

Food and Culture

INTRODUCTION TO FOOD AND CULTURE

JANUARY 21, 2025

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Discussion

What is food?

- When is it food?
 - What is 'right' to eat?
 - When is it right to eat it?

What is culture?

What is the link between food and culture?

What is Culture?

Raymond Williams

- A general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development.
- A particular way of life, whether of a people, period or group.
- The works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.

Nesbitt-Larking

- The general process of intellectual, spiritual, and artistic development of a people.
- The entire way of life of a people, in terms of those practices and facts through which they express their meaning.
- High culture – the works and practices of intellectual artistic activity
- Culture is the way of life of a people, in particular their evolving ideas, beliefs, and values as they are understood, communicated and represented.

Bennett

- Culture consists of all those practices (or activities) that signify; that is, which produce and communicate meaning by the manipulation of signs in socially shared and conventionalized ways.

You Are What You Eat

(Johnston, J., & Cappeliez, S. (2012) You Are What You Eat: Enjoying (and Transforming) Food Culture. In Critical Perspectives in Food Studies Second Ed. (2012), Koc, M., Sumner, J., Winson, A. Oxford University Press.

Spillman

Human process of meaning-making generating artifacts, categories, norms, values, practices, rituals, symbols, worldviews, ideas, ideologies, and discourses.

- institutions
- specific or defined group
- part of everyday interactions
- how social interactions convey meaning and how meaning is interpreted.

Anne Swidler

- o Culture is toolkit or repertoires
- o A realistic cultural theory should lead us to understand that people are not passive 'cultural dopes' but rather active, sometimes skilled users of culture whom we actually observe
- o Culture should be viewed as a collection of culturally defined elements
- o From a reparatory, individuals can pick elements that sustain habitual behaviors or select tools to explore new ways of acting in the world
- o People have agency but are also led by cultural norms

What is Food Culture?

Food culture refers to the practices, attitudes, and beliefs as well as the networks and institutions surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food.

It encompasses the concepts of foodways, cuisine, and food system and includes the fundamental understandings a group has about food, historical and current conditions shaping that group's relationship to food, and the ways in which the group uses food to express identity, community, values, status, power, artistry and creativity. It also includes a groups' definitions of what items can be food, what is tasty, healthy, and socially appropriate for specific subgroups or individuals and when, how, why, and with whom those items can or should be consumed.

[Source Dr. Long](#)

Food and Culture Course

Meaning and practice

- Can you think of elements of food and food practices that carry meaning?

Food and Identity

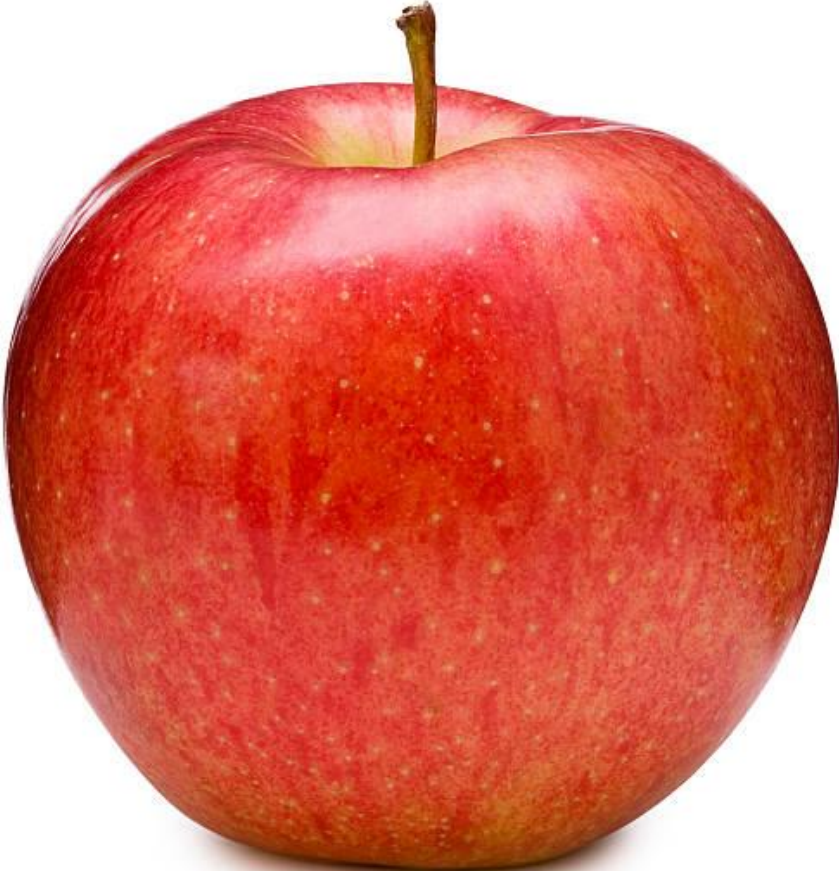
- How can food form cultural identity and personal identity?

Global and Local Food Food Movements

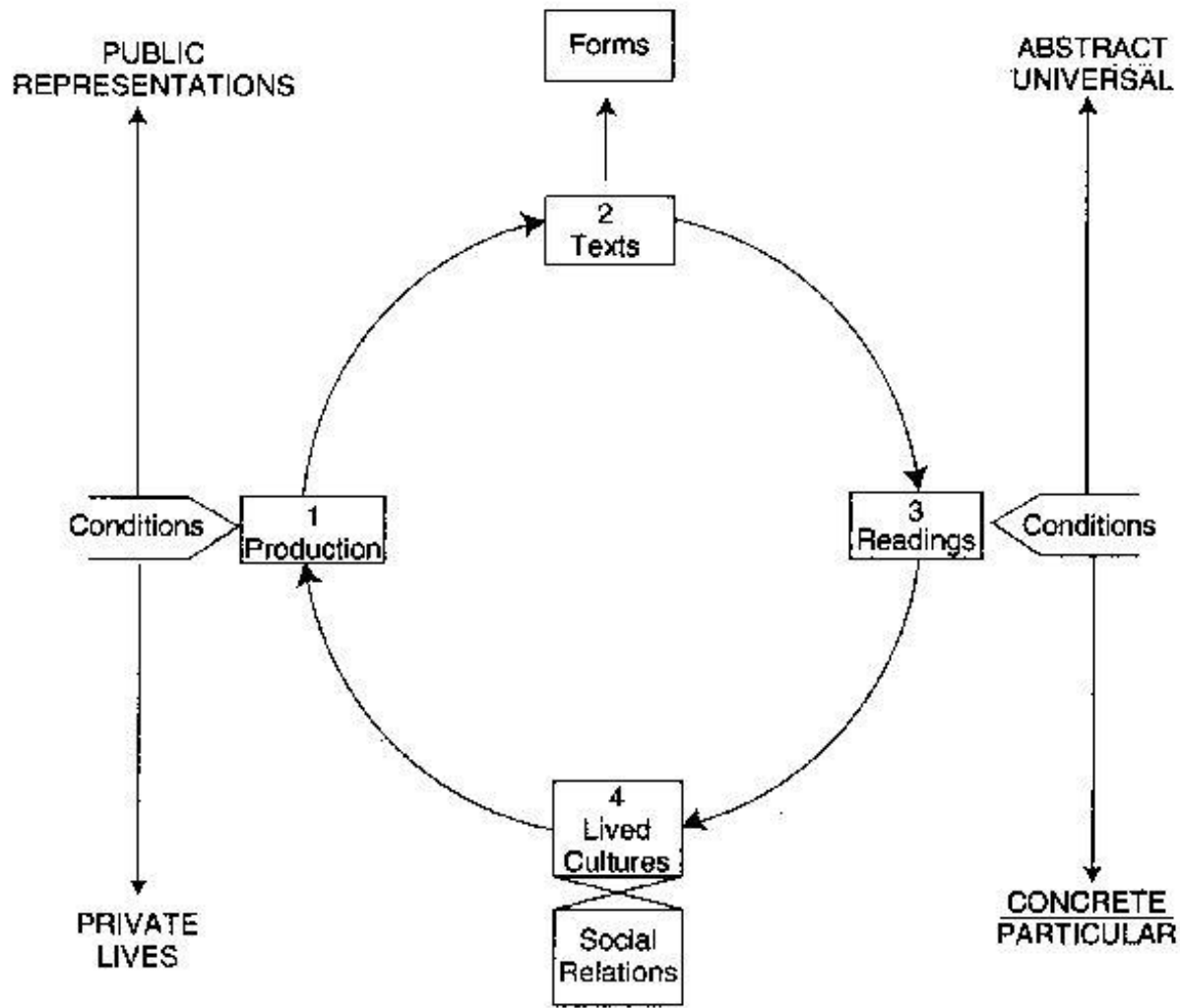
- What do you know about local and global food production?

Food Politics

- How can food be political?

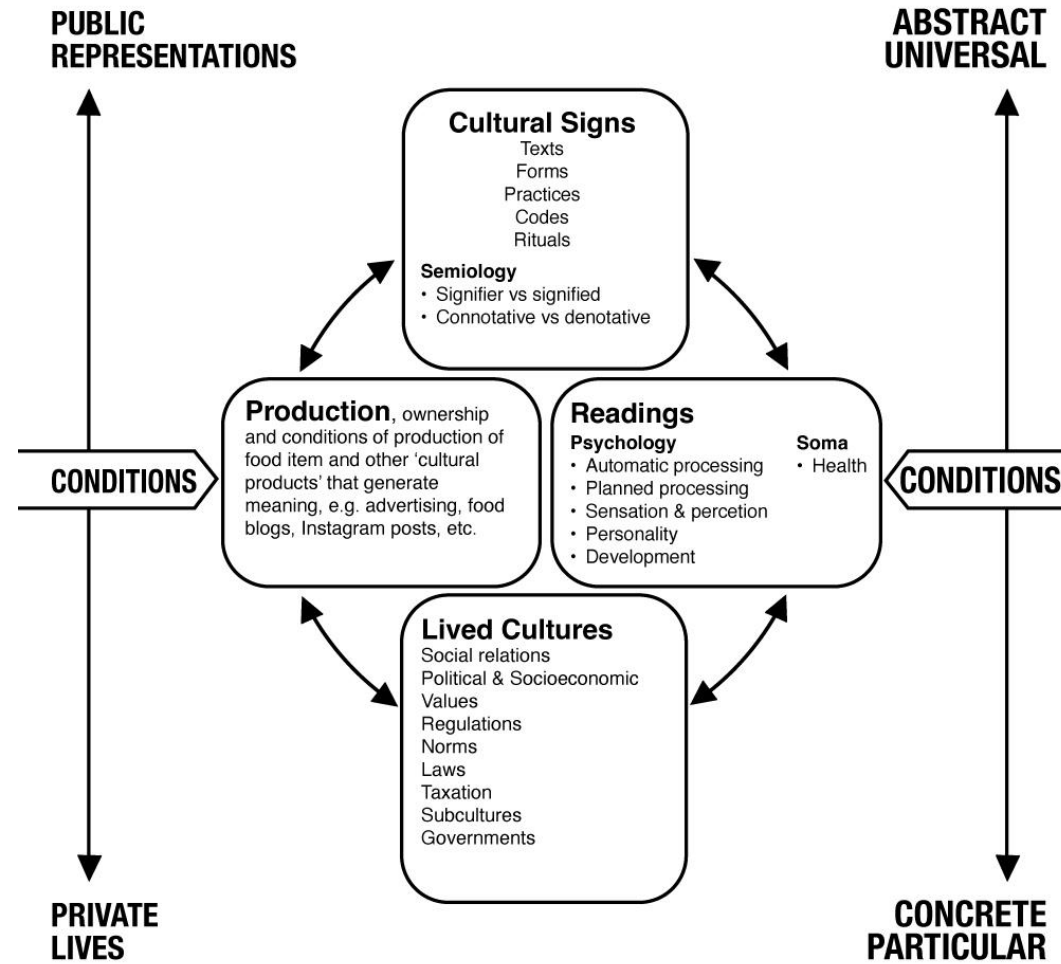






Critical Multidimensional Model

RICHARD JOHNSON
WHAT IS CULTURAL STUDIES
ANYWAYS, SOCIAL TEXT, (1986-87)



Semiotics

Semiotics:

- Is an analytic method that complements **context** and **medium** specificity, by focusing on broad **cultural processes** by which **meaning is produced and communicated across a range of cultural forms**.
- Is the study of **how meaning is produced and reproduced within a society**
- Provides us with **powerful tools for analyzing the meaning of food** as well as helping us **gain some distance from everyday practices of communication of meaning**, so that we can look at them, with new eyes and understand them in new ways.
- Involves 'unnatural tasks' (Bignell, 1997) such as **abstracting the ad from its environment**, and then **breaking it down into constituent parts (signs)**, working out **what they mean and how they're organized**, then trying to determine potential **ambiguities or alternative readings**.

Semiotics

Sign – Most basic discrete unit of meaning

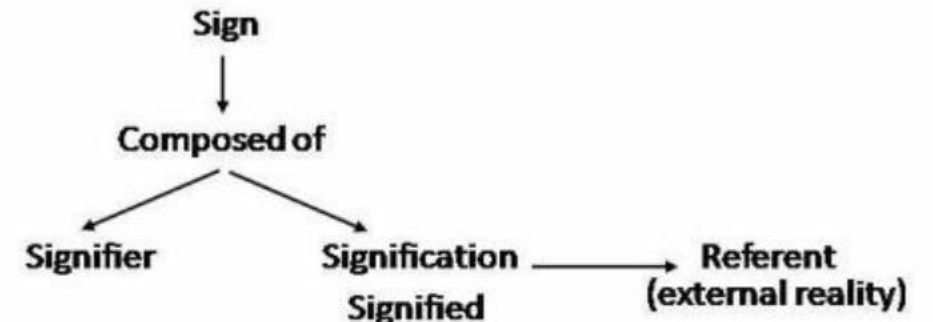
- Word, colour, sound, set of lines, shapes,
- Like atoms, we can dissect individual units

Assemblages – Collections of signs (that carry meaning)

- Texts, codes, practices, rituals, forms.

Ferdinand de Saussure – Understand power and flexibility of language as a social construction through which meaning is organized.

- Language is a structure that allows for flexibility and consistency.
- Meaning between signifier and signified is arbitrary
 - (flexible and consistent)
- Meaning is produced through cultural conventions
- Langue – Giant system of grammar and vocabulary
- Parole – Grammar and vocabulary can be manipulated



Signs and Symbols

Break down meaning into constituent signs and coherent signs

- Parts vs sum of parts vs complete whole

Denotative meaning of a sign

- Obvious, literal meaning of the sign

Connotative meaning of a sign

- Symbolic, seemingly secondary, more metaphorical meanings
- More socially conditioned



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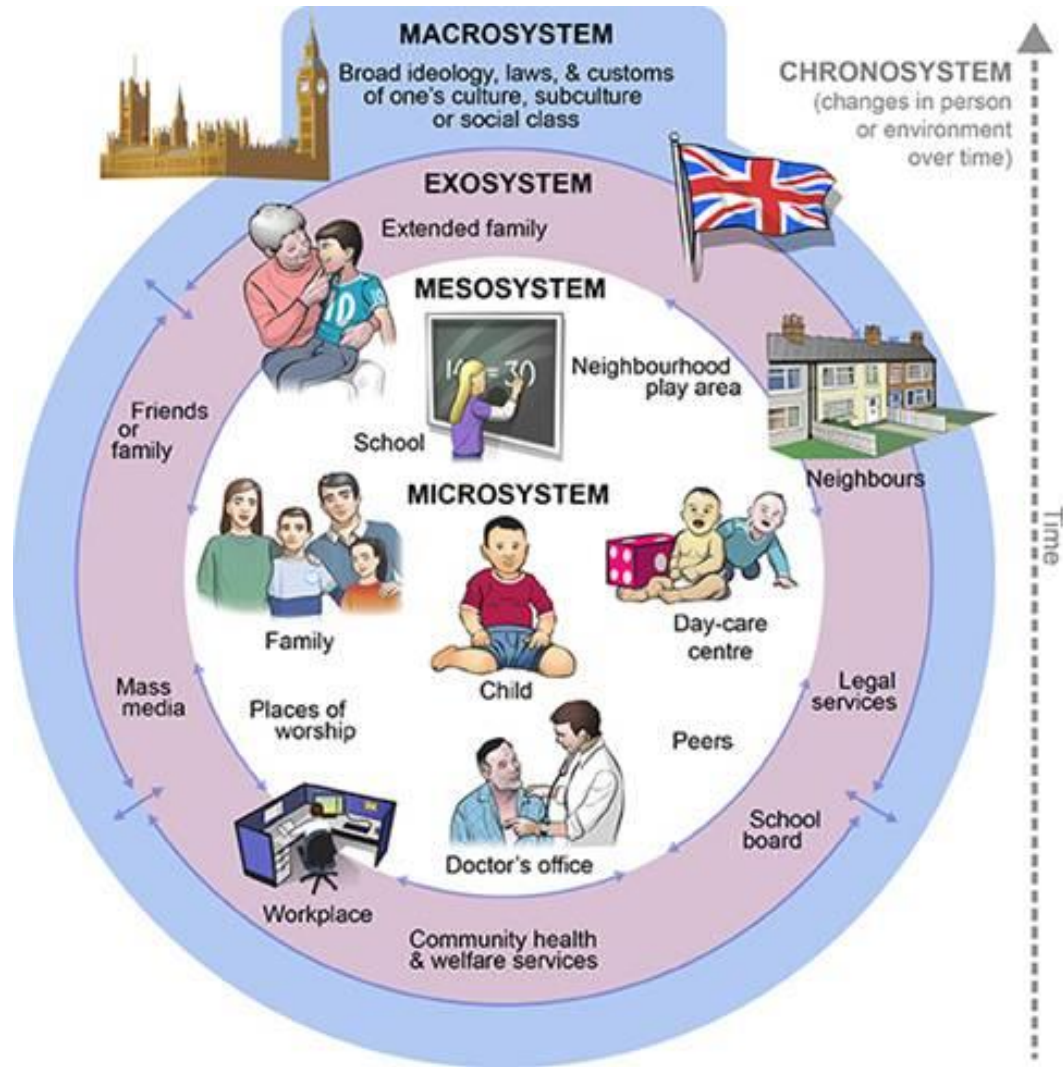
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Ecological Systems Theory of Development

NEXT WEEK, PLEASE BRING:

- A 500 ML OR 1-LITRE MASON JAR
- AN ELASTIC THAT FITS OVER YOUR JAR



Please Think About and Answer the Following Questions

How important is food to you – apart from eating for sustenance?

What is the relation between food and your personal identity?

How does culture influence your eating practices? How can your eating practices influence your cultural identity?

When (and how frequently) do your food choices involve conscious awareness and how many choices are more automatic? Which food choices are more automatic, and which are more planned?

What types of food practices do you participate in? What kind of rituals do you practice? Are they the same across social groups?

What Does it Mean to Eat Your Cultural Identity?

What does it mean to...
“Eat like a Canadian”?

Readings for Next Week

Food Meaning and Practice

[Counihan, C., Van Esterik, P, Julier, A. \(2019\) Food and Culture: A Reader, 4th edition, Routledge.](#)

Chapter 1 – Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption (p. 13 – 21)

Chapter 2 – The Culinary Triangle (p. 21 – 28)

Chapter 3 – Deciphering a Meal (p 29 – 47)

Thanks!

Have a great week! Don't forget to water your seed!