

# FOOD AND CULTURE

21A.265  
MIT Spring 2008

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Food is of wide-ranging anthropological interest because, in eating, humans incorporate into our very bodies the products of nature transformed into culture. This course explores connections between what we eat and who we are through cross-cultural study of how personal identities and social groups are formed via food production, preparation, and consumption. Readings are organized around critical discussion of what makes “good” food *good* (e.g., tasty, healthy, authentic, ethical, etc.). A primary goal of the course is to provide students with theoretical and empirical tools to understand and evaluate food systems at local and global levels.

Classes will combine lecture and discussion. Each class is keyed to a set of readings, and it is crucial that students keep up with the readings and be prepared to discuss them in class. Some lectures will directly engage our readings while others will provide contextualizing historical and theoretical information. Occasionally we will break into small groups for more concentrated discussion. Class participation — regular attendance and participation in discussion — will count strongly towards the final grade.

## Requirements:

*Participation.* You *must* attend class and participate in discussions. Short in-class written assignments and informal oral presentations may be asked of you throughout the semester. Attendance and participation will account for 20% of the final grade.

*Short Written Assignments.* You will complete 4 short written assignments during the semester. Three of these are described in the syllabus; the fourth will be a 1-1.5 page reader response to one of the week’s readings (not including those for 2/20) that you may complete at any time during the semester; nb: these are response papers, not summaries of the readings. These 4 assignments will each be worth 10% of your final grade. If you anticipate problems handing in work on time, contact me in advance; late written work is reduced by half a grade each day unless an extension has been granted 24 hours prior to due date.

*Final Term Paper,* combining library/online research and analysis, will give you an opportunity to explore in depth central themes of the course. 40% of final grade.

## SCHEDULE AND READINGS:

## **2/6                    introduction to food and culture: what's the relationship?**

Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1825) Aphorisms [handed out in class]

### ***Aperitif***

## **2/13                    food paradoxes and dilemmas**

MFK Fisher (1942) How to Distribute Your Virtue. In, How to Cook a Wolf.

Margaret Mead (1970) The Changing Significance of Food. *American Scientist*, Volume 58, Issue 2, p.176-181. Reprinted in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, first edition.

Harvey Levenstein (2003) Paradoxes of Plenty. In *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. University of California Press. Pp. 237-255.

Michael Pollan (2004) "Our National Eating Disorder." *New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 17.

Penny Van Esterik (2006) From Hunger Foods to Heritage Foods: Challenges to Food Localization in Lao PDR. In *Fast Food/Slow Food*. 83-96.

Sidney Mintz (2002) Food and Eating: Some Persisting Questions. In *Food Nations*, Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton, eds. Routledge. Pp. 24-32.

view: *BUFFET* (with director, MIT Prof. Natasha Schüll)

written assignment: FOOD AND POWER    DUE FEB. 20

Write a 2-page response to *Chicken*, informed by questions raised in readings for 2/13.

## **2/20                    food and power**

Sidney Mintz (1996) Food and its Relationship to Concepts of Power. In *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*. Boston: Beacon Press. Pp. 17-32.

Theodore Bestor (2000) How Sushi Went Global. *Foreign Policy* 121: 54-63.

Steve Striffler (2005) Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America's Favorite Food. Yale University Press.

### ***The Meal***

## **WHAT MAKES GOOD FOOD GOOD?**

## **2/27                    good food tastes good**

Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1825) The Physiology of Taste. Pp. 29-49.

Jonah Lehrer (2007) *Auguste Escoffier: The Essence of Taste*. In *Proust was a Neuroscientist*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Pp. 53-74.

Amy Trubek (2005) *Place Matters*. In *The Taste Culture Reader*, Carolyn Korsmeyer, ed. Berg. Pp. 261-270.

Emile Peynaud (2005) *Tasting Problems and Errors of Perception*. In *The Taste Culture Reader*, Carolyn Korsmeyer, ed. Berg. Pp. 272-278.

Steven Shapin (2005) *Hedonistic Fruit Bombs*. London Review of Books.

Susan J. Terrio (1996) *Crafting Grand Cru Chocolates in Contemporary France*. *American Anthropologist* 98(1): 67-79.

William Roseberry (1996) *The Rise of Yuppie Coffees and the Reimagination of Class in the United States*. *American Anthropologist* 98(4): 762-775.

view: "John Cleese's Wine for the Confused" (excerpt, 28 min.)

food tasting: chocolate

### **3/5 good food is culturally *authentic***

*there are a lot of readings for this week, I know; do your best, but feel free to read first the titles that most interest you.*

Julie Dash (1997) "Rice Culture," in *Through the Kitchen Window*, edited by Arlene Voski Avakian. Boston: Beacon Press. Pp. 19-23.

Josephine Beoku-Betts (2002) "We Got Our Way of Cooking Things": Women, Food, and Preservation of Cultural Identity Among the Gullah. In *Food in the USA*. Pp. 277-294.

Psyche Williams-Forson (2007) *More than Just the "Big Piece of Chicken": The Power of Race, Class, and Food in American Consciousness*. In *FC*, pp. 342-353.

Lisa Heldke (2005) *But is it Authentic? Culinary Travel and the Search for the "Genuine Article."* *The Taste Culture Reader*, Carolyn Korsmeyer, ed. Berg. Pp. 385-94.

Uma Narayan (1995) *Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food*. *Social Identities* 1(1): 63-86.

Jeffrey Pilcher (2002) *Industrial Tortillas and Folkloric Pepsi: The Nutritional Consequences of Hybrid Cuisines in Mexico*. In *Food Nations*. Pp. 222-239.

Rick Wilk (1999) "Real Belizean Food": Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean. *American Anthropologist* 101(2): 244-255. Reprinted in *FC*, pp. 308-326.

Janet Siskind (2002) *The Invention of Thanksgiving: A Ritual of American Nationality*. In *Food in the USA*. Carole M. Counihan, ed. Routledge. Pp. 41-58.

view: PBS "The Meaning of Food" (short excerpt)

Written Assignment: FOOD MEMORY

Write a 2-page description of a food memory, preferably from your childhood. This could be a memory of tasting for the first time 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 MARCH 12.

**3/12            good food *reminds* you of your mother (or homeland or childhood... or somewhere you've never been)**

Marcel Proust (1913) The Madeleine. From *Swan's Way*. Reprinted in the Taste Culture Reader.

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

Dorothy Allison (2007) Panacea. *New York Times*, Oct. 28.

C. Nadia Seremetakis (2005) The Breast of Aphrodite, Taste Culture Reader. Pp. 297-303.

David Sutton (2000) Whole Foods: Revitalization through Everyday Synesthetic Experience. *Anthropology & Humanism* 25(2): 120-130.

Ketu H. Katrak (1997) Food and Belonging: At "Home" and in "Alien-Kitchens." In *Through the Kitchen Window*, edited by Arlene Voski Avakian. Boston: Beacon Press. Pp. 263-275.

Cara de Silva (1996) Introduction to *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezín*, plus sample recipes. Rowman and Littlefield. Pp. xxv-xliii; 3-13.

Yunxiang Yan (2000) Of Hamburger and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing. Reprinted in *FC*, pp. 499-522.

Edmund Levin (2005) The Way the Cookie Crumbles: How Much did Proust Know About Madeleines? *Slate*, May 11.

view: clip from "Ratatouille"

**3/19            good food produces and maintains *relationships***

*read 5 total articles:*

Beth A. Conklin (1995) "Thus Are Our Bodies, Thus Was Our Custom": Mortuary Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society. *American Ethnologist* 22(1): 75-101.

Markens, S., Browner, C. H., & Press, N. (1997) Feeding the Fetus: On Interrogating the Notion of Maternal-Fetal Conflict. *Feminist Studies*, 23(2): 351-372.

Arjun Appadurai (1981) Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia. *American Ethnologist* 8(3): 494-511.

AND

Jennifer B. Saunders (2007) "I Don't Eat Meat": Discourse on Food Among Transnational Hindus. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 41(2): 203-223.

OR

James L. Watson (2000) Food as a Lens: The Past, Present, and Future of Family Life in China. In *Feeding China's Little Emperors: Food, Children, and Social Change*. Jun Jing, ed. Stanford University Press. Pp. 198-212.

AND

Marjorie DeVault (1991) Conflict and Deference. Reprinted in FC, pp. 240-258.

OR

Christopher Carrington (1999) Feeding Lesbian Families. Reprinted in FC, 259-286.

### **3/26            SPRING BREAK**

### **4/2            good food is *clean* and *pure***

*read 5 articles:*

Mary Douglas (1966) Deciphering a Meal. In *Implicit Meanings*. London: Routledge. Reprinted in FC, pp. 44-53.

Marvin Harris (1985) The Abominable Pig. In *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture*. Waveland Press. Reprinted in FC, pp. 54-66.

Carolyn Rouse and Janet Hoskins (2004) Purity, Soul Food, and Sunni Islam: Explorations at the Intersection of Consumption and Resistance. *Cultural Anthropology* 19(2): 226-249.

OR

Maris Boyd Gillette (2000) Children's Food and Islamic Dietary Restrictions in Xi'an. In *Feeding China's Little Emperors: Food, Children, and Social Change*. Jun Jing, ed. Stanford University Press. Pp. 71-93; plus Appendix.

Melissa L. Caldwell (2004) The Forest Feeds Us: Organic Exchange. In *Not by Bread Alone*. University of California Press. Pp. 100-126. **SKIM FOR DISCUSSIONS OF DIRT, CLEANLINESS**

Sarah Drue Phillips (2002) Half-Lives and Healthy Bodies: Discourses on 'Contaminated' Food and Healing in Post-Chernobyl Ukraine. *Food and Foodways* 10: 27-53.

Written Assignment: ITEMIZE and DECIPHER A MEAL, preferably one you've eaten in the previous week, offering a symbolic, structural reading akin to Mary Douglas's. Discuss why this counts as a "meal." This meal might be representative of your daily diet, or an exception to it. We are not being food police here, but rather doing symbolic analyses of empirical data. 2-3 pages. DUE April 9.

#### **4/9                    good food is good for you**

Kristen Borré (1991) Seal Blood, Inuit Blood, and Diet: A Biocultural Model of Physiology and Cultural Identity. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 5(1):48-62.

Steven Shapin (2003) How to Eat Like a Gentleman: Dietetics and Ethics in Early Modern England. In *Right Living: An Anglo-American Tradition of Self-Help Medicine and Hygiene*, ed. Charles E. Rosenberg. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Pp. 21-58.

E. Melanie du Puis (2007) Angels and Vegetables: A Brief History of Food Advice in America. *Gastronomica* 7(3): 34-44.

Marion Nestle (2001) Politics Versus Science: Opposing the Food Pyramid, 1991-1992. In *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 51-66.

Aaron Bobrow-Strain (2007) Kills a Body Twelve Ways: Bread Fear and the Politics of "What to Eat?" *Gastronomica* 7(3): 45-52.

FDA definition of "Milk"

AND *ONE* of the following:

Andrea S. Wiley (2004) "Drink Milk for Fitness": The Cultural Politics of Human Biological Variation and Milk Consumption in the United States. *American Anthropologist* 106(3): 506-517.

DuPuis, E. Melanie (2000) Not in My Body: rBGH and the Rise of Organic Milk. *Agriculture and Human Values* 17(3): 285-295.

Gareth Enticott (2003) Lay Immunology, Local Foods and Rural Identity: Defending Unpasteurised Milk in England. *Sociologia Ruralis* 43(3): 257-270.

Sandor Ellix Katz (2006) The Raw Underground. In *The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green. Pp. 161-181.

#### **4/16                    good food is connected to the *landscape***

##### **guest lecture by Juliette Rogers**

read EITHER about the North American or the European "models":

*the North American model:*

Wendell Berry (1990) *The Pleasures of Eating*. In *What are People For?* North Point Press.

Kloppenber, J., Hendrickson, J. and Stevenson, G. (1996) Coming In to the Foodshed. *Agriculture and Human Values* 13(1): 1-10.

C. Clare Hinrichs (2003) The Practice and Politics of Food System Localization. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19(1): 33-45.

<http://www.100milediet.org/>

<http://www.locavores.com/>

Lunch with Alice Waters (NY Times video)

Cathy Banwell, et al. (2006) Fast Food and Slow Food in the Fast Lane: Automobility and the Australian Diet. In *Fast Food/Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System*. Richard Wilk, Ed. AltaMira Press. Pp. 219-240.

*the European model:*

Wendy Leynse (2006) Journeys Through 'Ingestible Topography': Socializing the 'Situating Eater' in France. *European Studies* 22: 129-158.

Alison Leitch, Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity. Reprinted in FC, pp. 381-399.

Jillian R. Cavanaugh (2007) Making Salami, Producing Bergamo: The Transformation of Value. *Ethnos* 72(2): 149-172.

food tasting: local goat cheese

#### **4/23            good food is *ethical***

Warren Belasco (1997) Food, Morality, and Social Reform. In *Morality + Health*. Allan M. Brant and Paul Rozin, eds. Routledge. Pp. 185-199.

OPTIONAL: Eric Schlosser (2001) The Chain Never Stops. *Mother Jones*. Reprinted in FC, pp. 441-451.

Peter Singer and Jim Mason (2006) The Ethics of Eating Meat. In *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*. Rodale. Pp. 241-269.

Sandor Ellix Katz (2006) Humane Meat. In *The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved*. Chelsea Green. Pp. 274-283.

Donna Haraway (2007) When Species Meet. Pp. 294-301.

Raynolds, Laura (2000) Re-embedding Global Agriculture: The International Organic and Fair Trade Movements. *Agriculture and Human Values* 17(3): 297-309.

Sarah Lyon (2006) Just Java: Fair Trade Coffee. In *Fast Food/Slow Food*. Edited by

Richard Wilk. Berg. Pp. 241-258.

Dylan Clark (2004) The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine. *Ethnology* 43(1).  
Reprinted in FC, pp. 411-422.

view (possibilities): *Meat*, Frederick Wiseman (excerpt)  
*The Meatrix*  
*Black Gold*

#### **4/30            any food is good food if you're hungry**

Janet Poppendieck (2000) Want Amid Plenty: From Hunger to Inequality. *Monthly Review*. Reprinted in FC, pp. 574-581.

Patricia Allen (2007) The Disappearance of Hunger in America. *Gastronomica* 7(3): 19-23.

Janet Fitchen (1997) Hunger, Malnutrition and Poverty. In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, First Edition. Counihan and Van Esterik, eds. Routledge. Pp. 384-401.

Karen Coen Flynn (2007) Street Credit: The Cultural Politics of African Street Children's Hunger. In FC, pp. 554-571.

Penny Van Esterik (2007) The Politics of Breastfeeding: An Advocacy Update. In FC, pp. 467-481.

Jennifer Clapp (2005) The Political Economy of Food Aid in an Era of Agricultural Biotechnology. *Global Governance* 11, 467-485. Reprinted in FC, pp. 539-553.

Ben Sklaver (2003) Humanitarian Daily Rations: The Need for Evaluation and Guidelines. *Disasters* 27(3): 259-271.

### ***Digestive***

#### **5/7            rethinking food "choice"**

Michael Pollan (2006) Voting with Your Fork. *New York Times*.

The Economist (2006) Voting with Your Trolley.

Marion Nestle (2006) The Supermarket: Prime Real Estate. In *What to Eat*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 17-24.

Deborah Barndt (1999) Whose "Choice"? "Flexible" Women Workers in the Tomato Food Chain. Reprinted in FC, pp. 452-466.

Rachel Laudén (2001) A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food. *Gastronomica* 1(1): 36-44.

Julie Guthman (2007) Can't Stomach It: How Michael Pollan et al. Made Me Want to Eat Cheetos. *Gastronomica* 7(3): 75-79.



Anne Allison (1991) Japanese Mothers and *Obentos*: The Lunch Box as Ideological State Apparatus. *Anthropological Quarterly* 64(4). Reprinted in FC, pp. 221-239.

Michel De Certeau and Luce Giard (1998) *The Nourishing Arts*. Reprinted in FC, pp.67-77.

### ***Feast***

## **5/14 POTLUCK AND PRESENTATIONS**

Bring to class a food item of significance to you (perhaps a nostalgia food, or an item from the meal you write about; or a Slow Food Ark suggestion, etc.). Be prepared to speak briefly about your offering to our feast.

Final Paper Due: DISSECT AND CRITICALLY EVALUATE A MEAL in political-economic, social, symbolic, and ethical terms. This will entail library/online research as well as analysis informed by course readings and discussions. You must engage and cite at least 4 readings from the semester. Preferably you will work with the meal you offered a structural analysis of previously in the semester. We will discuss how to approach this paper in class. You are strongly encouraged to speak with the Professor and/or TA about your progress on the paper. 10-12 pages.