

INTIMITE FOOD

visionary food interaction

MFA Interaction Design 2014

Umeå Institute of Design

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January 2014

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// INTRODUCTION

In my degree project I am to investigate into food, nutrition, and the role that food plays in our lives. It aims to challenge our current understanding and definition of 'food' and 'healthy food', play with topics such as eating habits and food cravings, in order to provoke a critical discussion about the intimate relationship between food and the body and the consequences of your choices.

BACKGROUND

Eating a healthy diet increases the likelihood of avoiding overweight or chronically illness. (Gandini et al., 2000 and Hooper et al., 2001)

People usually have good intentions when it comes to their own health. The variety of food that is available is huge today. Everyone is given the same choice of either living a healthy or living an unhealthy lifestyle. To act on our good intentions and to make the healthy decisions seems to be a struggle for many people. The fact that 80% of all death in the US are caused by avoidable lifestyle diseases 2, (John Mackey, 2012) shows that just having good intentions is not enough to be healthy, we also need to act on them, persistently.

As food choices are self regulated, more and more we tend to find justification for our unhealthy choice. (Jessie C. de Witt Huberts, 2013) We find excuses to find an answer of why our food behaviour is right and how I am going to make up for it, or just how hard we worked for it. Making a bad food choice can be a failure of self-regulation through our reflective system and not just through our impulsive decisions.

'When people need medical advice, they go to their GP and when people have a toothache, they go to their dentist, but some people will believe almost anything and anyone when it comes to nutrition, food and diet.' Sian Porter

The perceptions of healthy food is different from person to person. Everyone creates their own summary of what healthy food is for them and what they shouldn't eat. The news are contradicting each other and confuse everyone. What is the healthy food and what is a healthy diet? If we have clarity around healthy food choices and we focus mentally on the health every time we make a food decision, people are more likely to make a healthy food choice. (Dan Ariely, "Blame the brain")

Given the current food culture and how most people understand so little of what food is doing to us is making the population more obese than ever. Our interaction with food has a certain value in a daily routine of people, despite of how emotionally attached humans are to food, the healthy choice is usually lacking in emotional attachment.

INFLUENTIAL TOPICS

Habit and behaviour

Charles Duhigg describes in his book how our life is defined by habits and that we are capable of changing them any time. (The power of habit, 2012)

We are creating our own food habits based on the knowledge we learn during our childhood, following with the influential surrounding and dietary goals we set ourselves. The society is used to the terms breakfast, lunch and dinner that we could look at as food habits. In this project I want to challenge how society sees food and how we created food habits. Some are rooted in history that I want to reconsider if they still fit with our new way of living, some of them are purely personal and I want to challenge the individual to questions their habits and believes in food. Food habits like eating three times a day and having dedicated times to eat is often the reason to take a break during daily activities. But are we creating food habits around our lifestyle or are we living around our food habits. Either way, are we conscious of the impact on food on us seen in a long term perspective?

Today's food environment

Over thousand of years the human species developed a genetic predisposition for the preferences for salty and sweet tastes. This was developed to serve humans as an adaptive function in a word where the food environment was a lot more scarce. This study has shown that because of this predisposition we as human tend to reject food with more energy dilute food since these tastes have to be learned, where salty and sweet taste are the tastes we already know without having to learn them. (Leann L. Birch, 1999) The food industry uses this advantage to add sugar and salt to most foods available on the market especially the high in energy food. The food that is available to us and that is in our closest surrounding is highly influential in creating food preferences.

Quantified self

Calories. The number we think of when trying to relate our body to food. Reading food labels and subtract them from the number on our smart counting wearable makes it a common practice to feel good about what we eat. Of course, Calories are valuable, but they still feel a bit abstract to relate to. In order to really understand food there are more factors to take in consideration to understand food. One nutrient will not tell us enough about the impact of food on our bodies. (Nutrition Journal, 2013)

If I burn 200kcal, does it mean I can now eat a chocolate bar? Measuring activity has great value and makes people excited about their achievements, but what are we compensating this activity with in our body?

INTEREST AREAS

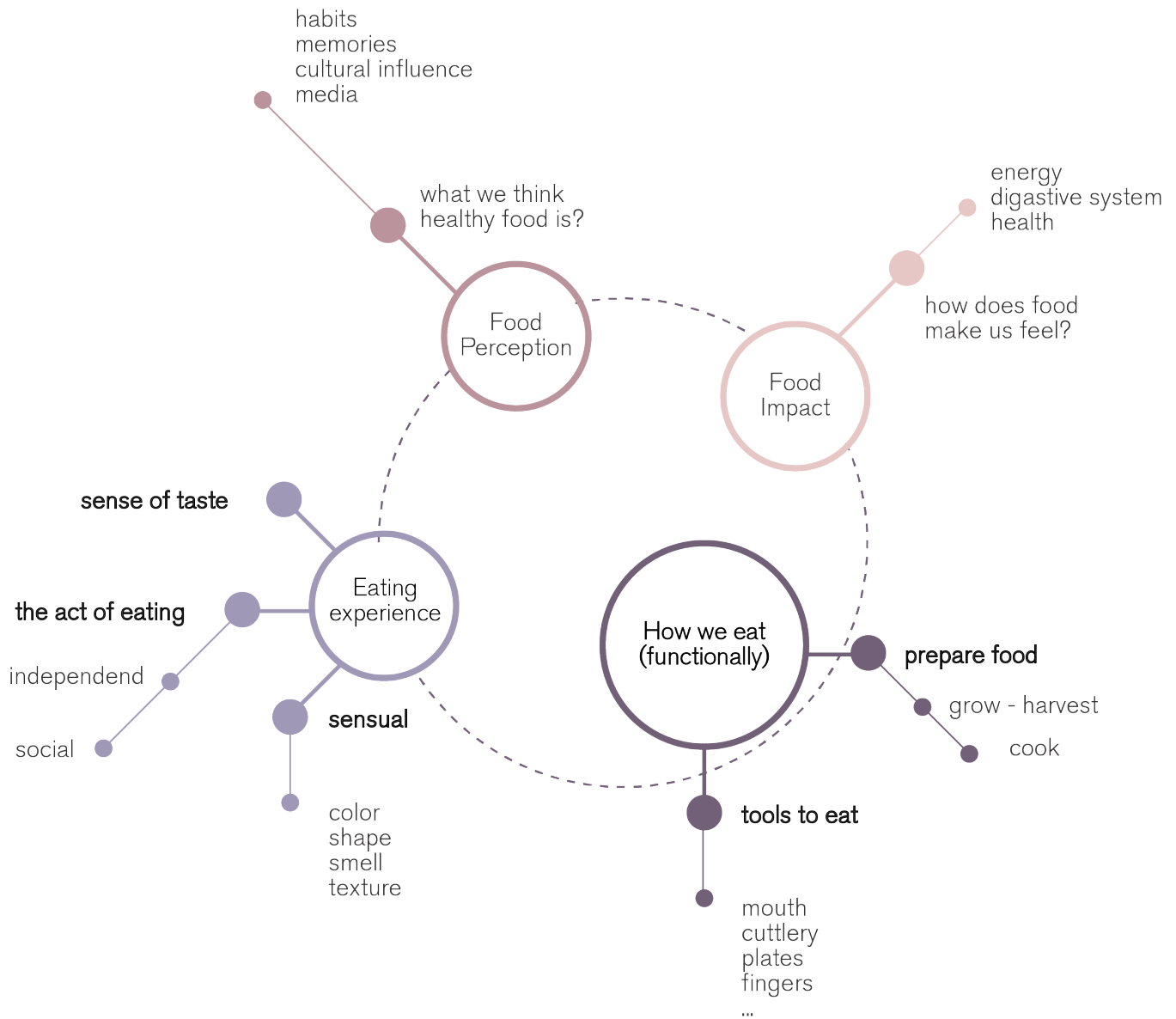


Figure 1. Interest area overview

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

Last year during my internship I had the opportunity to work on many healthcare projects in the field of chronic disease. As much as I enjoyed the area, it was a very frustrating process for me to see how pharmaceutical companies have the power over people's health. To see how much people are dependent on chemicals and of how little they understand of what impact their food choice has on their health.

"We probably as a culture have got our values inverted. We would rather spend our money on rent than we would on the best food ever." -David Wolfe, Food Matters

Growing up on the mountains right next to farmers, fresh vegetables and fruits and being surrounded by the people that cook fresh only, my world of food was simple. I didn't have to think about healthy or not, everything was fresh and homemade and as a child we played outside in the fresh air so much, we would just burn it away right away. Even though that was the case, I have always been very interested in nutrition. I remember as a 8 year old, I would unpack the chocolate, break it into pieces and tell myself how many little pieces I was allowed to eat over time. Things have changed over time and traveling around the world gave me a new perspective. Also making my own food decisions was not as easy as I thought. I used my body to experiment around food behaviours and what food will do to my body to then feel and see results and create a very sensitive reflection process towards food with my body as the tool. The process of what our mind goes through when thinking about food and how often food is given not enough time to think about, is interesting to me.

Making food decisions and dealing with planning what to eat everyday, can be just that extra decision we don't have the energy for after a long day. How often are we desperately looking for an inspiration on food to make for dinner or my next lunch break? Does food how we interact with it today still fit into our lives?

// METHODS

The strategy for my thesis is not to create a single design solution, but to create a series of scenarios to raise questions around our relationship with food.

CRITICAL DESIGN APPROACH

This topic is so very personal and everybody knows food so well, but do we almost forgot to think about its purpose? I want to spark the debate between our food desires and what we need to function. With this critical approach I want to create food interaction to provoke the society to rethink their behaviour around food. Since the research in Nutrigenomics is just at the beginning stage, we are not quite there yet to say what really the things are our body needs in a medical term. Even if we would, what would be benefit from it and would a personalized diet be the goal to make healthier food choices?

I am stepping away from a human centered approach with a problem solving outcome, since I am not aiming for an educational tool or trying to tell people what to eat. Rather am I looking for peoples reaction if their food interaction is interrupted or disturbed and therefore raise awareness. What is it that would make us second guess the food? How hard is it to resist the desire of a craving? How much food do we really need? Is our own perception and knowledge around food habits too personal to touch upon?

With the critical design approach I set myself into a new environment that gives me the freedom of playing with food interactions provocatively in order to raise questions of why we make so easily the wrong choice or why we ignore the impact of what food has on our bodies. These interactions and tools should lead the user to bigger questions and show the perspective of how we might interact with food in the future.

ADDITIONAL METHODS

secondary and primary research

Interviews, Surveys, Workshops and Co-creation sessions. Most will take place around Umeå and with people of mixed age and health condition. Specific subjects I am to include in the studies are those diagnosed with chronic diseases, obesity, and food intolerance. In addition, interviews to collect first hand understanding of nutrition with people at Umeå University at the Food & Nutrition Department will be crucial to developing a strong point of view.

ADDITIONAL METHODS

user workshops and experiments

I want to explore during my whole process of how people react to the prototypes I am creating, either in workshops or with hand outs. This should lead to open discussions around food behaviour and bring me closer to what

prototyping

Design objects around eating and the interaction with moving food to your mouth. Create engaging tools and objects for people to test how the concepts work what they trigger in peoples relationship with food, for single and social scenarios. I would like to look at the problems we are facing today and visualize the impact of our behaviour in prototyping tools and interactions to raise awareness and questions towards our future healthy self.

// GOALS

PROJECT GOALS

My goal is to create tools that provoke to build empathy between body needs and nutritional values. With these tools and experiences I want to make people think about the food choices they make and how they plan their food into their daily lifestyles. Rethinking of how much effort and energy people would give for their so called 'treats', or unhealthier food choice. These engagements should critically play with our rational and emotional mind during the decision making process.

For me this thesis is a playground for explorations to create new food habits or how to create healthy food habits and how independent eating situations lead us to make quick food choices and rely on current knowledge. How can tools and knowledge invite people to make food choices according to their health? How far would we go if our craving is talking back to us?

What if we live in a world where the food options we are given are directly related to our lifestyle and daily activities and essentially what our body needs in the moment? This setting can bring the relationship between our bodies and the feeling for food closer together and make it maybe more tangible to grasp. I want to challenge the imbalance between offer and demand in our society.

PERSONAL GOALS

I want have fun and gain confidence in my own intuition and believes.

My personal goals include mostly questions I would like to find answers for myself as a designer and as a person. I want to embrace the opportunity to work on my own, to find out more about me and my passions in design. I like to challenge myself always to a new level and this time the challenge is learning how to create critical design outcome and to see how I can find myself in this approach. Also do I want to challenge the quality of the result to be detail oriented and finished, even though they are interactions to explore user reactions, I wish for myself to see if I enjoy doing it. Also do I want to use video as the storytelling to capture reactions and interactions with the objects and around them.

// RESEARCH

I aim to explore with peoples perceptions and habits with food and other daily routines to create provocative prototypes. Using prototyping to explore the interaction with food is an important part of this project and the research I want to conduct.

QUESTIONS

I plan to investigate the following questions surrounding nutrition and our bodies:

- What if food will be prescribed to you?
- What if we can see and feel our nutrition?
- What if food is with us 24/7?
- What if our physical interaction with food changes?
- What if food is personalized to individuals?
- What if we get attracted by nutritional benefits and not by food?
- How can food be more integrated into our lifestyle?

TOPICS

Nutrigenomics
Genetically engineered Food
3D printed food
Food habits and preferences
Food industry and environmental impact
History of eating
Social impact on food choice
Nutritional values
Wearable technology
Perception of food
Decision Fatigue
Lifestyle Malnutrition
emotional connection to food
Willpower and habit control

//APPENDICES

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Dan Ariely - "Blame the Brain"

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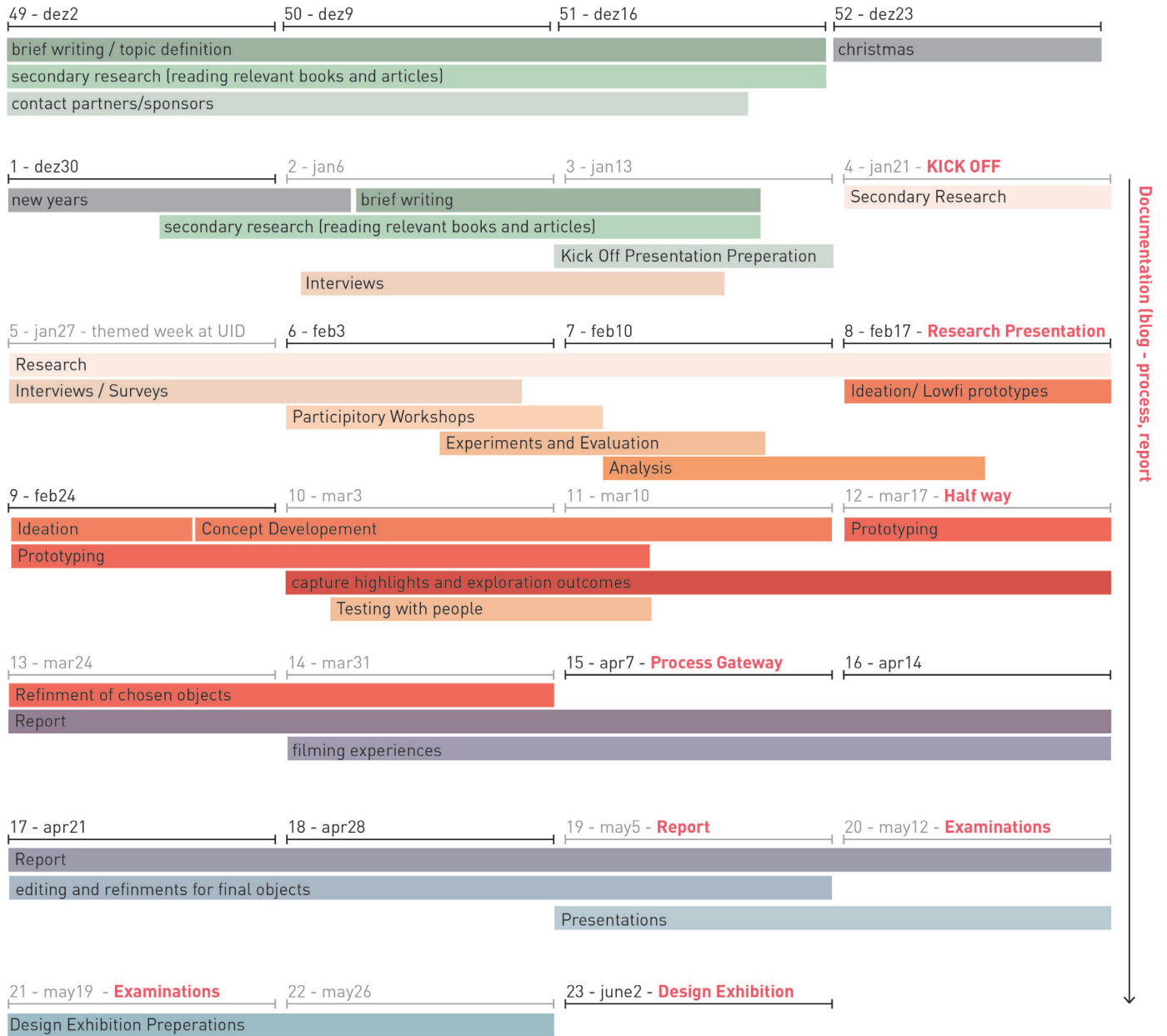
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SCHEDULE



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