Refining Pleasures

By Frank Armstrong

ABSTRACT

The sin of gluttony emerged in a context of recurring food shortages and social inequalities in medieval Europe. It also owed its origins to a philosophical schema that divided body and mind. This mortal sin was identified by Pope Gregory I and encompassed both excessive eating and the wider appreciation of food. But elites continued to consume conspicuously in Bacchanalian banquets, and folk myths endured that celebrated indulgence. The early modern era witnessed an increase and stabilisation in food supply across Europe as a result of improvements in agriculture, transport and the rise of nation-states. In this changed context a more refined approach to consumption became popular among elites with an emphasis on qualities imparted by chefs rather than the sheer quantity seen in medieval celebrations of food. Especially after the French Revolution the restaurant emerged as the main forum for this refined style of dining where an impression of aristocracy was preserved. The first gastronomes Grimod de la Reyniere and Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin changed our understanding of the idea of gluttony, de-coupling the wider appreciation of food from excessive consumption. A tension can be discerned in gastronomic discourse between exclusivity and inclusiveness which endures to the present day. Two challenges for present-day gastronomes are assessed: the problem of the obesity epidemic which is driven by consumption of large quantities of refined sugars; and the environmental devastation of diets high in meat. Gastronomes can play an important role in addressing these challenges. Elite fashions may permeate through society and gastronomes can influence all classes.

Refining Pleasure

A gastronome who is not also an environmentalist is stupid, but an environmentalist who is not also a gastronome is boring.
Carlo Petrini (1949-), founder of the Slow Food Movement.

The eminent French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu wrote: 'A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who has the cultural competence, that is, the code into which it is encoded.' (Bourdieu, 2010, p.xxv) Thus, without adequate historical and literary foregrounding we might find little meaning or interest in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It could be argued that a 'pure' art form like music allows immediate access, but education or other initiation is generally a precursor to 'elevated' genres. Children are taught nursery rhymes before arias.

Similarly enjoyment of particular foods or cuisines arrives through the prism of upbringing, intellectual engagement and even outright snobbery. A food critic or gastronome applies standards that are not restricted to physiological responses; taste buds alone do not distinguish the 'quality' of locally-grown, organic, asparagus. Attitudes to health, provenance, sustainability and animal welfare all colour the perceptions of critics, amateur and professional, a line that is increasingly blurred.

Gastronomic appreciation often involves a denial of crass gustatory pleasure. This can easily lapse into condescension of a kind that distinguishes the elevated gastronome from the *hoi polloi*. Bourdieu observes:

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word natural – enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. (Bourdieu, 2010, p. xxx)

Choice of food and the mode of its consumption is a marker of class identity in hierarchical societies (Goody, 1982). Indeed, gastronomy emerged as a form of nostalgia for the *ancien regime* in post-Revolutionary France.

Perhaps more than in other cultural arenas, food preferences are the product of family, class, national and religious backgrounds. This acculturation begins in early life. Bourdieu remarks:

> '[I]t is probably in tastes in *food* that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing or collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it' [Bourdieu, 2010, p.71]

This 'indelible mark' was observed by a German folklorist (Bringeus, 1970, p.45) who said that people are 'nowhere near more conservative than in matters relating to mouth and belly'. This is perhaps because: '[a]lone among the senses, taste has by far the most connection to the body's reward system' (Kessler, 2009, p.36). Thus, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver discovered in his TV series *Jamie's School Dinners* (Channel 4, 2005) that turning children away from familiar but unhealthy foodstuffs poses great difficulties.

The appeal of contemporary fast food may also be traced to a neurological reaction to refined sugars (sucrose derived from sugar cane and beet, and, especially, high fructose corn syrup) that figure so prominently[1]. Conversely, '[t]he amount of sugar in food today goes beyond the level we could have experienced naturally – and that just means we desire it all the more' (Kessler, 2009, p.45). We face a powerful foe since – just as the parasitic cuckoo's egg receives more nurturing in the nest than eggs that are true progeny due to its greater size – refined sugar's extreme sweetness proves more enticing than natural sweeteners that are generally accompanied by fibre. Children, who have not

[1] For example, apart from Fries, it is difficult to find an item on a McDonald's menu that does not contain refined sugar. For details go to www.mcdonalds.ie and look for 'detailed nutrition informtion'.

acquired a taste for stronger flavours, are particularly drawn to this uncomplicated sweetness that is neatly complimented by sophisticated advertising. An egalitarian gastronome Jamie Oliver can play an important role in curbing the damaging excess and generating a wider appreciation of different tastes.

Collective diets threaten to exert a fatal price on a global population that has risen from 1 billion in 1800 to 7 billion today. Apart from the immediate challenge of an obesity epidemic, we lurch towards an ecological apocalypse through global warming and over-exploitation of the biosphere. Our present agriculture drives climate change. Cattle-rearing alone contributes more greenhouse gases, as measured in CO2 equivalent, than transportation according to a recent UN report (2006). Conventional methods of cultivation display a fatal reliance on fossil fuels with livestock increasingly grain-fed. We see an evisceration of biodiversity and destruction of forests to make way for plantation agriculture. Environmental and health considerations often align: fittingly, the sugar cane has caused 'a greater loss of biodiversity on the planet than any other single crop' according to the World Wildlife Fund (2004).

With these considerations in mind I explore the origins of European attitudes to food, which remains embedded in our culture. We will see how there emerged a concept of a sin of gluttony encompassing *both* excessive eating and a wider appreciation of food, and how early gastronomes de-coupled this transgression. The long-standing tension between elitism and inclusiveness found in gastronomic discourse will also be traced.

The Sin of Gluttony

Since antiquity Europeans have sought to reconcile the selfish call of their own bodies over and above their basic needs with a societal need for a fair distribution of scarce food.

There also emerged a distinct philosophy concerning the control of bodily appetites; the religious symbolism of food became deeply embedded in our culture.

The availability of food was a source of anxiety for the bulk of the population under the Roman Empire. Successive emperors tamed a restive populace by bestowing free grain, the main component of the proverbial *pan et circe*. In these circumstances signs of excessive feasting by the upper classes could be a torment to starving plebeians. The Roman writer Seneca (d. 65 CE) was appalled by his decadent contemporaries who would 'vomit in order to eat, and eat in order to vomit'; and bemoaned the wastefulness of 'banquets for which they ransack the whole world.' (Kleinberg, 2008, p.81) Romanized Christianity would absorb a Stoic disregard for this greed.

While in our time we have, at best, a peripheral awareness of the disparity between the indulgence of our Western culture and the poverty of the Third World, in medieval Europe, as under the Roman Empire, feast and famine intermingled. According to Lucile F. Newman *et al* (1990, p.117) 'Europe's population by the late thirteenth century had reached a stunning size, and famines were widespread and recurrent'. In these circumstances, over-indulgence and excessive enjoyment of food could be considered cruel, sparking widespread criticism from ecclesiastics and writers. Thus in Dante's *Inferno* (*c*. 1300), those who have indulged in a life of gluttony are punished with excruciating and eternal hunger and thirst. Condemnation of gluttony served an egalitarian end, and might be interpreted in proto-socialistic terms. Christian ideas on dietetics may also be traced to seasonal shortages. Thus Lent, the season of sustained fasting, dove-tails neatly with seasonal fluctuation, leading Hermann Pleij (1998, p.101)

to observe that: ‘if the Church had not required a period of fasting at Lent, it would have had to be invented’.

Early Christian thinkers such as St Paul (d. *c*. 67 CE), synthesizing Hellenic and Judaic ideas, conceived a dualistic view of body and mind in which the former was subordinate to the latter. Bodily cravings were to be resisted where possible: sex was allowed only for procreation, food for survival and alcohol for ceremonial purposes. Holiness was equated with a denial of ephemeral earthly pleasures. Corporeal deprivation and even suffering could be lodged in a celestial account that would repay the keen interest of paradise for eternity.

St Paul writes of enemies of the cross whose end is ‘destruction, *their god is the belly*, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things’ (Phil. 3.18-19, New International Version). Later, Adam’s eating of an apple was interpreted by the Fathers as an act of greed. Hence a pious Christian might seek to expiate Adam’s original sin, resident in all, even to the extent of apparent inedia among the Desert Fathers.

St Augustine of Hippo (d. 430 CE) provides an archetypal insight into the moral confusion wrought by appetite in his autobiographical *Confessions*. Augustine acknowledges he must eat for the sake of his health but is wary of the ‘dangerous pleasure’ he draws from it: ‘it is difficult to discern whether the needed care of my body is asking for sustenance or whether a deceitful voluptuousness of greed is trying to seduce me’ (Ryan, 1960, p.83). For Augustine, all bodily appetites are indicative of the Fallen state of Man, a form of *cupiditas*, ‘Ardent desire, inordinate longing or lust; covetousness’ (OED).

Pope Gregory I (d. *c*. 604 CE) created the most lasting definition of gluttony when he ordained the seven 'deadly' or 'cardinal' sins. Building on St Paul's condemnation of those who treated their bellies as 'God', his taxonomy defined that sin as more than merely eating too much. For Gregory, this form of sinfulness resides in the eater's thoughts as much as his actions:

> 'the glutton eats before he is hungry and continues to eat when he is no longer hungry; he craves costly and gratuitously sophisticated dishes; he eats too much and with excessive eagerness; he seeks not sustenance, but pleasure; he becomes the slave of his stomach and his palate.' (Kleinberg, 2008, p.6)

As with the elements of a criminal offence, the sin involves a guilty mind (*mens rea*) which, with 'excessive eagerness', contemplates the food before the guilty act (*actus reus*) of eating 'too much' of it. Gregory attacks the conspiratorial idealisation of the next meal; the province of the contemporary gastronome who eats 'before he is hungry' or even 'when he is no longer hungry'. Conversely, Gregory's formulation does permit a level of 'eagerness' (below excessive) for food.

A more tolerant line emerges in the writings of the greatest theologian of the high medieval church, St Thomas Aquinas. The 'Angelic Doctor' still regards gluttony as a mortal sin but crucially, he says that it 'was not the greatest sin, for it is about matters connected with the nourishment of the body'. He defines it as 'eating too soon, too expensively, too much, too eagerly and too daintily (Prose, 2003, p.38)'. We may note that, while he agrees with Gregory on the need for restraint, Aquinas says indulgence is permissible to a certain extent. This hardly amounts to a gluttons' charter but elites might enjoy their often stupendous feasts, while performing the necessary fasting to assuage their consciences. Aquinas was simply advising them to curb those excesses. An appetite

for food was necessary, as Aquinas says: ‘we understand human life [*vita hominis*] to be a good to be served and preserved’ (Finnis, 1998, p.81).

But the breaking of any taboo tends to exert a fascination, and wealth and prestige could be expressed in conspicuous over-consumption. While gluttony was considered the ‘mother of all sins’, the nobility were known to revel in excess, enjoying stupendous, Bacchanalian banquets. Folk repudiation of orthodox theology is revealed in the popularity of a fictional land of fantastical abundance: ‘the land of Cockaigne’. Herman Pleij (1997, p.3) tells us: ‘Everyone living at the end of the Middle Ages had heard of Cockaigne at one time or another. It was a country, tucked away in some remote corner of the globe, where ideal living conditions prevailed … food and drink appeared spontaneously in the form of grilled fish, roast geese and rivers of wine … One could even reside in meat, fish, game, fowl, or pastry, for another feature of Cockaigne was its edible architecture.’ The popularity of this myth attests to the yearning for a sensuality which the prevailing moral schema proscribed.

Early Modern Change

The Renaissance and Reformation eroded the moral domination of a single authority; Guttenberg’s invention of moveable type (circa 1450) facilitated the easy dissemination of new ideas. Furthermore, by the late 18th century, the supply of food had increased significantly across Europe. The development of complex transportation infrastructures and bureaucratic organizations attendant to the emergence of powerful states allowed areas experiencing shortage to be supplied with surpluses from elsewhere. The productivity of farming itself doubled (Mazoyer and Roudart, 2006) in the wake of an agricultural revolution that brought advances in crop rotation, selective breeding, new

technologies, larger farms, and high-yielding crops from the Americas especially potato and maize.

Crossgrove *et al* (in Newman, 1990), associate the decline of hunger with the rise of the nation-state after the French and American Revolutions. Within this type of polity, they argue, governments were expected to provide food for their citizens. This process can be observed in England where from 1750 the government began to subsidise food after a 150 year interregnum (Floud et al, 2011, p.118). When famine did occur in Europe it tended to be a legacy of warfare, or affected regions where the main ethnic group lacked representative government: such was the case, for example, in 1840s Ireland.

By the late-eighteenth century, for the nobility to consume any more quantitatively would have been physically impossible, especially in France. What is more, a rising bourgeoisie could enjoy the privilege of plenty. Previously, social superiority could be expressed in gargantuan banquets, but for that style of eating to impress, the presence of hungry onlookers is required. How could consumption remain conspicuous?

The answer lay in increasing the demands made upon the skills of the cook to innovate. New dishes became increasingly complex, a process accelerated by the accumulation of culinary knowledge in recipe books. The emphasis turned to quality, mainly dependent on human ingenuity, rather than resplendent largesse. The introduction to a French recipe book from 1674 signals this change in fashion:

> Nowadays it is not the prodigious overflowing of dishes, the abundance of *ragoûts* and gallimaufries, the extraordinary piles of meat … in which it seems that nature and artifice have been entirely exhausted in the satisfaction of the senses, which is the most palpable object of our delicacy of taste. It is rather the exquisite choice of meats, the finesse with which they are seasoned, the courtesy and neatness with which they are served, their proportionate relationship to the number of people, and finally the general order of things which essentially contribute to the goodness and elegance of a meal.
> (*L'art de bien Traiter*, L.S.R., 1674 quoted in Mennell, 1985, p.73-74)

According to Stephen Mennell (1985, p.274) this newly discovered sense of delicacy implies 'a degree of restraint too, in so far as it involves discrimination and selection, the rejection as well as the acceptance of certain foods or combinations of foods, guided at least as much by social proprieties as by individual fancies.' Of course the trend for more varied and delicate *ragoûts* began to spread from courtly circles to the burgeoning bourgeoisie. By ending the private banqueting of the *ancien regime*, the Revolution established the public *restaurant* as the location for fine dining *par excellence*.

The word 'gastronomy' seems to have been invented by Joseph Berchoux in 1801, when he uses it as the title of a poem (Mennell, 1985, p.266). It was rapidly adopted in both France and Britain to designate 'the art and science of delicate eating'. The meaning of 'gastronome' overlaps with the older terms 'epicure', and 'gourmand', as well as the newer one 'gourmet'. Both 'epicure' and 'gourmand' had formerly pejorative meanings close to 'glutton' – that is they were applied to people who ate greedily and to excess. By the beginning of the nineteenth century however 'epicure' had acquired a more positive meaning in English as 'one who cultivates a refined taste for the pleasure of the table; one who is choice and dainty in eating and drinking' (Mennell, 1985, p.268).

In France, the word 'gourmand' acquires the same favourable sense and was used by Alexandre Balthazar Laurent Grimod de la Reynière[2] as the title of his series of restaurant reviews: *Almanachs des Gourmands* (1803-12). English writers today commonly draw a distinction between a 'gourmand', which has the same pejorative sense as 'glutton', and a 'gourmet' who is considered a person with a refined palate. But as Mennell (1985, p.268) notes, 'gastronome' differs from all the other terms in one key respect: a gastronome is generally understood to be a person who not only cultivates his own 'refined tastes for

[2] Henceforth abbreviated as 'Grimod'.

the pleasure of the table' but also, by writing about it, 'helps to cultivate other people's too'. The gastronome is not just a gourmet – he is also a theorist and, less appealingly, a propagandist of culinary taste.

Grimod, the first restaurant critic, was sensitive to the charge of gluttony that could be laid against him as he pioneered the celebration of the cuisine of his era. He asserts: 'Let it be said that of all the Deadly Sins that mankind may commit the fifth appears to be the one that least troubles his conscience and causes him the least remorse (MacDonogh, 1987, p.186)' He also grapples with the challenge of altering the understanding of the term itself:

> If the Dictionary of the Academy is to be believed, gourmand is a synonym for glutton or greedy, as gourmandise is for gluttony. In our opinion this definition is inexact; the words gluttony and greed should be reserved for the characterisation of intemperance and insatiability, while the word gourmand has, in polite society, a much more favourable interpretation, one might say a nobler one altogether (MacDonogh, 1987, p.187).

Jean-Anthelme Brillat Savarin (d. 1826) is the archetypal gastronome. It was he who most clearly distinguished gastronomy from the medieval idea of gluttony, thereby changing our understanding of the term. In the opinion of Balzac, Brillat-Savarin's *La Physiologie du gout* was a work of literature beside which that of Grimod's was 'too much of a pot-pourri (MacDonogh, 1987, p.108)'. Even Grimod, upon reading his contemporary's work, magnanimously observed: 'Beside him I am no more than a kitchen skivvy (MacDonogh, 1987, p.166)'.

Brillat-Savarin's *Gourmandism* was 'an impassioned, reasoned and habitual preference for everything which gratifies the organs of taste'. Importantly, he distinguished this from excessive eating and drinking, arguing that it is 'the enemy of excess; indigestion and drunkenness are offences which render the offender liable to be struck off the rolls

(Brillat-Savarin, 2008, p.112)'. He said: 'nowadays everyone understands the difference between gourmandism and gluttony.' His *Gourmandism* embraced the sensual pleasure of food, beyond even sufficiency; he argued it 'is one of the privileges of mankind to eat without being hungry and drink without being thirsty (Brillat-Savarin, 2008 p.183)'. This amounted to a pointed refutation of Gregory's definition of the mortal sin where 'the glutton eats before he is hungry and continues to eat when he is no longer hungry', and repudiates Gregory's conviction that drawing 'pleasure' as opposed to 'sustenance' from food is gluttonous. Brillat-Savarin contended that it showed 'implicit obedience to the commands of the Creator, who, when He ordered us to eat in order to live, gave us the inducement of appetite, the encouragement of savour, and the reward of pleasure (Brillat-Savarin, 2008, p.112)'.

Interestingly *La Physiologie du goût* contains a lengthy disquisition on the subject of obesity. Brillat-Savarin reveals an awareness of the danger posed by gorging on refined carbohydrates, regarding 'the chief cause of corpulence as a diet with starchy and farinaceous elements'. He does, though, admit that he may not have always adhered to his own prescriptions, admitting: 'I have always regarded my paunch as a redoubtable enemy (Brillat-Savarin 2008, pp.180-182)'.

Brillat-Savarin's book has been in print every year since publication in 1826 and his laconic wit is constantly recalled. He can be credited with altering our understanding of gluttony and liberating a sensual appreciation of food from the grip of a dualistic philosophy. He reconciles body and mind at the table. The admirable French devotion to the quality of their produce and cooking can in part be attributed to his influence. So dear

is cuisine to Gallic hearts that Pascal Ory (Ory, 1997 p.444) wonders whether it will be 'all that remains when everything else has been forgotten?'

If Brillat-Savarin was the amiable theorist, Grimod was a slightly insidious propagandist. He issued his pronouncements in the name of tradition as a member of the departed *ancien regime*. The son of a rich farmer-general, in his early life he displayed liberal tendencies but became disillusioned with the new order, condemning 'everything that is despicable and vile; there in two words you have the Revolution'. He asserts: 'I will never be the friend of a democrat. It is atrocious that men of letters should think as the majority do today (MacDonogh, 1997, p.203)'. According to MacDonogh (1987 p.41), he began to write about food after being told to write about something harmless or give up altogether. In this medium he 'masked his vicious attacks behind harmless idioms'. Gastronomy became a vehicle for his reactionary views. An awareness of 'good' food revealed the true aristocrat. After the Revolution he founded what he referred to as a *Jury des Degustateurs*, and between 1803 and 1812 set about writing his *Almanach des Gourmands*. The aristocratic display of pre-Revolutionary France could re-emerge in the new forum of the public restaurant.

In time, this manner of plutocratic musing becomes a feature of a particular brand of French chauvinism. The *hauteur* of the *ancien regime* became characteristic of a wider national identity fostered by the ascendant *haute bourgeois* who, Pierre Bourdieu argues, 'has no counterpart elsewhere, at least for the arrogance of its cultural judgements' (Bourdieu, 2010, p.245). A convenient syllogism developed positing cuisine as the greatest expression of civilization, and France its greatest exponent; a tendency that becomes more marked as France's political and military power faded in the late

nineteenth century. Thus the novelist Marcel Rouff in 1918 adapts Brillat-Savarin's observation that man eats while other animal feed: 'Everywhere else people feed themselves; only in France do they eat (Ory, 1997 p.444)'. That statement conveniently ignores the universality of Brillat Savarin's conviction that *gourmandise* is 'the common bond which unites the nations of the world, in reciprocal exchange of objects serving for daily consumption (Brillat-Savarin, 2008, p.113)'. Public eating in France is still marked by this tension between an inclusive hospitality and a stiff exclusivity.

Under Grimod and his heirs gastronomy became rarefied, abstract and nationalistic, a characteristic that endures and not just in France. Just as membership of the *ancien regime* was limited to those of noble pedigree, so *haute cuisine* was confined to the few. The universality espoused by Brillat-Savarin has often been ignored as food writers match their elevated tastes to the latest restaurant fads. In the background the *Guide Michelin*, natural heir to Grimod's *Almanachs*, acts as a kind of gold standard, conferring great reward to those restaurants that conform to its exclusive notion of good taste.

Challenging Gastronomy

The diet promoted by the early gastronomes particularly Grimod evoked pre-Revolutionary aristocratic taste. This meat-heavy diet was equated misleadingly with a traditional rustic one and popularised as 'French' food. Fernand Braudel writes: 'the diet of peasants, that is the vast majority of the population, had nothing in common with the cookery books written for the rich (Braudel, 2002. p.187)'. Peasants, the great bulk of the population might eat meat in the form of salted pork just once a week (Braudel, 2002, p.187). The spread of gastronomy coincided with a radical reduction in the price of sugar which allowed sugary-desserts to climax most meals. This trend only emerged in the

seventeenth century at the court of the French queen Catherine de Medici (Abbot, 2009, p.46).

So-called French food was a global hit. The great chef Auguste Escoffier (d. 1935) boasted: 'I have 'sown' two thousand chefs all around the world … Think of them as so many seeds planted in virgin soils (Ory, 1997 p.444).' It became the dominant idiom in Western elite cooking over the course of the nineteenth century and has only latterly been over-hauled. An implicit appeal of that cuisine was that it gave diners the impression of aristocratic sophistication, an aura that is maintained to the present day. Fine restaurants still exhibit a stiffling *politesse* not encountered in other commercial settings.

The extensive use of French words in gastronomic discourse (notably *cuisine*, *chef*, and *bon appetit*) accentuated the division between the diets of the rich (many of whom had a command of the French language) and the poor (the vast majority of whom did not) in English-speaking countries. There still is less of a vocabulary to talk about food in working class families.

Taste is learnt and trends are followed. Braudel observes: 'fashion governs cooking like fashion. Famous sauces fall into disrepute one day and after that elicit nothing but condescending smiles (Braudel, 2002. p.189)'. A gastronome will reflect popular taste but can also inform it through writing and broadcasting. Notwithstanding 'the indelible mark of infant learning', tastes in food can change over the course of a lifetime.

Vegetarian food is still viewed as the poor peasant relation, a position derived from the French pioneers of gastronomy who extolled a meat-heavy aristocratic diet. This is contrary to Hindu culture in India where the elite Brahmin cast refrain from the profane act of meat-eating. Parry (1985) observes of that culture: 'A man is what he eats. Not

only is his bodily substance created out of food, but so is his moral disposition.' A challenge for a new generation of gastronomes is to influence chefs and their customers to break with convention and raise the reputation of plant-based food. The recent *volte-face* of a former carnivore-propagandist, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall offers some encouragement.

Furthermore, the environmental devastation of the sugarcane and criticism of over-cultivation and genetic modification of maize (from which high fructose corn syrup is derived) should be given far more prominence by gastronome chefs and restaurant critics. The wide availability of these substances drives the obesity epidemic. Natural sweeteners abound in nature and chefs should refrain from using sugar to the extent we see it, even in the finest restaurants. The history of sugar shows how elite fashions permeate through society (Mintz, 1985).

Conclusion

Emphasis on the sin of Gluttony in medieval Europe served the role of regulating excessive demand, especially on the part of elites, when food was in short supply. But the taboo of over-indulgence tended to exert a fascination. Gastronomy made an important contribution to Western culture; an intellectual engagement with food engenders a concern for where its contents originate. Gastronomy also preaches moderation which is important for human health. Further, by increasing the demand for innovative cooking we broaden the range of dishes available to humanity. This enhances the pleasure of dining which performs an important role in drawing groups, especially families, together; according to French sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann, the 'magic of cookery' and the social engagement it encourages are vital to the welfare of a family: 'love sometimes grows as we peel onions or knead dough' (Kaufmann, 2010, p.222). However, traditional gastronomy is elitist

and tends to emphasise the noble pursuit of meat-eating which remains the most sought-after category of food. Recently a Michelin-starred chef told me: 'It doesn't matter what price you put on steak, people will still buy it.'[3]

The human and planetary contexts in which the ideas of both gastronomy and gluttony were framed have changed dramatically. The importance of gastronomy in aligning taste with environmental and health concerns has never been more urgent. But it should shed an enduring elitism and truly become *the common bond which unites the nations of the world, in reciprocal exchange of objects serving for daily consumption*.

[3] Private conversation, Dublin, October, 2011.

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