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/ South Korea / Seoul

What does it mean to eat lunch twice in one day?

In the course of a recent airplane trip, I ended up **traveling backwards in time**. The flight left Incheon, Korea at 6:00 pm on Monday, October 23, and it landed about seven hours earlier in Vancouver, Canada. By the time I had collected my suitcase, it was still Monday, and about noonish. Hungry, I ate again: my second lunch of the day. (I had also eaten one dinner and a couple of quasi-breakfasts in between, just to confuse matters.)

The first of these midday repasts was at 원조1호장충동할머니집 (Wonjo ilho Jangchungdong Halmeoni Jib), one of a series of restaurants along Seoul's famed **Pig Trotter Alley** that serve the Korean specialty, jokbal, the eponymous pork part. (The "alley" is actually a stretch of Jangchungdong-ro, a main road not far from Dongguk University.) With the enthusiastic support of UNISG master alumnus, Sam Park, I thought it would be a nice final taste of the city in which I had just spent seven food-and-teaching-packed days. The Slow Food Asia Pacific Festival was now over, my mind and body were happily saturated with ferments both solid and liquid, and I wanted a little lingering collagen to help float me over the Pacific. Kimchi'd turnips, pickled radish, chile-soy paste, some lettuce and garlic shoots, and a shared bottle of Cass beer complemented our toothsome and fatty foot.

A couple of airplane meals later—chicken and steamed rice with single-serve kimchi and a chickpea-and-celery salad (!), and later, shrimp-fried rice with "seasonal" sliced fruit (apple, watermelon, orange)—I was back on land at the Vancouver airport. I had some time between flights, and I was feeling a little peckish. It was lunchtime, after all.

And so my second midday meal on October 23 was the following: green tea, an apple, a clementine, and a slightly rumbled **fruit-and-nut bar** that I had been carrying around for weeks. It was a very different kind of lunch: functional, lean, and kind of disappointing. I sat in YVR's departure area, near the large, fabulous sculpture by renowned Haida artist Bill Reid, "**The Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe**". Two Sikh men sat next to me on the bench, one talking loudly on his phone, while somewhere in the near distance I heard a franco-québécois voice worrying about departure times. In front of me a young couple from Surrey tried to quiet their squalling, pink-faced infant. I was decidedly no longer on Jokbal Alley.

Reflecting on these two same-day lunches, it made me wonder about the significance of such an occurrence. Historically, the midday meal has often been the largest of the day, a break from work to recharge mental-manual resources. In many places, it serves as a chance to socialize, often with non-family members during the week, or, during the weekend, with extended family and friends. In many Latin countries, it is followed by a nap, a wholly civilized addendum. Lunch can be thought of as a rhythm shift in the timeline of the day, a full-stop (or at least a notable semicolon) that punctuates our waking hours.

Yet in societies where professional productivity is highly (and sometimes over-) valued, lunch is increasingly a quick break for calories, taken quickly at the desk or on the run between noontime errands. (Certainly both Seoul and Vancouver are sites of this kind of high-speed business culture.) A little fruit, a protein-object, some rehydration, and you're off again towards the next item on your iCal. These kinds of meals are more meager in their restorative qualities—a quick comma or em-dash, to continue my **punctuative** imagery. They make you miss the heartier engagement of tugging at pig skin and muscle, slurping up pickle juice and spices, smiling at chopstick fumbles. (Well, they make me miss such things.)

How one does one's lunch might therefore serve as a kind of self/cultural marker. Long and leisurely, meaty and alcoholized? Or pre-packaged and ascetic, light and dry? It highlights other elements of the ecology in which that meal sits. A lunch is a performance of the space that the eaters are in, their expectations both before and after, the companions who agree (or not) to share the same food, and the needs of the body, mind, psyche, and gut. My extended October 23 was, perhaps, a curious kind of cusp, a foodish boundary object between two of the ecologies I had occupied (and that had occupied me) that day.

In the intervening time since my two-lunch Monday, my midday meal has reverted to the second type, the one typified by quick and simple. I am getting back to getting on with headwork, rather than living in the bodywork moments of (my) Seoul. I miss the way I was eating there—not just for the sensations and effects that those foodscapes presented, but because of **the ways those meals performed me** differently. I **sensed myself as different**: the ways I smelled, the way I looked, the quality of my voice, the movements of my body. And now, I am different again.

What does it mean to eat two lunches in one day? What kind of world must we inhabit, to be so different in space and time, while also remaining the same?

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