

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



INTERNATIONAL
EDITION

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

www.accademia1953.it

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

JANUARY 2020 / N. 322

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MONTHLY MAGAZINE
REG. N. 4049 - 29-5-1956
TRIBUNALE DI MILANO

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Periodica Italiana



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Food waste: *an overblown problem*

by Paolo Petroni

President of the Accademia

After the holiday season, the problem of phony estimates arises.

After the long year-end holiday period, newspapers, magazines and television have shifted from the usual advice about meals for Christmas Eve, Christmas and New Year's Eve to the hackneyed and contradictory suggestions regarding **detoxifying diets**. So far, protocol is being followed. However, this new decade has dawned with fresh lamentations about wasted money. Wasted on pointless presents which are often recycled for being horrendous, bulky or useless, to the point where one doesn't know where to keep them. **What is amazing is the speed with which this problem is quantified, almost in real time.** But how? Christmas has barely passed, yet our experts, perhaps using an old-school crystal ball, inform us that a third of Italians, meaning 23 million wretched souls, are ready to recycle the gifts they've received. 3.3 billion Euros' worth of useless presents. These impressive reports imply that, considering the economic crisis under way in Italy, we are irresponsible lunatics to throw away all this money.

Food apparently accounts for 45% of recycled goods: how are these figures calculated?

It seems that food accounts for 45% of recycled goods, and that 20% of purchased food is discarded. This generates other dramatic figures of the type "each family throws away 85 kilos of food each year, amounting to 450 Euros" or "food waste comes to 15 billion Euros per year" and so on. **Values and estimations vary according to different sources.** And the problem is precisely this: there is manifestly some waste, but it is a real mystery by which methods one can discover precisely what happens in Italian homes, especially with such speed. What matters is the impressive news headline, triggering guilt for this waste of precious resources. But **are we sure that we, the consumers, are the true and sole culprits?** For starters, several million Euros are thrown away at the source: through agriculture, in wholesale warehouses and by shopkeepers, that is, before the food reaches our homes. Then there are the companies



offering substantial discounts on extra-large packages or 3-for-2 deals. They know perfectly well that the average family size is 2.3 people and that by now a third of households contain only one person, but instead of providing packaging suitable for such targets, they insist on treating consumers as if they were members of the large families common a century ago.

The problem of leftovers has always existed, and Artusi already knew this

There is also the considerable problem of **expiry dates**. Many throw theoretically expired food away the day after the date printed on its packaging, when its suitability for consumption could be ascertained by simply tasting and observing it, as happens with eggs, milk, cheese, cured meats, pasta and so on. The truth is that expiry dates, created to protect consumers, **have ended up being a boon to industry.** If we were all rational, only purchasing useful gifts or necessary foods without wasting anything, consumption would fall by 20-30%. Would our economy withstand such a blow? The problem of leftovers has always existed and Artusi himself already knew this. In 1918, a book by the poet Olindo Guerrini was published posthumously; it was entitled *L'arte di utilizzare gli avanzi della mensa e risparmiare con gusto* (*The art of using kitchen leftovers and saving money deliciously*). Following this, tens of books on the same topic were published even in recent years. In 2016, the Academy edited the volume *La Cucina del riuso* (*The Cuisine of Reuse*) in its old *Cultural Gastronomic Itineraries* book series. These are signs that consumers are thoughtful and cannot bear to see good food wasted.



Food and eroticism in Fellini's films

by **Giuseppe Benelli**
Lunigiana Academician

*Under Fellini's direction,
food embodies
temptation, forbidden
flavour and sensuality.*

Federico **Fellini's hundredth birthday is this year:** he was born on 20 January 1920 in Rimini, the seaside resort town where he spent his youth, before going to Rome at 19 years of age to work as a cartoonist for the satirical magazine *Marc'Aurelio* (*Marcus Aurelius*). Throughout his life he declared: "I cannot consider Rimini an objective fact. It is rather, or merely, a dimension of memory". In *Amarcord* he depicts the Rimini of school pranks, of the Grand Hotel with its *Belle Époque* allure and its wondrous Liberty façade, of plump girls bathing in summer and buxom farm girls on bikes on market days. He had encountered this

eroticism in his youth in the Fulgor cinema, where he seduced the tobacconist with her burgeoning bosom and a rump that seemed a world in itself. The winner of five Oscars, four for *La strada*, *Le notti di Cabiria*, *Otto e mezzo* and *Amarcord* and a fifth for his career, he encountered hostility from critics who accused him of breaking with neorealism to immerse himself in fantasy.

*The languages of love and food
intertwine constantly*

His work offers constant reminders of food within a riot of sounds and flavours, with the languages of love and food always intertwining. **The wedding banquet,** a ritual bound by definition to Eros, in which Zampanò and Gelsomina participate **in *La Strada*** is a popular celebration in which the protagonist (Anthony Quinn) expresses a primitive carnal desire. **In *Satyricon*,** which revisits a Latin work of fiction by Petronius, **gluttony** reaches its scandalous culmination: the silhouette of a bull's head on a platter, eyeballs on gigantic dishes, a roast pig being emptied of its viscera. The transport of Dionysian rituals and wine as an invasive deity proceed apace, disclosing alternate worlds. **But the film which most approaches his life in terms of food is *Amarcord*,** set in Rimini during the 1930s. Adolescent hormones run rampant; a proud woman dressed in red turns heads and attracts admiration; a deranged uncle flees up a tree and shouts to the world: "I want a woman!" The family dines on soup in the kitchen, though what is on





the table is far less interesting than what is happening around them. Under Fellini's direction, food embodies temptation, forbidden flavour and sensuality, as in the case of Guido and his lover's lunch in *Otto e mezzo* (81/2). The lack of appetite displayed by Guido (Marcello Mastroianni) witnessing the voracity of Carla (Sandra Milo) expresses a difficult erotic rapport: she slowly and rapturously devours a chicken drumstick, while he merely observes.

All this is connected with his childhood food traditions

While food is consolation in *Amarcord*, in a film like *Boccaccio '70* **the act of eating may conceal a sense of the forbidden.** The generous curves of Anita Ekberg, exhorting us to 'drink more milk', and the abundant figures of the women who starred in the director's own life are synonymous with substantial nourishment. **His mother**, Ida Barbiani, a seventh-generation Roman, **had raised her children**, Federico, Riccardo and Maddalena, **to appreciate good food.** His father Urbano was a parmesan salesman, and at home he stored cheese wheels as large as dining tables. "I grew up with that fragrance under my nose", recalled Fellini.

His wife Giulietta, born and raised in Emilia, cooked vast quantities of minestrone, tagliatelle with ragù and pollo alla diavola ('devil's chicken'). A reputed master of Roman-style *pasta e*

fagioli (pasta with beans) using red *borlotti* beans, she maintained that its secret was its thickness: the wooden spoon should stand upright in the terracotta dish. Finally, there were the recipes from his sister Maddalena, at whose table Federico magically rediscovered the symphony of flavours described in the volume written by his sister and niece: **A tavola con Fellini** (*At the table with Fellini*). **A series of recipes loved by Fellini:** *maltagliati* pasta with beans, fish stew, roast pigeon, boiled meatballs with raisins, but also tagliatelle, cannelloni and cappelletti in broth, all complemented by a glass of good Sangiovese wine. "One recipe in particular delighted uncle Federico", says his niece Francesca, "namely a fresh, flavoursome recipe which embodies the simplicity of Italian cuisine: *alicette agli agrumi* (citrus-marinated anchovies)".

He habitually roamed among the capital's restaurants, as recounted in the film Roma

Fellini recounts his habit of roaming among the capital's restaurants in the film *Roma*. The director is fascinated by the carnival atmosphere of the streets, "as if the entire city were dining together". Cooks dole out ladlefuls of snails and waitresses shout out the daily specials: "veal intestine", "clam fettuccine", "scampi with anchovies". The young protagonist joins a table of raucous Romans: "You are what you eat", says the man seated next

to him while extracting a snail from its shell. Humans have always felt the necessity of leaving reality, experiencing dissolution and euphoria. To be alone in a crowd, to shout into the hubbub, are forms of ritual which obey an innate instinct. The food and the actors' hunger are both real: the extras ate between scenes. Fellini captured forkfuls of spaghetti suspended in the air through multiple tracking shots around the square. Fellini's first act upon sitting at a restaurant table was to open a napkin, pull out a pen and begin sketching the face of the person seated opposite him, or drawing some fantasy that crossed his mind. Gianfranco Angelucci writes: "For meat, he much preferred the restaurant Dal Toscano al Girarrosto [...]; its young and attractive owner, exalted in a drawing by Federico as "The Blessed Paola of the Meatballs", shaped ground meat into flattened ovoid balls beloved by the director, **using a cut of stewing meat flavoured with pine nuts and raisins.** This delicacy is still named after Fellini in the restaurant's menu. The aforementioned paper is still kept in the restaurant as a relic".

Easy-going and unpredictable, the great director expressed himself by throwing open the door to mystery and entrusting himself to the voice of art, the only one that cannot be manipulated. Just like *The Voice of the Moon*, which seizes dominion of the sky and snatches night away from our eyes. Federico Fellini died in 1993 and his moon, poetic and wry, continues to shine.

Giuseppe Benelli



New technologies in the kitchen

by Anna Marmioli
Reggio Emilia Delegate

*A cultural challenge first
and foremost.*

The history of food storage traces one aspect of humanity's ancient and protracted struggle for guaranteed, safe and continuous access to food which would normally be perishable. By preserving food, humans gained an additional chance of survival.

The first food-preserving technologies date from antiquity, to the Romans and the Egyptians before them, and probably to still more ancient times lost to history, precisely because food storage fulfils one of our foremost needs, namely survival. Hence food was cooked and preserved using honey, salt, spices and so on, continuing to more recent inventions from glass (early 19th century) to vacuum storage to the increasingly refined modern cold storage methods.

*Technology has changed
our conception of food*

Technology - as any chef will concur - has undoubtedly changed our conception of food, even just in the past few years. Most strikingly, the **cold chain** has brought a veritable technological revolution. Increasing advances in cooling allow us to deliver a prawn just fished in Mazara directly to Milan without losing one iota of quality and freshness. Culinary



equipment has also been revolutionised. The past 15 years have radically changed our approach to dishes and ingredients. Additives are redundant: **rotary evaporators** can now distil at low temperatures, thereby allowing ingredients to retain properties which would otherwise be lost through boiling.

Meat can be unprecedentedly tender thanks to **roners for low-temperature cooking**. Raw materials are treated in new ways which let us use almost every part thereof, minimising waste. **Steam ovens** are now even found in homes; the latest models are remote-controlled with cameras to monitor cooking while performing other tasks. And then there is **ultrasound cooking**, allowing amazing speed in meat preparation. Ageing that once required months now takes only days with no loss of quality.

The latest culinary **blast chiller** models, using liquid nitrogen, can flawlessly freeze food at -30°C in a few minutes. Robotic artificial intelligence, which can flawlessly emulate the movements, postures and gestures of chefs even, and especially, in their absence, might usher us into a new paradigm of food preparation, without the need for humans but benefiting from all their technological expertise!

*Hydroponics guarantees vastly
efficient use of raw materials*

New technologies also play a role in developing and producing raw materials: a representative example is hydroponics. This agricultural technique permits ever-higher plant quality and heretofore unimaginable efficiency in resource use (**how much land is necessary for a field of courgettes, and how much less is needed for the same amount cultivated through hydroponics?**).

Beyond saving space, this crucially allows us to grow plants where classical agriculture would be impossible, while delivering higher guaranteed quality and nutritional value with almost year-round availability.

One could be frightened by these developments, but for this very reason it is imperative that we learn about these technologies to exploit their positive aspects while avoiding the redundancies or excesses which they might facilitate, perhaps by holding firm to the humanistic principle that has long inspired such progress.

We may even be witnessing the dawn of a new Renaissance.



Italian flavour?

It's an all-rounder

by **Gigi Padovani**

Honorary Academician for Torino Lingotto

*Interview with chef
Cristina Bowerman,
president of the
Taste Ambassadors:
"No recipe
is immutable".*

A few years ago, the restaurateur Tony May, one of the first Italian cooks to thrive in Manhattan, organised a meeting in New York with a meaningful title: "Italian cuisine: a victim of its own success?". That question is as timely as ever: **Italian culinary traditions are increasingly widespread internationally**, and our products are known, appreciated and often copied

to varying degrees. **However, stereotypes persist:** pizza and spaghetti (the mandolin having mercifully been consigned to the attic by now, alongside chequered tablecloths) remain the worldwide emblems of our cuisine.

In June 2016, **a group of forty chefs**, riding the wave of the successful Expo 2015 in Milan, founded the **Associazione Italiana Ambasciatori del Gusto**





Gnocchetti, sea urchins and black garlic bagna cauda (photo by Niko Boi)

(Italian Association of Taste Ambassadors), whose aim is to “make the most of Italy’s agrifood and wine heritage”. After all, ambassadors are emissaries carrying their mission abroad.

Cristina Bowerman strives to interpret “the Italian concept of taste” as best she can

Leading the organisation from its inception is a ‘nerdy cook’, as she has been described because of her professional rigour: the Pugliese-Roman-American **Cristina Bowerman**. She has resolutely undertaken her quest to interpret “the Italian concept of taste” (as expressed in the Statute of the Taste Ambassadors) to the best of her abilities. **Through talk shows, conferences and awareness-raising campaigns** (such as Action Aid and Fiorano for Kids), she wants to potentiate the success of haute cuisine at home, she says, “with a vision which allows us to transcend the stereotypes traditionally attached to it”. **This is Bowerman’s vision:** “Lifestyles have changed; we must fulfil the needs of real restaurant patrons, not our grandparents or mothers: hence traditional cuisine can serve as a launching pad, but must

adapt. There is a generation of chefs with worldwide reputations, first and foremost Massimo Bottura, who promote and protect our ingredients without forgetting that no recipe is immutable”.

What is the definition of ‘Italian taste’?

“When we’re abroad and see a well-dressed person walking, we can immediately tell if the person is Italian: we don’t know if they are wearing Armani, Valentino or some other stylist, but their style is unmistakable. The same applies to cuisine. **Our dishes have a rounded, voluptuous, velvety flavour:** they are filling, thanks also to our high-quality carbohydrates, which must not be demonised as unfortunately happens too frequently these days. If we compare our foods to Asian foods, the latter are characterised by peaks of acidity or spice, which could be rendered graphically by sharp angles rather than the Italian roundness”.

She has opened the Glass Hostaria restaurant in Rome, which garnered a Michelin star

Born in Cerignola, in the Puglia region, following a law degree Cristina Bowerman spent many years in the USA, where

she pursued her passion for cooking by gaining another degree in Culinary Arts in Austin: more than just a piece of paper, since she made excellent use of it upon returning to Italy by opening the Glass Hostaria restaurant in Rome in 2005, thereby gaining a Michelin star. Woman, mother, entrepreneur and chef: she cares deeply about being all of these. She declares this with determination, recalling the title of the book by the Americans Tania Kindersley and Sarah Vine, *Backwards in High Heels: The Impossible Art of Being Female*, citing a quip by the dancer Ginger Rogers, the unforgettable partner of Fred Astaire in so many mid-twentieth-century Hollywood films. “The fact that women still face difficulties in achieving the same professional success as male peers is, alas, well-known. I think it’s cultural, relating to a mentality which needs to change, as demonstrated by certain comments that remain common in this arena. I have seen debates dedicated to female chefs whose panels consisted of six male cooks... Perhaps it was unintentional, but things are still this way. I’m trying to teach my twelve-year-old son that we must not judge someone by their gender or physical appearance, because what matters is only the person and their merit”.

The activities of the Taste Ambassa-

dors have given rise to several projects, such as collaborations with hotel schools, Italian Food Weeks abroad, an agreement with the LUM Jean Monnet University to educate food entrepreneurs, and a partnership with the Ente Nazionale Risi (National Rice Council) to promote Italian rice worldwide. "Most recently" - recalls Bowerman - "we have worked with the Order of Psychologists to promote a scientific study on stress in the restaurant world. We wish to understand how to improve everyone's life, while dispelling a myth: in our kitchen crews we don't throw frying pans as seen on television; that is done for show. **The chef, which means 'chief', must possess and project authority, while also respecting the crew**, because the restaurant has a vested interest in harmonious operations".

The Trastevere quarter of Rome, Cerignola, San Francisco: which experiences influence the food of the Glass Hostaria? "I am Pugliese, Roman, American, all these together: I have always loved being free of boundaries. To cite a beautiful phrase that I recently heard: let us talk no more of nationality, but rather,

of humanity. After so many years in which tradition alone was praised, I now hear many chefs talking about cross-pollinations and the use of novel ingredients. **Tradition must be protected, but it cannot remain calcified, without evolving**, or future generations may not understand it and may reject it altogether. Early in my career I was criticised for using avocado, a memento of my time in America, while today it is widely cultivated in Sicily. **I'd rather avoid being limited by the 'zero-kilometre' doctrine enforcing local produce: I'd rather know the 'guaranteed origin' of an ingredient**. I'd like to know how it's cultivated before it reaches my plate. For instance I wouldn't be happy with a vegetable grown on the land near my home, right next to the motorway".

Do you agree that our cuisine is 'ingredient-centric'? Various foreign chefs, including Ferran Adrià and Alain Ducasse, have described Italian food in this way. "This idea is often repeated, it's true. But I agree only partially, because without the *savoir faire* of our cooks, nothing good will come about - using excellent ingredients is not enough".

Her restaurant's iconic dishes emerge from a multicultural vocation

Her multicultural vocation is also confirmed by her restaurant's iconic dishes, such as 'gnocchetti with sea urchins, black garlic *bagna cauda*, crunchy bread and truffle', the classic '60-month parmesan fondue ravioli with Isigny butter', the 'mini sandwich with *lampascioni* [wild onions], hazelnut mayonnaise and bone marrow' or the 'non-dessert' made of 'stilton, grapes, white and dark chocolate and port'.

The chef of Glass Hostaria adds: "**When cooking I always try to connect my multiple cultures**. At the Identità Golose chefs' congress two years ago, I presented a parallel between mole poblano and coda alla vaccinara (Roman oxtail stew), two dishes from geographically distant countries with one thing in common: the use of cocoa in a savoury recipe". And she concludes: "Food is the only thing which can connect all peoples".

Gigi Padovani

Fondue-filled ravioli (photo by Niko Boi)





The menace of plastic bottle caps

by **Gabriele Gasparro**
Rome Delegate

Opening and closing bottles releases microplastics which are swallowed with water.

Le Plastic bottles used for mineral water, in whose consumption Italy is second only to Mexico, account for a substantial proportion of waste. **Only 40% of plastic mineral water bottles go to recycling facilities.** The associated ecological dangers are often overlooked: our oceans contain veritable islands of plastic, including six major ones. The largest, the 'Pacific Trash Vortex', is in the Pacific Ocean and migrates according to ocean currents. Its massive size, comparable to that of the Iberian Peninsula, is estimated at a minimum of 700,000 square kilometres and a maximum of 10 million, for a weight exceeding 3 million tonnes of accumulated refuse. Even the Mediterranean is not spared, being classified as the sixth-largest zone of plastic waste accumulation in the world.

A study by the University of Milan indicts polyethylene bottle caps

A detailed study by researchers in the Department of Environmental Political



Sciences at the University of Milan **specifically indicts the caps** of these bottles. Its data suggest that unscrewing these bottle caps **releases microplastics which are deposited on the lip of the bottle** and are ingested while swallowing water. The laboratory examined various thicknesses of PET (polyethylene) bottles produced by several major brands and subjected them to a battery of tests to simulate repeated opening and closing of their caps. The opening and closing action was repeated up to 100 times. The water was then filtered to quantify the microplastics present and determine the polymer whence they originated. The study thereby confirmed the presence of microplastics in mineral water, with a density of approximately **150 microparticles per litre**. These come from caps made of **high-density polyethylene, which is abraded by the repeated stress of opening and closing**, leading to the release of microscopic plastic fragments

which are deposited especially on the lip of the bottle and on the cap itself. Hence we may **ingest hundreds of thousands of microparticles each time we drink from a plastic bottle.**

This research also revealed that bottles from different brands are eroded in different ways depending on their neck structure. Some brands produced ten times more microplastics than others. **The same problem could occur with other types of plastic screw-top containers;** hence it would be beneficial to develop closures involving less abrasion, or lubricants to reduce friction and its consequent release of particles. This research, however, could not assess and quantify the physiological effects of prolonged microplastic exposure in humans. We are now discovering that microplastics, thus far chiefly known for adversely affecting sea life, also have possible worrisome implications for human health, by way of bottle caps and presumably other pathways too.