

Folk 267: Food and Culture

**JANUARY 11:  
SOME BASIC CONCEPTS**

# Reminder: Stuff to know

- ◎ My office: CE 263-C
  - (around the corner, past the bathrooms, down that corridor, on the right hand side)
- ◎ Office hours:
  - Monday to Thursday, 9-10am (or by appointment)
- ◎ A web address to know
  - <http://tinyurl.com/folk267>
- ◎ I should actually go through the registration list: be patient with me.

# Let's answer it today:

- ◎ The dates for the first assignment and the exam are flexible: they can be switched, so:
  - Do you want to hand in the research assignment before reading week and write the exam after reading week?
    - **Feb. 17<sup>th</sup> essay; Mar. 1<sup>st</sup> exam**
      - or
    - Do you want to write the exam before reading week and hand in the research assignment after reading week?
      - **Feb 17<sup>th</sup> exam; Mar. 1<sup>st</sup> essay**

This presumes you have a favourite sandwich: what a Western-centric question this is! My word! How do I get away with such things in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? No matter: let's just play with it.

**What is your favourite sandwich?**

# The sandwich is a good illustration of the dynamics of folklore

- It is personal, local, and tends to reflect idiosyncratic aesthetic expectations
- In its more common forms, instructions for its construction are passed along through informal channels
- Once one understands the basic structures it is open to intense variation

# More on sandwiches and folklore

- ◎ It is ostensibly democratic, although one recognizes more and less proficient practitioners of the form
- ◎ It appears in commercial establishments (popular culture), where it is subject to standardization
- ◎ Even in popular culture manifestations, it retains a surfeit of “authenticity” and “humility”

# “What is folklore?”

15 credits in < 15 minutes

- Whereas folklore might retain the connotation of “old-timey activities and arts of rustic, unlettered peoples,” the modern study of folklore understands it as “artistic communication in small groups”
- Typically, folklorists concern themselves with a number of keywords

Folklore (the discipline) is interested in the ...

- Communal (relating to a group)
- Common (the everyday)
- Informal (i.e. not formalised/institutional)
- Marginal (outside the centers of power)
- Personal (face-to-face or similarly direct)
- Traditional (stable over time)
- Aesthetic (artistic expressions)
- Ideological (expressions of belief)



# Sandwiches are...

- ⦿ Communal
- ⦿ Common
- ⦿ Informal
- ⦿ Marginal
- ⦿ Personal
- ⦿ Traditional
- ⦿ Aesthetic
- ⦿ Ideological (ummm..., maybe not)

# Return to the points raised at the end of last class

- ① Why study food and culture?
- ① Food is a basic requirement for human existence
  - We must eat
- ① But what we eat, when we eat, how we eat, with whom we eat, are all cultural constructs

# Place

- Before mass-transportation and trade, we were limited by available resources, so food is associated with place

# Time

- Before storage (advanced storage), food spoiled, so food is associated with time

# Tradition

- Because cooking is a developed skill, it is passed down from elder to initiate, so food is associated with tradition

# Belief

- Because dietary laws are sometimes dictated through revelation (religious proscriptions), food is associated with belief

# Embodiment and corporeality

- Because we need it to survive, food is associated with corporeality

# Nutrition

- Because we need certain kinds of food to survive, food is associated with nutrition



# Hospitality

- Because food is expensive, food is associated with hospitality

Go away now.