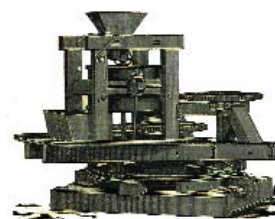


GRIST FOR THE MILL



In October I had the honor of participating in Terra Madre, the semi-annual international Slow Food meeting in Italy. Over 5,000 farmers, fishers, cheesemakers, chefs, teachers and journalists from over 150 countries convened for five days to plot together how we might bring about a world in which food is good, clean, fair and right. Scores of great minds, including pioneering Spanish chef Fernan Adria, Italy's president, and Indian food activist Vandana Shiva, addressed us from what soon felt like the pulpit, using words like destruction, fear, duty, brotherhood, joy, hope, manifesto and victory. Sound like a call to arms? Indeed it was.

I didn't learn how to do my job. But I did learn why. Dr. Fritjof Capra from the Center for Ecoliteracy brought a scientific angle to the discussion when he addressed the ancient question, what is life? It's not sufficient, he explained, to understand proteins or DNA, as those also exist in dead bodies.

Rather the thing that defines life is metabolism, the ingestion and digestion that allow generation, repair and perpetuation.

Acquisition and ingestion of food shapes life, and the methods thereof

classify organisms by domain and kingdom. To understand the basics of any ecosystem's food is to understand its life.

He went on to argue that food identifies us as human, too. Four million years ago the first standing primates developed the capacity to build tools which changed their diets and thus their brains and led to the emergence of the human species. Food acquired culture in both senses of the word: it was cultivated and it was shared in cultural rituals. These etymological links between agriculture and culture are specific to humankind.

Back in Brooklyn I found myself in a land teeming with life and humanity. Here fresh foods are better than in farm country (p. 20) and people prepay for a year of it (p. 31); here it's customary to wait an hour for beet *casunziei* (p. 12) or travel an hour for the best shawarma (p. 8). Coffee (p. 24) and doughnuts (p. 16) are earnest endeavors. We pass our food values to our children in books (p. 6), at school (p. 28) and through music (p. 10). Our Sunday afternoons at the Brooklyn Brewery (p. 38) express the very essence of human nature, and we scrawl food-themed graffiti on concrete walls (p. 50) like the cave paintings in Lascaux.

The culinary and cultural wisdom that has ripened over millennia bears fruit here every day. Viva!

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Gabrielle Langholtz, Editor

EDIBLE BROOKLYN

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