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FEATURE

A MORE ACCEPTABLE PLEASURE: FOOD AND SEX IN FILM

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As a culture, friends, family and romantic partners can be brought together via food. Food evokes conversation, emotional responses and feelings of pleasure and intimacy with one another. Food and sex in film can represent the intimacy of eating together and the intensity of physical pleasure. The ubiquitous nature of food in cinema is evident in both classic and modern cinema, so much so that as audiences, we may not fully recognize the culture significance of food and sex within film.

In 1977, Alexander Cockburn coined the term “gastroporn” to describe the pleasurable sensation experienced when looking at food. Cinema introduced a new way of thinking about “gastroporn.” In classic and contemporary film, audiences watch the sometimes almost literal coming together of food and sex.



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The portrayal of food often took the place of sexually suggestive themes in film during the Hays Code period. During said period, food existed as an “innocent” alternative to actually portraying the sexual act.

Food in film typically functions as a form of foreplay or as an allusion to sex. Emotions and desires experienced between lovers are often projected onto scenes connected to the making, and/or consumption, of food. Food can reflect the emotions and feelings of on-screen romantic partners, creating a representation of desire and lust, one where it becomes an object between the two that contains and reflects the intimacy of the characters. Consuming food and expressing feelings of intimacy and sexuality are both highly sensorial experiences, which can reflect human feelings of love and sex. In Robin Fox's article, [“Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective”](#) (2009), she argues that food and sex are closely linked in the limbic system of the brain, which controls emotional activity. Focusing on an example of how a romantic courtship can play out in a film, a man often offers to cook/order/buy a meal as a part of their foreplay, while the woman can often be seen making breakfast the next morning, indicating they've had sex.

In regards to the parallels between food and sex, in simplistic terms, both are basic components of human survival. The link between food and sex persists because of the parallels between them. The portrayal of food often took the place of sexually suggestive themes in film during the Hays Code period. During said period, food existed as an “innocent” alternative to actually portraying the sexual act. An on-screen couple eating together signified a certain level of intimacy, existing as a representation for sex while exploring various other aspects, such as desire, sensuality and giving into temptation.

Below are some of the most notable films that have utilized food to represent sexuality or allude to sex. Some of cinema's most memorable moments involve the consumption of food as a form of foreplay or as an allusion to the act itself.



Albert Finney and Joyce Redman share a passionate and wordless meal in “Tom Jones” (1963)

In the famous, lascivious dinner scene in **Tom Jones** (1963), Tom (a young Albert Finney) and Mrs. Waters (Joyce Redman) share a lustful, wordless meal together. The pair sits across from one another and hungrily watches each other while eating one

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course after another. They display their sexual aggression/desire by snapping lobster claws, munching fruit, slurping oysters and cleaning the meat off a chicken bone. Post-meal, they run off together.

Tampopo (1985) is considered one of the best examples, regarding food and sex, and a Japanese food cult classic or, better yet, a “ramen western” (a label borrowed from the spaghetti western genre). Focused upon a small, family-owned noodle shop, the film is divided into vignettes about the relationship between love and food. One of the most erotic and notable vignettes is the egg yolk exchange. One doesn’t typically associate eggs with anything sexual, but here they certainly are. A man in a white suit attempts to seduce his lover with a raw egg, passing the yolk from his mouth into hers. This continues until it breaks in the woman’s mouth, literally leaving her with yolk all over her face.

Emotions and desires experienced between lovers are often projected onto scenes connected to the making, and/or consumption, of food.


When **Harry Met Sally** (1989) deserves honourable mention, even though it doesn’t involve food, per se. Billy Crystal tries to convince Meg Ryan he can tell if a woman is faking an orgasm. To prove him wrong, she breaks out in moans, groans and “oh yeses,” then proceeds to dig into her coleslaw. This is followed by a patron uttering the famous line, “I’ll have what she’s having.”

The infamous fridge scene in **9 ½ weeks** (1986), with a blindfolded Kim Basinger being fed by a then-handsome Mickey Rourke, is both silly and sexy. Rourke teases Basinger with just about everything he can find in the fridge, from milk to jalapeños to dousing her in honey. This seductive game, like the rest in the film, leads to a romp.


Jason Reitman’s **Labor Day** (2013) follows escaped convict Frank (Josh Brolin) as he forms a relationship with a troubled mother, Adele (Kate Winslet). During his stay with the mother and son, Frank teaches Adele how to make a peach pie. To mix the ingredients, Adele looks around for a spoon. Frank stops her and says, “Sometimes the best tool is the one attached to your body.” Frank stands behind Adele, places his hands around her and they proceed mix the ingredients together.


Food isn’t necessarily the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about **Blue is the Warmest Colour** (2013). However, it does play an integral, and allegorical, role for the emotional and sexual relationship between Emma and Adele. One of the first, and recurring, foods in the film is spaghetti Bolognese, which is regularly served at Adele’s. Adele eats with limited investment, failing to properly enjoy the dish because she’s distracted by the television. This is meant to show her immaturity, but eventually symbolises her reckless nature with a friend, love and keen curiosity to explore her sexuality. For Emma, oysters are a main delicacy at her place. They come to signify a new side of Adele, which she explores with Emma. Adele is hesitant at first to try them, but comes to enjoy them. The oysters, in this sense, represent Adele’s undiscovered/unexplored sexuality and by trying them with Emma, Adele opens up herself to her.

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The sexual tension begins in the kitchen for Aaron Eckhart and Catherine Zeta Jones in "No Reservations" (2007).

The message these films have in common is that "food is sexy." Food in films such as these represent indulgence, health and pleasure.

Some other famous films concerning food and sex include **Flashdance** (1983): Jennifer Beals and the lobster claw. **American Pie** (1999): Jason Biggs and warm apple pie.

Varsity Blues (1999): Ali Larter, nude, save for whipped cream covering her breasts and vagina, with cherries over her nipples. **No Reservations** (2007): Aaron Eckhart and Catherine Zeta Jones play two chefs whose sexual tension ignites in the kitchen.

Chocolat (2000): the city of Paris, France; Juliette Binoche; Johnny Depp; chocolate.

The connection between food and sex in cinema is inextricably linked to the principle of desire between two sexual partners. Cooking and sharing a meal is a way to establish intimacy, one that, when done correctly, requires care and attention, demonstrating to a partner that their company is valued. Food is about sex only to the extent that sex can be about love, satisfaction and friendship. As a symbolic representation, feeding someone or providing them with sustenance can be viewed as an outward expression of love and/or affection.

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