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Introduction to the special issue on
“Gastronomy and Revolution”

by

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Introduction to the special issue on “Gastronomy and Revolution”

Manuela Albertone, Ludovic Frobert, Enrico Pasini



THIS number of our Journal is again a special, thematic issue, that brings to our readers the results of the Call on “Gastronomy and Revolution”, that we announced in 2014, and of the 2015 Seminar that followed the Call. In these few pages, we would like to provide a brief introduction to the theme of the issue.

The concept of gastronomy presented itself to the literate world and to the general public around the beginning of the 19th century¹. It had at times ample cultural and political echoes, and has been given various cultural and political nuances. A specific variety of such nuances connects gastronomy and gourmandise—or their rebuttal—to political, specifically to revolutionary agitation and militancy.

On one side of an ideal line, we can see a coherent and constant trend towards the refusal of pleasures, including those related to nourishing, and an insistence on the sheer instrumental character of it, or on downright abstinence. A sort of native connection of social dissatisfaction and refusal of the pleasures of food, and of the abundance of foodstuff and bourgeois society, is very clear in the social and political opposition of “grand maigreur” and “monde gras” in Zola’s *Ventre de Paris*. Political projections of this opposition can range from the gastronomic abstinence of Tolstoism to the ideologisation of Chairman Mao’s red-braised pork as a model food² with simple ingredients and unostentatious

¹ See among others Chikako Hashimoto, “Open Society or Closed Salon? A Reading of Brillat-Savarin’s *Physiologie du goût*”. *JJHI* 1 (2012): 3:1-3:22.

² See Mary K. Tate and Nate Tate, *Feeding the Dragon: A Culinary Travelogue Through China* (Kansas City: Andrews Mc Meel, 2011), 22 f.; see also Fuchsia Dunlop, *Shark’s Fin and Sichuan Pepper: A Sweet-Sour Memoir of Eating in China* (London: Ebury Press, 2008), 175 f. It saw eventually a transformation into the business brand of “the Mao-family’s dishes”; see Zhuang Kongshao, *The Development of Ethnic Cuisine in Bei-jing*, in *The Globalization of Chinese Food*, ed. by David Y.H. Wu and Sidney C.H. Cheung (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 69-85, at p. 82-84.

presentation, in accordance with the slogan “Practice frugality in carrying out revolution”¹.

Overall, a narrative of privation that was quite inevitably tied (often from the point of view of realistic experience) to rhetoric of militant life, became a value-laden matter. Gastronomy, as a bourgeois luxury, would be seen as the opposite to collective nourishment; indulgence in bourgeois luxuries being in turn connected to a betrayal of revolutionary purity and a loss of connection with the people². Among many other divisions, the leftist front during the Spain War saw some echo of this fracture:

Probably the greatest contrast between Madrid and Barcelona was in the use of hotels. In the capital Gaylords was later taken over by the Communist Party as a luxurious billet for its senior functionaries and Russian advisers. In Barcelona the Ritz was used by the CNT and the UGT as Gastronomic Unit Number One—a public canteen for all³.



In contrast to this admittedly clear-cut tendency, we envisaged for this special issue the historiographic depiction of occasional encounters, or more systematic connections, between radical, indeed revolutionary political programs,

¹ See Yee-Fui Lau, Wan-ye Ho and Sai-Cheung Yeung, *Glossary of Chinese Political Phrases* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1977), 195. This revolutionary stance was indeed in continuity with a Chinese “tradition of frugal eating” that extended to both the poor and the rich, and that was only confirmed when in the 1920s “the Peasants Association (a Communist-led organization), established rules against lavish banquets so as to distinguish themselves from those who abused them” (Frederick J. Simoons, *Food in China: A Cultural and Historical Inquiry* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 1991), 18).

² Attention to eating would be acceptable for practical purposes, f.i. in the sake of health. This surfaces already with the French Revolution: “One of the few cookbooks to be published during the Revolutionary years was a certain Jourdan-Lecoite’s *Cuisine de santé*, complete with an extensive preface on healthy eating’ (Emma C. Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment. Food and the Sciences in Paris* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago-London, 2012), 288).

³ Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 109.

and the idea of appropriating the pleasures typical of ruling classes, often in relation to bourgeois or proletarian revolutionary movements and commotions. Such connections have brought about, instead of the usual fostering of parsimony and asceticism that seems to necessarily complement revolutionary militancy, the pursuing of alternative forms and purposes of gastronomy in a revolutionary perspective. Some generic examples can be Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin's interest for continental cooking in the process of "unbecoming British"¹, or the well-known appropriation of gastronomy by the middle class at the time of 19th-century bourgeois revolutions; in the 20th century, the presumed revolutionary character of Futurist gastronomy, on which we heard, at the Turin seminary, a contribution that also appears in this issue, and the controversial idea of "Democratic luxury" as "an essential part of the everyday of the Soviet people"²; in more recent times, the "Slow Food Revolution" and its connection to the political movements of the years 1960s-'70s.



Yet perhaps the most relevant moment in this history is its beginning, that is, its French intellectual lineage. We might start from the "Guide du cuisinier" and the connected idea of gastronomical equality in Cabet's seminal communist work *Voyage en Icarie*³. But the most striking example is surely Charles

¹ See Kariann A. Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 73, 243 f.

² Jukka Gronow, *Sociology of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1997), 49 f. In the history of the Soviet revolution the development of a political role for gastronomy has been a long and complex process, which Daniela Steila has accepted to make the object of an essay that we are happy to add to those presented at the seminar. We would like to express her our deepest thank.

³ See Étienne Cabet, *Voyage et aventures de Lord William Carisdall en Icarie* (Paris: H. Souverain, 1840), 86f. See also James W. Brown, "Alimentary Discourse in Nineteenth-century Social Theory: Pierre Leroux, Etienne Cabet and Charles Fourier". *Dalhousie French Studies* 11 (1986): 72–96. Though one should not forget the republican physician Raspail, who dedicates long passages to food, ingredients, and even recipes, in a little work of his that will educate generations of workers

Fourier's proletarian *gastrosophie*, a political gastronomy that opposes directly to his relative Brillat-Savarin's bourgeoisie gastronomy.

In Fourier's system of passional attraction, 'luxism', *i.e.* a passionate attachment of the senses for luxury, was among the three fundamental passions. In his *Nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire* Fourier tried to determine which of the five senses, driven by the attraction of luxury, could be considered the initiating factor, enabling the serial organization of industry. According to him, pre-eminence should be claimed by the taste and by the pleasures connected with it. Thus, he wrote, "en régime sociétaire, la gourmandise est source de sagesse, de lumières et d'accord sociaux"¹.

No more the privileged vice of rich faineants, the gastronomic passion "becomes the guiding principle for harmonic production"². Gluttony, tempered and sublimated into 'gastrosophy', forms the general bond of the industrial series, "l'âme de leurs intrigues émulatives"³. In Fourier's system, "la plupart des vices dégradans selon nos moeurs, comme la gourmandise, deviennent voie d'émulation industrielle; de sorte que les raffinements gastronomiques y sont encouragés comme ressorts de sagesse"⁴.

Civilization, according to Fourier, revealed in this respect dramatic deficiencies. In the division of labour, those producing luxury (variety, beauty, quality) were the very people who had no access to it as consumers, this being reserved to idle classes. All artistic refinement was denied to *gourmandise*, that, besides, was restricted to men: "des prédicants de morale et de bon ton persuadent aux dames françaises que la gourmandise est une passion de mauvais genre"⁵. A call to nature against such *bon ton* would be necessary.

to the basic rules of hygiene, under this striking devise: "L'hygiène dérogerait-elle en employant le langage de la sensualité?" (François-Vincent Raspail, *Manuel annuaire de la santé ou Médecine et pharmacie domestiques* (Paris: Chez l'éditeur, 1845), 89).

¹ Charles Fourier, *Le nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire, ou invention du procédé d'industrie attrayante et naturelle distribuée* (Paris: Bossange-Mongie 1829), 296. More on this subject in Ludovic Frobert, "Venez à ce monde nouveau où tout est luxe, splendeur, beauté, amour, ineffables harmonies". Note sur le luxe chez Fourier et le Fourieristes". Forthcoming in *Économie et société*, 1 (2016).

² Laura Tundo, *L'utopia di Fourier: in cammino verso armonia*, Bari, Dedalo, 1991, p. 252

³ Fourier, *Le nouveau monde*, 297.

⁴ Fourier, *Le nouveau monde*, 2.

⁵ Fourier, *Le nouveau monde*, 301.

In addition to this, Fourier positively asserted the importance of a new first and complete knowledge, ‘gastrosophy’:

Le sens du goût est un char à quatre roues qui sont: 1. *la gastronomie*; 2. *la cuisine*; 3. *la conserve*; 4. *la culture*. La combinaison de ces quatre fonctions exercées en Séries passionnées engendre la *gastrosophie* ou sagesse hygiénique¹.

Reversing this order, separating the trivial functions from a gastronomy intended for the rich and idle, resulted in a huge social imbalance: “On voit dans Paris 3 à 4000 gastrolâtres se goberger au mieux, mais on voit à côté d’eux 3 à 400000 plébéiens qui n’ont pas même de la soupe naturelle”². Against this inequity, only gastronomic wisdom would provide a remedy:

La gastronomie ne sera louable qu’à deux conditions :

1° Lorsqu’elle sera appliquée directement aux fonctions productives, engrenée, mariée, avec le travail de culture et préparation entraînant le gastronome à cultiver et cuisiner; 2° Lorsqu’elle coopérera au bien-être de la multitude ouvrière, et qu’elle fera participer le peuple à ces raffinements de bonne chère que la civilisation réserve aux oisifs³.



Fourier’s ideas, so opposed to any vision of revolutionary frugality, were not easily accepted. Aside from disqualification by ridiculization, this sensualist approach was criticized from the point of view of a more ‘spiritual’ mobilization of the masses. Giuseppe Mazzini passes judgment on Fourier in a somewhat characteristic way. In a letter to Daniel Stern (pseudonym of Marie d’Agoult) of 1864, he writes that materialist communism, that he contrasts implicitly with his own socially oriented republicanism, brings socialism back to Benthamism; Fourierist gastrosophy would be the substitution of crass material eudemonism to political freedom and social thought:

¹ Fourier, *Le nouveau monde*, 303.

² Fourier, *Le nouveau monde*, 303-4.

³ Fourier, *Le nouveau monde*, 304.

Vous flétrissez les communistes matérialistes; ils n'ont fait que pousser à l'absurde et avec dévergondage le vice caché au fond de tous ces systèmes exclusifs qui ont fait presque rétrograder la pensée sociale commune à nous tous républicains qui comprenons, aimons et croyons. Tous ces hommes, Fourier, Cabet, Louis Blanc, Proudhon, etc., avaient l'intelligence, et, autant que le culte de leur individualité le leur permettait, l'amour du peuple: ils étaient tous dépourvus de croyance. Ils sont tous fils de Bentham. La recherche du bonheur est pour eux toute la définition de la vie. Ils ont matérialisé le problème du monde. Ils ont substitué au progrès de l'Humanité le progrès, passez-moi le mot, de la cuisine de l'Humanité.¹

In the French cooperative movement of the first part of the 20th century, some efforts of domestication of Fourier's ideas were deployed by the renowned economist and activist Charles Gide, who suggested this 'progressive' interpretation: "La gastrosophie de Fourier pourrait être considérée comme une anticipation de l'importance extrême donnée de nos jours à l'hygiène alimentaire, laquelle est devenue, on le sait, une grande science qui régit les individus et les nations"².

Episodic reappraisals of Fourier's schemes will instead punctuate the history of the 20th-century New Left: it is worth mentioning Daniel Guérin, who "enfin, intègre pleinement Fourier à ses réflexions et à ses engagements"³; he published in 1975 an anthology of Fourier's work, to whom he gave credit for avoiding an image of socialism based on boredom and privations⁴.

To such more positive and happier perspectives our Call was dedicated. The Seminar, organised in October in Turin by the local Gruppo interdisciplinare di Storia delle idee (GISI), has seen the participation of Aysegul Kesimoglu (City University of London), Roberto Ibba (Università di Cagliari), and Sarah Bak-Geller (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), with Marta Margotti (Uni-

¹ *Edizione nazionale degli Scritti di Giuseppe Mazzini* (Imola: Cooperativa tipografico-editrice P. Galeati, 1906-43), vol. 79, 60-61.

² Charles Gide, "Fourier et son Phalanstère". *Revue internationale de sociologie*, 30 (1922), 1-17 (p. 1), repr. in Charles Gide, *Fourier: précurseur de la coopération* (Paris: Association pour l'enseignement de la coopération, 1924), 23.

³ Thomas Bouchet, *Les fruits défendus: Socialisme et sensualité du XIX^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Stock 2014), xiv.).

⁴ See David Berry, "Metamorphosis: The Making of Daniel Guérin, 1904-1930". *Modern and Contemporary France*, 22 (2014), 321-342.

versity of Turin) as discussant. After the seminar, where the selected contributions have been engaged in an open discussion, the texts have been given their final form. We regret that Aysegul Kesimoglu's contribution on "Invented' Gastronomic Traditions and Eating Out: a Case Study of Turkish Modernization and Revolution" could not be made available for publication.



We would like, finally, to thank everyone who collaborated in this project, and in particular prof. Nicola Perullo, who, his public engagements notwithstanding, has constantly supported this enterprise with his scientific contribution; and the Departments of Historical Studies and of Philosophy and Education Science of the University of Turin, together with the Université Franco-Italienne/Università Italo-Francese, for their practical support to the organization of the Seminar.



Claude Lemaire, C'est la révolution!... que fait le "Suavitos" dans l'alimentation, lithographed poster, 1920-1930. Paris, Bibliothèque Forney (Les Champs Libres, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/leschampslibres/15362216068>).