

"The joys of the table belong equally to all ages, conditions, countries and times; they mix with all other pleasures, and remain the last to console us for their loss."

– Jean Antheleme Brillet-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*

"When from a long distant past nothing subsists after the things are broken and scattered, the smell and taste of things remain."

~ Marcel Proust

"Nothing would be more tiresome than eating and drinking if God had not made them a pleasure as well as a necessity."

~Voltaire

### **Feasting on Culture: The significance of food in everyday life**

Proposed by:

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Have you ever spent a day watching people eat? What they will and will not eat? How, when and with whom they eat? Food is deeply intertwined with our everyday, even hourly lives; it is a necessary part of embodiment but, apparently since the invention of fire, has had far deeper meanings that simply sustaining life and energy. Whether or not we consciously think about it, we all have a strong stake in what we eat at every meal – is it moral? Politically just? Clean? Does it remind us of family, align us with a social group? Is it environmentally friendly? Does it *taste* good? What is the most important of these considerations? *What* we eat really defines *how* we eat, and the process of consuming food has implications that permeate all aspects of our lives to some extent – social, religious, political, sexual.

This seminar will, hopefully, tackle some of these questions, and why they are so important to cultures around the world. The readings will focus on the ways in which food impacts, and is impacted by, our relationships with the rest of the world, whether that relationship be purely physical, emotional, or symbolic and theoretical. We will explore texts from a range of views, including pure theory (such as Bourdieu), historical accounts of eating habits, theoretical analysis of food in particular, or writing that appears to be about nothing but food (in particular, by looking through cookbooks and the hidden social information they often contain).

The way that food plays into so many aspects of human experience – culture, religion, physical health, psychology, sexuality, literature, and even as a fine art unto itself – gives it an important role across at disciplines of study. From any academic perspective, one can infinite levels of meaning and importance in our relationship with food, but in everyday life there seem to be a few major ways that individuals think about the significance of food. I will try to break it up into a few overarching themes, and find

sources from various academic fields for each theme, to incorporate the everyday experience of food with academic analysis. The study of food will help provide students of all backgrounds with a way to see the connections between various academic fields, and hopefully provide a new way of looking at something so seemingly mundane as the act of eating.

Possible Readings (not necessarily broken up by session, but these seem to be the major topics that come up, and could be useful organizing the classes):

**Control, Restrictions and Fears:** *Often food can be used as a way to find control. Often people find ways to control us through our food. Looking at different perceptions of control and food brings insight into particular food choices and how they interact with social connections.*

Levi-Strauss. *The Raw and the Cooked*.

Stacey, Michelle. 1994. *Consumed: Why Americans Love, Hate, and Fear Food*. New York: Touchstone.

Douglas, Mary. 1994. *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge. (Ch 6)

Harris, Marvin. 1985. *Good To Eat*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Alina Tugend. 2010. "Too Many Choices: A Problem That Can Paralyze," *The New York Times*. 26 February.

Ferrieres, Madeleine. 2006. *Sacred Cow, Mad Cow: A History of Food Fears*. Trans. Jody Gladding. New York: Columbia University Press. (Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4, 14)

Pollan, Michael. *In Defense of Food*. Chapter 2.

Lupton, Deborah. 1996. "Chapter 5: The Asceticism/Consumption Dialectic." *Food The Body and the Self*. London: SAGE Publications.

**Fabre-Vassas C. 1997. The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, and the Pig. New York: Columbia Univ. Press**

Nestle, Marion. 2003. "Part One: Undermining Dietary Advice." *Food Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

**Food, Identity, Memory and Social Connections:** *Food can play an important role in understanding identity, culture, sexuality, and power. The ways that we define what we eat, and share different cuisines ("break bread") and accept or reject certain foods influences what types of connections we forge, and what meanings we share with other people.*

**Ferguson PP. 1998. A cultural field in the making: gastronomy in 19th-century France. *Am. J. Sociol.* 104(3):597-641**

**Mintz, Sidney Wilfred (1985b). *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking.**

Beardsworth, Alan and Teresa Keil. 1997. *Sociology on the Menu: An invitation to the study of Food and Society*. New York: Routledge. (Chapters 2, 3, 4)

Probyn, Elspeth. 2000. *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*. New York: Routledge.

Willetts, Anna. 1997. " 'Bacon Sandwiches got the better of me': Meat-eating and vegetarianism in South-East London." *Food, Health and Identity*. Ed. Pat Caplan. New York: Routledge.

Diner, Hasia A. 2001. *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. (Chapter 3)

Johnathan Safran Foer, 2009. "Against Meat." *New York Times Magazine*.

Douglas, Mary. 1984. *Food in the social order : studies of food and festivities in three American communities*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Foster-Wallace, David. "Consider the Lobster."

Kitson, Peter J. 2004. "Sustaining the Romantic and Racial Self: Eating People in the 'South Seas.'" *Cultures of Taste/Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism*. Ed. Timothy Morton. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

"Carrots." *Tender*.

**Counihan CM, Kaplan SL, eds. 1998. *Food and Gender: Identity and Power*. Amsterdam, The Neth.: Harwood Acad.**

**James A. 1994. Cuisiner les livres: identités globales ou locales dans les cultures. *Anthropol. Soc.* 18(3):39-56**

**Sutton D. 2001. *Remembrance of Repasts: an Anthropology of Food and Memory*. Oxford: Berg**

### **Food and Social Change**

Benson, Peter. 2007. "Broccoli and Desire." *Antipode*.

Cowan, Brian. 2007. "New Worlds, New Tastes." *Food: The History of Taste*. Ed. Paul Freedman. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp 197-232.

Shapiro, Laura. 1986. *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Mintz, Sidney W. 1996a *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Leitch A. 2000. The social life of lardo: slow food in fast times. *Asia Pac. J. Anthropol.* 1: 103-18

Lentz C, ed. 1999. *Changing Food Habits: Case Studies from Africa, South America, and Europe*. Amsterdam: Harwood Acad.

Huss-Ashmore R, Katz SH, eds. 1989/1990. *African Food Systems in Crisis, Vols. I, II*. New York: Gordon & Breach

### **Cookbooks/Dietary Guidelines (read introductions or sections)**

*Cookbooks give a direct window into how people think about food, and often can tell us something about the rest of culture. Reading some of the actual first-hand claims about food, and looking at what food is actually eaten and valued, is a very important way to form our own opinions (and maybe find good recipes...).*

Rubin, Jordan S. 2004. *The Maker's Diet*. New York: Berkley Books.

Atkins

Zone Diet

Silverstone, Alicia. 2009. *The Kind Diet*. New York: Rodale.

*Skinny Bitch in the Kitch*

Macrobiotics

Something by Jamie Oliver

**Gastronomy and "haute cuisine":** *Cuisine is not only a "need," it is also an "art." Looking at "the art of cooking" can give insight into how foodways are shaped based on aesthetic values and how these values vary among different groups of people.*

**Kanafani A. 1983. Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates. Lebanon: Am. Univ. Beirut**

Brillat-Savarin, Jean Anthelme. 1932 [1926]. *The Physiology of Taste, or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*. New York: Liveright, Inc. (Selected Chapters – TBD)

Bourdieu, "The Aristocracy of Taste."

Khatchadourian, "The Fruit Detectives," *The New Yorker*.

Gopnik, Adam. 2009. "Whats The Recipe?" *The New Yorker*. 23 November.

Pollan, Michael. 2009. "Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch." *The New York Times Magazine*. July 29.

Watch an episode of Anthony Bourdain.

M.F.K. Fischer, *The Art of Eating*.

Baumann, Sharon and Josee Johnston. *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*. New York: Routledge.

Foster-Wallace, David. "Consider the Lobster."

Possible Speakers:

Michael Pollan (Berkeley) (long shot)

Jamie Oliver (another long shot)

Marion Nestle (NYU)

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (NYU)

Jenna Weisman Joselit (Princeton)