Expos 20: Eating Culture Janling Fu

Fall 2018 jfu@fas.harvard.edu

M/W 1:30-2:45; 3-4:15 pm Office: 1 Bow St., Room 235

CGIS Knafel K108 Office Hours: by appointment



<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/44235>

“Food . . . is not art . . . A good risotto is a fine thing, but it isn't going to

give you insight into other people, allow you to see the world in a new way,

or force you to take inventory of your soul.”

So William Deresiewicz, in an opinion piece for The New York Times, dismisses society's rising fascination with food over the last several decades, one attested to by the explosion of cookbooks, a proliferation of food blogs, bestselling books on cod, salt, and sugar, and multiple competitive cooking shows.

It seems that, like the gluttonous ancient Romans of old, we have become obsessed with food. But is Deresciewicz right to suggest that food won’t give us additional insight into ourselves, or the world? Isn't it equally possible that through an examination of what scholars and commentators call “foodways”— the various forces involved in how different cultures produce, buy, sell, and consume food—that we might possibly learn, and digest, much about our identities, ethnicities, and society?

Guided by the famous maxim of the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, “food is good to think,” in this course we contemplate foodways from multiple perspectives. In our first unit, we delve into what makes food "disgusting" or "natural.” How do we categorize edible material as polluting or pure? What even counts as food in different societies? In our second unit, we explore what we can learn about food and culture by looking at the intersection of food and society. How does food tie into structures of family and ethnicity? For this, we consider the success of food shows as cultural artifacts--what do they tell us about values? How does food enshrine social bonds and mores? In our third unit, we move to consider global trends of food as intertwined with power. We will reflect on the economic consequences of food as seen in the sugar industry, think through the popularization of sushi, and consider recent food trends? For the final paper of the course, students are free to research a topic of their choosing, in consultation with me.

Along the way, we read classic works in food studies, from food studies by anthropologists Claude Levi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, historians such as Sidney Mintz, as well as the popular, influential works of novelists, essayists, and food journalists such as David Foster Wallace and Michael Pollan.

• Differently than the typical Expos class, this course asks you to engage experientially both within the class as well as outside of it. So I invite you to make the most of these opportunities and welcome you to come to coffee hours in my office, the tour of a local chocolate factory, and a tea tasting. Beyond that, think of our class as an incubator in which to explore, to inform, and learn more about food. While your participation in outside class events is not required, it will enhance your experience of the course and broaden your understanding of the world of food. In addition to these outside events, this semester the Harvard Art Museum has put together a special exhibition, “Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings,” which we will have opportunity to visit together as a class.

• While this course's thematic component centers on food, an equally important goal of the course is to develop ability to write clear, engaging, and coherent analytical essays of the sort you will be asked to produce frequently at Harvard. With this in mind the class is structured to give you the opportunity to work in a sustained and systematic way on improving your writing, with the opportunity to explore a number of different ways through which writing can be structured or developed. During the semester, you will write three essays, each of which tackles different aspects about the relations of food to the self, society, and the world, each of which is designed to highlight different writing skills. The thematic units and their associated writing assignments are described below.

*Unit 1: Food and the Self*

In the opening unit of the course, we begin with a series of definitions: How do we define ourselves with respect to food? Have we internalized rules in relation to how, or what, we might eat? We will discuss the Deresiewicz article and explore the work of several anthropologists, for instance the prominent structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss, who wrote the important volume, The Raw and the Cooked, and from Mary Douglas', "Deciphering a Meal." In the first paper, we explore what foods are considered "disgusting" or "gross" in our culture. Why, for example, do many blanch when thinking about the ingredients to Scottish haggis, while this very food is celebrated through a festival in Scotland? Many cookbooks of the 1950s call for the use of aspic/gelatin, made from the bones of animals, and yet almost none do today. Are we too squeamish now? Alternately, you may choose a different option and consider what defines "purity" or wholesome food in your personal categorization or as represented, perhaps, in labeling at Wholefoods?

This first definitional essay allows the consideration of several keys to academic writing including thesis, structure, evidence, and analysis and, so, can be used as a basis upon which further building can proceed.

*Unit 2: Food, Society, and Culture*

The second unit considers the role food plays in our social and cultural interactions. For instance, how is food involved in ethnic and group identification? Beyond this, how differently are the rules expressed that revolve around food in different cultures or societies? To help us explore these themes, we will read selections from the anthropologist David Sutton and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to think about the relationships of memory, identity, and structure as it relates to food. Our paper for the second unit will then carry this theme by using one of these lenses to investigate cooking shows, for instance, the American show Top Chef, the wildly influential Japanese phenomenon, Iron Chef, and/or the popular UK, The Great British Bakeoff.

This second essay expands the slate of skills you have developed by applying close reading to visual media and by learning to apply theoretical perspectives to texts.

*Unit 3: Food and the World*

The third unit of the course continues an outward progression by investigating the consequences of globalization with sushi consumption, the problems of sugar, and the McDonaldization of the world. The final paper for the course focuses on research skills and methodology, possibly through design of a project related to Annenberg Hall. For instance, you might trace a history of dining at Harvard, show some element of social cohesion as illustrated through the practice of eating together, or reflect on an issue of social awareness as illustrated in the daily or festive offerings provided by the university.

In this third essay, the skills you develop include how to do primary research in the social sciences, whether archival and/or through surveys and interviews. Your results are then juxtaposed and complicated with secondary sources.

**Course Readings**

• Course Reader: The course readings will be posted in PDF form on the course website,

https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/44235/files. You are not required to purchase textbooks for the class, but I do expect you in return to print out the readings and have taken notes in preparation for class.

Resources

• Among the resources are your disposal are selected model essays written by members of the freshman class of Harvard published each year in Exposé magazine (http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/expose), essays that were written in the course of taking Expos. In a number of cases, the instructor of that course has added annotations that highlight the various intellectual moves made by the author, and show how these might be adapted for your own writing.

• Harvard University Guide to Using Sources (http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu) offers a helpful indexing for reasons and ways to use sources properly and should be bookmarked as it will be an important point of reference for you.

**How the Course Works**

• The main goal for the course is to produce an original, compelling, and analytically sound essay for each of the three units of the course. Such essays are not written on the fly; rather, they take time, continual reworking, and critical reflection. The writing requirements outlined below are designed to provide you with the techniques for constructing good essays.

• Class time is split between grappling with the course readings and in-class work directed at improving some aspect of your writing. It is important that you come to class with the relevant readings completed and ready to participate actively in discussion. To help you do so, we will often have an exercise, a response paper, that will help to generate thoughts on the reading, whether to be turned in or posted on the course website. Please note the requirement of your participation in class. Participation may be defined as active engagement in discussions, whether through a thoughtful comment, question, or even active listening.

• NO LAPTOPS or cellphones: In this technological age, everyone is sorely tempted to check emails, chat online, and click on the latest fashion trends and gossip. For that reason, unless otherwise noted, we will hold to a NO LAPTOPS policy. Instead, as above, you are expected to have printed the readings with annotations in front of you. You are also asked to work with a notebook in class. Recent studies have demonstrated the value both of reading paper and of writing by hand in a notebook, the latter of which allows you to reflect more carefully on the materials and remember it better. It goes almost without saying that phones should only be used in case of an emergency.

**Writing and Revising**

• Response Papers: Before composing an initial draft of each essay, you’ll complete one or more response papers that focus on particular writing skills important for the relevant essay type. At times, you may be asked to produce a paragraph summarizing an article we have read, followed by a well-composed paragraph of response focusing on highlights of the reading, etc.

• Drafts: You will submit an initial draft version of each of the three essays prior to the revision. On each draft you’ll receive comments in writing and in conferences that you will have with me.

• Draft Cover Letters: Every time you hand in a draft, you’ll include a cover letter in which you provide guidance to your reader about the aspects of the essay you are struggling with in addition to whatever other comments or questions you might have. I’ll give more specific instructions about writing draft cover letters later in the semester.

• Draft Workshops: Immediately after the first two drafts are due we’ll have an in-class draft workshop in which we work through two student papers (chosen by me) and offer the writers constructive criticisms and suggestions for improvement. These essays will be posted in the files folder of the course website shortly before each workshop. You will be expected to provide substantive written comments in the form of a letter on each draft that we workshop together. I’ll hand out more detailed guidelines on draft workshops later in the semester.

Note that for the third unit, in lieu of this process, we will instead work in small groups of three, which will serve as a replacement of the workshop and conference process.

• Conferences: After I have read your draft, we will meet for a 20-minute conference in which to strategize about ways to revise your essay. Plan on taking notes during the conference and think of questions to ask. These are to be scheduled online through the calendar of the course website. Missed conferences may not be rescheduled.

• Essay Revisions: You should expect to revise each of your drafts extensively before submitting it, together with a cover letter, for a grade. These revisions must be submitted on the course website. When I return your papers, I will write some marginal comments by hand, which will be accompanied by end comments.

**Other Policies**

• Grading: Strictly speaking, I will grade only the revisions, that is, the last version, of your essays rather than the drafts or response papers. For your graded work, I use slash grades that correspond to a numerical figure (A- = 91, B+/A- = 89, B+ = 87, etc.).

Course grades will be determined as follows:

Revision of Essay 1 20%

Revision of Essay 2 35%

Revision of Essay 3 40%

Participation and exercises 5%

NB: With each paper the number of writing components increases and, so, each essay becomes successively more difficult. For that reason, the goal of the class is not for you to become an exceptional writer equally accomplished in every facet of writing, but rather to improve your writing, whatever your initial level.

• Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance

 Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. If you are absent without medical excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade. On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course. Note that arriving to class more than 15 minutes after its beginning is considered an absence for counting purposes, although you should still by all means attempt to make class.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

N.B.: It is not acceptable to leave the class early to take an exam for another class.

• Deadlines: Because we are on a very tight schedule, it is imperative that you submit work on time. I will only accept late work if the student contacts me to request an extension in advance of the deadline with a compelling reason. Otherwise late work will receive a significant grade penalty, normally of 1/3 grade per day late.

• Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work:

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

• Collaboration Among Students: The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students, and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, “You do not need to acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden

• Academic Honesty: All work submitted for this course must be your own work. Any outside sources you use must be cited properly. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and will be referred to the college’s Administrative Board for further disciplinary action, including expulsion from the university. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, consult the relevant sections of Harvard Guide to Using Sources and/or speak with the instructor. Near the beginning of the course, I will schedule brief chats with each of you to get to know you as well as discuss your thoughts about the Honor Code.