



# IN SEARCH OF... THE LOST SEASON

## **Abstract / Dissertation**

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# FORETASTE

There are some memories that make a part of us, and sometimes, very small things are enough to make the past come back.

When I was a child in the countryside, and without our being fully aware of it, each time of the year had its special smell. In november, it was the chestnut smell, both sweet and lumpy, that my mother and I tasted and enjoyed as a reward after our lengthy walks through the woods. It was sometimes some mushrooms, that my brother and I have been looking for, and I still remember this delicious flavor of boletus mushrooms that we mixed with spaghetti, but which made my mother disgusted. The smell of pumpkin soup would get through the wood floor of the old house and reach my nose, as a call to go down to the kitchen.

Summer was also rich with memories, with the quest of strawberries with my brothers in my grandmother's fruit garden, but also redcurrants and their fleeting sourness, which made me do some funny faces. And then years passed over, and memories are not coming back.

What is the reason for that? Why cannot I have the opportunity to live those moments from my childhood again?

Is this what growing up means?

As a student, I was an unskilled worker in a greenhouse of tomatoes in a small town near Rennes in Brittany, and this experience has made me more aware of what I put in my plate. It was a building like a huge skeleton, spreading over many hectares with light on night and day.

I would find the tomatoes a few days later on supermarket stalls. First of all, and with a little sense of humor, I would look at the fruit of my work but I rapidly felt disgust for those tomatoes, devoid of any taste or smell.

What has happened to our feelings?

It is now difficult for me to recover the sensations from seasons that I so much enjoyed when I was a kid. It is thus with a personal conviction and with an interest for both cooking and food that I chose to explore this topic.

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# INTRODUCTION

Before our era, humans used to eat what nature had to give, and they had to hunt for their meat. Indeed, human beings' diet was regulated by seasons and the environment.

In our modern era, the “hunter-gatherer” time is definitely over and what we eat is no longer determined by weather conditions and spatial conditions, but rather by economic and social factors.

The context has immediate effects on the way people eat. Even though those contexts remained quite similar for many centuries – war time, food shortage etc. – food industrialization made a mark in the 20th century. This food diet, produced by industrial machines, came as an answer to the two world wars, when weakened populations had to be fed. Agriculture changes and progress could not be avoided as new more and more efficient machines and producing methods were discovered and invented. From this concept of progress, we see today an acceleration of our consumption society. In this book called “Temps hypermodernes”, Gilles Lipovetsky deals with the creation of a new social temporality, when short time is prevailing over lasting time.

He called this type of society “high-modern” and it is specific to the present time, which is the cause of acceleration and changes in our way of life. We can notice, thanks to Jean Pierre Poulain<sup>2</sup>, that the food industry actually focuses on efficiency. Indeed, the food industry is breaking the link between nature and food. But, it is not the only cause of this break. Therefore, the natural cycle of food production

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1. P.49, in “Les temps hypermodernes”, by Gilles Lipovetsky and Sébastien Charles. Ed. Grasset and Fasquelles, 2004. Collection Le Livre de Poche.

2. P.36, Industrialisation de la production et nouvelles formes d'autoproduction, in “Sociologies de l'alimentation, les mangeurs et l'espace social alimentaire”, by Jean-Pierre Poulain. Ed. Puf, 2013.

is no longer adapted to a society that is always looking for performance. According to this issue, the food industry has been looking for new food production methods, which totally deny the connection with the climate and seasons, although they are essential for qualitative soils and products. During the last centuries, food crises were related to lacks of food but we are now more concerned about the food quality. During the nineteen-eighties, some environmental, social and sanitary consequences appeared, which definitely modified our relationship to food. The mad cow disease scored the beginning of a long succession of sanitary crises in Europe.

As a consequence, consumers have become suspicious about what they eat, and more and more eager to know about their food. In this respect, we can ask ourselves why food has become more and more important and visible in the mass media. Therefore, there are a few cook shows like “Top chef” or “Masterchef”, and a lot of articles related to food topics are published in magazines and journals. But it sounds like a paradox because, today, the image of food is very damaged and suspicious.

**Considering food gets so much media attention and that the space and time of food production have been denied, is it possible for a graphic designer to challenge such a trend by introducing reference points into our food diet?**

While food has been more and more present on the media, it has obviously become more aesthetic and pleasant for people in a few mediums, which deeply affects both our outlook on food and our food behaviors.

*What are the reasons for this? How is it put forward through the different medias? (recipes books, social networks, etc.)*

We will try to understand whether the part of the media depictions in this spatial and temporal shift is symbolic or only aesthetic. In fact, understanding the causes of this problem will allow me to find appropriate solutions to rekindle consumers' desire for more seasonal food. In this way, food production (market gardening) can be connected to a season and a specific place, which would highlight the wealth and variety of the French territory.

# UNSEASONAL ITEMS IN OUR DIET AND EATING HABITS





This first part aims to clarify what unseasonal food is. First of all, I tried to understand the reasons why there is a gap between food and its production ways, for example the time to reap, to sow and where it has to be sowed. It deals with ongoing facts like the globalization and the relocation of many food productions around the world. These facts are very important because they allow us to understand why unseasonal fruits and vegetables are so plentiful on supermarket stalls. Avocados are so much imported from South Africa that they fill the stalls all year round. It is impossible for avocados to grow in our soils but, on the other hand, tomatoes or even strawberries are fruits that are easily grown in our soils during the summer. The problem is that we can find those fruits even in the winter. This permanent availability of fruits or vegetables at the supermarket prevents us from understanding the real time and the real process of growing.

#### Are consumers really aware of these environmental problems?

For sure, supermarkets excessively extend the shelf-life of fruits with some chemical products.

#### The second question is whether the depiction of fruits and vegetables contributes to this impression of confusion? What are the effects of such depictions on our eating habits?

If we take a few examples from Instagram, photos of meals and food items, or just photos from recipe books appear more and more aesthetic and sophisticated. We can explain that as a way to object to industrial and tasteless meals and we cannot deny that such images make you feel like cooking more.

#### But isn't it the decorative function of food that is put forward in this kind of pictures?

It lacks something to be more informative or educational. For instance, still life paintings and still life photos usually demonstrate some lifestyles. Dutch paintings, from the painter Abraham van Beyeren (1620-1690), reveal some facts: they depicted some unusual fruits instead of more usual fruits. The old still life painting deals with an image of abundance and shows a certain type of dream about food.



"Still life", by Abraham van Beyeren (1620-1690), oil on canvas, dim. 126 x 106 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Painters were more interested in painting some unusual fruits because of their specific textures, colours etc. It is disconnected from the reality because it is not what people ate at that period.

On the other hand, Lena Emery's contemporary still life photograph picks up some features from the Dutch Still life painting. There is less food than in the first one, but there is, beside, a will to create an aesthetic picture and a special atmosphere with food. Therefore, food becomes more decorative than edible or eatable. In both depictions, time freezes and consequently fruits become imperishable. According to my research, this kind of picture makes us forget the time needed to produce fruits and the exact time to consume them. Therefore, even if they are beautiful and pleasant to look at, they confuse us.

#### How could I re-use this still life style in my project?

For my plastic research work, I would like to re-use this Still life style in an unexpected way so as to make a more responsible depiction of fruits or vegetables. Some still life pictures could be made for each season, with a will to re-introduce good uses in eating habits and with an aesthetic set up, like still life does.



Photograph by Lena Emery,  
from the serial for Black isle  
bakery in London.

HOW COULD SEASONAL  
FOOD BE MORE VALUABLE  
AND GIVE SOME BENEFITS  
IN MANY WAYS?



The second part deals with the benefits and drawbacks of seasonality. The goal is to show that seasonality is a need and even an obligation to redefine some milestones in our diet. Specifically, people have to figure out that their food consumption depends on the food production and some growing factors. This idea is supported by articles, for example we can see that there is a deep desire to return to nature, particularly among city-dwellers that are looking for a rich experience of nature. We can see an increase in vegetable baskets, garden sharing and renting, short distribution channels between farmers and consumers etc.

If we take the example of vegetable baskets, people have doubts about them and they wonder about the limited choice of food within those baskets.

#### *Is it a limit or a benefit for our food diversity?*

Despite the fact that they are only supplied by available resources, we can find it even more interesting because they change season after season. A local and seasonal consumption could be more valuable because of this evolution along seasons. Consumers have perhaps to find some new ways to eat seasonal fruits and vegetables, for example by finding some recipes to cook tomatoes in summer and some others to cook chicories in winter.

Beside this question of limit, we can affirm that seasonal food truly involves a sustainable type of consumption, because it supports the local economy thanks to what is usually called “produced in France”.

#### *Is it possible to find existing solutions that correspond to a seasonal consumption?*

Focusing on local products is a good way to link a territory with its past and origins. It highlights the place of production, which varies with special features such as climate or heritage. Some prestigious chefs like Alain Passard have been elaborating a food heritage, associated with a seasonal practice. He has got a few vegetable gardens surrounding Paris where he has a Parisian restaurant named “L’Arpège”. He claims that dishes are modulated by nature and his practice can prove that it is possible to cook with seasonal food while being creative.

His work is inspiring to my design graphic practice because he sees cooking as a visual artist, with a research of colours. And then, he elaborated a range of four colours inspired from the vegetable garden ; yellow-orange, red-purple, green and white. As a designer, I could link those colours to each season, for example in associating white to winter, or green to spring.

# THE DESIGN PROJECT: ITS BACKGROUND AND ITS GRAPHIC IDEAS



The issue of my design project is to change people's view on seasonal food and especially on fruits or vegetables. Besides, what I want to do is to make people more aware of how food is produced and when it is produced, and show them the real process of production, which has been forgotten over the years. It is not so simple to define the factors that led to the gap between food, space and time, because it also depends on farmers and farming practices.

A survey published on Facebook helped me to understand the problems that I have to meet to complete my project. So, two main problems prevail. The first problem deals with the limit of resources and shows, thanks to many answers from people, that seasonal food reduces the variety of our food diet. For instance, they think that there is only a few vegetables available in the winter. They have been made so much used to having food they want by supermarkets that they believe that seasonal food is not rich and diversified enough.

The second major problem is that many consumers do not know anything about seasonal fruits and vegetables. About 31% of them only buy fresh vegetables because of their profusion on supermarket stalls. They are pretty ignorant and naive, and they cannot imagine what is at stake behind all this food. Another problem that I should meet as a graphic designer is that there is not enough information about what meals people could cook with seasonal food, and when they should buy it. Obviously, they cannot know how to cook nor how to find some recipes and make some mixes with other ingredients.

Young people could be an adequate target because they are still open-minded and curious about new lifestyles etc. Furthermore, thanks to the survey, young people from 18 to 30 years old have a good understanding of the issues of seasonal food diet, and they see it as an essential way to consume and eat.

The design project aims to highlight the diversity of French soils and French fruit and vegetable producers and to connect it to the diversity of fruits and vegetables that sometimes have been forgotten (over the past years).

### What type of design could be a good way to enhance such diversity?

A map seems to be the best graphic tool to do it. We can imagine making an inventory of the different farmers/ productions of a region, or of the entire country, so as to highlight the different types of fruits/vegetables that are available in each place at different moments.

Thanks to this map, which is actually very complicated to read and understand, we can see all the potentials a graphic designer could use to make the different regions and their food more visible. This old map used in schools, was obviously meant for young children, but is still interesting. Indeed, some fruit names replace names of cities and some colors create a hierarchy on the picture. As a graphic designer, it could be interesting to create a real graphic system for this map, in order to give the best understanding of the different fruits, vegetables, fruit gardeners etc.

We can imagine some simple symbols like lines, or circles, which could be a way to represent the period when people can eat each fruit or vegetable food (according to its season). For example, cherries or peas are produced in France for about two months a year, so the circle would have a small diameter. On the contrary, carrots can be grown almost all year round, therefore they could be symbolized with a long line.



### Which medium could best create this cartography?

A mobile or tablet application could be a very good medium to make a modular map which could change and evolve with seasons. For example, geolocation would enable us to find some seasonal fruits and vegetables nearby. For instance, if we spend some holidays in Brittany, we would be able to find some fresh apples or strawberries from a local farmer, depending on our location.

# CONCLUSION





A design project is always generated by society issues and thus tends to meet some problems related to our way of life. The issue of this research has been to enhance the fact that food is today disconnected from its spatial and temporal points of reference. The goal of this project might provide a graphic design solution to solve a very current problem; the lack of seasonality in our food behaviors.

We have seen that some depictions on the web, on television or in books, have strongly contributed to this gap and modified our relationship to food. Food diets have become more and more unreal in our minds, production processes and farming practices have been totally ignored in order to highlight only the plate and its decorative function. Today we mainly focus on the aesthetic quality of food. So, we have to answer this question :

### *Is it possible to challenge the unseasonal trend ?*

A real proximity with nature exists around many cities in France, and people are keen to know the origin of the food they eat. On the one hand, we are face to face with an aesthetic interest about food, and on the other hand, we see an interest from people to know more about their food's origins or quality. But, the communication tools are still insufficient, and this may be an opportunity for a designer to produce graphics that can make our views evolve. Furthermore, it is deeply connected to the economy because this project will put forward the variety of fruits and vegetables in France and give farmers and consumers a chance to develop a sustainable partnership. Eventually, the French cultural and farming heritage depends on this sustainable process.

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