

## Seating chart souvenir

We learn to shape verbs via “tables”. Tables teach that the starts of verbs usually stay, their exits leave, leave in extravagant directions.

<p>PRESENT</p> <p>je me souviens tu te souviens il/elle se souvient nous nous souvenons vous vous souvenez ils/elles se souviennent</p>	<p>PASSE COMPOSE</p> <p>je me suis souvenu tu t'es souvenu il/elle s'est souvenu/e nous nous sommes souvenus vous vous êtes souvenus ils/elles se sont souvenu/es</p>	<p>IMPARFAIT</p> <p>je me souvenais tu te souvenais il/elle se souvenait nous nous souvenions vous vous souveniez ils/elles se souvenaient</p>	<p>PLUS-QUE-PARFAIT</p> <p>je m'étais souvenu tu t'étais souvenu il/elle s'était souvenu/e nous nous étions souvenus vous vous étiez souvenus ils/elles s'étaient souvenu/es</p>
<p>PASSE SIMPLE</p> <p>je me souvins tu te souvins il/elle se souvint nous nous souvînmes vous vous souvîntes ils/elles se souvinrent</p>	<p>PASSE ANTERIEUR</p> <p>je me fus souvenu tu te fus souvenu il/elle se fut souvenu/e nous nous fûmes souvenus vous vous fûtes souvenus ils/elles se furent souvenu/es</p>	<p>FUTUR SIMPLE</p> <p>je me souviendrai tu te souviendras il/elle se souviendra nous nous souviendrons vous vous souviendrez ils/elles se souviendront</p>	<p>FUTUR ANTERIEUR</p> <p>je me serai souvenu tu te seras souvenu il/elle se sera souvenu/e nous nous serons souvenus vous vous serez souvenus ils/elles se seront souvenu/es</p>

*Seating chart souvenirs* is the name given to RENÉE PAULES Paule-ished blow-ups of seating charts, strategically composed for gallery dinners. A frame per long table graces the surrounding gallery walls; in practice plus ou moins four per dinner, the gallery guestlist never being as petit comité as hoped.

Remember: seating charts (in a gallery context, especially) match empty characters with nameless chairs. Their dominant aesthetic is a clear web, generated by démodé software. And usually that's the format they stick with or are stuck with: digital, closely monitored, on desktops best hidden behind makeshift reception desks. External memory provides a welcome alternative for the mental map memorized by this or that evening's hyper-sober personnel but powerbanks run out of battery too and computers still crash without back-ups. (If you're the type of reader to knock on wood, please spare Renée's perfect frames).

Art is always the answer. The pretty-banal tradition of private dining, wining & whining that more or less smoothly<sup>2</sup> follows the fall of the public vernissage curtain usually leaves the net network of everyone we pretend matters in the face of this week's art (as we go on pretending no one, but the art, matters). Doing nothing but record this tradition, these tables, RP ends up representing much more than the mere shadows of the p-art-y peeps, the moneys-hot-s at these tables *as we chat*.

RP ends up capturing too much. A recording act so simple helps reconstruct an intricate memory lost or in no-time overwritten by the next exhibition dinner, the next 1 you've likely missed already.<sup>3</sup> Not as simple as the "I" that "remembers" (who remembers *I remember* (1975)? who remembers, not Proust, but *reading Proust?*), this memory is created and recreated by others but yourself, singulars and plurals, in the past, present, and future, recent, now or near, distant or far-away.

*What you might get out of a surface reading:*

Who's-next-to-who.

Who's-not-next-to-who.

Names unfamiliar and familiar.

Names known and unknown.

Names bound to fade into obscurity, names destined to reach the spotlight at last.

Names idolized and canceled.

Old and new names.

Allergies that come and go.

+1's that come and go.

*What you might risk through further interpretation, first-, second or thirdhand:*

'I' eat with my mouth open, 'you' are not alone in noticing the transgression, 'we' learn about it later.

'You' spat in 'my' face; 'I' made a spectacle to 'those' at the furthest removed table, out of 'your' earshot by, like, a millimeter.

'He' and 'her' were at separate tables, to both tables' benefit ("Remember how last dinner's souvenir basically documents a crime scene").

'Him'-NEVER-next-to-'him'.

'Them'-ALWAYS-across-from-'them'.

'They' whispered something in 'their' ear.

'They' fell in love at the gallery dinner, the night they were seated across from 'each other'.

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<sup>2</sup> Public enemies don't get closer to each other than on the seating-chart-free backseats of the pre-arranged taxis, in case the gallery dinner takes place extra-muros.

<sup>3</sup> Now that RP's *bigger picture* is becoming unbreakable etiquette – as indispensable as Ruinart, as lacking as plastic straws – it seems strange that table planning, approached from a more scientific angle, managed to slip past party reporters.

Names familiar to 'all', unfamiliar to 'you'.  
Names known and unknown to 'us three'.  
Names – 'yours' – bound to fade into obscurity  
Names – 'ours' – destined to reach the spotlight at last.  
Names *not* idolized 'by you and me'.  
Names *not* canceled 'by you and me'.  
Should have taken 'his' name.  
Should have kept 'his' name.  
Should have never lost 'his' name.  
Should have never lost 'his' name to 'her', out of all people.  
+1's that to 'everyone's' surprise (?!) end up... staying.

This is Renée Paule, simply, writing history. Invitees will soon realize memory is co-created. Souvenirs are snapshots. What happens outside of the frame is meaningless. Portraiture goes way back & the Portrait Mode on iPhone has a long way to go. Here's what will happen: allergies will change from 1 dinner to the next, food fashion will accelerate. The *majuscule* 'H' of 'halal' in a red upside-down triangle shape will be thought of as particularly pretty, paired with an American name. Addicts will turn sober overnight (too far gone to comprehend sobriety doesn't qualify as an allergy; a 'diet', if you will, without visual translation on the chart). People will take plus 1's they don't care about as long as their *profile* provides a pleasant contrast *next to* theirs. It's the names that need to look hot together. The first date of diets that needs to inspire envy. Wild requests will be made to the galleries. To be seated "at the head of the table". To "be seated *behind* the person at the head of the table". To "be seated next to no one". To "be seated on my boyfriend's lap". To "be seated in-between my two exes." (To the point that with every souvenir you could *actually* wonder who's sitting *under* the table, which of course is off-chart territory. RP's decadence is *different*.) The decrease in RSVPs, not to mention the no-shows, at *Souvenir*-less dinners will become fact, then truth, then post-truth. Tables will turn for real post-RP's innocuous intervention. If we aren't already witnessing it, we'll witness a veritable revolution in gallery reputations. Gallery dinners, galleries in general, will be redefined as (ir)relevant on the basis of its tables being (un)portrayed.<sup>4</sup> Without *Souvenirs*, blue-chip galleries will be left with nothing but blue, the feeling. Blues, the music. Think of the missed opportunities... symbolically-empty seating charts, thanks to straight-to-SPAM emails, which as a plus might bring about a semi-democratization of paper invites (no longer just for top-tier collectors), as a minus: another gay intern fired. Can you picture how coveted these empty seating charts will be by public collections?<sup>5</sup> So coveted by museums world-wide, a reversal of the entire power dynamic is not

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<sup>4</sup> The Dutch have a saying: "op je honger zitten" which literally translates to "sitting on your hunger." The hunger in question seldom refers to the hunger, free food can satisfy.

<sup>5</sup> *Who* pays for the (group) portrait, in RP's case becomes: who *gets to pay* for the (group) portrait? What can be said on the topic of transaction is footnote stuff, galleries are nothing if not discrete enterprises. *Souvenirs* are never vulgarly auctioned off (except if actual auctions get their hands on them after-dinner) but collectors have started referring to the painstaking process of taking their table home as a "hunger game". They barely leave private collections.

at risk, but imminent. Without the 'museum-worthy' RP pieces, chances are through the roof these institutes will just become unworthy museums. People will pay. Collectors drunk-driving home without a *Souvenir* to have a gay assistant add to a sloppy Excel will see *Souvenirs* everywhere. Sloppy with the wheel, disappointed collectors will zoom in on their own seat on the iPhone pic (Portrait Mode, by accident) snapped of the *Souvenir* they failed to secure, like "That's me, that's me right, sitting right there, with the symbols of gluten-free and dairy, two seats from touching RP". The split seconds they give into the irresistible urge to close their eyes, they'll continue to see the work of art stretched across their retina, a mental image that painfully reminds of what they can't physically possess, what they can't forever store away. Everyone will see *Souvenirs* when they close their eyes. People will play, many more will be played. People will cheat: vegetarians by birth, pretending to be carnivores, will be seen switching plates with veteran carnivores, faux-converting to veganism. The talk of the table, of quite some tables, of every table in town, will be that one (ugly) name, the ugliness of which reached universal consensus, impelled a wife to poison her husband – the motif? An unfortunate prenup in between her and (her words) "a sexy *Souvenir*". The false promise of a *Souvenir*-worthy name, at last. Similar stories will follow. The question is not if but when. Food for thought will become food for fraud. The art world will no longer be a cliché everyone, dreaming to one day star in it, delusional they already star in it (this 'in' that keeps insisting it's an 'out'), consistently fails to adequately parody. Memes will no longer inflate impotence, block hope. Memes will kill, then memes will die. That's right. Tabula rasa. The world will be new. The art will be new. Fuck museum glass. How else will *Souvenirs* reflect the future?

What, in God's name, had the artist created? Nothing if not another ordinary *memento mori* – forget me, forget me, but ah! remember my fate.