

Feed Me! An Exploration of Appetites

Food is one of the most important aspects of Malaysian life. It brings people together and keeps them together. Serving food is used to show love, signify communities and establish loyalty. Withholding food or refusing to eat someone's food is an act of control. It can demonstrate displeasure, unhappiness and exclusion. At someone's home, even if you're not hungry, you still have to eat something if you value that relationship.

On a personal and a public level, food reveals the influences and identities that we take on and sometimes who we would like to be. Whether or not you eat in stalls, hotels, at home or in coffeshops represent statements about our character and lives. Similarly, the act of feeding or hosting others reveal the character of our affections and our ambitions.

The feeding of others, informally, when we buy a drink, a meal or cook for others, shape the creation of communities, conventionally structured families or emotionally constructed communities. The act of feeding is important to maintain and foster these ties.

On a social level, feeding people, is an elaborate and structured activity. Whether it is hosting an Open House, for Hari Raya, Chinese New Year or Deepavali, for immediate family or for thousands, the ability to host an Open House and draw many people demonstrates social and economic power. Fundamentally about generosity and caring, the act of feeding others takes on a symbolic weight in a society that values loyalty. Trusting the host, entering their homes and eating their food signals respect for that relationship. Even in the fraught times that we live in, this practice has not stopped.

In a more serious vein, uncontrolled appetites have also led to tremendous destruction of natural resources and the oppression of peoples. To facilitate car travel and to enrich a few individuals, rainforests are sacrificed, migration paths of endangered animals disrupted. With the alienation of rainforests, a handful of people benefit from felling trees that have taken hundreds of years to grow, to the detriment of the rest of the earth. Internationally, the desire to control the allocation of oil has led to war and death of tens of thousands. An unchecked appetite for cheap oil and the maintenance of unsustainable ways of living have led to great suffering.

For artists, please explore the dynamics of feeding others or the desire to be fed. What kind of hungers do we address? Physical, emotional or even spiritual needs are met through the feeding of food and the intangible dimensions of protecting and providing for others.

Looking at the act of feeding on a larger scale, work may also address the culture of feasting and the exchange of loyalty for physical support. Provide for me, feed me and I will be loyal is a message that emerges from the extravagant and ritualised feasts that define social life. What kind of trade-offs does this relationship entail? Does loyalty suspend doubt or critical thinking? Can you be loyal without being blind?

Additionally, the indulgence of gross appetites for power and money have led to irreversible ecological damage to the forests, oceans and hills that surround and support us. How has our hunger been allowed to run unchecked? You may wish to consider how our individual actions have led to this situation as well as the actions of others.

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