



How Canadians Communicate VI: Food Promotion, Consumption, and Controversy. Edited by Charlene Elliott. Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2016. 327 pp. ISBN 9781771990257 (pbk.)

Food not only makes our lives possible, but is of particular interest to us humans: testing new materials and techniques, borrowing, improving, and sometimes abandoning certain elements. If there is anything that brings almost the same pleasure as eating, it would be reading about eating. It is over food that we tend to come together—to commune—and so it is relevant that we consider the role of food through the lens of communication studies. In *How Canadians Communicate VI: Food Promotion, Consumption, and Controversy*, we can see the close link between identity and what we eat, as well as how food is represented, regulated, consumed, discussed, accepted, and sometimes feared. The book reminds us that food is more than just what we put on the table; it has a history, a path, and a politics. In doing so, the 17 chapters of this book cover four major themes: i) food as cultural meaning; ii) food as economic interaction; iii) food panic; and iv) rethinking food.

Under the theme food as cultural meaning, using the example of Mennonite sausages and pies, Charlene Elliott and Wayne McCreedy show how the qualities of places and cultures can be contained in certain foods. In a similar way, Ken Albala explores cultural meanings in early Canadian and québécois cookbooks. Through the semiotics of recipes, he illustrates the political context of cookbooks. Cookbook author Elizabeth Baird looks at the construction of a “Canadian” cuisine, which contains strengths such as pastry-making, grilling, and preserving. Jacqueline Botterill outlines some of the performative and normative rituals of the dinner party in Canada, which has survived despite lifestyle changes. Irina D. Mihalache explores issues of masculinity in Canadian culture through the lenses of Food TV and the playfulness around the resurrection of the cupcake. Nathalie Cooke discusses the early history of food radio in Canada, and outlines the rise of important female icons of everyday cooking, such as Kate Aitken. And John Gilchrist offers a more personal set of reflections on his life as a food critic and the expectations of his audiences.

The second thematic area, food as economic interaction, focuses on the ways that food choices are structured by retail and marketing operations. Jordan LeBel offers a fine review of the food retail environment in Canada. He introduces the intriguing retail measure related to a store’s “share of stomach,” and also rightly notes that stores are often in the real-estate business (selling shelf space and collecting listing fees for products). The consumer may put the items in their basket, but whole networks of processors and retailers try to influence those decisions. Valerie Tarasuk’s chapter explores the complex world of human nutrition, and the rise of fortified foods and “functional beverages” Early on, such foods met public health needs, but they are now much more discretionary and are marketed with loose references to non-essential “nutrients.”

Eric Pateman and Shannon King analyze the rise of culinary tourism as an industry, and ask what this tells us about our relationship to food and its effect on local cuisine.

Under the theme food as panic, Catherine Carstairs, Paige Schell, and Sheilagh Quaille provide an insightful explanation of the public health discussion over the pasteurization of milk. In the first half of the twentieth century (when Canada was introducing regulations for the pasteurization of milk) there were clear differences of opinion on the value of this public health measure, but the practice certainly made fluid milk widely available and nurtured the strong dairy lobby to come. Charlene Elliot and Josh Greenberg offer examples of how companies can respond to the risk of contaminated meat, by analyzing two major food scares. Stephen Kline discusses issues around children's weight being used as a canvas on which anxieties about modern foodways are drawn. There is increasing concern about children's eating practices, even though obesity rates are rising faster among adults (and most food choices for children are still made by adults).

One set of chapters refers to our need to rethink certain foods and our relationship to them. Melanie Rock discusses the role of Kraft Dinner and its predominance as a charitable food donation, which highlights the prevailing dairy insecurity faced by many people. After all, to get the full nutrition from the product, one needs both milk and margarine or butter. Neither of these items tend to be available in food banks. Rebecca Carruthers Den Hoed offers a piece on wild foods and the various discourses around hunting. Studies of food often ignore these areas, but there is much to be gained from considering the ethos of conservation behind traditional hunting and gathering. In what may be a challenging chapter for some, Pierre Desrochers provides a rethinking of the rhetoric around local foods. He questions the prominence of locavorism (eating as locally as possible). He raises important questions about how we define "local," and concludes that we should assess the life cycle of a product—including all of its inputs—before pronouncing judgement.

Overall, the wide variety of chapters adds to the zest of this collection. The book underscores the complexity of our food choices, but it also emphasizes that we can interpret the cultural shorthand that is exhibited in the patterns that emerge from our food decisions. It would be useful to graze the chapters like one would a good buffet. The 17 chapters represent a wide range of flavours and topics of interest for those who want to understand more about food as a cultural object. That is the nature, and the advantage, of an overview such as this. Through a mix of perspectives and levels of analysis, the book reminds us of the cultural and social aspects of what is on our plate, and the role that communication plays in our diet.

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