How Canadians Communicate VI
Introduction

Charlene Elliott

Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art.

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

To begin a book on food with Brillat-Savarin’s most famous aphorism has become a cliché. As the American journalist Bill Buford observes, the idea that you are what you eat has been “repeated so relentlessly that it is now a modern advertising banality” (2009, viii). Certainly, Brillat-Savarin offers other pithy insights to choose from in his Physiologie du goût, including such claims as “the destiny of nations depends on how they nourish themselves” and “the discovery of a new dish does more for human happiness than the discovery of a star” (Brillat-Savarin [1825] 1884, 15, 16). Yet despite aphorisms that tackle such grand themes as national destiny and human happiness, it is his comment on food and identity that steals the limelight: “Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art.”

As a communication scholar, I am interested less in the identity than in the telling, less intrigued by the you are what you eat than by the communication through and about food. Brillat-Savarin’s “tell me what thou eatest” captures the representation, expression, and language of food; his “I will tell thee what thou art” captures the evaluative component of this representation. The phrase as a whole suggests a dialogue, an interactive exchange around food that—while bound up with normative judgments—is less final than it sounds. It is difficult to imagine that being told “what thou art” would put an end to the conversation. One would imagine, instead, that this would be a starting point for debate.
Conversations and debates about food form the basis of this volume. *How Canadians Communicate VI: Food Promotion, Consumption, and Controversy* brings together a range of scholars and experts who examine important questions about food and communication. Here, we are interested in how food is represented (in terms of advertising, promotion, food journalism, food radio, and food television), how it is regulated (via policy and law, foodways, and food systems), how it is consumed (consumer perceptions and attitudes, Canadian habits of consumption, and so on), and how it figures in various controversies (from debates over pasteurization to responses to contaminated food scares). In tackling broad issues of promotion, policy, consumption, and controversy, we hope to illuminate—and trouble—some important aspects of the contemporary food landscape.

**FOOD IN THEORY, FOOD IN PRACTICE**

Anthropologists have long known that food is “good to think [with]” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 89) and that it serves powerful social functions (Douglas 1966, [1975] 1999; Douglas and Isherwood 1979). The symbolic nature of food and eating has been examined in anthropology, sociology, history, communication, and cultural studies, as well as in the burgeoning field of food studies. Documenting the “massive expansion” of scholarship on food is a significant task, since food has “permeated almost every scholarly field”—from architecture and film studies to philosophy and geography (Counihan and Van Esterik 2007, 1). Whereas food was once marginalized as a scholarly focus, today we encounter books like *Food: The Key Concepts* (Belasco 2008) and a three-volume encyclopedia devoted entirely to food issues (Albala 2015), not to mention *The A-Z Encyclopedia of Food Controversies and the Law* (Williams and Carter 2011), *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industries* (Allen and Albala 2007), and the *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture* (Katz 2003).

Despite this encyclopedic treatment, food is more than a collection of discrete “entries” or products. As French cultural theorist Roland Barthes famously observed in the 1960s, food “is not just a collection of products. . . . It is also, and at one and the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a code relating to usage, circumstances and conduct” ([1961] 1999, 926). Although Barthes’s structuralist approach to food aimed to unveil the code or grammar underlying people’s food preferences—a
task of some complexity—his point is also straightforward: namely, that what we consider to be “food” extends far beyond its nutritive (or economic) value. As a system of communication, people use food to differentiate themselves from others, to establish rules of behaviour (“protocols”), and as a form of classification. To provide a modern example, Barthes would probably suggest understanding the early status and success of Starbucks coffee within the context of the larger world of coffee, including Tim Hortons and McCafé. Stated differently, the meaning of Starbucks’s customized espresso-based (and barista-prepared) drinks makes sense only when framed in light of the world of the “double-double.” (Given Tim Hortons’ fiercely loyal customer base, and $2.54 billion net revenue in 2010 [Tim Hortons 2010], it is difficult to determine which “meaning” is winning out.) The protocols surrounding coffee are equally intriguing: the beverage stands as both a signifier of the workday and a social break (“Let’s meet for coffee”). Coffee is a morning ritual for many Canadians, but this morning protocol does not extend to all caffeinated beverages: we may drink coffee with sugar but object to Coca-Cola at breakfast.

A second example of food as communication involves the recognition that eating organic isn’t merely about avoiding pesticides. Rather, the choice of organic foods is often bound up with larger issues of identity (“I only eat organic in a world of industrialized food production”), as well as with issues of status, economics, and politics. For Barthes, the diets we select, the menus we create, all refer to a much larger set of themes and situations—so, too, do our choices of products and brands, restaurants, supermarkets, farmers’ markets, and the like.

Considering food as communication, and also food and communication provide important insight. The former allows for an exploration of food itself and its place in a larger system; the latter asks us to consider our “conversations” around food (broadly conceived) and the ways that foods: (1) become transformed into particular kinds of edible commodities through packaging, marketing, and promotion; (2) are managed and governed (through public relations, policy, and regulation).

This said, communication and food may be considered even more tightly intertwined. As John Peters observes in his history of the idea of communication, the word communication comes from “the Latin communicare, meaning to impart, share, or make common” (1999, 9). In Latin, communicatio “did not signify the general arts of human connection via symbols, nor did it
suggest the hope for some kind of mutual recognition. Its sense was not in the least mentalistic: *communicatio* generally involved tangibles” (7). Understanding communication as sharing and partaking in things that are tangible underscores the natural intimacy between *communicare* and food.

Invoking the Latin *communicare* in relation to communication and food is only part of the picture. The other part, I suggest, is nicely captured by Stuart Hall, one of the founding figures of British cultural studies, who reminds us that “when we speak of ‘communications’ in a consumer society, we have to think . . . of how other people speak *at us*” (1960)—rather like a kind of packaging. Combining the Latin *communicare* with Hall’s sense of communications in a consumer society thus gives us the sense of something tangible that we share and partake of and that is deliberately designed to tell us something in particular: viewed in light of food, the first sense of communication is about sharing food; the second is about its packaging. And both of these meanings make food a powerful vehicle of engagement, since consumers figuratively and literally feast on the entertainment and visual tantalization provided by food and food-related media.

The American Federal Trade Commission reports that in 2009, the food industry spent $9.65 billion promoting food and beverages to consumers, using the full spectrum of promotional activities—from television advertising and product placement to video game advertising and viral marketing. Of that, $1.79 billion was spent directly targeting children and youth (Leibowitz et al. 2012, ES-2). The global beverage-packaging market alone is predicted to grow some $28 billion in the next five years, reaching $125.7 billion by 2018 (O’Halloran 2013). Packaging and marketing aside, consumers feast on everything from *Top Chef Canada*, *Cupcake Wars*, and Anthony Bourdain’s *No Reservations* to the 475,000 recipes on Food.com, the glossy pages of *Bon Appetit*, and the countless Facebook pages, blogs, and Twitter feeds devoted to food. Food also takes centre stage in networks that create content, like YouTube (with some 4.9 million channels on “food”) and curation networks like Pinterest. The resulting jumble of food messaging is overwhelming.

**OUR MODERN FOODSCAPE: COMPLEXITY AND CHOICE**

This all makes eating sound tremendously complicated. In many respects, it is. The typical American makes close to two hundred decisions about
food each day (Wansink 2013, 277). In 2013, US grocery stores offered, on average, almost forty-four thousand items to choose from, while a superstore may stock closer to sixty-thousand items. Canadians, presented with a similar cornucopia, are constantly bombarded with messaging about how and what to eat. Health and nutritional claims confetti across food packages, and food-related advice comes from government organizations, health professionals, advocacy groups, newspapers, radio and television shows, magazines, blogs, Twitter feeds, and the food industry itself. The fact that a 611-page tome *What to Eat* (Nestle 2006) even exists is a telling sign of the complexity of our modern foodscape. Its subtitle, *An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating*, suggests that navigating those 43,000-plus supermarket products may, in fact, take some time. With eighteen full pages devoted to the conundrum of “butter versus margarine,” seven pages on decoding ingredient lists in frozen foods, and entire chapters on the “dilemmas and quandaries” pertaining to fish, the safety of meat, and the issue of bottled water, *What to Eat* transforms a quick jaunt to the grocery store into a research-based exercise.

Journalist and foodie Michael Pollan contributes to this prescriptive vision of food with his rather lightweight book *Food Rules* (2009), which, ironically, starts from the premise that eating doesn’t have to be so “complicated” before launching into 139 pages and dozens of rules of eating. Pollan’s succinct mantra—“Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants” (elaborated in his 2007 book *In Defense of Food*)—splinters into sixty-four “personal policies” and “broad guidelines” aimed to make “everyday decision making easier and swifter” (xix). The book includes such hints as “Don’t eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food” (7), “Don’t eat breakfast cereals that change the color of the milk” (79), and “It’s not food if it arrived through the window of your car” (43). These specific hints, I would suggest, seek to guard against food impersonation, food “cosmetics,” and food classification, respectively. Pollan also lists rules that directly pertain to the communication around food, ranging from the names of the edibles themselves to how they are promoted: for instance, “It’s not food if it’s called by the same name in every language. (Think Big Mac, Cheetos, or Pringles)” (45); “Avoid food products with the wordoid ‘lite’ or the terms ‘low-fat’ or ‘nonfat’ in their names” (21); “Avoid food products that make health claims” (19); and “Avoid foods you see advertised on television” (25).
Such advice joins many other cautionary books and films about placing faith in the food industry, including Michael Moss’s *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* (2013) and Gyorgy Scrinis’s *Nutritionism: The Science and Politics of Dietary Advice* (2013). Indeed, such cautions are wise, given the research showing that food products marketed as “better for you” are often as much about marketing as they are about nutrition (Elliott 2012). Consider, for example, Coca-Cola’s advertisements for Vitamin Water that promoted the beverage as “delicious and nutritious” even though a 500-millilitre bottle contained twenty-three grams of sugar: the average consumer would not expect a “nutritious” drink to contain four to five teaspoons of added sugar (266). Or consider the fact that Nature’s Path EnviroKidz Koala Crisp cereal—containing 40 percent calories from sugar—has a higher percentage of calories from sugar than Kellogg’s Pop Tarts (36 percent) and has the same percentage of sugar calories found in marshmallow Lucky Charms cereal (271).

Issues of food complexity, food rules, and marketing manipulation barely scratch the surface of issues pertaining to the ways in which Canadians communicate about food. There is much more to say, and this volume brings together scholarly perspectives from a range of disciplinary fields, including communication studies, history, marketing, english, nutritional sciences, geography, and museum studies. All have much to contribute to an understanding of how food is being thought about and communicated in Canada. This book structures the conversation about food under the broad themes of food promotion, food communication, and food controversy. Along with the academic contributors, the volume offers three essays from “food insiders”—a bestselling cookbook author and food editor, a veteran restaurant reviewer and food writer, and an executive chef and culinary tourism provider—all of whom offer perspectives on what is happening in the world of food. These “Insider Voice” chapters provide valuable insights from those who have worked to shape the food experiences of Canadians, whether they are cooking, eating, or simply thinking about food.

**FOOD PROMOTION**

We start with a look at what is offered up for consumption to Canadians, including the various environments in which food is represented and the
forms of communication used to promote foods. Part 1, on food promotion, examines the notion of place, food packaging, and the marketing of food in Canada. Charlene Elliott and Wayne McCready open the discussion by exploring how place of origin functions as a significant marketing strategy. They draw attention to the way in which certain packaged products gain distinctiveness by building on the values that consumers attribute to specific places, whether real or imagined. Labelling a product’s place of origin can be an effective marketing strategy because it appeals to a basic human condition: food and humans are always emplaced, and humans seek meaning through emplacement.

While Elliott and McCready suggest that we consider the packaging of foods and brands in light of constructions of place, Jordan LeBel provides more practical insight into the key place where most food selection and food expenditures actually occur: the supermarket. LeBel describes the food retail landscape from the perspective of manufacturers and retailers, illuminating the complexity of the $90 billion “food-at-home” market (Canada, AgCan 2013, 84). Introducing a range of industry-specific terms such as “share of stomach,” “speed scratch,” “premiumization,” and “ready-to-eat,” LeBel details how the operating realities of the retail end of the agrifood system work to influence what Canadians eat and how they relate to food. LeBel’s work complements the data available on how Canadians spend their food dollars. We know, for example, that Canadians spent $110.8 billion on food and beverages at retail stores in 2012, with the average Canadian household spending 18 percent of its grocery budget on meat, poultry, and processed meats and 16 percent on dairy products and eggs (Food in Canada 2013, 4, 12, 8). We know that Canadians are big snackers, spending $1.8 billion annually on snack foods and $3.3 billion a year on sugar and confectionary products (17, 21). Canadians are also interested in both health and indulgence, with “better for you” snacks and premium-priced confectionery and ice cream products in high demand (4). And Canadians are spending less time than they used to on food preparation, driving a demand for ready-to-serve salads, presliced fruits and vegetables, and ready-to-cook or ready-to-reheat foods (21). While such details are compelling in terms of mapping what Canadians spend on food and like to eat, LeBel unveils the factors that nudge us into eating what we do.

Chapter 3 also deals with packaged food products, focusing on the promotion of better-for-you foods. Similarly to LeBel, Valerie Tarasuk draws
attention to manufacturer-driven trends in food, but she does it by examining food fortification and the all-important role of Canada’s regulatory environment in fostering particular food trends. Tarasuk cautions that today’s nutrition-labelling regulations and practices have ushered in a “new era of food fortification” in which manufacturers sell nutritionally enhanced products with nutrient levels that far exceed the required daily intake of healthy adults. Despite the abundant marketing of functional and fortified foods, I suggest that Canadians are left in a “communicative desert” when it comes to getting the information necessary to make an informed choice. As Tarasuk observes, the only mandatory nutrition labelling on food products in Canada is the Nutrition Facts table, which is based on outdated science and “communicates nothing about whether prospective consumers would benefit by adding more of the particular nutrients supplied by a particular product to their diets.” Simply put, “selling nutrition” in Canada is often done at the expense of informed consumerism and public health.

Rounding out the section on food promotion is Eric Pateman’s “Insider Voice” on culinary tourism. As CEO of Canada’s largest culinary tourism company, Pateman offers his perspective on the marketability of place and Canadian food. As he notes, the Destination Canada has identified local Canadian cuisine as one of “Canada’s five Unique Selling Propositions”—and it is a proposition that has driven both the creation and cultivation of distinctively Canadian food products.

FOOD AND COMMUNICATION

Shifting from food “places” and promotion, we move to the theme of food and communication. Part 2 explores communication and “talk” about food, examining cookbooks, radio and television food shows, blogs, and reviews that—like food packaging—promote manners of eating. Food media create and/or channel certain styles of food, presentation, aesthetics, and expectations. Its educational and entertainment values often come bundled with implications for identity, tradition, and gender.

Ken Albala and Elizabeth Baird open the conversation on food media in Canada by exploring the question of whether, in fact, there is anything particularly Canadian about it. Examining the cookbook as communication, both authors argue that, indeed, there is. Albala illustrates how La cuisinière canadienne (the first culinary text published in Canada, in 1840)
provided a prescriptive vision for Montréal Canadians through its recipes and helped to shape a sense of a distinct heritage through food. His argument for an evolving yet distinctive cuisine—and one that creates traditions “in the very act of setting in print signature recipes that define this culture”—is echoed by Baird in her “Insider Voice” contribution (found in Chapter 9). The author of more than twenty-five cookbooks and a former food editor of *Canadian Living* magazine, Baird reflects on the Canadian foodscape. Baird also finds the building blocks of a Canadian cuisine in our regional ingredients, distinctive cooking techniques, identifiable “heroes,” and iconic dishes.

Jacqueline Botterill explores the “talk” around food quite literally, reporting on in-depth interviews that she conducted to reveal how Canadians apprehend and talk about dinner party experiences. Her research reveals the importance of sociability over status in the contemporary Canadian environment when it comes to dinner parties. Based on interviews with forty-seven Ontario residents in two different age cohorts, she suggests that the dinner party works to “construct an unmediated space of togetherness and the mindful preparation and consumption of food.” Her interviewees revealed the place of media in the modern dinner party: while they generally frowned on media use such as television watching and texting on mobile phones during dinner parties, they reported relying on media for content and coordination purposes. Cookbooks, food magazines, and food websites provide inspiration for menus (and cooking instruction for younger respondents), while Facebook and Doodle function as useful tools for inviting guests, at least for the younger cohort. Botterill’s work underscores how, for the Canadians in her study, conversation, connection, and collegiality remain the most important considerations in planning and executing dinner parties.

Dinner party conversation, the talk around food, segues smoothly to Nathalie Cooke’s chapter on Canadian food radio. While Botterill examines talk “around” food and the value of sociability, Cooke explores Canadian audiences’ long-standing appetite for food talk on radio—probing the meanings ascribed to food when it is served up on the airways, the opportunities and constraints that food programming creates for women, and why hearing about food (without being able to see or taste it) appeals to listeners. Cooke also highlights the commercial underpinnings of food radio. In the past, “food talk” was often about product endorsement dressed in an
educational apron, but it was also understood as providing a genuine service—sharing expertise in home economics with Canadian women. Cooke wraps up her chapter by describing the vibrant food radio programming of today, which offers an educational counterpoint to the fluff that typifies much of food television’s programming, and by underscoring the anticipation generated by hearing about food.

Like food talk on radio, nascent food television programming aimed to educate and entertain. In her chapter on the relationship between food television and masculinity, Irina Mihalache examines the “unintentional pedagogical acts” found in programs on Food Network. She argues that food television is less about making us better cooks than about communicating identity. By analyzing the transformation of the cupcake—“the quintessential symbol of domestic femininity”—in the hands of male celebrity chefs Chuck Hughes and Alton Brown, Mihalache suggests that food television provides a stage for the performance of masculine identity within that classically feminine space, the kitchen.

The final two selections in part 2 air the voice of insiders. First, Elizabeth Baird reflects on Canadian cuisine and the many “voices” that create it—not to mention the importance of Canada’s heritage ingredients, distinctive food “heroes” and iconic dishes. Then John Gilchrist provides the voice of the food critic. A prominent radio personality in Calgary, Gilchrist has reviewed restaurants weekly for CBC radio for over three decades. His essay discusses the delicate balancing act that food critics perform in providing both entertainment and evaluation. He also discusses how the changing media landscape, including “digital noise,” has buffeted the traditional critical review.

FOOD CONTROVERSY

As noted earlier, communication about food is not as simple or as untested as Brillat-Savarin’s aphorism about identity suggests, and food-related controversies abound. The chapters in part 3 touch on what happens when the system fails. Such food-related “failures” are readily identifiable: food insecurity amounts to a system failure in which people cannot afford enough to eat; the obesity epidemic represents a failure of proper nutrition (and, some would say, the success of food marketing and pseudo-foods); food-borne illnesses result from a failure of proper food handling,
inspection, or control; and industrialized food production can be viewed as a failure to support the local, small-scale farm producer (and as a triumph of distorted farm legislation and food policies/subsidies). But food controversies such as these are also not that straightforward. The controversies themselves are contested, as is demonstrated by many chapters in this section. Pierre Desrochers, for example, contests the widely publicized rhetoric and what he calls the “one-sided narrative” of the local food movement, suggesting that locavorism is riddled with myths and lies that harm humanity and the planet. Stephen Kline contests the journalistic framing of the obesity “epidemic” in children, suggesting that the moral panic around childhood obesity is a triumph of public relations over science. And Charlene Elliott and Josh Greenberg show how Canada’s largest-ever food recall (meat processed by XL Foods at the Brooks, Alberta, plant) isn’t simply about contaminated meat. Rather, it contains important lessons about the importance of communication and the (mis)handling of risk. In all of these cases, the role of communication—and particularly the media framing and PR handling of the food problem or controversy—is front and centre.

Part 3 begins with an examination of the history of milk pasteurization in Canada. Catherine Carstairs, Paige Schell, and Sheilagh Quaile show that current debates over the pasteurization of milk, spearheaded by advocates for raw milk, are not new. Carstairs and her colleagues foreground the advertising campaigns, pamphlets, exhibits, and government-sponsored “blue books” on child care that promoted milk consumption to Canadians, and especially Canadian mothers, in the early decades of the 1900s. Long before regulations made pasteurization compulsory, large commercial dairies, not simply public health officials, played a central role in promoting pasteurization.

Melanie Rock’s chapter also takes up the topic of milk—specifically with regard to its absence in charitable giving. Food bank donations are critically important in light of the persistent problem of food insecurity throughout the country. A recent report reveals that 3.9 million Canadians struggle to afford the food they require and, sadly, that food insecurity has continued or increased in almost every province or territory since 2005 (Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner 2014, 2). Rock’s chapter opens with the premise that “milk insecurity is often the epitome of food insecurity in Canada”; she then urges us to rethink food insecurity by considering Kraft Dinner, a product frequently donated to food banks because of its
reputation for being palatable, nutritionally complete, easy to prepare, and convenient to store. At the same time, Canadians who donate Kraft Dinner to food banks rarely reflect on the need for milk in Kraft Dinner’s preparation: milk adds nutrition and taste, yet is often beyond the means of food-insecure Canadians. Rock suggests that the popularity of Kraft Dinner donations to food banks reveals that many Canadians are misinformed about the nature and extent of poverty in their midst.

Along similar lines, Rebecca Carruthers Den Hoed, through the figure of the “hipster hunter,” urges Canadians to rethink food provisioning. This new hunter—in search of local, organic, natural food—could revitalize hunting across the country. However, “hipster hunting” also brings with it certain risks: namely, a new discursive rendering of “good” hunting—centred around notions of food quality—that threatens to exacerbate old (and to introduce new) forms of discrimination into Canadian hunting. Although excited at the prospect of encouraging more food-focused hunting in Canada, Carruthers Den Hoed urges foodies and scholars to consider the unforeseen consequences of their food talk and texts on others and to work actively to counteract injustices that new food trends create or perpetuate, usually unintentionally.

Pierre Desrochers also takes up the issue of “right living” through food provisioning, but he is far from sanguine about the viability of locavorism as a means of food-system reform. Acting as a counterpoint to Carruthers Den Hoed, Desrochers challenges the “erroneous information” and the “impractical and environmentally harmful solutions” presented by the locavore movement. Desrochers suggests that locavorism is “just a new spin on an old agricultural protectionist rhetorical package.” In this spirit, he articulates and rebuts what he identifies as five key myths articulated by local food activists and points out the benefits of our globalized food supply chain.

Charlene Elliott and Josh Greenberg examine what happens when the system fails. Focusing on two recent “food scares,” their perspective contrasts with Desrochers’s optimistic view of the industrialized food system. Elliott and Greenberg examine how institutional actors in the food safety chain communicated with Canadians during two major outbreaks: the 2012 E. coli scare associated with XL Foods meat and the 2008 Listeria outbreak linked to Maple Leaf Foods. The problem, they argue, was not simply about the risk of consuming contaminated meat but also about the

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communication strategies used in the crises, with the XL Foods response working to undermine consumer confidence and the Maple Leaf Foods response working to restore it.

Stephen Kline also examines the risks associated with food: in this case, the “globesity” and illness caused by eating too much of the wrong kinds of food. As in Elliott and Greenberg’s chapter, health and (mis)communication are front and centre. Kline shows how growth in the reporting of the obesity “epidemic” and the use of medicalized discourses helped to galvanize parents and health advocates against the mass marketing of food. He argues that the moral panic over the contribution of food marketing to childhood obesity fails to recognize the multiple lifestyle factors that contribute to weight gain in both children and adults.

In the book’s final chapter, Harvey Levenstein deftly unpacks the fascinating history of food fears in modern North America, a history in which the fields of science and communications tightly intertwine. Scientific discoveries of vitamins and germs, including Louis Pasteur’s “germ theory” of disease, and advances in chemistry that led to new forms of food preservation propelled forward certain fears about food, which were amplified though mass circulation newspapers and magazines. Levenstein shows how early muckraking journalists and media hype led to support for government regulation of food producers and processors; how the food producers employed costly advertising campaigns that used fear—of, for example, vitamin deficiency and contamination—to sell packaged, vitamin-enriched products; and how the media, particularly television, were later seen to be hiding information about food dangers, such as the dangers of chemical additives. As a whole, Levenstein reveals the indeterminate, shifting position of mainstream media when it comes to food fears—on the one hand, galvanizing public and government action by promoting scares about germs, pesticides, chemical additives, vitamin deficiency, lipophobia, and the like, and on the other, being suspected of “hiding facts” in order to appease corporate sponsors. Communication thus functions in generating and “solving” fears about food.

The themes that run through this book capture, in manifold ways, the intersections among promotion, values, and meanings related to food—and the fact that Canadians should not uncritically consume what is being “served” to them. Food and communication can provide the experience of belonging and communion; it can also, as Levenstein suggests, threaten
“death on a plate.” Brillat-Savarin starts the discussion rolling with “Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art.” In considering food as communication and also food and communication, the contributors to this volume underscore just how much more talking needs to be done.

NOTES

1 This pithy statement is often quoted in food-related literature, and somewhat inaccurately, since Lévi-Strauss was talking about the ways that traditional societies placed taboos on eating totem animals. These animals, he argued, were important because they were symbolic; that is, they were “good to think with” rather than simply good to eat.

2 Canadian figures are not available, since our federal Competition Bureau—the Canadian equivalent to the FTC—has not collected such data.

3 For US grocery store statistics, see “Supermarket Facts,” on the Food Marketing Institute website, where numbers are updated regularly: http://www.fmi.org/research-resources/supermarket-facts. Superstore statistics can be found in Moss (2013, 27).

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