

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
ISTITUZIONE CULTURALE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA
FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI

www.accademia1953.it



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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

DECEMBER 2017 / N. 299

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Monthly Magazine
Reg. n. 4049 - 29-5-1956
Tribunale di Milano



Rivista associata
all'Unione Stampa
Periodica Italiana



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*On the cover: Graphic elaboration of a detail
of the Pala di Santa Maria dei Fossi (Madonna
Enthroned Among Saints, 1496-1498) by
Bernardino di Betto, known as Pinturicchio,
displayed at the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria,
Perugia*

Youth and the Academy

Flawed perceptions and opportunities lying in wait.

BY PAOLO PETRONI

President of the Academy

A young Academician enters the Chieti Delegation



Among the many interesting themes featured in the recent gathering of the “Franco Marenghi” Study Centre, one drew the greatest number of qualified and impassioned speakers: Academicians’ average age, and its decrease.

This delicate issue has been tackled and debated on various levels and occasions in recent years. “If the young don’t join the Academy”, some say, “in a few years we’ll all be old and will achieve nothing”.

An incomplete, pessimistic and unrealistic view. But a preliminary clarification is mandatory. By their very nature, associations can have differing aims: there are those for older and those for younger audiences; every age has its requirements and priorities.

The Academy does not have a precise target regarding age, but by its nature it appeals to those who have, or should have, an extensive and mature connoisseurship of gastronomy and its culture, through experiences gleaned in the family, society and the restaurant world - and the socioeconomic status to sustain all of the above. Consequently its main audience is not the very young aficionados of happy hours, aperitif buf-

fets, kebabs, sandwich cafes, and pizza or fast food restaurants. It is therefore futile to court their preferences and needs.

The Academy conveys other messages, which are clearly comprehensible in view of its long history.

This is demonstrated by the new Delegations founded in recent years, formed by young professionals and adults in the earliest phase of family life.

Then time passes, and the Delegations age and often lose generational renewal without realising it. Furthermore, the average number of Delegation members does not increase; in other words, there is a virtual ceiling which many do not wish to transcend. This is one aspect of the issue.

The other, far more positive aspect reveals a vital Academy with a steadily rising membership, increasing by over a thousand members over the past two years. This renewal has occasioned a surge in female participation and a substantial reduction in average age, now 63 years overall and only 58 years abroad. Avoiding useless fee discounts and special deals to attract younger members, there remains the crucial point of language, which often does not make allowances for today’s world, thereby failing to reach the so-called ‘youthful sphere’ due to problems with vocabulary and communication technology.

The Academy will have to assume an increasingly active and innovative role in today’s food culture aimed at younger generations.



The Academy as a driving force

Sharing insights about the past by relating them to progress and innovation.

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO

A moment during the meeting of the "Franco Marengi" Study Centre at the Westin Palace, Milan



Words of welcome by President Petroni and Study Centre President Sergio Corbino kick off a most lively and useful meeting: a round table for members of the "Franco Marengi" Study Centre, in which completed projects and new ideas are alternately discussed.

Andrea Vitale, a lecturer at the University of Milan, is the first to emphasise the success of the collaboration between that University and the Academy: following an internship at the Academy, Tiziano Aldeghi, a student of Restaurant Science and Technology, gained his degree under the supervision of his tutor, Milano Navigli Delegate Giovanni Battista Spezia, with a thesis on "The Italian Academy of Cuisine: cultural significance and juristic relevance of an association for protecting Italian cuisine". A project worth repeating, affirms Vitale, both because the students displayed considerable interest in learning about the Academy and because it is important for youth to share traditional values and

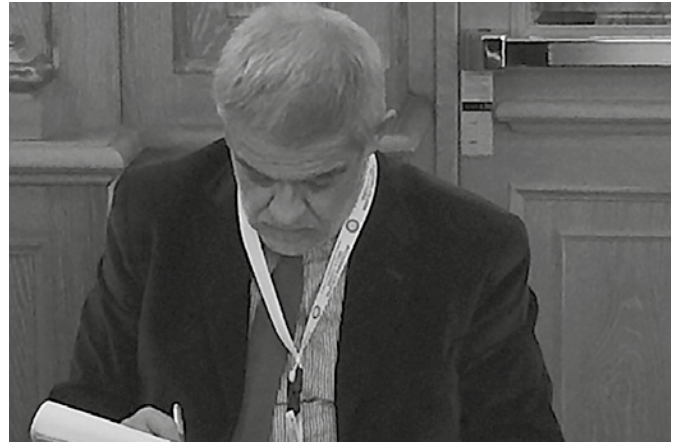
heritage spliced into present circumstances. In that spirit, Paolo Petroni expresses hope that the Academy will increasingly have the courage, since it has the capacity to do so, to address the qualms of today's consumers - to engage with cutting-edge issues, from counterfeit food to misleading myths, from showbiz cuisine to identity loss, from changes in food habits to the needs of the young, not only as a custodian of knowledge, but a propulsive agent of innovation interacting with current reality.

Vitale, enthralled by the University-Academy alliance, vigorously advocates programmes involving the young, such as Academic delegations at university open days or the organisation of internships or scholarships which could help to 'ferry' students towards the working world. Other speakers take up this theme, emphasising our institution's guiding role in tackling new issues with simple language (Massimo Vincenzini); stepping up as a qualified 'sentinel'



Elisabetta Cocito, FMSC Secretary and Regional Study Centre Director for Piedmont

Gigi Padovani, journalist, food writer and food critic



against gastronomic ‘fake news’ (Mario Baraldi); and transmitting intergenerational memory to interpret and understand recent developments through a form of storytelling for sharing values, ideas and symbols (Gigi Padovani). The concept of narration, preventing the loss of past knowledge and allowing its combination with subsequent developments and innovations, is taken up again by Enrico Dandolo, representing Gualtiero Marchesi, pointing out that the master chef has already taken action in this regard through his Foundation (to avoid losing the work undertaken) and will continue promoting the concretisation of his dream: a University of Cuisine (a reference point for development and innovation). Within the unflagging pace of the me-

eting, Paolo Petroni takes stock of the Academy’s image as it has evolved in recent years, beginning with its increasing openness towards the outside world, which guarantees its vitality: recognition as a qualified partner by Italian government bodies (manifested by the importance of the activities undertaken by foreign Delegations for the first, and still more the second, International Italian Food Week alongside Italian Embassies, Cultural Institutes and restaurateurs) and the *Food Culture Library* publications available in bookshops (they will be additionally promoted in various important bookshops in the jurisdictions of several Delegations which will organise events). He further notes that the Academy’s vitality is demonstrated by the 1000 new Academi-

cians joining in the past two and a half years (replacing those departing for various reasons), with a generational turnover which has lowered members’ average age (63 years in Italy, 58 abroad). He shares the opinion of those (particularly Gigi Padovani) who, throughout the meeting, stressed the opportunities inherent in a social media presence, but emphasises the need for an adequate and well-designed approach. He also expresses hope (in concert with Elisabetta Cocito’s view) for more support for Delegates by Regional Study Centre Directors in identifying interesting and current cultural topics for inclusion in future meetings. After briefly illustrating (how many topics have been tackled!) the other items on the agenda - the annual theme for 2018, the awards from the Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie, and the upcoming volumes of the *Food Culture Library* (*Flavours from the Garden and Sweet and Savoury Cakes*) - Paolo Petroni thanks the members of the “Franco Marengi” Study Centre, who for the past three years have constituted its heart and soul but especially its mind, bringing useful ideas, initiatives and projects aiming for timely awareness and critical understanding of every new trend in food culture. A prestigious team which, alongside government bodies, has added even more substance to the Academy’s cultural role in society.

SILVIA DE LORENZO



Andrea Vitale, lecturer at the University of Milan



The President of the Study Centre, Sergio Corbino, and Vice-President Giuseppe Benelli



Guilty parties

*Perusing menus brings on the guilt:
will food become a mere accessory in restaurants?*

BY ANDREA CESARI DE MARIA
Milano Duomo Delegate



A scene from the film Where are you going on holiday? with Alberto Sordi and Anna Longhi

The postwar years were emblematic for our country: torn to shreds at war's end, the flower of our youth lost or back home in a piteous condition, we were first and foremost faced with reconstructing a nation. Hence the glorification of individual and national growth, reconstruction and the economic miracle, advertisements exaggerating the benefits of meticulously formulated food products favouring a rediscovered health, abundantly nourished children - all principally casting the war as merely a bad memory. And meat, eaten even beyond necessity, demonstrating achieved prosperity to flaunt for friends and relatives through sometimes excessive consumption. Generous portions to make people forget the years of privation, finally relegated to memory alone. Then, as always happens, the backlash, the beginning of the blame game which is now reaching almost paroxysmic heights. Cooking examined under a magnifying glass. Fried food, heavy, tricky to digest, responsible for so many cardiovascular ailments. Barbecue, fraught with risks of tumours, thereby stigmatised: avoid. Lengthy cooking times, dissipating vitamins and minerals and increasing the danger of bacterial proliferation. Hence the birth of *nouvelle cuisine* in France, a reaction to the finger-pointing already present in the early seventies. Don't overcook; eliminate marinades, ageing or fermentation; lighten menus; avoid rich sauces and gravies, paying particular attention to the dicta of dieticians, favouring express preparation where possible. But above all, reduce portions (generally with inverse proportionality to price!), so much so as to theorise 8

maccheroni per portion, where once in Rome one frequently found portions known as *cofane* ('trunk-loads'). Dietary science therefore made its appearance through a breach which is now widening into a chasm. Leaping forward into the present, let us sit, ideally, at a restaurant table, in my case in Milan, though the Lombard capital is known to anticipate fashions, making it likely that whatever happens here will then surface in many other Italian cities. If we open the menu, we will fall prey to increasingly intrusive guilt, shared by one's table-mates, who rattle off their latest medical diagnoses. Salame or prosciutto? Heavens above, what about cholesterol? And besides, it is established that pork is unhealthy, and cured meats have recently been demonised. Rice or pasta? Diabetes lurks: overly refined flours are unhealthy and should therefore be avoided.

Dieticians prescribe fish, especially fresh, but we are hindered by the difficulty in obtaining it, with doubts regarding freshness, not to mention cost, especially if we want quality guarantees. We might as well give up on red meats, by now demonised almost as if they were the root of all evil. Pity that a substantial proportion of our peninsula's gastronomic traditions revolve around exquisite care in preparing meat-based recipes. We would be left with white meat, once pilloried over an oestrogen problem which now appears to have been overcome. Pity that when factory-farmed, fowl too have lost much of their flavour and texture.

Today, nutritionists preach the ingestion of vegetables, preferably steamed, without much salt (which raises blood



pressure) and a drizzle of oil which, as a vegetable fat, is much less harmful than butter, banned alongside all animal fats. Of course, they forget GMOs, pesticides, and frequently questionable provenance. Pity that in Milan, vegetables are practically non-existent in restaurants, both because there's no habit of providing them and because they are particularly expensive, with time-consuming cleaning and preparation processes and their concomitant risk of losing time and money if they go unsold. Not to mention cheese: competitive cholesterol comparison has become *de rigueur* among table-mates. This aspect merits more attention: official healthy values have recently been lowered, perhaps following a wise marketing operation by pharmaceutical companies, who can thereby broaden their clientele by adding new customers who previously felt safe. And what about sweets, with

diabetes as a constant menace, as well as the preoccupation with physique which afflicts the near-totality of diners? There is an increasing tendency to request reduced portions or declare, the moment one sits down, that one is on a diet: so the restaurant becomes ever more a venue to meet and converse, with food as an accessory. Notably, the phenomenon of guilt induction is clearly present in advertising too: where, until a few years ago, a product's benefits were extolled, now the emphasis is on what harmful elements are absent. Even basic ingredients, from sugar to salt, from butter to milk to flour, are subjected to exaggerated attention, as if to ignore that for millennia they were fundamental to life and evolution. But given all this, what will become of the Academy - our Academy - if this iconoclastic zeal continues attracting devotees? Must we mourn the

dear old *ragù* which simmered on the fire for hours, because only time allowed it to attain that blend of flavours which earned it a place in history books? Much has already been done to lighten recipes, purged of potentially harmful excesses, because respecting tradition is right, but also enlisting the aid of the tools developed by human intelligence to improve quality of life. We Academicians still have more to do: we must give due consideration to what progress can yield, without allowing it to dominate us too much, judging impartially, and in all things operating with intelligence and common sense. And above all, each of us must proudly remember one of the principles of our Roman forebears, who, not by sheer coincidence, conquered the world: *in medio stat virtus* - virtue lies in the middle.

ANDREA CESARI DE MARIA

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Academicians' contributions to the magazine are not only welcome, but essential. However Academicians should keep in mind some important guidelines so that their contributions, which are the fruit of their passion and dedication, are expeditiously published.

● **Articles:** it is essential that the **text of articles be sent via email**, in MS Word format (not pdf) to the following address: redazione@accademia1953.it

● **Article length:** it is important that articles are between 3,500 and 7,000 characters (including spaces); this is the best way to avoid cuts that are bothersome for both the editors and those submitting the texts. All computers should be able to provide character counts.

● Each issue of the magazine is printed one month ahead of the cover date so that it can be delivered to the Academicians by that date. Those submissions that are time sensitive should be sent in ample time.

● **"From the Delegations" Section:** In order to facilitate reading, please **limit articles to a maximum of 2,500 characters including spaces**.

● Please remember that in the "From the Delegations" section as well as elsewhere, **descriptions of meetings held outside the territory of the Delegation or in the homes of Academicians, unless they are associated with an important event, will not be published**. Also, **please do not include a list of dishes and wines**. Such listing should appear on the appropriate rating form regarding convivial meetings.

● **Rating forms for convivial meetings:** should be sent to the Secretariat (segreteria@accademia1953.it). It is also important to limit remarks in the "notes and comments" section of the form to **800 characters** (maximum 1,000) spaces included in order to avoid cuts. Rating forms that reach the Secretariat more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

● We also request that you not submit reports on convivial meetings held **outside the territory of the Delegation**, or that take place in the **homes of Academicians**, or are otherwise not held in restaurants or public venues, as they will not be published.



Christmas food: a gift and a marvel

A culinary display is a preponderant feature of nativity scenes in Calabria.

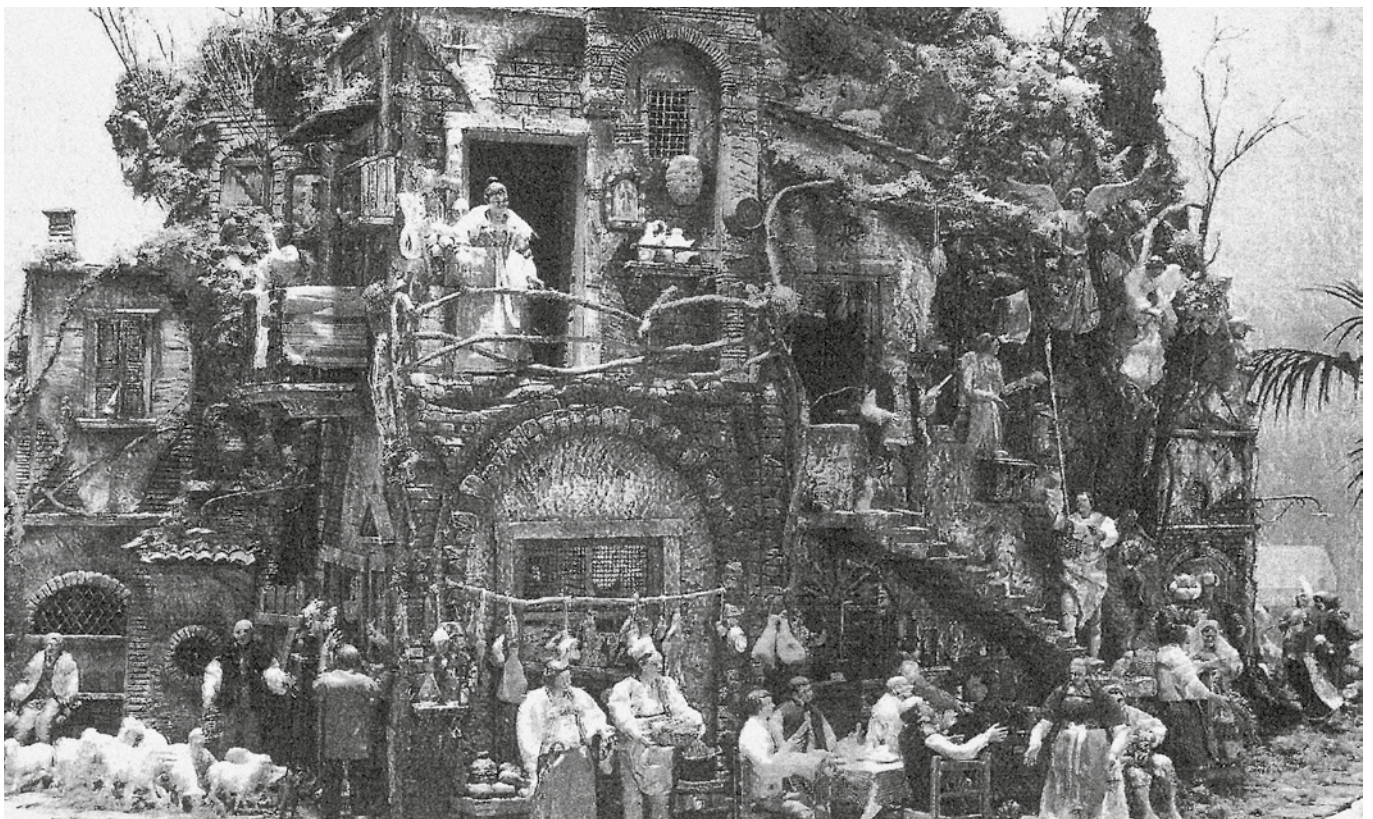
Since time immemorial, every ceremonial event in Calabrian family life has also involved a food ritual, just as every religious festival corresponds to a devotional food. The rigour of this calendar is fortunately untouched by modernity, retaining significant visibility in the local food repertoire, thereby constituting an incommensurable treasure, an expression of customs, culture and civilisation.

In archaic societies, food items wrought by intelligent and hard-working hands served as precious and auspicious gifts for weddings, religious festivals, and

particularly, Christmas. Viewed anthropologically, a sense of beauty, attributing value to gifts in kind, is clearly and emblematically visible in the representation of the sacred nativity scene. The shepherds' gifts to the infant Jesus are, indeed, products of pastoralism, the farmyard, the vegetable garden, pregnant with symbolism in the domain of food. For those able to perceive it in their hearts, the 'gift', as a gesture, involves one of the most profound elements of the nativity scene's pedagogic function. For one thing, the pedagogy of silence: all is quiet when Jesus is born

in the middle of the night. Silence leaves room for wonder, reflection, meditation. In silence, something always shines through: this refers to the light of hope and salvation, which is extraordinarily palpable in the symbolism of the nativity scene.

Notwithstanding modern society's attempts to impose other, gaudier Christmas symbols, the tradition of the nativity scene, eclipsed for a time, has made a stunning comeback in all traditionally Catholic areas, and some nativity scene promotion societies have even formed, motivated not only by this tra-





dition's educational value but also its quality as a vehicle to display the work of artists and artisans who, in technique and culture, elevate an art which boasts an ancient history in Calabria, appearing in highly distinctive local forms in some areas. In such locations the construction which sets the stage of the nativity scene reflects the lifestyle of the village, still authentic in its beauty and the simplicity of its ancient values and sentiments. Visiting the nativity scenes which people set up in their homes in Calabria, one observes a vibrant mass of humanity seething with life: farmers, shepherds, fishermen, herb sellers with their displays of vegetables and fragrant plants, peddlers, bagpipers, knife sharpeners, cobblers and animals wandering freely. There's no shortage of artisans' workshops, taverns, hostleries, and merchants displaying a profusion of wares. In this extraordinary and varied representation, creating highly evocative stills from village life, the Calabrian nativity scene is a splendid manifestation of taste and custom, clearly displaying culinary and food-related elements. Food depiction is a principal characteristic of these regional nativity scenes. Hung on the external walls

of the tiny shops, foods are on show to attract customers: chains of sausages, hams, farmyard fowl, rabbits, turkeys, and much more besides. In reality this exuberant show is none other than the Calabrian people's release from a hunger which in times past was never satisfied, and therefore in our nativity scenes the locations chosen for the display of so much luxuriant gastronomic detail are the tables groaning with traditional foods in the shepherds' humble abodes. The foods depicted vary between villages, but present in all is the pasta known as *ammullicata*: a savoury preparation, seasoned with a concoction of salted anchovies and breadcrumbs, lightly pan-fried with garlic, oil and spicy pepper; fried and stewed stockfish; eel, boiled beet greens, stewed broccoli, cauliflowers seasoned with oil, vinegar and a few salted anchovies, and *cuccia*: a restorative, highly aromatic wheat soup. The pinnacle of Christmas food is reserved for fruit, both dried and fresh: oranges, mandarins, grapes, almonds, dried walnut-stuffed figs *a crocette* ('crossed', referring to how they are stacked), and sweets (delicacies which in the past only wealthy families could afford). Sweets, among the Christmas food ri-

tuals retaining a pagan undertone, include the *pitta 'nchiusa* ('enclosed flatbread', related to the word 'pita'): a type of sweet bread, opulent and princely, made using flour, wine, oil and honey, stuffed with raisins, walnuts and almonds, which are common symbols of abundance and fertility and therefore auspicious indicators of prosperity and well-being.

Another simple but excellently flavoured sweet, created from few ingredients, is *crepelle*, a type of dough containing flour and water, left to rise for several hours, formed into rings, deep-fried, and then sweetened with honey or mulled wine. Other interesting sweets include *crustoli*, *tardilli*, and *chinulille*, crescent-shaped and stuffed with raisin compote.

Let us conclude our journey through Christmas food customs by reflecting that in the Calabrian nativity scene food has historical and anthropological significance, arising from the culture of a land proud of its historical origins, aiming, through these ritual foods, to reclaim family identities and the values and culture of the territory where one belongs, to transmit down the generations.

ADRIANA LIGUORI PROTO



*President Paolo Petroni, the President's Council,
the Secretariat in Milan
and the magazine's Editorial Team
offer all Academicians in Italy and abroad their warmest wishes for a*

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

The Secretariat in Milan and the Editorial Office in Rome
will remain closed
from 23 December to 8 January



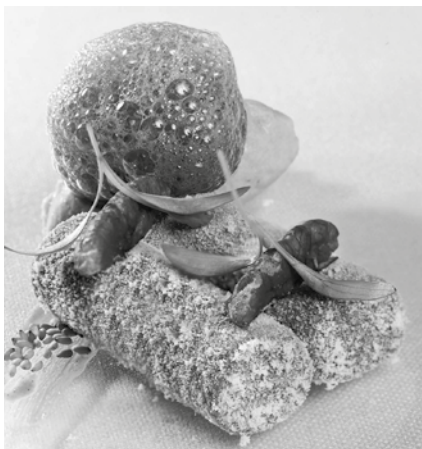
Fine powders

*Striking and brightly coloured, they run riot in creative cuisine.
We find powdered prawn and bacon rind, citrus peels, and even oil!*

BY ELISABETTA COCITO

Turin Academician

“Franco Marengi” Study Centre



We are apparently hostage to fine powders: some, impalpable and invisible, endanger our lungs, while others, choreographic and multicoloured, lord it over our culinary world. Obviously we are talking about different powders. The first are harmful, and the second innocuous, but only to a point - fine but gaudy, flung from the cooking stations by a few master chefs but then treacherously metastasising to the preparations of many other cooks, not always with the desired results: a dusting here and there, a pinch positioned with panache, a touch of colour, accompanied by intriguing descriptions, and dinner is served. We have succeeded in drying and pulverising everything, from citrus rinds to vegetables to ham, and not even

oil has escaped (no joke: a noted producer has created powdered oil). All is reduced to infinitesimal crumbs and parsimoniously sprinkled on culinary creations. Coal dust for decorating a light-coloured preparation; ham or spicy pepper powder to season *tagliolini* pasta. These powders are ethereal and volatile, probably just like this fashion, one of many.

I am convinced that we Academicians have the duty to look ahead, rather than ruminating on the past as an alibi to reject the new; but I think that cuisine has been overly obsessed with the aesthetics of the plate for too long now, excessively pleased with the beauty of a dish, beauty to be observed, like visual art. In the hands of a few, such a cuisine can be intriguing, but mass-produced and homogenised, it risks becoming cloying and amorphous. I honestly did not feel deprived of desiccated pulverised prawn shell or bacon rind, nor, having tasted them, do I urgently require a repeat performance. As an art enthusiast I recognise that without brave experimentation, without the ardour and courage of eminent and tormented talents, new horizons would never have been opened and today we could not benefit from many superb and majestic masterpieces; but alas, in their wake, many replicators have produced empty shells. By the same token, powders flung over food risk becoming a superfluous and laughable crust.

As always, with all innovation, homogenisation and slavish emulation often risk producing damage. In this case, it is damage to real cuisine. If we were then to dust a ‘sponge’ with powder,





The Spanish restaurant DiverXO



we would have truly ascended the pinnacle of trendiness. Because today 'sponges' are made with abandon: pistachio, basil, parsley and spinach sponges. One only needs a siphon and everything becomes fluffily soft and, indeed, spongy.

If we combine deconstructed food, whose ingredients are offered separately and not combined, or disassembled (perhaps liquidised) and then reassembled, we have reached the apex of style. Everything is soft, ethereal, with almost no chewing involved. One cannot help wondering whether the *nouvelle vague* has been elaborated for a population which is increasingly less *nouvelle*. Speaking of which, I recently smiled, though through gritted teeth



(my jaw remains locked!), at the response, delivered in all seriousness, of a cook in my city to a comment about an overcooked risotto, to the effect that he determines cooking time as a function of the diner's age, considering this a mark of authorial finesse. Will the esteemed clientele be asked, upon entering the premises, to reveal whether they use dentures? Will we reach this point?

And more! When the cook becomes an actor, original and well equipped with special effects, then the sparks really do fly: we have the nasty cook who jerks things about, the sly one, the *maitre à penser*. All of this fits into the general cult of the exterior, of appearance, which permeates the entire social scene today, including, therefore, cuisine.

A character who has successfully deployed aesthetics and provocation as his warhorse is assuredly a Spanish cook who has become very famous: there are long waiting lists to eat in his restaurant. The décor itself is spectacular. Upon entering, one approaches the stairs accompanied by a procession of large silver ants occupying one step each and vanishing at the top, giving way to a vortex of black butterflies. We are then greeted by the director in tail-

coats and shorts, with black-lacquered fingernails, who escorts us to our table, and isolates us from the rest of the room with a curtain embroidered with eyes that stare at the diners.

The waiter who will serve the table appears in horizontal braces tied like the thongs of a straitjacket. From that moment on, there is a parade of plates, morsels descending from the ceiling on fishing lines, waiters who spoon-feed customers.

The chef, with his mohawk, fierce gaze and language not exactly befitting a convent schoolgirl, offers cerebral dishes called *lienzos* ('canvases', where the ingredients are artfully arranged). The preparations, disposed in large dishes with varying shapes, are veritable abstract paintings for their presentation and original use of colour. The chef, undoubtedly talented, has earned three stars and his cuisine is much appreciated. He has clearly been able to detect and ably exploit the whimsy and the tendencies of the era. Considering even only the few examples cited above, one might share the concept which has guided that chef in his expressive and commercial choice: "haute cuisine is a *putocirco*" - a slutty circus. We can all see what he means.

ELISABETTA COCITO