Barthes (2008) Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption

Barthes, Roland


Roland Barthes, the author of this article, describes food as nutrition as well as a protocol (Barthes 2008). In contemporary French Society, food is becoming important to an ever-lengthening list of situations. Barthes guesses that food will continue to lose in substance and gain in function, and will be focused around two major points: activity and leisure (Barthes 2008:34). He claims that the subject of food connotes triviality or guilt (Barthes 2008:28).

The sociologists and economists realize that there is such a thing as the psychosociology of food, and a study of behavior of French working-class families was performed, showing the effects on contemporary food. In the book Le mode de vie des familles bourgeoises de 1873 à 1953, M. Perrot concluded that economic factors have made less of a role than changing tastes have when considering changes in middle-class food habits. Food is described as a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior. In other words, food sums up a situation, constitutes information, and becomes a sign and unit of a system of communication when one buys an item of food or consumes it (Barthes 2008:29). Food is a highly structured need, anthropologically speaking. The sense of food is not elaborated at the level of its cost, but rather at the level of its preparation and use (Barthes 2008:30).

Advertising plays a large role in isolating themes and situations that food signifies in the social environment. The sociology of mass communication has become increasingly apt to think that advertising reflects the psychology of it (I don't understand what you're saying--please reword). Food advertising is said to permit us to identify three groups of themes, according to the author. The first is the ability to take each day of the national past. Food allows one to put himself into his own past (these sentences need to be reworked to be clearer). Another theme has to do with inferiority of food, and the masculinity and femininity of foods and how advertising makes it possible to associate foods with sexuality (Barthes 2008:32). Health is the final theme, which is described as an alibi food gives us, the relay midway between the body and the mind which provides us with energy again, this is not clearly expressed. Food serves as a sign for all three of these themes. It is a sign because it replaces, sums up, and signalizes (does he use the term "signalize"--I would check but you did not give me a digital copy of this) other behaviors.

Modernity of food is much different than it was traditionally in the past. In the past, only festive occasions were signalized by food in any positive manner, however today many things are characterized with food acting as a sign. Work food, for example, provides energy and serves as the sign of participation in modern life (Barthes 2008:33).

After reading the article, I agree with Barthes concerning the differences from traditional patterns of food to modern food behaviors. It makes sense that food is a sign for many things and that it serves as situations, although many don't think about food as something more than a cure for hunger. Like Barthes said, behaviors such as activity, work, sports, effort, leisure, and celebration are all situations expressed through food (Barthes 2008:33). According to Barthes, the traditional function of food is apt to disappear, allowing for the opportunity for endless modern situations (Barthes 2008:34).

Barthes can be a difficult writer, and in many parts of your review I was lost. I don't see a digital copy in my Inbox so I couldn't refer to the article. In any case, work on simplifying and clarifying your writing.