

Food For Thought

A hundred years from now anthropologists and other descendants, upon looking back on our best-selling reading lists, will be curious to know just when it was that food and chefs and things culinary, and books about them, replaced sex as our main sensuous nourishment. (Arnold 2001: B3)

Introduction

You may not agree that food has usurped the place of sex in y/our culture, but the ascendance of interest in food, cooking, chefs, and restaurants cannot be denied. The journalist quoted above was struck by the number of books about food on the best-seller list – three as he wrote, one just off the list after 15 weeks, and others soon to appear on it. Tastes in reading, like tastes in food, change with the times and provide an interesting avenue for investigating a culture. In addition to books about food, more than 2,000 cookbooks were published in the year 2000 alone. Surely, this is food for thought. Ruth Reichel, one of the best-selling authors and editor of *Gourmet* magazine, suggested that the explosion of interest in food is a sign that we are finally “getting away from our Puritan roots and no longer are embarrassed about thinking about food” (cited in Arnold 2001), that is, we are able to view food sensually and aesthetically rather than merely as a source of energy and survival.

In this chapter I lay out a smorgasbord of ideas about the ways food shapes culture and culture shapes food. It is not a chapter about the nutritional value of

food – about vitamins, minerals, and food as an energy source – but about the culturally constituted nature of food and meals. These are interlarded with issues of classification, religion, identity, civility, pleasure, economics, and the environment. Throughout, be attentive also to the way the topic draws with it the topics from the previous chapters – space, time, language, social relations, and body.

(1) Regarding space, for example, think of all the places where you can obtain food and the spaces needed to grow food, which includes the pasturing of animals. *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (Bell and Valentine 1997) is organized around social spaces of food consumption – body, home, community, city, region, nation, and finally, the globe.

(2) The temporal dimension not only is indicated by the specific seasons when certain food becomes available, but also is present in the times of our daily meals. Each meal has a different meaning, as do the meals of different days of the week, let alone holiday meals associated with the ritual calendar.

(3) Linguistically, there is an enormous lexicon of terms for food, beginning, one might say, with the raw and cooked – also the title of a book by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss¹ – and roasted, boiled, broiled, baked, grilled, sautéed, and steamed, to mention only a few.

Roland Barthes, a French structuralist, sees all foods as “signs in a system of communication” ([1957] 1972: 63). The messages expressed by means of food can involve love or disdain, profligacy or stinginess, tradition or *avant garde*, ideas about gender, and the condition of, or concern for, health. As with language, there are rules of combination and substitution – that is, what goes with what, the order of the components, and what are suitable substitutes. Moreover, food terms are used metaphorically to speak of other things, for example a person who asks “Have you got any bread on you?” is not asking for food but to find out how much money you have in your pocket. “What’s your beef?” does not mean what cut of meat you want but what is your gripe.

(4) “Eating together lies at the heart of social relations” (Counihan 1999: 6); it is a kind of training ground in civility (Flammang, forthcoming). The etymology of the word *companion* has to do with breaking bread with someone.

(5) Finally, and obviously, food is essential for our bodies and, as we have just seen, it is also intimately related to our body image. Food is a consuming passion.²

We Are What We Eat

Food is also a very strong cultural marker, and thus an integral part of a person’s identity. In 1825, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, a French politician-gourmet, said: “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.”³ The statement was meant not primarily in terms of ethnic identity but of the stage a nation had reached in the scale of civilization, a scale which, at that time, was assumed to be unilinear and progressive. Naturally, France, with its subtle, refined, and sophisticated cuisine, was assumed to be the epitome. Today, anthropologists are far more likely to approach food as an index to culture, not in the sense of “high” vs. “low” culture, but of par-

ticular cultures and ethnicities. Snobbishness, persist in state: and manners is said to be related. British to their unimaginative food they consume, and the u they drink” (Farb and Arme quintessential symbol of ider. turally. “A people’s cuisine, or the collective self and the o other peoples” (Ohnuki-Tier the case of Marmite.

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particular cultures and ethnicities. Nevertheless, elements of cultural ascendancy, even snobbishness, persist in statements like the following: "French subtlety of thought and manners is said to be related to the subtlety of their cuisine, the reserve of the British to their unimaginative diet, German stolidness to the quantities of heavy food they consume, and the unreliability of the Italians to the large amounts of wine they drink" (Farb and Armelagos 1980: 40). Despite those stereotypes, food is a quintessential symbol of identity – we are what we eat – both individually and culturally. "A people's cuisine, or a particular food, often marks the boundary between the collective self and the other, for example, as a basis of discrimination against other peoples" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 3), or merely just a distinguishing trait, as in the case of Marmite.

Marmite is a brownish vegetable extract with a toxic odor, saline taste and an axle grease consistency that has somehow captivated the British. . . . They buy it at a 24 million-jar-per-year clip that has enshrined it as a national symbol right up there with the royal family and the Sunday roast. (Hoge, *New York Times*, January 24, 2002)

Indeed, so much is it a symbol of being British that several "members of Parliament asked the Commons to affirm the Britishness of Marmite," especially because of "its lack of appeal for the majority of the world's population" (*New York Times*, February 27, 2002)!

Clearly, one of the most important ways that people reproduce themselves as British, or Turkish, or Chinese, or American is by the food they eat. This is something often ignored by biologists, developers, and aid planners, and the absence of such awareness has had a number of embarrassing, and in some cases tragic, consequences. During a particularly bad famine in part of Africa some years ago, the United States sent an enormous supply of wheat to ease the hunger. However, it turned out that the people did not eat wheat and didn't know what to do with it, so the starving continued. Americans, I think, would balk if they were suddenly told they had to eat grubs – unless they were a contestant on the television show *Survivor*. There are many species of plants and animals that are edible but only some of them become food. Those that become food vary cross-culturally. Why is it that Germans eat pork while for Jews and Muslims it is forbidden? Why is beef the heart of a meal for many British and Americans, but it is sacred and not eaten in India? Why is the dog elevated to sacred status in Britain and the United States, but is eaten in Vietnam and elsewhere? All of these meats are edible; it is culture that deems them inedible. Eating is not just about surviving, about getting a certain amount and kind of nutrients; what we eat is who we are as a people. People "survive in a definite way. They reproduce themselves as certain kinds of men and women, social classes, and groups, not as biological organisms or aggregates of organisms ('populations')" (Sahlins 1976: 168).

Because of the strong association between food and identity, some people find it difficult, for instance, to sample food from a culture very different from their own because the food will be unfamiliar and they do not like to try new things. That was certainly true among many Turks I met. Turkish cuisine is considered to be one of

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the great cuisines in the world and Turks have strong feelings about it. They do not, or did not, see the point of trying foods of different cultures/ethnicities; perhaps they thought it would dilute their Turkishness. Until very recently, there were few restaurants featuring foods of other nations; indeed, Turkey was not really a restaurant culture. Today, this is changing rapidly, partly in response to tourism, and now, at least in the major cities, one can find all kinds of ethnic restaurants as well as French cafés, pizza parlors, Chinese take-out, and even sushi bars, as well as the ubiquitous McDonald's. Food may be becoming globalized and creolized, but attachments of people to their own local, regional, and national dishes remain remarkably strong.

The French notion of *terroir* is related to these sentiments. Although there is no exact English equivalent, it means that an agricultural product carries with it something of the "flavor" of the place where it was grown. "For *terroir*'s most ardent promoters, it is axiomatic that the finest fruits and vegetables are those truest to their roots; those whose taste reflects the interplay of soil, climate, topography, and ritual" (Steinberger, *New York Times*, April 14, 2001). Although normally the term is applied to wine making, where the specific region, light, soil, and type of vine are all thought to contribute to the distinctive style of the wine produced in that place, it can, nevertheless, be applied to any agricultural product. Not surprisingly, the French have a very ambivalent attitude to the commercialization and globalization of foodstuffs.

Because food is an important symbol of identity, "a nation's diet can be more revealing than its art or literature" (Schlosser 2001: 3). Italians, according to Alessandra Farkas, a correspondent for Italy's leading newspaper, are identified not just with pasta but especially with the meat and tomato sauce called *ragù*. "The sauce is the center of everything, it's like a cultural force. . . . [I]t's like chicken soup for American Jews – it holds generations together" (Asimov, *New York Times*, November 3, 1999). Meanwhile, people in Argentina eat steak "as if it were a national obligation" (Christian, *New York Times*, May 28, 1988) and eat more of it than any other people in the world. For Japanese, it is rice.

This is the thesis of Ohnuki-Tierney's well-researched discussion of *Rice As Self: Japanese Identities Through Time* (1993). "The symbolic importance of rice has been deeply embedded in the Japanese cosmology both of the elite and the common folk: rice as soul, rice as deity, and ultimately rice as self" (p. 8). Rice is the symbol of commensality – of eating together – whether a feast for the gods or in daily meals among humans. It is also a kind of sacred medium of exchange. It is relatively easy for Japanese to distinguish themselves from Westerners (meat eaters and bread eaters), but so too do they distinguish themselves from other rice-eating peoples. At issue is not the *kind* of rice (short-grained vs. long-grained), since the Japanese are vehemently opposed to the importation of rice from California even though its short-grain variety is very similar to their own and is much cheaper than the home-grown variety. Japanese will pay the additional cost to have Japanese rice grown in Japanese rice paddies. For rice is not only a symbol of the self, it is also a symbol of the land – its spatial and temporal dimensions – that is, both its territorial and historical meanings. "As a metaphor of self, rice paddies are our ancestral land, our village,

our region, and ultimately, our incorporates the spirit of Japan studies could be done for other

While rice may be a "key symbol of Japanese identity, anthropologists have provided an example of the working of the institutions that "exert power over" (1991: 196). While the nation, educational practices are world a certain way and of a world" (Allison 1991, quoting, I have called "naturalizing power already embedded in culture. given" (1995: 1) – that is the way

[O]ne look at a typical child's miniaturized meal whose pieces reveal [that] no food is "just" however, is why a small child is the recipient of a meal as elaborated family or invited guests. (Allison)

The state apparatus has made enormous amounts of time, space of tiny, beautiful, bite-sized meals for children, and the children, even if they deserve such attention. It is by means of the food they eat

Some people revel in trying food literally. Sometimes this is taken has been enthusiastically pronounced who brought McDonald's to Japan burgers and potatoes for a time 'we will become taller, our skin' (Schlosser 2001: 231). America Brillat-Savarin's dictum, Don't Food and the Making of America

our food reveals that we are nurturers who do not feel constrained naturally is how we eat, not what traditions of many regions are (1998: 225–6)

My Turkish friends did not put anything and everything, we reveal our stomachs make us into men

A similar issue regarding basmati rice erupted in India when the United States tried to patent a type of it. Protesters accused the US firm of "bio-piracy and theft of indigenous plant wealth" (*New York Times*, May 25, 2001) and feel that the term should only be applied to rice grown on "Indian soil [and] irrigated by waters from the Himalayan rivers," much as the appellation "champagne" can only be used for sparkling wines made from grapes grown in the Champagne district of France.

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our region, and ultimately, *our* land, Japan" (p. 10). By ingesting Japanese rice, one incorporates the spirit of Japan, creating an identity between self and nation. Similar studies could be done for other cultures.

While rice may be a "key symbol" (Ortner 1973) that opens up the investigation of Japanese identity, anthropologist Anne Allison argues that such identity is an example of the working of an "ideological state apparatus," by which she means the institutions that "exert power not primarily through repression but through ideology" (1991: 196). While the primary purpose of schools is assumed to be education, educational practices are also ways "of indoctrinating people into seeing the world a certain way and of accepting certain identities as their own within that world" (Allison 1991, quoting Althusser). It is similar to what Sylvia Yanagisako and I have called "naturalizing power," "the ways in which differentials of power come already embedded in culture . . . for power appears natural, inevitable, even god-given" (1995: 1) – that is the way the world simply is.

[O]ne look at a typical child's *obento* – a small box packaged with a five- or six-course miniaturized meal whose pieces and parts are artistically arranged – would immediately reveal [that] no food is "just" food in Japan. What is not so immediately apparent, however, is why a small child with limited appetite and perhaps scant interest in food is the recipient of a meal as elaborate and as elaborately prepared as any made for an entire family or invited guests. (Allison 1991: 196)

The state apparatus has made it seem normal that Japanese mothers would spend enormous amounts of time, skill, and money in a daily routine of making a variety of tiny, beautiful, bite-sized morsels for the lunch boxes of their nursery school children, and the children, even if they do not appreciate the artistry, are learning that they deserve such attention. In this way, the state forms particular kinds of people by means of the food they eat.

Some people revel in trying different kinds of food; they consume the culture, literally. Sometimes this is taken to extremes. "The idea that you are what you eat has been enthusiastically promoted for years by Den Fujita, the eccentric billionaire who brought McDonald's to Japan three decades ago. 'If we eat McDonald's hamburgers and potatoes for a thousand years,' Fujita once promised his countrymen, 'we will become taller, our skin will become white, and our hair will be blonde'" (Schlosser 2001: 231). Americans, apparently, take a different approach. Playing with Brillat-Savarin's dictum, Donna Gabaccia, in her book *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (1998), thinks that

our food reveals that we are cosmopolitan and iconoclasts; we are tolerant adventurers who do not feel constrained by tradition. . . . What unites American eaters culturally is how we eat, not what we eat. As eaters, all Americans mingle the culinary traditions of many regions and cultures within ourselves. We are multi-ethnic eaters. (1998: 225–6)

My Turkish friends did not put such a positive spin on this mingling; by eating anything and everything, we reveal we have no culture. The multi-ethnic mixtures in our stomachs make us into mongrels.

STRUCTURATION
I ★

What is Food?

Take, for example, the artichoke. Who, coming upon this thorny thing for the first time, could ever have imagined eating it? Indeed. I was 20 before I first saw as well as ate an artichoke; my first meeting with an artichoke coincided with the first meeting of my Bostonian (soon-to-be) in-laws. I do not know which was more intimidating.

We need food to survive, that is a given, but what counts as food? Food, in the United States, has until recently been classified into four food groups: (1) meat, fish, and poultry; (2) grains; (3) dairy products; and (4) fruits and vegetables. In 1991 a physicians' group recommended that this be completely changed and that four new groups be substituted: (1) fruits, (2) legumes (including beans, peanut butter, and soybeans), (3) grains, and (4) vegetables, with meat and dairy products being options. This is also known as a *vegan* diet. While this was not officially adopted, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was in the process of changing its recommendations for a healthy diet, recommendations that greatly reduced the role of meat and dairy products. On April 24, 1991, the USDA sent its proposal, the Eating Right Pyramid, to the printer to replace the food wheel used since the 1950s; the next day, the Agriculture Secretary, Edward R. Madigan, cancelled it. Although he denied it, it is widely suspected that the reason was "because meat and dairy producers objected to what they felt was the pyramid's negative depiction of their products" (Burros, *New York Times*, May 8, 1991). The Department of Agriculture is clearly in a double-bind – needing to promote the nation's health and, at the same time, promoting the health (or is it the wealth?) of the meat and dairy industries. Meat and dairy products are now included in the revised Food Pyramid just below fats, oils, and sugars, implying they should be eaten sparingly (see figure 7.1).

Regardless, the old "meat and potatoes" definition of a main meal is surely changing. Since the débâcle over the Food Pyramid, nutritionists have chosen to talk of the healthy diet as the "Mediterranean diet," which is essentially the same thing as originally proposed by the USDA. "The characteristics of the Mediterranean diet [are] simple 'peasant' food, with emphasis on pastas and breads, grilled fish, fresh fruit and vegetables, red wine, and especially olive oil" (Bell and Valentine 1997: 156). This diet, celebrated in Britain as well as in the United States in restaurants, advertisements, and on supermarket shelves, is thought to be far healthier than what the British and Americans have been eating, and it is also thought to be responsible for the longevity of the Mediterranean peasantry. The popularity of this diet began as more and more British and Americans toured the Mediterranean area, but it is also credited to the well-known British food and cookbook writer Elizabeth David, who was the first to bring a bit of culinary sunshine to the colder northern climes. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to point out, as did Bell and Valentine, that the whole notion of a "Mediterranean" diet is a *construction* – one that glosses over significant national, ethnic, and local variations. The only things that North African, Syrian, and Greek cuisines have in common are the ingredients, not the culturally distinctive ways they are used to make particular dishes that combine to make a meal.

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USE SPARINGLY

Milk, Yogurt, &
Cheese Group
2-3 SERVINGS

Vegetable Group
3-5 SERVINGS

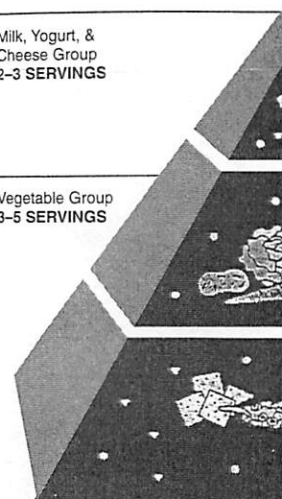


Figure 7.1 The USDA Food P

Clearly, food is more than a matter of culture and, within one person or one culture, food is another man's poison," as th

Classification systems

What counts as food in any given culture is intimately related to the roots in religious prescriptions: as animals were originally to

Behold, I have given you every green plant for food, and every tree, in which is fruit, and every tree, in which is meat.

THE FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID

Number of servings per day

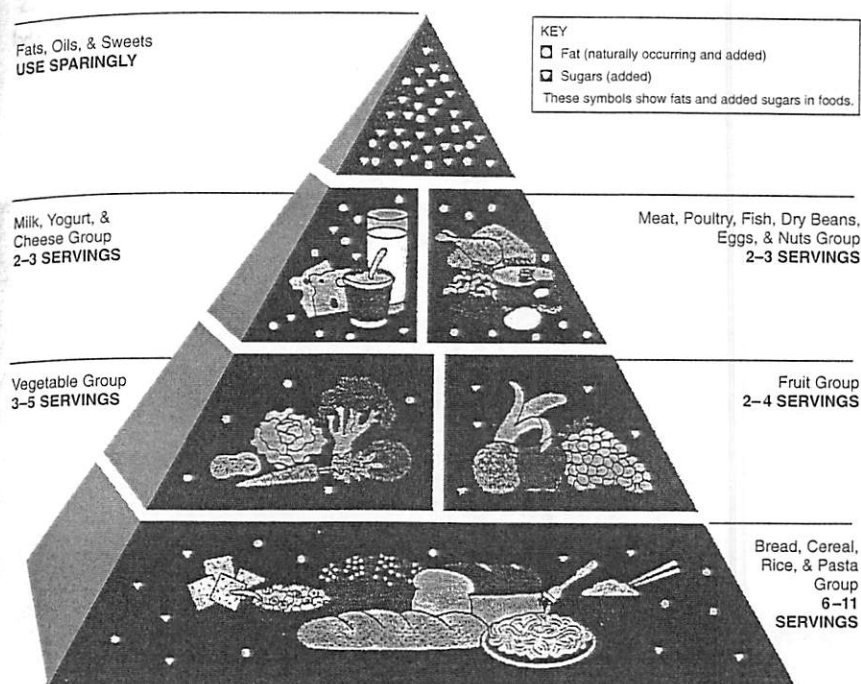


Figure 7.1 The USDA Food Pyramid.

Clearly, food is more than a matter of calories, vitamins, and minerals. It is a matter of culture and, within that, of individual preference. What is considered food by one person or one culture is considered inedible to another. "One man's meat is another man's poison," as the old adage succinctly states.

Classification systems

What counts as food in any particular culture, and what foods are preferred or forbidden, is intimately related to a system of classification that, in many cases, has roots in religious prescriptions. According to Genesis, for example, humans as well as animals were originally to be vegetarian.

Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you shall it be for meat.

And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. (Genesis 1: 29-30)

But not every fruit was given as food; eating the apple changed the human condition forever (Genesis 3). Only after the Flood and Noah's saving of the animals did God grant them as food.

Every moving thing that lives
given you all things. But flesh
ye not eat. (Genesis 9: 3-4)

The last sentence could still be about animals but is, instead, interpreted to mean that we have been drained (as is true in kosher law). Vegetarians believe that we need to eat meat to be original vegetarians dispensable.

Leviticus 11: 1-32, 39-47 – Clean and Unclean Animals

11 And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,² "Say to the people of Israel, These are the living things which you may eat among all the beasts that are on the earth.³ Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat.⁴ Nevertheless among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you.⁵ And the rock badger, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you.⁶ And the hare, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you.⁷ And the swine, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you.⁸ Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean to you.

9 "These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. ¹⁰But anything in the seas or the rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is an abomination to you. ¹¹They shall remain an abomination to you; of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall have in abomination. ¹²Everything in the waters that has not fins and scales is an abomination to you.

13 "And these you shall have in abomination among the birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey,¹⁴ the kite, the falcon according to its kind,¹⁵ every raven according to its kind,¹⁶ the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk according to its kind,¹⁷ the owl, the cormorant, the ibis,¹⁸ the water hen, the pelican, the carrion vulture,¹⁹ the stork, the heron according to its kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.

20 "All winged insects that go upon all fours are an abomination to you.
²¹Yet among the winged insects that go on all fours you may eat those which have legs above their feet, with which to leap on the earth.²² Of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind.²³ But all other winged insects which have four feet are an abomination to you.

24 "And by these you shall become unclean; whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean until the evening,"²⁵ and whoever carries any part of their carcass

shall wash his clothes and l parts the hoof but is not cl you; every one who touche paws, among the animals touches their carcass shall their carcass shall wash his unclean to you.

29 "And these are unclean upon the earth: the weasel,³⁰ the gecko, the land crocodile.³¹ These are unclean to you: they are dead shall be unclean; of them falls when they are on wood or a garment or a skin; it must be put into water, and it will be clean. . . .

39 "And if any animal shall be unclean until the evening wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening

41 "Every swarming thing shall not be eaten.⁴² Whatsoever has many feet, you shall not eat; for they are abominable with any swarm that is with them, lest you become defiled yourselves therefore with any swarm that is with them. I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt; therefore be holy, for I am the LORD your God.

46 This is the law pert
moves through the waters
make a distinction between
creature that may be eaten

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. (Genesis 9: 3-4)

The last sentence could still be seen as an injunction against eating warm-blooded animals but is, instead, interpreted as only eating meat from which the blood has been drained (as is true in kosher or halal meat). In any case, some contemporary vegetarians believe that we might return to Eden if we would only return to the original vegetarian dispensation.

Unclean

the people of Israel. These are the beasts that are on the earth and chew the cud, among which are those that chew the cud or part of it chews the cud but does not chew the cud, because it chews the cud, because it chews the cud. And the swine, because it chews the cud, is unclean to you; you shall not touch;

waters. Everything in the waters, you may eat. And scales, of the swarming things that are in the waters, is an abomination to you; of their flesh you shall not eat. Everything in the waters, is an abomination to you.

Among the birds, they shall be unclean to you: the vulture, the osprey,¹⁴ the eagle, according to its kind,¹⁶ the hawk, according to its kind,¹⁷ the owl, the carrion vulture,¹⁹ the bat.

These are an abomination to you. You may eat those which are clean. Of them you may eat according to its kind, the clean according to its kind.²³ But all the unclean are an abomination to you.

Whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean; and whoever touches any part of their carcass shall be unclean.

shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.²⁶ Every animal which parts the hoof but is not cloven-footed or does not chew the cud is unclean to you; every one who touches them shall be unclean.²⁷ And all that go on their paws, among the animals that go on all fours, are unclean to you; whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean until the evening,²⁸ and he who carries their carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening; they are unclean to you.

29 "And these are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm upon the earth: the weasel, the mouse, the great lizard according to its kind,³⁰ the gecko, the land crocodile, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon.³¹ These are unclean to you among all that swarm; whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until the evening.³² And anything upon which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is an article of wood or a garment or a skin or a sack, any vessel that is used for any purpose; it must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening; then it shall be clean. . . .

39 "And if any animal of which you may eat dies, he who touches its carcass shall be unclean until the evening,⁴⁰ and he who eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening; he also who carries the carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.

41 "Every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth is an abomination; it shall not be eaten.⁴² Whatever goes on its belly, and whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet, all the swarming things that swarm upon the earth, you shall not eat; for they are an abomination.⁴³ You shall not make yourselves abominable with any swarming thing that swarms; and you shall not defile yourselves with them, lest you become unclean.⁴⁴ For I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls upon the earth.⁴⁵ For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."

46 This is the law pertaining to beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms upon the earth,⁴⁷ to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.

I will return to the issue of vegetarianism below; here I wish to direct you to the biblical classification of permitted and tabooed foods first outlined in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. The meaning of the lists has perplexed numerous commentators for centuries. A major question has been why did Jews forbid pork? Was it a matter of hygiene, a recognition that occasionally people became ill from eating the meat, or because of the scavenging eating habits of pigs? Anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her famous 1966 essay "The Abominations of Leviticus," took issue with people who explained the prohibitions in terms of hygiene – that is, that there is an underlying medical reason for the prohibition. Douglas calls such people "medical materialists" (1966: 33).

For Maimonides himself, the great twelfth-century prototype of medical materialism, although he could find hygienic reasons for all the other dietary restrictions of Mosaic law, confessed himself baffled by the prohibition on pork, and was driven back to aesthetic explanations, based on the revolting diet of the domestic pig. (p. 32)

But that is *not* the reason given in the Bible. Indeed, "nothing whatever is said about its dirty scavenging habits" (p. 56). Pig is forbidden because it does not fit into the categories of the classification system – namely, those of cloven-hoofed, cud-chewing animals. Douglas's argument places the food prohibitions in a context of a system of classifications; certain animals are ambiguous or anomalous – they do not fit the system of classifications and thus become tabooed. While "cloven-hoofed, cud-chewing ungulates are the model of the proper kind of food for a pastoralist," a pig is cloven-hoofed but not ruminant. That "is the only reason given in the Old Testament for avoiding the pig" (Douglas 1966: 56). Since it does not fit the classification, it is outlawed. The primary issue about kosher rules is holiness and how to maintain a state of purity. "Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. . . . Holiness means keeping distinct the categories of Creation" (p. 54). Clearly, the pig transgressed those lines.

Hers is a very compelling and important argument and points out why people become morally exercised when others purposefully transgress the boundaries; it amounts to sacrilege. However, Douglas's argument does not address the question of what motivates this particular classification; after all, classifications do not exist in nature but are humanly constructed, and there is no objective reason for the classification.⁴

In a very different vein, novelist Jorge Luis Borges poked fun at the seeming naturalness of Western classifications when he suggested that any "creature, instead of belonging to groups like 'insects' or 'amphibians,' could be classified in one of these categories: 1) belonging to the Emperor, 2) embalmed, 3) tame," etc. (Rothstein, *New York Times*, May 12, 2001, A19). While fantastic to our modern scientific sensibilities, this classification does force us to think about how Europeans/Americans categorize the natural world, and why. "Do we create a narrative account, giving each animal a proper place, as in the biblical story of creation? Is there a hierarchy in our orderings, in which we judge animals by their usefulness to us or by their place in an evolutionary ladder?" (ibid.). Why should humans be at the top of the ladder? Do other people organize the world this way? If not, why not, and what are the implications?

British animals

Edmund Leach, another British anthropologist, discussed the classification of animals, not of God. His book "Anthropological Aspects of Leviticus," discussed in chapter 4, is on the classification system of food. He noted that some animals are both edible and nourishing, . . . and some are not. . . . They may be classified as potential food, but not as food, . . . or as potential culture, not of nature" (1964: 3).

- 1 Edible substances that are not in the normal diet.
- 2 Edible substances that are not normally eaten or else allowed to be eaten only in special circumstances.
- 3 Edible substances that by their nature are unclean. These substances are unclean.

The difference between 2 and 3 is that in the prohibition on eating pork with its hooves but no cud-chewing, it is admitted that pork is food for humans. In the prohibition on eating insects, on a categorical assumption that insects are not perfectly edible and, in some places, are not even eaten by anthropologists, does a cultural

American logic

Animals who share our beds and are
unthinkable to eat them. According to

America is the land of the sacred. . . . The cities at will, taking their material pleasures on curbs and sidewalks. . . . The employed to get rid of the material pleasures, the chairs designed for humans, the fashion awaiting their share of the material pleasures. . . . themselves will never be sacrificed. . . . accidental death. (1976: 171–172)

His analysis of the American diet is constructed by Douglas and her colleagues and associations. His book "Cultural and economic explanations for the American diet" presents concerns food, sj

Douglas's
"Abominations of
Leviticus"
1966

British animals

Edmund Leach, another British anthropologist, made an attempt to decipher the classification of animals, not of Genesis, but of the British. Although the focus of his article "Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse" (1964), discussed in chapter 4, is on the issue of taboo, his analysis depended on the classification system of food. He noted that while there is "a vast range of materials which are both edible and nourishing, . . . only a small part of this edible environment will actually be classified as potential food. Such classification is a matter of language and culture, not of nature" (1964: 30–1). He went on to distinguish three major categories:

- 1 Edible substances that are recognized as food and consumed as part of the normal diet.
- 2 Edible substances that are recognized as possible food, but that are prohibited or else allowed to be eaten only under special (ritual) conditions. These are substances which are *consciously tabooed*.
- 3 Edible substances that by culture and language are not recognized as food at all. These substances are *unconsciously tabooed* (Leach 1964: 31).

The difference between 2 and 3 is illustrated by the contrast between the Jewish prohibition on eating pork with the English objection to eating dog. In the first case, it is admitted that pork is food but Jews will not eat it, while the second case depends on a categorical assumption that dogs are *not* food (p. 32), even though they are perfectly edible and, in some places, are bred for food. Marshall Sahlins, an American anthropologist, does a *cultural* analysis of animals and food.

American logic

Animals who share our beds and table are like "one of the family" and it would be unthinkable to eat them. According to Sahlins:

America is the land of the sacred dog. . . . They roam the streets of major American cities at will, taking their masters about on leashes and depositing their excrements at pleasure on curbs and sidewalks. A whole system of sanitation procedures had to be employed to get rid of the mess. . . . Within houses and apartments, dogs climb upon chairs designed for humans, sleep in people's beds, and sit at table after their own fashion awaiting their share of the family meal. All this in the calm assurance that they themselves will never be sacrificed to necessity or deity, nor eaten even in the case of accidental death. (1976: 171–2)

His analysis of the American food system goes beyond the classificatory systems constructed by Douglas and Leach by considering the meanings of the categories and associations. His book *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976) is a major critique of economic explanations for cultural phenomena. One of the most telling examples he presents concerns food, specifically beef.

Why is it that beef, especially in the form of steak, is the most prized and the most expensive cut of meat even though "its absolute supply is much greater than that of tongue" (p. 176)? Doesn't this contradict one of the fundamental premises of economic rationality based on notions of supply and demand whereby scarcity is related to price? Steak is not the scarce item. Nor is there a natural desire for steak since many people(s) do not eat it and find it repulsive. "Taste," says Nick Fiddes in his book *Meat: A Natural Symbol*, "reflects rather than explains preferences" (1991: 6), and is related to an entire cosmology – distinctive views of how and what the world is.

It is "symbolic logic which organizes demand" (p. 175) according to Marshall Sahlins, not economic rationality, or, rather, economic rationality follows symbolic logic. For example, he points out that "innards" – liver, kidney, heart, and intestine – like tongue, are scarce in relation to steak, but they are cheap. He also notices how we disguise the provenance of muscle meat with terms like steak, chuck, roast, and chops but refer to internal organs by the same terms we use for human organs. "Edibility is inversely related to humanity" (p. 175), Sahlins claims, thus people who eat innards – who are most often poor and most often black – can be seen as less than human, and the entire meat system can be seen as a sustained metaphor on race, class, and cannibalism. "Black is in American society as the savage among us" (p. 176) – "us" here referring to white middle-class Americans. Blacks, however, subvert and recoup this ascription when they rename innards "Soul Food."

While there is always some play in the system, we must not be lulled into thinking such classification systems are merely play, for "the symbolic scheme of edibility joins with that organizing the relations of production to precipitate, through income distribution and demand, an entire totemic order, uniting in a parallel series of differences the status of persons and what they eat" (Sahlins 1976: 176). That is, the scheme of edibility is a way of naturalizing and reinforcing class and ethnic differences.

The artichoke with which I began this section is a useful example of the way food can index status or class. In the 1960s when I first encountered one, artichokes were exotic and relatively rare on the east coast; I do not recall seeing them on the shelves of standard supermarkets. Being able to appreciate them, knowing where to find them, how to cook and how to eat them was a sign of elite status – of having what Pierre Bourdieu calls "cultural capital." At that memorable luncheon, I was made aware, without any word being spoken, that I was clearly and obviously outclassed.

Artichokes were a west coast vegetable having been introduced by Italians who emigrated to the area around Half Moon Bay, California, now known as the artichoke capital of the world.

What Makes a Meal?

Just as what counts as food is related to a classification system, so too are meals and menus. Is a hotdog bought from a street vendor and eaten on the street considered a meal? What if you add french fries and a coke? What about pizza ordered in? In order to understand what a meal is, one first needs to think about it in contrast with all the other ways food may be obtained and eaten, and second, to consider the kinds of food that make a meal, the places a meal may be eaten and with whom. In "Deci-

phering a Meal" (1975), Mary family.

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phering a Meal” (1975), Mary Douglas began at home – in Britain and with her own family.

Between breakfast and the last nightcap, the food of the day comes in an ordered pattern. Between Monday and Sunday, the food of the week is patterned again. Then there is the sequence of holidays and fast days through the year, to say nothing of life cycle feasts, birthdays, and weddings. (Douglas 1975: 251)

The classification of meals consists not just in their order – in the day, the week, and the year – but also in the kinds of foods appropriate for each meal and the kinds of people with whom one “breaks bread.”

In Britain there are, according to Douglas, “two major contrasted food categories . . . meals versus drinks. . . . Meals are a mixture of solid foods accompanied by liquids. With drinks the reverse holds” (pp. 254–5). Both the meal category and “drinks” category have names: breakfast, lunch, supper, cocktails, or tea. The drinks category is, appropriately, more fluid and is not nearly as structured as a meal. It also often involves standing rather than sitting at a table.

The food categories also correlate with social categories. “Drinks are for strangers, acquaintances, workmen, and family. Meals are for family, close friends, honored guests. The grand operator of the system is the line between intimacy and distance” (p. 256). As we noted in chapter 5, French people find the American custom of inviting newly met acquaintances home to dinner very odd; conversely, Americans think the French are very cold and unfriendly because they rarely invite their new (American) friends to dinner in their homes. Being invited to a French home for dinner marks a significant shift in the quality of the relationship that might not be appreciated by an American guest for whom such behavior seems normal.

In India, caste membership will determine those with whom one may eat. Among the upper classes in Britain and France (and no doubt elsewhere), children do not regularly eat with their parents, and in quite a number of societies men and women do not eat together. In addition,

Meals properly require the use of at least one mouth-entering *utensil* per head, whereas drinks are limited to mouth-touching ones. . . . Meals require a *table*, a *seating* order, *restriction* on movement and on alternative occupations. There is no question of knitting during a meal. . . . (Furthermore), a meal is not a meal if it is all in the bland-sweet-sour dimensions. A meal incorporates a number of contrasts, hot and cold, bland and spiced, liquid and semi-liquid, and various textures. It also incorporates cereals, vegetables, and animal proteins. (Douglas 1975: 255–6; emphasis mine)

Before turning to the food and menus, let us briefly explore some of the conditions that make a meal a meal.

Setting the table

Douglas began with “mouth-entering utensil,” of which chopsticks would qualify, but there are some peoples who use their fingers or bread to scoop food. The

Breakfast Around the World

What follows are traditional, or culturally dominant, menus in each culture. It by no means assumes that all people in each culture eat these meals, nor does it deny that many people go hungry and have no breakfast, let alone other meals.

United States

A common breakfast is orange juice, cold cereal with milk and sometimes fruit, and coffee. Alternatives: (a) toast or English muffin with butter and jam; (b) bacon and eggs and toast. (Some people get all of these combined in an Egg McMuffin.) On weekends Americans sometimes merge breakfast and lunch and call it *brunch*. This meal includes more elaborately prepared and presented foods: an omelet instead of just eggs, various cold meats or smoked salmon, bagels and cream cheese. Some people serve champagne at this meal, sometimes mixed with orange juice and called a "mimosa." Restaurants have capitalized on the craze for brunch and offer a veritable cornucopia of foods, lavishly presented.

Turkey

A *sine qua non* of a proper Turkish breakfast is bread, as it is of every meal. Indeed, food is equated with bread. Turks do not say: "have you eaten (food)?" they say "*ekmek edin mi?*"—have you eaten bread? In the city the *kapacı* (resident doorman) goes out for bread (crusty sour-dough type bread) every morning and delivers to each apartment in the building; in the village, round flat breads (like a large English muffin) are warmed up and eaten with white feta-like cheese, olives, tomatoes, and cucumbers in season. Sometimes in the village we would also have peppers, potatoes, and onions fried in olive oil—one of my favorites.

Japan

I was surprised to see a Japanese breakfast. It consisted of miso soup, rice, and green tea. I asked a Japanese woman about her breakfast. She said she would eat this every day.

The Netherlands

Dark (wheat) bread, cold meat, and cheese. My favorites is a honey-spread and butter for children. Today my interest is in flakes and other cereals.

Bhutan

A Bhutanese friend informed me that Bhutanese who live in the west do not drink butter tea (a mixture of butter and tea). In the eastern part tend to be poor. They only drink butter tea, instead drink sugared tea.

Ivory Coast

Among the Beng people, bread is pounded into a ball with butter. If people have money they will buy a new one and serve it with freshly

manner of eating will also indicate quite a lot about the cultural notions of proper food. However, for the purposes of this discussion, the example of a meal in my mind will be one familiar to Europeans and Americans and includes forks, knives, and spoons. That leads one to think of the industries behind every meal. *First* are the manufacturers who produce the utensils, whether of stainless steel or sterling silver. Among the elite sterling silver is essential, a place setting includes far more than the three items above, and there is an intricate etiquette involved in the appropriate placing of each item. Among each type of flatware there are hundreds, if not thousands, of patterns, and a huge amount of money is spent on advertising them. Women, in particular, are advised to choose a pattern so that when they get married they can register it at various gift stores.

Second are the manufacturers of dinnerware, for in addition to utensils you need dishes to put the food on. Again, the distinctions and patterns are numerous and a

lot is communicated wordlessly. On the china used at a party, many families have several sets of dishes for everyday fare. Some are family heirlooms, passed down from generation to generation, or both.

The *third* industry that is involved is crystal versus ordinary glass, table linens, of which only the best of cotton and synthetic fabrics are used for tablecloths as well as placemats.

Japan

I was surprised to see a Japanese breakfast available at a hotel in Istanbul, Turkey. It consisted of miso soup, steamed spinach leaves, rice, grilled fillet of salmon, and green tea. I asked a Japanese anthropologist if this is a traditional Japanese breakfast. She said she would add eggs and pickles.

The Netherlands

Dark (wheat) bread, cold ham and a variety of cheeses, butter and jam. One of my favorites is a honey-spice loaf cake but now I hear it is intended primarily for children. Today my informants tell me that many people have shifted to corn-flakes and other cereals.

Bhutan

A Bhutanese friend informs me that traditional breakfast among more well-to-do Bhutanese who live in the western part of the country is rice, dried yak meat, and butter tea (a mixture of tea, salt, butter, and baking soda). Farmers in the eastern part tend to be poorer and eat rice with pepper curry mixed with cheese. They only drink butter tea on special occasions because it is expensive and instead drink sugared tea without milk.

Ivory Coast

Among the Beng breakfast could consist of leftover *foufou* (cooked yams pounded into a ball) with sauce or corn porridge sweetened with ripe bananas. If people have money they might buy a loaf of French bread from a local trader and serve it with freshly made peanut butter.

lot is communicated wordlessly about class, income, taste, and lifestyle depending on the china used at a particular meal. For example, many middle- and upper-class families have several sets of china – fine china for fancy dinner parties and pottery dishes for everyday fare. Some people are fortunate to be given or to inherit as a family heirloom, passed down from one generation to another, a set of china or silverware, or both.

The *third* industry that provisions a dinner table is the makers of glassware – lead crystal versus ordinary glass, stemware versus tumblers. *Fourth* are the makers of table linens, of which only some are actually made of linen, many more are made of cotton and synthetic fabrics and, today, even plastic. In this category, there are tablecloths as well as placemats, and each, generally, denotes the level of formality.



Figure 7.2 A place setting from a homeware catalogue.

The *fifth* industry involved in making a meal is furniture. Picnics notwithstanding, a proper meal generally demands a table: indeed, witness the oxymoron "picnic table." Some people eat at a table in the kitchen while others eat in a dining room; usually the type of table is different. In the 1950s for instance, the big new thing was a Formica-topped kitchen table. Its selling point was that it wouldn't stain as does wood, it didn't need polishing, and it was easy to clean. At my house and among those of my acquaintances, dining rooms and dining tables were reserved for special

holiday dinners or when out of wood, though sometime

Turkish villagers, at least on the floor around a large support. A cloth was placed over his or her legs and clo use plates, but each person from the communal dish. A lages men ate first and then

Seating arrangements include every family member the "grown-ups" eat. A tr usually the father, sitting at their regular seats. At a di attention to the seating pla and also to alternate by sex

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holiday dinners or when other people were invited. Dining tables more typically are of wood, though sometimes of glass.

Turkish villagers, at least where I worked, did not eat at tables. Instead, they sat on the floor around a large copper tray raised off the floor by a small round wooden support. A cloth was placed beneath the tray and each person picked up an edge to cover his or her legs and clothes; that is, it functioned as a napkin. Often we did not use plates, but each person had his or her own spoon or fork and simply took food from the communal dish. All family members sat around the tray; but in some villages men ate first and then the women and children.

Seating arrangements in American families (when they eat together) generally include every family member unless small children eat first and are put to bed before the "grown-ups" eat. A traditional seating plan has the head of the household, usually the father, sitting at the head of the table; most other family members have their regular seats. At a dinner party, the host or hostess often pays considerable attention to the seating plan and tries to put people with similar interests together, and also to alternate by sex.

All this before we even get to the food served. And I have not yet even mentioned the work in the background, the preparation and cooking. There is a vast industry that supplies cooking utensils – the pots and pans and mixers and processors and stoves and microwaves. Not surprisingly these items, too, have myriad producers, prices, and designs, and, again, these differences often relate to class and income, lifestyle and taste. There is no room to go into detail in this fascinating area; I state this merely to draw attention to the vast areas for research in relation to food besides the food itself. It is clear that what makes a meal a meal involves much more than merely food.

In addition to a table, the setting and the seating, Douglas claimed there is a "restriction on movement and on alternative occupations." People are meant to keep seated while at table, though children often get restive and are sometimes "excused" early. Douglas's definition would seem to exclude those who listen to music or the radio or watch television, as is the case among Turks both rural and urban, while they eat. Would she consider it a meal if you eat alone? Would you?

The inclusion of a seating order in Mary Douglas's definition of a meal seems to imply that a real meal involves more than one person. Sociologist Janet Flammang is more explicit: "Table conversation is an art of give and take, where we think before we speak so we do not disrupt the pleasures and sharing of the group" (forthcoming). She believes that the "table is where we learn the art of conversation, especially across generations, learn to feel connected, and learn to trust ourselves and others." For her,

[C]ivility at the table is a cornerstone of civil society and democratic process. . . . A democratic process is deliberative: people think and give reasons for what they think in trying to persuade others to agree with them. People will be more persuasive to the degree that they understand both what they think and what others think. This mutual self- and other-understanding comes primarily from conversations,

and people begin to learn this as children sitting with the family at mealtimes. This is clearly an idealistic view of the family dinner table, for there are numerous families where dinner times are tension ridden and conversation is minimal.



ture. Picnics notwithstanding the oxymoron "picnic" others eat in a dining room; hence, the big new thing was that it wouldn't stain as does 1. At my house and among les were reserved for special

Nevertheless, the model she presents conveys an important message at a time when American families, of whatever type, are spending less time together and hardly ever eat together anymore. Flammang believes there is a relationship between the breakdown in family dining and the breakdown in civility. Her forthcoming book *Women and the Politics of Food* explores the social costs and the possible alternatives that do not depend on putting women back in the kitchen nor assume that women's lives have been improved by staying out of it. Instead, she advocates that we all need to become more involved with food and its preparation. Now that the table is set and the people are gathered around it, let us move on to the food, to the actual components of a meal.

Menu

Any discussion of meals entails a discussion of the menu. Not only do menus vary considerably cross-culturally, but "there is an implicit order governing the idea of what constitutes a meal both in terms of appropriate foodstuffs and the order of eating them" (James 1990: 676). We do not begin with dessert, as every child who wants ice cream first quickly learns. The order will depend on what type of meal it is: a quick breakfast on a weekday or the "soup to nuts" menu (soup, fish course, meat course, salad, cheese, dessert, coffee, nuts, cordials) considered appropriate for elite dinner parties. As a Fulbright fellow in Belgium, I was treated to several very elegant meals where the courses were separated by sorbets to cleanse the palate.

For each item in the order there are acceptable substitutions: for the soup course one might substitute a cream soup for consommé, and for the fish course one could have halibut, tuna, or salmon. All are equally fish, and each can be prepared in any number of ways. The same rule applies to all courses. Among some people color is important – one would not want every food in the meal to be the same color. I recall one home meal in Belgium where everything was kind of whitish – the soup, endive, rice, white fish! Although it did not taste bland, it looked that way; I felt it was unappealing.

There are some meals where substitutions can only be made in very narrow compass. Holidays have special foods though these may vary by region, ethnicity, and family. For example, my family always had roast beef and Yorkshire pudding for Christmas, but many others had duck or turkey. Some people have spring lamb at Easter, perhaps symbolic of the "paschal lamb," but others have ham, something that seems to me a direct affront to Jews especially when Passover occurs around the same time. Gillian Feeley-Harnik, anthropologist at the University of Michigan, explores the way food became a means for the emerging theological differences between Jews and early Christians in her 1981 book *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity*.

Thanksgiving is a major holiday in the United States. The story we are told is that the Pilgrims instituted this to thank the Native Americans for helping them through a terrible winter. While they did have a harvest celebration in October 1621, there were hardly any Native Americans left around Plymouth because the Pawtuxet who lived there had been wiped out by an epidemic. While the Pilgrims

did continue to hold harvest proclaimed by Abraham Lincoln election campaign . . . and Civil War" (Quinn, *New York Times*).

The Thanksgiving meal turkey along with gravy, cranberry sauce, vegetable, salad, and pumpkin pie. Thanksgiving in the year 2001 around the country. For example, greens, while a Vietnamese shiitake mushrooms and lotus root turkey with a crown roast of pork. The article concluded: "That's why you're free to create your own Thanksgiving menu" (B1). I am not so sure. Is it still immigrants from Fujian Province? new tradition of a Thanksgiving meal" (*Times*, November 29, 2002):

Main meal

Douglas's family rejected socialism and an end and no more meat must consist of, at least in both Britain and the United States (James 1990), meat could be substituted. In the United States, vegetables with vegetables or salad and the United States, a meal why? The answer appears protein, and simply because (Fiddes, 1991: 1), but, as no meat and taste is surely a result in the 1940s and 1950s, I insisted of meat (including oysters, starch, and a vegetable. On difficult to break, and to this day traditional pasta dishes or a stew in those days, at least at the time, canned, or jello, and when

But why meat?

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did continue to hold harvest feasts, it did not become a national holiday until it was proclaimed by Abraham Lincoln in 1863. "It can be read as a first salvo in his re-election campaign . . . and of our bloody crucible as a people, [during] the Civil War" (Quinn, *New York Times*, November 24, 1994).⁵

The Thanksgiving meal has been represented by whole roasted and stuffed turkey along with gravy, cranberry sauce, pearl onions, yellow squash, a green vegetable, salad, and pumpkin pie. An article in the *New York Times* just before Thanksgiving in the year 2000 featured innovations being made by different people around the country. For example, a family in Georgia served *fried* turkey and turnip greens, while a Vietnamese family in California stuffed their *brined* turkey with shitake mushrooms and lotus seeds, and a gay couple in Massachusetts *replaced* turkey with a crown roast of pork stuffed with brandied dried fruit and sausage. The article concluded: "That's what makes the holiday so great. After all, this is America. You're free to create your own traditions" (Hesser, *New York Times*, November 15, B1). I am not so sure. Is it still Thanksgiving without a turkey?⁶ Meanwhile, Chinese immigrants from Fujian Province now living in New York City use the day "for the new tradition of a Thanksgiving Day matrimonial marathon" (Sachs, *New York Times*, November 29, 2002) accompanied by traditional Chinese wedding banquets.

Main meal

Douglas's family rejected soup and pudding as a meal because it has only "a beginning and an end and no middle" (1975: 250), the implication being that the main meal must consist of, at least, three courses. Meat is at the center of the main meal in both Britain and the United States. In Britain, according to Douglas (1975) and James (1990), meat could be fish and either should be accompanied by two vegetables. In the United States, until recently, the main meal had to have "meat and potatoes" with vegetables or salad on the side. For many people in both Britain and the United States, a meal of only vegetables is not a meal at all. But why? The answer appears obvious – meat is "high in strength-giving protein, and simply because when cooked it tastes good and is satisfying" (Fiddes, 1991: 1), but, as noted, plenty of people flourish with little or no meat and taste is surely a matter of culture and upbringing. Growing up in the 1940s and 1950s, I simply assumed that a proper evening meal consisted of meat (including occasionally fish or poultry), potatoes or other starch, and a vegetable. Once learned as a "proper meal," the habit is difficult to break, and to this day, I tend to follow that pattern except for occasional pasta dishes or a stew that would combine all in one dish. Dessert, in those days, at least at my house, was relatively simple – fruit, often canned, or jello, and when we got a freezer, ice cream.

But why meat?

Many of us, and the society in general, consider meat eating normal; it is part of our *habitus*, of what we take for granted. Yet recall the biblical injunction against

In the 1950s home freezers changed the foodways of American households. I recall my mother ordering a "side of beef" to be cut into chops, steaks, and roasts in suitable portions for our family of six and put in the freezer until needed; vegetables were no longer canned but frozen and soon could be bought in packages already frozen.

meat eating (see p. 279). We tend to think that only vegetarianism is ideological; it is much more difficult for us to realize that meat eating is also ideological for it embodies ideas, categories, and values that *go without saying*. Fiddes shows that vegetarianism is not substantively defined but is defined only in relation to meat eating; it is the avoidance of meat eating.

Building on the work of Douglas, Leach, Sahlins, and others, Nick Fiddes argues that "our use of meat as food reflects our categorization of, and our relations towards, animal competitors, companions, and resources . . . that it tangibly represents human control of the natural world" (1991: 2). This idea has been with cultures influenced by the Bible for a very long time. Recall the biblical license: "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Genesis 1: 24). Fiddes continues: "Consuming the muscle flesh of other highly evolved animals is a potent statement of our supreme power" (1991: 2). Incorporating their flesh, we consume their power.

Of Meat and Men

"People with power have always eaten meat" (Adams 1991: 26), and that implies not just class distinctions but also gender distinctions. While Sahlins barely mentions the association of men and meat in his discussion, this is the main theme in the work of both Nick Fiddes and Carol Adams. There are two major dimensions I wish to discuss *vis-à-vis* gender and meat; first, the idea that women *are* meat, and second, that men, in many cultures, have traditionally had rights to meat.

Some of the gender symbolism of meat eating may have begun with "Man the Hunter," or at least the cultural myth and ideology of man the hunter. We do not eat lion meat, according to Fiddes, because it would blur the categories of Man the Hunter and Lion the Hunter. This seems a better reason than the one given by Leach, who said we don't eat lions because they are wild, beyond our pale. In any case, Man the Hunter is portrayed dragging home the meat. When this is combined with the idea that women are meat, we get the numerous cartoons of primitive man dragging home a woman by the hair. "Man is the hunter; woman is his game" (Tennyson, cited in Fiddes 1991: 144), a statement that casts all men as sexual predators.

There are numerous words that can be applied indiscriminately to either food or women, e.g. appetizing, delicious, succulent. Fiddes notes how Alex Comfort named his *Joy of Sex* after the classic American cookbook bible *The Joy of Cooking* (Rombauer and Rombauer Becker, 1931), including chapter titles that continue the culinary metaphor: Starters, Main Courses, Sauces and Pickles (Fiddes 1991: 144). The symbolic equation of women with food, and specifically, meat, can have violent implications. Adams tells how she came across what seemed at first sight to be a typical meat diagram in a Boston meat market – the kind that outlines where the rib, chuck, loin, rump part of meat come from – except on closer inspection, the diagram was a woman's body. Might there be a connection, she asks, between

the butchering and dismemberment of women's bodies by men; the woman's body going head first into the meat?

Meat is associated with strength whose strength are men incarnate. This has not been noticed or commented on between meat and masculinity. Men are gay; after all, *Real Men Eat Meat*. The connection between men and meat is not only in the dining tables of athletes and sportsmen but in the consumption of meat by what Fiddes calls "two-and-a-half times that of women."

In patriarchal societies, men have "the lion's share" of the choice of meats. Turkey is a patriarchal country. People ate little meat at regular meals but meat in a stew. Although it could not afford to each man a portion of the market, whatever they ate was meat. But at special feasts were to leave on the *hajj* (pilgrimage) slaughtered and roasted, as in Turkey. However, on these occasions who served them. The delicious meat everyone hungry for their husbands. The women and children were not to eat for several months, I can still remember the portion of the roasted lamb in the midst.

When meat is scarce, it is a time when pregnant or nursing – a time when in "my" village were anemic. This is a pattern painfully observed in many countries, women do with less meat. I occasionally hears news reports that the house did not get meat for several months.

In addition to the supposed need it for "brain food." The connection between the categorization that men do have with meat and nineteenth-century medical theories of evolution, and therefore

In proportion as man grows, the quantity of certain organs diminishes, and increase the quantity of others, and therefore of evolution, and therefore

the butchering and dismembering of animals and the killing and dismemberment of women's bodies by men? I recall that a cover of *Hustler* magazine depicted a woman's body going head first through a meat grinder.

Meat is associated with strength and virility, but if women *are* meat, then just whose strength are men incorporating when they eat it? Oddly, this contradiction has not been noticed or commented on by the authors cited. But the associations between meat and masculinity may also be why some people think that vegetarian men are gay; after all, *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* (Feirstein, 1982). The association between men and meat is no doubt behind the prominence of meat on the training tables of athletes and soldiers. During World War II, for example, the consumption of meat by what Russell Baker called the "American warrior" was "about two-and-a-half times that of the average citizen" (Adams 1991: 32).

In patriarchal societies, men often eat their meals first and, thus, get "the lion's share" of the choicest cuts of meat while women get the leftovers. Turkey is a patriarchal society, and in the village where I worked people ate little meat at regular daily meals – sometimes a bit of minced meat in a stew. Although it was a fairly prosperous village, most people could not afford to eat much meat. Since meat was intended for the market, whatever they ate meant that much less to sell and thus less income. But at special feasts such as weddings, or before a few villagers were to leave on the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, a number of sheep were slaughtered and roasted, and the whole village gathered for the meal. However, on these occasions, men ate together and ate *before* the women who served them. The delicious smell wafted over the village making everyone hungry for their share. Often there was little left by the time the women and children were ready to eat. Having not had much meat for several months, I can still recall my lust as well as my guilt as I fell upon my portion of the roasted lamb which I, as an "honored guest," was served in their midst.

When meat is scarce, it is usually women who go without even when they are pregnant or nursing – a time when they need it more than men. Most of the women in "my" village were anemic. "Meat is a constant for men, intermittent for women, a pattern painfully observed in famine situations today. Women are starving at a rate disproportionate to men" (Adams 1991: 26; see also Fiddes 1991: 158ff.). In many countries, women do without meat, and in Britain and the United States, one occasionally hears news reports of "domestic abuse," i.e. wife beating, if the man of the house did not get meat for his dinner.

In addition to the supposed need of meat for strength, men are also thought to need it for "brain food." This idea and the statement below depend on the prior categorization that men do *head* work while women do *hand* work. George Beard, a nineteenth-century medical doctor influenced by Darwin, advocated that:

In proportion as man grows sensitive through civilization or through disease, he should diminish the quantity of cereals and fruits, which are far below him on the scale of evolution, and increase the quantity of animal food, which is nearly related to him in the scale of evolution, and therefore more easily assimilated. (Cited in Adams 1991: 30)

Not all patriarchal societies are meat eating, however. India is a patriarchal society but, among Hindus, cows are sacred and are not eaten. A Hindu student made the interesting suggestion that the "Mad Cow disease" scare in Britain is a kind of revenge for the way they colonized and incorporated India in their commonwealth.

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This ideological statement has little to do with nutrition, and the assimilation of animal flesh is not easier for humans than the assimilation of plants. Instead, his evolutionary schema seems to follow more closely biblical valuations: recall that when Cain "brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord" (Genesis 4: 3), God had no respect but instead preferred Abel's offering of a "firstling of the flock." Cain became angry and, as the story goes, rose up and killed his brother. However, no reason is ever given for God's preference. Personally, I think that the story symbolizes the tension between the practices and beliefs of the agriculturalists of Mesopotamia and the nomadic pastoralists who were, through Abraham, to become the "chosen people" of God. The chosen food symbolized the people chosen.

Food and Worldview

Food is intimately related to religion/worldview whether it is biblical, Hindu, Buddhist, Hopi, or even that promoted by the "health food" movement. Anthropologist Jill Dubisch investigated the health food movement in the United States and claimed that the analysis of its "underlying world view reveals that, as a system of beliefs and practices, the health food movement has some of the characteristics of a religion" ([1981] 1997: 62). Its roots go back to mid-nineteenth-century "hygienists" such as Sylvester Graham, of graham cracker fame, who "preached that good health was to be found in temperate living. This included abstinence from alcohol, a vegetarian diet, consumption of whole wheat products, and regular exercise" (p. 63) – quite a contrast to Beard, who wrote somewhat later, after Darwin's work was published.

The health food movement resurfaced in the counter-cultural 1960s. According to Dubisch, becoming part of the movement often involves a kind of "conversion experience," perhaps one that includes healing from an ailment. Such an experience demands a reorganization of one's kitchen and also one's life; it demands a psychological reorientation – a different way of perceiving the world and one's own place in it. It

means learning and accepting the general features of the health food world view. To begin with, there is great concern, as there is in many religions, with purity, in this case, the purity of food, of water, of air. In fact, there are some striking similarities between keeping a "health food kitchen" and the Jewish practice of keeping kosher. Both make distinctions between proper and improper foods, and both involve excluding certain impure foods (whether unhealthful or non-kosher) from the kitchen and table. In addition, a person concerned with maintaining a high degree of purity in food may engage in similar behavior in either case – reading labels carefully to check for impermissible ingredients and even purchasing food from special establishments to guarantee ritual purity. (p. 64)

Devotees of health food categorize food either as "health food" or "junk food"; the former is believed to promote well-being and bestow *mana* (a kind of beneficial

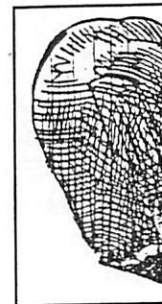


Figure 7.3 An apple as "health"

power), while the latter is *tal* are felt to be health promoting: sugar, yogurt instead of ice cream. Especially singled out for opprobrium are fries, and coke – the "all-American diet."

Health food is not just about establishing a healthy relationship with the universe. Growing your own food, a cow and making cheese are a reliance – a pioneer ethos. It is linked to nutrition, and at the same time is life affirming while justifying the destructive culture of the talgic – harking "back to a simpler time" assumes that many of the ills of society's departure from this

Fast food

At the opposite end of the food spectrum, fast food, itself, is not new. Fast food, itself, is not new and chips in Britain, noodle What is new is the standard brief period of time, the fast American diet, but also our (Schlosser 2001: 3). In his *Ex All-American Meal* (2001), Eric the quintessential American relation to food, the environment for granted and find it convenient the darker side of the indus



Figure 7.3 An apple as “health food”.

power), while the latter is *taboo* and, if eaten, conveys malignant power. Foods that are felt to be health promoting are dark bread instead of white, honey instead of sugar, yogurt instead of ice cream, and tofu or soybeans in place of beef. Especially singled out for opprobrium are McDonald’s hamburgers, french fries, and coke – the “all-American” favorites.

Health food is not just about achieving a healthy body – it is a way of establishing a healthy relationship with society and getting in tune with the universe. Growing your own food, baking your own bread, perhaps raising a cow and making cheese are thought to foster independence and self-reliance – a pioneer ethos. Emotional, spiritual, and social problems are linked to nutrition, and at the cosmic level, health food is allied with nature and is life affirming while junk food is a symbol and symptom of a death-oriented destructive culture (p. 67). In many ways the movement is nostalgic – harking “back to a ‘golden age’ which it seeks to recreate and assumes that many of the ills of the contemporary world are caused by society’s departure from this ideal state” (p. 69) – Eden, once again.

Fast food

At the opposite end of the food spectrum from “health food” is “fast food.” Fast food, itself, is not new if one considers street kebabs in Turkey, fish and chips in Britain, noodles in China, and station box lunches in Japan. What is new is the standardization and automation. “During a relatively brief period of time, the fast food industry has helped to transform not only the American diet, but also our landscape, economy, workforce, and popular culture” (Schlosser 2001: 3). In his extraordinary book, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (2001), Eric Schlosser has meticulously documented the ways that the quintessential American meal, namely a hamburger and fries, has changed our relation to food, the environment, and each other. While most of us take “fast food” for granted and find it convenient, few of us know anything about the history and the darker side of the industry and the consequences for our society as a whole.

Horn and Hardart’s “automat” might also be classified as fast food. The restaurant had tables and chairs but its walls were lined with what were really vending machines: the food was already prepared and put in little window boxes. You selected your choice, put in the money, and got your food. There was a lot more choice in a typical automat than at a fast food restaurant today. The first automat opened in 1902; they were popular during the Depression and were still in operation when I was a child (in the 1940s) and visited them in New York with my grandmother.

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The origins of the fast food industry are set in late 1940s and early 1950s in California and are bound up with the increasing use of automobiles and, thus, the need for restaurants to be located on the road and outside the city centers. Carl Karcher, the founder of Carl's Jr., first began with a hot dog stand; later he opened a drive-in restaurant as did the McDonald brothers. But sometime in 1948 the McDonald brothers transformed their operation. Not only did they reduce the number of items on their menu, basically to hamburgers, french fries, and milkshakes; they also replaced dishes and glassware with paper cups and plates. In addition, they

divided the food preparation into separate tasks performed by different workers. To fill a typical order, one person grilled the hamburger; another "dressed" and wrapped it; another prepared the milk shake; made the fries; and another worked the counter. For the first time, the guiding principles of a factory assembly line were applied to a commercial kitchen. The new division of labor meant that a worker only had to be taught how to perform one task. (Schlosser 2001: 20)

The McDonald brothers' system caught the attention of Ray Kroc, who convinced them to sell him the franchise rights to spread McDonald's across the nation and eventually the world.

This deskilling of workers was touted as a benefit for anyone wishing to set up a franchise since it was more difficult to find skilled cooks. Their Speedee Service system transformed the restaurant business and was quickly imitated by others such as Carl's Jr., Burger King, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, but it is McDonald's that symbolizes the phenomenon, as



Figure 7.4 Food automat, 977 Eighth Avenue, Manhattan, 1936. Photo by Berenice Abbott/Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 7.5 Cartoon by Pete Mueller.

its use in new words such as in negative mode, McGarbag

A new McDonald's open worldwide.⁷ "The company other American organization a depressing statistic that do people deplore McDonald's f according to Conrad Kottak get a fast meal, but also as places, stained-glass window when one is in unfamiliar to wonderful food, I slipped in and to have a familiar "quart And discovered that it had b gather.

Despite its enormous su "Americanization" of the w of national identity: how, w 44). It counters this by bei example: McDöner (Turki: China), and McLaks (grille cheese in respect for koshe 1997).

Margaret Visser, a Cana 1986 book *Much Depends o* mass-produced processed di more directly expresses ou



Figure 7.5 Cartoon by Pete Mueller, 'I'm optional, you're optional, fries are not'. © Pete Mueller.

1940s and early 1950s in California, and, thus, the need for drive-in city centers. Carl Karcher, a German immigrant; later he opened a drive-in restaurant. In 1948 the McDonald brothers reduced the number of items on the menu to burgers and milkshakes; they also eliminated fries. In addition, they

employed different workers. To each worker, they "dressed" and wrapped the food; and another worked the cash register. The division of labor meant that a worker could perform a task. (Schlosser 2001: 20)

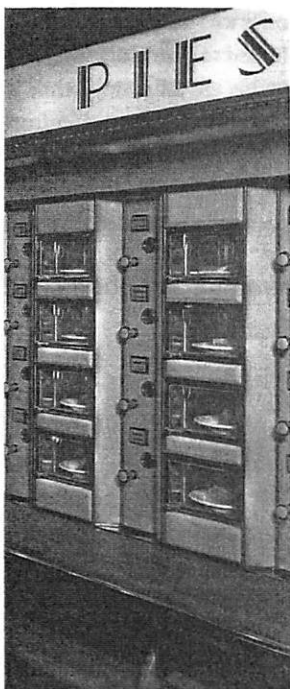
benefit for anyone wishing to work in the fast-food industry. To find skilled cooks. Their restaurant business and was the first of its kind. Burger King, and Kentucky Fried Chicken popularizes the phenomenon, as

its use in new words such as McDonaldization, McWorld, McThink, McDollars, or, in negative mode, McGarbage, McGreedy, and McProfits, indicates.

A new McDonald's opens every 3 hours and there are now more than 28,000 worldwide.⁷ "The company annually hires about a million people, more than any other American organization, public or private" (Schlosser 2001: 4). If true, that is a depressing statistic that does not bode well for the future workforce. While some people deplore McDonald's food and work tactics, the behavior of numerous others, according to Conrad Kottak (1982), reveals that it functions not only as a place to get a fast meal, but also as almost a sacred site (with golden arches and, in some places, stained-glass windows), a pilgrimage destination, and a refuge, especially when one is in unfamiliar territory. And I confess that once in Paris, the mecca of wonderful food, I slipped into a McDonald's just to feel "at home" – to hear English and to have a familiar "quarter-pounder with special sauce," a coke, and french fries! And discovered that it had become, at least among young people, a trendy place to gather.

Despite its enormous success and increasing popularity, some people fear the "Americanization" of the world and worry that it "threatens a fundamental aspect of national identity: how, where, and what people choose to eat" (Schlosser 2001: 44). It counters this by being extremely pliable and by adapting local tastes, for example: McDöner (Turkish döner kebab in Germany), McChao (fried rice in China), and McLaks (grilled salmon in Norway), and in Israel Big Macs have no cheese in respect for kosher diet that separates meat and milk products (Watson 1997).

Margaret Visser, a Canadian classicist who turned her attention to food in her 1986 book *Much Depends on Dinner*, thinks the popularity of these "standardized mass-produced processed dishes" might be an expression of democracy, "for nothing more directly expresses our loathing for hierarchy than the pre-cut, pre-coated,



936. Photo by Berenice Abbott/

ground and reconstituted portions – often computer calculated to be *equal* – which we get as fast-food” (Visser, quoted in interview with Trish Hall, *New York Times*, June 15, 1988). She may have a point, but this is a cookie-cutter image of democracy; equal doesn’t always mean, or need to mean, the same. Equal access to good food might be a better expression of democracy.

In the year 2000 Americans spent more than \$110 billion on fast food; it is more than they spend “on higher education, personal computers, computer software, or new cars. They spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music – combined” (Schlosser 2001: 3). Americans are hungry. Schlosser continues: “On any given day in the United States about one-quarter of the adult population visits a fast food restaurant,” and so do millions of children who are, increasingly, the targets of advertising. Virtually all children in the United States know about McDonald’s, and most have probably visited one not once but many times, some several times a week. However, children who early on become accustomed to, if not addicted to, fast food do not easily abandon it. Obesity in children and in the general population has paralleled the growth of the fast food industry, and the same is true in other nations after they have introduced fast food. Schlosser does not claim fast food is the only cause, but it is certainly a contributing one; nevertheless, obesity contributes to and exacerbates numerous health problems which, in turn, contribute to the rising health care costs.

The enormous demand for meat and potatoes, even in these new forms, has a concomitantly enormous impact on our environment. According to Sahlins: “The exploitation of the American environment, the mode of relation to the landscape, *depends on the model of a meal* that includes a central meat element” (1976: 171). What he means by this is that an enormous amount of land (80 percent of the arable land in comparison with a mere 3 percent taken up by cities) is devoted to feed grains for cattle and their pasturage, “[a]ll of which would change overnight if we ate dogs” (Sahlins 1976: 171), became vegetarian, or adopted the diet recently proposed by the USDA.⁸ What Sahlins is trying to get across is that there is nothing of economic rationality in the use of our lands. Rather, the use is determined by the cultural logic of foods and meals and the meaningful distinctions and identities we create.

Another issue related to the land concerns how the fast food industry has changed the way the food is grown. In a very short period of time, a few companies have managed to buy out, take over, and dominate the production of both beef and potatoes, a process that has forced thousands of small farmers into virtual *serfdom* for the large agribusinesses or out of business and a life. Quite a number of these people have committed suicide because of the end of their way of life and the farm which had been in their family for generations. “The suicide rate among ranchers and farmers in the United States is now about three times higher than the national average” (Sahlins 1976: 146). This tragedy was borne out by anthropologist Eric Ramirez, whose dissertation research was devoted to this problem in Oklahoma (2001).

Another human tragedy unfolds with the workers in the “modern” slaughterhouses. No longer butchers, a highly skilled occupation, these workers have been demoted to manning one particular station at one particular instant in the assembly line. It is now perhaps one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States; most

of the workers are immigrants. Because of the speed-up in the line for accidents such as the spilling of meat. Such meat will not be eaten in restaurants and even school lunches. Poisoning get reported in the news.

The human tragedy is part of the cattle were raised in pasture part because of the rising cost of efficiency, most of the cattle are where they are stuffed full of hormones of their normal diet. Cows waste parts of animals, including the parts that has been definitely linked with the disease known as Mad Cow disease. Conveyor belts into the slaughterhouse minute. No wonder there are so many accidents.

Where does all this automation go? raised and processed, the food is full of chemical additives, often more than McDonald’s used to fry the food. How can their distinctive taste. However, by a group of vegetarians the food is full of chemical additives to simulate the taste of meat.

This overview is far too brief for more information. Fast food is not just what we eat, and where we eat, but how we eat, farming, compassion for workers, and accompany dining. In the kitchen, to incorporate the other concerns, and other fast food chains are not eating a home-cooked meal, or even from that of eating a home-cooked meal and presentation of food, and who eat at fast food restaurants to have a “normal” meal. It is both symbolizes and embodies the fast food industry.

Anomalous Foods: Beef

There are some edible things in the health-conscious world, but because of the warnings and the fact that it is full of sugar

calculated to be *equal* – which Trish Hall, *New York Times*, hokie-cutter image of democracy same. Equal access to good

million on fast food; it is more uters, computer software, or ies, books, magazines, news-asser 2001: 3). Americans are ne United States about one-irant,” and so do millions of g. Virtually all children in the robably visited one not once r, children who early on be-ot easily abandon it. Obesity l the growth of the fast food y have introduced fast food. ut it is certainly a contribut-bates numerous health prob-e costs.

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in the “modern” slaughter-n, these workers have been ticular instant in the assem-os in the United States; most

of the workers are immigrants, have no benefits, but risk life and limb every day. Because of the speed-up in the production process, there is also much more room for accidents such as the spillage from intestines that can contaminate an entire line of meat. Such meat will not necessarily be disposed of but may easily end up in restaurants and even schools, as we learn only after the fact, after incidents of food poisoning get reported in the news.

The human tragedy is paralleled by what happens to the cattle. Traditionally, cattle were raised in pastures calculated as 30 acres for each head of cattle; today, in part because of the rising costs of land for real estate but also because of the value of *efficiency*, most of the cattle are housed in pens where they can barely move and where they are stuffed full of chemicals, hormones, and feed other than the grasses of their normal diet. Cows are vegetarian, yet feed companies have been using the waste parts of animals, including the nerves and brains, in their feed, a procedure that has been definitely linked to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), otherwise known as Mad Cow disease. When the cattle are fattened up, they are put on conveyor belts into the slaughterhouse where one is killed and processed every minute. No wonder there are accidents and spillage.

Where does all this automation and speed-up lead? Because of the way cattle are raised and processed, the food has little taste. Whatever taste there is is derived from chemical additives, often made at perfume factories. The same is true for the fries. McDonald's used to fry their potatoes in 93 percent beef tallow which gave them their distinctive taste. However, they did not disclose this fact, and after being sued by a group of vegetarians they switched to vegetable oil, but continue to use chemical additives to simulate the smell of the former fries.

This overview is far too brief, but I hope it is enough to whet your appetite for more information. Fast food has changed our lives; not only *what* we eat, *how* we eat, and *where* we eat, but it has also contributed to a deterioration of land and farming, compassion for workers and animals, and in the patterns of civility that accompany dining. In the long run that may be its most deleterious effect, for it can incorporate the other concerns. Although it is true that families eat at McDonald's and other fast food chains, the experience is very different from that of families eating a home-cooked meal around the table and talking about the day's activities, or even from that of eating in a restaurant where thought is put into the selection and presentation of food, and where preparation is both a skill and an art. People who eat at fast food restaurants are generally people “on the run,” people too busy to have a “normal” meal. Perhaps fast food is quintessentially American because it both symbolizes and embodies the value we place on speed and efficiency.

Anomalous Foods: Betwixt and Between

There are some edible things that are, nevertheless, classified as non-food. In a health-conscious world, British anthropologist Allison James wonders why it is that despite the warnings and the knowledge that confectionery, or candy as Americans refer to it, is full of sugar and often high in fat, the consumption of it is actually

increasing in Britain. In a report in 1988, Britons spent £3,285 million on confectionery but only £2,375 million on staples like bread, and only £650 million on cereals. It is not enough simply to say that Britons have a sweet tooth; one needs to ask why. James resorts to classification systems whereby confectionery is both food and non-food, yet it is not the same as "junk food," which still qualifies as food. Because of the "place which confectionery occupies in the system of food classification is between 'real' and 'junk' food, and as a 'liminal' foodstuff, confectionery has the symbolic power both to mediate social relationships and to confer particular sets of social meanings" (James 1990: 666). Never part of a meal, yet still something to be eaten, it stands outside the major classifications and thus can act as go-between, sweetening the path of social relations. It makes an appropriate gift in place of flowers or wine when one is invited to dinner. Confectionery has become a symbol of love, not only between parents and children but between men and women. For example, confectionery, especially chocolate, is an appropriate gift from men to women on Valentine's Day. The ability of candy to sweeten social relations depends first of all on the classification of sweet as good and pleasurable.⁹

Frankenfood¹⁰

Just as we begin to think we know what food is and is not, and what its meanings are, a whole new category emerges that confounds all the traditional classifications, and that is the newly *made* genetically modified foods, GMFs, or in a more ghoulish mode, *frankenfood*, as the British refer to them. These *transgenic* foods – the new chimera – fuse genetic material not only from two different kinds of plants – as occurs in hybrids – but from two different species altogether. Thus we have tomatoes with fish genes, potatoes with chicken genes, tobacco with hamster genes, and corn plants with firefly genes (Rifkin 1998: 81). No wonder people are wary. Are these things safe to eat? Are they really foods? What will be the long-term effect on the environment? At a deeper level the anxiety may be related to the belief that we are what we eat; if we eat transgenic food, the question looms: what will we become?

The scientists who are developing these foods or, more accurately, the seeds, glorify their usefulness: they make plants resistant to bugs, they lace rice with vitamin-enriched bacteria, and they can insert genes that will prevent frost damage and thus, theoretically, prevent financial loss for farmers. All of these alterations will, they claim, help the starving peoples of the Third World. However, a *Nova Frontline* special (April 24, 2001) said that genetically modified food will not relieve world hunger but will, instead, make the Third World more dependent on the companies that hold the patents on the seeds.¹¹ The developers seem not to have learned the lesson from the aid workers who, as we noted, became aware that even hungry people will reject edible food if it does not fit their classification system. Turkish villagers also told me that they rejected a new, "improved" strain of wheat because the flour made from it produced inferior bread.

If the main problem is not scarcity of food but distribution as many economists believe, then there is no guarantee that genetically modified food is going to solve the problem of hunger. Most of the world's food is consumed by people living in

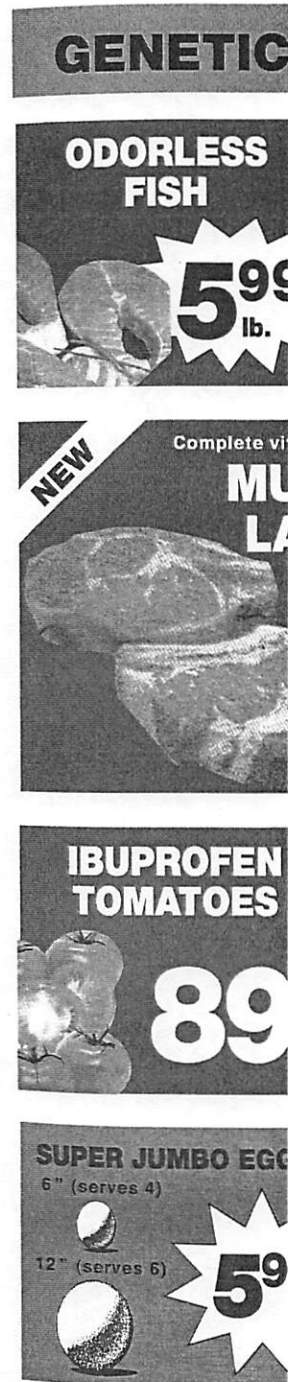
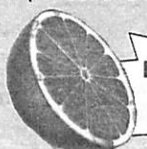


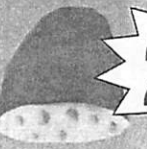
Figure 7.6 "Frankenfoods." bocker Design. From New Yor

GENETICALLY MODIFIED SPECIALS

ODORLESS FISH

5⁹⁹
 lb.

CAFFEINATED ORANGES
 A perfect one-stop breakfast

78¢
 each

HAMCHEESE
 The multipurpose cold cut

2⁹⁹
 lb.

NEW
 Complete vitamin package bred right into meat!
MULTI VITAMIN LAMB SHANK

4⁷⁹
 lb.

LASTING LETTUCE
 Won't wilt for six months in or out of fridge

78¢

VIAGRA PEAS
 He'll never know!

99¢

IBUPROFEN TOMATOES

89¢

PERSONAL-SIZED TURKEYS
 Eat like quail!

3⁹⁹

BONELESS RABBIT

5⁹⁹

PINK BANANAS
 Kids'll love 'em!

89¢ **NEW**

PROTEIN POTATOES
 Serve like meat!

1⁹⁹
 lb.

SUPER JUMBO EGGS
 6" (serves 4)

 12" (serves 6)
5⁹⁹

RECTANGULAR ZUCCHINI Easy to grill!

1⁹⁹
 lb.

GENOME SPECIFIC SALAD DRESSING
 Pick the dressing that matches your DNA!

89¢

Figure 7.6 "Frankenfoods." Genetically Modified Specials, by Jesse Gordon and Knickerbocker Design. From *New York Times* (July 15, 2000).

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the rich nations of the First World. We sample the world's smorgasbord while the rest of the world gets the crumbs or gleanings. It is unlikely that a technological fix will solve what is essentially a social problem.

Consumers worry about what we are doing to our bodies and to the world's ecosystem. Monarch butterflies apparently died eating genetically modified corn pollen (*Nova Frontline* special, April 24, 2001). Europeans demanded that all transgenic foods be labeled but the United States, which is at the forefront of the development of these foods, determined it was unnecessary. The scare during 2000–1 about the possibility of inducing allergies from the genetically modified corn in Taco Bell tortilla shells helped to generate more public interest. Still, the percentage of consumers involved in these issues is small and many of them are not fully aware of the potential consequences of GMFs, especially that, once planted, the process is irreversible. These species cannot be contained within the boundaries of a field; they cross-fertilize and tend to take over existing species, which will result in massive extinctions of traditional plants. Some people are concerned about the consequent narrowing of the gene pool and feel it is presumptuous of scientists to "play God" by deciding which species will be preserved and which will perish. Are GMFs Lucifer in disguise?¹²

Farmers' markets

The ingredients for the food were produced by local organic farms and ranches. The celebration on the University of California's Berkeley campus began with a reception at the Campanile that featured pork specialties from Panzano and panisses, radishes, and almonds. Lunch was served on the Esplanade: summer vegetable salads, Provençal fish soup cooked in the fireplace, spit-roasted barons of Canfield Farm lamb with chanterelles, spicy lamb and mint sausages, fresh shell beans, herb salad, cheese from Jean d'Alos, apple and plum jellies, mulberry ice cream cones, friandises and tisane. Surprisingly, the wines were not local California wines.

In response to the manufacturing of our food, whether as fast food or as GMFs, some people clamor for farmers' markets in the hopes of finding a hint of the "authentic" tastes of their childhoods, when "a tomato tasted like a tomato." For some this means primarily "organic," foods grown without chemical additives and pesticides; for others it means produce locally grown by small, traditional farmers. While farmers' markets and food stands with fresh local produce have been around for a long time, there has been increasing interest in them.

Alice Waters, the founder and owner of Chez Panisse, an upscale restaurant in Berkeley, California, has been an important force in this development. She could rightly be called the new Julia Child because the transformation she has brought about in people's notions about food and dining has been just as powerful and far-reaching. But it is a different kind of transformation. Unlike Child, who was trained in the classic French tradition and emphasized recipes and method, Waters is more concerned not just with what we eat but where and how it is grown. Her "delicious revolution" has five component parts – land, food, meals, conversation, and community (Flammang, forthcoming). Rather than sampling the global smorgasbord, she emphasizes seasonal organic produce from local growers. At the celebration party for the 30th anniversary of Chez Panisse (August 2001), there "was no caviar, no *foie gras*, no truffles, no shellfish, none of the luxury ingredients other lovers of fine food might have chosen" (Apple, Jr., *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 29, 2001). Good food need not mean exotic.

An International School

Congress has vowed to talk spring with the reauthor lunches. The attention co have never approached ha of mystery meat and crea thing we suffered through

Today few children wo many are swapping the gy for candy bars, ice cream who can blame them? Cho pizza, chips and chocolate

The problem, of course the world, and the readily unhealthy eating habits. M ing yet healthful, these lun

Ellen Ruppel Shell, *codirect ism at Boston University and Future of Thin.*"

Russia
SCHOOL

On the

Beef
Potato a
Boiled r
Mandar
Wheat l
Rye bre
Fresh to

Whole g
this hear

France
ÉCOLE É
RUE ST. J

On the

Ham w
Salad w
Yogurt
Baguett

An International School Lunch Tour

Congress has vowed to take up the highly polarized issue of school lunches this spring with the reauthorization of the law that helps states pay for school lunches. The attention comes not a moment too soon. While school lunches have never approached haute cuisine, some of us can recall a time when trays of mystery meat and creamed corn offered a sort of bonding experience, something we suffered through together, like showers after phys. ed.

Today few children work up enough sweat in school to require a shower, and many are swapping the government-sanctioned "meat and two veggies" lunch for candy bars, ice cream and soda from the cafeteria vending machines. And who can blame them? Choosing soggy broccoli, gray pot roast and an apple over pizza, chips and chocolate cupcakes seems, well, almost un-American.

The problem, of course, is that American children are among the fattest in the world, and the readily available junk food has plenty to do with setting up unhealthy eating habits. Meanwhile, other nations focus on the basics: appetizing yet healthful, these lunches offer children all the choice they need.

Ellen Ruppel Shell, codirector of the Knight Center for Science and Medical Journalism at Boston University and author of "The Hungry Gene: The Science of Fat and the Future of Thin."

Russia

SCHOOL 1529, MOSCOW

On the Menu:

Beef

Potato and wheat soup

Boiled rice

Mandarin orange compote

Wheat bread

Rye bread

Fresh tomato

Whole grains and fresh fruit enliven this hearty selection.

France

ÉCOLE ÉLÉMENTAIRE

RUE ST. BERNARD, PARIS

On the Menu:

Ham with lentils

Salad with tomatoes, corn, soy and Gruyère

Yogurt with sugar

Baguette slices

Banana

Water

Four fresh vegetables and banana: French children get their "five a day" on a single tray.

Mexico

LÁZARO CÁRDENAS GRAMMAR SCHOOL, MEXICO CITY

On the Menu:

Meat

Rice, corn and squash

Horchata (water mixed with oatmeal and sugar)

Apple

A big dose of starch, but very little sugar or fat.

South Korea

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, TAEGU

On the Menu:

Rice

Chicken soup

Squid with hot sauce

Fried sweet potatoes

Radish kimchi

High in flavor, low in fat, and varied enough to keep even finicky eaters interested.

USA

SOUTH AVENUE SCHOOL, BEACON, NY

On the Menu:

Pot roast

Mashed potatoes

Broccoli

Apple

Milk

The gravy and chocolate milk may go down easy, but they don't do much to enhance the nutritional value of this fat-heavy meal.

In her search for fresh, local food, Sneed found on a number of local, small intimate relations unmediated by the market. She realized how much she needed the community. As "a restaurant on the land, the sea, and the people," Sneed's projects are pointless without a healthy relationship (in Clark 1990: 113). She has found a way of farming that maintains the land as possible and profitable" (Sneed 1990: 113).

As her philosophy developed, Sneed on the Garden Project. Sneed learned to work as organic farmer. It gave them "the kind of life that is worth living. And it shows that even self-worth if they're given just a little bit of land. At first they donated their produce to the school to sell directly to customers.

This project gave Waterbury Elementary School with a large but underutilized kitchen and cafeteria (replaced by a new one). She conceived the idea to start a school garden. Did the children learn how to grow food? They flourish, but they also learn to eat. As Waters comment on the project, "like salad" to saying "You've got to eat it." The excitement they have in the garden is along to family and friends. The goal is a community that is perhaps the goal of the project.

The Edible School and the Panisse Foundation set up a project to provide educational and cultural projects to the community, and reinforce the project to prepare, and share their food.

In addition to the health and environmental markets is a relatively new movement "Food" that began in Italy in the 1980s, an indication that life, which manifests itself in the food supply and the degradation of the environment (September 4, 2001). Not unlike this movement "believes that by slowing down, respecting the diversity of the earth's biodiversity, our fast-paced lives, they can protect the environment, and

In her search for fresh, local ingredients, Waters "discovered" and came to depend on a number of local, small-scale farmers and foragers with whom she established intimate relations unmediated by the middlemen of commercial food provisioning. She realized how much she and her restaurant were part of a wider interconnected community. As "a restaurant," she said, "we are utterly dependent on the health of the land, the sea, and the planet as a whole, and that this search for good ingredients is pointless without a healthy agriculture and a healthy environment" (Waters, in Clark 1990: 113). She has tried to show that "sustainable agriculture – a careful way of farming that maintains the quality of the soil for future generations – was possible and profitable" (Severson, *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 19, 2001).

As her philosophy developed, so did her political action: she worked with Catherine Sneed on the Garden Project whereby inmates from the San Francisco County Jail learned to work as organic farmers, a process that had a profound effect on their lives. It gave them "the kind of skills to nourish themselves physically and spiritually. And it shows that even the most difficult segments of society can find hope and self-worth if they're given just a small opportunity" (Waters, quoted by Garcia 1999). At first they donated their produce to homeless shelters but have since been allowed to sell directly to customers, which include many of the fancy Bay area restaurants.

This project gave Waters the idea for the Edible Schoolyard. After driving by a school with a large but unkempt yard and learning that it also had an abandoned kitchen and cafeteria (replaced by fast food concession stands on the playground), she conceived the idea to start a program similar to that for the prisoners. Not only did the children learn how to grow vegetables and about the care necessary to make them flourish, but they also became much more interested in the food they were eating. As Waters commented, "in about six weeks these kids go from saying 'I don't like salad' to saying 'You've gotta try the arugula!'" (see Flammang, forthcoming). The excitement they have in eating what they have grown is contagious and is passed along to family and friends; this may truly be the beginning of training in the civility that is perhaps the goal of the "delicious revolution."

The Edible School and other projects like it are now funded in part by the Chez Panisse Foundation set up in 1996, whose statement of purpose is "to support educational and cultural projects that promote sustainable agriculture, strengthen community, and reinforce self-esteem by creating opportunities for people to grow, prepare, and share their food" (quoted in Flammang, forthcoming).

In addition to the health food movement, organically grown food, and farmers' markets is a relatively new international movement called (appropriately) "Slow Food" that began in Italy in 1986. It now boasts more than 65,000 members in 45 countries, an indication that a reaction is setting in against fast food and the "fast life, which manifests itself through the industrialization and standardization of our food supply and the degradation of our farmland" (www.SlowFoodUSA.com, September 4, 2001). Not unlike Alice Waters (who is a member of a California branch), this movement "believes that pleasure and quality in everyday life can be achieved by slowing down, respecting the convivial traditions of the table and celebrating the diversity of the earth's bounty." Instead of creating fast, convenient foods for our fast-paced lives, they draw attention to the relation between food, social relations, the environment, and time. As we saw in chapter 3, time is the one thing

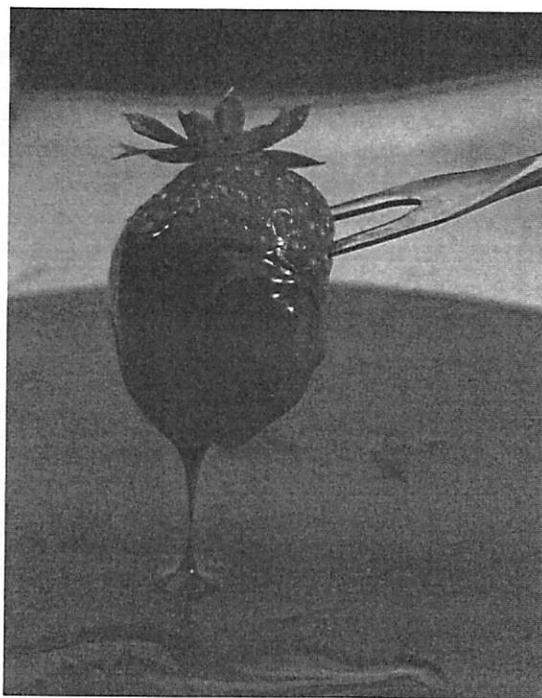


Figure 7.7 "Food porn." Photo © Food Features.

Americans seem to have less and less of because we are working more than ever before. Are we really "getting away from our Puritan roots," as Ruth Reichel believes? Or are they becoming more exposed? What is the relation between them and the increasing interest in food, cooking, and cookbooks?

Cookbooks and cooking

In many parts of the world, traditional recipes are handed down from generation to generation. Where one learns by example, by helping to prepare meals, there is no need for a cookbook. In the Turkish village, for example, I was told there were only three ways to prepare green beans! In modern urban society where people do not live close to their parents or other relatives, and have often reached the age of maturity without knowing how to cook, cookbooks became a necessity. Obviously, they require a literate readership, for in order to use a cookbook, you have to know how to read. Beyond teaching the basics – how to boil, broil, roast, or fry – cookbooks serve myriad purposes. For the neophyte cook, they help create menus that serve both to dissipate boredom and to ease the anxiety of entertaining. For immigrants displaced from the homeland, they can help keep alive the flavors and aromas of home while simultaneously helping them adapt to their new home.

According to anthropology Chinese Americans are often which the immigrants may advanced cook, preparing for friends. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the subtle competition among cookbooks.¹³ Not only was it launched the extremely popular her house and liberate food possible for raising the level of States. Today, a number of generation of cooking program tion would be to discover how on the programs versus this form of entertainment: beautifully illustrated cookbooks.

Reading cookbooks can others they provide vicarious those who know full well where we began this chapter: books indicate a revolution talgia for the delicious, nutritious so hard and so long has made to food as the last resort, the time to prepare the luscious still savor the simulacra of

Cooking, for Lévi-Strauss represented for him a major from the animals. But it also we perform everyday. Even are other ways of transformation. Perhaps, as the only an cooking and the civility of

Bon appétit!

Notes

- 1 In it, he "argues that a relation between raw ingredients between nature and culture is his "culinary triangle," transformation . . . [and] transformation of rotting
- 2 See the book of the same

According to anthropology student Malindo Lo, Chinese cookbooks written by Chinese Americans are often quite nostalgic and attempt to evoke an authentic past which the immigrants may never have experienced (Lo 2001). For the more advanced cook, preparing meals from certain cookbooks is a means to impress friends. In the 1960s and 1970s, when I lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I remember the subtle competition among friends to reproduce the recipes from Julia Child's cookbooks.¹³ Not only was Cambridge her home at the time, but she had just launched the extremely popular television series *The French Chef*. (I used to walk by her house and liberate food magazines from her trash can!) She is certainly responsible for raising the level of appreciation of food and its preparation in the United States. Today, a number of other chefs have followed her lead – witness the proliferation of cooking programs on television. However, an interesting research question would be to discover how many viewers actually cook the recipes demonstrated on the programs versus those who watch them purely for entertainment? And why this form of entertainment? Similarly, how many people cook the recipes from the beautifully illustrated cookbooks they buy?

Reading cookbooks can whet appetites and spur people to cook; but for many others they provide vicarious pleasure – a culinary voyeurism or “food porn”¹⁴ – for those who know full well they will never have the time to do so. This returns us to where we began this chapter. Does the increased interest in cooking, food, and cookbooks indicate a revolution in our approach to food, or might it also indicate a nostalgia for the delicious, nutritious sensuousness of food that we have lost? Working so hard and so long has made people too tired for sex, so perhaps they have turned to food as the last resort, the last pleasurable refuge. Even though they do not have time to prepare the luscious meals they see in cookbooks or on television, they can still savor the simulacra of them.

Cooking, for Lévi-Strauss, represented the transition *from nature to culture*. It represented for him a major event in human evolution; it is what distinguishes us from the animals. But it also symbolizes the transformation *of nature*, a magic trick we perform everyday. Even more important, cooking helps us to realize that there are other ways of transforming nature into culture besides domination and exploitation. Perhaps, as the only animal species that cooks its food, the lessons learned from cooking and the civility of the table are what make us fully human.

Bon appétit!

Notes

- 1 In it, he “argues that a universal feature of human thought involves linking the distinction between raw ingredients and cooked food with the fundamental distinction between nature and culture” (Beardsworth and Keil 1997: 61). Central to this distinction is his “culinary triangle,” whereby raw food “becomes cooked food through a *cultural* transformation . . . [and] cooked food may be reclaimed by nature through the *natural* transformation of rotting” (p. 61; emphasis mine).
- 2 See the book of the same title by Peter Farb and George Armelagos (1980).



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