RSVP
RSVP is a series of meals taking place across the city, borrowing the format of the dinner party as a model for unscripted yet conscious social performance. At these dinner parties, nominally hosted by local figures accomplished in performance-based disciplines, audience and actors are one and the same, emphasizing the performative nature of not only social gatherings, but also other social practices such as negotiation, friendship, service, networking, competition, and civil affairs.

HOT SPEAKING
Germaine Koh is curator of Sophie’s Cosmic Cafe and a community leader. She and the restaurant have been well-known informal institutions since the 1980s, providing an anchor of authenticity as the neighbourhood has changed around them.

Mary Hackett is a social and MC promoter and co-founder of the Dukes. She is an award-winning drag queen and singer. As a Dukes founder, she is one of the original “Duchess” of the Dukes. Alongside the Dukes, she runs and continues to be resident DJ for the Historical Society Tuesdays at Cinnamon. As an academic, she has published journal articles and the book Lady J’s Bar: Comforting Lynda’s Lunch.

Jolene Robinson is Research Assistant in the Masters of Digital Media Program at Great Northern Way Campus and an M.A. candidate in Popular Culture at Brock University. Her research explores issues of gender representation, performance, identity, and implications for everyday life in online game and social communities. She has spoken at key conferences about her research and about her experience using virtual environments to augment and enhance teaching experiences.

Tamoh Pienkowsi is an actor and indie-blogging enthusiast. He plays Liz Hall ‘Scooby’ Agathon on the television series Bitten: Selwyn and has appeared in Cost Squid (Shelbourne) and The c. Wolf.

Tony Pienkowsi is a media and digital strategist, former sales/marketing officer, former leader of the Fusion Government, teacher and author. He has written the books: Reclamation: First Nations News Making at British Columbia and drawing Silent the Cini: The Mix Tape and La Perouse Parks and the play Separation Coming to Squashies Radio City. He and Liz are teachers in the department of Public Policy at Simon Fraser University.

Dr. Cynthia Verchere is a plastic surgeon, administrator, researcher, teacher, mother, and all-woman. She is Head of the Division of Plastic Surgery at Children’s Hospital and former Director of Undergraduate Teaching in the Division of Plastic Surgery at University of British Columbia.

Ian Verchere is a video game designer and developer, former pro gamer, writer, visual artist and puzzle-angler. He is Faculty of the USC/GGU/ILT/FFI Masters of Digital Media program. His books: WRAY: General Delux, Whistle, and Art of Guided to World’s Creation-Myths, and His screenplay Atom’s Cousins (cowritten with Douglas Coupland) was bought by Disney. His games include the best-sellers by SGI Tricky and notstreet Street 12 by Electronic Arts and Beaks and Bug-Watcher W2.

PROGRAM
DOWNTOWN LOFT DINNER
Home-cooked by your hosts, featuring local ingredients
Date: Friday 19 October, 7 pm
Location: Downtown loft
Hosts: Tony Pienkowsi and Tamoh Pienkowsi
Cost: $40 contribution to costs

CAMPUS AND SECOND LIFE BAG LUNCH
Bag lunch at the Masters of Digital Media program campus and in Second Life. Bring your own laptop to participate in Second Life
Date: Monday 22 October, noon
Location: Centre for Digital Media in Vancouver and Second Life
Hosts: Masters of Digital Media Program, Joanne Robinson and Ian Verchere. Second Life: Joanna Tsai Blazer and Georges Joubert
Cost: Bring your own or reserve $15 lunch from Meinhardt’s

DINNER DINNER
Comfort food at a local dining institution
Date: Wednesday 24 October, 7 pm
Location: Sophie’s Cosmic Cafe
Hosts: Mason Hancock and Sophie Dikeakos
Cost: Dutch treat

NORTHWEST COAST RESTAURANT DINNER
Fine regional cuisine at a celebrated new restaurant
Date: Sunday 28 October, 7 pm
Location: Gastopod
Hosts: Ian Verchere and Dr. Cynthia Verchere
Cost: Dutch treat

TO RESERVE YOUR SEAT ON TABLE, CALL 604-GRT 2700

RSVP GUEST-CURATED BY GERMAINE KOH
PRESENTED BY CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY
FOR 2007 LIVE PERFORMANCE BIENNALE
OCTOBER 19–29, 2007
Perhaps the resurgence of salon-like activities within cultural discourse and the opening of hierarchies to participation both arise from a perceived need to pay attention to the current state of social conventions at a time in which their rules are changing quickly. It seems relevant to look at such forms as the participant-led discussion or the dinner party as types of unscripted performance because they seem especially representative of the changeable character of current society. Today, formerly-certain rules of social etiquette are being ignored or substantially modified, reminding us that in fact social customs are not legislated but rather the result of cumulative collective habit. Furthermore, the evolution of social practices is continually accelerating, so that each time we participate in certain social phenomena, we are contributing to their varying (re)definition.

There is a growing awareness that, in our electronic-media society, our lives are open to each other in an unprecedented way – and that the rules of etiquette are shifting accordingly. Today, with masses abiding Technology’s call to “Broadcast Yourself!” an awareness of performing one’s life in the public eye has been extended from public figures to the average person. The notion of our being ensnared in a “Society of the Spectacle” might not seem as radical today as when Guy Debord pointed out the alienating effects of spectacle and consumption in 1967.

Indeed, the thought seems hardly worthwhile to many now – which perhaps illustrates the seductions of self-entertainment. Although many of us still cling to the belief that we are in control of our own destinies, in which we participate. One can think of the crafting of a lifestyle as an extended public play – or play – in which the markers of identity we choose (and how we deal with markers out of our control) are means of broadcasting the social roles we have selected for ourselves. In this view, social interactions are moved in a stratagic game of self-elaboration and, in order to understand them as such, one could consider the structure of social networks. Social networks operate at many levels, from the intimacy of a family to the impersonal scale of a nation (and even relate to phenomena that might seem categorically different, such as synaptic networks, epidemics, and market dynamics). Network analyses map out ties between people or nodes, allowing individual actors “social capital” to be described or quantified. In non-hierarchical, rhizomnic networks, the value of particular nodes derives from peer-to-peer connections rather than top-down organization. This fact – of individual value accruing through connections – is key to understanding that it is strategically advantageous to participate in situations of social exchange.

It is also worth considering the motivations for participating in and building networks, communities and other group works. Self-organizing social networks and collective projects such as open-source code development are some forms in which individual contributions might seem likely to be lost within the larger work, so that one might expect that selflessness or compulsive initiative would condition us to "suck" in the background rather than extend ourselves publicly with no apparent promise of personal gain – yet vast numbers do it. It is arguable, though, that this participation is motivated not by altruism but self-interest. One analysis of contributions to online communities has identified some of these motivations as: an anticipation of recipocity from one’s peers, increased public recognition, and an understanding that one is personally capable of effecting progress.

Within these motivations, the expectation of reciprocity would seem to apply to other sorts of social acts that, on the face of it, are enacted freely but which may entail an expectation of return, and to situations of social obligation, in which the “return” may be quite diffuse. On the other hand, the sense of efficacy – effecting results through one’s actions – must be a factor in activities such as civic action, public demonstrations, and rioting. Phenomena such as runaway fads, protests and flash mobs that are generated by urban legend and word-of-mouth, are forms of public public performance that stimulate public imagination about a connected individual’s ability to affect a crowd, and also reveal the desire of masses of individuals to be a part of an efficacious body. With evidence now of the ability of large, all-but-leaderless groups to assemble and self-organize, there seems to be a pervasive sense of the theatrical possibilities of being in society.

Still, one should not forget the less spectacular performances of everyday life. Certainly, some daily performances – competition, professional practice, etc. – have public, even legal, consequences: other actions depend upon or are triggered by them. Yet even without public liability, tasks are performed every day for audiences of employers, peers, families, and clients. Other actions are even more incremental, slower or lower: processes such as developing friendships and trust or gaining reputation, or modest individual acts that advance a drama (gossiping, meeting). There is also a gamut of social roles – moderators, servers, negotiators – whose players are traditionally expected to recode into the background in favour of a seamless show. Of course, these roles are less performative for being publicly self-negating.

With regard to public service, it might be worth adapting terminology as runaway fads, protests and flash mobs.