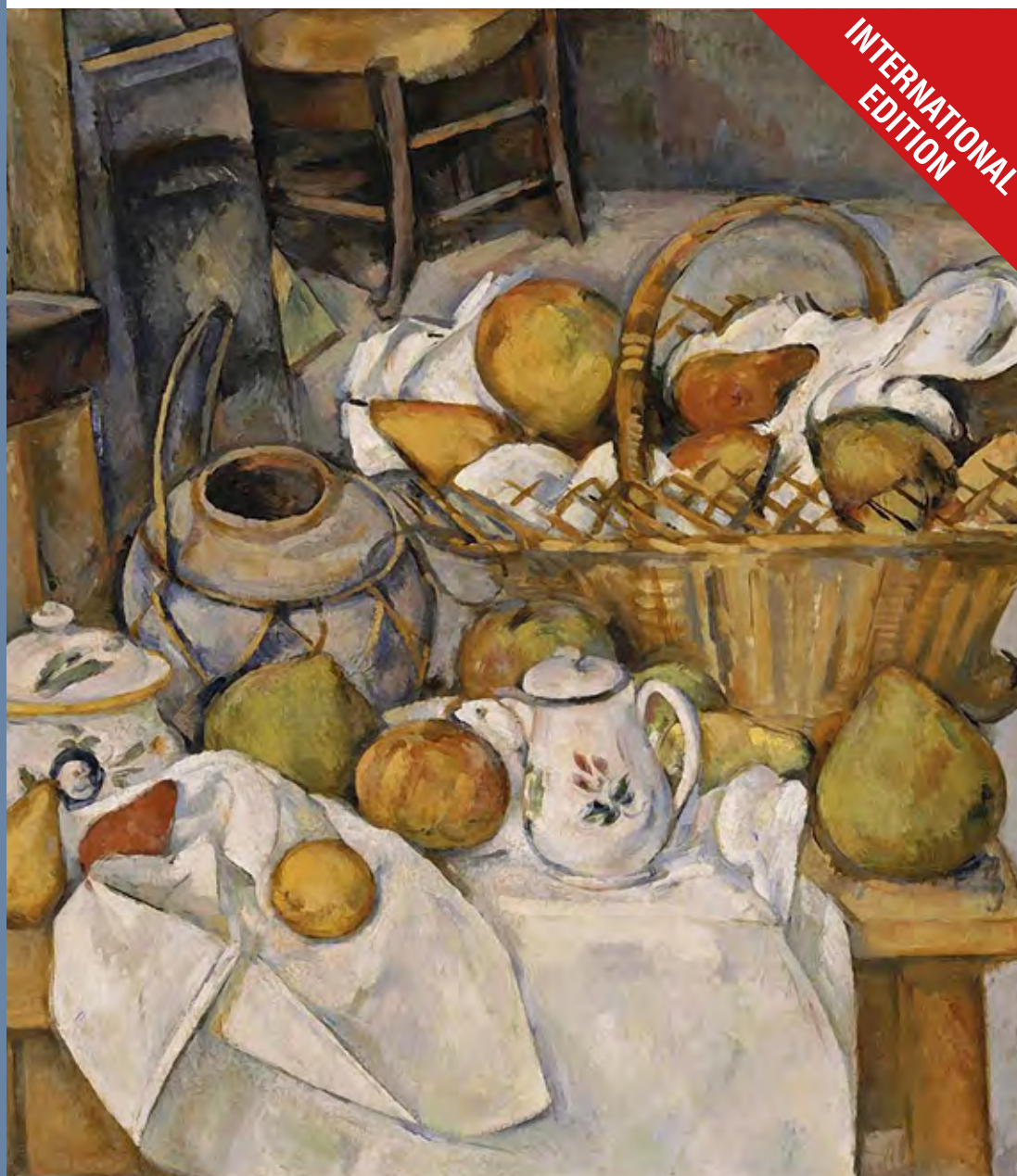


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*On the cover: Graphic elaboration of Still Life
with Fruit Basket (1850), by Paul Cézanne,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.*

Counterorder, comrades! The Mediterranean diet is dangerous

The UN wants to tax olive oil and cheese, including buffalo mozzarella.

BY PAOLO PETRONI

President of the Academy

Those who are past the first bloom of youth may remember the surreal cartoon series entitled “Contrordine compagni!” (Counterorder, comrades!), published by Giovannino Guareschi in the magazine “Candido”, to poke fun at blind, prompt and absolute obedience to the Communist party. This old exhortation sprang to our minds upon learning that the UN wants to tax olive oil and cheese for health reasons. The counterorder now aimed at us morons is clear: the Mediterranean diet, recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010, is beneficial to health and longevity. This diet favours fruit, cereals, vegetables and olive oil while permitting moderate use of dairy products and wine. Nonsense! The World Health Organisation instead wants to tax olive oil, *grana* cheese and wine. A formidable attack on Italian products and a windfall for the ‘light’ or ‘diet’ products of gargantuan multinational industries. And since we are, indeed, morons, they might as

well dumb down food labels by law, getting rid of those pesky numbers. How about a nice big traffic light, with red meaning “stop”: eat this little chunk of parmesan at your peril. It’s too salty and fatty. The same applies to buffalo mozzarella, not to mention the pernicious prosciutto and other cured meats. Even Neapolitan pizza, also recognised by UNESCO, would be verboten, and wine would be off-limits. In short, the fulsomely lauded Mediterranean diet would in practice be recast as unhealthy and hazardous. But since we are not, in fact, morons, we can easily perceive what is behind all this: the overwhelming interests of food multinationals, combined with indifference from our politicians who usually jerk awake in disbelief when the fat is already in the fire, presumably accompanied by excessive salt. Halt! Red card. Given its position, the Academy will strive hard to contain this folly, even by involving the Académie Européenne de la Gastronomie, though time is truly running short now.





The red revolution

Perhaps it was the volcanic fire under its roots, or the sunlight of Campania - whatever the reason, the tomato emerged from the earth as flawless as Venus.

BY MORELLO PECCHIOLI

"Franco Marengi" Study Centre

My cup runneth over - with an abundance of tomato sauce, marvellous gift of the gods, most delectable of condiments, which ardently returns our devotion. It lunges at us if we plunge in the fork and reel in the sauce-drenched spaghetti with famished urgency. Its joyous tears find the spots left uncovered by our napkin if we avidly mop up the scarlet remainder in our plate with a piece of bread. If we covetously approach the pot where it simmers and burbles, a sudden splat leaps out and leaves its mark. Food historians agree on 1770 as the year of the tomato revolution, five years before the American Revolutionary War began, 19 before the French Re-

volution and 147 before its Russian counterpart. It was a blood-red revolution, but the only blood spilt was that of the vegetable that had taken root in the volcanic earth of the Sarno river plain, with superb views of Vesuvius. There it had found its patron saint, San Marzano, and chosen a people to whom it would pledge loyalty in life and in death: the Neapolitans.

Because we are, in some ways, all Neapolitans, the tomato also gathered the rest of the Italians into its embrace. Grateful for such love, we have repaid it by giving it, alone among all vegetables, three plurals: pomidori, pomodoro, pomodori; for 'pomodoro' means, literally, 'golden apple', of which each

word, or both, can be pluralised. When Garibaldi, after encountering the first King of Italy at Teano, retired to Caprea with a sack of onions, his men, the renowned Thousand (Mille), returned home with San Marzano tomatoes in their packs. Italians adopted the tomato, originally from South America, as their own, improving its appearance, colour and flavour, disseminating throughout Europe and then the world the newfound colours of the Italian flag through their cuisine: green, white and tomato red.

The opening salvo of the tomato revolution was fired by Felipe Manuel Cayetano de Amat y Junyent, appointed viceroy of Peru by Charles III of Spain.





Felipe sent Ferdinand IV, king of Naples and son of the very same Charles III, a cornucopia of Peruvian gifts to ingratiate himself to his sovereign's son. These included the tomato seeds that had originally arrived from America two centuries earlier aboard the ships of Hernán Cortés, which at the time had not garnered the success anticipated by El Supremo Conquistador.

These new-world 'golden apples' arrived in Italy slightly later, docking in Puglia. Those first sprigs bore a yellow fruit that shimmered gold under the sunlight. Beautiful to behold, it was considered dangerous to eat, and was used only ornamentally. A long-lasting yellow tomato still exists in Salento, which local scholars identify as the origin of the name 'golden apple', eventually extended to all tomatoes.

Let us return to Ferdinand IV whom we set aside clutching his Peruvian tomato seeds. The king ordered them planted in San Marzano - a most fruitful decision. Whether because of the ruddy volcanic fires under their roots or the crimson sunlight of Campania, the tomato emerged from that earth as perfect as Venus rising from the Aegean foam: slender, curvaceous and silken, shining deep red (the tomato, not the goddess) and with a playful, whimsical ruff embroidered on its underside. Who can fail to love such a creature? Domenico Rea, a Neapolitan writer and journalist of the first half of the 20th century, even penned a declaration of love to it: "Its beauty is extraordinary: after the Venus de Milo there is nothing in the world as perfect as a San Marzano tomato".

The marriage of pasta and *pummarola* tomato sauce was not automatic. This nightshade, not yet welcome on wealthier tables, was already known in the poorer kitchens of southern Italy, and Antonio Latini's seminal cookbook *Lo Scalco alla moderna, ovvero l'arte di ben disporre i conviti* (*The Modern Steward, or the art of the well-arranged banquet*), published in Naples in 1692, contained the earliest surviving recipes for tomato sauce including the so-called 'Spa-



nish sauce'. However, Neapolitans continued eating pasta sans tomato until well into the 19th century, which would half elapse by the time tomato would finally incarnadine the Neapolitans' fingers (used in lieu of a fork, as in Totò's film *Miseria e Nobiltà*).

If the Neapolitan tomato became integral to the Mediterranean diet, much credit is due to the Piedmontese Francesco Cirio, whose slogan "Come natura crea, Cirio conserva" ("Made by Mother Nature, preserved by Cirio") is well-known in Italy. He pioneered tinned San Marzano tomatoes in the second half of the 19th century, and so the tomato, overcoming any remaining doubts, invaded the market and conquered our kitchens.

The red revolution transformed our lives. "The discovery of tomato", writes Luciano De Crescenzo, "was to food history what the French Revolution was to the development of a social conscience". Plates and kitchens acquired a vermilion glow as this Aztec fruit, its American roots forgotten, assumed a starring role in the Way of Italian Food, alongside pasta, wine and extra-virgin olive oil.

Following the pronouncements of Synesius of Cyrene (*In Praise of Baldness*), our tomato shed its outer layer to offer the best of itself in the form of concentrate. It did not even become conceited when in 1889, joining forces with white mozzarella and green basil, it won

the heart of a queen, Margherita, to whom the Neapolitan baker Raffaele Esposito dedicated the eponymous pizza. Since then, tomato and pizza have been inseparable.

Tomato sauce has become the glue that holds together the Italian family, the mortar unifying the Italian peninsula, the ink of our best poets and writers - at least those who came after our voyages to America. Writing to his daughter Linuccia, Umberto Saba recalls his wife Lina with boundless devotion, remembering the delicious meatballs that she prepared: "The meatballs with tomato which neither of us will ever taste again in this world were prepared in two different ways. Your poor mother ate them warm, without sauce, and I, cold, in a dish brimful of tomato".

Ugo Tognazzi, excellent actor and cook, confessed in his autobiographical recipe book: "Good food runs in my veins - which no doubt contain both red and white blood cells, but in my case, also a considerable admixture of tomato sauce".

Tomato figures in an anecdote from Pellegrino Artusi, the father of Italian cuisine: "A priest in a city in Romagna habitually stuck his nose into other people's business, interfering in every family's domestic affairs. The locals had cleverly nicknamed him Father Tomato, because tomato goes well with every food; indeed, a delicious tomato sauce is a formidable asset in every kitchen".



The pleasure of sharing

A conception of hospitality in which environment, cuisine and service harmonise in a project where everyone plays a role, including the diners.

BY ELISABETTA COCITO

Turin Academician

“Franco Marenghi” Study Centre

In a time and a society marked by widespread selfishness and egotism, a dissenting movement is gaining momentum. Indeed, many increasingly desire a return to a more social and communal lifestyle in which desires and ideas are shared. This phenomenon encompasses every arena, from work to leisure to culture. Food, one of the foremost expressions of a shared lifestyle, could hardly remain untouched. Conviviality was, after all, well-known to the ancients, though recently it has often been supplanted by haughty, often chilly preparations aspiring to aesthetic perfection at the risk of becoming affected and incomprehensible, sometimes assuming the aura of chemical formulae conjured in distant laboratories by remote figures elevated to the

rank of gurus or philosophers impervious to contradiction. Barthes himself maintained that in a pleasure-based society, food sheds its nutritional value in favour of ‘ancillary values’, which may account for the above tendency. Food, however, is a form of culture, in terms not only of what but of how we eat and in what environment. The table has always been a forum where societal mores and fashions are expressed, and it is therefore no coincidence that the current restaurant scene displays this new tendency towards sharing, recalling the communal board of yore in which all diners partook of the same food.

Turin has recently witnessed the inauguration of a new venue, set like a jewel in the new multipurpose La Nuvola (“The Cloud”) centre designed for Lavazza by





the architect Cino Zucchi. The restaurant's name, *Condividere* ('Sharing'), was entrusted to the experienced hands of chef Federico Zanasi and manifests the new food philosophy. It was born from a collaboration with Ferran Adrià, who spent two years training the chef with a view to offering diners new sensations and above all a new, or perhaps rediscovered, conception of cuisine. Zanasi has organised his work around the new principles and ideas acquired through this two-year tutelage.

Thanks to a spacious kitchen in plain view, diners can witness the creation of their food. Though this is not unprecedented, one cannot fail to be impressed by the smiles, fluid rhythms and collaborative timing of the young kitchen crew as they ply their trade. Nowhere can we see the tension and exhaustion which often characterise kitchen work.

It is at the table that the project's fundamental principles are best expressed. Here diners are drawn into the ethos of sharing. Equipment is minimal: no longer the standard setting of cutlery and individual plates, but a small plate with tongs, reminiscent of chopsticks, for each diner, and a communal serving dish for each course. This is probably inspired by Asian 'family-style' dining, aiming to make the meal more communal, thereby encouraging interaction and comments about the food. It is probably no coincidence that the tables are round or oval, with no 'head' position, eliminating physical and hierarchical distances among diners.

Cuisine has, I believe, its roots in ancient cultural practices, in which the best nourishment is derived from blending distinct, even contradictory flavours. These combinations and contaminations only appear bold, and are by no means coincidental.

Surprisingly, in his two-year training with Adrià, Zanasi was never tasked with cooking, in which he was already an expert, but rather with learning the history of cooking since antiquity. Much attention was dedicated to the study of regional Italian cuisine, and the nature



and origin of ingredients: his recipes are informed by that scholarship, that knowledge of raw materials and their organoleptic properties and therefore their best culinary uses. Zanasi was also alongside Adrià through the conception, opening and inauguration of his first restaurant in Barcelona, including all its managerial and financial aspects. Adrià did not, therefore, exert himself to create a 'chef', but a 'manager', with cultural and historical expertise in the culinary realm.

The 'Sharing' restaurant's first aim is to make the people of Turin feel 'at home', offering them familiar traditional dishes creatively revisited, leaving their basic flavours perfectly recognisable yet complemented by aromas from Asia or Spain, with some incursions by other Italian regions and even ancient Rome. So we have Turin-style bread sticks with Spanish cured meat; steamed bread with *cunza modenese* (lard, garlic and rosemary sauce from Modena); the classic roast pepper with tuna sauce spiked with cured roe; or tongue in cinnamon-infused green herb sauce. And more: three-meat *agnolotti* dumplings with broth on the side, served *al tovagliolo* ('in a napkin') embodying hallowed Piedmontese tradition, but steamed and presented in a bamboo basket like dim sum, displaying the genius of cross-border fusion cuisine. Finally, a homage to France with Kys oysters from Brittany, and to chef Adrià with spherified olive pearls. The recipes

of Apicius are recalled with Spanish *capicola* cured meat cooked in a *jospir* (a Spanish charcoal oven) and brushed with *garum*, or rather, the reinterpretation of *garum*, the fish sauce considered indispensable in ancient Roman cuisine.

Dessert also honours tradition while exhibiting exoticism through spices or original presentation. The star is the *Tropézienne* cake, a homage to a dessert which graces many Sunday family gatherings in Turin, the signature creation of a noted local bakery. The service also deserves praise: youthful, swift, knowledgeable, attentive and engaging.

The chef paid particular attention to training and motivating both service and kitchen staff, promoting transparency and collaboration between teams. Everyone has roles and responsibilities, and though minor lapses in formal service are forgiven, this does not translate into shoddiness in welcoming and paying attention to customers. I consider this crucial, though it is frequently neglected even in prestigious establishments.

Condividere is a project marked by a hospitality concept which I hope will find new converts. Indeed I believe that any restaurant that aspires to grow should foster the sense that the venture as a whole, encompassing its ambience, approach, cuisine and service, results from a harmony in which everyone, including the diners, has a role to play.



The perfection of the egg

Indispensable in many recipes, it has fascinated artists with its flawless form.

BY MYRIAM FONTI CIMINO

Naples Academician

The gigantic eggs which tower over the roof of Dalí's house in Port Lligat (Cadaqués), the easternmost town in the Costa Brava, pay homage to a food whose form has long fascinated and intrigued me. I was always mesmerised by the wooden eggs which women in the old days turned over and over in their hands while meticulously darning socks, and by the egg-shaped lamp created by Fontana-Arte, with its distinctive luminescence which inspired both wonderment and serenity. This is the same sensation that we feel when holding and gazing upon

an egg. It basks in our admiration of its form, which even bewitched Modigliani and resurfaced in the ovoid shapes of his work; it demands respect, because even the slightest clumsy move could break it, revealing its red heart.

Is there truly an egg underneath Castel dell'Ovo (Egg Castle), the imposing structure where Virgil apparently once resided? How fascinating! Another oddity is that in Italian, it is masculine in the singular and feminine in the plural, representing its adaptability.

The egg even played an important role in the Russian court, captivated by the

legendary mastery of the Fabergé jewelers that entranced the empress Maria Feodorovna, enchanted by the golden hen concealed within the Easter egg received from her husband, Alexander III. Symbolising the birth of life, the egg figures in both Jewish and Christian, including Orthodox, religious celebrations, giving rise to the chocolate Easter eggs of the mid-19th century. Its Latin name, *ovum*, is probably etymologically related to *avis* (bird). This precious little foodstuff is a female gamete, enclosing all that is necessary to create a new life. It is one large cell, whose nu-





cleus, the yolk, is richer in highly nutritious proteins than any other food. The yolk is also rich in various fats and contains a high percentage of cholesterol, offset, however, by lecithin, which plays a role in clearing the arteries. The claim that egg yolk causes high cholesterol has been debunked.

On the contrary, it is now demonstrated that it favours liver activity. It contains complete proteins, minerals (calcium, magnesium, sodium and potassium), and vitamins A, D and B. The yolk is rich in fats, of which 30% are saturated (unhealthy) and 70% unsaturated (healthy). All told, the egg is small but surprisingly substantial in terms of positive qualities: it is as nutritious as meat but more digestible; soft-boiled, it requires an hour and a half to digest, compared to three hours for pasta and four for roast meat. Elders should be particularly grateful because eggs help to retain youthfulness by providing substances including phospholipids, which protect cell membranes from oxidation and ageing. And the egg is indispensable for vegetarians! Yet it must be consumed in moderation, especially considering its presence in many foods including pasta, cakes and creams. So: a maximum of one egg 2-3 times a week. Only children, athletes and convalescent patients can eat eggs daily. A particularly modern food, since, though small, it is even branded, its shell being marked with useful information about its geographical origin and mode of production: organic, open-air (where hens can run outside for several hours a day), free-range (indoors but without cages, where eggs are laid on the ground and then gathered by the farmer), or in cages or batteries (where hens are confined 4 to 6 to a cage), laying eggs on to a conveyor belt which transports them to packing facilities under controlled conditions of hygiene. Here we must clarify a frequently overlooked fact: eggs from battery hens are not nutritionally inferior to free-range eggs, thanks to increasingly suitable plant-based diets. A study by the Department of Science and Technology at the University of



Milan shows that the higher price of free-range eggs is due to greater costs for maintaining security and hygiene standards.

After all this praise, let us find some flaws in the egg! It is crucial that it be extremely fresh, since it rapidly deteriorates and is highly sensitive to environmental factors including temperature and humidity. Its freshness can be tested in the traditional manner: if it makes no sound when shaken, or sinks when placed in salt water, it is fresh.

Another difficulty is presented by storage: eggs must be kept whole, apart from other foods, in stable conditions; they are best stored in the back of the fridge, not in the door, which is exposed to greater temperature variation while being repeatedly opened.

The egg is a precious companion because it is found in so many recipes: it never goes out of fashion and is often a life-saver, because it can compensate adequately for shortcomings in the pantry. It can be eaten raw, which in Italy is called 'oyster style', with some lemon juice, and is a crucial ingredient in many sauces and creams and as a binder in batters. Its most common uses are: baked (salt only on the white, melted warm butter on the yolk, then baked in the oven); fried; soft-boiled (with barely

solid white and liquid yolk); lightly boiled (boiled slightly longer than soft-boiled); hard-boiled (seven minutes from the water's boiling point); in tomato sauce; scrambled; and poached (for delicate stomachs: in slightly salted water with vinegar, the egg is gently tipped into the water from a small dish and boiled for 3 minutes or so).

Dante considered buttered eggs the best food, while Gabriele D'Annunzio described the frittata as 'sublime', writing to his cook Albina that the 15th century culinary expert Maestro Martino (Martino da Como) advised in his *Libro de arte coquinaria* (*The Art of Cooking*) that it should be prepared "with a little water and a little milk to make it softer". To stimulate the most refined palates, eggs can be used in an omelette, the French version of the frittata, containing the semi-liquid interior called *baveuse*; or to create the delicate Italian crêpes called *crespelle* (from the Latin *crispus*, 'wavy') or various flans. Eggs can also be combined with flour to make egg pasta, cakes, doughnuts and rolls.

A very distinctive technique is that of sand-cooked eggs: a layer of sand is disposed in an earthenware pot, followed by the eggs and then another, thicker layer of sand, and the container is then placed in the oven.



Futurist cuisine

Artistic presentation, combination of disparate flavours and raw materials, emotional tasting: an inheritance of which today's cuisine still bears the mark.

BY ROBERTO BRANCONI

Viareggio Versilia Academician

In this brief overview of futurist cuisine I would like to suggest a reflection on Italian cooking. It seems to me that we could use a metaphor comparing it to a living system, endowed with DNA, inherited through a long environmental evolution which, as with every living organism or system, is subject to mutations (often random, as in the Darwinian biological model, or cultural, economic or political). According to Darwin's theory, these are then selected according to environmental advantageousness, and then, if useful and viable, transmitted to subsequent generations. This appears to happen even in the food world, with the emergence of fashions, concepts and innovations which either vanish or are in some way assimilated.

Following this premise, which obviously does not aspire to explain but merely to simplify, and which I shall revisit at the

end of this outline, let us examine some aspects of futurist cuisine. In Italy, its ideological ancestor was undoubtedly Tommaso Marinetti, who in 1930, in a radio broadcast [quoted in Guido Andrea Pautasso (ed), *Cucina futurista, manifesti teorici, menu e documenti* (Futurist Cuisine: theoretical manifestos, menus and documents): Abscondita, 2015], forcefully declared "down with pasta!"

In 1913, in the *Manifeste de la cuisine futuriste* (Futurist Cuisine Manifesto), Marinetti and the French chef Jules Maincave set themselves the goal of revolutionising gastronomy through unconventional experimentation with ingredients, aiming to create a "gladdening, optimistic, dynamic and quickening" cuisine. Returning to the 'psycho-logical' dimension of futurist cuisine, Pautasso notes: "Dishes and foods were transformed into colour

palettes, and forks were abolished to encourage samplings and tactile delights. The futurist restaurant Taverna Santopalato (Tavern of the Holy Palate) had aluminium-panelled walls and was redolent of eau de cologne sprayed by waiters armed with vaporisers, while the rumble of an aircraft's combustion engine served as background music". As we know and readily perceive through these words, the pillars of futurist cuisine almost all derived from ideas of technological innovation, synaesthesia, experimental combinations, and sensory and mechanical dynamism.

Here is the intriguing menu, re-defined, of course, as a 'list', of the first futurist meal served in the Taverna Santopalato in Turin, on the 8th of March 1931.

Intuitive appetiser: little baskets made of orange peel containing rolled ham, stuffed olives, oil-pickled artichokes, and sweet green peppers. Inside were

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E FILLIA
LA
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Carneplastico ('Meatscape')



slips of paper which were spat out, opened and read aloud to the assembled company. They expressed futurist slogans such as "Futurism is an anti-historical movement" or even "Physicians, pharmacists and undertakers will be rendered unemployed by futurist cuisine".

Aerovivanda ('Aerofood'): a composition of fruits and vegetables, olives, fennel and candied *chinotto* orange, eaten with the right hand without cutlery (considered distracting) while the left hand stroked a textured tablet clad in sandpaper, velvet and silk or satin as an orchestra played noisy futurist music (perhaps the equivalent of our heavy metal) and waiters sprayed an intense carnation essence on the nape of each diner's neck!

Carneplastico ('Meatscape'): conceived by the futurist painter and poet Fillia,

it sculpturally alluded to Italian landscapes. It reportedly consisted of a large cylindrical meatloaf made of roast veal (which, alongside chicken and sausage, honoured the three meats produced by Italian pastures) stuffed with eleven different cooked vegetables (representing Italian agriculture). The cylinder, positioned vertically in the centre of the plate, was crowned with honey (homage to the garden) and supported by a ring of sausage resting on three golden chicken spheres. Its vertical stance was intended to counteract the weak, unmanly and artistically vacuous horizontal disposition of pasta.

Pollofiat (Fiat chicken), also named 'steel chicken': its name change was allegedly requested for transparent marketing reasons by the managers of Fiat. Chicken stuffed with red zabaione (zabaione custard with Marsala and full-bodied red wine) covered in approximately 200 grammes of silver-coloured spherical bonbons. Diulgheroff's first version used steel ball bearings which were removed after the chicken was seasoned.

Ultravirile ('Ultra-virile', served only to ladies). Veal tongue, thinly sliced lengthwise, was disposed on a rectangular plate. Over this, roast prawns were arranged in two rows parallel to the length of the dish. In the centre was a lobster with green zabaione (zabaione with asparagus purée), and finally two halves of a boiled egg were placed at the base of the veal tongue slices.

Brodo solare ('Solar broth'), created by

the cook Ernesto Piccinelli, was a meat-based broth. Three eggs were beaten in the soup tureen and then three small glasses of Marsala, a spoonful of oil, the zest of one lemon, parmesan, salt and pepper were whisked in. Yellow or orange vegetables (for example, carrots and even lemons) floated in this liquid.

I would like to end by returning to the metaphor offered earlier to describe Italian cuisine. It has emerged unscathed from various bizarre and I daresay extravagant experiments, or, metaphorically, 'mutations', but the way I see it, it was able to assimilate some of their functional elements over time: for instance, the insistence on a properly lit kitchen clearly visible to diners (Maincave's *Futurist Cuisine Manifesto* declares that "Futurist cuisine forbids food preparation in subterranean darkness"); the possibility of experimenting with combinations of disparate flavours and raw materials, already expressed in Brillat Savarin; and the concept that ambience, furnishings and efficient service are indispensable elements in a convivial meal. And finally, the principle that artistic or at least aesthetic presentation of food and its dishes and colours is crucial to what we now call taste, which is not simply the combination of the four or five fundamental flavours (sour, sweet, bitter, salty and umami) but a complex synaesthesia of smell, touch and sight, perceived by deep-seated and ancient areas of our nervous system before even reaching the gustatory cortex. In a word: emotions...

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