

# Nasu at the end of the world: eggplant, memory, diaspora



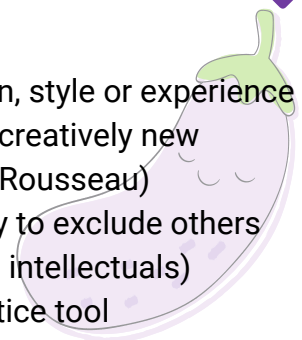
Audrey Jiang

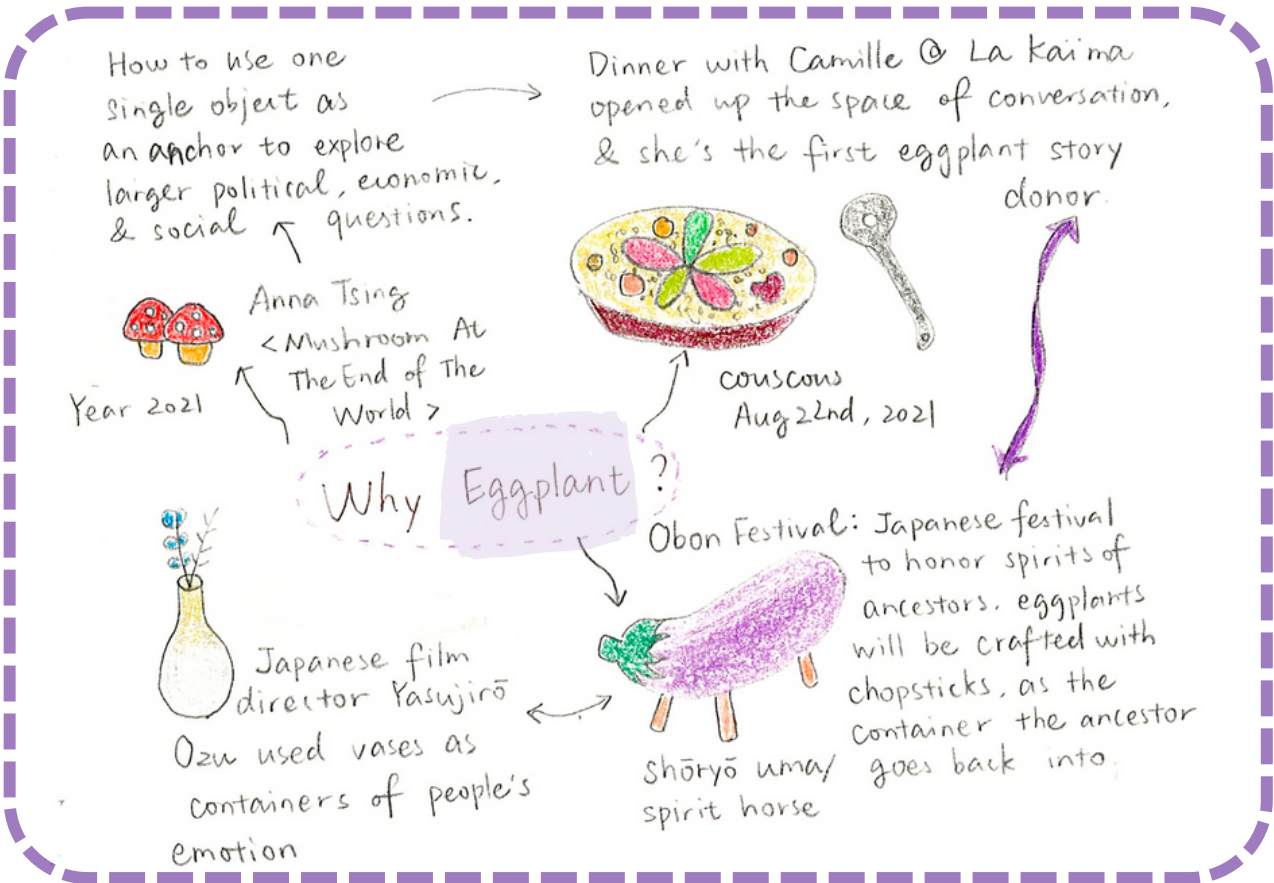
This project “was born from the **body** of its author” (Virginia Woolf, 1929), from her allergy-suffering nose, tethered teeth, (un)cultured taste bud, and broken stomach. My interest in food and related themes comes from a lack of, or deficiency of food-related memories in my childhood. The experience of being a Chinese diaspora for the past 7 years repositioned **food** and **stomach** as the center of my emotion and identity, as I realized more and more that “my stomach and its microbial colonies grew up in China”. Food connects us with self-realization, personal history, identity politics, everyday practice, and it is what constructs us materially and spiritually. It is also the “mnemonic device that brings people together” (Katrina).

In this project, I pursued the questions of “**what is authenticity**” and “**who owns the authenticity**” through tasting, understanding, exploring and reflecting on the eggplant dishes in ethnic food restaurants in Montreal. The investigation has two key components: 1) conducting **ethnographic** interviews with the people behind the dish that affectively moved me; 2) sharing knowledge through the delivery of an eggplant-themed **workshop** that’s inspired from performance art and friend’s dinner gathering. Framing my end-product as a workshop instead of an academic paper or presentation is an attempt to share knowledge in a more accessible and embodied way. I believe many formats of knowledge are more accessible through **bodily experience** than intellectual comprehension, as “the body sometimes lives in a world that the mind cannot yet think, the tongue articulate, or the fingers inscribe” (Krishnenu Ray, 2016).

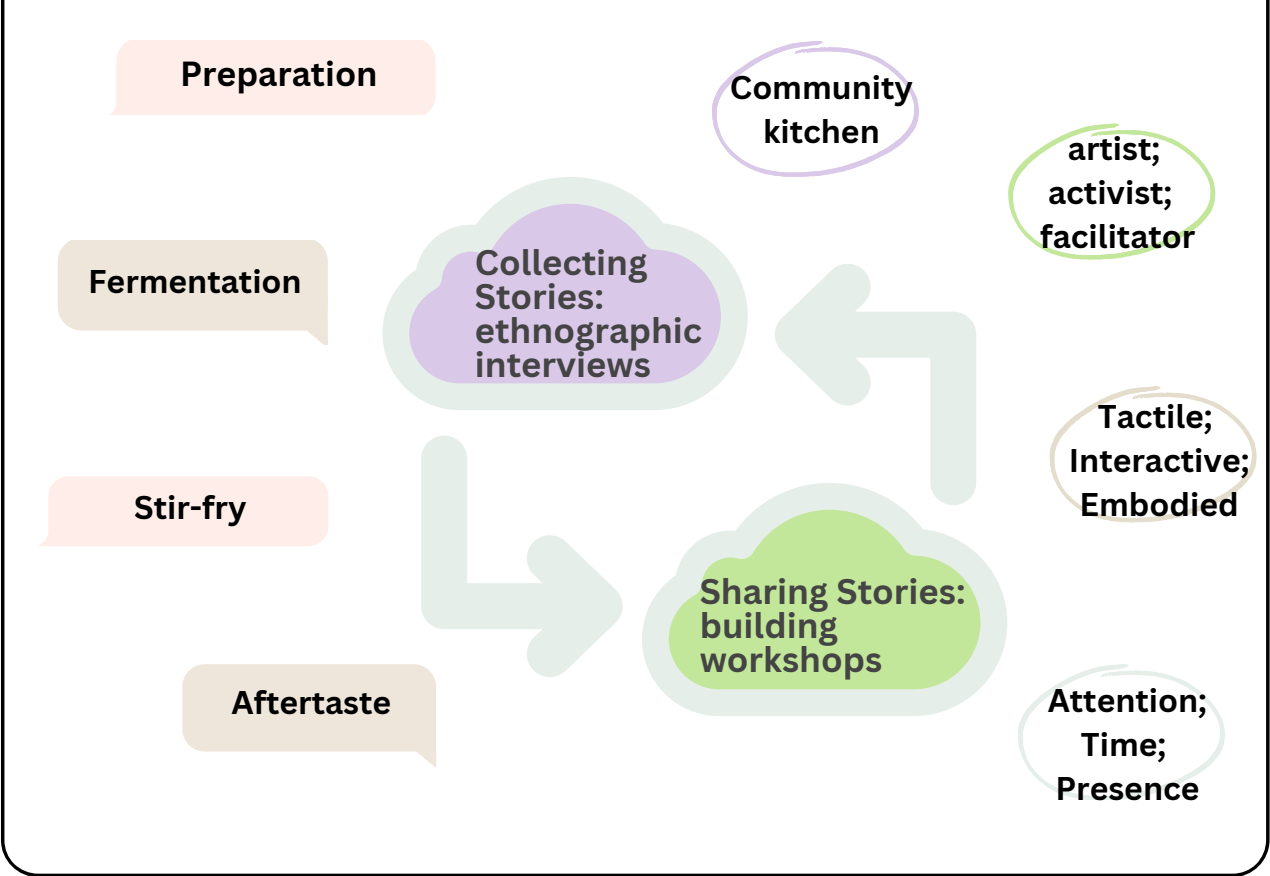
## authenticity?

- artwork’s presence in time and space, and a unique existence in the place it happens to be (Walter Benjamin)
- a sympathetic vibe between consumers and the objects of their desire (Sharon Zukin)
- to describe origin, style or experience
- historically old | creatively new
- close to nature (Rousseau)
- moral superiority to exclude others (18th C. German intellectuals)
- as a power-practice tool





# Methodology

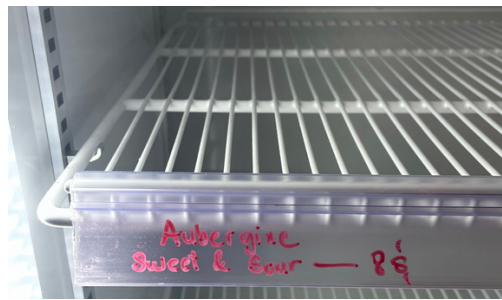
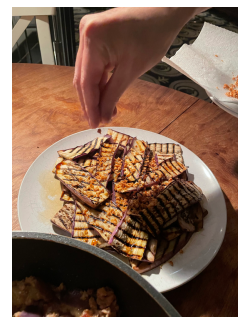


# FINDINGS

"Authenticity does not exist once it's outside of its origin."

"Authenticity of food for me is coherent with me as an authentic person. I will not serve food to my customer which I do not eat myself."

"The Shanghainese cuisine is definitely of shanghai flavor, but the flavor of shanghai is not necessarily Shanghainese cuisine."



## How did your approach or question evolve throughout your journey?

In the beginning, I thought I was trying to be an eggplant dish hunter in Montreal. Towards the end, I realized I am searching for "home", whether it's the physical existence of the Asian Canadian home of my friend at West Island, or the three restaurants I have opportunity/ honor to interact with, who deliver the sense of home or home-cooking through different vessels.

My question evolved from "what is authenticity in ethnic restaurants?" to "what is home and how to deliver a sense of home through a restaurant context?". I also expanded my scope from eggplant dishes in restaurants to people's households, eventually I also broadened the recipe collection to daily conversations, such as with one of the employees at the textile shop where I gathered the tablecloth material for my eggplant wokshop. This process makes me realize how my project is participatory by nature.

Moreover, throughout the process I also shifted my attention from sensory ethnographic techniques to conduct the interview to developing my eggplant wokshop, as there are plenty of things unknown/new to me in terms of creating an experience, such as how to curate a safe space for participants, how to incorporate touch in the process. It has been a very wonderful learning journey with the help of many people inside and outside of B21.

The Sock is Absent

