



**FERRAN ADRIÀ**

**in conversation with Corby Kummer & Harold McGee**

**A Day at elBulli**

**October 10, 2008**

**Celeste Bartos Forum**

**LIVE at the New York Public Library**

**[www.nypl.org/live](http://www.nypl.org/live)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Good evening. My name is Paul Holdengräber and I'm the director of public programs at the New York Public Library. "Expect wasabi" is our new motto for this season. No more lions roaring, you will be relieved to hear. "Expect wasabi" seems quite perfect and nearly tailored to welcome one of the greatest chefs today, Ferran Adrià. A couple of weeks ago we had wasabi, all right, with Spike Lee and James McBride. On October 29th, we have another great cook, Grant Achatz. On October 27th, join us for an evening about the

perverse pleasures of obituaries, naturally entitled “Live from the New York Public Library presents Dead from the New York Public Library.” **(laughter)** October 28th an evening entitled “Can the Economy Be Saved?” with Nouriel Roubini, Jeffrey Sachs, Fareed Zakaria, and others. Following on October 30th, as is only fitting, by an evening on Dracula. The Live season will end on December 9th with a conversation I will have with the conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim, preceded by numerous other events during the season. To find out more, join our e-mail list. Tonight, if you fill out our survey, you will get two free tickets, so be sure to do that. I encourage all of you to become Friends of the New York Public Library, join the New York Public Library, support it. It is easy to do so. Information is available on the tables at the exit.

After the conversation, which will last about as long as a psychoanalytical session—expect somewhere around 59 minutes—Ferran Adrià will show a short video, expect about ten minutes. The order may change, actually. There will be a Q & A. After the Q & A, 192 Books will sign Ferran Adrià’s small tome published by Phaidon, *A Day at elBulli*. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Liz Thompson at Phaidon as well as Kim Yorio who have been so helpful and wonderful to work with. Also, it has been a pleasure speaking with Lucy Garcia, Ferran Adrià’s translator. Now it is my great pleasure to introduce to you one of the great librarians and curators of the New York Public Library, Rachel Federman.

**(applause)**

**REBECCA FEDERMAN:** Good evening, my name is Rebecca Federman, and I’m the Curator of Culinary Collections here at the New York Public Library and I’m as excited as all of you are

to be here tonight to listen to what I am sure will be a very spirited conversation. But I'm also excited to be here tonight to be able to address this intimate crowd of five hundred people who all share a love and interest of food. Because just outside these doors, in this very building, lies one of the most comprehensive culinary collections available in the United States, and it's available and free of charge to every one of you, no matter which borough you live in, which state you live in, or even which country you live in.

We have a wonderful collection of historic and current cookbooks, but our real treasures lie in our menu collection and that sets us apart from a lot of other libraries and institutions. We have roughly forty thousand restaurant menus in our collection, and, as you can see here, this is our earliest menu which is from 1843, it's the Astor House menu from the Ladies' Ordinary, which is where the ladies went to eat calves' brains. We also have a collection of current menus. Just today I received a package of WD-50 menus to add to our collection. That's our latest acquisition. And we also have special events menus, such as the JFK's birthday menu from the Waldorf Astoria, which is right over there. We recently received thirteen hundred menus from a donor who liked to eat at coffee shops and diners and Lower East Side eateries that no longer exist today. But these menus represent a bygone era of New York City history and these menus are crucial evidence of the way people lived and ate. And researchers come frequently to look at these menus and consult them.

But while we have a wonderful historic collection, I want to stress that the New York Public Library's culinary collection is a living and breathing collection. We still collect cookbooks; we still buy them, frequently. We still collect pieces of culinary ephemera, and we still definitely

collect menus. So consider this an invitation, an invitation for all of you to come and use our collection. It's free and available to you all and there is a one-sheet on all of your chairs that gives you some information on how to access the collection. There are some links for the CATNYP catalog and for our menu collection database. Of note on the one-sheet of particular interest is the Treasures from the New York Public Library, which is a number of different videos that highlight some collections but our menus and cookbooks video is particularly special because Lidia Bastianich, who is here tonight, contributed her time and expertise to the project and we were very thankful for that. Thank you, Lidia. So, in short, the New York Public Library is committed to serving not only the food scholars' community but the food enthusiast community and not only in New York City but around the world. Thank you and enjoy the program.

**(applause)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Thank you, Rachel, I mean Rebecca. He spent hours as a kitchen slave to Mario Batali, line cook, pasta maker, and apprentice to a Dante-quoting butcher in Tuscany, an adventure he recounts with gusto in his book *Heat*, won the James Beard Foundation journalism award, was on this very stage not so long ago with Anthony Bourdain and Mario Batali, Batali having requested that night for there to be beer on the stage. You will have recognized and will join me in welcoming to now properly introduce Corby Kummer, Harold McGee and Maestro Ferran Adrià, Bill Buford.

**(applause)**

**BILL BUFORD:** This is no small task. I think there's two ways to approach Ferran Adrià—as a god and as a mortal. As a god, he's the person that Alain Ducasse described on the cover of the book that you will probably buy on exiting, “the greatest chef on the planet,” and as a mortal, he's just, you know, a guy in the kitchen. As a god, you go to his restaurant, as many of my friends have, including Mario Batali, expecting everything—perfection, the dream, the best meal of your entire life, and you come away noting that the plates are small, and there's a whole lot of courses, and the lavatory door didn't really close, and besides there's a long line of people at the lavatory.

I went for the first time with my wife and had my first meal at EdBulli at 7:45 p.m. on Tuesday July 30 this past summer and I was going to see a guy in the kitchen. I have to admit I was a little skeptical. I mean, he's been around a long time, this Ferran Adrià, and we know his food, or we at least know the imitations, like this foam. What's with foam? I mean, it's like aerated toothpaste. I'm privileged to have become a father recently and we have two toddlers and they go out every day and they get really, really dirty and we stick their clothes in the washing machine, and we throw in a lot of soap, especially if I'm there taking care of them, and then eventually what comes out of the pipe—foam. You wanna eat that? Or—And all this stuff they do with nitrogen, you know, like, they drop something in the nitrogen, and they mumble something and then out comes this little toad that you're meant to eat, or this other thing, I can't even remember what it's called, it's like bathing your food in sodium alginate. Since when did everyone become a chemist? Do you know what sodium alginate is? I looked it up. It's the sodium salt of alginic acid. Does that help?

Recently I had a conversation with Ruben Garcia, who works with Jose Andres, who's here tonight, and Will Goldfarb. And what these three men have in common as they all worked for Ferran Adrià and I was between Will Goldfarb, who's a pastry chef who's famous for delivering desserts in a gas mask and Ruben Garcia and I said, "What is it with Ferran Adrià, what's the deal?" And Ruben took a tomato and said, "Tomato. Many people take the peel, many people take the flesh, many people take the water. Ferran takes the seeds and he goes into the seeds and he goes into the depth of the seeds. Do you get it?" **(laughter)** I have no idea what he's talking about.

Molecular gastronomy? Six months in a laboratory? I kind of like Grandma's cooking, so I was going as a pretty skeptical guy. You can see where this is headed and I'm going to show you, very shortly, a video but first I wanted to make a few random observations about the meal that we did have. One is that there was no bread. You couldn't have any bread. There was an Italian at our table and at one point he said, "Panne, por favore," to the waitress. And she panicked, "Panne," and she was stricken. "There is no bread, no bread allowed." Loved that. Or the meat course. The meat course was course 35 and it consisted of three baby pig tails, tiny baby pig tails, beautifully crisp, beautifully fried, on the side of the plate. Ferran, afterwards as we got to know him, said, "It's very hard to get baby pig tails. Weeks. Nobody would send me a baby pig tail." Actually, I lie, there was one other meat course, course 28, which was beautifully prepared pork tendons. Now, pork tendons are connective tissue. It's the bit that everybody throws away, it's the bit that you learn how to be a butcher to learn how to get rid of, but these were a meat course and they were delicious. But, you know, the sweets, sweet things like chocolate, were

savory, savory things like beets were sweet, and everything was all confused until we got a Schezuan button, which electrified our tongues, my wife leapt from the chair and was trying to go home and we were all numb for thirty minutes and utterly in this man's power. I think this might be a good time for that video. This is a video of a day in the restaurant.

**(music during video)**

**BILL BUFORD:** Who needs drugs? **(applause)** Tonight Ferran Adrià's going to be questioned and interrogated by two of our most formidable writers about food, Corby Kummer, who has made his great name at *Atlantic Monthly* and is a great advocate of Slow Food. EdBulli is probably the fastest Slow Food you will have in your life and Harold McGee, who is the smartest man on food alive, and if you have not bought his books on the science of cooking, you need to do so immediately, and if you have them you need to reread them every day.

On the 29th of July, my wife and I had, not unlike the couple at that table in that video, the greatest meal of our lives, unquestionably, unequivocally, and at the end of it, I was not skeptical anymore and therefore on behalf of the New York Public Library and Corby Kummer and Harold McGee, it is my privilege to introduce Ferran Adrià, no longer a guy, but clearly the greatest chef on the planet, possibly the greatest chef ever, Ferran Adrià, god.

**(applause)**

**CORBY KUMMER:** Welcome, all of you, and for those of you who won't be getting on a plane, considering the recent news, maybe that's a lot of us won't be getting on a plane in the near future, we've at least had a hint of the continuous orgasm that awaits us all when we visit elBulli, a pleasure that unlike Bill Buford, who wonderfully evoked it, thank you, Bill, I've not had, I have to confess that right away, but Harold McGee, who does know everything and is the smartest person in the world, has, twice, and he's not only survived to tell the tale, he'll be talking quite stimulatingly about it, but one thing that will get when you buy that book, as you will, is a sense of how much Ferran considers himself an artist and that's where I want to lead off, because Adrià has redefined the role of the chef, I think, for all of us and I'll come to the science and the technique, which is what's always talked about with him, later, but for now it's the artistry, and it's the idea of the workshop, which he's revived, I don't know if all of you in the legend, and if you're one of the two million who's been refused entry once a year know, but six months of the year, Ferran spends in Barcelona at his own laboratory, thinking, creating, inventing, leading a team of mostly scientists who will invent dishes for the rest of the year, which is for the six months he's open, he's there every night.

So I wanted to ask Ferran, who draws so much on other disciplines in his food, deconstruction, for example, an idea that took the world by storm and that you can see everywhere in New York right now, was suggested by architect friends, and I wonder, did you model your studio, elBulli el Taller on architects or couturiers or who were the artists whom you had in mind. You talk about Tàpies a lot, and your reliance on Tàpies and your influence. You all know Tàpies, the great Catalan artist, there's a whole museum devoted to him, nearby the laboratory in Barcelona,

and I wonder if you even went back to the Renaissance, Velásquez, Verrocchio, and then Bernini and Rubens in the idea of a workshop?

[NOTE: Ferran Adrià speaks through a translator throughout]

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** Yes. **(laughter)** Good night.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Not yet.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** If I had known I was going to be in such a marvelous building, I would have started younger. **(laughter)** I never dreamed I would be with this wonderful audience and in this incredible environment. Thanks to everybody for coming. And big thanks to Phaidon for organizing this tour and thanks to Paul for inviting me. When I was told about the tour and I just saw, you know, a library, a bookshop, I wasn't sure. **(laughter)** "That's okay, fine, fine."

**(laughter)** It's probably one of my virtues and possibly also a defect, I tend to say yes to everything, anything that excites me. When I realized where I was, I thought, "Wow, what am I going to tell these people so they'll be interested in what I have to say?" **(laughter)** And I hope during this conversation I will be able to transmit and explain what elBulli is about.

I put this video on. The man in the video has no relationship with Bill. They look alike but nothing to do. **(laughter)** This gentleman is possibly one of my oldest clients. He's the person who has eaten most at elBulli and personally I think it's the most wonderful piece of video on people eating. It was filmed at elBulli when elBulli was open, an area of the dining area, and we

filmed for four hours. And it's probably the only visual way I can find to explain what elBulli is about. And it's very difficult to explain what elBulli is about.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Let me ask you about—The workshop—the question that I asked.

**(laughter)**

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** A lot of people talk about elBulli, but very few people have actually been.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Raise your hands everybody who has been to elBulli in this group.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** But as far as El Taller, the workshop, there is a bigger myth, very, very few people have actually been. Harold has been. People may think it's like a proper science lab, you know, with testing tubes and the like. And it's not at all like that. There are chefs, cooks, knives, and very little else. And with a very great passion to creativity. I will talk about the relationship between science and cooking. The first myth I want to dispel is that elBulli is not a laboratory at all. My relationship with science began in the year 2004. And the relationship between high-end gastronomy is directly connected to cuisine. It's a very, very young science. It's a very exciting new field, but it's still very young.

**CORBY KUMMER:** It's a young field that you have been one of the great innovators in, but who have been your models? And were you were aiming to—no other chefs have that kind of lab

that you have at El Taller. Why did you decide to start it? Hiring two chemists, for the first, and what are some of the other people who work there? From what sciences?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** In 1996, together with Robuchon, who was considered at the time the best chef in the world, he decided to retire, and he came back. He—you have to now go back and envision this—he retired in 1996 and publicly he said that he is—the heir was Ferran Adrià. The minister of culture and the minister of tourism called him up personally and asked him “Are you absolutely mad?” It was a historical feat in Europe at that moment. I took an airplane and I turned up in Paris. “I’d like to see you, because I’d like to thank you.” And he asked me, “where are you?” and I said, “No, I’m here downstairs.” He said, “Okay, come up.” So we had a conversation, and he gave me just one piece of advice. He said, “You’re going to have so much work and you’re going to be so busy you’re not going to have time to create.”

And on the flight back I started thinking, “Well, why don’t I create a workshop like most creative people have, a space to work and create and develop?” So we decided to start it up. I called my friends who were chefs, I called the press, and nobody could tell me of anybody who had created anything similar. So where do we start? How do we do it? We started off with just a table and a chair and twenty books. That was 1997. And we learned on the first of January 2000 we inaugurated the actual El Taller, and slowly we started to learn and to what it’s become now. There are no chemists at the El Taller. It’s another big myth.

**CORBY KUMMER:** I thought I read it in your book.

**(laughter)**

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** No. For a time we started a dialogue with science that is now a foundation called Alicia, and everybody in the scientific world is involved. I realized we had to create a dialogue with science and scientists. Like the dialogues Frank Gehry or Ron Arad or any other creators in any discipline will create a dialogue with.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Tell us who is in the staff of El Taller, then, is it all cooks, is it your *equipe* from the rest of the year? Who all is there?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** Five people, five cooks.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Your brother?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** Albert Adria, Oriol Castro, Casañas, Eduard Xatruch—those are the five team members. They are all chefs.

**CORBY KUMMER:** All chefs.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** As in a lot of disciplines, as in a lot of disciplines, we try to develop and create a dialogue with many other disciplines: science, history, and so on. This is the biggest revolution in cuisine right now that chefs want to have knowledge, want to acquire knowledge, but we can't be expected to know everything, so we started to collaborate with specialized

people. The people who are closest are people in the science world but we have to be careful because it's been going on for years and years. For example, bread, the best artisanal bread you can find in New York, you can find very specialized people in all over the world, scientists, who are working on getting the best flour quality. And trying to reach, find the best cooking for bread. And nobody would think to call that a scientific bread. **(laughter)** Science is everything.

**CORBY KUMMER:** But you still can't get it, because the chronology says in 1991, you stopped serving bread because you said that "anyone can get bread anyplace else in the world, they have to come here for what only I can give them."

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** You said 1991.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Well, I'm reading from the book.

**(laughter)**

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** I didn't know the questions. I realized that at a very certain moment in my career that something wasn't working in restaurants, especially avant-garde restaurants. If I go to Harold's home with Corby, I don't get a menu. I'll sit at his table, and Harold will cook whatever he pleases. **(laughter)** I can't ask Harold, "hey, can I get this salad?" So I thought, "how is it possible that an avant-garde restaurant should have a menu?" When people read the menus it's like reading Chinese or Indian, that is if you are not Chinese or Indian. **(laughter)** You won't understand anything, so it's a kind of tragicomical situation, a table and you have to decide what

to order, so people were embarrassed to ask, so they don't order. This also happens, though, when you go to a Japanese restaurant for the first time. Everything that is new and novel, when it's new, you need to just let yourself go. And that's the reason I took the menu away.

**CORBY KUMMER:** And it was in 2002, according to his book. No more menus. And Harold, I was asking Harold before, I want you to take us through a dish that you remember eating in one of your two meals there and tell us I had to know how to make this. You know, what absolutely leapt out at you as in "I've never had anything like this. I must know, I cannot imagine how it was made." And he looked at me and he said, "But you know it was thirty-five dishes and there was no menu." Because the whole idea is you're like those people on the screen, you're constantly surprised, you're constantly taken off balance, and there would be no point in having a menu, because it's all new experiences you've never had before, but afterward, as you all might know, you do get a little souvenir that has a suggestion of what the courses were, so have you been able to think, because you were going to think back, without your prompt sheet, of some of the dishes you had and what you really wanted to know about?

**HAROLD MCGEE:** And the thought that immediately came to my mind was that's not the way I experienced my meals at elBulli. I thought going into those experiences, that it was going to be exactly that, that it was going to be this occasion for kind of, you know, an analytical Olympics, trying to figure out each dish and how it was done and instead I just got caught up kind of in what you saw on the screen, which is that dishes are placed in front of you, first of all, they're beautiful and that's something I'd love to know about is where that comes from. We hear a lot about the strange compounds, alginates, and things like that that are used, but the first thing that

hits you is just how beautiful the dishes are, and then they're delicious, and by the time you get through processing those facts and sharing them with your tablemates, it's time for the next course. And so there were dishes that I was puzzled by, I really had no idea how they were done.

The second time I ate there, I actually ate at the kitchen table, and Ferran was there to explain how things were done, if we wanted to know, and the one that came to my mind is actually something that was seemed very simple but completely inexplicable and that was a cup of coconut, essence of coconut, tasted like the most intense coconut I've ever had, and it was a shell that looked as though if it had been scooped out of the coconut, so I expected when I picked it up that it was going to be tough and chewy like a piece of coconut and in fact it was neither hot nor cold, it was room temperature, it was neither hard nor soft.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Was it liquid or solid, could you even tell?

**HAROLD MCGEE:** It was solid enough to pick up, but it melted in my mouth. So it was the essence of coconut without any of the battle that you have to do to deal with coconut and I had no idea how that was made. Ferran explained to us and said that in fact it wasn't quite as good as it should be because it was a very humid day and it was such a delicate thing that it changed minute by minute once they took it out of the dehydrator. So that's an example of a piece of what you might think of maybe as a high-tech equipment, a dehydrator, which a lot of, a vacuum dehydrator, which a lot of restaurants don't have, but put to the use so that when you're presented with something on a plate, you don't say, "oh man, that must have been done in a

vacuum dehydrator, how interesting,” it’s “that’s the best piece of coconut I’ve ever had in my life.”

**CORBY KUMMER:** Which is the goal, to make people experience food in a way they haven’t before. But Ferran, do you want people to know what they’re eating?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** To know about food and eating is a rather difficult task, a really difficult one, impossible. **(laughter)** How many different types of carrots are there? What are the references we have? Multiplying that by all the different ingredients available in the world, you realize you just can’t know, you won’t have the knowledge. In the end, it’s a question of emotion and it has no cultural reference, it’s an animal instinct. And what I want is when somebody comes to eat at elBulli, they should come out with an experience. You have to be available and open. If you are open-minded enough, you will be able to feel what these diners were experiencing. If we want to go beyond this level and try to understand, and it’s rather difficult to understand a meal at el Bulli like it’s very difficult to understand a sunrise—you don’t understand it, you just enjoy it. If you want to understand the work of Ferran Adrià or the work we do at elBulli, then you have to study it, and that’s what happens in most disciplines. Imagine how one would speak about Frank Gehry’s work with just one visit to his museum in Bilbao, the Guggenheim—that would be impossible. They can give an opinion, but they won’t be able to analyze Frank Gehry’s work, and this is very, very complicated in cuisine. The reason is—I don’t normally do this, but I’m going to bet a table at elBulli.

**(laughter)**

**CORBY KUMMER:** That's a big bet, everybody.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** With Paul, who's right there. I just saw the absolutely wonderful library above us. He's told me that there were fifty-two million books—that's so many books—but there's one missing. There's no book on analyzing the history of contemporary avant-garde cuisine. It seems incredible. It doesn't exist. In the—all the different culinary institutes around the world, you can't find any book that will give you the history from Escoffier to now. The work and job of an analyst in cuisine and cooking—it doesn't exist. And to make matters even more complicated, dishes are not being dated, so if we were going to go to the MOMA, imagine we didn't have the dates on the paintings. It would be crazy. **(laughter)** Now, more or less, everybody knows the styles, the different periods of paintings, the reasons, the whys. Imagine if *Demoiselles d' Avignon* didn't have a date. Is it the first or the last of the Cubist paintings? Imagine nobody would know when it was painted and it might seem like a very simple observation and it makes studying the high-end cuisine impossible and from this point on understanding high-end avant-garde cuisine is very difficult, but enjoying it is very easy.

**CORBY KUMMER:** That's two questions that I've got and one important one leads right back to that carrot you were talking about and the carrots but following right on from that question something I did want to ask was—say that there are young chefs who want to take part in the history you've begun and they don't have the ability to go around the world as you have. You started in Catalonia. You cooked traditional Catalonian food from teenage years on, then it was France because the first owner and chef of elBulli, who liked bulldogs, which is where that name

comes from, knew nouvelle cuisine, so he was enormously influenced by nouvelle cuisine, and there have been lots of histories, maybe not the comprehensive international textbook we're all waiting for, but there are many histories of food, so it goes nouvelle cuisine and then you go beyond. What about the young chefs in America who don't have the chance to travel abroad? Where should they be studying to try to take part in and even extend your movement?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** I think the United States can be very proud of the young chefs, the up-and-coming new chefs in the United States, because they are selling American culture all over the world. And, you know, with regards to the people who criticize those who imitate, I think it's a rather complex question. I imitate a lot of people. I imitate Escoffier. I make consommés, I make pastries, and many other elaborations previously done by other chefs and there's nothing wrong with that. Why can't some chefs be using the same elaborations we are creating at elBulli? Or it's because maybe they're doing, but they're not doing it that well. Others are doing it really well. Why are pastry chefs, for example, not criticized for bad pastry? It seems like anybody *not* doing avant-garde cuisine is doing a good job. It's, you know, surrealistic, it's a serious matter. How can you criticize young people who are battling to make their way in a really very complicated field, and many of these cannot continue with their work simply because they would like to find the limits in their work. If you don't like this kind of cuisine, don't do it. If you don't like jazz, you don't listen to jazz. You know that jazz is for minorities and it's wonderful.

**(laughter)**

**CORBY KUMMER:** But give us an itinerary. Say that there's a young cook who really wants to be part of alta cucina and haute cuisine today and in the avant-garde and in the swim? What are places in America you've seen where it's being done well? What can he or she do and should he or she be taking courses from Harold at the French Culinary Institute, where he teaches, or where can they learn?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** Well, first thing is, you go to a school, an institute, whatever, that's the logical place to start, and the longer you study, the better. But it's really difficult; just imagine knowing all about Indian cuisine. You need three years of your life. You need to do a scanner depending on what you need to do. If you want to do avant-garde cuisine, you need to know the current cuisine like a lobster thermidor, you will find these on the menus we sold previously, it's a disastrous recipe, even though Escoffier created it. It's a lobster cooked for twenty minutes, twenty more minutes in the oven and béchamel sauce, and when you eat it, you ask, but where's the lobster gone? **(laughter)** History has created wonderful things and things that have gone by with time. A young person has to learn to make consommé because it's still a contemporary dish.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Consommé and roast chicken, the two things everybody has to learn. But if it's haute cuisine, if it's Indian food, if it's Chinese food, most young cooks have an idea of where to go and how to spend three years trying to master it. But what about the movement you've started?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** What you were saying is really important because there are very high expectations on young chefs, and it's not just in cuisine, but in architecture and design, in so

many other disciplines that are creating a new language every year. In cuisine, from 1900 until now, there have only been two distinctive movements, nouvelle cuisine and avant-garde Spanish cuisine. Techno-emotional cuisine. It's not me who's coined those terms. You can imagine if I was saying this it wouldn't have any value. The experts and the critics have decided that that's the way it is. In cuisine for the last seventy years, from 1900 to 1970, cuisine was about interpretation. You took a recipe and you carried it out. And from 1970 until today we've had these two movements. You can't expect a young Spanish chef or a young American chef or anyone to create a new language. We're going to show another video, it's the latest style.

**CORBY KUMMER:** We are? Which one?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** The latest style we've created in elBulli.

**CORBY KUMMER:** I'd rather show *Nitrogen*. I have them cued up for *Nitrogen*, so can we see *Nitrogen*?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** This is famous liquid nitrogen and Harold's now going to tell us a little about this. It's a product used very recently in high-end cuisine and it has allowed us to create new different elaborations: for example, a sorbet made of alcohol. Alcohol doesn't freeze in a conventional freezer, but in minus 196 degrees, which is the temperature of nitrogen, this will allow you to make an alcohol sorbet, in this case we're seeing a caipirinha supreme sorbet with a lot of alcohol as you would find in a caipirinha and this allows you to create a sorbet. This is one of the uses you can give to liquid nitrogen. We'll get to see another which means cooking using

refreezing, by freezing, this is a pistachio puree with a little bit of water, a very simple mixture, we dip this in the nitrogen and we'll achieve what you will see now. Imagine it was chocolate, you'd make the most magical chocolate truffle.

**CORBY KUMMER:** We've got to stop you right here, because it's Harold's turn. Nitrogen. You've dealt with nitrogen before which is something that really was put on the map by Ferran. How is it being used in the service of actually eating food that we recognize and did you learn a lot from seeing nitrogen as Ferran used it?

**HAROLD MCGEE:** Well, I think this is a wonderful example, along the lines of what I said about the coconut dish, of something that you might classify as scientific simply because you don't find it in traditional kitchens that in fact is being used for pretty basic familiar traditional sorts of ends, which is to make a delicious ice cream that you couldn't make using a standard ice-cream maker because it doesn't get cold enough, but all liquid nitrogen is a medium that's really, really cold and that allows you to change the structures of foods in ways that you can't if you can only get down to the temperature of an icy, salty slush. And that was a technological development, you know, ice creams and sorbets didn't exist until the middle of the eighteenth, or seventeenth, centuries because no one knew how to bring the temperature of liquids below the freezing point, and you had to do that if you wanted to make something sweet, so that was a technological development in exactly the same way that this is, the difference being that you can mine salt or get it out of the sea. You have to work pretty hard to get liquid nitrogen out of the air.

**CORBY KUMMER:** You were saying something before, speaking of nitrogen and how nobody was able to do it, and can we cut the mood music, Dave? You were talking about—did everybody know that you're not allowed to say molecular gastronomy, especially not in front of Ferran. It's discredited, it's a term that's out of use, we're not allowed to reduce what Ferran is doing, but Harold suggested that there is a term, "science-driven cooking," and I wonder if you want to define it and say how much Ferran has been at the forefront of it.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** In front of me I accept the term "molecular gastronomy," but not molecular cooking with Harold and Heston we have complete agreement. One thing is molecular gastronomy, which does exist, and we're all for it, it's a movement that started quite a while ago and the other thing is to consider it molecular cooking, which happened two days ago. I'm going to give you a very simple—

**CORBY KUMMER:** No video yet.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** It's very important. Nitrogen, this is a wonderful technique. It allows you to create something unique. But, because you see smoke, you think, "wow, this is scientific."

**(laughter)**

**CORBY KUMMER:** And is that liquid nitrogen? What is the smoke?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** This is a wonderful technique. This is coconut milk. You will see a shell and this was a technique created at elBulli thanks to nitrogen. Without nitrogen this would be impossible. As well see, it's scientific. If we take orange juice and Harold McGee were to investigate how to introduce this into the siphon, how to introduce nitrogen into the siphon, in a gas form, not in a liquid form, to create the best orange soda in the world, that's not scientific. As it's not spectacular, one doesn't consider it scientific. Science is a very serious issue. To convert it into art, a show—and this is the problem that's one of the things that's been going on in the last two years, thanks to people like Harold, who's carrying out marvelous work, and it has a very serious approach to science and cooking, we will overcome some of the hitches in this dialogue, otherwise this would end up becoming mad. The next thing you would expect to find would be astronauts with test tubes in a kitchen (**laughter**) and it's not at all like that. Chefs have to cook. And scientists have to help us to make a better world through our cooking, but not turn this into a show, not turn something as serious as science into a show.

**HAROLD MCGEE:** In fact, I would say it's going in the other direction. You know, there's this kind of sense we all have that science has all this knowledge, and so the science can help cooks understand what they're doing and make dishes either better or completely differently or to imagine dishes that they wouldn't be able to imagine otherwise. But it's working in the other direction as well. Cooks are now pushing the limits of what they do and know so much, that they're actually creating new areas for scientists to work in because we don't really what's going on when, for example, you cook an egg at 63 degrees Celsius, that's 145, for twenty-four hours. You get really interesting things to happen that make for interesting dishes, but because no one's ever done that before, scientists can't tell you what the proteins are doing to give you the kind of

creamy texture in the white when you do that that you don't get any other way. Same thing with longtime low-temperature cooking of meats. Sous-vide cooking, which New Yorkers have heard a lot about over the last couple of years. That involves cooking meat for maybe two or three days at a relatively low temperature so that the meat comes out rare, medium-rare, but it has a texture like nothing you've ever had before, and meat scientists can't tell you how that works, because it's never been an issue before. So there's this idea that science is somehow driving cooking, that the existence of liquid nitrogen is kind of encouraging chefs to do crazy things, and in fact what's happening is chefs are driven to create and innovate and make things new. Science is one of the tools they use and they're actually taking things so far that they're giving the scientists more work.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Can you take us into the lab? Since you've been at the lab and you've visited him at El Taller, and say how it was different from any lab you've ever seen and do you have any idea of how it led, what you saw there, to some of the magic we've just seen in the videos?

**HAROLD MCGEE:** As Ferran said, it's almost not correct to call it a lab, because there aren't test tubes and Bunsen burners and things like that, there's an induction heater, and a gas burner, and a sink and then lots and lots of foods, and a few cooks really interested in coming up with something new.

**CORBY KUMMER:** So you saw people cooking?

**HAROLD MCGEE:** People were cooking, people were consulting very long notebooks of years and years of notes and it was very quiet and people—I think they had come in that day already knowing what they were going to be working on and they just set about it and then about eleven o'clock or noon, something like that, there was a pause and people got together and tasted the results and talked about them. So it was a lab in the sense that experiments were being done, things were being tried that hadn't been done before, but it was a kitchen, it was people cooking, trying to make things more interesting.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** The reason molecular kitchen cuisine cannot exist, there is not style of nothing that is the consequence of an investigation, it will always be a consequence of creativity. When I drink this water, this glass of water, I don't know whether there's been a scientific process behind this or not—whether there's a great science behind it—and I don't care. Do I feel a certain emotion or not? The consequence will never be a style of cooking when somebody takes some, drinks some Matcha Tea you don't know the process that comes behind this. As I said before, one of the most complicated physical chemical processes is bread and nobody begins to think that this might be molecular cooking. It's a very serious issue, because it's confusing everybody and, as Harold was saying, scientific research will not be just for the cook and kitchen. The best chefs in the world and the best scientists in the world have still not achieved those dream fried potatoes. There are hundreds of different normal problems related to the kitchen that science and cooking can work on together. But please don't keep the image of nitrogen, because there's just one nitrogen, there's no other magical product like this.

**CORBY KUMMER:** That's beautifully said and that leads me to exactly my carrot question.

Which is: there are five thousand carrots and the reason that I knew that I would love everything that Ferran did, if I was lucky enough to go to elBulli, is because he's one of Slow Food's oldest and most enthusiastic supporters, something you wouldn't necessarily expect. He's in touch with farmers, he cares enormously about how food is grown and about ingredients and collects them every day. Farmers are hugely important. But say that you're at Taller in the winter and you come up with a dish that expresses carrots in a new and fantastic way and then the farms—when the restaurant is open, the farms deliver carrots that are completely different. Would you change the dish?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** As you know, I'm a very close friend of Carlo Petrini, the founder of Slow Food, I'm a very, very close friend, and on the twenty-first I'm going to be at the Gusto event in Turin and on a lot of things we agree completely, but I'm a rather pragmatic person. I'm interested in better things if I think they are solutions, and it's not easy to find solutions. With regards to fast food, as you might imagine it's not my dream to go to a fast food, but what can we, you know, give and offer people in exchange for two dollars? And that's a, you know, it's a reality. And this moment, this turbulent economical moment we're going through, there will be a lot of people who cannot afford to pay more than two euros. What is the language we should be using? From Slow Food—I consider myself Slow Food, but to be pragmatic I know what the problem is, but what is the solution? And with regards to products from France, the same thing. I would like that everybody will be able to eat in, but through this philosophy the big companies are starting to complicate these issues. Because most of organic products in the world, they come from big companies—but that isn't a bad thing, we can't have everything in life, you can't. I

really want to be pragmatic. We have a foundation called Alicia, which means Food and Science. Harold knows it and he's a great defender and we're obsessed with education. We care very much for the education of young people until they are older. How they feed themselves with regards to their health. But if there isn't education, this entire speech is worthless, that's senseless, it's, you know, talking for talking's sake. If we can't achieve that children go back home and, "let's cook because we want to eat better," everything else is not working. It turns out that we are all flashing our iPhones and it's a wonderful object. If anybody is from Apple, I quite like it. **(laughter)** And they know an iPhone, but they don't know that vanilla's black. That's a very serious issue. The people involved in food know that food feeds the soul. We have to be pragmatic, peaceful, and be aware that education is the most important issue.

**(applause)**

**CORB Y KUMMER:** I'm about to open the floor to all of you and questions, but I want to give Harold the last word and question because he had some great questions he wanted to ask Ferran, and before I do, I do want to emphasize, Ferran is doing an enormous amount to further the cause of education both for young people and for cooks. You'll see the foundation, you'll see the links he's trying to draw all over Europe between cooks and scientists in the foundation that he's established in Barcelona, so there's an enormous amount in this book. It's dense. It's got beautiful pictures, but it's also got an enormous amount of thought and it struck both Harold and me, the disquisitions on creativity, and I'm going to leave it over to Harold, who was curious about the same things.

**HAROLD MCGEE:** Just a very basic question, because it's to me one of the most striking things about the book and makes this book unlike any other book about food that I've ever seen, which is a book by Ferran Adrià about his restaurant, about his cooking, with recipes, but also with really remarkable kind of self-analysis of the evolution of his own thinking and the evolution of his own approach to food and trying to set it in the context of the time and it seemed to me—that I mean we were talking earlier about this idea of science-driven cooking and how cooking is not driven by science, but in the case of this book it became very clear to me how driven Ferran's cooking is, not by science, but by the need to make new things and also by the need to understand how those things are made and to understand the process by which they're made, so there is, as Corby says, a tremendous amount of really interesting stuff about creativity—what is it to be creative in the modern world. And I wanted to ask Ferran where that came from—did it just sort of emerge out of the experience of hearing a French chef at one point saying, “to be creative is not to copy,” and then following his own train of thought or whether it came from somewhere else? He said that there does not exist anywhere a good analysis of the development of avant-garde cooking, but within this book is an amazing analysis of the development of this particular avant-garde cooking.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** Creativity is a very complex issue. On a personal and humane level you have to have a very cold-headed approach. If you think that because you are creative it will make you a more important person, then I'm not interested. If it's done in a natural way, it's wonderful. And when people give out their visiting cards and it says “creative,” I think they're wrong. **(laughter)** I have, thankfully I have maybe my dream team. But if one of them gets sick I am not so worried. But if my dishwasher gets ill, that's when I really worry. **(laughter)** Because

somebody's going to have to go and wash the dishes, and that's a tough job. Creativity moves the world, and it's a wonderful thing, but you have to keep a certain distance. With regards to what Harold said about self-analysis, I did it without really knowing what I was doing and in the end it became a bit like a guillotine. We do an audit, a creative audit, each year. I think there are a few people involved in the art world here. Most artists don't like to look back, because they will realize that 99 percent they were copying. It's very, very tough to look back when you see you're not creating something new or that it doesn't have the strength that you expect it to have on a creative level, it's very depressing. And it's the reason why I understood that the creative world is so schizophrenic and—people who know us at elBulli everybody thinks that we're a very positive people, we're always happy, and to be on the top of the creative level, people asked why, because we never expected to create what we have ended up creating. This is why the creative ego, which is the motor behind creativity, we've covered it a hundred times over, and if one day it ends, I hope Paul will invite us, and we will come here and give lots of talks about what we did. **(applause)** It's really tough.

**CORBY KUMMER:** And you'll see in the book, there's a profound thing he says. There are three creative disquisitions which are inserted in the book, all through it. And in the end, he says, "it's a lot harder to be creative today than it was ten years ago," because he's been such a Catherine wheel of creativity, and there's so much that he's done, but you see how hard he's always challenging himself to go farther and to go beyond. Paul do we have time for questions?

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** We don't have time, we have to have questions. And there's a mic right there. Ferran Adrià when I asked him if wanted written questions, he said under no

condition does he want written questions, he wants people to come up to the mic because he wants to see their face and look at them straight in the eye.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Fair warning.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Just to give you a little bit of pleasure, we'll do a video very quickly, but then line up for your questions and if I may say something about questions, they should never last more than forty seconds. Questions rather than long comments. Quick video. Okay, okay, okay. Thank you.

**(applause)**

**Q:** In the summer of 2000 my husband and I were lucky enough to come to your restaurant at the recommendation of some friends from Barcelona and when we arrived, I told the waitress that I'm allergic to shellfish and a lot of the dishes were shellfish and it was incredible—the wonderful dishes that you came out with for me—but my question is how do you go about knowing how to juxtapose the bitter taste, tart, sweetness, I mean, do the chemists tell you, or you test it and have all the chefs taste it and then retaste them and modify?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** In the end people eat what I like eating. **(laughter)** It's as simple as that.

**(applause)** It's no more if I don't like what I make myself and I give that to people I would be stupid. The most important thing is that my taste and the people I serve should coincide inasmuch as possible, like this language you saw and things you had no idea what they were, this

becomes a rather difficult task. It's very difficult. If it's a language you know, we might coincide. With a new kind of language it's rather difficult. It depends on how open your mind is.

**Q:** I have a question. I was wondering if there was something that when you go back to Barcelona to your workshop that you're particularly excited about looking into.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** In November I'm going to Brazil, I'm going to the Amazon Basin, and it's probably the thing that is most exciting for me right now. What influence the Amazon Basin will have on everything you've seen right now. That's where we are right now. He knows her, he remembers you. **(laughter)** She worked at elBulli.

**(laughter)**

**Q:** What is it like to be at the forefront of cuisine and having your brother by your side in all the creation that you do?

**CORBY KUMMER:** Ferran's brother Albert has been pastry chef and his close collaborator almost since the beginning of the restaurant.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** Albert is one of the most creative chefs I've ever met in my entire life and together with Oriol Castro I've had the privilege to work with two exceptional people. The people who know them know that I'm not exaggerating—they are the number one creative

people in the world and elBulli is what it is and we can continuously reinvent ourselves thanks to the fact that it's not just Ferran Adrià, there's a lot of other people behind it.

**Q:** Question—what is the bet with Mr.—with Paul here, what's the bet?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** If there is a book in those fifty-two million books here in the New York Public Library that can explain the history of contemporary cuisine from Escoffier up until this day?

**CORBY KUMMER:** We have a challenge here, we have a lot of writers in this audience so your work is cut out for you.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** And if it exists, then it's great. Because Paul will then come to elBulli.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Hallelujah.

**Q:** Good evening. I want to know when you set out to create a dish in your El Taller, how much is your creative process driven by creating sort of the—trying to fool the taste buds with what you're expecting by what you see and how much of it is driven by trying to recreate a memory, a flavor memory, for someone, because it is a small world and at the very base we all have similar food memories.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** It depends on the period. I've played more or less with memory. The cuisine at elBulli was created from '94 to '97, we changed everything from textures, temperatures, shapes, like what you just saw in the video. Nobody understood anything, because it was completely new. We needed a thread, a narrative thread, that allowed people to grasp on to some kind of knowledge. And that was memory. And deconstruction was based on that. You won't find deconstruction today at elBulli, because people already know that language, so we don't need to use that language anymore.

**Q:** Another question about your creative process. I'm interested in what kind of a role does chance play, how much of it comes from accident and how much of it comes from intention?

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** This is—as Picasso would say, this is a bit of a topic, that inspiration should find you working, and I don't know so many years later, it's true. You have to be there and you're working and the main point is to see in the end that very precise moment where you see something and you grasp it and you can't explain this. I've explained all the different creative methods, in a house, the reason I've seen glass, for example, a thousand times and the thousand times I realize it's colorless. I don't know.

**Q:** Thank you for your talk and I wanted to know if you could speak briefly about your foundation, the work of your foundation, what its mission is, etcetera.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** There are two different aspects, one we talk with—we carry out work connected to education from childhood until people are adults, a very important aspect of this is

also nourishment with regards to ill health and disease. From cancer to common-day illness. And on the other hand we have like a workshop, like El Taller, for all the restaurants in the world, because people cannot afford to have their own Tallers, so we have this space for them, that's our restaurant.

**Q:** Since many of us won't have the pleasure of going to your restaurant, won't you please tell us what do you enjoy eating here in New York?

**CORBY KUMMER:** Thank you for asking that.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** Next year we're going to have eight thousand people and fifty percent is new and it's a chance lottery. We have lots of very normal people coming to the restaurant, otherwise it would become a private club, and I'm personally not very interested in that. When I come to New York, it's a city I find I get very excited about. It's a very vibrant city and gastronomy is very alive here, and I continuously come here to do brainstorming, eating, brainstorming and eating, it can be in a shop or in a restaurant, or in a, you know, high-end gastronomical restaurant.

**CORBY KUMMER:** Don't tell us something you've eaten, tell us something you've eaten in New York that you were interested in.

**FERRAN ADRIÀ:** We went to Katz Delicatessen this morning.

**(applause)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I would like to, on the note of Katz, I would like to thank Harold Magee, Corby Kummer, and Ferran Adrià. Thank you very much. And now they will sign books over there.

**(applause)**