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Food and Femininity

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much a product of its form as its context, that our aesthetic responses to food are entirely analogous to those we have before songs and paintings, and that cuisine undergoes the same tensions and dialectics between innovation and tradition as other arts. Therefore, he claims, cuisine is likewise self-critical and aesthetically renewable.

I recommend reading Furrow's book alongside Nicola Perullo's *Taste as Experience*, released in English the same year (2016). Both philosophers make unprecedented cases for the ethical value of food's aesthetic experience, but Perullo insists that this value depends on tasting's uniqueness, not similarity to other aesthetic events. The pair present rich new grounds for debate.

References

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FOOD AND FEMININITY,

BY KATE CAIRNS AND JOSÉE JOHNSTON (NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC, 2015).

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Although Cairns and Johnston did not intend to explore the relationship between women, femininity, and food when they began their research on the role of food in people's lives, it was ultimately the "main dish" of their study (p. 4). Through forty in-depth interviews and twenty focus groups with food-oriented consumers in Toronto, Canada, as well as discourse analyses of English-language food blogs, newspapers, and magazines, the authors found that women and food remain powerfully connected, even in today's so-called postfeminist world. Contemporary women continue to use food to construct feminine selves in "key sites" of foodwork including shopping, cooking, eating, and feeding others.

Cairns and Johnston argue that, although the link between food and femininity is a continuity of the past, the feminine performances women enact in the contemporary world are much more complex than "the straightforward performance of the 1950s' housewife" (p. vi). Being able to successfully perform femininity through food, they contend, is a challenge because women are expected to express a myriad of food femininities at once—e.g., the nurturing mother, talented home-cook, conscientious consumer, and health-savvy eater. At the same time, women must avoid paying *too much* attention to food in order to evade being labeled the strict vegetarian or the health nut.

Moreover, their study reveals the powerful role of emotions in foodwork for the contemporary woman, which is best exemplified through the interviews with forty-seven mothers. Providing healthy meals, socializing children's palates, and protecting children from the harmful products of an uncaring food system were some of the ways that women cared for their children and expressed love. Even when women were critically reflexive about how the pressures of foodwork in motherhood were unfairly gendered, most remained involved because they found it to be an emotionally rewarding practice. For example, in one interview, a mother was filled with pride and joy when her six-year-old daughter announced that her favorite food was sushi and McDonalds was "gross"—she felt she had successfully socialized her daughter into a healthy, responsible food consumer.

In order to better understand how women actively manage the performance pressures of these complicated and layered femininities, Cairns and Johnston develop the concept of *calibration*: the valuable idea that women continually adjust their identities "to meet idealized/elusive feminine standards" (p. 160). Femininities, therefore, are to be seen as conceptually fluid, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory performances, which women continually negotiate and enact. This important conceptual tool should be used in future studies to help rethink the issues of food and femininity.

In each chapter, Cairns and Johnston include essential intersectional analyses, indicating that access to the different femininities (consumer, maternal, healthy, ethical, and foodie) in each of the key sites of foodwork depends heavily on the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts shaping the woman's life. For instance, in their chapter on food shopping, they found that women with no material constraints described it to be a pleasurable experience. They expressed positive emotions—happiness, satisfaction, and discovery—because it gave them the opportunity to perform a "socially valued consumer femininity," which Cairns and Johnston define as the ability to "enact choice, responsibility, and competence in the marketplace" (p. 62). In contrast, women with economic constraints viewed food shopping as more of a burden, expressing emotions of disappointment and frustration.

In summary, *Food and Femininity* is a highly readable and informative text that offers an up-to-date, contemporary analysis of the longstanding discussion of the relationship between femininity and food. The fact that the authors began with a general interest in the role of food in people's lives and ended up unintentionally exposing the deep connections between women, food, and femininity indicates that the relationship remains quite powerful. Their multi-method study not only exposes how the relationship endures, but also reveals how it has become even more complex and even more complicated than ever before. Foodwork for the woman can be a source of conflict or struggle, an opportunity for creativity, a site for activism, or a place for meaningful action depending on the context of one's life. At the same time, it also offers women opportunities to enact, contest, and balance a range of feminine identities.



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The book is a valuable addition to the burgeoning field of feminist food studies, particularly because Cairns and Johnston incorporate intersectional analysis throughout the text, being careful to examine the ways in which gender intersects with race/ethnicity and class to shape women's experiences with food. More than this, *Food and Femininity* adds to the development of a collective feminist food politics.