

POLLENZO
MANIFESTO



Università di Scienze
Gastronomiche di Pollenzo
University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo



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P O L L E N Z O
M A N I F E S T O

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“From here onwards I shall begin to outline an extremely important role of Nature and will explain to man his proper foods, compelling him to admit that he does not realize how his life is sustained.”

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*

Preface

We believe gastronomy is essential for human life, for all living beings and for planet Earth in general. What does gastronomy mean? Gastronomy is an ambiguous word, intriguing yet hard to pin down. Even more difficult is the expression “gastronomic sciences,” a neologism invented a few years ago, here in Pollenzo, which has since started to enter the academic world.

We believe gastronomy is of fundamental importance because it is essential and pervasive. Our aim is to develop a new sensitivity for gastronomy as an inclusive and open field. If, in its traditional and prevalent meaning, gastronomy refers to specific ways of cooking and preparing food, we propose instead a broader and deeper sense of this word: we think that any food from the fields, woods or sea can be gastronomy. Any cuisine, from the simplest and most domestic to the most avant-garde and experimental, can be gastronomy. Any way of consuming food can be gastronomy. The ingredients that turn these possibilities into actual realities are available at any time and latitude: care, respect, attention, dexterity, memory, imagination. To put it even more succinctly, gastronomy has to do with the human condition; it is passion and love for life. Gastronomy is not a science, nor a discipline. It is an active field of intertwining areas and knowledge. The gastronomy to which we are committed thus represents as a new form of humanism. Humanism is anything but anthropocentrism: the finest tradition of humanism has its roots in respect for the living and a flowering of diversity at every level—not just human but also animal, vegetable and cosmological.

Historical framework

Though it has a long history behind it—large swaths of which remain hidden—it is only in recent decades that gastronomy has emerged as a fundamental discourse in culture and society.

Let us take a look at Western culture, offering a few critical and historical guidelines in order to frame and understand gastronomy as it is today. Gastronomy began to develop in ancient times with the Greeks. Its codification, however, occurred only during modernity; since then, gastronomy has acquired an increasing autonomy in the cultural discourse. In the 20th century, with the industrialization of agriculture and the explosion of technology, new modes of production and new models of consumption contributed to its growing complexity. Antiquity, modernity, postmodernity—gastronomy has evolved in conjunction with the rest of society and its problems.

The term “gastronomy”—from *gastros*, stomach, belly, and *nomos*, rule, law: the rule or law of the stomach, something managed by humans but which, in part, transcends them—appeared for the first time in the *Deipnosophistae* (*Connoisseurs in Dining*) by Athenaeus of Naucratis, who lived sometime between the 2nd and 3rd centuries. This long, 15-volume work, explicitly inspired by Plato’s *Symposium*, includes many references to food and eating habits in the Greek and Roman periods. Athenaeus, in turn, borrows the term *gastronomy* (γαστρονομία) from Archestratus of Syracuse or Gela, a poet who lived in the 4th century BC and author of a work, now lost, entitled *Gastronomia*, according to some, or *Hedypatheia* (*Life of Luxury*), according to others. In this context, the term that

meant “rule of the stomach” was already being extended to mean “good cooking,” “pleasure of the table,” and the ability or “art” of appreciating good food and drink. The etymology of the word *gastronomy* thus contains a fundamental dietetic and normative element (forgotten in the modern version but recovered in the contemporary one): namely the ability to elaborate foods and dishes in a certain way and to appreciate them.

This meaning of the word subsequently disappeared from Western parlance only to re-emerge at the start of the 19th century—in 1801 to be precise—when the term appeared in the title of a short poem, *La gastronomie ou l’homme des champs à table, poème didactique en quatre chants*, by a minor writer, Joseph Berchoux. This probably came in the wake of the first French translations of the work of Athenaeus in Paris at the end of the 17th century.¹

One can find references earlier, of course. In the 16th century the great Rabelais had been the perfect ideologue of the term *gastros*, personified in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* as *Gaster*, “the first master of arts of this world” and the *gastrolatres*, his followers.² It is worth remembering the fact that a word disappearing from language for a long time does not mean that the living matter it refers to disappears too. But all the same, this particular disappearance did not happen by chance: it had to do with a certain way of understanding and experiencing the concept that the word conveyed.

¹ The first French translation was published in 1680 (Paris, Jacq. Langlois), the second between 1789 and 1791 (Paris, Chez Lamy): cfr. Georges Vicaire, *Bibliographie gastronomique*, Genève-Paris, 1983.

² Cfr. F. Rabelais, *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, trad. *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, London, Grant & Cutler 1991.

Some historians of ideas named the 18th century “the century of taste.” Modern democracies were born in the West between the 17th and 18th centuries, thanks to political and economic revolutions. It was the century of the Enlightenment and the bourgeois class, the century in which the scientific method and esthetics came to maturity. The concept of museums and restaurants as institutions and public places where one could go to enjoy life-enhancing esthetic and gastronomic experiences also arose around this time. It was the 17th century that laid the foundation for the birth of modern gastronomy, generally associated with France, home of its most famous and acknowledged founding fathers, Grimod de la Reynière and Anthelme Brillat-Savarin.³ It was thanks to them that the term acquired meaning and circulated in cultivated circles, first in France itself, then in the rest of Europe, while always remaining at the margins of high culture. “Gastronome” became a synonym for the pleasure-loving bourgeois, addicted to the luxurious and carnal pastime of eating. Gastronomy managed nonetheless to gain a status of its own in this period, advancing an order of discourse that still contains elements of interest for us, albeit flawed by limits and critical points.

On the one hand, Brillat-Savarin fully grasps the “encyclopedic” vocation of gastronomy: “*La gastronomie*

3 Besides Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, a deputy at the National Constituent Assembly and later a judge at the Court of Cassation and author of the celebrated *Physiologie du goût* (1825), a fundamental but lesser-known contribution to the birth of modern gastronomy was also made by Alexandre Balthazar Laurente Grimod de la Reynière (1759-1837). He was a rich Paris lawyer, organizer of spectacular luncheons and author of the *Almanach des Gourmands*, a sort of annual of tips on how best to use food ingredients, published in Paris from 1803 to 1812, and the *Manuel des Amphitrions*, published in 1808.

est la connaissance raisonnée de tout ce qui a rapport à l'homme, en tant qu'il se nourrit."⁴ He thus brings farmers, winemakers, fishers and cooks into the terms of reference of gastronomy. He argues that the subject pertains to natural history (in terms of the classification of edible substances), to physics and chemistry (in terms of analysis, resolution and separation), to cooking, to commerce and to political economics (in terms of the procurement of resources and the institution of means of exchange among nations). He claims also that, from this point of view, gastronomy "governs all life."⁵ As Roland Barthes points out, Brillat-Savarin sees gastronomy as a general topic that may be touched upon by all the sciences, natural and social: biology, chemistry, sociology, history, anthropology, philosophy, economics, law and art. Modern gastronomy was thus aware that it was a mirror of the human condition, a prism through which to observe, describe and experience the world as a whole. There has been no shortage of ambitious gastronomy-inspired philosophical hypotheses. In *The Theory of Four Movements* and *The New Amorous World*, the philosopher Charles Fourier (Brillat-Savarin's cousin) theorized a society based on a sense of community and sharing, in which social and sexual relations would be free and unchecked by rigid bourgeois moral codes. In this utopian society, gastronomy, as pleasure and enjoyment of food and conviviality, would play a crucial role. With his celebrated saying, "We are what we eat," the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach laid the theoretical foundation for what is now an accepted scientific assumption: namely the inseparability of mind

4 A. Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du gout*, Paris, 1982, *Méditation III, De la gastronomie, Définition de la gastronomie*, p. 62

5 Ibidem.

and body in cognitive processes. We all know that any thought is always incarnate and thus partly depends on the energy-giving, dietary and metabolic processes that are constantly taking place inside us.

In Western modernity, these theoretical hypotheses—which we also find in Nietzsche’s thinking go beyond the Cartesian dualism and start again from the body and a “philosophy of food”—have remained marginal. They succumbed to the prevalent epistemological model, based instead on the dualisms of mind and body, and theory and praxis. This theoretical dualism also had practical and hierarchical consequences. Suffice it to think of the social and intellectual devaluation of manual and artisan labor, and of the division between arts and intellectual jobs on one hand, and artisanship on the other, with the consequent submission of the latter to the former. This hierarchy was of course not particularly new in history, but modern democracy stressed it in a different and powerful way.

On the other hand, then, modern Western gastronomy was partially an ally to the situation described above. In addition and consequently, it corresponded primarily to an anthropocentric and Eurocentric model. French, male and upper-class hegemonies determined a standard of “good taste” that today appears not only historically unsatisfactory but also theoretically inadequate. In the end, modern gastronomy was both ambiguous and unresolved. Along the way between modernity and our own time, gastronomy’s destiny has changed, so accordingly the meaning of the word should change too. Gastronomy finally has the chance to clarify its theoretical status.

**Towards a reformed and
critical gastronomy**

To understand fully the potential of gastronomy today we need to quickly take a closer look at the routes of knowledge—at least in our tradition, in Western culture. After that, we will be ready to understand the reasons why we think it is important to maintain the same word, even though it is loaded with prejudices; it was this conviction that led us some years ago to propose the new expression “gastronomic sciences” for our academic institution.

We have already seen that modern gastronomy held an ambiguous status, between emancipatory impulses and a male-gendered eurocentrism. The same ambiguity also crossed the multitude of disciplines it encompassed: anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, economics and all the others involved in the process of nourishing life. After all, this was the ambiguous status of institutional knowledge stressed by many scholars in the 20th century: knowledge also has to do with structures of power and social hierarchy. Even the modern university has suffered somewhat from the same limitations.

However, this is no longer possible today: the terms of reference are, by necessity, global and globalizing. This implies the construction of theoretical and practical models that look beyond the end of their own noses and gaze beyond their navels. If any real research is research that looks to the world even when focusing on very specific local cases, then the same is true for gastronomic research.

The parallelism between the destiny of gastronomy and the destiny of other fields of knowledge lies, first, in the

sense of an increasing awareness of its complexity. This is the basic and inescapable assumption of the expression “gastronomic sciences.” “Science” is not a simple, smooth reductive concept; rather it is complex, tortuous and very wide-ranging.

Let us take two examples from different disciplines. The first comes from one of the earth sciences, specifically botany. As we all know, botany is essential to gastronomy. The American writer Michael Pollan dedicated his first important book to it: *The Botany of Desire*. Botany has to do with biodiversity. However, if the modern concept of biodiversity was defined on three levels of diversity—genetics, species and ecosystems—today the new paradigm is, instead, about biocultural diversity. Biocultural diversity is a plexus, an inextricable tangle that describes the diversity of life by taking into account both the biotic world and a human being’s cultural and social surroundings, which are part of the biota too. The second example comes from history. It is significant that an interest in food and gastronomy began with the French Annales school, which, since the 1930s, has provided the theoretical framework for material culture’s admission to the field of historical studies. Scholars and writers made some important explorations—witness the historical and philological studies of recipe books which date back to the 14th century and published in Italy in the 19th century—but before the Annales school they were in no way systematically or programmatically structured. The school invented a new way of writing history very much based on the intersecting of different disciplines—from paleontology to archeology, geography to the life sciences—and based on concern with apparently insignificant, minor, marginal aspects.

This brief overview of the trajectories followed by the subject of gastronomy serves to understand its passage beyond modernity. While gastronomic studies reached their first identification and codification in the academic context between the late 1970s and the late 1990s, a new challenge occurred between the 20th and 21st centuries. Gastronomy in the 21st century must confront a new global crisis—environmental, political, social and economic. Gastronomic sciences are working on admittedly complex, uneven ground, so they are seeking to reconstruct an *overall, global* sensemaking scenario. After all, in our time the demand for sensemaking and history, for plans and for a future, has now become pressing, and we believe that the pleasurable knowledge not just *of* but *with* food—in the sense of *participant knowledge*—is one of the most powerful tools for meeting this demand.

We want to stress it again: the expression “gastronomic sciences” designates *not a single science nor a discipline*, but a heterogeneous field in which different methodologies, perspectives and approaches to knowledge are in an active and dynamic dialogue. Once more, the gastronomic sciences reflect the evolution of the human condition. As Edgar Morin says, the study of the human condition depends not only on the enlightenment of human sciences, or, for that matter, of philosophy or literature. A “well-made head” is formed with the help of scientific culture, which shows human beings their right place in the physical universe and the terrestrial biosphere; the human sciences—anthropology, sociology, psychology, history and all the others; and, finally, the humanities, namely literature, art and beauty. Only in

this way is it possible to achieve the “awareness of a common destiny” typical of our planetary condition. It is with this spirit that gastronomic sciences operate in the 21st century, and the same spirit inhabits the principles that inspired Slow Food and Terra Madre.

Worldwide, many important scholars and thinkers in the last decades have proposed a theoretical framework for a systemic complexity that can help the construction of awareness for a new, critical gastronomy. Most of them are not gastronomists in the classic, bourgeois sense of the term. Too often, the representations of the modern gourmet have emphasized gastronomic pleasures as the “Sundays of life” or the cultivation of conspicuous consumption or wealthy *otium*: an enjoyable leisure time that requires no effort but offers only shreds of meaning and gratification. Instead, we want to reform gastronomy and free it from these by-now obsolete and unfair limitations.

The new gastronomy: a dynamic map

Here is a brief list—a sort of map that can continue to be worked on in the near future—of some of the words and key concepts that we believe are necessary for well-made, critical, global, aware gastronomic heads.

Common goods and technology

Gastronomy today must acknowledge the huge political and economic questions around food. The interests of multinationals, the desire to privatize and control essential resources such as water, the problem of seeds, land grabbing—these are just some of the issues that we must study and discuss in order to come up with ethically sustainable solutions. Besides its economic market value, eco-gastronomy also has a great social value in the sphere of collective and non-privatizable goods. This problem intertwines with that of science, especially technology and biotechnology (witness the very heated on-going debate around GMOs). On one hand, the development of new technologies has increased the possibility of access to food, but, on the other, the logic behind the development of patents and private property risks making this access more difficult and exclusive. More precisely, the problems involved in introducing biotechnologies are huge and exceedingly complex. The developments implemented in agriculture in recent years, largely based on the manic pursuit of maximum profit, have made it possible to maximize the productivity of production factors. But this process has not always ensured either fair distribution among the different areas of the planet, nor modes of production compatible with the need to protect the environment and the sustainable development of the land.

Food justice and food sovereignty

Insofar as it has a global perspective, gastronomy in the 21st century is becoming aware of its other, forbidden side, and its hidden taboo: hunger. Gastronomic sciences cannot disregard questions of food waste and the fair distribution of resources right from the very start of the chain, from the raw materials. The rights of those who produce food and those who create new food—and who, adopting the logic of private enterprise, seek to exploit its economic potential—easily come into conflict with the natural right of those striving to survive, to choose their own food and to have effective access to enough of it. In this respect, the question of food sovereignty is central: every society and every community has the right to conceive, design and develop food systems that represent significant values to them. Many legal issues are also central to developing a new gastronomy today: from food security to consumer safety, following the birth of mass consumption with the Industrial Revolution, to agropiracy and the protection of the environment and farm labor and agricultural defense. Today fewer and fewer produce for the increasingly many who consume; for the vast majority “acquiring” is increasingly replacing “doing.” This evolution necessarily concerns the law in regards to unethical behaviors that may prejudice the health and food sovereignty of the many.

Biocultural diversities and sustainability

The new gastronomy is increasingly facing environmental challenges, in relation both to biological and cultural issues concerning food. Hence for example ethnobiology and

agroecology, created from the convergence of Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK)-centered studies and biology and agronomy and ecology, respectively, are emerging research fields in which social, biological, agricultural, and ecological sciences are applied in the understanding of folk knowledge of nature and in the design, planning and management of sustainable agro-systems. The aim of these new interdisciplinary areas is to improve sustainable and sovereign foodsystems by celebrating biological and cultural interactions among all the components of the foodsystem. Paramount here is a cosmocentric as opposed to anthropocentric vision of the universe, in which human beings see themselves and act as complex organisms in an environment made up of other organisms, according to a systemic and monistic model of interdependent relations, neither discrete nor dualistic nor based on exploitation and dominance. In this respect, gastronomy today is particularly concerned with questions relevant to the planning of complex food systems designed according to a model of circularity and reciprocity that ensures a proper use of resources: hence the valuing of biocultural diversities.

Well-being, pleasure, conviviality

In ancient and medieval gastronomy, dietetics was crucial. Diet had a very broad sense: a complete lifestyle capable of ensuring well-being, health and a happier life. *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* (“Concerning honest pleasure and physical well-being”) is the title of a famous treatise by one of the most important Italian Renaissance humanists and gastronomes, Bartolomeo Sacchi, known as Platina.

However, in modern gastronomy, the dietetic element separated itself from taste and pleasure. The new gastronomy intends to revive the spirit of old, reinforcing the link and, of course, enriching it with the contribution of present-day medical science. Consequently, the modern distinction between food and gastronomy, between the needs of the body and the pleasure of the self, appears problematic, both in cognitive and symbolic terms. This misunderstanding probably also arose from the confusion between the terms “nutrition” and “nutritionism.” Gastronomy is nutrition because nutrition stands for something essential and complex. Nourishment is life, but this does not mean that the biocultural complexity of food values is translatable into the modern nutritionism that has often claimed to reduce the value of food to that of its nutritional and quantitative components. Today, in fact, all good nutritionists are perfectly aware of this fact. Eating an apple does not coincide, simply and solely, to eating a certain amount of fiber, carbohydrates and vitamins, because the act of eating it involves other aspects, equally essential to pleasure and to wholesome good nutrition: namely, its flavor, its crunch, its solidity as an apple. The philosopher Emanuel Lévinas once wrote that we do not live to eat nor do we eat food simply as fuel to live on; *we eat because we are hungry*, and implicit in being hungry are all the processes linked to human pleasure, and the desire for relationships and sociality. One of the greatest challenges will be to develop cultural and educational strategies to harmonize not only taste and health, but also, more generally, pleasure and well-being, not only of humans, but also all other living beings. The question of social and convivial pleasure is crucial for gastronomy.

Identity, tradition and authenticity

The deconstruction of these words is a crucial task for a new gastronomy. Gastronomic sciences must restore and add value to their meaning. Though it may seem obvious, it is still necessary to clear the field of a basic misunderstanding: gastronomy does not raise barriers to defend traditionalist, nostalgic, static notions of identity and tradition. Tradition is nothing but elaboration of the future, while future is nothing without memory. To build the future it may be useful to take some steps forward, others sideways and still others backwards. The new gastronomy is at ease between localism and globalism. The image that arguably represents it most of all is that of a beehive: the identities of places and people are seen as dynamic processes, in constant evolution; tradition as a project, a tool to build a better, fairer future; and authenticity as an ongoing process of authentication. Authenticity is an even more dangerous word; a complex, thorny concept, often used in a culturally and politically conservative manner. Authenticity is not a hypostatic base for stable values, but, instead, a dynamic process of authentication produced by human negotiations and dialogue. It is an always changing, evolving and momentary stabilization of hybridizations and contaminations. By way of example, these days a Barolo wine carefully made by Macedonian or Swiss migrants could be more authentic than a Barolo produced with invasive, homogenizing methods by a family that has lived in the Langa wine hills for generations. Only the dialogue after tasting among the members of a given community familiar with Barolo can establish this authenticity.

In other words, neo-gastronomy wishes to contribute to thinking about evolution, which does not correspond necessarily to the capitalistic-economic development paradigm that represents another obsolete residue of modernity.

Experience, taste and education

Food as nutrition and as taste needs to be experienced. Gastronomy is knowledge by experience. The gastronomic sciences, a huge field of different perspectives and disciplines about food, also lean on the experimental side of knowledge: theory and practice are strictly interwoven. Taste experiences are relational and dialogic. The new gastronomy is tasked with creating a more suitable and encompassing epistemological model for understanding different taste cultures. Food expertise should thus be seen both as a training of the senses and an education of sensibility. Under these lenses, exercising taste is a continuous education in diplomacy, the diplomacy of convivial relations. To underline the value of experience is to deconstruct the modern epistemic and social paradigm of the superiority of theory over practice. Instead, the gastronomic sciences put theory and practice, contemplation and participant observation, books and hands, mind and body, writing, gesture and speech all on the same plane. So the new gastronomy has the task of carrying on stories: food experiences cannot escape a narrative dimension, because experiences are stories. Gastronomy, then, is art, communication and creativity.

In this respect, the true 21st-century gastronome does not study food as an object; a gastronome studies with food,

considering culture as a form of practical comprehension that leads to constant enrichment, transformation and evolution, as opposed to a mere acquisition of pre-arranged data. In other words, our relationship with food serves not only to transform that food and ensure the production of ever better food, but also to transform us into better human beings.

Coda

Gastronomy is an open community, corresponding to the planet Earth. The fields of research, teaching and learning that gastronomic sciences help to animate are not made by academics alone. With gastronomy, a certain idea of academy must also be deconstructed. Academics themselves have to change, learning to learn along the road towards a new way of creating knowledge. This is possible in an open and welcoming space, inhabited by students, farmers, fishers, producers, domestic and professional cooks, retailers and food enthusiasts. All humanity and all living beings are legitimate members of this community, because food concerns everybody and belongs to everybody. More precisely, if we are not to be eaten by food—to use an expression of Carlo Petrini—it will be necessary, above all, to stop thinking about it as an object under our total control, and relate to it with respect, care, passion and love for life. This is the task to be elaborated by a new gastronomy.

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