Food and Culture

INTRODUCTION TO FOOD AND CULTURE

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How is your plant doing?

Has your plant started growing yet?

- If so, how big is it?
  - What does it look like?
  - What are you doing to care for it?
- If not,
  - What do you think is going wrong?

What is Food?

What is Food?

What counts as food, and who gets to decide?

- What isn't considered food—and why not?

What makes something edible in one context but not another?

How are ideas of "normal," "disgusting," or taboo food learned?

Is food defined by nutrition, survival, pleasure, or meaning?

When does something become—or stop being—food (e.g., raw, processed, spoiled, waste)?

How do power, colonialism, politics and/or economics shape what is considered "real" food?

What is Culture?

What is Culture?

How do people participate in and perform culture through everyday routines, habits, and practices, and what does this reveal about shared meaning and community?

How do cultural forms—like language, art, music, rituals, or clothing—express identity, values, and ways of life, and how can we read and interpret these cultural texts?

How does culture emerge from particular times, places, and social contexts, and how do historical and local conditions shape what is meaningful or shared?

How do individuals and communities negotiate, challenge, or reproduce cultural norms and power hierarchies, and how do institutions influence these processes?

How do people navigate multiple, overlapping cultural worlds, and how does this shape their identity, sense of belonging, and understanding of the world?

How can culture help us make sense of a complex, changing world, and how do its meanings feel natural, learned, or contested by communities?

What is The Link Between Food and Culture?

What is the Link Between Food and Culture?

How do people produce, prepare, and consume food in ways that perform and communicate cultural meaning and shared practices within a community?

How do food practices—like recipes, cooking techniques, meals, or rituals—express identity, values, and ways of life, and how can we read them as cultural texts?

How are food practices shaped by particular times, places, and social contexts, and how do historical and local conditions influence what is considered edible, appropriate, or meaningful?

How do individuals and communities negotiate, challenge, or reinforce norms, hierarchies, and power relations through food practices, and how do institutions influence these processes?

How do people navigate multiple food cultures at once, and how does this affect their sense of identity, belonging, and cultural understanding?

How can food practices help us make sense of social, cultural, and environmental complexity, and how do their meanings feel natural, learned, or contested?

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

- Culture is toolkit or repertories
- 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
- Culture should be viewed as a collection of culturally defined elements
- From a reparatory, individuals can pick elements that sustain habitual behaviors or select tools to explore new ways of acting in the world
- 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
What foods or food rituals carry meaning for you, your family or your community?
How do these practices communicate values, traditions, or beliefs?

Food and Identity
How does what you eat reflect your culture or personal identity?
Can adopting or sharing new foods change how you see yourself or others?

Global and Local Food Movements
How do local and global food systems shape what we eat?
What examples of food movements challenge or change these systems?

Campus Food Culture
What foods or practices define the culture on campus?
How can students influence or create campus food culture?

Food Politics
How can food reflect inequality or social justice issues?
Can your food choices be political? How?







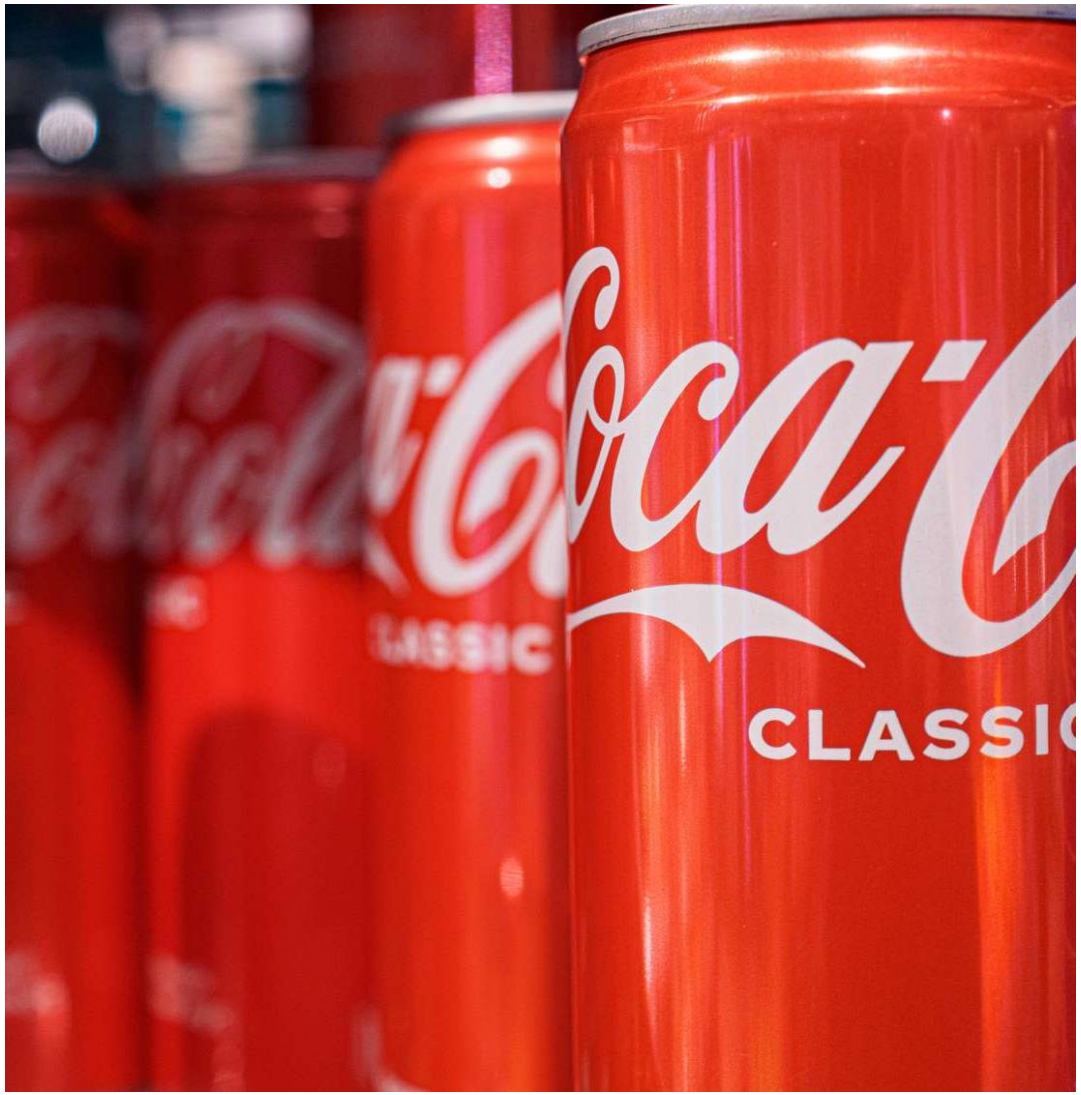





DAVIS
CORN STARCH
NET WT 6.5 OZ






CLASSIC







Eggs

Don’t put all your eggs in one basket

A good egg / a bad egg

Walk on eggshells

Egg on your face

You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs

To egg someone on

Get cracking

Nest egg

Don’t count your chickens before they hatch

Which came first: the chicken or the egg?

Eggs: nature’s protein

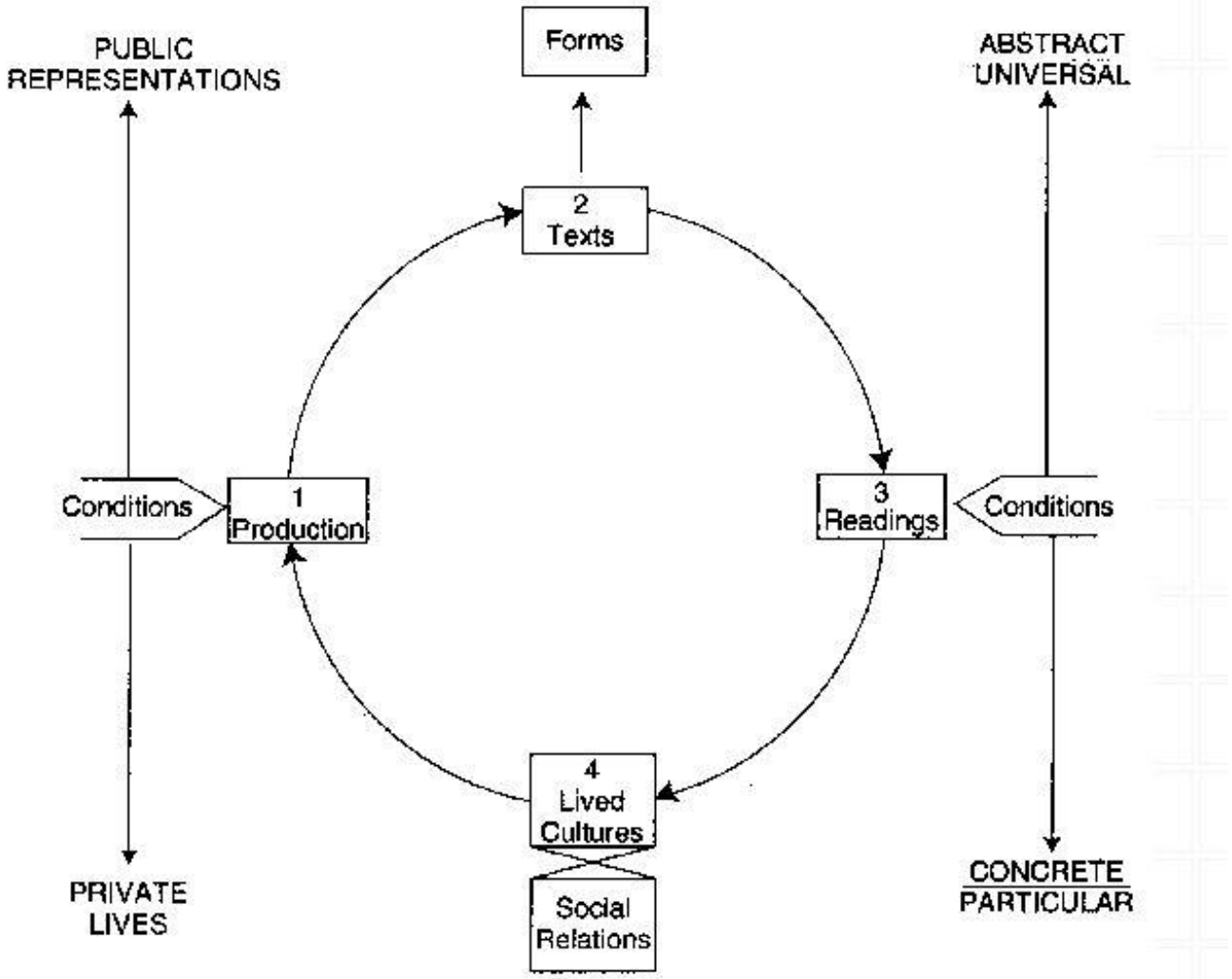
Cracking up

Sunny side up

New beginnings

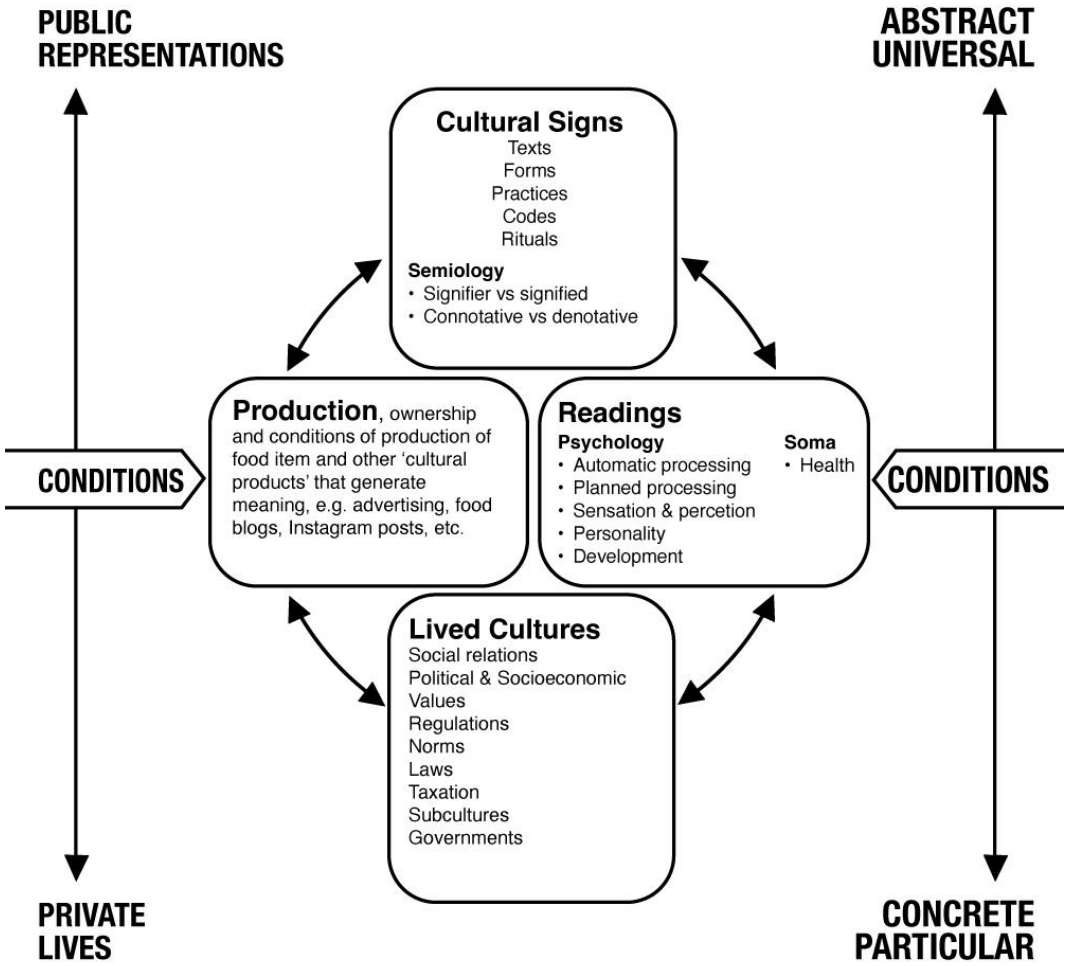
In every egg, potential

Egg-spectation



Critical Multidimensional Model

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


PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS
ABSTRACT UNIVERSAL
Cultural Signs
Texts
Forms
Practices
Codes
Rituals
Semiology
• Signifier vs signified
• Connotative vs denotative
CONDITIONS
Production, ownership and conditions of production of food item and other 'cultural products' that generate meaning, e.g. advertising, food blogs, Instagram posts, etc.
Readings
Psychology
• Automatic processing
• Planned processing
• Sensation & percetion
• Personality
• Development
Soma
• Health
CONDITIONS
Lived Cultures
Social relations
Political & Socioeconomic
Values
Regulations
Norms
Laws
Taxation
Subcultures
Governments
PRIVATE LIVES
CONCRETE PARTICULAR




Cheetos
Flamin' Hot
Puffs


Cheetos
Puffs
Souffles
VALUE
ECONO
410 g

Production

Who produces the food item?

What means are used to produce the food item?

- Labour conditions?
- Materials?
- Means of production?

Who produces the cultural signs of the food item?

- What means are used to produce the cultural signs of the food item?
- Labour conditions?
- Materials?
- Means of production?

Are the conditions of production more public or private?

Are there any other conditions of production that are important to identify?

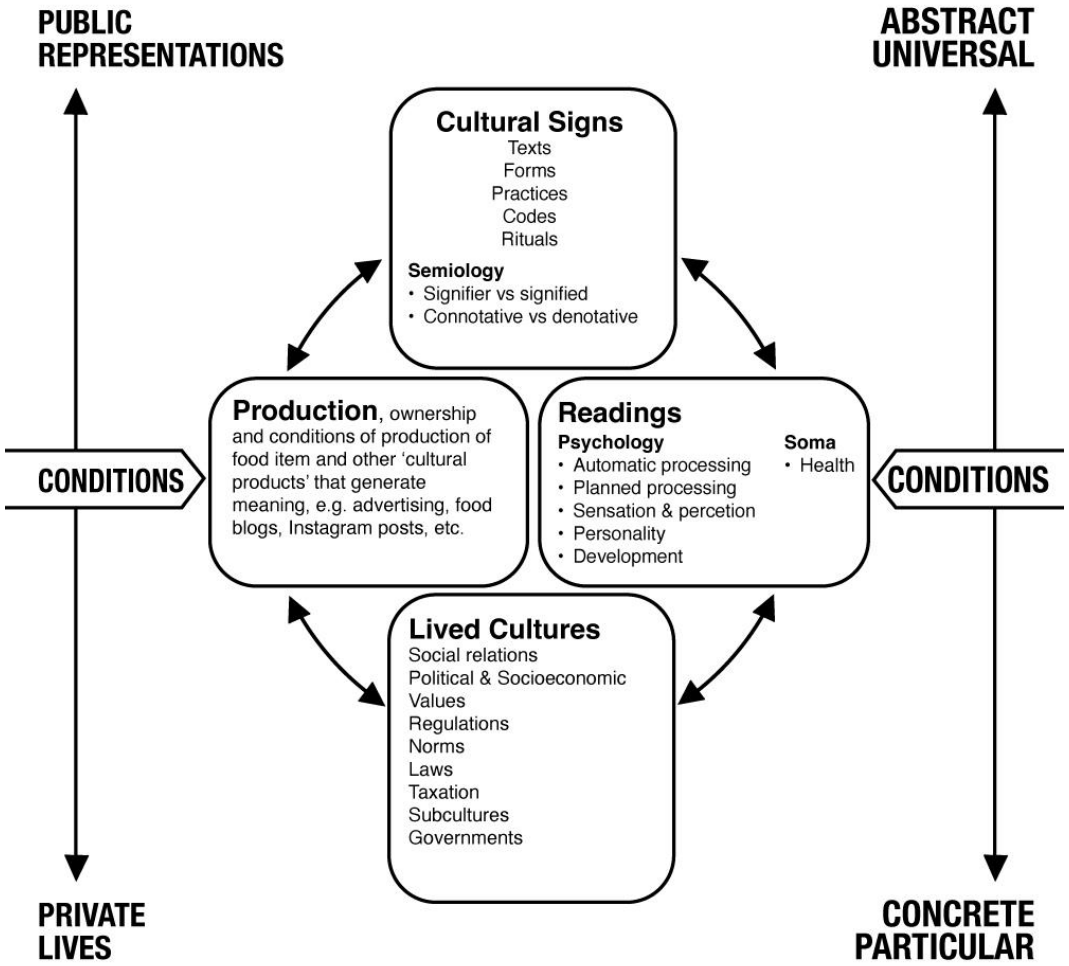
Who Owns Cheetos?



Who Owns?



Who Owns?


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CONCRETE PARTICULAR

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 meaning 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)

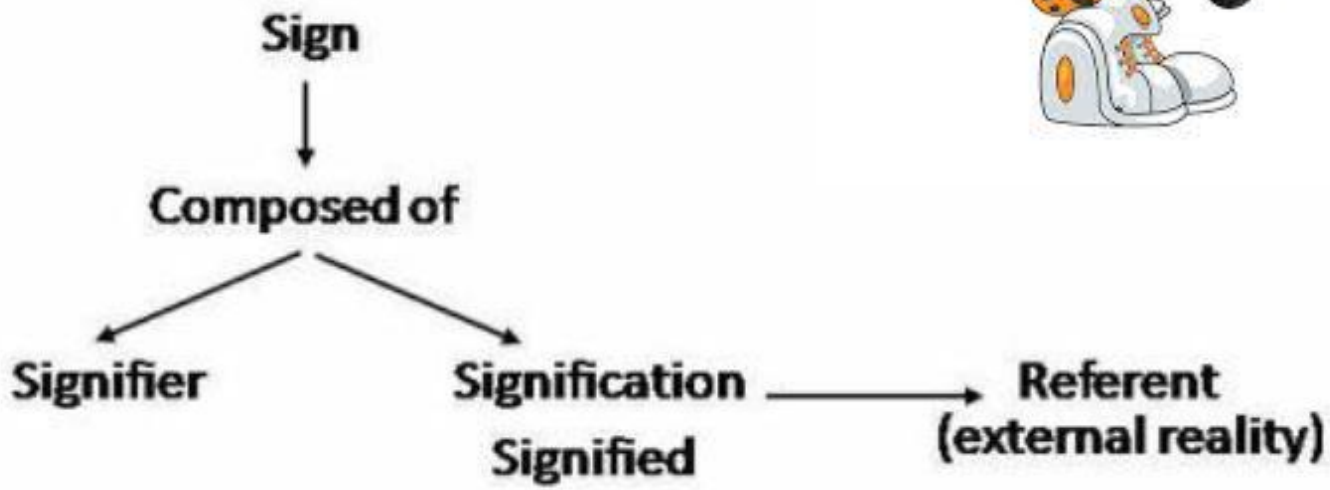
- Texts, codes, practices, rituals, forms.

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





Nutrition Facts

About 17 servings per container
Serving size About 21 pieces (28g)

Amount per serving

Calories	**160**
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 11g	**14%**
Saturated Fat 1.5g	**7%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	**0%**
Sodium 200mg	**9%**
Total Carbohydrate 15g	**5%**
Dietary Fiber less than 1g	**3%**
Total Sugars 0g	
Protein 1g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 10mg	0%
Iron 0.6mg	2%
Potassium 100mg	2%

Not a significant source of added sugars.

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.



INGREDIENTS: ENRICHED CORN MEAL (CORN MEAL, FERROUS SULFATE, NIACIN, THIAMIN MONONITRATE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID), VEGETABLE OIL (CORN, CANOLA, AND/OR SUNFLOWER OIL), AND LESS THAN 2% OF SALT, YEAST EXTRACT, MONOSODIUM GLUTAMATE, POTASSIUM SALT, CITRIC ACID, MALTODEXTRIN (MADE FROM CORN), ARTIFICIAL COLOR (RED 40 LAKE, YELLOW 6 LAKE, YELLOW 6, YELLOW 5), CORN SYRUP SOLIDS, HYDROLYZED CORN PROTEIN, CHEDDAR CHEESE (MILK, CHEESE CULTURES, SALT, ENZYMES), ONION POWDER, SUGAR, WHEY, LIME JUICE, WHEY PROTEIN CONCENTRATE, GARLIC POWDER, NATURAL FLAVORS, BUTTERMILK, SODIUM DIACETATE, DISODIUM INOSINATE, AND DISODIUM GUANYLATE.
CONTAINS MILK INGREDIENTS.

Signs and Symbols





Break down meaning into constituent signs and coherent signs

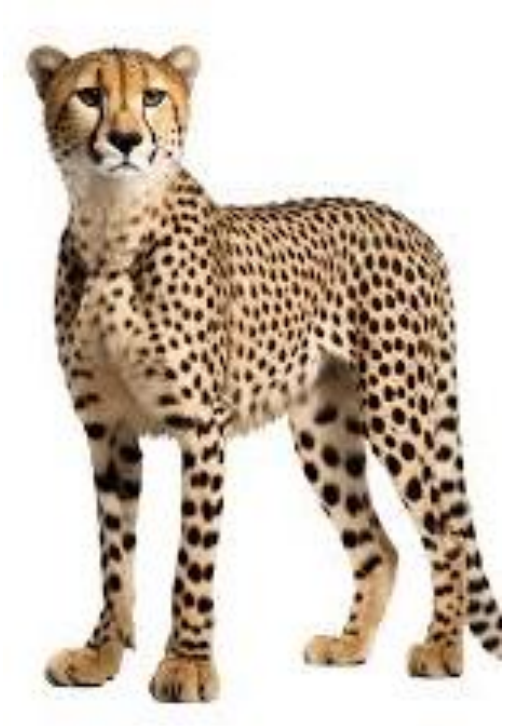
- Parts vs sum of parts vs complete whole

- 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

- What is the meaning of tigers?

Signs and Symbols



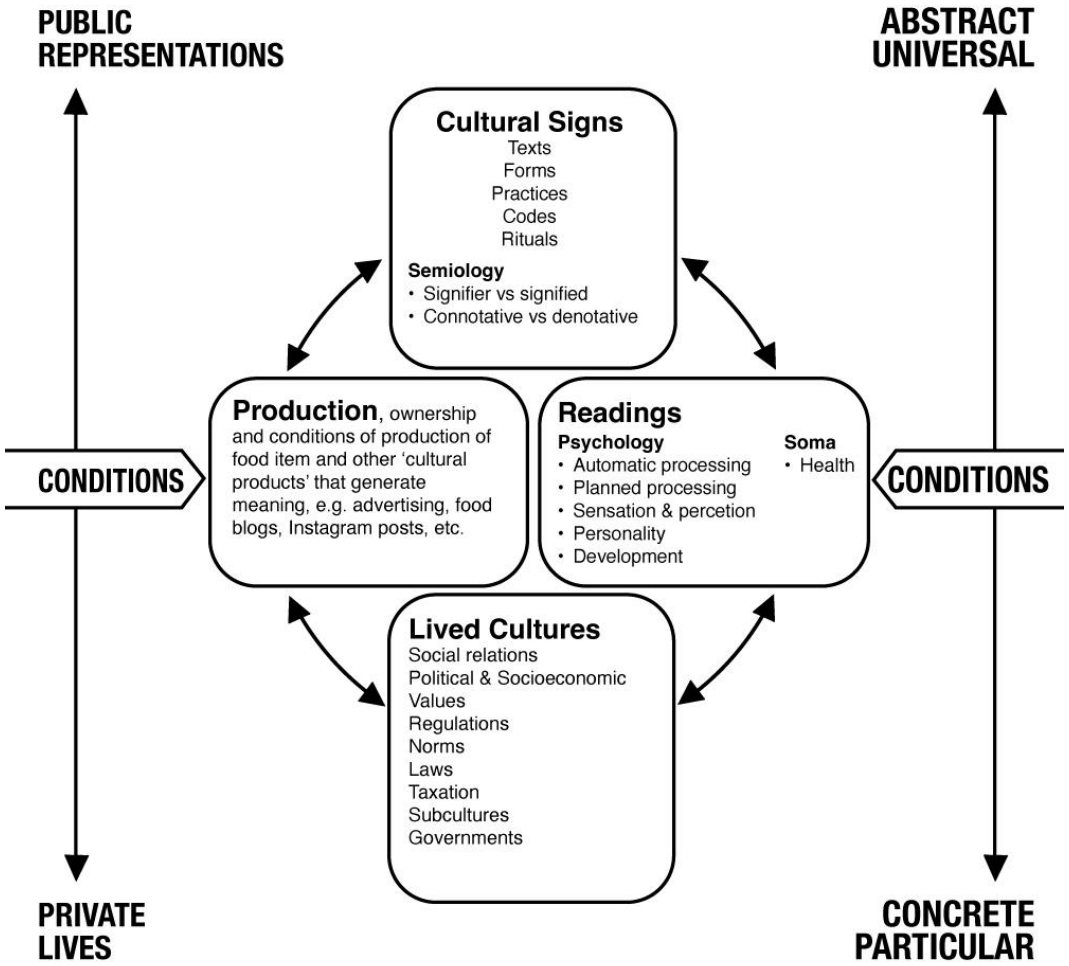


[Cheetos ad 1989]

[Cheetos 1972]

[Cheetos Commercials Compilation]

[Contemporary Cheetos Ad]


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Next Class

How We Understand Cultural Signs (Readings)

How do you notice signs automatically versus when you stop to think about them?
How do your senses, body, or health shape what stands out?
How does your identity influence what signs mean?
Can groups understand the same sign differently?

How Context Shapes Meaning (Lived Cultures)

How do your close environments (family, friends, school) influence meaning?
How do connections between different settings affect meaning?
How do larger forces (culture, media, laws) shape signs?
Can meanings change over time or across generations?

Food for Thought

Pick one food item you encounter regularly.
Ask yourself: What cultural signs or symbols does this food carry?
Consider both:

- How individuals and groups notice and interpret it (Readings)
- How time, place, and environment shape its meaning (Lived Cultures)

Please Think About and Answer the Following Questions

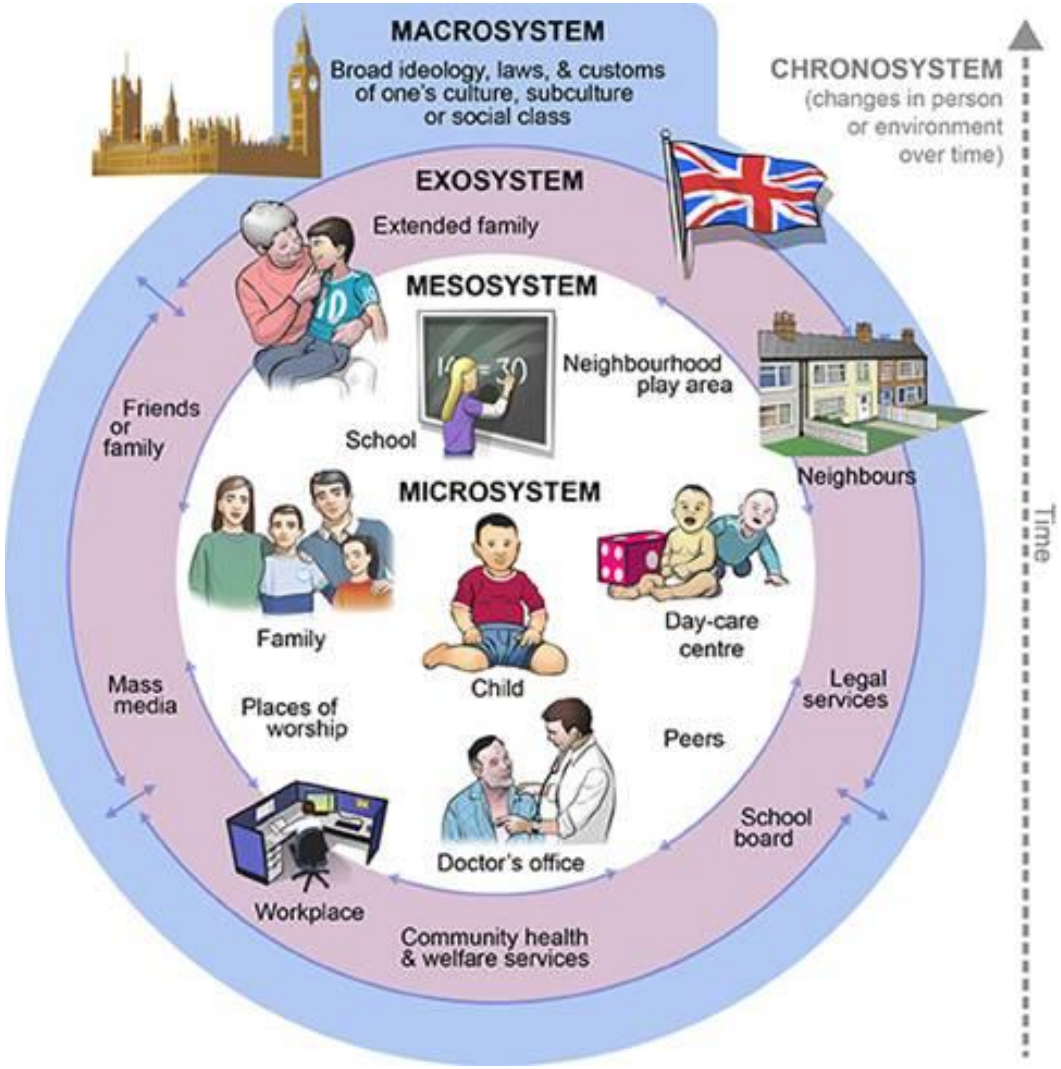
How important is food to you – apart from eating for sustenance?

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?



Ecological Systems Theory of Development

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!