

la table / le tableau

If we were to have written down all the words we spoke across this table.

Meaning held from countless hours of shared and lonely seatedness. So many letters and sounds spilled on the surface that carries more than its institutionalized meaning. Table: a surface on which things, such as food, drinks and (religious) objects, are placed; a piece of furniture around which one can sit; a flat material used for a specific purpose.

Specific purposes are eating, drinking, working, gathering, arranging, talking, and so forth. It could be any specific purpose. Even in our mother tongue it becomes difficult to define what a table is exactly. We can describe it, but how when it is an overturned moving box, a stack of books, a piece of fabric on the floor, the surface of the earth. The English language lacks words for table, but the thing it refers to moves beyond them. A table nurtures on multiple levels.

San Juan de la Cruz said “form is emptiness.”¹ Thus a table is a form. It is an idea and points to itself, yet it is also an icon for us to interpret through the memories it carries, and the ones we do. A table both brings people together and separates them. Leonardo Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* is the example par excellence. On a more literal level, every time two or more people are seated a table they are connected while kept at a distance. Each person their own seat, sundered by the table’s surface. Yet, when sharing a table for a meal certain boundaries abate.

Across a table we talked about how food makes the need for language disappear. We can sit with people who we have never met before, in unfamiliar places, and we can sit together for hours and eat. Everyone opens their mouths and different languages may come out but the same food goes in. A family can have dinner and not speak throughout. Depending on the (dinner) table’s context, balances between comfortability, vulnerability and hierarchies shift.

Over dinner, time disappears and so does purpose. Seated down to eat we stay after the food is gone, often even longer than the time it took to consume the meal. We shared the same food and now we share the same language, we agree and disagree with gestures, our filled bodies are in conversation. We will reach a peak and then become still. Everyone leaves, the table stays. We create and become part of the remnants. A tableau.

The afterlife of a dinner indicates an end perhaps more so than anything else. *Fin.* Tables with empty plates and glasses, disarranged chairs, inedible parts of food and burned down candles show what is

no longer there. A tableau that points at the presence of absence. Something that is impossible to see yet so frequently rendered. Francisco de Zurbarán excels in representing nothingness in his still life paintings, even if the food is yet untouched.

In these photographs nothing seems untouched. Welcomed to satiate our curiosity every item on the table has moved from its original location to a new place. Not only mouths, but hands, eyes and minds were served. Framed in segments, as there is too much to capture at once and so by abundance we are slowed down, the images bring the table back to stillness, and the sacrality from the cathedral-like shape of what has become a dining room echoes on the pages of this book.

This project pays homage to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* from 1979. Concepts of absence and abundance come together in Chicago's piece; 1038 historically underacknowledged women are carefully placed at a triangular table, each side 48 feet long. There are 39 assigned place-settings at the table and the names of another 999 women are inscribed in gold on the floor underneath the table. *The Dinner Party* is specific, a calculation of people, materials, placement and time periods.

When learning French we used furniture as a mnemonic device to learn prepositions:

sur la table

devant la table

pour la table

sous la table

par la table

contre la table

derriere la table

envers la table

entre les tables

à table.

Through prepositions we presuppose a place. Our bodies have moved to and from California, and with our bodies we move through tongues. In *A Lover's Discourse* Roland Barthes writes, "I adore you because you are adorable, I love you because I love you."² Suddenly the difference between the French *adorable* and the English adorable becomes obvious. Clarity, like looking through the water, through the bottom of my glass into the blurriness of language and meaning.

Visually the same the word, adorable connotes different meanings in each language. Language becomes a context and can be further contextualized. For example, *The Last Supper* instigated the adoration of Christ or so bears the bible, but the eucharistic adoration is semantically far from the English adorable.

Etymologically table means: "a tablet of stone or other material bearing or intended to bear an inscription."³ A table is thus meant to keep stories. Words of patience. There seems to be more time when seated at a table, we already assumed to pause for a moment.

When do banal objects become visible beyond their integrated function?

In French, *table*—now an object meant to write on—then gets so close to *tableau*. It was Picasso who designated *table* as the plane of actuality and *tableau* the plane of imagination. Both words find their root in Latin and Picasso (re-)joined both planes in his collages. Object and idea, like word and referent, place us between body and mind in a reality that we can never fully verify.⁴

This is where the exhibition, the book and the dinners meet. Mattea Perrotta's *The Last Supper* wavers between personal and shared experiences. Seven paintings refer to specific dinners that took place in different places, Dakar, Napoli, Istanbul, Marrakech, Narbonne Plage, Lisboa, and London. They are all personal experiences, inscribed only in Perrotta's mind and the tables that nurtured her. They are presented here, the way the word table represents itself, as an idea of the thing we all understand. The tables in her paintings are not specified to reality, they become *tableaux*. The photographs, contrarily, are all taken in her studio in Los Angeles and influenced compositionally by everyone who joined the dinner and interacted with the table and what was on it. They are very literal fragments created by the disappeared participants of the still lives you see before you. The dinners themselves ended, a memory of them only exists in the minds of those who were there before they left the table.

The table becomes a point of view.

¹ Zwagerman, Joost. *De Stilte van het Licht*. Amsterdam, Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers. 2015: p. 30

² Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1978: p. 21

³ "table, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/196785. Accessed 11 February 2019.

⁴ Poggi, Christine. "Frames of Reference: 'Table' and 'Tableau' in Picasso's Collages and Constructions." *Art Journal*, vol. 47, 4 (1988): 311-312