fieldwork had to adapt to this novel context – which I describe throughout the thesis, though particularly in the methodology chapter, (§2.7). I researched online, offline and 'in' their interface – and heavily leaned on visual and sensory anthropology (P.20; §2.9; §3.1) in these existences.

My adaptation of digital ethnography (introduced on P.25) utilised 'perceptive participation' to multi-sensually interpret, and to incorporate new methodological approaches to formulate bio-digital ethnography (§2.7-§2.11) (Graf, K., 2022, 4). I realised that there was a constant criss-crossing in my fieldwork to adjust to being simultaneously online (in a bi-sensory context); offline (in a multi-sensory space); and within an interfacial – bio-digital – perspective (material and a-material existing concurrently). My fieldwork experience mirrored the simultaneity, adaptations, and practices of my participants' transformational move from offline to online work (§2.10; §3.3).

To distinguish between these perspectives during my fieldwork was extremely hard, and I realised that it was only because of the 'pause' given by the acute intensity of asocial pandemic times, coupled with dominant online dependence for social learning that I came anywhere near understanding the complexities of our fused a-material and material relationship with food. Beyond parallelisation of these relationships – a fusion by no means novel in humankind's long history (e.g., P. 85; 88), of abstracting, representing, and symbolising

the acts of food, social cooking and eating – I instead saw them as a web of possibilities. My ethnographic processes and experience I liken to being hyper-linked – a constancy of moving between finite and infinite choices – of how food knowledge was being made and re-made in overlapping parallel contexts, e.g., by sensory empathy in tangible encounter and its coinciding online metaphorical narrative (§2.8-2.11; §3.1-3.4).

Additionally, observations of related online activity (e.g., webinars: P.168; §4.5-4.6), and interviews with my participants, added to the evolution of my interpreting and understanding the transformation of commensality's role within social and informal food education. It felt like a complementary rather than a comparative lens, inspired and informed by learned cross-disciplinary scholarship (i.e., P.20-27), as I wove in anthropological views on, kinship and reciprocity, social network, (e.g., P.15; 17; 58-59), with commensality, the practices and politics of social cooking and eating, and transmission of knowledge (e.g., P.11; 50). Temporalities and transformations (e.g., P.14; 121); connectivity and collective memory-making (P.3; 13; §7.5); the spaces and places of hospitality and home (P.6; §7.6); knowledge, touch and untouchables (§7.7); and weariness and loneliness (P.131, §7.8), all expressed the problematised intimacies of everyday bio-digital life during the pandemic's magnification of what being social around food meant.

7.1 Politics of pandemic commensality

My research, set within the pandemic 2020-2022, explored the interdependent relationship between food and freedom in three ways significant to my fieldwork context. Firstly the vulnerability and control of the food supply chain, secondly the supply chain's challenge of access to healthy and culturally appropriate food for all, and lastly the tensions around being publicly social around food (e.g., §4.1). Each of these elements expressed eating as a political act, and each were under duress in the pandemic as they made loud and

transparent remonstration throughout the pandemic because the hecticness of the material world, which had previously hidden or normalised many of these issues in busy and unconscious lifestyles, fell away to reveal the dysfunctionalities of food systems.

The core arguments of my research (§7.10) were framed by the pandemic tensions and transformations for commensality – particularly for sensory empathy (introduce P.185) and social food knowledge reproduction (introduced P.12). The disruption of a global health emergency contextualised my fieldwork, so my participants and their students (§4.6-4.7) experienced the 'three freedoms' by how easy, or not, it was to take part in a social meal – on or offline – during the pandemic. An ease characterised by the interplay of transnational and local food supply chains, and their offer (or not) of healthy, appropriate, affordable food. The ultimate question for commensality's welcome and educational role was how can eating, wrapped up in the fragility of a food chain filled with animal stress, blanket use of antimicrobials[182] in industrial livestock, and low-grade cheap produce, be hospitable and a positive teachable moment (P.136; 141; 146-147). Corelative to the cheap meat dilemma is the taut relationship between disease and human, determined by zoonotic animal-human relationships that includes animals as food, as discussed in chapter four subtitled *When Hospitality becomes Hostile* (§4.1- 4.2)

The pandemic revealed many vulnerabilities and hinderances, though as a food bank worker observed, 'COVID didn't create this problem, it just helped people to actually see it'[183] with a massive increase in UK numbers (e.g., 81% more in Spring 2021) of new users turning to food banks for help.[184] The incumbency to food choice, when supplies, education and work faltered was the pandemic's health emergency experience for millions and, '… the crisis

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[182] Antimicrobials prevent and treat infections in humans, animals and plants.
[183] https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/1/6/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-london-food-bank
[184] https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8585/CBP-8585.pdf

showed that the emergency food aid sector was ill-equipped to deal with the surge in food insecurity created by COVID-19' (Pautz, H., and Dempsey, D., 2021). My fieldwork was of a viewpoint of privileged food and freedom. One where I considered the comfort and discomfort of commensal – be it in offline or online – encounters of the comfortably off. However difficult the physical distancing measures felt, the fieldwork insights I gained were seemingly set in a stark juxtaposition to life-threatening hardship, e.g., how *UNICEF* worked to feed children in lockdown Britain for the first time in its 70-year history.[185] Worryingly there was also a doubling in the numbers of eating disorders in 2021[186] agitated by a range of pandemic features such as:

> *… social isolation to food insecurity, and from pressures to exercise and challenges to losing weight to loss of routines and disruptions in accessing face-to-face clinical services, it is difficult to think of a scenario that could have promoted so many risk factors for eating disorders at a societal level as much as the current situation …*

<div align="right">Solmi, F., Downes, J., L., and Nicholls, D., E., 2021</div>

The 25% global rise in anxiety and depression also necessitated, '… mental health and psychosocial support in their COVID-19 response plans' (*World Health Organisation,* March 2022).[187] So the issue of commensality, with all its qualities of, solidarity, companionship, sensuality, and food knowledge sharing being in lockdown stranglehold was a factor that aligned with emotional health, which in turn had potential physical and life-threatening consequences. The online commensal place of my fieldwork saw how the disruption of this stranglehold impacted on how the chef-educators, and their students, felt supported – or not – in their bi-sensory and technically defined contexts.

7.2 Human and internet entanglement – bio-digitality

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[185] https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/dec/16/unicef-feed-hungry-children-uk-first-time-history
[186] https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(21)00094-8/fulltext
[187] https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide

Within the processes and practices of online co-narration, formed by the presence of the smartphone's immense capacity to reconfigure commensality's food knowledge, the biological human act of cooking and eating together seemed impregnated with digital detail. My fieldwork was filled with observations and interview revelations of the ways and means that this happened (e.g., P.70; 116-119), and because of the intensity of pandemic internetworked habit – which increased by an extra hour each day in the UK – bio-digitality was more overt (*Ofcom Online Nation* 2020 Report). Its hold over food culture, education, rituals, relationships, and behaviour, felt more palpable, and the objectification and distancification[188] of cooking and eating shifted gear to accelerate into individualised stories of collective food interaction. Stories that were about the human entanglement with the internet in a deeply intimate yet social solo dance in a dance hall filled with an infinite number of possible acquaintances (e.g., P.50; 119; 158).

My participants shared lots of stories of their entanglement, some empowering, some not, and their disempowerment was mainly due to technical issues and protracted solutions, the biased coding of algorithms and software design (§6.4), the visualisation of selfhood (introduced P. 29; 51 and developed P. 206), and digital ethics (e.g., P.99; 206). As chef-educator Sweetie shared of the technical adaptations to her work due to the pandemic, '… it's absolutely an audio-visual job, if my kids hadn't been out of school, because of the whole confinement thing, I don't know that I would have started this because it requires so much figuring out' (November 2020).

In chapters three *The Internal Human Compass to the Sensory World* (P. 105-134), and six *The Affordances and Allure of the Online* (P. 204-235) I introduce and then present the

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[188] Distancification is a term used by food anthropologists to describe the emotional and physical distance made by industrial commodification of food and eating.

analysis of my fieldwork material that looked at the ease, sublimation, and complicity with the internetworked space. One that promised improvement yet seemed to become a golden cage of gilded addiction, so very embedded in the architecture of social inclusion that it enticed with the easy pleasure of colourful and plentiful visual stimuli. Here I pause to consider some contradictions in this line of analysis because there were disparities between the chef-educators' pandemic-filled on-line experiences, yet the constants were the plentiful creative re-inventions of culinary interaction and story-making presence (e.g., figures 16-18; , P.61; 64) to keep guests signing up and committing their time, which was particularly tricky once lockdowns had ended.

By Summer 2021 there were distinctions between chef-educators who had retained a rootedness to their culinary identity in contrast with others who felt a despair with the limitations of a forced online transition for their culinary career. There were plentiful accounts and observations made of the ways in which the participants and their numerous guests wrangled with the technical impact on engagement and non-engagement through the loss of internet-connectivity, and the technical vulnerabilities of sound and vision (§3.3; §6.4). The tactics to subvert these challenges manifested in 'digital wayfaring', laborious and convoluted making-it-up as you go along tactics that were easily forgotten or were indescribable afterward.

What I noted of these technical machinations were the ways the participants and their students worked with collective endeavour to circumnavigate the 'clunkiness' of the internet's infrastructure to utilise the world-wide-web. I saw how technical hitches were changing the ways we related to each other around a compelling social necessity – commensality – and its embeddedness in food knowledge (§3. 3; §6.4). The online encounter with socialising around food became disjointed and bi-sensual (audio-visual), and thus a representation of the multi-

sensory experience of cooking and eating together. Clearly there was a sensitive dance of non-engagement in a collective experience – the acceptance of disconnect was normalised.

And in this endeavour, I noted new features of online food togetherness (e.g., P.126-131; §3.3) stimulated by the architecture of algorithms and software design, which defined synchronous and asynchronous encounter. I found changes in social food etiquette and togetherness practices within internetworked kitchen spaces, such as online impatience and intolerance; technically induced rushing or waiting; gaining and keeping attention; and the allowance and propensity of multi-tasking, all agitated the food togetherness relationship (§6.5-6.6). Plus, through my auto-ethnographic work I found and analysed the plentiful acts of feigning collective engagement, and how the screen made allowances of faking deliberate involvement with online ease.

Examples of this parallel activity – of the intention of the online gathering, and the actuality of what was happening in my and others' kitchens – was individualised to such a point that there were two perspectives in the bio-digital encounter. A parallel that at times felt comedic in its maverick expression (§6.4). Here I reflect on the frequent instances of self-imposed distraction that revealed itself in the duality of performing, and actuality, with an example taken from fieldwork observations with Nicé:

> *I had searched everywhere for fresh fish as Nicé requested, but in lockdown supplies were low and so ended up buying fishfingers. During the online lesson I surreptitiously had to scrape the bright yellow industrial coating off to present the pretence of having the visual and cultural aesthetic of Instagram-able fresh fish.*

> Nicé, observation notes, (cooking lesson), September 2020

Additionally, I observed, and experienced, recorded in my auto-ethnographic notes, that life on screen was changing our perception of ourselves. Being online using a video conference platform such as *Zoom* meant hours of observing ourselves in action, and reaction to social others (introduced P.30 and developed P. 216-217). The bio-digital fusion in the unconstrained

work of algorithmic coding shaped who was included, what we saw and heard, where we performed and how we actualised our computer defined selves. So that computer-defined selfhood seeped into perceptions of physical wellbeing, as chef-educator Sweetie agonisingly described of her new self-consciousness of decades-long mannerisms, after countless hours watching herself during cooking classes (P.216). In this acute physically asocial time I watched and analysed the visible shift to increasingly definition by technological device, one that made selfhood construction a persistent machine-human endeavour.

7.3 Ethnography in an a-material world

I describe in my methodology chapter, subtitled *Serving Up Bio-Digital Ethnography* (P. 51-103), the machinations of stepping away from the twentieth-century model of anthropological fieldwork that focused on the contextuality of a physically defined place (§3.2-3.3). The validity of the 'thick description', with the inclusion of the voices of the participants themselves instead of purely the researcher's; 'perceptive participation' (Graf, K.,2022, 4); and observation, gave insight into the everyday lived experience, and those everyday lived experiences proffered a totality, a rationale made by, and of those described (Geertz, c., 1973). In this approach the physical experience of interacting and responding to the concreteness of daily life rested on the relational junctures of how individuals and groups made and dealt with their materialities. As anthropologist Daniel Miller proclaims, '… we understand who we are in the mirror of a material world within which we are born and socialized', so it seemed this understanding became a bio-digital one of simultaneously using the mirror of a-material and material co-joined dimensions (Miller, D., 2018, 3).

I found that bio-digital ethnography grappled with understanding who we were in an a-material world, a place of abstract definition that influenced my understanding of, '… a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live' (Franks, M., A, 2019).

Already a firm step away from infancy the anthropology of the twenty-first century rests on prophetic work in the field of science and technology by many, such as Professor Donna J. Haraway (b.1944), and indeed of the blurring of the discipline's edges to form greater interdisciplinarity. There has been a notable increase in the cross-over and relevance of Human-Computer-Interaction (HCI) in communication and engineering departments; behavioural studies in user experience software design; digital ethics (i.e., intellectual property, privacy, security, information overload, digital divide, gender discrimination, and censorship); a focus on digital responsibility, activism and agency (e.g., Digital Good);[189] and, increasingly the signs of Digital Humanities'[190] use of digital resources to archive, inform and critique human creativity.

Plus, there is academic work being done (including anthropological), in concurrent development with companies, charities and policy makers, to respond to the accelerated reconfiguration of bio-digital lives accelerated by the pandemic years. Digital wellbeing[191] is an issue receiving attention and tech company interest because of the social and individual mental health vulnerabilities of bio-digital lives, the addictive features of being in the online space, and the tensions of being 'alone together' (Turkle, S., 2011). In my fieldwork I witnessed the tension between whether 'technology was in charge of us or were we in charge of technology'[192] in daily internetworked lives (e.g., P.78; 160; 167; 170; 264). I found how my ethnography relied on the blending together of offline and online spaces of subjective voices, and hence digital ethnography carries the age-old anthropological challenge of its 'goal' of unbiased intention, but additionally must scalarly 'deal' with – and value – the profusion, and diversity of those

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[189] https://digitalgood.net/about/what-we-do/
[190] What are the digital humanities? | The British Academy
[191] Digital Wellbeing through technology | Google
[192] Digital Wellbeing through technology | Google

voices. My fieldwork approach aimed to consider the multi-nodal channels of online immersion's cacophony of the written and articulated word, (i.e., it's prolific practices of co-production in the prosumer endeavour), but be mindful of the co-presence of the machine-designed 'compass' that filters and directs interaction and interface.

The anthropological pursuit of seeking meaning by being embedded in social interaction – such as commensality's gathering around cooking and eating – deviated from the linear of material daily life. Instead, the multi-directionality jumpiness of human-machine activity both demanded and revealed a propensity for making mosaics of trail-making and remaking, so the challenging context of my fieldwork was of a 'here and there' perspective of a 'here and there' community separated from the physicality of the same material world. It was a time where extra-domesticity slumbered in a deep two-year pandemic coma, and the trails of togetherness made by online commensality felt unfamiliar and enforced because of physical distancing guidelines.

As a researcher of bio-digitality in a pandemic framed time of physical asociality my digital ethnography investigated an a-material world, an online space where machine could inflect human. I deliberately had to choose, and therefore minimise the investigation to an examination of human entanglement with digital machine, rather than focus on the machine-made channels of connectivity that much digital ethnography examines. I stayed in the kitchen, both offline and its online simulation, and with that my bio-digital ethnography was of the multi-faceted and sensorial human experience with the online screen as an interface. A form of digital ethnography deeply grounded in visual and sensory ethnography that contemplated the embeddedness of abstract modes of thinking in research (e.g., P. 80; 89).

7.4 Temporalities and transformations

Time is a social construct that fills and demarcates human experience. During the pandemic years, the construction – on individual and group level – felt distorted with the onset of *COVID-19's* isolationist measures of virus containment. Temporality is felt through change or continuance, so pandemic existence in the same room with a repetitive routine and unchanged company minimised daily experience to a feeling of timelessness. And with that constant sameness of sleep, eat, work or study with no physical extra-domestic or public expression of sociality, internet activity surged with stimulating relief, but provided a surreal convergence of physical temporal pause with an acute acceleration of online time (e.g., P. 168). Instead of physically being in the same four walls endlessly there was an alternative, an escape to a place of frequent changes, as the online context allowed us to travel.

However, therein lay a paradox because the energising, connective and stimulating audio-visuals of internetworked social space was a co-constructed lively 2D representation of a subdued pandemic-ised 3D life. In that physical asocial time the online construction, and co-narration of daily life as a social encounter, became a collective endeavour of marking the days. The home kitchen – offline and online – became a theatre of time. It was a place of experiencing and narrating the encounter of criss-crossing time zones, pandemic news and events, the intimate every-day, and moments of group socialisation, all doled out in bio-digital effortless practice. It felt completely understandable that the online space, one with endless and ever-changing activity, would be the place of choice for physically isolated millions. My research was framed by the juxtaposition of timelessness and time-filled encounter formed by two physically restrictive years mainly spent indoors. It was fifteen months of fieldwork, situated within the rupturing demands of the pandemic, as my participants and I experienced the friction between daily indoor monotony against an acceleration of experiencing 'exciting' online news and information.

The transformations needed to change their deeply multi-sensual work from the physical to the internetworked was complicated and energy thirsty – both physically and emotionally. Within the space of months all my participants had to rapidly learn the skills of online technology to promote (e.g., *Instagram*), and socially facilitate (e.g., *Zoom*) their online classes (figures 16-18; P.116-119). The shift was energetic in its response to a new time of absent extra-domesticity, as seen in the first three-months of 2020, with a 25% increase in *Zoom* meetings, which grew from 498,000 to over thirteen million (*Of*com, 2021, 152)*.

Also, all the participants had to physically transform their homes into not just live-work spaces – as most deskbound workers did – but into live-work-perform places of host and guest (§3.3; §3.5). This making, unmaking, and remaking of their private spaces was frequent for those who lived in small flats as they reconfigured bedrooms into kitchens, or those with busy family homes turned into a façade of calm oases. There was a different way of spending time preparing for their classes, and the visible and invisible restructuring shifted their temporal relationship with their professional identity. Additional to the temporary transformations to home, routines, and lifestyles was the incredibly unique temporalities of cooking. Of changing raw ingredients into something other, of the kitchen-science of physics and of the internal changes made by ingestion – felt both immediately and incrementally.

All the chef-educators and their guests lived this very ethereal relationship to the temporal and transformative qualities of food and eating in their material lives, which anthropologist Graf describes as the 'cook's sixth sense' (Graf, K., 2022, 2). My thesis describes – in chapter three (P.105-134) *The Internal Human Compass to the Sensory World* – how these fundamentals were navigated by the chef-educators (and their guests) online. Of how the complexities of the temporal-sensual processes of cooking (and eating together) were reconfigured in response to a 2D a-sensual space determined by algorithmic coding. How there

was tension in the online kitchen of not 'being in time' with one another as in the physical kitchen – particularly noted in synchronicity and a-synchronicity online practices (P.13; 17; 42).

Chapter three also proposes that many of these newly learned online practices were seeping into offline relationships with food – and each other through food and add to the abstraction of food (§3.4). An objectification that already dominated social media pre-pandemic of 'food porn' – a glamourised online dish – with an ease that increased 'distancification' – the disconnect adding to not appreciating food's journey from field or sea to mouth. Undoubtedly the internet can and did facilitate social connection – as I can attest to by my fieldwork's fifty cooking lessons, it did provide a time and space for millions for respite from isolation, and a taste of global narrative and solidarity in a starkly asocial physical time (e.g., P. 22; 35-37). My research recognises the immense value to sociality that the internet gave in the pandemic years yet is piqued by the signs of continuance with social cooking and eating – commensality – as a machine-defined experience, one that problematises the multi-sensual aspects of commensality's role in social food education.

7.5 Connectivity and collective memory-making

The pandemic years revealed the ease of believing in technologically defined social connection. The normalisation of 'absent presence' – being uncommitted on a video call or social media platform, akin to a stalker with voyeuristic tendencies – felt accepted during my fieldwork. Throughout the chapters, though specifically chapter five subtitled *The Silence of Loneliness* (§5.7), I observed and interpreted countless instances of 'absent presence' (P.180), with technically induced affordances, such as the camera being on or off on a video call, or the unintroduced guests lurking half-hidden from camera view. Added to this was the conundrum of the co-presence (introduced P.27; §5.7) of a smartphone, an interface provider of fictional relational connectivity that muddied the norms and rituals of togetherness, a piece of tech

heralded to foster easy channels of connectivity. Yet my fieldwork saw tensions between the faith and futility in video conference channels and social media platforms, and there were plenty of instances and conversations that defied the connective power of the internet particularly as the pandemic guidance on physical distancing ('stay at home' guidance) continued (introduced P.54). Internetworked-connectivity was a convenience with many limitations – technical and social – that increasingly found agitated feelings of disconnect, loneliness and frustration (§5.1; §5.9).

Connectivity was a mantra during the pandemic years, it was deemed a solution to so many social ills and struggles. For the participants connectivity was staying in touch with family and friends, a means to promote their culinary identity, and an engagement with online cooking class 'audiences,' both new and old. In all of these encounters the constant – though at times intentionally ignored – agenda was to keep up with pandemic news. Like others their online connectivity seemed like a dance of numerous parts that seamlessly added up to endless internetworked hours, as the promise of being digitally connected was embedded in pandemic lives of most participants. Only two of the chef-educators bucked the call of online work and social-life made possible by the high-earning big tech-companies. Maverick and Franchement looked to their physical communities to adamantly criticise smartphone activity, as they stoically believed that internetworked lives were harming social connection, because as an interface the hand-held computer and its workings, seemed to them an intrusion rather than an enabler.

Embedded in the perception and activity of online connectivity was the urge to collectively make memories, and I saw infinite social-media examples of this co-narrative work, and the participants and their guests' preoccupation with their online authored selves (introduced P.51 and developed P.61; 206). The 'attention economy' – the business of keeping

and using our interest – (introduced P.28 and developed P. 88; 92; 99;234) was rife in their endeavours of collective story and memory-making, which they shared and re-made in a determined prosumer march toward globally networked individualism. The social media platform *Instagram* was a theatre of self-promotion and harried collective co-narration, and in my fieldwork, I observed its partnership, its *Polymedia*[193] (Miller, D., and Madianou, M., 2012) activity embedded in *PolySocial Reality's* temporal, bio-digital and relational networks (Applin, S. A., Fischer, and M. D., 2012).

Many of the participants, notably Elicit and Sweetie, became increasingly angry with feelings of being 'let down' by their governments. Forgotten and undervalued the world of hospitality and food education limped toward the pandemic finishing line whilst pharmaceutical companies reaped the benefits of a medicalised human.[194] Most – barring Maverick, Franchement, and Kiki – lived the inevitability of life on screen with dulled acceptance. Few, barring André and Ferment, relished the ongoing dominance of their internetworked careers, and I increasingly felt and heard their desperation to return to offline chef-education. As the months progressed the online collective story-making and memories were of tired efforts to feign enthusiasm of food togetherness. As restrictions lifted and offline public-facing cooking and eating together resumed (albeit initially in masks with plentiful handwashing and metred out physical-distanced gaps) the surge of change was palpable. The online classes dropped away, and for weeks I was the only participant smiling supportively at

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[193] A term introduced by anthropologists Miller and Madianou to convey, '… the way individuals configure a particular combination of media in their communication as an aspect of contemporary identity' (*Future Identities*, UK Gov, 2013).

[194] How Big Pharma Will Profit From the Coronavirus (theintercept.com)

my dazed chef-educators who were working out how to transition from lonely pandemic online kitchens back into the hubbub of extra-domestic physical work.

7.6 The spaces and places of hospitality and home

The practices of ritual and identity-making embedded in commensality were uniquely absent in the extra-domestic public spaces and misshapen inside the fieldwork homes. Kitchens and dining rooms became critical in both their absence (outside the home) and in their intensity of intra-domestic lives and within the hospitality of commensality, one I view as, '… a means of articulating social structures', there was much to examine as to the reconfigurations made in a pandemic framed time of physical distancing (Selwyn, T., 2001, 18-37). I observed the tensions of this disparity for my chef-educator participants. The hospitable norms of reciprocity, intimacy, assimilation, trust, performance, power, etiquette, and invitation left the comfort of familiar physical spaces for a life on screen.

For some of the participants there was a palpable sense of sadness, akin to grief, for the loss, albeit temporary (though during the pandemic the temporary felt interminable and an end to restrictions for hospitality uncertain), for physical commensality with their students. Their sadness stripped them of energy and optimism to continue simulating online commensality beyond the final lockdowns in 2021. Though for two chef-educators, André and Nicé, there seemed a liberation proffered by being online as they both effortlessly harnessed evocative storytelling of their active culinary lives beyond the screen, which worked to captivate their students (e.g., P.68; 123). Maybe an element of escapism was shared to tease the memories and dreams of cooking and eating together in a 'verse' that was not 'meta-', but 'uni-'.

On top of dealing with economic precarity of a livelihood founded on social learning around food they – and their guests – had hospitality's problem of, '… how to deal with

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strangers' problematised by the thrust into online cooking and mealtime practice (Pitt-Rivers, J., 2017, 163). The virtual welcome into one another's homes was a default made possible and normalised by the pandemic distancing measures and lockdowns. My fieldwork studied the acceleration into the internetworked space where thousands of private kitchens became public spaces, and particularly for the chef-educators this shift caused a reconfiguration of spatial, conceptual, and relational practices with their guest learners – and with each other through food.

The construction of the everyday, and the performance of this 'ordinariness' belied the invisible efforts made by the participants in how they reconfigured their homes into professional educational spaces (§3.2-3.3). The technical and spatial setting up of the internetworked stage for their online lessons was for all – barring Wori who used his empty restaurant kitchen – a physical restructuring of a pre-pandemic space of privacy. Charisma was the most notable in the work undertaken to change his home space, i.e., of making his bedroom into the teaching kitchen, yet he cloaked his behind-the-scenes efforts with flamboyant presence and quirky Parisian aesthetics. For Wori his teaching kitchen was not the same professional space as it was pre-pandemic, something I felt acutely as he stood awkwardly dressed in chef whites with disconcerting quietness all around a normally hectic restaurant kitchen. However, the magic of the results of their homelife transformation felt soothing in lockdown, and the urge and joy of gathering to perform around food continued – albeit in dislocation – because of the efforts made by the participants. It was additionally reassuring to interact socially (outside of family or home groups) without masks or the need for plentiful hand sanitising gel, and the online kitchen space appeared visually friendlier than the quiet streets of be-masked pedestrians or desolate restaurants.

Proximity was an essential element in the work of the pandemic home kitchen – whether offline or online – of both people and food ingredients. Ever-present during the *COVID-19* pandemic was the realisation that some ingredients would not be easily available because lockdowns made the (apparent) smooth running of pre-pandemic food chains shudder, dwindle or stop. For many individuals, the material home kitchen was an unusual space compared to pre-pandemic, instead of being stocked with the familiar they were filled with what was available. My kitchen in the cooking classes often smelt culturally stripped down as numerous ingredients were not available, and the many substitutions I made were unappealing (e.g., P.211). Part of the practice and charm of the chef-educators – pre-pandemic – was how their local food story was skilfully embedded into the cooking lesson, with perhaps a visit to the local market or food producer to immerse in a culturally situated experience. The gastro-touristic experience of the meal was narrated by the physical context that sensorially shared its unique taste of place. All the chef-educators struggled with the online recreation of this context-making through scarcity of ingredients, and of their guests in far-flung places having little access to anything other than their very meagre local pandemic choices (e.g., P.245).

The welcome into the online teaching kitchen was an endeavour of new forms of boundary-making, unmaking, and remaking. The ecology of the home universally changed for most of the northern hemisphere with abrupt immediacy – a happening with little other historic comparison. A key focus for my research was how the pandemic and accelerated internet use impacted on commensality, hospitality, and food skills. This was defined and enlightened by the norms of simultaneously being in a private place that analogically required a welcome, and in a public online space filled with machine-designed etiquette and ritual. The machine-coded design was efficient, but always during my fieldwork I observed the challenges

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commensality had with its bi-sensual, 2D and technologically entangled practice. I saw how technical software defined the choreography of 'togetherness' (§6.2; §6.6).

7.7 Knowledge and touch

My research presents some key aspects of bio-digital relationships to eating and food knowledge. These perspectives were framed by the tensions between the multi-sensory physical encounter in offline kitchens, which existed concurrently with the online bi-sensory simulation or narration of the processes occurring in each home kitchen. These were explored and analysed in my fieldwork particularly in the monthly one-to-one semi-structured interviews (P.102) with my chef-educators – on themes such as transformation, technology, and the senses – my participant observations, or 'participant perception' (introduced P. 13 and developed e.g., P.117; 131), of fifty online cooking lessons, and my autoethnographic studies of social online cooking lessons (Graf, K., 2022, 4). One of my aims was to consider and realise some answers on how culinary knowledge dissemination was transformed in an acute time of physical distancing. For my participants, and their guests, it transitioned from a deeply embodied and sensory material practice, to one that rested on the bio-digital lexicon (Sutton, D., 2010; Ingold, T., 2019). A machine-human defined mode of communication propelled during the pandemic's absence of multi-sensory physical commensal eating.

Much of this relates to the *sensorium* – the individualised sensory memory 'bank' – and its daily use, described in chapter three subtitled *Making Sense with the Sensorium* (P.105-134), and problematised in chapters five subtitled *The Silence of Loneliness* (P.174-201) and six subtitled From *Enhancement to Enchantment* (P.204-235). I argue that the construction and work of the sensorium – a lifetime and continual project – showed signs of discord during the physically distanced months of the pandemic. Its signature of collective response to multi-sensory stimuli and the memories, associations, and inherent identity processes became a

strained combination of culinary intimacy in individualised kitchens entangled with collective bi-sensory narration. Thus, the pandemic enlisted us as actors in food and eating knowledge transformation. Instead of being free to share the social learning mechanisms of intimacy and relatedness in physical moments of extra-domestic commensality the internetworked pandemic months felt individualistic in a sea of online, 'social plurality' – of collective but separate social groups – (*Foresight Future Identities*, 2013, 5).[195]

So, the ways a chef-educator shared or performed their knowledge to guests or students relied on multi-modal practices that revolved around the group dynamics of mirror neuron work (introduced P.107 and throughout thesis including P.126; 143; 185), a practice deeply embedded in eating together and is dominated – or perceived to be dominated – by vision. The online transfer of food knowledge would seem to lend itself to the ocular ways in which learning to cook and eat together happens (P.112). The inventive online process of the chef-educators, and in some instances of their guests, was to narrate, simulate, compensate, or manipulate the 2D bi-sensory into a narrative filled with metaphors and playful demonstration. This became a fascinating aspect of my fieldwork, which both harked back to my original interest of online co-narration (introduced P. 4-6) and pointed toward how processual and dynamic the norms and communicative practices of bio-digitality were.

Some participants felt positive about their 2D on-screen 'manipulations' precisely because there were less moments for sensory spontaneity. As Charisma shared, '… so they [guest students] pay a little bit more attention once you're doing an online experience … they are more aware of every single word that I'm telling them.' A revelation that confirmed the immense, and troubled role of sound in an online lesson, and the busy work of spoken

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[195] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-identities-changing-identities-in-the-uk

language. The styles I observed were recognisable from offline usage and included plentiful metaphorical detail as compensatory and explanatory communication in the kitchen. None of my participants – barring Flash – experimented, explored, or included the potential of creative playfulness within the online space. The chef-educators were neither a total sensual presence, nor an innovative and technically defined persona, as their video platform skillset – combined with haphazard online connection – simply set them up as television-style culinary professionals with an interactive audience. Theirs was the presence of the sound and vision of a personable real-time guide.

My research sought to demonstrate how the quiet work of the other senses – smell, taste, and touch – were all working hard to stimulate, explain and embed food knowledge and the pleasure – or disdain—of eating. Additionally, the list of senses can be more detailed, more granular, with expressions of memory; movement (internal and external to bodies); thermal encounter; and the complexities of touch, all intrinsic to the 'tools' of learning to cook and actions of commensality. Touch – haptic, textural, pressured (from an external source), vibratory, painful, or pleasurable – was a particularly important and complex aspect of relationship-making and this was a dominating feature in its absence during the pandemic from offline and internetworked perspectives. The absence of touch in both social spaces was an engaging contemplation throughout the fieldwork months and related to human-human and human-food interaction. Guarded or absent touch impacted on emotional wellbeing, particularly in the times of commensal gathering around food as described in chapter five *The Pandemic's Epidemic* (P.174). It highlighted the role of touch in the mutuality of experience and the ways presence is established, because fundamentally, '… food may be necessary for survival, but touch is what sustains us' (McNichols, K., 2021).

Additionally, the lack – or restraints – of human touch distorted the processes of the sensorium and the practices of food literacy as two 'social' parts of the body, the mouth, and hands normally at the 'frontline' of commensality, were either be-masked and covered up, or sterilised and kept at a distance (i.e., P.70). Despite the visual domination of food, as chef-educator André described as, '… eating with your eyes first,' Franchement's declaration that, '… the camera is not enough', problematised the anticipation of cooking and eating's visual abstraction.

An abstraction that the online and software designed screen-interface propelled in its bid to maintain attention in the internetworked attention or aesthetic economy. It also magnified the dilemmas of online presence, an experience of space devoid of odour, movement, touch, sound, or temperature that abstracted knowledge – and the work of knowledge bearers – within communities of bio-digital practice. An abstraction that fed individualism as it removed the collective endeavour of sense-making – whether that be learning to make a cake or sharing the pleasure of eating it.

7.8 Weariness and loneliness

Loneliness as a subject is of great enormity and relevance to anthropological understanding of what it is to be human in the twenty-first century, and my research presents why the pandemic's isolation was a health emergency in itself. An epidemic of loneliness, allowed to accelerate with commensality's pandemic absence or distortion, was also a powerful representation of the social structure of contemporary bio-digital loneliness. As discussed in the introduction chapter (P.29), there is a surprising dearth of anthropological writing on loneliness, as anthropologist Parsons (2020) describes of the discipline's 'scant' contribution. (Parsons, M. A., 2020, 635).

My research hinges on the lens of commensality and the potential of togetherness through cooking and eating socially. It naturally uncovered themes of how loneliness was visualised and perceived because my fieldwork was embedded in an asocial time, an acute and unique two-years of absent, or restricted, public facing gathering around food. The feigning or adaptation of being connected with others in much of northern hemisphere urban lifestyle had, pre-pandemic, become about the individual amongst crowds of other individuals. This normalisation of being 'alone together' was seen clearly in extra-domesticity with its neutrality and anonymity of social space (Turkle, S., 2011). Examples of the global propensity for social yet individualistic dining is explored in chapter five subtitled *The Silence of Loneliness* (P.174) in a time when solo-households were increasing at an exponential rate in much of Europe (Cohen, P., N., 2021).

Eating alone, but 'together' has complicated the human urge to gather because internetworked gathering was in countless ways an engineered visual simulation. It looked like togetherness but was it really, and how much had the co-presence of a smartphone at the table maladapted the construction and understanding of bonding practices and ritual? Cappacio (2008) presents one of loneliness' causes as 'social connection illiteracy', the inability to read the cues of what being together looks and feels like. I return to my argument, introduced in chapter three *The Internal Human Compass to the Sensory World* (P.105-134), of the work that commensality does as a vehicle of forming and re-forming a bank of social knowledge. An ongoing project that rests on a collective endeavour to make and test the boundaries of trust, identity, risk, and pleasure seems relevant to the literacy work of social connection.

All my participants, and some of their guests, openly and increasingly discussed the issue of pandemic loneliness. Plus, I – as an unexpectant solo-householder due to the pandemic

restrictions on international travel – made the most of autoethnographic research informed by scholarship and cross-referenced with participant's experiences. As Franchement alluded it is the imposition of the physical distancing measures that differentiated loneliness from being alone, because it was not a choice to seek solitude, and with that there was a sense of powerlessness that heightened the struggle with mental wellbeing. The 'social, cultural, and relational' parameters that determined pandemic loneliness were framed by the hyper-activity of the machine-defined online space, the absence of the physical public space and the magnification of intra-domestic togetherness (Ozawa-de-Silva & Parsons, 2010, 613).

'Our need to connect with others is the very thing that creates the potential for loneliness', and so as I describe in §5.7-§5.8, the concerted effort in the first year of the pandemic to connect online had ramifications later (Ozawa-de-Silva & Parsons, 2010, 614). At the start of my fieldwork the chef-educators, and their guests, had to suddenly increase or adapt their online practices of social connection, portrayed in chapter three *The Internal Human Compass to the Sensory World* (§3.2-§3.3). The interworked ways of making a livelihood and keeping in social touch demanded new skills and an intensity of constant adaptation and re-adaptation to pandemic control measures. By June 2021 my participants, and I in my autoethnographic work, had 'digital fatigue' as expressed by chef-educator Sweetie. The weariness of constant re-invention of their culinary identity in the hyper-busy online marketplace with others doing likewise felt exasperating. We were 'zoomed-out' (figure 36).

Figure 36: '*Zoomed Out'*, Farrell, M. B., 2021

Numerous conversations – particularly with Kalm, Elicit, Sweetie, Charisma, Mims, and Chief – were of their exhaustion, or discontent with the amount of time it was taking to keep a small pool of guests inspired to take their lessons. Their online weariness was a result of the reality that however easy logging-in online was plenty just could not be bothered any more. Chapter six, subtitled From Enhancement to Enchantment (P.204) plays with the idea that the internet was heralded to enhance life, but how during the pandemic it became clear that it held an uneasy compulsion. I describe internetworked transition, from pre-pandemic to the acute point of the pandemic in 2021 when being online moved from alluring to potential addictiveness. There was also a weariness of being on-screen socially, and the roller-coaster years of winter restriction and less restricted summer months clearly revealed disorientating contrasts of coping and casualness.

7.9 Inequities and divisions.

During my fieldwork I unravelled layers of motivations embedded in the architecture of internetworked spaces and their inherent practices. Layers that impact on inequity and

division, and my research presents these as five interconnected frames that co-exist in the online social space. The first layer, overshadowing all conversations of inclusion and exclusion, was the foundational peacetime military funding of academics and businesses to innovate technological defence systems. The innovation focused on the creation of computer mediated mass-communication and efficient machine-led organisation. Warren Chin, an academic on International Politics (i.e., war, strategy, defence economics and military history) describes how military-academic computer design became embedded in societal use:

> *… technology acted as a vital agent of change in the war–state relationship, and eventually the ripples of this change spread throughout society. To illustrate this point, you have only to look at the ubiquitous smartphone and the genesis of technologies produced by defence research that made it possible.*

<div align="right">Chin, W., 2019</div>

Chin's work is interesting to reflect upon when considering the formation of the online space threaded throughout the thesis, as it offers a historical perspective on the underlying tensions between promise and renege of us all being social and online, as discussed in §4.5, *Othering, boundaries and borders.* The algorithmic structure of the online social space – as investigated through commensality in my research – was borne by the wrangling of efficient defence strategy and the concomitant second layer of the '… independence of cyberspace' (Barlow, J. P., 1996).[196]

Today's digital society is a marriage of the twentieth century bid for efficient and institutionalised warfare with a second layer of online counterculture that believed the internet an alternate space of creativity. A '… civilization of the mind' where the imagination of social and collective counterculture offer an alternative of abstracted liberty as championed by John Perry Barlow in his, 'A Declaration for the Independence of Cyberspace' (1996): 'We will create a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace. May it be more humane and fair than the

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[196] https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence

world your governments have made before (Barlow, J. P., 1996).[197] So, from the very start of the internetworked space there were divisions in the motivations and cultures of being online. A vast spectrum of promise from control to liberty.

The third layer of division was the economics surrounding the skills and devices needed to connect online. Affordances that are favoured toward the globally and technically comfortable, unlike the ones that chef-educator Sweetie described with, 'I don't understand … I don't get it, how someone in their 50's has lived this disconnected for 20-years' (December 2020). My research was a study of this 'comfortable' group – which now make up 63% of the global population – as they socialised around learning to cook online. The fieldwork space, its absences, and its practices, were both a consequence of, and framed by, layers of inequity and division.

The fourth layer, one that I was mostly unaware of during fieldwork as I worked in a European country, is that of censorship and surveillance. Easy generation of, and access to data is heeded or not by, 'pervasive to suspect' measures in countries such as China, Syria, Bahrain, Iran, or Vietnam. There are also plenty of reports about the role of disinformation that add to my reflection of the online space as deeply biased. As described by *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF) and a '… two-fold increase in polarisation amplified by information chaos – that is, media polarisation fuelling divisions within countries, as well as polarisation between countries at the international level' (RSF website accessed 2022).[198] As Fischer and Applin corroborate in 'Watching me, Watching you' (2013), online information threatens to be a tool of opaque social control and challenge agency:

> *When agency is diminished, or disrupted via surveillance or the process that requires them to follow a pre-determined script, humans are restricted using their abilities to independently think and problem solve creatively.*

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[197] https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence
[198] https://rsf.org/en/rsfs-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation

My observations saw reaction to inequity and division in numerous discussions that reflected the contrast between the formal and informal online channels.

However, it was clear that even within informal channels there was divisive work at play, and oftentimes the users' online practices revealed complicity with software and platforms designed to efficiently – rather than intuitively – manage social situations. This was most transparent in the ways the software created hierarchies of interaction on video platforms, both between human-human and human-machine. I describe this in chapter four subtitled When *Hospitality becomes Hostile* (§4.7-§4.8) with examples of a range of online gatherings of different size groups and of host's choice of *Zoom* functions (e.g., guests kept on mute or held in the 'waiting room' before entering the *Zoom* 'room').
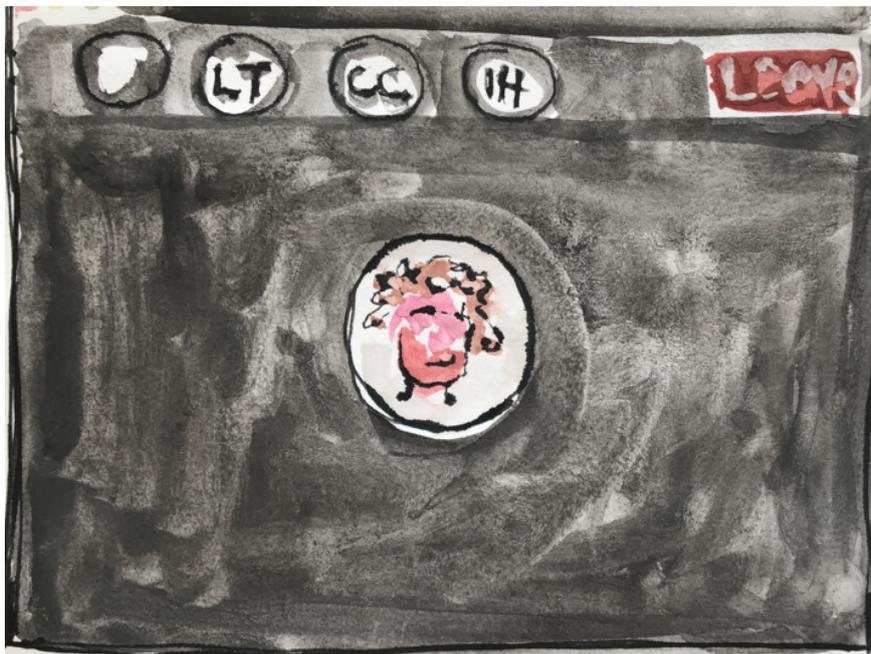
Figure 37, 'Unseen and Mute', Farrell, M., B., September 2021

There were webinar examples (§4.7) when the hosts intentionally kept me, and others, silenced and unseen via the guest mute and camera off (figure 37) selection – particularly and paradoxically noted in a webinar on equity – 'having a voice' – in the hospitality sector. There

were times when my and/or others' presence was fractious or disjointed because inclusion relied on the technicalities of *Zoom* harmonising with spontaneous response – which it frequently did not. For example, the online cooking class when I was left 'alone' to stare at a chaotic kitchen worktop, one abandoned by the host in favour of his adjoining physical dining room (P.158). The ways that algorithms are designed, to filter searches and show preference, means that there is structural bias online – the social architecture of the online space is prejudiced (e.g., P.77; 142). This technological divisiveness in not innocent. If you are not there (online) your voice is absent and your material life is affected by this 'non-existence' in the internetworked metaverse.

7.10 Core arguments

Set within a particular landscape of technological possibilities e.g., *Augmented Reality* or *Virtual Reality*, my research was purely about the video conference platform *Zoom* and its 'happenstance' relationship with *Instagram* photo sharing social media. It was not about simulated reality or avatars, but about the participants' determination to continue food knowledge reproduction – converse about food – in an online context. Here I reflect on how online sensory learning gaps – the 'what was missing' – and their substitutions, became too heavy a burden – emotionally and financially – for nine of my eleven chef-educators to continue after the pandemic lockdowns. The psychosocial factors of enforced dependence on a video platform for food togetherness in a (semi) public place exacerbated feelings of loneliness and disconnection. So, with a sense of relief when pandemic regulations lifted my most participants tentatively moved back into their multi-sensory filled physical food education spaces to reconfigure again how to be commensal. Though for all of them this was not returning to 'where they left off' pre-pandemic as they all had found ways to supplement their food work income (e.g., telephone sales or fruit freight).

My founding research questions structured an exploration of principle themes and responses, with plentiful new questions evolving along the way. It seems logical to present 'answers' (see below), to research questions introduced on page 73-74 and I follow these with the more nuanced responses (which reflect on the research questions' notes), and fresh questions that surfaced, which both respond to the original main questions, more specifically their accompanying detail, and highlight the weightier matters I considered in my fieldwork.

1. What were the contrasts between offline and online commensality's role in food education?

The contrasts were comparatively explored through autoethnographic accounts and interviews with the participants, and through digital ethnography. Within the spectrum of human agency vs machine defined human (bio, bio-digital and digital) contrasting practices revealed the significance of sensory empathy to food education. The online methods to reach offline multi-sensory understanding of food depended on the chef-educators' skills in manipulating technology and using metaphoric storytelling to dis/engaged students.

2. How culinary knowledge dissemination transformed in an acute time of pandemic physical distancing?

The physical distancing restrictions of the pandemic meant that the offline channel was an intensely individual physical experience, whereas online became the social context of an adaptation of learning which relied on visual, auditory and textual co-narration.

3. How trust and commensality was networked, structured, and performed in spaces of 'public intimacy' on the internet?

There was a profound opportunity for online collaboration, it seemed that the process of constantly co-authoring and sharing information formed a bond of reciprocity and networks of affinity (also the possibility of trust). The span of 'public spaces of intimacy', defined by compliance with software function (and adaptation to mis-function), ranged from committed

confident 'actor' to those who felt obliged – to portray their social or professional self as online persona.

4. Did the internet offer or contradict eating together as social bonding around food knowledge?

I felt being online during the pandemic benefited from the functionality of 'togetherness', and so in simplistic terms it neither offered nor contradicted the sociality food and learning brings. Yet it seemed a constrained time, a 'holding place' where most of the chef-educators and their students (and others) felt too beholden and agitated by the limitations and adaptations of online to continue depending on it as the pandemic came to its two-year point.

As mentioned above the notes accompanying the research questions structured a more nuanced interpretation with depictions of how and where my research might find relevant and illuminating 'answers'. Indeed, the search for contrasts discovered how *Instagram* and *Zoom* software shaped how cooking and eating together was a computer-mediated process and outcome. This was through the lens of two foundational signifiers of pandemic isolationist times; the distorted and heightened work of the sensorium (e.g., a virtualising of our mouths P.60; 91;107), and the surge of auto-ethnographic study, which Graf likens to 'participant perception', which felt pertinent to my studies (P.13).

The examples of this 'shaping' (§2.13), were in a variety of forms which included how online metaphorical language commandeered the multi-sensory 'language' of understanding (§3.4); online 'absence presence' or a distortion of presence (P.180) with the option of invisibility (camera off option) and/or being silenced (on mute function); and the relentless adaptation to the limitations of online technical capability or skills when, for example cameras froze (P.118; 214; 230) or the loudest on the 'call' became the unintended focus (e.g., P. 76).

The unexpected dominance of autoethnographic methodology – due to enforced physical distancing rules – was living the pandemic pattern of individualistic physicality in parallel with online 'togetherness' in an oftentimes very uncomfortable state of physically 'watching' myself, 'watching' myself online (e.g., P.30; 245). This was done whilst I also explored how others (§ 3.2-§3.3) were responding to such an intense bio-digital state of being and the discomfort of this increasingly felt problematic, because of the constant opportunity to analyse online 'performance', e.g., chef-educator Sweetie's growing dislike of her screen self (e.g., P. 130), or conversely the propulsion of the 'prosumer' endeavour where the intimate details of everyday were a constructed façade (e.g., Charisma's routine room changes, page P. 255).

7.11 The future of social food knowledge

Throughout my fieldwork the discourse on commensality's vitality in social learning was heightened by the contrast of the pandemic's online representation of food togetherness and magnified further by the absence of extra-domestic commensality. I felt that this disparity fostered dysfunctional yet determined practices that aimed to seamlessly mesh the bio with the digital as if a natural impulse. I became increasingly aware that this bio-digitality could be heightening issues of loneliness and related aspects of mental health. With countless tech-companies and health trusts welcoming the efficient options of online software and apps to tackle loneliness and related mental health issues I argue that commensality's role in relationship literacy – with each other through food – is a longer-term solution. The pandemic months of wholly online commensality – in the form of cooking and eating together – was appropriate within the architectural restraints of *Zoom* for that isolated time only. A time that highlighted the limitations and opportunities of the internetworked space as a place for social learning and food education. Yet a generalised viewpoint has to be considered as extremeness, intensity or 'togetherness' was clearly different during my fieldwork if the pandemic kitchen

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was in say Paris or Porto Rica, regardless of the supposed universality of living equivalent lives enabled by an online perspective.

These research experiences led me to an appreciation of the impact on 'fresh' questions, ones which evolved from what, in hindsight, felt like a human experiment on a global scale of what the absence of physical public facing social interaction – through a perspective of learning and sharing cooking and eating knowledge – could lead to. In chapters five (P.174) and six (P.204) I present the machinations I observed of the impact of a-physicality in food work and commensal extra-domestic eating, which focus on loneliness, and the changed expectations and behaviour in social 'etiquette'. The observations discovered – and theoretically reinforced – were of the importance of touch – which was forbidden to anyone outside your household during pandemic lockdowns – to wellbeing, and that included how the social act of eating contains so many opportunities – thwarted 2020-2022 – of touch, for example sensory empathy of watching another ingest a mouthful, of how it feels inside us when food is touching us inside (e.g., P. 271).

Alongside, and indeed, also relevant, to my research on loneliness were the plentiful instances I saw and discussed with my participants on the change in their students' or guests' behaviour – and their own behaviour too. I mainly describe this in chapters three (P.105) and four (P.136) with a focus on how these small but incremental shifts nod toward Turkle's portrayal of being 'alone together' (introduced P.2 and developed P.27; 49 and throughout thesis), in that being social online is about efficiency rather than sincerity and thus allowed the many online instances I observed of impatience and intolerance; technically induced rushing or waiting; gaining and keeping attention; and the allowance and propensity of multi-tasking (P.206), the normalisation of such online behaviour I argue infiltrates the physical social context.

My 15-month fieldwork was short and intense in an acute and unusual time and because of the rapidity of changes – legal, social, and medical – it felt like a fast-forward glimpse of technically defined humanhood. One anchored by the intimacy of physical commensality, yet also able to co-imagine its identity in bio-digital and online contexts due to food's age-old ability to be visually represented. So, I come to the last words of my research question's sub-themes (P.73-74) of*, who represents culinary culture*, and *how do we share food knowledge?* Each question undoubtedly depends on both the designed architecture of the online context and the part we play in its formation, and how the offline perspective of cooking and eating together is valued and actualised. Will it be a future of human-centric digital collaborative design between anthropologists, software designers, and food educator chefs working to ensure that learning about food in commensal moments nurtures first-hand food knowledge and sensory empathy? I passionately hope it is, and that I might be a part of this in practical and theoretical ways.

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APPENDICES

Appendix i: Template invitation to participate letter

Bernardine Farrell
University of Kent
Giles Lane, Canterbury CT2 7NZ,
United Kingdom

<div align="right">xxxx 2021</div>

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: *The Transformative Impact on Hospitality and Commensality of Covid-19: Exploring the Virtual Lifeworld of Hosts and Guests*

Dear xxx,

I am conducting interviews and questionnaires, as part of a research study, to increase understanding of the Covid-19's impact on cooking and eating together (out of the home) and the activity in internet spaces of hospitality (Zoom classes).

As a professional chef who works in online and onsite spaces (with social media profiles), you are in an ideal position to give valuable first-hand information from your own perspective.

The 10 virtual (telephone or Skype) interviews take around 20 minutes each month and are very informal with semi-structured questions. There will be themes for each interview that I will let you know one week in advance. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives that will contribute to the final thesis.

Your responses to the questions will be kept secure and confidential and adhere to University of Kent Ethics Code of Practice. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings could lead to greater public and academic understanding of the role of chefs in transmission of food skills and the 'new normal' of culinary teaching during Covid-19.

Thank you for your time and consideration of participation in the project,

Bee

Appendix ii: Invitation to participate Instagram version

<div align="center">

TITLE OF RESEARCH:

</div>

THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT ON HOSPITALITY AND COMMENSALITY OF COVID-19: EXPLORING THE VIRTUAL LIFEWORLD OF HOSTS AND GUESTS*

RESEARCHER: BERNARDINE (BEE) FARRELL
DATE 16/07/2020
YOU ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY CONDUCTED BY BERNARDINE (BEE) FARRELL FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT, BRITAIN.

WE ARE INVITING YOU TO TAKE PART ON THIS STUDY THAT AIMS TO:
- CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE INTERNET.
- FUTHER THE INTEGRATION OF ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE INTERNET AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF FOOD.
- EXPLORE THE STORIES OF COOKING AND EATING TOGETHER IN AN ACUTE TIME OF SOCIAL CHANGE DUE TO COVID-19 SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES.
- EXAMINE THE HYBRID PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL (* THE VIRTUAL LIFEWORLD) GATHERING AROUND FOOD AS AN EXPERIENCE OF TOGETHERNESS, OF COMMENSALITY.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY AND WOULD CONSIST OF:
1. SHARING YOUR PERSONAL AND/OR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES AND COMMENTS ON COOKING AND EATING TOGETHER.
2. IDENTIFYING IMPACT, CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING AND COOKING & EATING TOGETHER.

There are no anticipated risks or direct benefits to you for taking part in this study.
Withdrawal of your comments and contributions to thesis data can be made at any time.
I believe in collaborative research methods.
I follow university ethics and permission guidelines.
Your confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured in my finished PhD thesis.
If you would like more information, please contact me at mbf6@kent.ac.uk

Appendix iii: Template of participants' informed consent letter

INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF RESEARCH: The Transformative Impact on Hospitality and Commensality of Covid-19: Exploring the Virtual Lifeworld of Hosts and Guests
YOUR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH:
Your participation is voluntary and over the course of 10 months (November 2020-September 2021) will include monthly interviews and two questionnaires that focus on themes that:
- Think about online and onsite aspects of your culinary work.
- Discuss your culinary knowledge sources and style of cooking, teaching and sharing food knowledge.
- Consider the movements surrounding the visual portrayal of food and cooking (artwork to TV cooking shows to social media)

- Reflect on hospitality sector challenges, adaptations and benefits due to pandemic Covid-19 physical social restrictions.

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH:
- Written accounts of transitions from physical to virtual cooking and eating together experiences.
- Comparative case study information on the practices of acquiring knowledge and learning skills in virtual (online) spaces.
- Accounts produced on the hybridity of virtual and physical experiences.
- To highlight social media prosumer (producer and consumer) aspects of cooking and eating together.
- To highlight the need and the activity that work towards equality on (and off) the internet by providing case studies.
- To help further the integration of two sub-disciplines of anthropology: *Anthropology of the Internet* and the *Anthropology of Food*.
- To contribute to educational observance of the changes inherent in online learning.

PROCEDURES INVOLVED IN RESEARCH:

Over a 10-month period, starting November 2020 there will be monthly interviews and two questionnaires with a consultant group of 10 chefs who teach on and off-line.

The researcher will take regular online lessons, community meals, *cookalongs* and/or cook-ins given by the chefs (and pay for these at the normal price).

Onsite lessons with the chefs tentatively planned from spring 2021, Covid-19 restrictions allowing.

Daily analysis of Instagram food and eating imagery undertaken by the researcher (that will form part of the interactive website).

A project Instagram account that is a landing point and navigational point.

RESEARCHER Vice Chancellor awarded PhD candidate Bernardine (Bee) Farrell mbf6@kent.ac.uk School of Anthropology and Conservation, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, Britain.

DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN: There are no anticipated risks or direct benefits to you for taking part in this project. Withdrawal of your comments and contributions to data can be made at any time. All data will be stored in accordance with the requirements of the University Research Ethics Committees and of the Data Protection Act 2018.

The project adheres to university of Kent Code of Practice in regard to ethics, permission guidelines and your confidentiality rights. The qualitative data will be anonymised and will not be used to share potentially identifying information. More information is available via this link

https://research.kent.ac.uk/researchservices/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2017/04/Research-Integrity-Code-of-Ethical-Practice-in-Research.pdf

1.   I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary. I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview without an explanation.

2.   I understand that my interview will be recorded. The interview will be transcribed to text and will be subject to data analysis. The information I provide may be incorporated into project reports and other publications.

3.   I understand that I can withdraw some, or all, of my statements from the research before the publication of the final report.

4.   I understand that the information that I provide will be anonymised and any quotations used in the final report will not be attributed to me.

5.   I have read and understood the information sheet provided. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

Name: (please print) …………………………………………………………………….

Signature: …………………………………………………………………………………

Date: …………………………

Appendix iv: A sample of my Instagram photos of fieldwork online cookery lessons
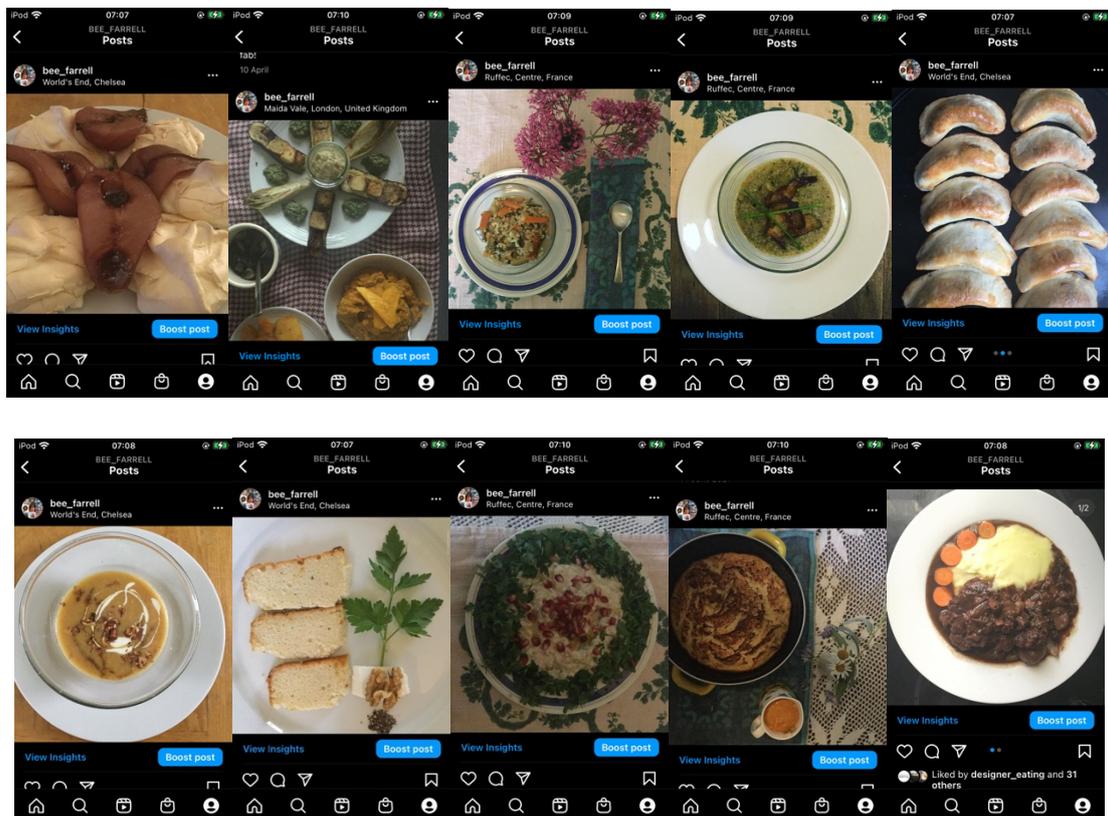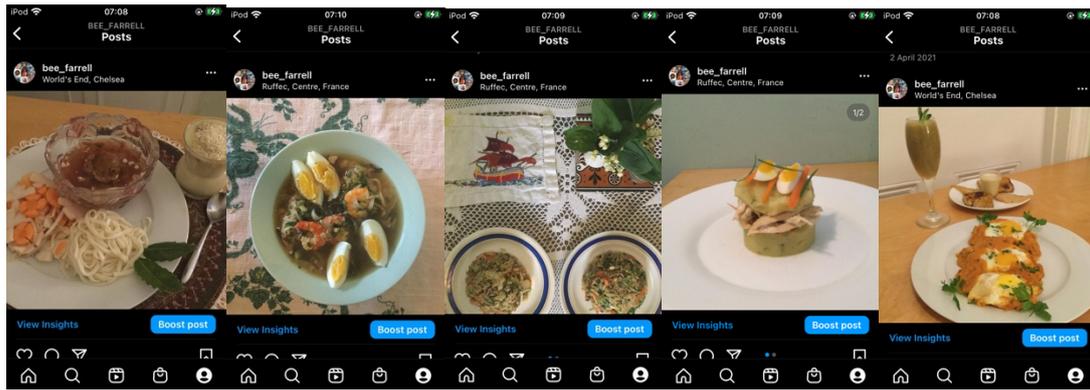
BURGERNESS & POWER HYBRID WORKSHOP PLAN: CREATIVE TASTEBUDS SUMMER 2021

SLIDE 1

The aim of this session is to explore a little of how the **internet plays a pivotal role in food choices as part of our taste apparatus.**

The **smartphone, a hand-held computer**, arrived about **fifteen years ago** to create a **'switched-on universe for which no off-switch exists'** (Crary 2013: 30). Instagram with its 100 million photo- graphs and collective live authorship each day and YouTube with xxx viewers are a key to my VC PhD project that looks at the virtualisation of food and eating.

Today for 56% of the world population with access of the internet and a device eating together can be online now with activity.

SLIDE 2

skeating (skyping and eating together virtually), **Instagram's foodporn** and **gastroporn photos** and **ASMR** (autonomous sensory meridian response), or **brain massage** through viewing **Mukhbang** (YouTube stars overindulging in fast food for an audience) or **hands only** repetitive film clips on IGTV.

We are **prosumers, entranced by 'participatory culture' producing and consuming in co-narrated stories of food togetherness.** Our **brain's mirror neurons activate imitative behaviou**r, the performative interaction with food and each other, determine what is safe, tasty, appropriate and ethical to eat. A permanently under-construction endeavour in part because our tastebuds are renewed every 14 days.

The questions to ask include:

what is the **sensorium doing in the sensory barren place of the 2D screen?**
How does **virtualised co-eating** impact on our **relationship to food**?
and on the **rituals of eating**?
could it be that the **objectification of food is** adding to the **disconnect** between us and food?

Is the **disconnect adding** to issues of **obesity** and **food disorders**?
…and **harming commensality**?
what is the **language of imagery** doing to our bellies?

SLIDE 3

For 15-minutes, we are going to explore, as an individual and as part of a group a **simulation**, an interpretation of eating a beefburger in a bun.

We will think about the **presence, absence** and **collaboration of the senses – touch** (haptic, textural, temperature through thermoreceptors; pressure through mechanoreceptors; pain and nociceptors); **smell** and (sweet, salty, bitter, umami, fatty and metallic) of **taste**-in flavour (retro-nasal olfaction); **sound** and also maybe mouthfeel. Movement external (proprioception) and internal (interoception).

Watch the Mukhbang video clip… (warning if you have **misophonia** the hatred of hearing others eat … or if you easily feel nauseous with excessive eating)
With eyes CLOSED….
Then with eyes OPEN…
Consider how **colour, light, memory and their associations** experienced through vision and hearing can alter, enhance or challenge how we feel about what we eat – whether on or offline. Look at others watching the film, **mirror neurons will be firing**, gauging group responses of what is seen and heard…felt…perhaps indicating the associations being made…
Loss of control, sensuality, visceral, arousal, power, intensity, stimulation, masturbating, overindulgence, release, voyeurism, the visibility of pleasure (and pain) offensive excess, urge to consume, going beyond the biological necessities, (Books on food and sex), hunger, substitution, simulation, fantasy, exposure, consumption, desire, losing self-restraint, no inhibitions, temptation, gratification, stigma, salivation…
NOW MAKE YOUR SIMULATION OF A BURGER IN A BUN … combine your senses and culinary creativity. I will talk as you make and you are welcome to make comments in the chat box, create quietly or respond to each other's making activity or comments.
The paper bag, **feel the weight**, listen to it crunkle and crackle. The introduction to a meal. Does the bag sound like the food to be eaten? Which foods do this before eating? Is it only fast and processed food? A lot of product design has gone into all the packaging of our food, the atmospherics…HEAR THE TASTE… What does it smell of inside the bag? What doesn't it smell of? What is the **temperature** and the **dampness** of the bag feel like?
Squeeze the bread bun with both hands … **the first taste is with the hands**…transferring what we touch/feel to the food – known as **affective ventriloquism**. The crisps…listen to the sounds of opening and cracklings of crisps moving. **Pinch your nostrils closed**, what can you **smell**? Release your nostrils, what are you impacted by? What are the **sounds**? Can you hear the sounds of others eating? Or does your munching drown those sounds out? The crisps have a saltiness, a dryness and scratchiness. The bread bun a softness and dampness. How does the inside of your mouth feel, your throat? Look at your hands, fingers what is on them?

The gherkin, hold it between thumb and index finger, smell it. Let a piece of gherkin sit on your tongue without chewing it. Feel and compare the dryness of the bun and the dampness gherkin. Try a huge bite that goes right back to your molars. Hold the bun poised near your

mouth as if ready for next big bite. Tear into it with your teeth, chew rapidly using all your mouth and then swallow. Put the bun down. Look at your fingers, put your hand to your throat picture the chewed pieces travelling down your oesophagus. Look at the fingers and hands of the others.

Put your hand into the bag rustling the paper as your hand pulls out the crisp lettuce leaf and the sachets of tomato sauce. Feel the difference in weight, in surface texture. Smell the sachet, smell the leaf. Tear the leaf and bite into a strand with your front teeth, nibble and swallow. Pull a mouth-sized piece of the filled bun off with your fingers, pop it into your mouth chew-chew-chew and then swallow. Smell your fingers. Watch the others.
Tear open the sachets, use your teeth … squeeze a little on your index finger and lick it off. Breathe in, what can you smell.
Hold the bun near your mouth and take a big greedy bite, feel the sauce trickle down the sides of your mouth, feel any 'escaping' contents against your face. Chew with all your mouth. Stop midway and feel the damp and warmth of the clump on your tongue. Finish chewing and look at the others – either on screen or on and off screen

Get out paper and pencils and draw:
Eating a burger less bun with others. Photograph and airdrop the images to facilitator (onsite) or via email etc if online. Are there differences between online and offline drawings?

The Impossible Burger: water, protein powders, glues, factory flavourings, flavour enhancers, synthetic vitamins – all signifiers of low-grade, ultra-processed food – and a novel ingredient that has no proven track record of safety.

Blythman, J., 2017

As investigative journalist Blythman describes the urged race to find a substitute meat that bleeds and has the Heme (the naturally occurring iron rich molecule found in protein haemoglobin in an animal's blood or myoglobin in the muscle) taste of meat is producing a highly processed product. In terms of health and culture, would synthetic meat simply maintain concerns of cuisine homogeneity, ensure white wheat bread as a dominant grain and, ultimately not tackle obesity epidemics (Hurt, R.T., et al 2010)?

The hamburger is a symbol, an icon, of the complications of food, something once hailed as a solution to suburban living and then became a symbol of globalisation, of western expansion and, now has its revival as a gourmet food.

Louise. O. Fresco, 2015

BURGERNESS & POWER INNOVATION WORKSHOP
BEE FARRELL: INGREDIENTS & EQUIPMENT NEEDED
(at home and onsite)

All in a burger style/take out paper bag:

5 large marshmallows (cooking on the fire style)
1 small bag of salted crisps
An industrially made soft white bread bun cut in half horizontally
5 sachets of tomato sauce
A gherkin
A very crisp (iceberg) lettuce leaf

Drawing paper and pens/pencils

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