

#PalazzoGrassiatyours

Ryoko Sekiguchi

Why Do We Eat?

1. How many miles of noodles have you eaten in your life?

Let's go on a journey with udon (the recipe you make with your feet)

Have you ever thought about how many miles of noodles you've eaten in your life so far? 1 mile? 100? To the moon?

I once saw a book of photos showing the amount of food eaten by families living in various cities: no matter what the country, the amount is huge, and it's almost dizzying to picture the oceans of orange juice we drink, the avalanche of yogurt our bodies consume, and the forests of broccoli that disappear into our bellies.

Especially in the case of noodles, which tend to consist of a single strand, to create a road... leading to Rome? Or towards Karachi? Are these noodles, like skeins of wool, waiting to be untangled into a single thread so that we can map out all the roads in the world?

At any rate, it would be amusing, and even expedient (!) to adopt noodle length, rather than weight, as its unit of measurement. "Hm, I've got the munchies. I could go for 2 yards of spaghetti!" "Have some more: these noodles are ultra-thin; 12 yards is nothing!" "To stay healthy, do not consume more than 36 yards of ramen per week..." It would then be easier to imagine the hidden paths inside our imaginary bodies, inviting us to travel to unknown lands.

Let's go on an adventure with our noodles!

Here is a recipe for udon, one of the most popular noodles in Japan, prepared with wheat flour.

Udon recipe

2 ½ cups wheat flour

Flour to dust: according to preference

½ to ⅔ cups water

2 ¼ teaspoons salt

1. Dissolve the salt in water.
2. Pour the flour and half the water into a large bowl and mix. Add the rest of the water and mix again.
3. Put the dough into a plastic bag and knead it with your feet (a bit of exercise doesn't hurt when you're on lockdown).
4. Leave to rest for an hour.
5. Fold the dough several times and leave to rest for 15 minutes.
6. Dust a bit of flour on the work-top and spread the dough with a rolling-pin until it is about 1/8th of an inch thick.
7. Fold the dough and cut into thin strips about 1/8th of an inch wide.
8. Cook the noodles in boiling water for ten minutes.
9. Rinse the noodles under running water. Serve immediately (you can also serve them reheated, but they must be left to cool first in order to become nice and firm).

Of course, you can eat any length you wish (2, 5, 8 yards), but in general 3-4 yards are enough for one adult.

How many miles of noodles have you eaten in your life?

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2. What exactly happens when you put something in your mouth? Let's write a play, in dialogue with our palate

During meals, every mouthful is an encounter between two individuals: the food and your mouth. Sometimes your mouth wants to fill itself with sweet things, such as candies or nougat, as often as possible. Sometimes your mouth might even be surprised when it first encounters a product, during a trip abroad. Sometimes the encounters go marvelously well, but other times, when your mouth is tired, it might refuse to interact even with ingredients it knows well, preferring to remain alone until it feels better. Your mouth might be uncomfortable with a certain vegetable, but might allow itself to be convinced by someone else, another mouth that it loves, which might recommend your mouth to try it again. Your mouth might change over time, accept varied visitors, become more open as it learns the words of a foreign language.

By imagining the part where your body opens to the outside world and the elements that you absorb into your body as two characters, you will be able to heighten your awareness of what you eat, and these relationships will also become full of nuances and feelings.

So, let's write a play, imagining a dialogue between our food and our palate.

– First consider your mouth’s personality: is it taciturn or chatty? Open-minded or conventional? Does it love solitude or is it sociable?

– And then the meals: it might be ingredients in their natural state such as strawberries, grapes, or pieces of cucumber or carrot to crunch on... Or maybe chips, peanuts or other snacks... These encounters might take place with dishes devised by a chef, or a family meal, a cool drink or a minestrone full of different bits...

– What conversations will your mouth have with them? Friendly conversation? Lively debate? Confession? Meaningless worldly chitchat? Fierce negotiations before your mouth will allow the spoonful to enter?

– And the outcome of the event? A love story between your mouth and a dish of stew, maybe a long walk with the oysters, two silhouettes fading into the distance? What background music would be playing?

Next, let’s applaud the players...

Let’s write a short dialogue between our food and our palate, imagining it as a fragment of a theatrical play!

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3. What are the symbols that save us?

Let's draw a map of the territory (of our body)

Contrary to what we tend to think, it's not just because we like the taste of something that we eat it. Recently, many of us have baked bread at home or put leek roots in a glass of water to make them grow new leaves. As if, in order to make up for the lack of contact with other lives, we create our own little kingdom where little lives emerge, still fresh, into this world. We take in this bread, these leek shoots – these lives – in order to be as alive as they are.

We always need symbols in our food. Throughout history, the fruit and vegetables, meat and fish, and cereals, have always had multiple relationships with humans, and each culture assigns symbols to them that change as the times change. Our foodstuffs can never be reduced to mere numbers, such as “calories”, nor to nutritional value.

When our choice of food is limited, as in the situation that we are currently experiencing, we have an even greater need to be surrounded by these symbols, evidence of the richness of the outside world that we have been cut off from. It's not a bad idea to draw up a list of our cravings, or rather, a list of the cravings of each of the members of our body...

Let's draw the map of the territory of our body!

– You can draw your map whatever way you want: like a map of the world; or as an outline of your body; in color; black and white; or even as a collage of drawings or photographs...

– What do your eyes need right now, for your meals? Bright colors or a gradation of dull colors to rest your weary eyes? And your head? Does it desire symbols of renewal, of strength? Our feet yearn to walk directly on the earth, on the grass, so what foods would be able to fulfil their desire? And your throat? A flowing river, or transparent bubbles that tumble in sparkling cascades? Your nose must have a great urge right now to smell different things, since smells are a synonym of the world itself. The smell that flies at the speed of a swallow, the perfume that lingers and accompanies you for a moment... what foods would satisfy these desires?

– In this way, you will sketch out a sort of symbolic landscape of what you need for your body to feel completely alive. Hang it somewhere in your home, look at it every morning, make changes to it if your cravings change. You will gradually become more familiar with this map of the territory that represents you, and that continuously changes as your activities and your thoughts change, and then will begin to take on its own seasonal nature...

Draw the map of your body, reflecting on the things you crave and miss right now.

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4. What do other people taste like? (This is not a text on cannibalism)

Let's imagine organizing a themed evening party

When you spend your days alone, what you miss is not just the conviviality of meals shared with friends, but also the loss of the imagination of the "tastes of others". In principle, you know your own tastes well, and also those of your family: you don't buy food that you don't like, and you season your food as you please. But when you invite friends over, you end up imagining what your guests might like or not like, or dishes that might pleasantly surprise them... Do you remember the first time you invited your partner to a dinner at your place? You were maybe a little worried about whether he or she would like it... Professional cooks are those who are able to imagine the tastes of others. But for us, too, every time we cook for someone else our taste territory expands, along with our imagination of the bodies of others, and of the relationship each person has with food and cooking, including their feelings, affections and fears. This is where the subtlety, as well as the pleasure, of preparing meals for others lies.

Let's imagine that you're arranging a themed evening party!

– Imagine the guest or guests: your friends, family, strangers, youngsters, foreigners...?

Or figures from history (a dinner with Yukio Mishima)? The hero of a novel, like “Winnie-the-Pooh” (at least we know what he likes to eat)? Or living celebrities (imagine being the chef charged with preparing the official dinner for the G7)? You are free to choose your fellow-diners or guests.

– Imagine the setting: at your house, on the beach, in your school, in a café owned by one of your friends, on a picnic (we miss those so much right now!) ...

– Draw up the menu: the advantage is that we can let our imagination roam freely! We can play at being a great chef, look for historical recipes and organize a sumptuous banquet worthy of the 18th century Venetian nobility, or be the young cook in a Belgian bistro, a witch who knows how to concoct a potion for an object of desire, or you can dream of a giant birthday party, like a return to your eternal childhood...

And if you can imagine the feelings that your concoctions might elicit, you will be the winner of the grand “imaginary chef-host” prize.

Imagine your special guest. Then draw up the menu imagining to cook something that will meet their taste.

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5. What will be the “first meal” that you will eat after lockdown ends?

I often find myself posing this question, everywhere and to everyone: “If the world were to end tomorrow, what would you like to eat for your last meal?” Often, the answer is a good reflection of the person’s personality: “A couscous, because I don’t want to be alone”, “Nothing, because I have better things to do than eat on that last day”, “A rice ball and I’d be happy with my life”...

This question can be amusing when the life of the person you are asking is not in constant danger in reality, and when the question hasn’t already occurred to them.

Today, time stands still, and we are waiting for the day of release, of reunion. We remain in the heart of our home, waiting to see everyone again, and we are more likely to ask the following question:

What would be the “first meal” you would like to eat on the day of your birth? On that day, what fresh, young leaves, what fruits, what vegetables, would you like to see once again? With whom? And where?

On the grass, in the fresh air, of that I am sure.

What is the first meal you would like to eat after lockdown ends?

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