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## The Slow Food Story: Politics and Pleasure

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THE SLOW FOOD STORY: POLITICS AND  
PLEASURE (PAPERBACK)

*by Geoff Andrew*

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*Reviewed by Emily Reynolds*

Geoff Andrews' historical account of the development of "Slow Food" is an inspiring and descriptive story detailing the rise and impact this movement has had on a worldwide scale. Beginning with the movement's origins, first in Italy, in the 1960s and 1970s, Andrews is able to provide readers with an understanding of the motives behind founder Carlo Petrini's desire to develop the Slow Food way of thinking. This in-depth examination of the culture and politics behind the Slow Food movement both critiques the modern fast-paced world in which we live, and also promotes the idea that Slow Food's alternative ideals can extend to all aspects of the future.

The term "Slow Food" was first used following a demonstration outside a future McDonald's location near the Spanish Steps in the centre of Rome, in response to the growing dominance of fast-food restaurants, chain supermarkets and industrialized agriculture. Following this demonstration, the Slow Food Manifesto was written, describing the movement's philosophies and spreading Slow Food's ideals beyond Italy, setting in motion what is now seen as a widespread political and cultural movement. In critiquing the "fast life," the Slow Food Manifesto says:

We are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: Fast Life which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat fast food ... In the name of productivity Fast Life has changed our way of being and threatens our environment and landscapes. So Slow Food is now the only progressive answer.

In recent years, this Italian movement has found a following on six continents as it attempts to reconnect people from all walks of

life to the pleasures of food, and in doing so, to the passions of a slower-paced way of life. Slow Food quickly spread to the United States with the development of Slow Food USA, which has become the second largest Slow Food association in the world. Discouraged by the fast-paced American way of life, Alice Waters was behind the rise of Slow Food USA. Describing the passion behind her vision, Waters said, "We had the sense that we could do anything and we could change the world. We wanted to live differently."

At its core, Slow Food's basic ideological principle, and most distinctive feature, centers on "eco-gastronomy," which combines the pleasures associated with producing, preparing and consuming food with a concern for the environment. This contemporary view of gastronomy is based on the consequences and costs associated with modern diets, globalization and an interest in food culture. Slow Food advocates believe that there is no future for gastronomy without also focusing on the environmental context. Members of the movement also believe in sustainability and have taken interest in initiatives on sustainable agriculture.

Further, Slow Food's principles of "good, clean and fair" help to explain the movement's objectives and philosophies. "Good" relates to the palate and the mind. "Clean" concerns the naturalness in the way in which food is produced, with an emphasis on whether food is sustainable. "Fair" focuses on a commitment to social justice as it relates to whether food has been produced in a way that respects labor through adequate pay and conditions. Slow Food activists want to promote a global community comprised of producers, chefs and academics, as a means of reaching these objectives. By intertwining these three principles, the movement's purpose takes aim at a more enjoyable, safer and respectable living environment.

While some argue that Slow Food is an elitist "dining club," author Michael Pollan believes otherwise, noting that "Slow Food's potential as a 'political movement' is clear from its commitment to 'virtuous globalization' and 'eco-gastronomy.'" In reality, the people behind Slow Food come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, each having in common an appreciation for good food and an interest in bettering the world. According to Andrews, "the 'gastronome' is someone who has 'a finely tuned sense of taste,' but also a 'knowledge of food production that makes him care very much about the world around him.'" These characteristics are shared by Slow Food members from far-reaching and vastly differing cultures and communities. Based on their passion for food and ability to

create critical global environmental awareness, Slow Food leaders have quickly become a new face in the political arena.

Without doubt, there is a “local” feel to the Slow Food movement. However, members also encourage a global awareness of the impact of the “fast life” on people throughout the world. Summing this idea, Slow Food has been referred to as an “international actor for the global promotion of the local.” Focusing on “virtuous globalization,” Slow Food members believe that there must be a global system set in place to aid farmers in local communities so that they are self-sufficient, yet also sustained through interdependent support.

The cultural politics brought to life through the Slow Food movement have raised serious questions concerning the future of food worldwide. Now an international organization with more than 80,000 members in over 100 countries, Slow Food examines the relationship between consumers and producers, the connection between local and global communities, the importance of identity, culture and differences, and the dialect of social and political change. But it is the connection between pleasure and responsibility that seems to truly define Slow Food politics. It is this relationship that has helped create a spectrum of thinking broader than merely food, with focuses on issues such as local government strategy and quality of life.

Andrews encourages readers to embrace the fascinating ideals of the Slow Food movement, suggesting that the blending of pleasure and politics, with emphases on the desire of the palate and the future of the planet, has influential implications on a global level. Undoubtedly, food has become a key issue in the political agendas of many nations, including the United States. As governments focus on issues such as obesity, animal treatment, factory farming and local food production, the ideas advocated by the Slow Food movement provide an innovative, food-focused and environmental-friendly approach to facing the battles of the future. Andrews’ story provides a fresh outlook on the foods people eat and their vast implications on all aspects of modern lifestyles. Perhaps readers will be intrigued enough to trade in the usual trip to Wal-Mart for a shopping experience at a local farmers’ market or pass by McDonald’s to dine at one of the Slow Food restaurants listed by Andrews. By embracing Slow Food objectives, people worldwide may be able to discover a slower gear in today’s fast-paced society, enabling them to appreciate food, and, in turn, the other joys of life, as well.

