

Chapter 13

Multisensory restaurants, Art and Tourism – Case study on Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet



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Abstract The article aims to study a new generation of restaurants: the multisensory restaurants, currently offered by half a dozen of high-end gastronomic establishments throughout the world. These establishments offer a fixed menu dinner in which the five senses of the guests are stimulated thanks to a complex technical, technological and theatrical layout. The focus will be held on the pioneer restaurant Ultraviolet owned by Chef Paul Pairet, and opened in 2012 in Shanghai, China. This exploratory research work will focus on two areas. First, possible parallels can be drawn between the multisensory restaurants proposals and some current social practices, such as the related tourism activities. Ultraviolet's proposals are offering a sensible way of travel through both Asian and European *terroirs*, thanks to an immersive gastronomic experiment in virtual reality. Then, some of Ultraviolet's proposals can be considered not only as products for consumption, but also as artistic productions. As these immersive proposals favour the interaction and the stimulation of the guests' minds, they are also 'food for thought' that convey an artistic thinking and message. The innovative restaurant in Shanghai appears as a multisensory establishment that offers a new kind of gastronomic, touristic and aesthetic travel experience.

Keywords Multisensory restaurant · High-end cooking · Shanghai · Virtual tourism · Gastrotourism

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13.1 Introduction

Gastronomy has an increasingly significant role in current tourism development strategies. In Asia, Singapore recently started its process of requesting UNESCO World Heritage Status for its traditional “hawker food”. Since 2013, Asia’s 50 Best ranking delivers an annual snapshot of the opinions and experiences from worldwide experts on contemporary Asian high-end cooking. Asia’s 50 Best is thus becoming a key contributor to the tourism branding strategies of Asian countries, regions and cities today. A recent international YouGov survey (www.yougov.co.uk/topics/food/articles-reports/2019/03/12) found that Chinese and Japanese food respectively occupy the second and the third places in the most popular cuisines worldwide. Such examples indicate the growing place of gastronomy in Asia.

This article aims to study a new generation of restaurants – the multisensory restaurants, which currently amount to half a dozen of high-end gastronomic establishments throughout the world – that offer a fixed menu dinner, in which the five senses of the guests are stimulated, thanks to a complex technical, technological and theatrical lay-out. Among the six multisensory restaurants opened today in the world, half of them are located in Asia, specifically in Japan and in China. The study will focus on one of the first establishments of this genre: Ultraviolet, which was opened in 2012 in Shanghai, China by Chef Paul Pairet.

The major innovation proposed by the multisensory restaurants relies on enhancing gastronomic experiences through virtual reality. The virtual immersion – based on the broadcasting of sounds, images and scents that accompany high-end dishes and wines – invites the guests to a sensory journey comparable to the experiments proposed by some virtual tourism products. However, in a multisensory dining experience, the immersive dimensions are balanced out – and often overcome – by the genuine and concrete dimensions of the food and wines that are served. Hence, the experience goes further than a mere virtual, mental and intellectual journey.

As it plunges the guests into an aestheticized trip through several *terroirs* and food cultures across the world, this study will answer the following question: “How is Ultraviolet proposing a kind of aestheticized gastro-tourism experiment in virtual reality?” This paper proposes an exploratory approach on an innovative gastronomic trend, with the following two assumptions: first of all, possible parallels can be drawn between the multisensory restaurant experience and contemporary social experiences such as virtual tourism and luxury gastro-tourism. Then, as the multisensory restaurants are generating an innovative and creative gastronomic language, the dishes may convey a form of aesthetic thinking. We thus shall wonder if some of these restaurants’ proposals could be considered not only as products for consumption, but also as artistic productions.

This article first presents the long-term history of the dinner-and-a-show concepts and attempts to define a multisensory restaurant, by using Paul Pairet’s Ultraviolet as an example. Then, the study determines the gastro-tourism features of Ultraviolet’s proposals, particularly when the experience quotes and recreates Asian or European food heritages, *terroirs* and food habits. Eventually, the paper also

attempts to emphasize the artistic features of such proposals, studying the meaningful resonance between the sounds, images, scents and tastes of some sequences, as they convey a particular way of viewing the world through an unseen expression format.

13.1.1 Defining the Multisensory Restaurant

13.1.1.1 Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Tendencies

Dinner-and-show Formats and Twentieth Century Culinary Revolutions

The multisensory restaurant concept of offering a dinner that stimulates all the senses of the guests, thanks to sophisticated means, is neither a new nor an unseen phenomenon within the history of chefs and cooking. For centuries, some chefs have been attempting to offer more than a classic dinner to their royal, noble or bourgeois guests. As sophistication and fineness of food and service are used as a way of social distinction (Warde and Martens 2000), the quest of the spectacular, with the help of multi-sensoriality, has long ago been one of the main purposes of high-end food practices. Some famous cooks – legendary or historic – have proposed dinner-and-show formats. In Early China, Yiya who was considered a very creative mind was known for offering unseen dishes to the Duke. The legend says Yiya even cooked his own son to impress his audience (Anderson 2014).

In Europe, well-known medieval banquets actually offered a show and a dinner, with musical entertainment, and with visual and highly impressive dishes. (Bouas and Vivas 2008). Later, Antonin Carême, the famous pastry cook of the powerful, conceived desserts so sophisticated that they looked like architectural works. In August of 1671, the famous cook François Vatel worked as Superintendent of the Great Count in the Chantilly castle. He organized an extraordinary banquet to honor King Louis XIV with the alternation of live shows, leisure activities and meals, that lasted for several days (Michel 1999). Furthermore, in relation to the 18th and 19th centuries, the French historian Jean-Paul Aron designated the luxury dinners as “dinner shows”, where everything, from the table’s design to the arrangement of lights and guests and even the composition of menus disclosed a sophisticated dramaturgy (Aron 1988). The multisensory restaurants can find a part of their historical antecedents in these luxury dinner and show examples.

TWENTY-FIRST century developed societies are becoming more and more “experience societies”: the consumers not only have access to useful and functional goods, but also to “experiential products that deliver individualized experiences in unseen environments; therefore, creating long lasting memories in their minds” (Pine and Gilmore 1999 p. 12). “Experiential dining”, which is quite a strong trend within the current gastronomic industry and within contemporary leisure practices, has part of its origins in the ancient banquets, dinner-and-show and other *café-theatre* concepts. These options have in fact evolved – with the help of

contemporary digital technologies – into several types of multisensory food experiences that aim to satisfy as many senses as possible within a unique dinner.

Thematic Dining Establishments and Multisensory Experiments

In spite of this consistent legacy, today's offerings aim at stimulating the entirety of the guests' senses, but this stimulation has to be as simultaneous and immersive as possible, and achieved by a specific technological set up. Offers from multisensory restaurants have been, and are, diverse. Some thematic dining experiences are taking advantage of the "eatertainment" trend – that aims at feeding and entertaining the guests at the same time, with "a mashup of high-quality food, beverage, and entertainment – a one-stop shop where experience-seeking consumers can go for premium meals, fun activities, and the chance to connect socially with friends and family" (Avant 2017 p. 1). Recently, these concepts have been relying more on fun and entertainment than on gastronomy and high-end cooking. For example, some places offer performance dinners – the Supper Clubs, first founded in Amsterdam, where the guests lounge in beds in a clubby, lively eatery, bar and performance space. There is also the interactive work, "Degustación de Titus Andronicus" by the Fura dels Baus theatre group, or the more gastronomic-focused Heart in Ibiza held by the Cirque du Soleil and the two avant-garde cooks, Albert and Ferran Adrià. Other concepts are reproducing a determined cinematographic aesthetics – the Twin peaks Double R Dinner inspired by David Lynch's famous television series. "The Grand Expedition" by Gingerline, an eatertainment concept inspired by the escape game practices, plunges guests into "a 180-min multi-media experience including elaborate set design, dance, story-telling, interactivity and immersive performance (www.thegrandexpedition.co.uk).

Additionally, there are more experimental and research projects focused on multi-sensoriality, such as the multisensory food lab Sony Multiroom Audio System, which consists of the observation and study of the links between sounds, music and food intake thanks to high-tech sound devices. Lastly, the pop-up experiment *El Somni* ("The Dream") imagined by the Roca Brothers and the videartist Fran Aleu in 2013, took the form of "an opera in twelve dishes, a banquet in twelve acts" (El Somni 2014 p. 15).

The Multisensory Restaurants

For such an innovative and little-studied topic, the multisensory restaurants stand out as one peculiar pattern within the contemporary multisensory tendencies. These commercial establishments led by professional cooks – often collaborating with other business partners – propose to contextualize food by organising food intake into different virtual and highly multisensory environments, with the assistance of a combination of techniques and technologies.

These places serve the most advanced multisensory dinners existing in the current food market. Their purpose is to stimulate all the five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch – often simultaneously. These restaurants, located in different cities around the world, are all built upon a stable and recurrent technological and spatial set up. They can only receive a few guests each day – between 8 to 12 seats, during a unique – generally evening – service.

The basic set-up of the dining space is typically the same, with 3 distinct places. First, the “dining room” in itself includes a rectangular white table and chairs installed in the middle of a white room equipped with technological devices. From the control room, one is able to watch the guests and to broadcast the sounds, images and smells. The kitchen may have an easy and quick access to the dining room. The price of these dinners starts from 300 Euros up to 1600 Euros per guest.

Some of the most exemplary models of this type of restaurants are located in China and Japan. In Japan, Moonflower Sagaya Ginza restaurant, associated with Team Lab, serves dishes made with seasonal ingredients, while appreciating an interactive digital art installation, featuring trees and flowers as they change from season to season. In China, the city of Shanghai offers two multisensory restaurants: Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet and the more recently opened (November 2018) Liangshe Night Banquet. In Europe, Ibiza (Spain) is home to the seasonal restaurant Sublimotion by Paco Roncero, while London (England) hosts The Gastrophysics Chef’s Table.

13.1.1.2 Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet

The Initial Idea

The restaurant Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet opened in May 2012 in Shanghai, China, with the support of the VOL group. Ultraviolet is the first multisensory restaurant that has been conceived, developed and opened. Chef Paul Pairet began the development of his idea in 1996¹: a ten-guest single-table multisensory restaurant. Chef Pairet’s idea was born from his desire to “cook at his best”, offering a fixed menu to a *table d’hôte* model, thus controlling and optimizing the quality of cooking “in ways that the majority of traditional restaurants cannot” (Times 2013). This proficiency in cooking and service allows Ultraviolet to play on the atmospheres that offer the guests an unprecedented and multisensory tasting environment for each dish served. Pairet’s project matured over several years, while he was cooking in high-end restaurants all over the world. In 2010, Pairet was invited as a speaker at Omnivore, a French festival of innovative cooking. His presentation of his Ultraviolet’s strawberry/truffle/foie

¹ Born and trained in France, Paul Pairet, travelled the world – Paris, Hong Kong, Sydney, Jakarta, Istanbul before opening in Shanghai Jade 36 of the Shangri-La Hotel. While he was working in Sydney, Paul Pairet had the first idea of a 12-guest single table he would have called ironically “The Last Supper”, as a reference to the famous biblical dinner.

gras/soy sauce *trompe-l'œil* cigarette – accompanied by a small bowl of red cabbage ashes – caught the attention of several food critics and journalists.

Ultraviolet appears to be the Patient Zero: the first in the series of current single-table multisensory commercial restaurants. Multi-awarded by press and professional food critic,² Paul Pairet and his team serve avant-garde dishes dressed-up by lights, sounds, music, and/or scents to provide context for the dish's taste. The changing environments are generated by complex virtual reality lay-outs: a purpose-built room specifically equipped with dry scent projectors, stage and UV lighting, 360 degree wall projections, table projectors, beam speakers and a multichannel speaker system.

“Gastrophysics” and “Psychotaste” as Core Pillars

This kind of gastronomic experience was founded on the “psychotaste” that Pairet defines as “everything about the taste but the taste. It is the expectation and the memory, the before and the after, the mind over the palate. It is all the factors that influence our perception of taste” (Ultraviolet's Brochure 2015). This concept is close to the “gastrophysics” studies (Spence 2017). It is also the object of scientific research.

The “Very sea Sea Scallop” sequence (Fig. 13.1) in Ultraviolet UVC's menu is a good illustration of the “gastrophysics” concept. All the elements of this sequence – the sea urchin and seaweed dish, accompanied by cold meringue, the powerful white wine, the sounds of the waves, the projected images of the ocean, and the marine and iodine smell diffusion – converge to plunge the guests into the ocean. As Pawaskar and Goel (2014) described, humans are a lot more likely to remember an experience by its smell rather than by its sound, sight or touch. This is mostly due to the fact that our nose is the only organ with a direct connection to the brain (Giordimaina 2008). The marine smell diffusion thus does not only make more real the plunge into the seawater, it also intensifies the tasting experience of seafood, that becomes unforgettable.

With the example of the sea urchin sequence, we can assert that this restaurant (whose name will be abbreviated as UV from now on) has become the epitome of what we call the multisensory restaurant, and the study will focus on its offers.

² Ultraviolet has received 3 Michelin Stars from the Michelin Guide Shanghai since 2017. It is on the list of the World's Greatest Places ranking by TIME Magazine 2018. The restaurant has also been on the list of The World's 50 Best Restaurants since 2015, and on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants list since 2013. Paul Pairet was named Restaurateur of the Year, 2018 by Les Grandes Tables du Monde.



Fig. 13.1 “Very Sea Sea Scallop” (UVC). (Photo: Scott Wright of Limelight Studio)

13.1.2 The Multisensory Restaurant, Virtual Reality Tourism and Gastrotourism

13.1.2.1 Dining at Ultraviolet as a Touristic Experience

The Metaphor of the Journey

A journalist from “Le Point”, a French weekly news and political magazine – described the UV experience as a gastronomic trip: “Ultraviolet is much more than a restaurant. It is a gustatory journey magnified by digital technologies” (Danancher 2013 p. 121). The metaphor of the journey, of the travel of the senses, is very frequent in critics’ and guests’ comments about UV (UV Press portfolio 2016).

The “travel” experience consists of entering an unseen world, discovering something unknown and at the same time, being able to make use of criticism and consideration. The multisensory restaurants are not only offering a metaphoric and idealistic gastronomic journey, they also present a new kind of travel, and thus, an innovative tourism experience. Far beyond general common features such as the links which both tourism and multisensory restaurants share with luxury (Barrère et al. 2014), as well as their shared definitional leisure purposes, the study will now focus on the common features of the multisensory restaurants and the tourism activity.

Tourism: A Dynamic Concept

According to some authors’ points of views, we could be currently witnessing a “touristic revolution” in which some major breakthroughs can be observed, such as: “the transition from Western tourism to a truly global period, and the development of more personalized practices breaking with standardized forms, emergence of new actors” (Violier 2016 p. 25). Besides, the digital technologies are the main

technical means used by individuals and societies – the social forces in this renewal of the forms of tourism (Violier 2016).

Tourism is deeply affected by the boom of new digital technologies: virtual reality is transforming not only human experiences, but also the proper definition of the concept of tourism and the tourism practices. Nowadays, the applications of virtual reality to tourism are varied, and are developing quickly; they can affect many aspects of the tourism business (Guttentag 2010). In promoting destinations, for example, virtual reality is heavily used and thus opens new paths for the consumer, who can roam the globe and have access to a recreated past or to very restricted areas.

Is “*phygital* tourism” (Neuburger et al. 2018) – that brings together digital and physical experiences – a possible future for touristic practices? To some journalists, the neural pathways of our minds wandering are the same pathways as when the live experience is in situ. Virtual tourism would propose that “increasingly a mash-up of physical and virtual worlds”, could – clearly be an alternative to “real life tourism” (Schaffer et al. 2018 p. 1).

From “Holidaying at Home” to “Holidaying at the Restaurant”

Virtual tourism is able to offer the tourist an immersive virtual travel – which of course cannot be the equivalent to real concrete travelling. Instead, it is a new kind of “holidaying at home” (Schaffer et al. 2018). The multisensory restaurants propose a form of “holidaying at the restaurant”, or to go with the metaphor, a “*phygital* gastronomy”, with the help of new technologies and psychotaste principles. In UVC’s menu, the guests travel through several natural environments from the first act, “The Sea” to the second act, “The Land”. Throughout these two acts, a huge diversity of natural elements, landscapes and ecosystems are recreated: the green islands of New Zealand and the natives’ campfires – “Abalone Primitive” sequence – the submarine wildlife of the ocean floors – “Very Sea Sea Scallop” –, the coastal wild life – “Carabineros” –, the meadows and their verdant grass – “Pasturage” –, the forests’ undergrowth “Mushrooommssss”. This experiential trend surely responds to the humans’ yearning for mobility and to their strong desire for being able to travel quickly, without constraints from one place to another. The guests of the multisensory restaurants are enjoying a kind of ubiquity and are thus able, for 2–3 h, to transcend the boundaries of human perception and physical capabilities.

One other basic principle of tourism activity is physical movement. How can a restaurant – where the guests usually remain seated most of the time – reproduce or, at least, evoke such a principle? At UV, what is offered is a journey, an itinerary through the city of Shanghai first, and then, through the restaurant’s spaces. Every evening, the guests gather at Mr.&Mrs. Bund’s restaurant located on Shanghai’s Bund, the city’s most touristic and iconic district. Once the first appetizer is eaten, the driver takes all the customers to the dinner place, whose precise location remains confidential. After what could be considered a small city tour, the guests enter quite a dark place, closed by a heavy dark door. They are then plunged into the elevator simulation that makes them lose their bearings. The movement is also planned

Fig. 13.2 “Black Pepper Beef – Hawker stall – Singapore” (UVC). (Photo: Scott Wright of Limelight Studio)



within the very progress of the menu. The intermission is in the “Garden” – where the guests are invited into a small room, in which a very old dead tree is lying. In the “Black Pepper Beef” sequence (Fig. 13.2), all the guests stand up to go and pick up a plastic tray at a funny stall just installed behind a partition wall of the restaurant’s room. Even the furniture is not as motionless as it seems: the guests are in fact seated on rotating armchairs and the whole restaurant is made of movable doors and walls. At UV, the apparently closed space reveals itself as complex; the table is far from being the only space unit of the evening.

13.1.2.2 Gastrotourism at Ultraviolet

Contemporary Forms of Gastrotourism

As the “holidaying at the restaurant” experience is not only a virtual trip, it is also a gastronomic dinner – multisensory restaurants’ menus are generally composed of 15 to more than 22 dishes. Such experiences have common features with the gastro-tourism activities. From various authors’ points of view, tourism and gastronomy are strongly linked as tourism “built up himself on the progressive implementation

of new gustative and culinary discoveries” (Csergo 2008 p. 11). However, the appearance of what the specialists call “gastrotourism” has its origins in the eighteenth-twentieth centuries, when “the food component of the journey is gaining autonomy regarding the other activities” (Csergo 2008 p. 12).

Gastrotourism has become nowadays a strong industry linked to the logic of desire, the importance of heritage and the experiential and memory dimensions (Barrère et al. 2014). In addition to today’s multiple forms of gastrotourism – from the consumption of highly typical products during the journey, to the visits of farms, of agro-food factories, or the attendance of gastronomic routes – a new relationship has been established lately between tourism and gastronomy, through the offer of the Grand Restaurants. This demand for luxury, increasing since the 1990s, is becoming an international phenomenon (Barrère et al. 2014). In this “new era of gastrotourism” (Csergo 2008 p. 15), the chefs and their creative cooking reputations give new resources that are built up and valued as touristic attractions.

The multisensory restaurants’ offers could be considered as a part of this new type of luxury gastrotourism. UV restaurant, is first and foremost a gastronomic restaurant. The virtual and spectacular features are dominated by food and cooking, as genuine epicentres of the experience. The broadcast images, sounds and flavors are willingly made to be peripheral: what the guests see, hear and smell can be compared to landscapes or backdrops, conceived to accompany and magnify the gastronomic and tasting experience. The strength, texture, presence in the palate of the dishes have always been conceived as fundamental elements in each sequence. The multi-sensoriality is finally always serving food and taste. “Let’s make it clear (...) Ultraviolet is a restaurant, definitely not Moulin Rouge nor Fantasia. (...) The food always leads” (UV brochure “More”). UV is definitely more gastronomic than spectacular.

Recreating Food Cultures and Heritages

The gastro-tourist experience is defined as a “vector of discovery of oneself, of the place, of the other” (Bessière et al. 2016 p. 12). Through the meaningful act of incorporating food (Rozin 1997), as “To incorporate food is, in both real and imaginary terms, to incorporate all or some of its properties: we become what we eat” (Fischler 1988), the guests go through moments of emotion and pleasure which lead them to question their inner selves and their relationship to food. Going to UV is also a physical challenge that modifies the guests who incorporate, in approximately 3 h, quite a big quantity of high food 20 dishes and between 700–820 grams of food per guest, and great beverages - cider, champagne, red and white wines, as well as Chinese tea, rhum and saké.

Ultraviolet rotates currently with three menus: “UVA”, “UVB” and “UVC” and 3 upgraded variants of these menus “UVA+”, “UVB+” and “UVC+”. Each offer proposes the discovery of several food cultures and places in only one single dinner. “Tourism and gastronomy are both funded on the consumption of heritage” (Barrère

et al. 2014 p.13). UV's menus are built on the idea of sensorial journeys with products, dishes, table manners borrowed from multiple food heritages. The offer oscillates between Asian, French and world fusion cuisine always proposed in an avant-garde way. The menus evoke the vast and diverse Asian food heritage. The already quoted "Black pepper beef sequence" in UVC evokes the strong Asian food habit of "eating out" street food. The "Cucumber Lollipop" is the chef's interpretation of the *Gado Gado*, a traditional Indonesian salad, used as a refresher and a cleanser. The "Thai fruit yoghurt" refers to the Thai style of combining sweet and sour flavors.

Then, some menus include typically Chinese products or cooking techniques, coming from one of the 8 most famous regional Chinese methods of cooking, that define the authenticity of Chinese food (Théry 2015). "No shark fin soup" in UVA evokes a precious luxury product: the shark fin. In UVC, the "Beijing cola duck" refers to a heritage dish and a complex cooking technique. The "Candle in the wind" dish is a strong reference to Chinese flavors: sesame, ginger and spinach.

The names of some dishes for example the "Sashimi steak frites" or the "Royco Deluxe", actually a re-mastered coco noodle soup, clearly refers to fusion cuisine and thus to a dynamic and syncretic understanding of Asian heritage. The Asian dishes proposed by Paul Pairet are avant-garde dishes that, most of the time, marry three culinary heritages and cultures: French cooking, the chef's signature and Asian food habits and cooking. As a social construct, food heritage and –food tradition are no longer fixed and stable: "Heritage is constructed, constantly reconfigured. It is a social concept that evolves, and changes with time" (Bessièrè 2013 p. 7).

UV is materializing with its cooking the dynamic and multicultural heritage of today's Shanghai city.

Between Globalized Food and Genuine Asian or European *Terroirs*

One of the major features of the gastrotourism activities is their strong link with a determined origin, an identified *terroir*. In gastrotourism, the naturalness of the products acquires a major role, as it responds to the consumer's needs for identification, emphasized by many authors of the socio-anthropology of food: the food must be identified before being incorporated (Poulain 2002), and then "... through incorporation, the eater brings into himself not only the characteristics associated with the physical territory but also with its symbolic dimensions. In the imaginary, this incorporation integrates the 'tourist-eater' to the local society" (Bessièrè et al. 2016 p. 34).

UV is a kind of de-"territorialized restaurant" built on a variety of food cultures and heritages. The restaurant proposals could thus be a reflection of Shanghai: attractive, dynamic, urban, sophisticated, open to the world and also definitely Chinese. In such a complex environment, UV is falling back on a sort of a "globalized *terroir*", halfway between Europe and Asia, traditions and modernity.

Otherwise, the complexity and sophistication of some dishes and preparations always alternate with the simplicity of products served in an almost raw and natural



Fig. 13.3 “Mushroooooomsss” (UVC). (Photo: Scott Wright of Limelight Studio)

state, thus directly evoking determined *terroirs* and landscapes and often cooked with prosaic instruments in front of the guests. The “Abalone primitive” dish is a rare seafood cooked very simply by the fire, as if the guests were in New Zealand’s meadows; the “Mushrrroooooomsss” sequence consists of serving raw fresh mushrooms, still on their piece of tree wood, quickly roasted in front of the guests with a blowtorch, and finally cut and served with olive oil and lemon drops. This sequence, as it plunges the guests into an old forest with images, sounds and fragrances, could also be interpreted as a gastro-tourist journey (Fig. 13.3).

13.1.3 *The Artistic Features of the Multisensory Restaurant*

13.1.3.1 **Twentieth Century’s Practices: Between art and Arts and Craft**

When trying to analyze the multisensory restaurants offer, one of the main questions is determining if these proposals are merely serial arts and craft products for consumption, or genuine artistic productions with a message to deliver in their own aesthetic language. In other words, are these creations and gastronomic universes profitable products for consumption, or artistic products? To consider the relationship between the immersive restaurants and the concept of art, the polemic existing for centuries regarding the artistic or non-artistic nature of high-end cooking cannot be avoided. The same goes to the evolution of the artistic practices and discourses that began in the twentieth century. Indeed, as it is rooted on a human basic need for survival, the activity of the cook, which generates ephemeral productions partly oriented to satisfy “low appetites”, has frequently been under classified, if not totally rejected by the ancient and modern – and in some aspects, also contemporary (Csergo and Desbuissons 2018) – thinking. If compared to Kant’s traditional eighteenth century’s categories, the more creative multisensory restaurant productions could only be classified into the “agreeable arts”, distinct from the highest “fine art and beautiful” category (Clintberg 2013 p. 27). But since the early twentieth century, various phenomena contributed to changes of the image and discourse regarding the cook’s activities and productions, such as the success of the *nouvelle cuisine*,

that permitted some cooks to reach the status of recognized authors, and even, of artists. The twentieth century's *avant-gardes* questioned the official artistic processes of institutionalization and broadened the classical definition of the art. At last, the chefs and critics discourse since the 1990's showed more than ever in the culinary art's history, the porosity of the limits between art and cooking (Champion 2010). The Catalan chef, F. Adrià the first cook invited as an artist to an international art exhibition, Kassel, 2007 – who held the famous establishment ElBulli - is now recognized worldwide as a “commercial restaurant and artist's restaurant” (Clintberg 2013 p. 203). It now seems possible to be both commercial and artistic at the same time.

Even if classical “official arts” – painting, sculpture, dance – are not massively involved in UV's productions, numerous sequences of UV's menus deliver a strong message in an innovative and creative language. As Pairet asserted in an interview in Shanghai in December 2018, UV serves “simple, figurative and investigative *avant-garde* cooking”. Paul Pairet vindicates the simplicity of almost all the dishes he creates, that are always the result of one idea, as well as the flavors and products he uses, generally quite popular and well known. However, UV's culinary signature is, in some of the aspects, quite close to the gastronomic current of “techno-emotional cuisine” which “pays attention to the 5 senses and not just to the taste and smell”, and aim to “creating emotion in the diner with the use of new concepts, techniques and technologies” (Arenos 2011 p. 11).

13.1.3.2 Virtual Reality and Aesthetic Thinking in UV

The Virtual Reality Experience: Immersion and Interaction

At last, due to the use of digital technologies and the peculiar virtual reality plunge UV proposes, the whole menus seem to be built upon alternating moments of diving into contexts, while other moments are a more distanced reflexion proposed to the guests, particularly while letting the audience interfere or intervene in the menu itself. According to Pimentel and Texeira, virtual reality is precisely built on such an alternating between immersion and interaction of the user: “In general, the term virtual reality refers to an immersive, interactive experience ” (Pimentel and Texeira 1993 p. 43).

On the one hand, there is at UV a strong will to plunge the guests into immersive experiences, that is to say, into parallel worlds. As soon as they go through the restaurant's heavy entrance door, the guests are guided into a dark cubical room that suddenly seems to be moving due to loud and swinging music as well as images projected on the four walls all around. This first virtual device plunges the guests in a quite old-fashioned service lift, going down, again and again. Quite an unexpected way of entering a high-end restaurant's dining room. Of course, all along the dinner, the complement of scents, sounds and images aim at sustaining this multisensory

immersion with the purpose of serving the dish within the most relevant context and ambience. UV's technological layout is made of a semi-immersive device (Ryan 1991): large and flat 360-degree projections on screens and tables.

On the other hand, Pairet aims not only to immerse the guests into a virtual world, but also to submerge them in external stimuli. Despite an apparent lack of freedom for the guests, due to the apparent “ultra control” by the restaurant's team fixed menu, fixed times, fixed pauses – the immersion cannot be realized without a constant stimulation of the guests' minds and senses, to allow a critical overview to emerge, to allow the guests to take a step back and think about what they are experiencing.

Indeed, as Ryan writes, “while immersion looks through the signs toward the reference world, interactivity exploits the materiality of the medium... you cannot see the worlds and the signs at the same time” (Ryan 1991). UV evidences this awareness that the objects perceived during the immersion sequences are only objects of perception. The signs and their meanings thus disappear for a while during the immersive moments; then, the critical consciousness – can disappear too. The dining experience is thus built on a transversal game of in and out, an alternating of immersion and interaction, of virtual and real experience.

Sixth Sense and Aesthetic Thinking

Some sequences are planned to be moments of reflection. For example, the dish “Think” of the menu UVC is a small tea cup, accompanied by a small teapot. It is subtitled: “A Real Cup of Tea”. When the guests hold the teapot to pour some tea into the cup, they realize that only some powder (made of orange and lapsang-souchong tea) comes out. The guests hold the cup and feel it is frozen, and then realize they need to eat it before it is totally melted in their hands. The dish, entitled “Think fast this is not a pipe” is a clear reference to Magritte's 1929 painting “The treachery of images”, representing a very realistic pipe and the baffling title *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (“This is not a pipe”). This occidental and masculine practice of smoking the pipe is here transposed into an Asian practice: tea consumption is part of Chinese gastronomic heritage, strongly linked both to the daily popular individual practices and to more social and even spiritual rituals. This dish could be interpreted as an edible *vanitas*, reminding the deceiving dimension of the signs, the ephemeral character of food, and maybe the vanity of luxury.

UV seems to worship signs, significance and thought. On this aspect, P. Pairet's productions are close to one of the “techno-emotional” cooking principles: the food experiences would not only stimulate the five senses, they would also aim at stimulating another necessary “sense”, the sixth sense according to F. Adrià: the thoughts of the guests (Weber-Lambedière 2010). The experience eventually generates substance, conveying a form of aesthetic thinking (Fig. 13.4).

Fig. 13.4 “Think – Lapsang Souchong – A Real Cup of Tea” (UVC). (Photo: Scott Wright of Limelight Studio)



13.2 Conclusion

The article aims to give a stable definition of the multisensory restaurant concept and to determine the touristic and artistic features of their productions. Among the seven multisensory restaurants currently opened around the world, three of them are located in Asia. In Shanghai, Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet has since 2012 been part of the megalopolis’ vibrant touristic and gastronomic portfolio and this peculiar restaurant appears as the Patient Zero of the multisensory establishment pattern. Ultraviolet offers 10–12 guests, seated around a single table, a fixed high-end cooking menu. The whole experience is conceived not only to stimulate the five senses of the guests, but also addresses their minds and emotional intelligence, thanks to a complex technical, technological and theatrical lay-out.

In such a context, the present study raised two questions. The first one was about the possible parallel that could be drawn between the experience of dining at a multisensory restaurant and the current gastrotourism or virtual reality tourism experiences. It appeared that Ultraviolet offers a new kind of gastronomic and touristic journey, thanks to a thoroughly built concatenation of high-end cooking dishes and immersive sequences that plunge the guests into various landscapes and genuine *terroirs*. A particular in-and-out game between virtual immersion, tasting and socialization, enables the guests to live a virtual experience, plunging them into

changing contexts and environments. Neither the social and physical dimensions of food - 22 gastronomic dishes and a large palette of products, flavors, aromas, textures, forms and colors - nor the signification of cooking – through the reflexive approach of the chef and his team - are disappearing. Such gastronomic experiences could be announcing the future of a high-end cooking, looking for answers to an increasing demand for more experiential, immersive and digitalized offerings by increasingly wealthy gastro-tourists searching for new and unusual, yet still authentic experiences.

The second question tackled the artistic dimensions of the multisensory restaurant's proposals. Ultraviolet is not only serving food for leisure and pleasure, it is also proposing an artistic gesture and aesthetic productions. The first multisensory restaurant's techniques and technologies aim to serve food for thought, questioning thanks to an unseen language, the act of feeding oneself, and the plastic nature of food. In this sense, UV proposals could be considered as products for consumption, as well as artistic productions. Thereby, such a restaurant could be paving the way to a new culinary aesthetics and genre.

The multisensory establishments make use of the richness of the *terroirs*, the potentialities of virtual reality and digital technologies, the peculiar forms of contemporary aesthetics and the globalization processes. In that sense, the multisensory restaurants are not only a valuable part of a wider gastro-tourist offer, but are also undoubtedly a representation of one of the contemporary Asian directions in terms of innovative cooking.

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