

Folk 267: Food and Culture

**JANUARY 13:
SOME BASIC
TERMINOLOGY**

Return to the points raised at the end of the first 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

Some bigger thoughts

- ⦿ We tend to like our bodies more or less **inviolable**: we are ambivalent about things entering and leaving our body
 - Entering: drink, food, piercings, other people's genitalia
 - Leaving: urine, feces, sweat, blood, mucus, semen, menstrual flow, earwax, nail clippings
- ⦿ We may be okay with our own: we're *really* not comfortable with other people's (unless we *really* like them)

Attitudes to food

- ① Eating involves taking something from outside of your body and putting it into your body
- ② What we put in our body needs to be something understood as not threatening the self
- ③ We thus have ideas about safe/unsafe, beneficial/detrimental, clean/unclean foods

Attitudes to food (cont.)

- ◎ Some of the attitudes are based on a “scientific” understanding
 - one based on observation, if not necessarily validated by contemporary science
- ◎ Some are based on ***sympathetic magic***
 - the idea that certain objects are connected because either
 - they have been in direct contact with each other (**contagious magic**) or
 - they resemble each other (**homeopathic magic**)

Examples

⦿ Contagious magic

- Eating the meat of an animal that eats the dead (lobsters, vultures, dogs, etc.) is the same as eating the dead
- Eating something grown at a particular place is ingesting the properties of that particular place
 - This concept is referred to as **terroir** (Fr. “of the earth”)

Examples

⦿ Homeopathic magic

- Wine resembles blood: wine is good for the blood
- Raw oysters resemble women's genitals: oysters are an aphrodisiac
- Cocktails are sweet and overly decorated: drinking cocktails makes you effeminate
- Uncut noodles represent a life not cut short: eating them on your birthday promises a long life

Place

- ◎ Before mass-transportation and trade, we were limited by available resources, so food is associated with **place**
 - What was there among the indigenous peoples (flora and fauna)
 - What was available through simple trade
 - The new

Time

- ◎ Before storage (advanced storage), food spoiled, so food is associated with time
 - Solar year and the effects of the harvest calendar
 - Celebratory times: **rites of intensification, rites of passage**
 - **Pre-liminal, liminal, post-liminal**
 - *Liminus* (Latin: threshold)
 - **Carnivalesque:**

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
 - Proscription: something that is forbidden
 - **Dirt**: “matter out of place”

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.