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Gastronomic
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The Roots
Issue

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R O O T S A C C O R D I N G T O

Beauty

lies in the eye of the beholder. So does meaning. Nothing signifies anything without the interpretation, the angle, the perception of the person who reads and looks at.

Following you will see how three people with entirely different backgrounds and working in a variety of domains interpret the word ROOTS.

They tell us what this word means to them, what part it plays in their personal path, see the matter from different points of view.

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THE COMPLEX LIFE OF TABLEWARE

by
ANDREAS
FABIAN

ANDREAS

grew up between Afghanistan, Lebanon and Portugal, then studied design and silversmithing in Germany and in Great Britain at the Royal College of Art. His tableware creations are nourished by the global design culture he has been in touch with, but also by philosophical concepts, and fruitful collaboration with chefs and food researchers such as Roberto Cortez and Charles Michel. Spoons are his objects of inquiry: this familiar piece of cutlery, whose presence in our lives has become almost banal, turns into the instrument of sensual and sensory eating in his creative and meaningful designs. Its use is interpreted in an infinite number of ways and its influence in the gastronomic experience explored throughout a variety of forms and materials.



A WESTERN KID IN THE MIDDLE EAST

During the formative years of my childhood growing up in Lebanon and Afghanistan in the late 1960s, I was fascinated by the sight of people seated on the ground, eating from large metal trays instead of tables and using cups without handles, bread, or even salad leaves as 'cutlery'. Perhaps my heightened curiosity was in part the result of coming from a western background.

This curiosity or 'need' to know and understand the ways in which our eating habits are determined by culture as well as by nature, stayed with me since then, becoming not only a source of inspiration but also the driving force behind my work.

THE CREATIVE ACT

Marcel Duchamp concluded in his essay 'The Creative Act' that: '...all in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act ...' These lines could equally be applied to the work of a designer: the user of tableware, like Duchamp's

spectator, brings the designed object into action and completes the creative act.

From my earliest training as a silversmith to my subsequent profession as a designer, tutor and researcher, the focus of my work has been making objects for the dining table. What defines these objects is that they require handling and use.

This physical interaction is the root of my work, allowing the user to explore and interpret the inherent qualities and properties of the objects I have fashioned, and thus completes my 'creative act' as a designer.

Although the sense of touch is vital in helping us to fully understand a tableware object, how it feels and how it works, all our five primary senses are equally involved in the act of eating. The senses and the interaction between them affect our perception of food and shape our dining experience. Take a spoon for example: during a meal we feel its weight, we feel how it balances between our fingers, we feel its surface and we see its colour; we perceive the temperature of the material it is made of. We hear the sound the spoon makes when touching the bowl. We explore the consistency of what we are about to taste by gently moving it with the spoon. We let the aroma spread and reach our nose and finally, we taste the food.



Andreas Fabian creates his designs by working directly on raw materials in his Buckinghamshire workshop.

We may be aware that we are doing something very intimate by feeling the spoon in our mouths, on our lips. We might also remind ourselves that we often use a spoon that others have previously had in their mouths – in this sense the spoon is an intensely intimate instrument.

Something of the intimate and extraordinary nature of this phenomenon was described by artist Richard Wentworth - albeit discussing plates, not spoons - :‘The strangest thing about plates is that when you sit down to eat you get your own, but the moment you finish it’s somebody else’s. Plates operate in a complex world of manners, sharedness and separation – a public / private thing, enormously widely experienced. This makes them very special.’

All of the above demonstrates how tableware exists within a highly complex field both in terms of how it is experienced and how it generates meaning. For example, the way we handle the spoon between thumb and fingers nowadays is defined by manners and etiquette. Handling a spoon instinctively does not seem appropriate anymore and has become culturally determined.

Furthermore, a small drop of soup on the bottom of our spoon might cause our entire body language to shift. We don’t want it to drop onto the tablecloth - it could leave a mark on the cloth and, more significantly, leave a stain on our social reputation. Or, even worse, it might leave a mark on our clothes, a mark that we take from the table with us into the public domain. This may become a ‘sign’ to others - a stain upon our status and standing.

Over the years I have been very fortunate to work with two internationally acclaimed chefs: Charles Michel and Roberto Cortez. What emerged was a very fruitful collaboration in which my objects became part of a whole symphony of culinary experiences where content, use and form became one.

As a designer I need to remember that the ‘object-in-use’ is not just the sum of several elements brought together; it is always something more, not least when the object is only fully alive in a rich, complex and ambiguous performative context.



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Drop spoon, hand bowl and silver beaker, utensils created for Michel / Fabian’s 2016 limited collection.
Images taken from short film TOUCH HUNGER.