

# Food, Culture & Identity

Pitzer College  
Anthropology 031  
Fall 2002

MW 1:15 – 2:30 pm

Prof. Heather Paxson

## Course description:

Recent food movements — from veganism to anti-cancer diets, from international factory farming to protests against genetically modified food — bring into focus new linkages between what we eat and who we are. Reading anthropological and literary classics as well as recent writing on food and eating, we will explore a cross-cultural range of identities and socialities built through food production, preparation, and consumption. We will pay particular attention to how people use food to develop a sense of themselves as ethical beings. How do people — through what, and how, we do and do not eat — construct moral relationships with our bodies, with other people, with our cultural histories, with animals, with the environment?

## Course Requirements:

short written assignment 1	10% of final grade
short written assignment 2	15%
midterm exam	25%
research paper	40%
participation	10%

In lieu of a final exam, students will write a 10-page research paper. This paper can be an in-depth study of the foodways or cuisine in a particular society, an investigation of a particular food (its history, preparation, use, mythology, significance, etc.), or research on some other food-related topic of interest to the student. Papers must be guided by some aspect of anthropological theory and analysis. A list of possible topics will be distributed. A thesis statement, outline and initial bibliography will be due roughly a month before the end of the course. Students will present their research findings to the rest of the class.

## Required Texts:

Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste* (originally published in 1825). Penguin Classic Edition.

Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds. *Food and Culture: A Reader* (1997). Routledge.

David Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (2001). Berg.

Sydney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1995 edition). Penguin.

James L. Watson, ed. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia* (1998). Stanford.

Books are available for purchase at Huntley bookstore, and will be on reserve in the library. All other readings are available as a Course Pack on sale at Huntley.

Outline of Readings and Assignments:

Wed. 9/4 Introduction to the course

Mon. 9/9 Why is the study of food central to anthropology?

read: Margaret Mead, *The Changing Significance of Food*, pp. 11-19 in *Food and Culture* (FC)

Roland Barthes, *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption*, pp. 20-27 in FC

**PART 1: HISTORICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO FOOD, EATING AND GASTRONOMY**

Wed. 9/11 on the sense of taste

read: Brillat-Savarin (1825) *The Physiology of Taste*, 13-19; [skim 29-35]; 36-70

MFK Fisher (1943) from *The Gastronomical Me*, pp. 3-35.

Krishnendu Ray (2002) *What I Learned from M.F.K. Fisher about Living after 9/11*. *Gastronomica* 2(3):15-17. To be distributed in class.

written assignment: food memory

Write a 1-2 page, informal description of a food memory, preferably from your childhood. This could be a memory of tasting or liking/disliking a particular food, or it could be a memory focused on a particular eating event, collective or individual. Pay attention to as many senses as you can invoke to evoke this memory. DUE MONDAY 9/16.

Mon. 9/16 civilizing the appetite: the rise of gastronomy

read: Brillat-Savarin, 132-145; 155-171

Stephen Mennell, *On the Civilizing of Appetite*, 315-337 in FC

Wed. 9/18 aesthetics and aesthetes: eating and the ethical body

read: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fast, Feast, and Flesh: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, 138-158 in FC

Brillat-Savarin, 176-183; 205-225

Hillel Schwartz (1986) *Ritual and Romance. In Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies and Fat*. Pp. 3-19. New York: The Free Press.

**PART 2: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THINKING FOOD**

Mon. 9/23 structuralism: food is good to think

- read: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Culinary Triangle*, 28-35 in FC
- Mary Douglas, *Deciphering a Meal*, 36-54 in FC
- Wed. 9/25 functionalism: food is good to eat ... in certain circumstances
- read: Marvin Harris, *The Abominable Pig*, 67-79 in FC
- E. N. Anderson, *Traditional Medical Values of Food*, 80-91 in FC
- Mon. 9/30 symbolic-social analyses: what people do with food
- read: Anna Meigs, *Food as a Cultural Construction*, 95-106 in FC
- Marjorie Devault, *Conflict and Deference*, 180-199 in FC
- Wed. 10/2 food and the making of gender
- read: Denise Lawrence (1988) *Menstrual Politics: Women and Pigs in Rural Portugal*. In *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, eds. Pp. 117-136. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Anne Allison, *Japanese Mothers and Obentos: The Lunch Box as Ideological State Apparatus*, 296-314 in FC.
- Mon. 10/7 taste and status
- read: Brillat-Savarin, 71-73
- Pierre Bourdieu (1984) selections from *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Pp. 183-186; 193-200. Harvard University Press.
- Anna Willetts (1997) "Bacon Sandwiches Got the Better of Me": Meat-eating and Vegetarianism in South-East London. In *Food, Health & Identity*. Pat Caplan, ed. Pp. 111-130. London: Routledge.
- Wed. 10/9 MIDTERM EXAM ON ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES
- Mon. 10/14 food, culture and memory in Greece
- read: David Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts*, Introduction + Chapters 1-3.
- Wed. 10/16 food, culture and memory
- David Sutton, Chapters 4-5 + Conclusion.
- Mon. 10/21 FALL BREAK

written assignment: eating nostalgically

Return to the food memory you wrote up at the beginning of class. Now you will do a bit of research to place your memory in wider context. Write a 4-page (double-spaced) essay on the cultural, symbolic, social, structural, or other meanings of this dish. Specify the social group for whom it has meaning, for what kinds of occasions and settings is this dish prepared, who is involved in the preparation, serving, and consumption of this dish, etc.

There are many ways to approach this assignment: 1) If you recalled a specific event, talk to others who were also present and see how they remember the event; analyze the similarities and discrepancies between your recollections; 2) If you remembered a specific dish, try to find the recipe for it. You may find multiple, slightly different recipes for a regional dish (say, gooey butter cake or black eyed peas) – if so, see how many varieties you can collect from friends, family members, and other sources (do not only look in Better Homes and Gardens or some other standard cookbook). If it is a family recipe that has one ‘original’ source (say, a great grandmother), see if others with access to this recipe have come up with modified versions. You might also try to interview at least one other person about his or her memories, feelings, associations with this dish and/or recipe.

DUE FRIDAY 10/25

### **PART 3: FOOD POLITICS**

Wed. 10/23 production, consumption, and power

read: Carole Counihan, Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia, in FC

[Fri. 10/25 WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE, in my mailbox in Scott Hall]

Mon. 10/28 colonial products and the power of food

read: Sydney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, pp. 3-150

Wed. 10/30 read: Sydney Mintz, pp. 151-214.

Mon. 11/4 critiques of food development

read: Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, Beyond the Myths of Hunger: What we can do? pp. 402-411 in FC.

Vandana Shiva, The Stolen Harvest of Seed. *In Stolen Harvest*. Pp. 79-93.

view film in class: *In My Father's Garden*

Wed. 11/6 GMOs

read: Anne Murcott (2001) Public Beliefs about GM Foods, and commentaries on the article, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (15):9-37.

Mon. 11/11 what's in the meat?  
read: Eric Schlosser, What's in the Meat? Chapter 9 of Fast Food Nation, 193-224.  
Michael Pollan, This Steer's Life. New York Times Magazine, 44-51;68; 71-72; 76-77. March 31, 2002.

PAPER PROPOSALS AND INITIAL BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE ON MONDAY 11/11

Wed. 11/13 politics of food distribution: hunger and obesity  
read: Penny Van Esterik, The Politics of Breastfeeding: An Advocacy Perspective, 370-383 in FC  
Janet Fitchen, Hunger, Malnutrition, and Poverty in the Contemporary US, 384-401 in FC

Mon. 11/18 eating disorders: medical, political or both?  
read: Brillat-Savarin, 226-230  
Joan Jacobs Brumberg, The Appetite as Voice, 159-179 in FC  
Susan Bordo, Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture, 226-250 in FC  
handout: news stories on obesity and anorexia in the developing world

Wed. 11/20 NO CLASS HELD  
[professor will be at the American Anthropological Association meetings]  
read: David Wu, McDonald's in Taipei: Hamburgers, Betel Nuts, and National Identity. Pp. 110-135 in *Golden Arches East*.

Mon. 11/25 food and national identity  
read: Kolleen Guy (2001) Wine, Champagne and the Making of French Identity in the Belle Epoque. In Food Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages. Peter Scholliers, eds. Berg, pp. 163-178.  
Arjun Appadurai (1988) How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India. Comparative Studies of Society and History 30(1):3-24  
Brillat-Savarin, 74-81

Wed. 11/27 globalization of the food industry  
read: Jack Goody, Industrial Food: Towards the Development of a World Cuisine. 338-356 in FC

Emily Martin and Richard Cone (1998) *The Immune System, Global Flows of Foodstuffs, and the New Culture of Health*. In *The Visible Woman*, Paula Treichler and Constance Penley, eds. Pp. 321-359. New York University Press.

Mon. 12/2 cultural critiques of the global food industry: the Slow Food movement  
see [www.slowfoodusa.org](http://www.slowfoodusa.org)  
Slow Food Manifesto (on-line)

Chapter 1 of *Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food*: “The Ark and the Deluge”; also “Unnatural Cooking”

Alice Waters, “Making Food the Educational Priority” at  
<http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/feedingfuture/>

David Hawkins, “Managing the Edible Schoolyard” at  
<http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/gardendevlopment/>

Wed. 12/4 cultural challenges — or accommodation? — to the global food industry

read: Chapters 4& 5 in *Golden Arches East*:  
Sangmee Bak, McDonald’s in Seoul: Food Choice, Identity, and Nationalism. Pp. 136-160.

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, McDonald’s in Japan: Changing Manners and Etiquette. Pp. 161-182.

Mon. 12/9 PAPER PRESENTATIONS

Wed. 12/11 POTLUCK LUNCH (finishing up presentations if need be)

If possible, bring your “nostalgia food” or a Slow Food Ark suggestion!

FINAL PAPERS DUE FRIDAY 12/13