Selecting Eating: The Rise, Meaning and Sense of Personal Dietary Requirements - An Interdisciplinary Perspective

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In most if not all human societies, turning down food offered amounts to rejecting the relationship, pulling out of the circle of guests and the group. It indicates distrust and may prompt exclusion. In today's world, however, a large and apparently growing number of people are asserting personal dietary requirements for a variety of reasons: medical allergies and intolerance; health and weight; various diets and regimens; ethical, political and spiritual vegetarianism, veganism, religious restrictions. Does the sudden assertion of these individual demands indicate an evolution or even a rejection of what can be considered the bedrock of sociability: the sharing of meals? The issue of selective eating is explored here from a wide interdisciplinary perspective: from a biomedical standpoint immunology, allergies and intolerances to social and historical analyses. The rise of personal dietary requirements poses questions as to the scope and limits to individualization in contemporary societies. This book and the conference that gave rise to it triggered a debate in the French media: Will the trend lead to the end of eating as a social, shared activity? Will we abandon all forms of commensal eating? Or will novel configurations emerge, flexible enough but also ritualized enough so that the experience of eating retains a sense of conviviality? 264 pages Odile Jacob Editions