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5.1 If eating is inherently intimate, how can food be arbitrary?.

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Sommario/riassunto

This article extends the boundaries of Columbia School linguistic semantic theory by applying its analytical constructs to nonlinguistic behaviors, where, as in language, there exist systematicity and arbitrariness: food; construction of social and gender identity; and use of architectural, private, and urban space. Further, meaningful elements of these behaviors vary analogously to Labovian sociolinguistic feature variation. The guiding orientation is that human behavior is structured not by an unmotivated, autonomous culture, but is communicative and social, interpreted by people as signals with meanings; and these meanings are discerned as interpreting power, prestige and identity. Data come primarily from fieldwork in Lamu (Kenya) and Thailand.

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