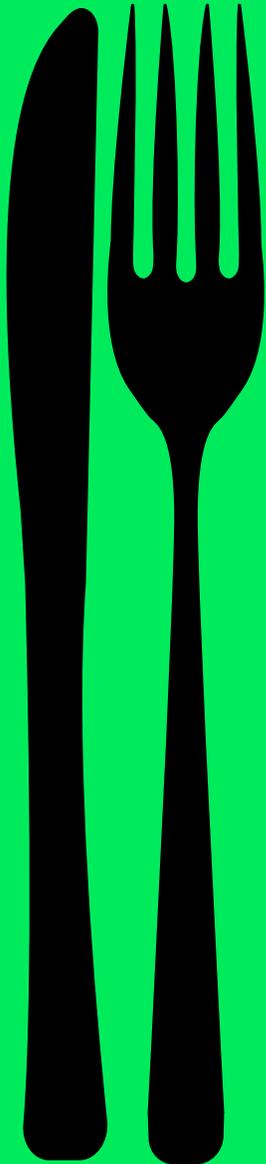


# ON THE TABLE:

LEXIE SMITH



The Ubiquitous Expertise Steering Committee

MIT List Visual  
Arts Center

# The Ubiquitous Expertise Steering Committee

*This meal is a game that looks at the isolation inherent to participating in gatherings outside of our usual social environments (and sometimes present even within them) and works to dissolve group hierarchies through an invisible horizontal structure (directed participation), and activation of ubiquitous expertise (the ways we already know how to participate).*

## OVERVIEW

An assortment of guests, all between one and seven degrees away from each other socially, convene for a meal. The Host provides a set of materials and dishes, but does not execute the ambience (set the table, music, lighting, etc.) or otherwise conduct the experience once the occasion has commenced.

Each guest is assigned a role by blindly drawing a title and brief description from a pool. There are physical actors and emotional actors. Aside from the Host, no one knows whose role is what, or what the other roles are.

## LOFTY CONTEXTUALIZATION

The room will be filled with 8 people who might be linearly connected to one another but have immersions in different social groups. This will give them some shared and some separate forms of *ubiquitous expertise*, defined as "the kinds of expertise that all citizens of a society have" (whereas an expertise more broadly is "anything which you can or can't acquire through deep immersion in a social group"). This expertise will allow the individual to uniquely fulfill their designated purpose.

We can consider two opposing ways of learning: *algorithmic*, where knowledge is considered a set of formal instructions (i.e. teachable, learnable without social immersion, as AI learns); and enculturation, in which knowledge is based on a set of

social skills and tacit understandings (i.e. something we know but cannot explain how or why, acquired through repetitive engagement, as how humans learn their native tongues).

We become who we are twice: first we develop tacit knowledge, a slow, personal, and invisible process. Then we enter into a foreign space where that knowledge is different than others' and we utilize it to realize ourselves again, with witnesses.

The game presented here proposes the pursuit of social wellbeing (by psychological means) through a blend of known theories of value fulfillment - namely *eudamonia*, or 'human flourishing', accomplished through self-actualization and meaningful individual purpose; combined with desire-fulfillment and philosophical richness. An individually prescribed purpose to be executed through one's tacit knowledge and ubiquitous expertise is levied to (maybe) achieve the ends of contentment, connection and self-realization. We will take the pressure off by applying the pressure to a specific point. We will see.

## GROUNDING

Food systems are economic networks and social networks. They are constructed: dependent on subsumed, naturally occurring systems that are manipulated for the immaterial and/or material needs and/or desires of the humans tasked with developing them. It's for this reason that a concentration on the sociology of science and psychology of fulfillment can both be considered in how to improve our food systems, which are predominantly led by top-down, capitalist, centralized and regulated entities, managed by individual psychosocial motives that determine the ability for basic needs (and therefore wellbeing) to be met by the general public.

Much is made of the individuals' effects on the natural world and the expected effort to collectively learn which of our actions most heal (or do not harm) our home here on Earth. Leaving aside the scapegoating of the individual in the service of the ultimate group dynamic - a corporation! a government! - individuals can't reasonably begin to attend to the horrors society has inflicted on our external environment without making internal contact beyond our immediate social groups - where we develop habits, senses of self (or assaults on them), and relationships to place - and finding (or building) connection, satisfaction, and energy towards shared pursuits.

# Ubiquitous Expertise Steering

## Committee HOSTING MANUAL

### 1. MATERIALS - Physical / Ambient

#### SETUP AND SERVICE

serving platters, bowls, plates, etc.

candles and matches/lighter

"tablecloth"

utensils for eating and serving

glasses

napkins

organic matter of some kind for table decoration

fans? (wind)

written / printed menus (at least one)

#### SOUND

*suggestions to be provided to setter*

music in background

movie in background

news in background

bird songs in background?

storm in background?

silence?

*materials to be provided to setter*

a bowl for amplifying sound from a cell phone

optional: speaker/sound system (bluetooth or AUX with necessary adaptors)

## 2. MATERIALS - Instructional

### MENU

#### *MENU*

Something torn. A fresh vegetable or fruit (can be lightly cooked) to celebrate a great but humble accomplishment. Anything that stings of the insolence of adolescence. A protein good enough for a pregnant person. A starch for after surviving a horrific accident. A starch for after a loved one leaves. What you want the burp to taste like. A sweet that would depress a four year old. A sweet that would please a four year old. A drink for your organs. A beverage for the limp. Plenty of water.

*\*Guests are encouraged to guess which menu item corresponds to which dish served. The Host can choose whether or not to disclose this information.*

### 3. GUESTS

The meal accommodates 8 guests total, including the Host, to be assembled as follows:

Host

Host's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest 's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest 's Guest's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest 's Guest's Guest's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest 's Guest's Guest's Guest's Guest

### ROLES

Instructions for role distribution: The following titles and their accompanying descriptions (not including the Host role) should be written or printed on individual pieces of paper and put into a vessel of some kind. When all guests have arrived, the Host should instruct them to take one piece of paper each from the vessel. The assignments are to be kept secret until at least the end of the meal. Guests should consult with the Host only if stipulated in their description.

*\*If the Host is an organization, it can assign a member of the organization as the Host and follow instructions as written.*

**the Host:** prepares the meal and assembles all necessary materials prior to arrival of the guests. After guests arrive, the Host only 'hosts' in the sense of orienting people to the space and explaining the procedure of the evening (role distribution, menu reading, any support that the guests need to fulfill their roles, etc).

**setter:** sets the table (including how food is displayed and accessed) and determines ambience using the materials provided by the Host (including lighting and sound); maintains setting throughout (keeps candles lit, adjusts auditory ambience as desired,

etc). Consult the Host for materials.

**server:** ensures that all are served food adequately; explains the dishes. Even if meal is family style, the server is responsible for ensuring that everyone gets what they want and offers more of it when they've run through their first helping; keeps everyone's drinks refreshed and makes drinks using ingredients provided by host, as necessary. Consult the Host for menu briefing prior to service.

**sweeper:** clears empty/dirty plates, refreshes with new ones as necessary; tidies space throughout meal; washes dishes and ensures no mess at end of occasion. Consult the Host if necessary.

**jester:** lightens the mood throughout the conversation, especially when/if there is a lag, interruption, or conflict; alternatively or additionally, acts as provocateur.

**caretaker:** observes guests carefully and engages those who appear isolated, bored, dejected, shy; generally attends to the near invisible needs of the other guests.

**plumber:** digs into personal conversational depths; probes and dwells.

**butterfly:** moves throughout the group, paying mind to different guests throughout the meal in unique and personal, but fleeting ways.

## 4. INVITATION

The Host should share the following page (as a printed copy, handed off in person or mailed, or sent digitally if necessary) with *a single guest*. The "Host" line should be crossed off before doing so.

The Host should be sure to fill out their name and preferred contact information (email address and/or phone number) at the bottom of the invitation before sharing.

# INVITE

Host

Host's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest 's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest 's Guest's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest 's Guest's Guest's Guest

Host's Guest's Guest's Guest 's Guest's Guest's Guest's Guest

*You've been invited to the The Ubiquitous Expertise Steering Committee, a meal made of mere suggestions and tacit knowledge.\* You have to bring nothing but the wisdom you already contain and a willingness to use it however you see fit, towards an end assigned to you upon your arrival.*

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*\*Ubiquitous expertise is defined as "the kinds of expertise that all citizens of a society have."*

Consider your spot on the guest list above to be the horizontal line directly below the one most recently crossed off, always moving down the list vertically to the longer line. Upon accepting your spot, cross off your line and pass the invitation to a friend, acquaintance, or anyone you'd like to share a meal with. This process should continue until all of the lines are crossed off, amounting to 8 guests total, including the Host.

After accepting a place at the table, all guests should RSVP to the Host (contact information below), who will proceed with setting a date and time with the group after the receipt of the final guest's reply. This invite should be returned to the Host after the bottom line is crossed off.

HOST:

CONTACT:

*If you're uninterested in participating or unable to do so, please return this to the person you received it from.*