

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Food Studies: Matter, Meaning, Movement**

David Szanto, Amanda Di Battista, and Irena Knezevic (Eds.). Ottawa: Food Studies Press, 2022, 864 p.

This book, edited by David Szanto, Amanda Di Battista and Irena Knezevic, contains 63 essays dealing with diverse topics within the broad field of Food Studies. Aside from elementary methodologies defined for Food Studies as a discipline, essays embraced by this book branch out into a multitude of other theories and methods used in sociology, cultural studies, environmental studies, approaching issues related to health, global and local identities, sustainability, folklore, and many others in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives. In general, the book contains very interesting, relevant, and up-to-date insights into the field of Food Studies, and its uniqueness can be found in the approach – it does this through very specific examples. It is also important to note that this publication is written as a textbook for undergraduate students which makes it an invaluable source for students of the above-mentioned disciplines all around the world.

Regarding the organisation of this publication, the book contains a traditional introduction, a set of instructions on how to use it, the essays themselves and a very useful glossary at the end. The glossary provides the reader with specific yet concise definitions of the most important Food Studies concepts. Each of the essays includes a short introduction about its author, while some of them also include exercises, discussion questions and learning outcomes. The exercises usually take the form of an activity related to the topic discussed in the essay. Some of them ask the reader to replicate an artistic technique, create haiku or analyse a picture, while others ask them to discuss their standpoints and opinions. These exercises are a very creative and interesting addition, which provides the reader not only with information, but also memorable experiences in which many of student may clarify and remember concepts related to Food Studies. The discussion questions are another very important element included in the book. By providing the reader with an opportunity to discuss the topic at hand, interesting new insights can be found. Lastly, the learning outcomes provide the user with a short and specific goals which can be attained by reading the essay. These sections are great tools to transform the process of learning into a diverse and interesting academic experience.

As for the content, this book is organised in quite loose thematic circles. The most general and everyday topics, such as food preparation, are included at the start of the book, with more specific chapters, such as food habits in a specific country, included at the end. This form of organisation is both logical and effective, first providing the readers with necessary vocabulary and information which is then required to understand later, more complicated, and specific essays. Moreover, essays are divided into three groups, those being: a Case, Creative, and a Perspective. Cases deal primarily with the most elementary concepts related to food, its preparation and consumption. Examples include food preparation traditions in specific countries, difficulties and challenges of sustainable food production or the relationship between food and culture. Creatives deal with food from more abstract viewpoint. Most essays deal with the connection of food and art, poetry, and other forms of expression, while also exploring the cultural implications of food in human society. The last category of essays entitled Perspectives provides the reader with broader insight into background aspects of food studies such as financialization, economy, or ethics. This division creates a variety of lenses through which

food studies can be understood, thus allowing the reader to understand related concepts more easily.

Due to the large number of authors who provided their essays for this book, it is impossible to assess a specific writing style. While it is true that most authors follow a classic essay format, their writing styles are significantly different. Some of the authors use concise, short, and informative sentences, while some use more ornate and metaphoric language, which includes a multitude of questions and contemplations. This is once more most evident in the previously introduced categorisation of essays. While Cases and Perspectives usually include more concise language, Creatives include more artistic form of expression. Another aspect of note is the use of pictures, tables, graphs, and poems. Essays from the Creative category are most likely to include pictures and poems to serve as examples, while essays from the remaining two categories are most likely to include graphs and tables. As for the pictures themselves, most are examples of specific art pieces, but there are also many various photos of food items, preparation processes, and people preparing and consuming food. All these devices provide much needed and welcome variety, allowing the reader to take a break from reading large amounts of text.

While all essays deal with topics of Food Studies, it is important to note that some approach these topics from a more specific perspective than others. Some of the many examples of topics discussed in these essays include concepts of authenticity, food identity in Japan, Samoa, Kyrgyzstan, the meaning of food, food and folklore, food and school systems, nutrition, pollinators, allergies, breast milk, food advertising, insecurity, waste, access, financialization, trade, ecology, traceability, safety, insect-based food, morality, veganism, and many others. Due to this large number of areas, only three essays from each category have been selected to be analysed in this book review.

Starting with the Case category, the first essay selected for analysis is written by Lucy Long and is titled *Food and Folklore*. This essay deals with the influence of the environment and history of a region on food traditions, and an explanation of folkloristic concepts of tradition and the relationship between commercial foods and local cultures. The author starts the essay with an introduction of several concepts such as tradition, folklore, identity, ethos, and aesthetics. The next chapter deals with a discovery of a tradition, in this case green bean casserole. The author examines the process through which a tradition is created, and she does this by interviewing residents about the food and then cross referencing the results with older members of the community. The following text deals with the dish itself and all of different aspects which contribute to its position as a traditional and folklore related food. In the conclusion of this essay, the author creates a connection between traditional food and its preparation with more commercial and mass-produced versions of it. The author provides a sufficient theoretical framework, upon which a more specific issue is then analysed. The essay also includes a new development in the field which once more serves as another viewpoint through which the complicated field of food studies can be understood.

The second essay from the Case category selected for analysis was written by Melissa Montanari and is titled *Veganism and Morality*. Topics discussed include common rhetorical strategies used to construct narratives of moral consumption, complex relationship between mainstream veganism and discourses of white femininity using the skill of close-reading and analysis of food media within enduring and overlapping systems of power. The introduction is devoted to the current and past development of veganism, its link to religion and so-called diet culture, and the relation between mainstream veganism and systems of violence. The second chapter of the essay deals with PETA and its relation to white, middle-class sentimentalities,

while the third chapter discusses the cultural participation of different brands on social media and their effort to support social justice. The conclusion provides the reader with a recapitulation of topics discussed, while also pointing out a connection between use of language and reinforcement of violent structures of power. The essay in its entirety provides a concise introduction of its concepts but includes too many different topics for a text of its length.

The last essay chosen from the Case category was written by Leda Cooks and is titled *Food Rescue*. Cooks discusses topics such as connection of food waste to hunger and examines food rescue networks and their situation as sub-systems of food. The first chapter includes the issue of food waste and provides numbers and graphs depicting how much food is wasted. It also includes the introduction of concept of food rescue, a description of its functions and its importance in global hunger relief. The second chapter of the essay provides even more in-depth description of the food rescue system mainly from the theoretical point of view, while the following chapter deals with this concept from a much more practical point of view. This chapter deals with food rescue in western Massachusetts specifically, thus providing the reader with concrete and precise example through which previously mentioned concepts can be understood. The conclusion recapitulates previously stated pieces of information. The author's style of writing which connects theoretical background with more specific examples is easy to understand and quite effective in conveying the information in question.

Essays included in the Creative category usually include much less text than those from remaining two categories, shifting their attention to artistic depiction and understanding of food related concepts. One of examples includes an essay written by Andrea Elena Noriega titled *Poems for Pollinators*. This essay includes only a very short introduction which explains the author's motivation behind the creation of said poems. The rest of the essay includes the poems themselves and some pictures painted by the author. It is evident that aside from essays from the Case category, essays from this one usually do not include a conclusion in which some new information is provided or confirmed.

Another example of the Creative category includes essay written by Annika Walsh titled *Herding Humans*. As in previous the example, only a short introduction explaining the inspiration of the author is provided, while the rest of the essay consists of artwork which compares human food behaviour to that of cows. As before, this essay provides no real conclusion aside from artistic experience.

The last essay used as an example of the Creative category is written by Vincent Andrisani and is titled *Street Food Vendors*. Aside from a short introduction which was provided in a similar fashion to previous examples, this essay contains even more experimental features than poetry and pictures. The essay itself largely consists of a video documentary to which a link is provided within the book. The larger part of the essay consists of exercises through which the reader is led to experience various sounds, tastes, and smells of places where street food is sold. This experimental and sense-oriented approach is quite peculiar and may prove very effective in the process of teaching about food.

The last category of essays analysed is the Perspective category. As mentioned above, these essays deal with issues which are less connected to food studies themselves, but rather to economy, ecology and other industries connected to production of food. The first essay chosen for analysis from this category is written by Evalyn Nimmo and André E.B. Lacerda and is titled *Agroforestry*. This essay discusses importance of local ecological knowledge and histories supporting and developing sustainable food systems and the impact of conventional industrial food systems on traditional food cultures, and it describes how researchers can

integrate scientific approaches and traditional knowledge to develop innovative solutions to food system challenges in rural Brazil. In conclusion, this essay provides a very well-structured overview of basic concepts related to agroforestry, introduces concepts and practices of original inhabitants of the region, and most importantly introduces the most recent scientific methods developed to help the region.

The second essay chosen from this category is written by Janet Colson and is titled *Breast Milk*. A topic discussed in relation to food studies less frequently, this peculiar essay discusses topics such as the history of infant feeding practices over the last three centuries the importance of human milk for infant survival, differentiating between cross-nursing, wet-nursing, and milk-sharing and pros and cons of pasteurizing human milk. This essay is much more data heavy than previous examples provided, relying heavily on tables and numerical data. The author also provides a detailed comparison of different breastfeeding methods and milk alternatives. It is important to acknowledge the importance of less traditional essays related to food studies mainly due to their usually unique perspectives on more general problems discussed.

The last essay from Perspective category analysed is written by Liam Cole Young and is titled *Salt*. The essay discusses intersections between culture, economics, and technology related to salt, explains how human cultures ascribe symbolic meaning to foods that transcend flavour or nutrition, and describes how to build links between the histories of food production, distribution, and consumption and aspects of contemporary food cultures and supply chains. Seemingly a common kitchen commodity, the author of this essay discusses salt from multitude of viewpoints which provides a unique opportunity to change the readers' understanding of it. This kind of essay once more provides a new and alternative viewpoint on a seemingly everyday concept.

In conclusion, the essays included in this collection provide very interesting and alternative viewpoints of elementary Food Studies concepts. The division of essays into three categories provides a set of unique lenses through which Food Studies can be approached and understood. The theoretically and methodologically diverse insight into the field can find readership among students in many humanities and social sciences.

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