

# The rise and fall of the New Nordic Cuisine

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## Abstract

This article provides a history of the New Nordic Cuisine—the ideology, the politics, the criticism, and the counter-reactions to it. The article has a particular focus on the Copenhagen restaurant scene which has been recognized as the epicenter of the movement, and it argues that after a decade of dominance of the strict Nordic locavorism, the dogmas of New Nordic Cuisine are being challenged from within by a generation of chefs who were brought up in New Nordic restaurants, but they are currently distancing themselves from the movement. A notable example of this new generation is Christian Puglisi, who while holding on to some of the core elements of the New Nordic Cuisine (particularly ideals of sound production and the focus on vegetables) refuses the geographical dogmas of the movement and unfolds a cosmopolitan fusion kitchen. The article also discusses how different actors in different contexts have used the New Nordic Cuisine to position themselves in the culinary field either by adhering to or rejecting the concept, and how the example of the New Nordic Cuisine highlights the complex and often contradictory dynamics of the local/global dichotomy in contemporary food and consumer culture.



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On May 13, 2016, the Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke was invited to a state banquet at the White House. The Danish Prime Minister gave a speech to his American host, Barack Obama, and to the surprise of many, Løkke—who has a history of terrible international appearances, notable as host of the disastrous climate summit COP19 in Copenhagen—did really well. Obama laughed several times. During the speech, Løkke gave the most powerful man in the world a piece of advice on cooking:

And if I may, allow me to give you a piece of personal advice. When I get too frustrated, I let off steam by cooking. And I can recommend that. And if you do take my advice, I think you could be inspired by the New Nordic cuisine. It already involves eatable varieties such as musk, bark, and eating ants. (Laughter) But maybe you could be helpful in our search for a recipe called lame duck. (Laughter)<sup>1</sup>

The New Nordic Cuisine has helped put the Nordic countries on the map and is internationally

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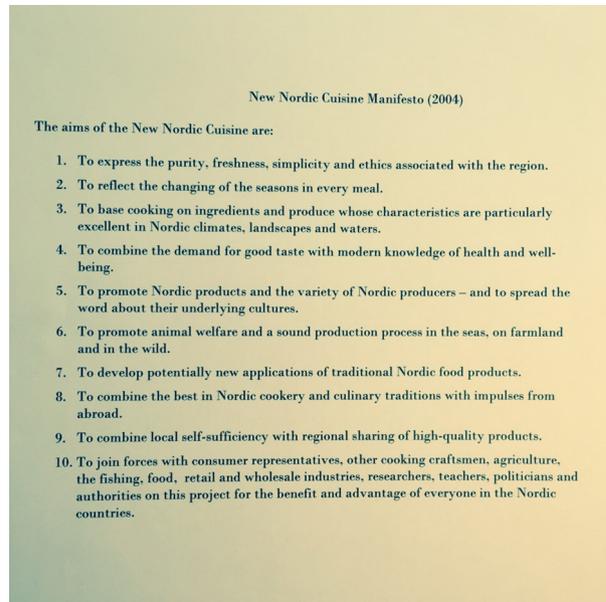
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associated with Scandinavia in contemporary culture. Løkke's speech demonstrates this, as he assumes the President of the United States and his international guests at the White House to be familiar with the concept, and the concept is so well established that the Danish Prime Minister can speak of it satirically.

The New Nordic Cuisine was initiated in 2004 with a manifesto proposing a cuisine based exclusively on products from the Nordic terroir.<sup>2</sup> For the founders of the New Nordic Cuisine—notably food entrepreneur Claus Meyer—this terroir communicates a distinct “Nordic order” that was considered the very soul of the movement and which should be expressed through the cuisine. The movement proposed an alternative to the Mediterranean and French cuisines which for centuries had defined “good taste” in the Global North. Internationally, New Nordic Cuisine was recognized through the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen—built on the principle of the manifesto and with René Redzepi as head chef—elected best restaurant in the world in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2014.<sup>3</sup> Although the Copenhagen restaurant scene could be considered the epicenter of the movement, there are numerous restaurants across Scandinavia that are following more or less dogmatically the ideas of the New Nordic Cuisine's manifesto such as KOKS (Faroe Island) or Hotel Arctic (Greenland). In Sweden, an internationally recognized example is the restaurant Fäviken located in the deserted Swedish wilderness and run by the young chef Magnus Nilsson who “tries to hunt, gather, and prepare most of the food served.”<sup>4</sup>

The manifesto was authored by Claus Meyer and the President of Danish gastronomic academy Jan Krag Jacobsen in collaboration with a series of Nordic gourmet chef. Ten declared aims are presented in the manifesto. The first is to “express the purity, freshness, simplicity and ethics associated with the region.” The second aim is to reflect the changes in seasons. The third aim concerns the use of ingredients and produce “whose characteristics are particularly excellent in Nordic Climate.” These terroir-bound dogmas resonate in the rest of the manifesto along with ideas of rediscovering, rethinking, and promoting Nordic food culture and traditions. Also, the manifest emphasizes that the cuisine should live up to “modern knowledge of health” and meet ethical standards of animal welfare and “sound production.”



This article discusses New Nordic Cuisine—the ideology, the politics, the criticism, and the counter-reactions to it. Also, the article will try to situate the debates around the New Nordic Cuisine within a larger discussion of “culinary capital” in the globalized gourmet “foodscape,” and show how different actors in different contexts have used the New Nordic Cuisine to position themselves either by adhering to or rejecting the concept.

The article opens with some considerations on how symbolic boundaries and status distinctions are established in contemporary food culture. After this theoretical discussion follows an analysis of the New Nordic Cuisine in four parts: (1) the ideology and the rapid success (2) the (failed) political project of democratizing the ideology (3) the criticism of the New Nordic Cuisine (4) the recent counter-reactions and movement away from the strict dogmas of the New Nordic Cuisine in the Copenhagen restaurant scene with a particular focus on the example of chef Christian Puglisi, and his work at the restaurant Relæ. In the concluding discussion, I will discuss how the New Nordic Cuisine could be understood as a part of a local-global-dynamic in contemporary food culture.

## CULINARY CAPITAL AND THE NORDIC IN CONTEMPORARY FOOD CULTURE

The article is driven by a Bourdieusian perspective on taste and food. For Bourdieu, taste (in relation to food or other kinds of cultural consumption)

“classify and classify the classifier.” This means that rather than reflecting individual expressions of “a self,” taste practices are understood as modes of social distinction, and they are used to demarcate and maintain social differences and hierarchies through consumption.<sup>5</sup>

Inspired by Bourdieu, Naccarato and Lebesco use the term “culinary capital” (derived from Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital) to understand “how and why certain foods and food-related practices connote, and by extension, confer status and power on those who know about and enjoy them.”<sup>6</sup> While culinary capital in the Western culture for many years has been closely associated with French food and eating culture, contemporary food culture has become increasingly more omnivore and open to include new culinary repertoires.<sup>7</sup> The omnivore age is not, however, a “relativistic cultural paradise where ‘anything goes’ and all foods are made legitimate. Instead, boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture are redrawn in new, complex ways that balance the need for distinction with the competing ideology of democratic equality and cultural populism.”<sup>8</sup>

In omnivore food culture, new taste ideals are invoked as distinctive, and the concept of authenticity, in particular, has become a positive marker adopted by “foodies” and the cultural élite. Authenticity may be expressed in various ways, but often it invokes a distancing from the homogenized and globalized food industry, and a “distance to the complexities of life in advanced industrialized societies.”<sup>9</sup>

In this article, I consider the New Nordic Cuisine as an example of such a new culinary repertoire trying to challenge the traditional, French-oriented understanding of good food by emphasizing its “authenticity.” Although it is difficult to define “authenticity” because it is used in so many contradictory ways, Johnston and Baumann identify several ideas that are often associated with “authenticity.” Some of the most important are *regional specificity*, *simplicity* and *history and tradition*.<sup>10</sup> The New Nordic Cuisine is clearly connected to these ideas with its cultivation of the Nordic region and the revitalizations of traditional food practices and forgotten ingredients. As such, the Nordic movement also plays on ideas and themes that are used more generally in what could be described as the “alternative” food movement that is rising across the Western world, with new ideologies such as

“slow food” or by new types of food events such as farmers’ markets.<sup>11</sup> In these initiatives, locavorism is very often a core value.<sup>12</sup>

With this Bourdieu-inspired perspective, I understand the New Nordic Cuisine and the counter-reactions to it as a part of a negotiation of what constitute legitimate taste and “culinary capital” in a food culture in which the culinary hierarchies no longer are fixed, but constantly subject to debate. In such a climate, new taste régimes work to position the people who represent them and those react against them.

It should be noted that social position and class are central elements to the Bourdieusian perspective. Despite the intention of democratization in the “alternative” food movement, social differentiation and class distinctions resonate throughout it, as these “alternative” spaces are adjusted to middle-class ideals,<sup>13</sup> and middle-class subjects use their ethical consumption to demonstrate their moral superiority and to problematize “bad consumers” from the working classes.<sup>14</sup> However, the social positions expressed through food are not just vertical and demarcating boundaries between working class and middle-class citizens, but they also mark boundaries between different groups within the middle class. The French Sociologist Michel Maffesoli described the phenomenon as neotribalism.<sup>15</sup> The contemporary food culture contains many examples of such middle-class social groups founded on competing ideologies such as paleo versus vegan.<sup>16</sup> In this article, I will mainly deal with the horizontal struggle for the right to define culinary capital through the focus on the Copenhagen restaurant scene, but in the section on the political ambition to popularize New Nordic Cuisine, the vertical axe will also be discussed.

## THE IDEOLOGY OF THE NEW NORDIC CUISINE

The invention of New Nordic Cuisine is commonly attributed to Danish food entrepreneur and TV chef Claus Meyer, who founded the restaurant NOMA in 2003, and had the idea of making a the New Nordic manifesto. As described above, the idea of the New Nordic Cuisine was to create a cuisine expressing the specificity of Scandinavian nature using only ingredients and produces from this region. However, as noted by food ethnologist

Håkan Jönsson, the ideas of the manifesto were far from new. Many of the ideas were also central to the “Nouvelle Cuisine” that dominated the culinary scene in the decades up to the conceptualization of the New Nordic Cuisine. The key idea of the Nouvelle Cuisine was to recreate a lighter and more delicate version of the French cuisine without heavy sauce or fatty dishes, and seasonality, freshness, local produces were a key to achieve this reconceptualization.<sup>17</sup> So Jönsson argues that the New Nordic manifesto was more a “codifications of practices than something new.”<sup>18</sup> Hereby Jönsson seems to suggest that the more general ideas of locavorism and seasonality as well as creating an innovative and precise culinary expression already existed, and the New Nordic Cuisine adopted these principles and put them to use within a Nordic context. So Jönsson’s argument seems to be that the New Nordic Cuisine was only new on a material level and not at a theoretical level as it was an application/codification of ideas already known, but in a new region focusing on new materials (Nordic products and traditions). If we accept this distinction, the New Nordic Cuisine was just as much an extension of the Nouvelle Cuisine as it was something radically different and novel. However, this legacy is not acknowledged in the New Nordic manifesto, rather the Nouvelle Cuisine—and the Mediterranean cuisine in general—is positioned as an anti-model.

But what was new about the New Nordic food movement was that it rapidly became a popular brand also at a political level and it attracted funding. It should be noted that the idea of a manifesto was inspired by the DOGMA 95 manifesto of Lars von Trier and other Danish movie directors, who wanted to change Danish movie making and succeeded in drawing international attention to their project through their manifesto.<sup>19</sup> The manifesto idea work very well for both DOGMA95 and the New Nordic Cuisine to brand the project as something radically new—although the novelty at least in the case of the New Nordic Cuisine is debatable.

As mentioned a key element of the manifesto and the branding of the New Nordic Cuisine as something novel was the way it explicitly challenged the Mediterranean—notably the French—cuisine. Produces like olive oil and foie gras were banned. The Mediterranean cuisine was traditionally understood as both more tasty and more healthful

that the traditional and less varied Nordic food. Meyer’s ambition was to prove that the New Nordic Cuisine could be both as tasty and “every bit as healthy as its Mediterranean counterpart.”<sup>20</sup> The desire to establish a distinction from Mediterranean cuisine is also evident in the aesthetics of the cookbooks and the restaurants of the New Nordic movement. Gray and dark blue nuances and raw wood seem to dominate the tableware, and variations of dark red (e.g. of red cabbage or beetroot) and dark green (e.g. in wild herbs or green cabbage) dominate the dishes. This is in stark contrast to the brilliant and sunny expression of many Mediterranean images, for instance, the iconic images of the Italian *tricolore* of basil green, mozzarella white and tomato red.<sup>21</sup>

This strategy proved successful. So paradoxically the New Nordic manifesto’s codification of the ideas of the French “Nouvelle Cuisine” led to the loss of prestige of the French and Mediterranean cuisine in Scandinavia. This also illustrates a central idea in Bourdieu’s understanding of the social constructions of legitimate taste, namely that “good taste” to a large extent is constructed by asserting what it is not. Taste ideals and social identity is constructed in and affirmed by difference.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of revitalizing the Nordic cuisines is certainly not new, but previous attempts saw French cuisine as an allied. In postwar Sweden, the chef Tore Wretman tried to create a true Swedish cuisine in form of the “smörgåsboard,” a buffet of many small dishes, but he also introduced new ingredients and cooking styles from the French cuisine to the Swedish public.<sup>23</sup> In the 1960s a series of prominent male artists and food writers criticized Danish food culture and the industrialization of particularly dairy and pork production. This movement who also founded *L’Académie de la Gastronomie Danoise* in 1964 (significantly with only a French name) “heralded France as a culinary apotheosis.”<sup>24</sup> The members of the *Académie* insisted that it was necessary to look to France and copy their culinary traditions to get create a proper Danish food culture. The same argument was brought forward by Claus Meyer—who had lived in France as a young man and became interested in food during that period—in the early 1990s.<sup>25</sup> However, Meyer changed his views, and the central idea behind New Nordic Cuisine and NOMA seems to be a rejection of

the preeminence of French and Mediterranean cuisine. So while Wretman and the Danish movement around *L'Académie de la Gastronomie Danoise* saw it as necessary to duplicate the French and Mediterranean food culture, the New Nordic Cuisine insisted on marking a distance to these cooking traditions—although the manifesto contained many of the same ideas. However, to underscore the “newness,” the inspiration of the “Nouvelle Cuisine” is not mentioned.

The dismissive approach of the New Nordic Cuisine toward Mediterranean gastronomy was received with some skepticism as many saw it as impossible to produce a serious alternative to the French cuisine; even persons who applauded the project were “doubtful about what, if anything, this manifesto would lead to.”<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the project became rapidly a success, and in 2006 the Nordic Council funded a program called “New Nordic Food—Enhancing Innovation in the Food, Tourism, and Experience Industry” (2007–2009) with 25 million DKR/ approximately 5 million USD. Also, NOMA earned two Michelin stars, and started to climb in the culinary ranking, notably the San Pellegrino list of best restaurants in the world, and soon followed other successful New Nordic restaurants. Fäviken has been a part of the San Pellegrino list since 2012, and the head chef at Fäviken, Magnus Nilsson, was portrayed as a great New Nordic artist in the prestigious Netflix Series *Chef's Tables* in 2016. This is an example of the wide-spread positive media coverage—in and out of Scandinavia—which has helped the brand to gain terrain. An earlier example is the television show, *Scandinavian Cooking* (initiated in 2003), that helped to popularize the New Nordic Cuisine to a larger audience. The program was hosted by several popular Nordic TV chefs, such as the Swedish Tina Nordström, and Claus Meyer. The show was shot in English and broadcast in more than 130 countries, and viewed by approximately 100 million viewers, according to the producers.<sup>27</sup>

According to a pan-Nordic analysis of the success of New Nordic Cuisine, the financial support and the well-orchestrated dissemination of the concept through the “creation of stories” were central to the deployment of the concept and the ideology (ibid. 38), but the study also highlighted that choosing an “empty label” such as “New Nordic” was a very smart move. Claus Meyer was very aware

of this “emptiness” and saw a potential in the concept of New Nordic, although he primarily was interested in developing the Danish food culture.<sup>28</sup> However, it was problematic to rebrand Danish in a culinary context as Meyer explains: “the Danish food brand was polluted . . . when you say Nordic food . . . [it was a] brand that was free, open space [allowing to] define what it is.”<sup>29</sup> Also, “Nordic” has attractive connotations, both through its political image of democratic, liberal welfare state, and through its brand value in terms of design and popular cultural productions such as TV series and crime novels. From a locavore perspective, one might ask whether geographically and historically it would have made more sense to create a cuisine around Denmark and Northern Germany,<sup>30</sup> as these regions share much more in terms of climate and landscape than Denmark and most of the other regions of Scandinavia, but of course the brand value of the “Nordic” is just stronger.

The New Nordic Cuisine was certainly an attempt to redefine what should be defined as culinary capital, and this successful redefinition also conferred status to the founders of the concept. For instance, Redzepi has explained that his conversion to the New Nordic is closely connected with his ambition of becoming the best chef in world. If he would continue to imitate French cooking as he did in his early jobs, he would always be considered as an imitation of the “authentic” French chefs in the greatest French restaurants,<sup>31</sup> but by adhering to a new taste régime and because this new taste repertoire was recognized internationally, he could become one of the leading chefs in the world.

## THE POLITICS OF THE NEW NORDIC CUISINE

From the earliest stages of the formulation of New Nordic Cuisine, the project had political ambitions to provoke a revolution of the Nordic food culture beyond the urban restaurant scene. Claus Meyer had a two-part vision of the project. Phase one aimed at defining the New Nordic Cuisine and testing this in a professional restaurant kitchen, but from the very first symposium, the mission was also to popularize the concept in a phase two,<sup>32</sup> and make New Nordic Cuisine accessible to the public through a New Nordic Diet.<sup>33</sup> With political initiative to democratize the

New Nordic Cuisine, Meyer's focus was again the context. In 2009, the Nordea Foundation gave DKK 100 million Danish (app. USD 20 million) to the OPUS project. The project was based at the University of Copenhagen and made in cooperation with Claus Meyer as well as a series of other actors. Opus is an acronym for "Optimal well-being, development and Health for Danish children through a healthy New Nordic Diet."<sup>34</sup> The project aimed to develop and test the benefits of the New Nordic Diet. This was done by comparing people who followed the diet with people eating and "ordinary" Danish diet. This comparison was done through home intervention among adults and by offering New Nordic school meals to selected schools. Here, Meyer joined forces with scientists, and it is evident that this alliance has helped to legitimize the idea of New Nordic Cuisine for the public.<sup>35</sup> The scientific strengths and neutrality of the project have been questioned, something to which I will return.

Simultaneously, Meyer developed several cookbooks on New Nordic everyday cooking. One of them, *Ny nordisk hverdagsmad* ["New Nordic Everyday Food"], was coauthored with professor of nutrition Arne Astrup, who was the leader of the OPUS project. The book was written and distributed in partnership with the supermarket association, FDB. This partnership helped to sell the book to a broad public. The book targeted the "typical" Danish nuclear family of two adults and two children—although this constellation is less typical than it used to be—and the introduction promises that the recipes had passed the "test of everyday life," so anyone should be able to create a menu with three New Nordic dishes every day. It was also promised that this locavore and sustainable diet would help people to become healthier. Another feature that is meant to underline the functionality of the book is the description of how leftovers may be used for the next day's lunch boxes. Through this detailed planning of everyday life, the gastronomic entrepreneur, the professor, and the supermarkets invited the reader to partake in a transformative project that is not just about individual well-being, but also involves a broader vision for restructuring society by reorganizing family life, the national economy, and the global climate.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the promises of accessibility, several studies by the sociologists working in the OPUS

project have questioned the accessibility of the New Nordic Diet. It appears that many of the dishes presented in the New Nordic Diet presented difficulties to the OPUS test participants, although they allegedly had passed "the test of everyday life." Time was a central problem, as was unfamiliarity with and unavailability of the ingredients<sup>37</sup>, and the skepticism seemed greater among those who preferred "traditional cuisine," and who felt that the recipes were "concocted by gourmets and experts, who are seeking to impose their food preferences on the population."<sup>38</sup> This may also support the idea that the New Nordic Diet caters to an open-minded, resourceful, and adventurous middle-class lifestyle with high "culinary capital," and accordingly, the ambition to democratize proved difficult which is the case with many "alternative" food movements.<sup>39</sup> The difficulty of democratizing food culture also underlines that despite recent changes in contemporary food culture away from the bourgeois French gastronomy toward a more omnivore taste ideal, class distinctions are still very clear in the contemporary food consumption.<sup>40</sup> Taste ideals of the urban middle-class subjects continue to be distinct from those of the working class subjects.

It is also remarkable that although the OPUS project constantly refers to a "Nordic" way of eating, it has a very explicit national focus on Denmark and the Danish population and its main partnerships are with the Danish school system and the Danish supermarket association. A similar national focus is found at the same time in Sweden. The Swedish Government launched the campaign "Sweden, the New Culinary Nation" in 2008. Inspired by the New Nordic Cuisine, the campaign aimed to develop the food and restaurant sectors nationally.<sup>41</sup> So although the New Nordic Cuisine originally could be understood as a pan-Nordic movement, and was supported by the Nordic Council in the first years, many of the subsequent initiatives seemed to focus on a national level. So the regional hype of the New Nordic Cuisine was used to push national, political agendas.

## THE CRITICISM OF NEW NORDIC CUISINE

The question of elitism has been raised by some of the relatively few public critics of the New Nordic Cuisine. Notably, chef Bo Jacobsen has argued

that the cuisine has no public appeal, but is just about top chefs trying to “impress journalists, food critics and not least each other.”<sup>42</sup> Sociologist Ulla Holm underscored the exclusiveness of the project and accused the project of being “fascist” in its exclusion of other cultures and in its emphasis on the superiority of the North.<sup>43</sup> This led to a big debate.<sup>44</sup>

In academia, criticism of the New Nordic has only recently begun to resonate with considerations of how the movement favors whiteness and gastrationalism<sup>45</sup> or gendered hierarchies between men’s and women’s cooking,<sup>46</sup> or how OPUS used “nudging” strategies to make people accept the diet.<sup>47</sup> Here, however, I would like to dwell on some critical studies of the media success of the movement.

Food sociologist Arun Micheelsen, who wrote his doctoral dissertation within the OPUS project on the acceptance of the New Nordic Diet, launched a critique of the project. His findings showed that there was significant resistance to the diet, and he publicly stated that when he tried to publish his results, OPUS’s scientific committee, with Claus Meyer and Arne Astrup, tried to make him tone down his critique, and manipulate the results. This became a big media story in August 2013. Astrup denied the allegations, and said that Micheelsen and his supervisors concluded too much, based on a limited, qualitative data set. In an essay, Micheelsen outlined the dispute and his experience as a sociologist in a project dominated by the natural sciences and Meyer’s ideology, and sponsored by a private foundation with high expectations of success and capitalizing on the success of New Nordic Diet. The essay accentuates how the OPUS project conflates the mythology and the branding of New Nordic Cuisine with the scientific documentation in a rather problematic way.<sup>48</sup>

The media has been relatively uncritical of New Nordic Cuisine. Sørensen and Müller examine the ways in which the media appear to have been seduced by Meyer’s energetic personality, and allowed Meyer to position himself as an idealist who, through his engagement with the New Nordic Cuisine and Diet, worked against the established capitalist food system, although in fact he is very much a part of the capitalist system. Notably when Meyer sold most of his business to IK Investments Partners for DKK 700 million in 2014. This sale

also underlines that “culinary capital” can be converted to other forms of capital, both symbolic and monetary.<sup>49</sup>

Media criticism seems to suggest that there has been great—almost naïve—goodwill in the media surrounding the narrative of the New Nordic Cuisine/Diet helping to secure the status of the brand. The story of an “authentic,” “alternative,” and “Nordic” food culture has been very easy for the media to accept, although the Danish population appears much more skeptical about the project, especially in adapting the new food régime in their everyday practices.

### **THE COUNTER-REACTIONS TO THE NEW NORDIC CUISINE**

The New Nordic Cuisine has experienced a huge success with international attention and countless restaurants following the dogmas of the New Nordic Cuisine, notably in Copenhagen. However, in the last few years there seems to have been some counter-reaction. Copenhagen has seen an upsurge in restaurants that reject concerns for locavorism, healthiness, and sustainability, for instance, in Copenhagen’s neighborhood of Vesterbro, the emergence of restaurants based on heavy and meaty American food, such as the restaurant Warpigs, serving “authentic Texas BBQ.”<sup>50</sup> Also, we see that people associated with New Nordic Cuisine try to go beyond the strict dogmatism of the movement without, however, rejecting everything about it. The American chef Adrien Norwood came to Copenhagen in search for the New Nordic Cuisine, but after some years at Geranium, the first restaurant to get three Michelin stars in Copenhagen with head chef Rasmus Kofoed, Norwood started an American inspired restaurant. In the press release on the opening of the restaurant in September 2013, Norwood explains: “New Nordic Cuisine has been a phenomenal success, one that has resonated across large parts of the planet. But if we are to continue attracting tourists to the city, something new must occur. Copenhagen has become an international metropolis with a pulse and the potential to offer more than just a regional New Nordic Cuisine. With our new American culinary concept we would like to be part of this innovative movement.”<sup>51</sup> Here, it is striking that the New Nordic Cuisine is no longer considered

as something innovative, but something which stands in the way for innovation.

The chef and owner of the restaurant Amass with its own vegetables garden, Matt Orlando, also expresses a desire to move beyond the New Nordic Cuisine. After several years in a leading position at NOMA, he has now gone solo. In an interview in the Danish newspaper Politiken, he emphasizes that his restaurant is not a Nordic restaurant, although 85% of the ingredients will be from the local region, but he does not want to be put in a box: "As a chef I want to be free to do what I want to do without being accountable to others."<sup>52</sup> Here the dogmatism of the New Nordic is seen as an obstacle to culinary creativity.

One of the most elaborate accounts of a desire to go beyond the New Nordic Cuisine is presented by former NOMA chef Christian Puglisi in his cookbook, *Relæ—A Book of Ideas* (2014), inspired by his work at restaurant Relæ, in the trendy neighborhood of Nørrebro, in Copenhagen. I would like to dwell a little on this book to analyze the resignification of the New Nordic Cuisine for this new generation. The food at Relæ embraces a lot of central ideas of the New Nordic Cuisine, notably the emphasis on sustainability, organic food, and locavorism. Also, in the menu, vegetables are given a much more significant position compared to the cuisines of the 1990s, and, furthermore, less common parts of animals—such as neck or shoulder of lambs—are served in the restaurant. However, Puglisi like Orlando feels a need to distance himself from the movement.

It is notable that *Relæ—A Book of Ideas* is written in English. Meyer and Redzepi have written cookbooks in Danish, primarily targeting a Danish public. Some of these were subsequently translated into other languages, but Puglisi targets an international audience directly. This also emphasizes that Puglisi has a different take on locavorism, a take that is colored by a much more cosmopolitan vision. Puglisi uses his own personal history to explain this vision: "I was born Italian, my mother is Norwegian and I have lived in Italy, Denmark, Spain and France. I am a child of a globalized world, and anyone who draws up national borders and geographical restrictions on people—or vegetables—always provoked me."<sup>53</sup> So despite his ideals of locavorism, Puglisi is also

heavily inspired by the cuisines of France, Italy, and other places. He uses Italian olive oil and anchovies from Spain without any hesitation. Therefore, he does not feel like he is part of the New Nordic movement, nor does he applaud its dogmas or its "simplistic" locavorism: "I am an individual, and Relæ is a unique restaurant with its own identity ... The question of whether our cooking is locavore, Nordic, Italian, or French is the same as asking me if I am Italian, Norwegian or Danish. The answer is yes to all of them."<sup>54</sup> Redzepi also has an immigrant background, but he was comfortable embracing the New Nordic dogmas.

Meyer and Redzepi saw a creative challenge in the manifesto that could spark culinary innovation, just as Lars von Trier and his DOGMA brothers saw a creative challenge in the commandments of the DOGMA95 for revolutionizing the film industry. For Puglisi, on the contrary, the dogmatism does not allow for creativity, it restricts creative freedom of the chef. This was also the point made by Matt Orlando. Furthermore, Puglisi suggests that the regional focus is not in tune with the globalized world in which he lives. So, the idea of a lost "Nordic order" that should be dogmatically rediscovered is presented as an obsolete way of thinking that is not compatible with being a modern individual.

With Relæ Puglisi wanted to disconnect himself from the world of fine dining that NOMA worked so hard to be a part of. Puglisi wanted to serve his food in "an environment that made guests feel welcome and relaxed"; and he continues his criticism:

I couldn't understand why a creative cuisine should be a slave to a luxurious dining room and its oppressive style of service ... I can pretty much take care of finding the toilet, at least the second time I go, and I prefer pouring my own water, thank you very much. It felt like everyone was putting an array of extraneous things on top of my dining experience. I didn't want those things and I sure didn't want to pay for them.<sup>55</sup>

This criticism targets the traditions and the structures of the entire fine dining industry, and Puglisi's ambition was to subvert the norms and codes of this world. However, this criticism may also be read as a more specific criticism of NOMA, as though Puglisi suggests that although

NOMA has challenged the ideas of fine dining by rejecting the Mediterranean and French cuisine and products, Redzepi's restaurant has not—in the hunt for Michelin stars—dared to challenge the formality of the fine dining experience. So, an important part of the ambition driving Relæ is to go that step further.

In Redzepi's *NOMA* cookbook from 2010<sup>56</sup>, the illustrations are dominated by photos of dishes served at NOMA, but these are accompanied by many images of Nordic landscapes, and portraits of peoples collecting the Nordic ingredients unique to NOMA. In Puglisi's cookbook we do not find a single landscape image. Puglisi's locavor and organic cuisine is integrated into a trendy urban space, namely Jægersborggade, the street in which the restaurant is located. Over the last few years, both Jægersborggade and the neighborhood Nørrebro in which the street is situated have changed from being a rather rough part of town to becoming a hip, gentrified district with many well-educated inhabitants, bearded hipsters, and a diversity of “cool” shops and restaurants catering to this demographic. This development of the neighborhood is carefully described by Puglisi, and illustrated by several photos of this urban microcosm. So whereas the *NOMA* cookbook went to great lengths to visually associate the food on the plates with Nordic nature, *Relæ* tries to integrate locavorism within a modern urbanity that does not appear particularly Danish, but a part of a transurban hipster culture. So, *Relæ* is negotiating an interesting position that includes some of the ethical concerns of the alternative food movement, but rather than relating these to romanticized portraits of an eternal, but lost essence of nature (as in *NOMA*), they are integrated into a dynamic, cosmopolitan urbanity.

Puglisi has overtaken many of the central ideas of the New Nordic cuisine in his cooking philosophy, particularly the focus on vegetables and the ethical approach to food and “sound production”—*Relæ* was the first certified organic Michelin Restaurant in the world. Also, despite not being 100% on Nordic ingredients, he uses a high percentage of local ingredients and produces compared to the Michelin Restaurant of the 1990s. However, it seems critical to *Relæ*'s brand to create distance to the New Nordic.

## THE NEW NORDIC CUISINE MOVING TO NEW YORK

Considering the history of the New Nordic Cuisine, there are some very interesting dynamics around its conceptualization that are repeated in the recent counter-reactions to it. With the manifesto of the New Nordic Cuisine and its application at NOMA, Meyer and Redzepi worked hard to highlight that what they did was radically new and to mark a distance to the French and Mediterranean cuisines. They were successful in their attempt to challenge the status of these cuisines which had defined good taste for centuries. Although it could be argued that the ideas of the New Nordic Cuisine to a large extent were borrowed from the *Nouvelle Cuisine*, this legacy was not mentioned as it might diminish the novelty of the project. So the newness was primarily defined through distance and by modes of distinction. Similarly, the new generation of chefs who reacted against the dogmatism of the New Nordic, all emphasized that they did not belong to the New Nordic Cuisine, and they did not highlight the elements of the New Nordic Cuisines they inherited. Particularly Puglisi's cooking style owes a lot to the New Nordic Cuisine with its focus on sound production and vegetables; the food philosophy at *Relæ* is certainly not a return to “*Nouvelle Cuisine*” or to the playful molecular gastronomy.<sup>57</sup> It appears much closer to the food of the New Nordic movement than these two cuisines. However, the distance to the New Nordic is vital to Puglisi's brand.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this new generation may be seen as a “natural” reaction to the New Nordic Cuisine, because just as the New Nordic chefs needed to challenge French and Mediterranean cuisine to establish their own distinctive positions in the culinary field, Puglisi depended on a refusal of the New Nordic Cuisine to claim originality. And just as Redzepi argued that he could only be an imitation of the “real” French chef when cooking French food, Puglisi and his generation could only be copies of Redzepi as long as they cooked New Nordic Cuisine. So Puglisi and his generation had to distance themselves from the New Nordic food movement if they wanted to have a high status in the culinary field. At the same time, Puglisi and his colleagues profit from the global attention that the New Nordic Cuisine have brought to Copenhagen and

made it a favored destination for foodies from around the world.

Thus, the case of the New Nordic Cuisine also highlights the complex and often contradictory dynamics of the local and the global in contemporary food and consumer culture. The middle-class food culture is currently very engaged with ethical and environmental issues and locavorism is often highly praised. At the same time, middle-class consumers are to a large extent children of the globalized world, and it is also prestigious to have a diverse and exotic portfolio of taste experiences. So just as Puglisi, the middle-class foodie does not want to be limited by a radical, locavore dogmatism; the foodie (and Puglisi) wants the best of both worlds, the local and the global world, and the freedom to shop around these worlds.

Another aspect of the local-global dynamic of the New Nordic food movement was offered when Claus Meyer in 2015 announced that he would move to New York. It is not to say if it was because of the difficulties of democratizing the New Nordic Cuisine or due to the lost prestige of the New Nordic Cuisine among the new generation of chefs in Copenhagen, but Meyer decided to leave the Danish capital and open a Nordic food market and a Nordic restaurant at the Grand Central Station. Here, the New Nordic Cuisine still has a certain freshness to it, and certainly some of the culinary elite will gladly pay 8 dollars for a “Danish Dog” in the New Nordic hotdog stand. To serve New Nordic Cuisine in New York City might seem somewhat contradictory to the original, locavore ideas of the movement, but if you can make it (Nordic) there, you can make it (Nordic) anywhere.

## Notes

1. “Læs hele Lars Løkkes engelske tale”, Politiken. The speech is reproduced in its entirety in the Danish newspaper POLITIKEN’s website: [http://politiken.dk/udland/int\\_usa/ECE3205929/laes-hele-lars-loekkes-engelske-tale/](http://politiken.dk/udland/int_usa/ECE3205929/laes-hele-lars-loekkes-engelske-tale/) (accessed May 20, 2016).
2. “The concept, *terroir*, is traditionally connected with French wine production and can loosely be translated as the ‘taste of place’... Terroir often evokes the idea of the cultivated land, or in other words, the notion of human domain taking over the natural world. However, in the case of the New Nordic *terroir*, the concept tends to be used in the context of the traditional image of the *uncultivated*, pristine, wild, fresh Nordic nature.” Hanne Pico Larsen and Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch, “Foraging for Nordic Wild Food,” in *The Return of Traditional Food*, ed. Patricia Lysaght (Lund: Lund University Studies, 2013), 70.
3. The World’s 50 Best Restaurants <http://www.theworlds50best.com/list/past-list/2010> (accessed May 30, 2016).
4. Håkan Jönsson, “The Road to the New Nordic Cuisine,” in *The Return of Traditional Food*, ed. Patricia Lysaght (Lund: Lund University Studies, 2013), 66.
5. Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979).
6. Peter Naccarato and Katie LeBesco, *Culinary Capital* (New York, NY: Berg Publishing, 2012), 3.
7. Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, *Foodies* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
8. Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, “Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing,” *American Journal of Sociology* 3 (2007): 179.
9. Johnston and Baumann, *Foodies*, 85.
10. *Ibid.*, 69–96.
11. Jessica Paddock, “Positioning Food Cultures: ‘Alternative’ Food as Distinctive Consumer Practice,” *Sociology* (2015). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0038038515585474>
12. Locavorism refers to cuisines based on local products. The actual meaning of “local” is however a subject of debate cf. Jan Arend Schulp, “Locavorism and seasonal eating,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Sustainable Food and Gastronomy*, eds. Philip Sloan et al. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 120–121.
13. Paddock, “Positioning Food.”
14. Joanne Hollows and Steve Jones, “‘At Least he’s Doing Something’: Moral Entrepreneurship and Individual Responsibility in Jamie’s Ministry of Food,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3 (2010): 307–322.
15. Michel Maffesoli, *Le temps des tribus* (Paris: Table Ronde, 1988).
16. Jonatan Leer and Karen Klitgaard Povlsen, *Food and Media: Practices, Distinctions and Heterotopias* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1–18.
17. Exponents for this movement were famous personalities as Paul Bocuse and Roger Vergé cf. Carl Th. Pedersen and Jørgen Fakstorp, *Gastronomisk Leksikon* (København: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 2010), 224.
18. Jönsson, “The Road,” 63.
19. Karen Wistoft, “Ny Nordisk Nudging,” *Social Kritik* 4 (2015): 28–36.
20. “Nordic Cuisine”, The official website of Denmark, <http://denmark.dk/en/green-living/nordic-cuisine/the-new-nordic-cuisine> (accessed May 25, 2016).
21. Jonatan Leer, “Den ny nordiske mand,” *Social kritik* 4 (2015): 21.
22. Bourdieu, *La distinction*, 191.

23. Nicklas Neuman and Christina Fjellström, "Gendered and Gendering Practices of Food and Cooking: An Inquiry into Authorisation, Legitimation and Androcentric Dividends in three Social Fields," *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 4 (2014): 275.
24. Caroline Nyvang, "Good Fare and Welfare: Perceptions of American and French Food Culture in Postwar Cookbooks," in *Food and Media: Practices, Distinctions and Heterotopias*, eds. Jonatan Leer and Karen Klitgaard Povlsen (London: Routledge, 2016), 32.
25. Bi Skårup, "The New Nordic Diet and Danish Food Culture," in *The Return of traditional Food*, ed. Patricia Lysaght (Lund: Lund University Studies, 2013), 49.
26. Ibid.
27. Haldor Byrkjeflot, Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen, and Silviya Svejnova, "From Label to Practice: The Process of Creating New Nordic Cuisine," *Journal of Culinary Science & Technology* 11 (2013): 45.
28. The national focus on the Danish food culture—rather than the Nordic—is evident in the foreword to his first cookbook from 1994, *Året rundt i Meyer's Køkken*, and echoed in an interview in 2014 in which he explains that NOMA was not a goal in itself, but an instrument in 20 years long struggle to challenge the miseries of the Danish food culture. <http://politiken.dk/mad/madnyt/ECE2172579/opgoer-med-det-ny-nordiske-koekken-er-det-tid-til-at-loefte-blikket-fra-plovfuren/> (accessed May 20, 2016).
29. Quoted in Byrkjeflot et al., "From Label," 45.
30. Bo Ærenlund Sørensen and Anders Riel Müller, "Meyer som appetitvækkende gastrokapitalist," *Social Kritik* 4 (2015): 52–61.
31. Jönsson, "The Way," 63.
32. Skårup, "The New," 50–51.
33. "Grundlag for ny nordisk hverdagsmad", University of Copenhagen, <http://foodoffice.ku.dk/opus/media/docs/pdf/Grundlag-for-Ny-Nordisk-Hverdagsmad.pdf/> (accessed May 20, 2016).
34. Charlotte Mithril et al., "Guidelines for the New Nordic Diet," *Public health nutrition* 15 (2012): 1941–1947.
35. Byrkjeflot et al., "From Label," 46–47.
36. Caroline Nyvang, "Ny Nordisk Hverdagsmad," *Social Kritik* 4 (2015): 50.
37. Arun Micheelsen, Lotte Holm, and Katherine O'Doherty Jensen, "Consumer Acceptance of the New Nordic Diet. An Exploratory Study," *Appetite* 70 (2013): 14–21.
38. Ibid., 20.
39. Jessica Paddock, "Invoking simplicity: 'Alternative' Food and the Reinvention of Distinction," *Sociologia Ruralis* 55 (2015): 22–40.
40. Naja B. Stamer, *The Social Dynamics of Food Consumption—Exploring the Role of Values, Taste and Social Class* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2016).
41. Neuman and Fjellström, "Gendering," 278.
42. "10 år med ny nordisk mad", Food Culture, <http://www.foodculture.dk/tema/foedevarer/2013/10-aar-med-nordisk-mad/elitaer-klappebamse-eller-folkelig-succes#.V1A8M-SZM0Y> (accessed May 20, 2016).
43. "Noma er fascisme", Politiken, <http://politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/ECE1275730/noma-er-fascisme-i-avantgardistiske-klaer/> (accessed May 30, 2016).
44. "Madsociologen de kaldte nazi-Ulla", Politiken, <http://politiken.dk/mad/ECE2595160/madsociologen-de-kaldte-nazi-ulla-kokke-er-ikke-vor-tids-frelsere/> (accessed May 30, 2016).
45. Rikke Andreassen, "The Search for the White Nordic: Analysis of the Contemporary New Nordic Kitchen and Former Race Science," *Social Identities* 6 (2014): 438–451.
46. Jonatan Leer, "Ma(d)skulinitet i nynordiske koge-bøger," *Social kritik* 4 (2015): 16–27.
47. Wistoft, "Dogmemad," 42–29.
48. Arun Micheelsen, "En autoetnografisk fabel om tilblivelserne af ny nordisk hverdagsmad," *Social Kritik* 4 (2015): 41–48.
49. Sørensen and Müller, "Meyer," 52–61.
50. Linda Lapina and Jonatan Leer, "Carnivorous Heterotopias: Gender, Nostalgia and Hipsterness in the Copenhagen Meat Scene," *NORMA: International Journal of Masculinity Studies* (2016). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2016.1184479>
51. "Press Release", MS Amerika, [http://www.msamerika.dk/aktuelt/Press\\_Release\\_Sep\\_2013\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.msamerika.dk/aktuelt/Press_Release_Sep_2013_ENG.pdf) (accessed May 30, 2016).
52. "Opgør med det ny nordiske køkken", Politiken, <http://politiken.dk/mad/madnyt/ECE2172579/opgoer-med-det-ny-nordiske-koekken-er-det-tid-til-at-loefte-blikket-fra-plovfuren/> (accessed May 20, 2016).
53. Christian Puglisi, *Relæ: A Book of Ideas* (London: Ten Speed Press, 2014), 33.
54. Ibid., 32–3.
55. Ibid., 14–15.
56. Redzepi, *NOMA* (København: Politikens Forlag, 2011).
57. Molecular gastronomy is a culinary movement using scientific methods to create spectacular and surprising meals. It was invented by the scientist Nicholas Kurti and Hervé This in 1988 (Pedersen and Fakstorp, *Gastronomisk*, 210). It is particularly associated with the renowned chef Ferran Adrià and his groundbreaking work at the restaurant El Bulli. See Isabelle De Solier, "Liquid nitrogen pistachios: Molecular gastronomy, elBulli and foodies," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 (2010): 155–170.

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