

The Way to the Heart through the Stomach:**Reading Communication as Cannibalism in *The Lunchbox* and *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi***Sambhabi Ghosh¹**Abstract:**

In this paper, I would like to explore the communication that can be enacted using the language of food, and the symbolic cannibalism in the process of understanding such language, through Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* (2013) and Masakazu Fukatsu's *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* (*Dad's Lunch Box* 2017). The language of the food (*what* one eats) is intrinsically bound up with *how* one eats (the consumption) and how one *prepares* what is to be eaten (the communication) and their interaction is crucial to the recognition that "understanding is still an assimilation" (Birnbaum and Olsson). Such assimilation facilitates what Derrida calls an "infinite hospitality" (Derrida 282)—a continuous two-way nourishment of understanding the others, as well as giving oneself to be understood by the others, using "the very notion of comprehending as an act of incorporation" (Birnbaum and Olsson). I would also like to extend this idea into the relationship of the audience with film itself—in their consumption of characters, the stories, and the cultures represented—geared towards a back-and-forth nourishment between addresser and addressee.

Keywords: food, cannibalism, function of language, Derrida, Jakobson

Novalis, in what would seem like a bizarre supposition, speaks of friendship as a form of cannibalistic assimilation. He writes:

All spiritual pleasure can be expressed through eating. In friendship, one really eats of the friend, or feeds on him. It is a genuine trope to substitute the body for the spirit – and, at a commemorative dinner for a friend, to enjoy, with bold, supersensual imagination, his flesh in every bite, and his blood in every gulp. (qtd. in Birnbaum and Olsson)

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While this may sound barbaric, one cannot ignore its resemblance to the consumption of bread and wine as Christ's body and blood. It is a rite that is largely believed to "enhance and deepen the communion of believers not only with Christ but also with one another" ("Eucharist")—an action in which one is not only 'consuming' Christ, as it may seem, but also their fellow Christians, for a deeper communion. Such cannibalistic consumption is rooted in more than just the physical eating of flesh and blood. It is associated with a larger discourse of understanding and assimilation. One is always consuming another. In our bid to understand communication, we are consuming words spoken from an orifice (the mouth) via another orifice (the ears), and assimilating them in our brains to take cognizance of any meaning that they might bear within a particular code. This transfer in between orifices that partake of a common body (language) enables us to consume and understand, as Kelly Oliver, in her reading of Derrida, points out: "All forms of identification and assimilation in relations to the Other (language, meaning, and so forth) and others (including animals, plants, rocks, and so forth) are literal and/or metaphorical forms of eating." (Oliver 460) This further reinforces Novalis' pronouncement that all "taking in" is eating, which brings us to his equation of spiritual pleasure with consumption (qtd. in Birnbaum and Olsson). Conversations, friendships, education, knowledge, aesthetic, and art are all things, amongst many others, that enrich and please our spirit—these are all enjoyments in which we "feed on" what is produced by another as well as "eat of" another person. And the consumption of literal food, its language, and the subsequent cannibalism fits neatly within this purview.

The preparation and presentation of food—the culinary arts, as it is called—is an art form that is known to bring spiritual pleasure to those practicing as well as to those consuming. Like any art form, it has its own system of syntax and semantics. Rules and practices related to the sequence of eating, postures, seating arrangements, use of hands or utensils as well as those associated with the cooking of food and their aesthetic presentation point to the specific linguistic code that food is embedded in. How does this language of food facilitate communication, and the subsequent cannibalism, in terms of understanding and comprehension? For that, one can hark back to Jakobson's functions of language. They include the Emotive function from the side of the addresser, the Conative function on the side of the addressee, the Referential function on part of the context, the Poetic function or the

message itself, the Metalinguistic function and the Phatic function.¹ It is understood that these functions relate mostly to poetry, literature, and to verbal communication (although not exclusively), where a speaker and a listener exist. However, it is possible to extend these functions to consumption as well, where a giver and a receiver exist. *What* we eat (language that is exchanged between orifices) is intrinsically bound up with *how* we eat (consumption) and how it is *prepared* for eating (communication). Additionally, the message (food) is largely influenced by the relationship between the addresser (maker/cook) and the addressee (eater). The communication between a parent and child would be markedly different from that between partners and would thus require their message to be specially crafted with relation to the linguistic code it is part of—in the same way that the poetic function influences the structure of the language around it. This opens up the possibility of what Derrida understands as an “infinite hospitality” (Derrida 282). Eating, according to Derrida, must be a two-way process, whereby the eater does not only selfishly nourish themselves but also provides the possibility for the other to gain nourishment. Language acts in a similar manner in which the addresser and the addressee seek to enrich each other by understanding the messages that pass through a common communication channel; it is in this way that one is “*learning and giving to eat, learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat*” (Derrida 282). In many cultures, cannibalism is practiced somewhat along the same principles—while it nourishes the receiving body (the Self), it also pays homage and respect to the giver (the Other). On the other hand, the giver lends itself to be consumed, as the receiver opens itself up for that incorporation. Food, too, helps perform a similar function, where the communication operates in a nexus. First, the relationship between the addresser and the addressee is established along the registers of kinship, seniority, marital status, and such others. Secondly, the addresser understands the personhood of the addressee and constructs a message (i.e., food) according to the response they wish to receive from them through the consumption of this message. For example, a person could make the addressee’s favourite food on a special occasion to convey their affection towards the person, hoping for the message to elicit joy and satisfaction on the part of the receiver. On the other end, the addressee deciphers this received message – given that it follows a recognizable code—and performs an equally expressive non-verbal action on the basis of the personhood of the addressor and communicates it for their consumption. Thus, the addressee would perhaps choose to finish the food entirely, a message that, when

consumed by the addresser, would indicate that their efforts evoked the desired response in the addressee. The giver and the receiver then are able to assimilate one another through a spiritual enjoyment of the literal consumption of food and a figurative consumption of each other. *The Lunchbox* and *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* explore the various ways in which the consumption of food, as a substitute to the exchange of words in between orifices, facilitates the consumption of one another in a symbolic cannibalism.

Masakazu Fukatsu's *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* (*Dad's Lunch Box*, 2017) explores the relationship between a father and his daughter through food and eating. The film starts with literal food as well as with allusions to eating. It begins with the frame of a man drinking from a cup and telling someone to take care of themselves. As this person, a woman, gets up from her seat, she tells the man, "Look after Midori. She has a weak constitution. Her diet needs...". She is unable to finish as the man strongly asserts that he knows and will do the needful (*Papa no Obentō*, 00:00:01 – 00:00:40). This begins Mr. Otsu's heart-rending journey towards taking care of Midori, his daughter, through one of the most difficult jobs of his life—making her *bentō*. In Japan, *bentō* is typically a packed lunch that is carried by students to their schools, employees to their offices, as well as by people on their outings.² These *bentō* boxes have specific preparation and presentation techniques, generally prepared by the mother (or the woman) of the household—a language that Otsu is completely unaware of, wherein begins his journey of understanding the language of the *bentō* and communicating in it. This brings with it a reformulation of the registers of kinship between Otsu and Midori—Otsu now has to replace the absent mother in Midori's life by taking on the role of the caretaker and the *bentō* maker. On the other hand, Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* follows the lives of Ila and Saajan who come in contact with each other when Ila's *dabba*,³ meant for her husband Rajiv, is mistakenly taken to Saajan, and this soon culminates into a unique interaction. The story begins with Ila who, on realizing that her *dabba* has gone to the wrong address, writes an explanation to Saajan, the unwitting receiver of the lunchbox. She thanks him for returning the *dabba* empty and explains that it was in fact meant for her husband. She adds a further detail about how she spent a few expectant hours in the hopes that her husband would praise her cooking. Having failed the first attempt, she tries again, this time cooking Rajiv's favourite food, *paneer* or cottage cheese (*The Lunchbox*, 00:20:50 –

00:21:20). The *dabbawalas* mistake (or is it?) again brings Ila's food to Saajan—food that is meant for Rajiv. This opens up a new communication channel between our two protagonists. From then onwards, the *dabbas* begin to be accompanied by letters where they exchange details about their lives—a beginning of an “infinite hospitality” (Derrida 282). Saajan learns about Ila's yearning for her husband's love; Ila recognizes Saajan's loneliness following his wife's death. With such a turn of events, the relationship between Ila and Saajan is unconsciously reformulated—they both have to act, not as a replacement, but as a substitute, to each other's partners. These reformulations directly impact the nature of the communication enacted through food. The presence and the absence of food in the lunchbox remains the poetic function in both the films, while the metalinguistic code around it adjusts accordingly. The filled tiffin from the side of the addresser (emotive) carries with it the affections that are reciprocated through the empty tiffin box from the side of the addressee (conative), as the existing registers of kinship shift. Otsu's initial failure to reach out to Midori was rooted in his inability to understand the language of the *bentō*—they were unable to communicate because of their inability to understand each other's metalinguistic code. A *bentō* meant for students is generally expected to be in colourful or cute lunchboxes—with the youngster attraction to the Japanese *kawaii* culture⁴—with equally colourful food inside. Hence, *bentō* can be made with as many ingredients as desired, but they must be filling. However, the catch with *bentō* is that they should be filled with food that has been cooled down. Since they are prepared much earlier and are consumed later in the afternoon, the *bentō* must have food that tastes good even when cold. Unaware of these specificities, Otsu fails to communicate to his daughter his message of affection through his insipid food, which causes further estrangement between the two. It takes an intervention from a female colleague and late night video tutorials for Otsu to readjust the metalinguistic code he wishes to embed his *bentō* in, to further connect and communicate with his daughter. A similar readjustment occurs between Ila and Saajan. On receiving the *dabba* and the letter from Ila for the second time, Saajan writes back, “Ila, the food was very salty today” (*The Lunchbox* 00:22:10 – 00:22:50). While there is nothing necessarily wrong in this trite response, this is not something Ila would want if the addresser was her husband. As a sign of her disapproval, she cooks extremely spicy food the next day, which helps Saajan give his thoughts a few more words, effectively changing their respective communication methods. In this changed

metalinguistic codes, the incorporation of food translates into a gradual incorporation of one another. It enacts a journey—from the stomach to the heart—of cannibalism through communication, of protagonists who “eats of a friend, or feeds on him” in a bid to comprehend one another (qtd. in Birnbaum and Olsson).

The beauty of *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* (2017) lies in such a journey that both Otsu and Midori undertake. Otsu does not simply give Midori food to eat. He gives himself to be understood—that he is trying to love, care, and form a meaningful relationship with his daughter, as a replacement of the mother. It is also a journey where Midori too gives herself to be understood—that she appreciates and respects the effort that her father is putting into her well-being. It is also a journey where they gradually come to understand each other in a circumstance where barely any words are exchanged. They are only ever able to explain themselves through the making and consumption of literal food. This process of understanding begins at the moment when Otsu starts making Midori’s *bentō*, but it is tasteless and colourless. Despite these obvious drawbacks, Midori finishes her tiffin entirely. When Otsu comments in surprise, “But you ate it all”, Midori casually says, “What could I do?” (*Papa no Obentō*, 00:07:45 – 00:07:55). While it does not seem to have any obvious significance, I think the importance of this scene becomes evident at a later point that involves Midori’s boyfriend. Infatuated by the stirrings of a first love, Midori wanted to make sure that her boyfriend also ate proper lunch instead of eating bread at a kiosk. She requests her father, who has achieved some level of proficiency in the culinary arts, to make her two lunchboxes. Undoubtedly, she lies about the identity of the second lunch enthusiast, claiming that it is a friend who is a fan of her father’s cooking. Delighted, Otsu does everything Midori asks of him, including adding more meat to the lunches or skipping eggplant. However, on one occasion, the boyfriend does not finish the lunch and returns a full *bentō* to Midori, citing a lack of time. To which, Midori says, “[d]on’t leave Dad’s lunch”, and eats the lunch herself (*Papa no Obentō*, 00:44:00 – 00:45:40). This happens on another occasion, when she discovers her boyfriend cheating on her. She takes both *bentō* boxes to school, and her friends help her finish the lunches as she gradually tears up. What is significant about that moment of returning a filled *bentō*? The answer lies in Midori’s calling it “dad’s lunch”. It is the same reason she finished even the most burnt omelets. By “dad’s lunch”, Midori does not

simply mean a lunch made by her dad—it is an extension of her father. By finishing the food, no matter how flavorless, or how large the quantity, Midori showed respect towards Otsu.⁵ In the complete consumption of the *bentō*, Midori expresses her gratitude towards Otsu who, in the absence of the mother, was trying his best to take care of Midori, whether by staying up late at night to learn cooking, or taking advice from a female colleague, or by shopping for groceries on his way back home. In consuming the *bentō*, Midori not only eats of the cooked food, but also feeds on her father's affection towards her, which helps her understand him better. The emotive function in Otsu's *bentō* is reciprocated by Midori through her praises and her finished lunches. However, this communication channel that Midori builds through the *bentō* is also her way of giving herself to be understood by her father, which Otsu is unable to decipher initially. He is not able to feed on or eat of Midori's affections in the empty *bentō* boxes—he simply assumes that it was because she liked the food—and is thus unable to understand her. This is where the language of food differs significantly from verbal communication. Otsu cannot employ the phatic function of Jakobson's model to test if their communication channel is functional. He can only continue to make his *bentō*, through a continued process of trial and error, hoping that the message will stir the desired response in the addressee. It is not until Midori asks her father to stop making the second *bentō* that Otsu understands what was happening in the silences of Midori's words. He listens to her crying to bed that night. (*Papa no Obentō*, 00:50:15 – 00:52:30). That moment opens up a new channel of communication and consumption. The words that Otsu and Midori could not exchange in verbal speech come to be compiled in notes that accompany her *bentō*. Even his wish for her seventeenth birthday is spelt out on her food with seaweed. This new communication takes its ultimate form in the final few sequences. Otsu, saddened by Midori's graduation bringing his *bentō* routine to a halt, writes her a heartfelt letter expressing love and gratitude for the last three years of Midori enjoying his cooking. The words bring tears to Midori's eyes as she begins eating her food and praising it as delicious. In return, Midori too puts a letter in the lunchbox, expressing her gratitude, and naming her father's *bentō* the best in the world. The film then continues to show an adult Midori, who is heading off to university, make her first ever *bentō* for her father. Otsu then goes to the roof of his office and enjoys the meal while verbally praising the taste (*Papa no Obentō*, 01:04:00 – 01:10:20). The emotive and conative functions of this non-verbal communication between Otsu and Midori operate on the

recognition that the *bentō* is not simply a box of food, but a repository of emotions, thereby making the message (poetic function) of love, affection, and respect easier to decipher. For both, the *bentō* is an extension of their personhood; the consumption of which entailed a consumption of each other. It is this mutual feeding, a symbolic cannibalism, that opens up the path of their comprehension of each other, through the language of the *bentō* itself.

A nested sequence of such symbolic cannibalisms is characteristic of *The Lunchbox*. It operates on multiple reformulations of relationships and communication, all of which unfold through the language of the literal food. This nested chain begins with Mrs. Deshpande, the resident who lives on the floor above Ila. The curious Mrs. Deshpande never physically appears on the screen; instead we are greeted by Bharati Achrekar's inimitable voice. We are told that her husband is in a coma for the last fifteen years, and has been staring at an Orient ceiling fan the whole time. Mrs. Deshpande is of the opinion that his life is stuck in the fan, and gets herself an electric generator to keep the fan running. While the parallel between Mrs. Deshpande and Ila's mother, desperately feeding on whatever remains of their husbands, is obvious, another level of consumption opens up⁶—that between Mrs. Deshpande and Ila. Their relationship functions only through food—Mrs. Deshpande sends Ila ingredients in a basket hung through the window and tells her how to win her husband's heart; she also guides her in responding to Saajan, while playing tapes that Ila wants to listen to. In this relationship, Ila eats of Mrs. Deshpande through her ingredients, her suggestions about cooking and winning the love of a husband, and her guidance, whereby Mrs. Deshpande acts as the substitute for a mother. Mrs. Deshpande, on the other hand, feeds on Ila's affection, her obedience, and her willingness to listen to her, where Ila becomes a substitute for a daughter. This mutual feeding on and eating of seeks to fill up the insatiable void inside both these women, imprisoned in loveless households.

This cannibalistic communication between Ila and Mrs. Deshpande contributes to the next sequence—that between Ila and Saajan. It is under Mrs. Deshpande's advice that Ila sends the first letter—as Mrs. Deshpande says, “Thank you *toh banta hai na*” (You should thank him) (*The Lunchbox*, 00:21:20 – 00:21:30). It is this letter that shapes the new registers of kinship between Ila and Saajan—that of substitute partners. With passing time and letters, both Ila and Saajan begin understanding each other's metalinguistic code—a communication

that takes the form of a mutual feeding on and eating of. Saajan here eats of Ila's *dabba*, but also feeds on her story and perhaps a companionship. Ila too eats of Saajan's company to replace the emptiness left in the absence of her husband, while simultaneously feeding on the validation of having someone return her *dabba* empty. This mutual feeding is perhaps most explicit in the scene with Ila's mother, grieving her husband's passing away (*The Lunchbox*, 01:27:10 – 01:28:10). "Ab sirf bhook lag rahi hain" (now, I'm hungry, that's all)—these words from her at the time that the corpse of her husband is being tended to might seem socially incongruent, but it has a deeper meaning to it; a way for her to grieve her husband and the vacuum that she had been feeling in her life in the absence of love as well as the loss of a communication. With these words, she explains the relationship between her husband and her—they were deeply in love when Ila was born, but with her husband's growing ill health, the daily routine of taking care of a semi-vegetative patient made her significant other despicable to her. There was no longer any mutual feeding as her mother continued to give her all to someone who no longer responded equally. While Ila's mother continued to care for her father and tend to his needs, she learnt of him and gave to him, but there was no reciprocation from her husband's end—perhaps, this draws a parallel to Ila's own collapsing marriage. Her mother's apparent ramblings simply highlight the complete end of any possibility for her to eat of and feed on someone's affection or love. The hunger arises out of her inability to both give herself to be fed on, or feed on someone else—a hunger that makes Ila understand the impossibility of a future with Rajiv, a moment where she recognizes the failure of the phatic function to keep their communication going.

This communication between Ila and Saajan branches out into another symbolic cannibalism between Saajan and his new colleague, Sheikh. Sheikh is a new employee at Saajan's firm, meant to replace Saajan when he retires. Saajan continues to ignore and avoid Sheikh who is the constant reminder of his imminent end of work life. Through a few moments of indignation and reconciliation, however, they soon learn to work with each other, to the point that Sheikh begins to share Saajan's lunch. This, of course, poses a pertinent question—what is the cannibalistic relation between Sheikh and Ila? Does Sheikh too have to act as Ila's substitute husband, if he is also partaking of the same food as Saajan? The answer is in the negative. The communication between Sheikh and Saajan directly takes on Novalis'

idea of the spiritual pleasure of friendship and the assimilation of the friend. Sheikh's partaking of Saajan's food opens up another layer of mutual feeding – he is eating of Saajan's tiffin and feeding on Saajan's experience in the office; Saajan is eating of Sheikh's labour and feeding on his company. However, his comprehension of Ila differs from that of Saajan. The code within which Ila and Saajan have been communicating is unknown to Sheikh, but not altogether unfamiliar. He does not understand the language infused in Ila's cooking—a language directed specifically towards Saajan—but he eventually equates it with his relationship with his fiancée. That is why when Saajan claims that he has a girlfriend named Ila, Sheikh finds no issue in assuming that she is the marvelous cook who feeds them both. For Ila and Sheikh, the symbolic cannibalism lies in their feeding on and eating of a common body, that of Saajan.

The shifting registers of kinship in *The Lunchbox* bring us to a crucial difference between the two films. In *Papa no Obentō*, the reformulation of the relationship between Otsu and Midori continue to function along the familiar registers of guardian-ward bond. The symbolic cannibalism here seeks to strengthen the existing affection between the two. *The Lunchbox*, however, makes it difficult to categorize any of the new relationships. Are Saajan and Ila lovers? Is Mrs. Deshpande acting as the mother when she helps set off the chain of these cannibalisms with the first letter? Does Sheikh, as an orphan, think of Saajan as a father figure, to the extent that he invites Saajan to his wedding as a substitute for his family? Where does that put his relationship with Ila, if any? Questions abound in our inability to name the registers of these kinships. And yet, the realism of these films is not lost on us—beyond the known registers of connections, we regularly interact with the world through assimilation and consumption, of our surroundings and of one another.

Such symbolic cannibalisms also extend beyond the narratives of the films and to the existence of cinema as an industry. The industry feeds on an urban, educated, young audience who are expected to eat of films designed specifically to suit their tastes. This too operates on a nested sequence of interactions. By keeping the audience in mind, the filmmakers create films that are decipherable by the viewers, putting them within a recognizable linguistic code. On the other hand, the audience understands the stories, characters, cultures, and perspectives, and assimilates them through their ability to relate to the narrative unfolding

before them. Although every person may take away a different meaning from the product, every new interpretation adds on to the subsequent viewings—thus consuming multiple meanings. From the other end, filming techniques of editing, point-of-view shots, and the invisible fourth wall consume the audience, allowing them an escape from their routine tribulations, which keeps the audience coming back for more. This chain of comprehension feeds into the larger structure of the industry that reorients itself according to the need of its primary consumers in order to keep the machinery functional and relevant. To that end, films often take the existing repertoire of significations and modify them to suit the tastes of changing times. *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* takes the typical slice-of-life family narrative and situates it within contemporary concerns of single parenthood, familial schism, and teenage apprehensions. *The Lunchbox* takes the predictable tropes of a hetero-romantic story and does away with all of its stereotypical characterizations and larger-than-life melodramatic narrative. These stories then consume of the world that exists outside and incorporates such narratives to make it more palatable within a functional communication channel between addresser and addressee.⁷

Derrida points out a difference in the methods of consumption between human and animals in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. He says, "Animals have a negative relation to the object because they simply swallow it. Human negativity, however, is reflected: man does not in fact devour the object, but rather incorporates it abstractly, and thereby creates the inner space that is the subject." (Birnbaum and Olsson) The object consumed gains its meaning through our consumption, and this consumption gives us our consciousness—the Self in relation to the Other. Because of this, it doesn't matter what one eats (as all things are to be consumed to be understood), but what matters is that one is "eating well". And such eating well is embedded in "respect for the other at the very moment when, in experience one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, understood ideally..." (Derrida 283). These cannibalisms do not entail a complete consumption of the Other into the Self, neither does it constitute a silencing of the Other. Such cannibalisms, when done respectfully and not as "merely a habit", contributes to our perception of the world and of others (Oliver 462). Otsu and Midori as well as Ila and Saajan do not devour one another negatively as would an animal; instead they create a space in which they are able to meditate on their

consumption and understand others, as well as give themselves to be consumed in the same way and be understood. And the object that allows for such self-consciousness to be facilitated is literal food—a language that is not only limited to humans, but takes on multiple codes depending on the communication channel and speakers.

Endnotes

¹ For further reading, see essays by Roman Jakobson in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge, pp. 31-61

² *Bentō* can be of different types, depending on the purpose, place of sale, and consumer. Generally, *bentō* carries rice or noodles, grilled or simmered fish and meat, or fried items along with vegetables and omelet.

³ The *dabba* or the lunchbox in Mumbai is served by a city-wide network of carriers known as *dabbawalas* who work to provide lunches to the employees in offices. For further reading, see Stefan Thomke's "Mumbai's Model of Service Excellence", from November 2012 issue, Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org//mumbais-model-of-service-excellence>

⁴ The *Kawaii* culture in Japan refers to people, items, animals, even anime and *manga* characters that represent cuteness. It has in fact become a marker of Japanese aesthetics where cuteness is preferred over sophistication or beauty. Harajuku city is known for its abundance of *kawaii* merchandise and fashion which is popular mostly among the youth. To the other parts of the world, *kawaii* is nearly synonymous with Japan. There are many different types of *kawaii* ranging from ugly and grotesque, to dreamy and sexy. *Kawaii* is also used to bring focus upon taboo topics such as depression and suicide in Japan (*yami kawaii*).

⁵ While title of the film uses the more Anglicized 'papa' to refer to the father, it uses *obentō* to refer to the lunchbox. *O~* and *go~* prefixes are part of Japanese honorific language and are used to sound more polite and formal. The prefixes are generally used to show respect towards others, and also to refer to things that belong to or are being given to others. Here, the use of the term *obentō* instead of the casual *bentō* highlights Midori's association of the lunchbox with her father's personhood, thus deserving of the same respect reserved for her father.

⁶ During Ila's visit to her mother before her father's death, her mother claims that if her son was alive she would not have to worry about medical bills. The grief of the loss of her son, coupled with her vapid life of caring for her ailing husband, has further estranged her from her daughter, thus making way for Mrs. Deshpande to fill the vacuum.

⁷ Although outside the scope of this paper, the influence of *rasa* theory on Bollywood could also provide another layer of symbolic cannibalism, both within the narrative of the films as well as with the audience. Bharata uses the metaphor of food in explicating the relish of the Dominant States in the minds of the spectator of the play (*sahrdaya*), experienced through the help of gestures performed on stage. Following the various relationships explicated in the films, the audience may experience the arousal of *rasa* by virtue of their identification with characters, enacting a different communication between cinema and its viewers.

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