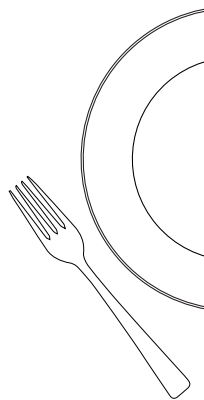
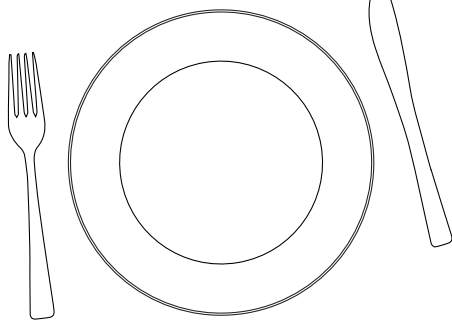
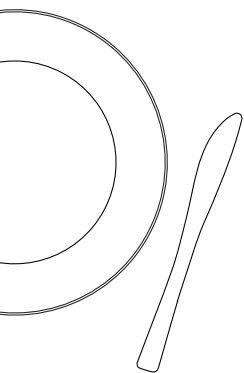


**You  
are  
invited**



# You are invited

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Adrien Fuchs

Research work in design,  
Under the supervision of Élisabeth Charvet,  
Laurence Pache and Catherine Pradeau  
for the English abstract.

Master 1 type state diploma  
in graphic design specializing  
in Eco-design and Sustainable development  
Cité Scolaire Raymond Loewy, april 2016.

# Preface

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*“So? Are you still in the kitchen cooking the same meal after 2 hours? Please take a look at how I prepare mine. I only need 5 minutes. I take a pita bread, fill it with some peanut butter and I put it in the oven. I then wait for 4 minutes, take it out of the oven and eat it!”*

Recipe for a pita with peanut butter by John Human, May 2013.

I may have had certain interest for table-companionship, since I lived 3 months with John Human, my American roommate. John would eat anytime of the day in his bed

**AT THE RIGHT**  
Fresh seasonal products of the market on Jerusalem.



© Adrien Fuchs, 2013

and on our couch: pizzas, pitas with peanut butter and corn flakes. As for me, I was in the kitchen and living room following a schedule, I cooked different meals with seasonal food, bought on the local souk

of Jerusalem. I organised my meal like a ritual ceremony, as if I wished to revive the flavour of the numerous family meals of my childhood. Thus I stood my ground against the American food culture of my roommate. Both of us were incapable of standing out of our cultural identities in a foreign country. As I could not really share and use my mealtime to get to know my roommates better, I felt little frustrated. That's why I desired to improve my knowledge on the social dimension of eating habits when I came back to France. I had the will to create tools of design which could initiate times of table-companionship.

© Adrien Fuchs, 2013



**ABOVE**

A table companion-ship with my roommate John Human, discovering the concept of a long “*apéritif*”: a sort of welcome drink with a variety of salty food.

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# Introduction

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“What the individual eats no one else can eat under any circumstances [...] eating together is a profound intersection between the social and the individual. [...] We might sit down together at a meal, but we must understand what we share.”

Goerg Simmel, 1910, *Soziologie der Mahlzeit*<sup>1</sup>

Are we still asking ourself this question: *what do we share during a meal*, at a time when an urban middle-class American has 20 food contacts a day?<sup>2</sup> If French people don't have the same habits and associate more easily the act of eating with the word conviviality,

## AT THE RIGHT

The artwork *Soup no Soup* by Rikrit Tiravanija presented for the first time in New York City in 2011.



© Rikrit Tiravanija, *soup no soup*, New York, 2011

<sup>1</sup> Simmel, G. 1910. *Sociology of meal*, Der Zeitgeist, Supplement to the Berliner Tageblatt

<sup>2</sup> Griffith, S, Leader, S and Dickinson R. 1998. *Consuming Passions: Food in the Age of Anxiety*, Manchester University Press, p.124 “The French sociologist Claude Fischler, weighing the evidence from a marketing survey of American eating habits, announced the decline of the organised, ritualised meal in Western societies. The finding that American urban middle-class families could have as many as twenty ‘food contacts’ a day.”

it seems difficult to find *the intersection between social and individual* wills in the act of eating. As designers, we must realize that the amount of individual packagings has increased, and ask this question: does table-companionship still have its place in our society? By questioning mealtime we will talk about a topic which cover several areas. As Mary Douglas<sup>3</sup> said “*the meal is particulary interesting because it is both physical and social, both a metaphor for communication and a physical event*”<sup>4</sup>. Consequently if we eat together less and less, don't we gradually damage sociality among us? We can go some way toward answering this question by looking briefly at the conceptual art work of Rikrit Tiravanija entitled *soup no soup*. In this project the artist invited people to share a meal in New York in 2011. With a kitchen crew, he distributed a Tom Ka soup (from Thaï cuisine) in a space in which kitchen, serving and eating areas were joined. By this action of making a community around mealtime, the participants constructed the art work. If experiencing table-companionship could be interpreted as an artwork it may be because we are losing the sense of eating together and are living in a crisis caused by extreme individualism. I think that, as a designer, I could respond to this crisis and rethink mealtime in order to redefine the concept of eating together, which is currently based on individuals users. So my purpose is to find a way to eat in a sustainable manner based on table-companionship and to create different tools of design to engage it.

<sup>3</sup> *Consuming Passions: Food in the Age of Anxiety*, p.124 (*ibid*)

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, M. 1972. *Myth Symbol and Culture*, chapter 4 *Deciphering a Meal*, Dædalus, journal of the american academy of arts and sciences

# **1. From the table of designers**

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# Table-companionship and its applications in design

## 1 Table-companionship and social links

The first communities of men were ate together for millions of years. This scientific fact is explained by Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin two archeologists, in their book the *Origins Reconsidered*<sup>1</sup>. They found they was been eating together for millions years and began to stop eating this way quite recently with the emerging of agriculture and sedentary life. So instinctively we are searching sociability by eating together, but it is our culture supported by Modern philosophy which encourages individualistic behaviours. Thus by designing a table-companionship, we try in fact to learn again how to be together and how to live in community. Yet, before that, we have to consider the current place of the designer on this topic.

### AT THE RIGHT

The credits of the serie *Downton Abbey* which show us tableware and illustrate the concept of *micro-private-territories*.



© Downton Abbey , 2010

1 Leakey, R et Lewin, R. 1993. *Origins Reconsidered: In Search of What Makes Us Human*, Anchor

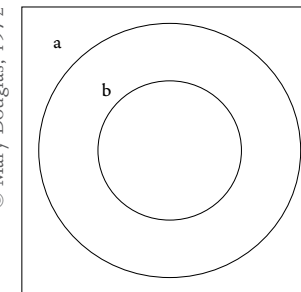
## 2 A bridge between design and food ritual evolutions

Craftsmen have designed plates, knives and forks. Through these creations they have opened the doors to individual and autonomous eaters. Within those objects they create “*micro-private-territories*» for eaters, as the French sociologist François Asher defines it<sup>2</sup>. Hence, we can say that designers are linked to the evolution of our food rituals. Therefore they have to take their responsibilities on this topic.

## 3 Graphic design and food topic

A table is a space which is formed by several items. It is easy to relate it to interior design and product design. Instead of that it can be difficult to find a link with graphic design. However we may find an answer to this issue with Mary Douglas who analyses food as a code. In 1972 in *Deciphering a Meal* (op. cit.) she tells us that: “*a code affords a general set of possibilities for sending particular messages. If food is treated as a code the message it encodes will be found in the pattern*”

© Mary Douglas, 1972



### AT THE LEFT

This symbolic figure designed by Mary Douglas expressed the different degrees of intimacy granted to our guest according to the kind of food we offer them.

Figure 1 Social universe  
(a) *share-drinks, share-meals too* (b)

2 Asher, F. 2005. *Le mangeur hyper-moderne, une figure de l'individu éclectique: l'individualisation du mangeur, du plat collectif à la portion personnalisée*, Odile Jacob

of social relations being expressed.“ Mary Douglas sketches this expressed code by the act of offering food with a symbolic visual. It defines different degrees of the intimacy we grant to our guests according to the kind of meal we offer to them. This research shows that the meal is in the first place a form of visual communication. Inviting a guest to our table is becoming a way to create a message. Consequently it seems natural that graphic design surrounds this pre-existent message and enhances its meaning. Here we will make this food message clear in order to generate social links.

#### 4 The graphic designer responsibility in table-companionship

*I go to the supermarket to buy milk, and I see Star Wars has taken over aisle 5, the dairy section“*

John Seabrook, *The Culture of Marketing, the Marketing of Culture*, 2000.

Because food is a common need, big brands gain a powerful visibility by taking place inside supermarkets. This conquest is made possible by the work of designers. The question we ask is: can designers send messages that question our food rituals rather than express “*the vulgar, useless and artificial desire of the advertising design*“ as described by Victor Papanek in his book *Design for a real world*. The author tells us that if design has become a powerful tool, “*designers have to adopt a high social, and moral responsibility*”<sup>3</sup>. We could also report the thought of Annick Lantenois<sup>4</sup> who tells

3 Papanek, V. 1971. *Design for a real world: Human Ecology and Social Change*, Pantheon Books

4 Lantenois, A. 2010. *Le vertige du funambule le design graphique entre économie et morale: introduction, une définition*, B42

us in *Le vertige du funambule* that graphic design can change the opinion of people on different topics. We must use our power of communication and responsibilities in the right way. Here is another way to express it more clearly: why doesn't the designer use the dairy section to encourage us to eat together, to construct social links and to break with our individual mentality? The designer could ask this question to a large public by working with huge brands.

© Ethanoos.com



ABOVE

Advertisement for the movie Star-Wars inside the stalls of a supermarket.



# Different conversations between graphic designer and table-companions

In the following chapter we will see different examples of how the graphic designer interacts with the main subject of table-companionship.

## 1 Idealising table-companionship

Frequently the designer turns the table-companionship idea into a myth, particularly through advertising. We can take the example of the Herta video *“le goût des choses simple”* to explain it. In this video we can see an extended family eating outside a beautiful country house while having deep conversations. This strategy offers us an idealistic view of table-companionship and traditional families. Thus we look at this scene with a nostalgic feeling. By taking the decision to buy the Herta ham



© Ogilvy & Mathers

ABOVE  
Freeze-frame from the commercial Herta *le goût des choses simple* realised by Ogilvy & Mathers.

we hope to resuscitate the traditional idea of a table. This goal seems unrealistic because the campaign ignores the contemporary society issues. Moreover it doesn't engage table-companionship. Currently Ikea has made a campaign for single-parent families. They invite parents to cook food for their children in order to express their love to them in a humorous way. By taking into account the society context they are making the first step towards table-companionship!

## 2 Avoiding table-companionship

Conversely, we find some graphic design projects like the poster *“a table”* made by Jean Widmer, which avoid the notion of table-companionship. This poster financed by the Centre George Pompidou was realised in 1969. It is composed of a big “T” and the message *“à table”* written in yellow. Its shape and esthetic qualities are well designed. Yet, this poster is not descriptive. One of the goal of graphic design is *“to improve habitability of the world in all dimensions”* as Alain Findeli put by. We can say that this goal

© Jean Widmer, 1969



AT THE LEFT  
Research works and poster made by Jean Widmer for the exhibition *à table* financed by the Centre George Pompidou.

is not achieved here because there is no correlation between the subject of the exhibition and the message of the poster. This example shows an essential point: graphic design is not just about esthetic, it's also a way to ignore or spread ideas, concepts and questions. As Annick Lantenois says in *Le vertige du funambule* (op. cit.) graphic designers are messengers, interpreters and mediators.

### 3 Another way to avoid table-companionship

Here we will analyse another way to avoid table-companionship in order to highlight other issues. We will focus on the communication of the English dessert Gü published in Marsh 2011. The visual of the packaging and the video are esthetic and sober. The text: “*plunge, succumb!*” encourages us to have selfish pleasure. This communication works on the delight asset of food and represents this product as a gourmet dessert. Because we only see one spoon in the advert and on the packaging it seems that Gü doesn't encourage us to share this dessert. We can easily object that point by saying: there are two desserts inside the package so it is made to be shared! But in fact the issue goes beyond that point for different reasons. Gü offers us the possibility to enjoy a luxurious dessert, a kind of select food. By this simple fact this product puts face to face with the first difficulty: can Gü be shared with the great majority? Secondly, if we look at the packaging in itself, it's made of glass, metal, paper and a large list of components. Those elements make us face the issue of the numerous actors that permit us to enjoy this dessert. This issue introduces the question of table-companionship degrees, because it raise this question: are we really alone when we eat a Gü dessert? We will answer these questions in the text that follows.

1 In French the campaign tell us: “*plongez succombez*”

#### BELOW

Freeze-frames from the commercial Gü Desserts.



© Gourmand mais pas cuisinot

#### BELOW

Advertisement poster of the Gü Desserts in 2012.



© Gü®, Noble Desserts Holdings Ltd.

**2. A graphic design  
which gets us to  
eat together in a  
sustainable way**

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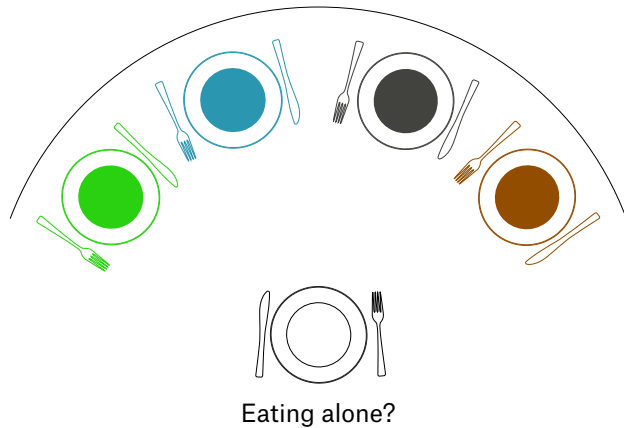
# Defining a sustainable table-companionship

We have analysed and criticized various examples which don't make table-companionship possible. We will see if we can define a sustainable table-companionship in order to construct it with graphic tools.

## 1 Different degrees of table-companionship

The last example we're taken seems to clarify one thing: there are different degrees of table-companionship. Eating together can't be understood only at the little scale of a single table.

AT THE LEFT  
Illustration of the concept of *invisible guests* by Corinne Peluchon. When we eat we need the action of farmers, cooks, distributors, dustmen... represented here by the different colored plates.



© Adrien Fuchs, 2016

The work of Corinne Peluchon may help us to understand this Different degrees of table-companionship. Corinne Peluchon tells us that: "*we are never alone,*

*so why can it happen at mealtime?!*". She answers this question by telling us that we are surrounded by different *invisible guests*.

There are three kinds of *invisible guests*, those who make our meals possible: the farmer, the distributor, the seller... those who come after our meals and those who can't have any access to it. The second ones are the coming generation who will repeat the same food rituals. We determine their future. The third part of invisible guests are all the other eaters who eat or want to eat at the same moment as me, they can be with or without me. Our food choices stop them or allow them to eat as Corinne Peluchon (ibid.) says "*our food choices determines the right to be that we allow us to be and the limits we give to the other eaters.*"

Regarding these philosophical principles we can say that if we eat in a responsible way, we allow the great majority to eat in the same way in the present time and in the future. In this dimension we can understand food as an economic, political and environmental issue and choice. So by learning how to share with the others, and how to consider our guests and fellow eaters, we will learn ethics and sharing. Therefore look at the origin of our aliments seems to be a logical thing to do.

## 2 Food choices and local issues

How to deal with our food choices? Maybe by choosing local and healthy food? We could argue this point by using some figures and proportions which show that making the choice of local food is the best choice to make. The brand Sainsbury does it by introducing kilometres

1 Peluchon, P. 2015. *Les Nourritures Philosophie du corps politique, L'ordre philosophique: Introduction*, Seuil

of information in their sale receipts and in some of its products. It may be the first step towards food consciousness. But as Lévinas<sup>2</sup> tells us “*our feed can’t only be interpreted as ustensil or a fuel in a explotative world*“. In other words food is not just an amount of kilometers or a ratio of pollution it also has a taste, a smell an odour and a colour. So as the French cook Jean-Pierre Coffe<sup>3</sup> puts it we should also learn again what a real tomato tastes, like one that doesn’t stay red for weeks, in his book *CONSommateurs révoltions-nous* published in 2004 he encourages us to react. So, we should follow the French cook Jean-Pierre Coffe advice and rediscover what a real tomato that doesn’t stay red for weeks really tastes like. The graphic designer could be the mouthpiece of this revolt, he could defend local food and highlight these social, economic, and healthy benefits as the Slow Food movement has been doing it since 1989. This action could allow us to reaffirm our understanding of being inhabitants of this earth and let us remember what Findeli says: “*the aim of design is to improve the livability of the Earth.*”<sup>4</sup>

2 Lévinas, E. 1990. *Totalité et infini: essai sur l’exteriorité*, Le Livre de Poche, Collection Biblio Essais,

3 Coffe, J-P. 2004. *CONSommateurs révoltions-nous*, Plon

4 Findeli, A. 2010. *Searching for design research questions: some conceptual clarifications, questions, hypothèses et conjectures: discussions on projects by early stage and senior design researchers*, Bloomington (Ind.), iUniverse

© Sainsbury



© Sainsbury



ABOVE

Mileage datas are printed on the packaging of products at Sainsbury’s supermarket. Those packagings are inspired from the esthetic of the airport stickers for suitcases.

# Constructing a sustainable table-companionship

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We will see now how we can construct a sustainable table-companionship.

## 1 Do we dream under the same sky?

“Do we dream under the same sky?” is a collective art work realised by the conceptual artist Rikrit Tiravanija, the architects Nicholaus Hirsh and Michel Muller and the Finnish cook Anton Melaniesmi. This project is a social place where people can meet ; it is based on the act of eating. The structure includes a vegetable garden, a movable kitchen, a place with different chairs and tables that people can use to eat and to spend time together. The architecture of the place is made to promote the collective act of eating and is defined by the artists as utopian area based on self-sustaining and alternative energy and brought to life by food. The harvest of the vegetable garden allows the artists and cooks to create different dishes. The rules are simple: “we cook and when it’s ready, eat and wash your bowl, thanks“. In other words: “it’s free if you accept to help us“, it’s a principle of gift and counter-gift. I chose this example because it presents a sustainable process around food viewed as a global act. In this huge hut made out of bamboo it is possible to drink a tea produced on site. This project enables us to be very aware of the origins of our products and to taste the vegetables that grow in the ground. Furthermore, the project provides us two tools we could use to construct a sustainable table-companionship: on a writing screen of a collective experience and the creation of visual and written messages.

© Masdearte



AT THE LEFT

The instructions of the exhibition handwritten on a blackboard.

## 2 Writing scenarios to question our food rituals

Now let’s look at how designers could help to construct table-companionship with two examples. The first will be *the sharing dinner* made by the *eating designer* Marije Volgelzang. In her projects she redefines our food rituals by constructing different food events. With the sharing dinner she had to revisit the symbolic meaning of a Christmas meal. She wanted to mask the social status of her guests and encourage them to share their food in original ways. In order to mask the social status of the guest she hung the tablecloth from the ceiling and made some opening for the hands and the head. In this way the guests can’t see the clothes of their guests. The scenario of the event permits the guests to live an original exchange. In this way they are committed in an original and playful exchange. To impulse the sharing the designer uses plates divided into two. In the first row of the table she puts some plates with melon and on the other side of the table she puts some raw ham. Instinctively the guests need to understand they have to exchange one part of their plate. The goal is to enjoy melon with raw ham. If I detail this point it is to show how we can use simple tricks to initiate sharing at a table and question our food rituals. I think graphic designers have the capacity to construct

AT THE RIGHT

The project *Sharing Dinner* made by Marije Volgelzgang: installation and organisation of a christmass dinner in the Netherlands. Picture from the repeated experience at Tokyo in 2008.



© Marije Volgelzgang

scenarios like this one to question our food rituals and bring us together around the table.

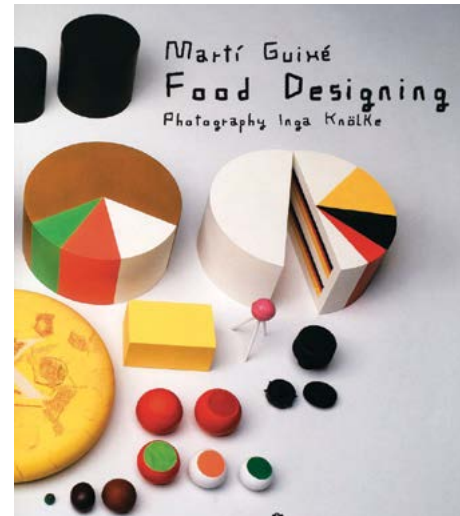
### 3 The role of the graphist

And now let's have a quick look at the movement *food design* supported by Marti Guixé in order to define more clearly the role of the graphic designer. The author of the book *Food designing* tells us that we are going through a *food transition*<sup>1</sup> which will lead us to *the obsolescence of gastronomy* and the advent of *food design*. To him *food design* will permit us to change the shape and the symbolic meaning of our food. He questions the function of food in itself, he looks at it as a an *edible material* to design. We could have chosen some text of Marc Bretillot

1 Guixé, M. 2011. *Food design*, Corraini Edizioni

the leader of the *Design culinaire* since 1999 who speaks about the *feed material*<sup>2</sup>. But I have chosen to speak about Marti Guixé for two reasons. The first one is because he is not from France, the country of gastronomy. This reason permits him to speak and work on the topic of food with no complex at all. The second reason is Marti Guixé has a designer approach and works with the tools of the graphic designer. He promotes a prospective vision of design and decompartmentalizes the topic of food. He shows us that graphic designers graphic could reinterpret the image and the esthetic of food. So If we construct sustainable table-companionship the tools of *eating design* and *food design* could be helpful. We have to use written messages and visual messages as all graphic designers but also to work on the esthetic of the food in itself and write scenarios able to question our food rituals.

© Marti Guixé



AT THE LEFT

Cover of the book *Food designing*. Marti Guixé, 2011.

2 In french: *materieau nourriture*, Marc Bretillot write the first manifest of culinary design in 2004

# Conclusion

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We have seen that the fragility of our food rituals reflect social evolutions. As a designer, I could help to reconstruct them in order to be in harmony with our contemporary society issues but also to engage social links and promote a food consciousness. We have seen that eating is much more than an act which caters for physical needs but it is a global thing which engages us ethically and morally.

So trying to define the position we have to adopt at mealtime with each other is trying to give a common sense to our feed. The graphic designer could transmit the basics of a sustainable table-companionship and be the messenger of conscious and responsible food choices. In order to construct this sustainable table-companionship we can use the tools of the graphic designer: visual messages and written messages that can have impact on people and question their food choices and food rituals. In order to improve the capacity to eat together, it will be interesting to create some table-companionship events. Thus the public could have now an alternative view of meals experienced with other guests. The designer will have to screenwrite the moments and organize them. To achieve those goals it will be interesting to work with a big brand to speak to the great majority.

It seems important to make compromises with them because they will give us acces to a great communication power. With those companies our purpose will be to construct a responsible and eco friendly program of design. So we will show that the designer can bring people together around a sustainable meal and lead them to question throughly themselves.



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As we are invited here to read and eat together, we ask this question: “does eating together make any sense for our contemporaries“. This question comes as we are more individualistic in our food selection and the design that generates them aims to rationalize our eating habits toward more and more independence and autonomy.

Designers usually represent the table as a place of individual construction and not as a place of collective construction. They promote a table where everyone enjoys a solitary and personalised meal. Nevertheless, when designers represent the conviviality at mealtime, they depict it in an idealistic way, giving it a mythical status, so much so that it looks like an illusion. But the dinner table is the mirror of society, so if its standards and practices are shattered, no longer eating together means dissociating from each other in a more definite way.

It may be up to the designer to invite people to the dinner table to question their choices in order to construct an event during which everyone could learn how to be together.

