

ANTHONY WINSON *The Industrial Diet: The Degradation of Food and the Struggle For Healthy Eating*. Vancouver and New York: UBC Press and NYU Press, 2013.

Some concepts for understanding contemporary food environments:

Food environments

Food environments are those institutional spheres where food is displayed for sale and/or consumed.

Market concentration

In contrast to the claim of orthodox economics that our economy is characterized by a competitive marketplace, the reality is that many sectors of the food economy outside of farming are concentrated in the hands of a very few powerful corporate organizations. The majority of processing in such sectors as red meat, poultry, and grain handling is largely controlled by four or fewer firms, while at the retail level in Canada, supermarket chain store operations, which control most of the retail sales of food, are dominated by three or fewer corporations, depending on the city or region. This concentration confers on these firms tremendous market power to determine prices and influence what foods people buy, via costly advertising programs and the saturation of product via spatial colonization (see below).

Mass advertising and product differentiation: mass advertising is a phenomenon of the recent industrial era, pioneered by such food processing behemoths as Kelloggs and Coca-Cola. Its purpose, whether in the early 20th century or today, is to create an enduring resonance in the minds of the consuming public that a product or products are superior and more desirable than competing commodities, and worthy of the higher price they typically attract. Successful product differentiation via mass advertising results in an enduring brand.

Pseudo foods

Pseudo foods are those nutrient poor edible products that are typically high in fat, sugar and salt, and other than the excess calories they contain are notably low in nutrients such as proteins, minerals and vitamins essential for health. A more inclusive category than “junk foods”, pseudo foods also refers to a variety of nutrient poor edible products not traditionally thought of as “junk foods” and are to be found in supermarkets and elsewhere among juice, dairy and breakfast food products, for example.

Differential profits

Differential profits is a concept that captures the reality that some commodities in a capitalist economy attract higher profits than average. Evidence indicates that pseudo foods (see below) return a higher, or differential, profit to producers and retailers than many other edible commodities, and this explains their growing prominence in a host of food environments.

Spatial colonization

Spatial colonization refers to the process whereby food corporations secure the *physical visibility and availability* of the product within a particular food environment. The process of spatial colonization then, essentially refers to the power of food processors to place product *in the most visible and effective selling spaces* in a food environment.

Annotated Further Readings:

*Marion Nestle 2007 *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Probably the most widely known person writing about nutritional matters in the world today, Nestle established her reputation with the earlier version of this book. With a title that says it all, Nestle has excellent chapters on shaping the diets of children and youth, school foods, and the role of food corporations in influencing the science of nutrition itself.

*David Kessler 2009 *The End of Overeating*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. A remarkably accessible book that considers how the profit motive distorts modern restaurant meals, and processed foods more generally. The book is particularly illuminating on the role of added salt, fats, and sugars in making processed foods so palatable, with an excellent and very readable discussion of the powerful neurological effects of these substances.

*Michael Pollen 2006 *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin Press. This book begins with an expose of corn, which as it turns out is, in its various forms, at the core of the modern industrial food system. Pollen's account of the transformation of this onetime mainstay of the Mexican diet into a feedstock of the contemporary food economy is exceptionally engaging, and leads to his examination of the meat industry as well.

*Wayne Roberts 2013 *The No Nonsense Guide to World Food, 2nd Edition*. Toronto: Between the Lines. A wide-ranging and pioneering treatment of issues related to food by the former head of the Toronto Food Policy Council. Roberts' style is accessible and engaging and challenges us to explore the surprising and disturbing contradictions that characterize the world of food, whether it be issues around food production and marketing, the reality of mass hunger in the world of food surpluses or the amazing rise of food activism across the globe.