CONVERSATIONS WITH FOOD

Edited by

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Texas Tech University

and

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Series in Sociology
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Foreword

Anastacia Marx de Salcedo

We called my father the human garbage can. He appreciated a good dinner as much as anyone—he would polish off second and third helpings and then clean out the serving bowls in the kitchen, all while groaning, "I'm never going to eat again" (a vow forgotten by morning). His gluttony was understandable—after all, lots of people love to eat, and, as a long-distance runner, he was spared the usual consequences, but not an indiscriminate palate. He was just as happy with a hamburger and fries from McDonald's as a gourmet meal. And, although he knew how to boil water and make a few other things, he didn't bother with even the most rudimentary preparation. He gnawed frozen bagels rather than toasting and schmearing them. At lunch, like a colony of army ants, he bored front to back through carrots, cabbages, and grapefruit, leaving nothing behind, not even a citrus rind. He intercepted and rerouted to his mouth items destined for the disposal—the brown ends of vegetables, slightly stinky leftovers, and scrapings from other people's plates.

Which made the loss of his appetite all the more devastating. At the age of 72, after complaining to his doctor about a persistent pain in his back, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I collapsed into his arms when he told me; I knew it was a death sentence. But we did what families too rattled to face the truth about a loved one's diagnosis do. We insisted he get chemotherapy; we tried to enroll him in pharmaceutical trials (already Stage IV, he was rejected); and we distracted ourselves with med schedules, trips to the pharmacy for narcotics and swabs, and the million of other small tasks that go into caring for the very ill. I, as the (self) designated family cook, busied myself in the kitchen, preparing him delicate, easy-to-swallow lunches and dinners: a filet of sole with a light grinding of lime zest; a small mound of nutty Basmati rice, cauliflower soup thinned with milk, small salads with Bibb lettuces, and puddings and tapiocas dusted with cinnamon. He declined the wine I'd offer-he who had once glugged enormous goblets at the end of the day—and took tiny bites of the food. When he'd finished, I'd collect his plate and bring it to the kitchen. I stood at the sink, sliding the mostly uneaten meal into the disposal, crying silently.

My husband would scold me. "Why are you in here? Can't you see he has no appetite? Go be with him." It was true that my father seemed to enjoy the drugstore protein drinks I'd bought him—Boost, Carnation, and Ensure—more than my carefully prepared dishes. But I couldn't go. I couldn't trust myself to sit by his edema-swollen legs without feeling absolutely flattened by the

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enormity of my grief. And so I hid behind my stove, my refrigerator, my toaster, and my blender, gently stirring scrambled eggs and spreading butter over perfect toast. I let the food say what I could not: "I cannot bear to let you go."

Food, metabolized to build and fuel cells, is vital to all creatures. But for people, its importance is even greater than simply sustaining life. Cooking both required (it's time-consuming) and enabled (batch preparation) the division of labor, the basis of civilization—spawning farming, government, technology, and culture. The pervasive and diverse roles food plays in human society are adroitly captured in *Conversations With Food*, a wide-ranging anthology assembled by Dorothy Chansky, a theatre scholar and founding director of the Humanities Center at Texas Tech University, and Sarah W. Tracy, a historian of medicine and food at the Honors College of the University of Oklahoma.

The book's ambiguous title hints at the variety of viewpoints and approaches within. Does "with" mean food is an agent or instrument, as in my story about my father? Or an element or accessory, as the two sides of beef framing Pope Innocent X in Francis Bacon's 1954 painting "Figure with Meat"? Or does the preposition indicate that food is the subject, in this case, of an intellectual inquisition? The answer, of course, is all of these things. *Conversations With Food* applies a similar inclusivity to disciplines. The book features contributions by actors, anthropologists, classicists, culinary and food science experts, epidemiologists, historians, language and culture scholars, women's studies researchers, and writers on food and popular culture. The result is panoramic.

Chansky and Tracy are uniquely qualified to pull together this freewheeling collection. Chansky's lifelong love of the theatre began when she was six and her mother enrolled her in a "dramatics class." After an AB in English from Smith College, a master's degree from the Catholic University of America, and a PhD from New York University, Chansky plunged into practice. She was an actor for seven years and then wrote and produced the off-Broadway musical The Brooklyn Bridge, celebrating the building of the landmark. But her fascination with theory, criticism, and history led her in a more scholarly direction. In 2004, Chansky published her first book, Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience, about a period in which motion pictures freed live drama to experiment with less conventional structures and themes. She was soon invited to join the faculty at Texas Tech University. In 2015, she published Kitchen Sink Realisms: Domestic Labor, Dining, and Drama in the American Theatre, incorporating food and feminism into her domain. She is currently working on a book about representations of dementia in the past century of American theatre.

Chansky's partner in the project has had an equally storied career. Sarah W. Tracy graduated with an AB from Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges and then earned her master's and PhD in the History and Sociology of Science at the

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University of Pennsylvania. Her interest in the interlocking trinity of food, medicine, and public health resulted in her first book, *Alcoholism in America from Reconstruction to Prohibition*, a history of alcoholism and its treatment in the United States, published in 2005. She is currently finishing a groundbreaking—it will be the very first—biography of one of the 20th century's most influential scientists: nutritional physiologist and epidemiologist Ancel Keys (1904-2004); her anthology chapter is drawn from this work.

Food studies, as Chansky and Tracy note in this book's introduction, is a very young field—appearing only in the 1990s. (The neglect of a topic that touches virtually every facet of existence is undoubtedly due to its historic association with women.) This just means there's more to explore! *Conversations With Food* expands the perimeter of the discipline. The thirteen essays begin by addressing hunger and end by discussing insatiety. Each chapter brims with fresh ideas and resonant details, from ballpark franks as signifiers of democratic ideals to the displacement, lack of acknowledgment, and appropriation of Indigenous horticulture by ecologically minded gardeners.

For example, in the opening piece, by Tracy, which examines Ancel Keys's famous experiment depriving conscientious objectors (COs) of food, a role they assumed in lieu of military service, I was struck by these lines: "The COs became obsessed with food, however, dreamt about it, traded recipes, and collected cookbooks. Some made plans to pursue careers in agriculture and to take cooking classes . . ." Keys and his colleagues termed this "semi-starvation neurosis," but it sounds exactly like so many people in the twenty-first century. What does that mean about us, I wondered, living at a time when the average American consumes more than 3,600 calories a day? Is our collective obsession with food a sign of its poor quality—or of spiritual starvation?

Another essay that hit home was Adele Hite's "Food and Trumpism." I found myself nodding my head as I read how the 1980s farm crisis fueled the present political divide by pushing rural white families off the land and into the use of food stamps—as had happened with rural Black families after World War II. Poverty, stigma, and racism ignited into anger when Michelle Obama became the figurehead for the "healthy diet" championed by coastal elites and promoted as policy through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the school lunch program. The antidote: Donald J. Trump brandishing a Quarter Pounder and fries.

And as I read Roger Porter's closing chapter, a dissection of how Anthony Bourdain's televised gastronomical adventures were designed to both titillate and frustrate us, I mused on the meaning of appetite. "['E]verything is brightly colored, crunchy, exotic, unrecognizable, and attractive. I suddenly want everything . . . I'm happy, exhilarated, delirious with hunger and curiosity. A manic-depressive on a happy jag, I'm on top of the world . . . Everything I see, I

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want to put in my mouth." For the food celebrity, as for the rest of us, the desire to eat was a desire for life. I imagine that, like my father, as Bourdain receded, he stopped wanting to taste its sweet, sour, savory, and bitter tang.

In the Spanish-speaking world, it's customary for diners to begin a meal by saying *buen provecho* to each other. The phrase is not, as some people mistakenly assume, the equivalent of the French *bon appétit*, enjoy the food. It expresses the hope that eaters can take advantage of the nourishment before them, to use it for their benefit. ¡Buen provecho!

Anastacia Marx de Salcedo

Author

Combat-Ready Kitchen: How the US Military Shapes the Way You Eat

Preface

The editors would like to thank Texas Tech University's Humanities Center, Provost Michael Galyean, and Vice President for Research Joseph Heppert for their support of the 2018 "Food and . . ." conference. We also thank Justin Hughes for unflagging administrative and editorial assistance and Alec Lee Williams for prodigious assistance with all things MLA 8.

We especially want to extend our gratitude and admiration to the contributors to this volume. Our colleagues who offered sympathy for the missed deadlines and misunderstood instructions that (inevitably) plague editors trying to marshal the troops (but instead find themselves herding cats) never met this baker's dozen of authors. To a one, they were timely in their revisions and they put up with our nitpicking. If you meet, see, or know one of them, and if you have any interest in this book, buy that scholar a drink.

Dorothy Chansky Sarah W. Tracy

Introduction

Dorothy Chansky *Texas Tech University*

Sarah W. Tracy University of Oklahoma

This book emerged from a year of events organized by the Humanities Center at Texas Tech University in 2018 under the rubric "Food and. . . ." But the collection does not precisely fit in the category of food studies. On the other hand, it doesn't *not* fit there.

The explosion of food studies at the end of the twentieth century was an institutional response to the myriad ways in which food might be-and in a preliminary way, had been (see Tannahill)—approached by scholars; the field has only expanded in the intervening years. As the introduction to a recent humanities-inflected anthology of essays on food and theatre notes, food carries "symbolic and material unwieldiness," showing "comestibles and their consumption to be both bedrock and flashpoints of cultural identity" (Chansky and White 1). Historians of medicine, too, have long appreciated the fact that dietary advice for healthy living has often been much more than, well, dietary advice. American physiologist Wilbur O. Atwater's food recommendations for the early twentieth-century industrial worker were a recipe for what he considered "efficient democracy." We all eat, yet what counts as appealing, nourishing, traditional food in one culture may be repulsive in another. Even what simply counts in one society as food, as poison, as medicine is historically and culturally fluid, as the American temperance campaign against alcohol—regarded in some late-nineteenth-century medical and lay circles as nourishing and restorativemakes clear. What is cheap and ordinary in one time and place is luxury in another. Oysters, for example, were the poor food of the working class in early nineteenthcentury England and New York. Now, after decades of over-harvesting, elites jockey for position in selecting specific types of this expensive delicacy. Religious practices, too, dictate what may be consumed and when for numerous kinds of believers. Food is what we make of it, and what its consumption makes of us.

Recent books that do claim a place at the food studies table typically nod to what has gone before and then point out how their area of interest has been underexplored. In the former camp ("what has gone before," or even "the bad old days"), as early as 1996 the editors of *Consumption in the Age of Affluence*:

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The World of Food (Fine, Heasman, and Wright) acknowledged that food had become solidly present in divers areas of scholarship where it had previously been ignored. Nonetheless, they argued, the earlier foci of critical investigation were outdated. Economic concepts (supply and demand, theories of state and policy making, or the relation between agriculture and industry) did not tell us enough about how food was perceived, used, understood, misunderstood, or manipulated at the grassroots level. Nor did it tell us enough about how food serves people as locus of identity or as trope or prop, to name just three of the ways comestibles function in everyday life, in literature, and in the plastic and performing arts. Geography, psychology, and social practice show up on the editors' list of other recommended approaches to considering food.

In the decades since *Consumption in the Age of Affluence*, a plethora of scholars in the humanities and social sciences have heard the call and have obliged with studies such as *Food and Gender: Identity and Power* (Counihan and Kaplan, 1998); *Food and Cultural Studies* (Ashley et al., 2004); *Food in the Movies* (Zimmerman and Weiss, 2005); *Food and the City in Europe Since 1800* (Atkins, Lummel, and Oddy, 2007); *Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture* (Parasecoli, 2008); *Cuisine and Symbolic Capital: Food in Film and Literature* (Fine et al., 2010); and *Food and Theatre on the World Stage* (Chansky and White, 2015). A list of books that take up particular "ethnic" or regional foods could fill the rest of this introduction. Suffice it to say that by 2009, *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods* (Miller and Deutsch) anticipated sales within the by then robust roster of university programs in food studies.

This collection does something slightly different. Emerging, as it does, from a yearlong series of programming that took place across several platforms, the anthology offers a great variety of ways to replace the ellipsis in "Food and ..." with none given pride of place. As in the examples above, "Food and . . . " may suggest areas of inquiry that fall under several broad thematic categories: culture, literature, politics, policy, environment, technology, health. More specialized topics under these large rubrics include malnutrition, access, education, inequality, media representations, depictions in fine art, sustainability, ecology(s), local food, small-scale agriculture, global agribusiness, colonialism, restaurants, taboo, packaging, eating disorders, marketing, terroir, and gastronomy. This list is not exhaustive. Humanistic ways of looking at food run the gamut from "primary source in material culture to semiotic tool; from literary trope to exchangeable commodity; from colonial weapon to method of cultural resistance; from obsession either due to absence or to fetish; from comfort, reassurance, and sustenance to oddity or source of disgust; from sin to salvation" (Chansky and White 9); from welcoming gesture to coercive faux hospitality; and from political bribe to political rallying point. Social science ways of looking at food rely on participant-observer praxis, interviews, ethnographies, data analyses, and parsing Introduction xv

government documents. Neither of the latter methodological lists pretends to be exhaustive, either. Jessica Romney's chapter in the present volume nods to Kaori O'Connor's assessment of food studies as a house with many interconnected rooms. We like to think of our collection as such a house.

Most anthologies of any sort feature clusters of essays under headings that point to shared thematic DNA. A dozen essays in this collection emerged from papers given at the 2018 themed conference, simply titled "Food and. . . ." Our call for papers invited scholars from any humanities or social science discipline to fill in the blank as they saw fit. The thirteenth essay is an expanded version of a talk given by English literature scholar and food writer Roger Porter in the Humanities Center's yearlong "Food and . . ." speaker series. It fell to us as the editors to try to create topic-driven clusters. Attempts to do so, however, proved maddeningly slippery, as essays that seemed to belong securely under one rubric often also seemed to want to migrate to the shelter of another. Here are some of the many connections we see among the essays in this book.

At least three of the essays treat what might be called national cuisines. These are Benjamin Poole's "The Inventory of Tradition: French Culinary Heritage in the Global Age"; Lauren Miller Griffith's "Local But Not Traditional: Farm-to-Table Dining at a Belizean Resort"; and, in a more indirect way, Jessica Romney's "When Diplomacy Sours: The Failed Feast and Intergroup Relations in Ancient Greek Literature."

But Romney's essay could fit into a unit on literature, where it would be joined by Patrick Midgley's "Food and *The Skriker*: Consumption and Corruption in Caryl Churchill's Posthuman Fairy Underworld" as well as Belinda Kleinhans's "Of Eating and Being (Eaten): Identity, Power, and Food in Eich's Radio Drama *Der Tiger Jussuf*," with the latter two pieces analyzing food and eating in plays originating in different countries at different times. This grouping of essays highlights food's transformative power, its ability to alter the power dynamics between different cultures and worlds—human and nonhuman.

Chapters addressing food practices and policies in the United States could easily go together and would include Jonathan Rees's "Harvey Wiley and the Transformation of American Food Manufacturing"; Seth Tannenbaum's "A Ballpark United by Food: Hot Dogs and Bridging the Gap Between the Skyboxes and the Cheap Seats at the Houston Astrodome"; Adele Hite's "Food and 'Trumpism': How a Farm Crisis, Food Stamps, and a Fat-free Diet Foreshadowed a Trump Victory"; and Abby Wilkerson's "They Tried to Make Me Go to Rehab But I Said No, No, No: Single-Serve Packs and the Social Contract."

Both Rees and Wilkerson, though, are dealing with food chemistry, industry, and government policy as much as they are with how consumers think about

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and choose their foods. Accordingly, these essays could be part of a policy and science unit along with Maya Hey's consideration of fermentation in "On Performative Food Acts and the Human-Microbe Relationship." And since Hey considers microbes as co-inhabitors of the earth that humans often imagine we own, her essay could loop back and pair with Midgley's study of Caryl Churchill's dystopian universe brought onstage as a plea that attention must be paid to all the living creatures that make up our ecosystem, especially the parts of it we eat and the habitats that support them. This last theme figures, too, in Audrey Lundahl's analysis of permaculture discourses that frequently fail to acknowledge their authors' borrowing of the holistic ecological perspectives and agricultural practices of Indigenous peoples who were systematically disenfranchised from the lands they had historically tended.

"Authenticity" is a dearly held yet contentious concept that is crucial to and parsed by Poole, Griffith, and Roger Porter, whose essay about Anthony Bourdain's "Food Tourism" asks us to think about the ways in which readers and television viewers anticipate or believe they recognize the authentic. These three authors consider food tourism as an industry that is crucial to the cultures they explore. Poole's France and Griffith's Belize are countries that host tourists, while Porter's study of Bourdain as "über-tourist" reveals this larger-than-life food celebrity and his television crew paradoxically crafting the authentic in a variety of global destinations and inviting viewers to savor experiences of which they cannot be a part. Reading the three essays in light of each other invites us to shift positions or lenses regarding profitability, policy, role-play, advertising, and publications as a means of shaping tourist (and citizen) expectations concerning food experiences. The chapters remind us, too, of the mediated nature of authenticity.

Shifting positions could be the DNA shared by essays in a unit that might be called "Self/Other." Here, Romney's consideration of warring states in the ancient world defining themselves and their "others" via food would be joined by Tannenbaum's careful analysis of how a popular informal food was (and arguably remains) perceived as uniting rich and poor while they watch "America's favorite pastime," baseball, from their box or their bleacher seats. Audrey Lundahl's work might figure here as well. Her study of how gardening methods marketed as healthful, organic, or good for the land are subtly co-opted from Indigenous cultures by privileged, first-world whites, often ignorant of the people they are both depriving and mimicking, reveals an insidious kind of we/they. Yet, seeing Indigenous peoples and their foodways as timeless may itself be a mode of naïve and ahistorical thinking. Poole notes that "it is a modern conceit to imagine premodern societies as unchanging, traditional, and isolated. Exploration, invention, and exchange are surely ancient human activities," which leads us right back to Romney's warring Greeks and Persians with their aggressive forays into unfamiliar

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territories where eating practices were as alien as the languages and terrain. And then, there is Kleinhans, whose analysis of Eich's drama *Der Tiger Jussuf* reveals just how quickly and easily the Self/Other distinction may be reversed through the act of eating.

Science is also the focus of a number of the chapters in *Conversations With Food*. Maya Hey's detailed consideration of fermentation and bacteria as always already with us, whether we recognize that or not, and Rees's examination of Harvey Wiley's obsession with food purity in an increasingly industrial food system remind us of the persistent human impulse for mastery over the microbial world of food. To the extent that Lundahl is working with some of the science of food, a section under that rubric would surely include Sarah W. Tracy's "Starving for Science and Conscience: The Minnesota Experiment, Ancel Keys, and Religious Pacifism, 1944-46." Tracy's and Lundahl's essays remind us, too, of the ways disenfranchised others-whether conscientious objectors or Indigenous peoples-contribute to science in acknowledged and unacknowledged ways. Tracy's subjects submitted to starvation voluntarily, but extreme alimentary privation makes an appearance in Kleinhans's reading of Der Tiger Jussuf, written shortly after World War II, when Germans were still reeling from the effects of the food shortages that had so many of them tightening their belts to the point of desperation and diminished functioning.

World War II and the deprivations suffered in its wake led to large-scale industrialized food production and government subsidies to growers. Poole discusses these developments as a France's twinned means of feeding a nation. But feeding a nation via industrialized agriculture and manufacture can have devastating effects on vulnerable communities, something addressed head-on by both Hite and Lundahl. Hite reminds us that dietary guidelines and agricultural policies are often inflected with racial and class status biases—biases that may be difficult to detect but bear significant political consequences. And Lundahl offers a path toward recognizing the unrecognized voices and interests that have historically served the common good and contributed to alternatives to the industrial food system. Wilkerson parses the coercive traps set by large-scale food processing that yields products intended, one might say, to mess with consumers' minds while facilitating their efforts to discipline their bodies. As Poole writes of France and as Wilkerson demonstrates to be clearly entrenched US phenomena, "branding and marketing gradually replaced local interpersonal relationships in mediating consumers' food choices."

The world of food studies is an intellectually rich and increasingly well-seasoned place. The best part of the conference, for Dorothy as organizer, was seeing the looks of surprise and delight as participants from wholly disparate disciplines—theatre studies, Classics, French studies, English, epidemiology, nutrition, history, history of medicine, anthropology, to name some—got

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excited about research they had not before imagined would be of any interest to them. Classicists picked the brains of art historians who, in turn, were fascinated by cultural studies of the foodways of countries other than their own, and quantitative methods garnered curiosity and questions from scholars whose work depends on qualitative investigation or even close readings of literature.

So, as co-editors we have eschewed the subheading route and, with two exceptions, have simply arranged the chapters using their authors' last names, presenting them in reverse alphabetical order. The exceptions are the first and last pieces, which deal, respectively, with starvation and with an excess of food opportunities—from the alpha of deprivation to the omega of glut. Tracy's "Starving for Science and Conscience" considers the importance of understanding the effects of extreme deprivation on the human body and mind as a key part of learning how to reintroduce nutrition without overwhelming (and potentially killing) the severely malnourished people being rescued. Clear though this may sound in retrospect, it was anything but at the time a group of conscientious objectors made a successful plea during World War II to aid their country without weaponizing and to strengthen global democracy after the war through food security. Porter's "Food Tourism: With Anthony Bourdain, What You See is Never What You'll Get" considers the ways in which armchair travel to food destinations is neither a wholly innocent nor even a genuinely benign undertaking. Bourdain's death, just a few months after Porter delivered his lecture, brought the food memoirist and television star's legacy to the attention of millions who might previously have been less critically attuned to the ways in which what Porter calls "food porn" is part of what those of us with access to expensive and varied cuisines seek in the name of adventure.

Read the chapters in any order that appeals to you. In the spirit of conversation, however, each author's chapter is followed by his or her suggestion for two or more other chapters in the volume that seem to them to have things to say to each other. You will, of course, see what you think. Push back. Talk back. Rearrange. No two cooks need to use the same main ingredients in the same way.

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