

Introduction

Kathleen LeBesco and Peter Naccarato

When he buys an item of food, consumes it, or serves it, modern man does not manipulate a simple object in a purely transitive fashion; this item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies.

—Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

As Roland Barthes suggests, buying, consuming, and serving food are acts of signification through which people construct and sustain their identities. At the same time these acts—and the broad range of cultural representations that support and are supported by them—also serve as vehicles through which ideological expectations about those very identities are circulated, enforced, and transgressed. While on the surface food culture offers its consumers education, entertainment, and escape, it implicitly invites them not only to appreciate the beauty and pleasure of well-prepared food, but also to consume the subtle messages embedded within these representations. However, food representations are not simply tools of seduction or devices for the exercise of repressive power—they are also occasions for resistance that provide opportunities for pleasure.

The twentieth century has seen a boom in the industry of representing food and foodways, culminating in the present era of celebrity chef worship, culinary boot camps, lush food magazine spreads, gastroporn imagery on television and in film, stores selling nothing but cookbooks, and heavily traveled chowhound websites. However, at the same time that we have become fascinated by food and food culture, we hear cries from all quarters about the growing American waistline. Both sides of the political

aisle have linked food representations and their presumed physical consequences: policy makers have sought to ban the advertising of sugary “junk food” to children, public health officials have fretted over the appropriateness of fat health care providers as role models, and government agencies have attempted to more closely regulate claims about the health benefits of food products as touted in media and even on their wrappers. It is evident that representations that would presume to shape the American diet in a repressive manner—as various as the Food Pyramid, diet cookbooks, and antiobesity public health campaigns—in fact simultaneously produce pleasure and knowledge when transgressed.

Thus, we want to move beyond stale objections to the state of our food culture, present and past. We’ll neither frame the fast-food industry nor big agriculture as nefarious villain and the consuming citizen as unwitting victim (as the political left is fond of doing), nor impugn the individual for lacking the God-given strength to resist the temptation fobbed upon her/him by the decadent structures of modern living (as the political right is fond of doing). Our contemporary preoccupation with food makes little sense when viewed as the plight of a docile citizenry at the mercy of Big Food and its alluring representations. But a clearer picture starts to crystallize when we consider how these representations produce both power and pleasure.

This book begins from the premise that representations of food and foodways, when closely examined, illuminate both the repressive power and the productive potential of representation, in a Foucauldian sense.¹ Food representations have historically been understood as mere barometers of cultural sensibilities; instead, we contend that these representations actively *produce* cultural sensibilities and the possibility of transgression. One of the ingredients that flavors this book is a dash of Marxist theory, as we do want to think (in part) about how food and foodways serve as vehicles for the deployment of repressive ideologies. However, we are concerned that past scholarship on the culture industries has focused almost exclusively on the ways in which ordinary people are manipulated into adopting specific ideologies through pleasurable means; one could easily imagine Louis Althusser rejecting delectable representations of food as serving the needs of the State as their viewers and consumers digest dominant ideologies. But ideology must be considered in a more nuanced manner than that pursued by Althusser or Theodor Adorno, to take into account the productive nature of those representations. What pleasures and knowledges do those representations afford in the consuming citizen?

In asking this question, we seek to balance this deterministic streak with one that more robustly imagines the affordances of these representations as well as their constraints. The work of reception theorists like John Fiske and Michel de Certeau, while not attended to directly by the chapters that follow, provides an appropriate counterbalance.² Obviously aware of structural constraints, Fiske and de Certeau nonetheless championed the meanings made by audience members of popular representations and rejected the notion of false consciousness. It is this spirit that informs our shift to Foucault as a theoretical guide throughout the book. Although Fiske and de Certeau demonstrate that pleasure is important, Foucault shifts the terms of the discussion as he recognizes discourse as a vehicle for exercising both repressive and productive power.

It is this theoretical framework that flavors our particular foray into cultural studies, which has taken as a central objective the critical examination of “culture” as a means of producing and regulating economic and social power.³ While this work has moved in a myriad of directions, this book follows from a tradition that dismisses the privileging of “high culture” as the only site of intellectual investigation and, instead, considers texts and genres from across the cultural spectrum. This shift towards “cultural populism” has widened the scope of intellectual inquiry from established literary canons to an open-ended list of cultural texts and practices.⁴ Janice Radway’s work on romance, Dick Hebdige’s work on subculture, Ien Ang’s work on soap operas, and Alexander Doty’s work on queer mass culture are only a few examples of such scholarship on popular representations.⁵ At the same time, there has been a growing focus on food practices and foodways as sites of cultural production. Bob Ashley, Joanne Hollows, Steve Jones, and Ben Taylor have recently released work that theorizes food(ways) through the prism of semiotics, while other scholars like Arlene Avakian, Carole Counihan, Marion Nestle, Warren Belasco, and Sherrie Inness (to name but a few) have interrogated the politics of food in an array of situated contexts—from U.S. government debates about the food pyramid, to the gradual deskilling of the American home cook, to a close-up look into the kitchens and dining rooms of denizens of a startling variety of cultures.

Edible Ideologies extends this line of inquiry specifically to the realm of representation, hoping to help readers digest that how a culture decides to (re)present itself tells us far more about that culture’s dominant ideological underpinnings (and the fun people can have in transgressing them) than some “naturalized,” purportedly nonconstructed

version of it does. We begin with questions about ideology that concern, for instance, whose interests are served by a particular food practice or habit, and what political ends were fulfilled by the historical change that led from one practice to another. This allows us to look beneath the surface of the stories that groups tell about themselves, revealing not only underlying political ideologies, but also, and perhaps as importantly, the tenuous, socially constructed quality of those stories and the pleasurable ends to which they are put.

Our focus on representation as a specific vehicle through which a culture's ideology is shaped and circulated is informed, first and foremost, by the work of Roland Barthes. In *Mythologies*, Barthes defines myth as "a system of communication" that "can consist of modes of writing or of representation; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity" (Barthes, 109, 110). As such, myth is sustained by a series of oral and visual representations that can be read semiotically. In this way, for instance, the decadent chocolate cake in a late-night television commercial is not simply an incitement to salivate (or to head to the nearest grocer); with dulcet-toned voice-over and gastroporn imagery, it is also an offer of sensuality, of erotic comfort to the solitary viewer, available for mere cents. It also provides a promise of resistance to food norms in a society with an inconsistent attitude toward indulgence. In addition to employing semiotic analysis to understand the structure of myth, Barthes acknowledges that myth also functions within an historical and cultural context.

Consequently, Barthes shifts his focus from semiology to ideology "to explain how [myth] corresponds to the interests of a definite society" (Barthes, 128). One of myth's central functions, Barthes argues, is to mask historically and culturally specific ideologies as it "transforms history into nature" (129). The chocolate cake does not merely remind the viewer of the essential human need for food; instead, it plays upon sexual desire and culturally ingrained fantasies of attainment through consumption, thus keeping our economic machinery well-oiled while disguising this ideological work behind the mask of a seemingly natural appetite. Myth, then, plays a central role in the circulation of bourgeois ideology by "giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (142). But myths also produce pleasure. This book follows Barthes' lead through its focus on representations of food and foodways. Each chapter demonstrates how such representations are not just about nourishment or pleasure, but are instead sophisticated producers of both repressive and resistant ideologies and practices.

In approaching this book, readers will encounter ten chapters that explore how various modes of representation, reflecting prevailing attitudes and assumptions about food and food practices, function to circulate and transgress dominant cultural ideologies. With this as the thread that connects them, each chapter offers its own perspective as it charts the sophisticated interconnections between particular cultural texts, certain aspects of food culture, and specific ideological values. Taken together, these chapters offer a rich historical narrative that moves from the construction of the nineteenth-century English gentleman to the creation of two of today's iconic figures in food culture, Julia Child and Martha Stewart. Along the way, readers will encounter World War I propaganda, holocaust and Sephardic cookbooks, the Rosenbergs, German tour guides, fast-food advertising, food packaging, and chocolate! What unites these disparate topics is the complex methodology employed by each chapter for illuminating the power and politics of representation and underscoring the potential of food and foodways as sophisticated ideological signifiers.

Within the borders of Western, primarily North-American culture, this book offers its readers a rich buffet of culinary choices inasmuch as it examines a range of food products and modes of representation. While very serious and insightful books have focused on the history and significance of particular food products—from chocolate, to cod, to salt—our readers will encounter a fuller menu. Rather than focusing on specific foods or food groups, this book includes chapters that cover a rich variety of foods and food practices within a Western, largely U.S. context. Readers who have given little thought to the meanings of everything from Camembert to Velveeta, from spotted dick to blood sausage, from salads to burgers, from tikka masala to Campbell's Soup and from healthcake to porridge will find food for thought here. At the same time, readers will find that our authors engage a broad range of cultural texts as they examine the ideological impulses behind various representations of food. While other books have focused on food and literature, food and film, or food and television, this book offers a array of textual analysis. From literature and popular fiction to cookbooks and travel guides; from war propaganda and women's magazines to television and print advertisements; this book covers a broad range of cultural texts, highlighting their unique role in utilizing representations of food to circulate and transgress specific ideologies.

This range of textual forms is vital in response to earlier cultural critics who limited their studies of ideology and ideological manipulations to a number of dominant social institutions and to a set of privileged artistic

venues, like literature and film. Following Michel Foucault's cue, we contend that less obvious, more subtle forms of discourse are perhaps even more vital sites for the production of knowledge, and thus further exploration and analysis of them is warranted. Discourse moves in multiple directions, and is articulated through a disparate range of cultural sites. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to examine not only great works of literature (as Annette Cozzi and Celia Kingsbury do in the chapters that follow), but also the minutiae of food packaging (Elliott), advertising (Retzinger; Nutter), cookbooks (Drews; Mason), news reports (Abrams), travel guides (Fallwell), and cooking shows (LeBesco and Naccarato) to round out our comprehension of the ways in which food and foodways are productive sites of discourse.

The Volume

The ten chapters in this collection are arranged roughly chronologically, beginning with Annette Cozzi's chapter on Charles Dickens, which establishes the framework that structures the entire book. By revealing how nineteenth-century English culture utilized specific food practices to maintain social stratification during a period when it was promoting a national identity based on the illusion of equality and then exploring how fictional representations of these culinary customs and rituals both circulate and normalize them, Cozzi underscores the role of food and foodways in sustaining cultural ideologies during periods of significant political, economic, and social change. Her specific analysis of several novels by Charles Dickens reveals how nineteenth-century English society utilized food and food practices to define and promote certain gender and class ideals. As subsequent chapters shift the historical moment, the cultural context, the modes of representation, and the specific food customs and practices, each of them advances the central goal of the book that is initiated in Cozzi's chapter, namely, to reveal the ways in which representations of food and foodways are utilized to negotiate social change and protect dominant ideologies.

In the second chapter, Celia Kingsbury shifts the focus to World War I as she explores how propaganda from that period—including posters, books, and popular magazines—was used to recruit women as “culinary soldiers” in support of the war effort by encouraging them to conserve

food and to adopt the modern tenets of domestic science that emphasized the nutrition, health, and moral well-being of the nation. In making this argument, Kingsbury also examines representations of various food and food practices in wartime fiction, including works by Willa Cather, Ford Madox Ford, H. G. Wells, and Helen Zenna Smith. Like Annette Cozzi, Kingsbury reads a range of cultural texts to understand food's vital role as a powerful political force that serves the cause of social control during a period of change and upheaval.

Marie Drews also explores the power of food as she considers a number of crucial questions that emerge from the publication of *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy of Women of Terezín*, a cookbook that houses recipes collected by concentration camp victims. Drews uses this specific text as a springboard for analyzing the important intersections of cooking, story, history, and memory, arguing that *In Memory's Kitchen* memorializes a set of culinary practices and rituals that serve as vital sites of individual and cultural identification. By asking what is at stake when we publish and produce the recipes in *In Memory's Kitchen*, Drews, like the other authors in the book, explores the ways in which specific representations of food and food practices carry with them complex ideological messages.

For Nathan Abrams, media representations of the Rosenbergs leading up to their conviction for atomic espionage serve as an unexpected site for the convergence of ethnic and gender ideologies with particular food and food practices. In particular, Abrams distinguishes between those kosher foods and food practices through which Jewish-Americans communicated their loyalty to America and those nonkosher foods, such as Jell-O, that came to symbolize un-Americanism. By analyzing the role of food and food practices in the media's representations and the court's prosecution of the Rosenbergs, Abrams utilizes this specific historical moment to explore a number of themes that resonate throughout the book. First, the deployment of food practices to establish and police the boundaries between Self and Other plays a central role not only in Jewish culture, but also in a broad range of other contexts (see Cozzi, Mason, Fallwell, Elliott, LeBesco and Naccarato, in this volume). Second, Abrams' particular discussion of the condemnation of Ethel Rosenberg as a bad mother highlights a connection between food practices and gender that is taken up at a number of other points in the book (see Kingsbury, Drews, Retzinger, Nutter). Third, by situating his discussion in the broader context of the Cold War, Abrams teases out the subtle connections between food practices, cultural

identity, and national politics, thereby offering his own slant on a number of themes that run throughout the book (see Cozzi, Kingsbury, Drews, Mason, Fallwell, Elliott).

In chapter five, the focus returns to cookbooks as Eric Mason explores how they enshrine particular culinary practices and, consequently, contribute to the production of national, ethnic, and individual identities. To support this argument, Mason focuses specifically on the modern interest in Sephardic cuisine, the cooking of the descendants of the large Jewish community that lived in Spain and Portugal during the Middle Ages. He reviews a number of popular cookbooks to expose how they circulate particular ideological values while masking this work behind the everyday practices of food preparation and consumption. While Mason's focus on cookbooks aligns his chapter most overtly with Marie Drews' discussion of *In Memory's Kitchen*, his work connects with other chapters that focus on the deployment of "ethnic" food as a vehicle for designating the boundary between Self and Other, both individually and culturally (see Cozzi, Abrams, Fallwell, Elliott, LeBesco and Naccarato).

This is certainly one of the links that connects Mason's chapter with Lynne Fallwell's investigation of how German food and culture is represented in English-language travel guides. In particular, Fallwell is concerned with how such representations function to help readers/travelers define and reinforce their own familial, communal, regional, and national identities by establishing the food taboos through which the boundary between them and this foreign "Other" is demarcated. While her analysis of this particular mode of cultural and culinary representation is unique, it nonetheless furthers the overall exploration of the political and ideological function of food and foodways that guides the entire book. In particular, Fallwell's chapter connects with others in the book that explore the links between food practices and national identity (see Cozzi, Kingsbury, Mason, Abrams, Elliott). At the same time, by framing her discussion around the concept of "culinary tourism," Fallwell's analysis bridges the individual and the nation by demonstrating how the assumptions, expectations, and practices of individual tourists both inform and are informed by broader national politics.

Broad national and cultural values and assumptions also serve as the backdrop for Jean Retzinger's examination of contemporary print advertisements and television commercials for fast-food salads. While such advertising is geared toward satisfying our desire to exercise individual choice as consumers, Retzinger argues that it simultaneously exploits

contemporary anxieties and stereotypes about sexuality, body image, ethnicity, and gender. Through her analysis of specific print and television advertisements, Retzinger exposes how they deploy the discourse of health in a purely narcissistic fashion laced with innuendo and double entendre. By exposing the discursive maneuvers and manipulations in these advertisements, Retzinger works to reclaim the concept of “health” by framing individual health within the context of social and environmental health. Retzinger’s sharp analysis of the cultural assumptions and messages that inform the fast-food industry’s advertisements for salads provides another perspective for understanding the complex connections between specific representations of food and the broader ideological values that they circulate.

Charlene Elliott deploys a similar framework even as she shifts focus from food advertisements to food packaging. Specifically, she utilizes Edward Said’s notion of “Orientalism” in her analysis of the powerful implications that food packaging has for perceptions of one’s own and other cultures. To accomplish this task, Elliott turns to the *President’s Choice* product line sold in Canada’s Loblaw-owned supermarkets. She explores representations of the “exotic” in *President’s Choice* packaging to reveal how such packaging circulates particular stereotypes of race, class, and culture. Like Retzinger, Elliott is also interested in the discourse of health as she contrasts the packaging and marketing of the exotic through *PC’s* “Memories of” product line with that of its “blue menu” of “health” foods. While Elliott’s particular focus on food packaging adds another mode of representation to those that are discussed in the book, it simultaneously merges with other chapters that explore how such representations promote cultural assumptions about race, class, and ethnicity (see Cozzi; Drews; Abrams; Mason; Fallwell; LeBesco and Naccarato).

In chapter nine, Kathleen Banks Nutter returns to a focus on print and television advertising to explore how advertisements for chocolate reflect shifting assumptions about women, gender, and sexuality in American culture. By assuming a broad historical perspective, Nutter contrasts advertisements from the beginning of the twentieth century, in which women assumed the demure role of fulfilling the needs of others rather than acknowledging their own needs and desires, to more contemporary ads, where women delight in consuming chocolate in order to fulfill their own cravings. As such, Nutter argues that female empowerment and feminist liberation have, themselves, become marketing strategies for selling a range of products, including chocolate. By using changes in

chocolate advertisements as a lens for reading shifts in gender ideology, Nutter makes her own contribution to the larger analysis of how representations of food and foodways produce and sustain cultural and individual identities.

In the final chapter, Kathleen LeBesco and Peter Naccarato shift the focus from particular cultural texts to a consideration of how such texts function to create the ultimate representation of food and foodways, namely, the culinary icons of Julia Child and Martha Stewart. LeBesco and Naccarato frame the Child and Stewart oeuvres in the context of lifestyle programming that encourages have-nots to daydream of class mobility, suggesting that while lifestyle experts maintain their privileged class status through their knowledge and appreciation for food, they simultaneously offer their viewers an otherwise elusive taste of this privileged position through the food products they buy, consume, and serve. While acknowledging that both women can be read as gender outlaws as they each manipulate cultural expectations for women as a means of transgressing those limits, LeBesco and Naccarato ultimately use class as the lens that frames their analysis of these iconic figures. From this perspective, they contend that while the overt message of both Child and Stewart is one of class mobility as they invite their readers/viewers to emulate their practices and, thus, share in their privileged status, they ultimately serve to maintain the very class hierarchy that contributes to their iconic status. After close examinations of both women's cookbooks and lifestyle books, biographies, and television shows, LeBesco and Naccarato conclude that each of these texts contributes to the construction and circulation of the ultimate cultural production, the iconic figures of Child and Stewart, themselves, both of whom come to represent and circulate a set of ideologies that sustain the prevailing class hierarchy. This final chapter, then, ties together a number of arguments that have been made throughout the book and highlights the multiple and productive ways in which these ten chapters intersect with each other.

Notes

1. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

2. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and John Fiske,

Understanding Popular Culture (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989).

3. See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Knowledge, Education and Social Change*, ed. R. Brown (London: Tavistock, 1973); and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2d ed. Ed. S. During (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1993).

4. See Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992).

5. See Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Ien Ang, *Reading Dallas* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985); and Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

Works Cited

- Althusser, Louis. 1971. "Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." In *Lenin and Philosophy*, 127–186. London: New Left Books.
- Barthes, Roland. 1957. *Mythologies*. Trans. A. Lavers. Reprint, New York: The Noonday Press, 1972.
- . 1997. "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption." In *Food and Culture: A Reader*. Eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 20–27. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.