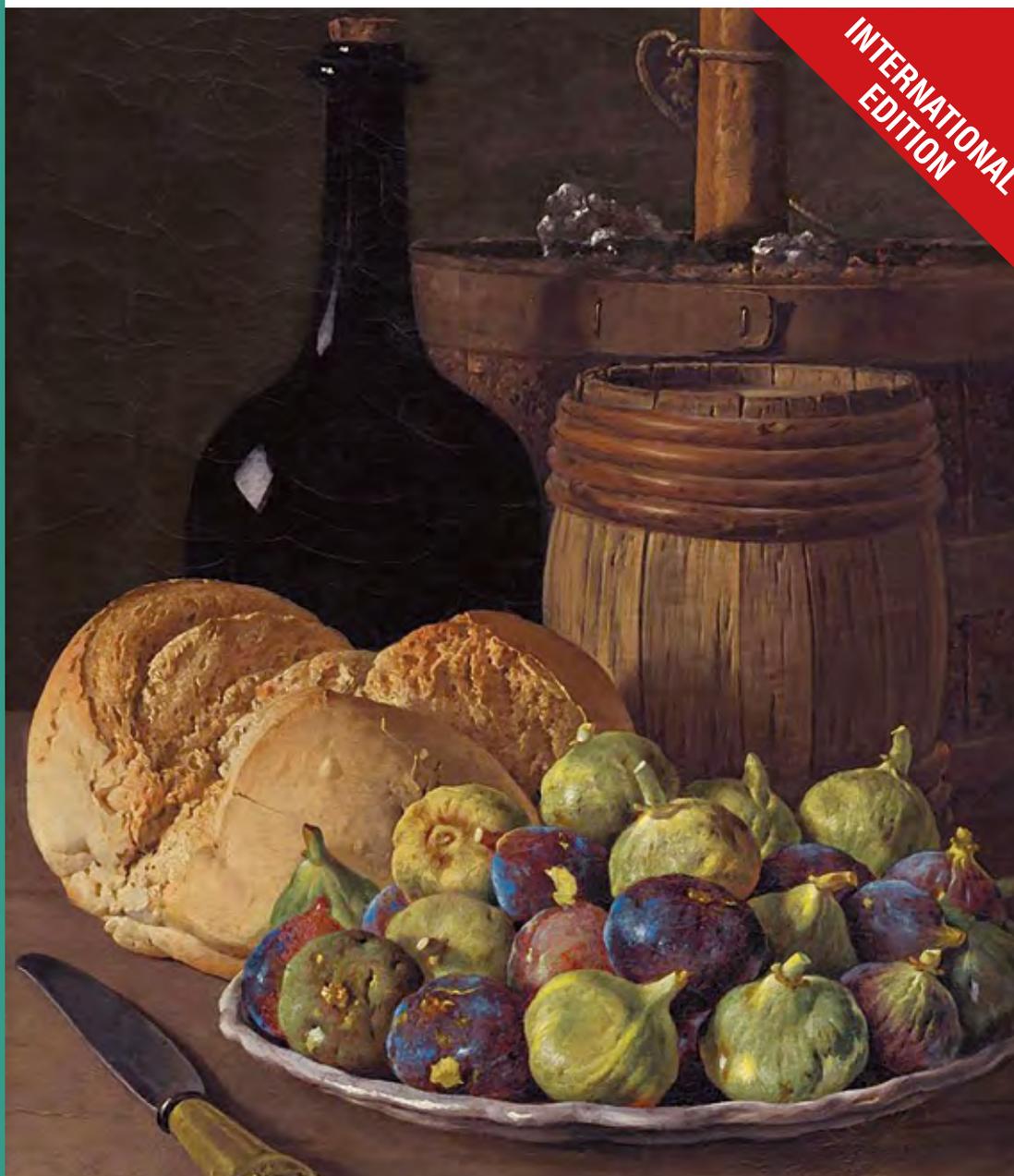


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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI
E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,
CESARE CHIODI, GIANNINO CITTERIO, ERNESTO DONÀ
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ARTURO ORVIETO, SEVERINO PAGANI, ALDO PASSANTE,
GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: *Graphic elaboration of a detail of Still Life with Bread and Figs (1770), by Luis Egidio Meléndez. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., USA.*

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From an elite conception to the world's largest Academy

by **Paolo Petroni**

President of the Accademia

*Academicians' contribution
is essential to our mission's
development.*

When, in 1953, **Orio Vergani** chose to give life to the Italian Academy of Cuisine, his frame of reference was the **Club des Cent** (Club of a Hundred), an exclusive French society founded in 1912 by **Louis Forest**. Its members gathered every Thursday, usually at **Maxim's**, and the menu was organised always by a different "*Brigadier*" (our Symposiarch). The dishes were assessed afterwards. They even had their own restaurant guide, only distributed among members, however. Admission was not easy. Candidates had to be nominated by two members (as in our Academy) and could then only be accepted with approval from a strict Examining Commission that weighed their human and moral qualities and knowledge of wine and food. **Initially, therefore, Vergani had in mind an exclusive, elite Club.** Yet the idea was too worthy and stimulating to be restricted to a group of Milanese friends, and so **his creature soon 'took him by the hand' and grew its membership**, creating numerous regional Delegations. Vergani was very pleased by this, **having created something unique.**



A convivial Club des Cent (Club of a Hundred) meeting

At first, the Academy's life revolved around gatherings in various restaurants, and its rare conferences were of national scope. Then came a second phase, oriented towards culinary culture, which developed through numerous local conferences and the publication of books and restaurant guides; our magazine *Civiltà della Tavola* was completely overhauled and updated. **In 2003**, the Italian Ministry of Culture recognised the Academy as a **Cultural Organ of the Italian Republic.**

*Our conferences must move beyond a purely
Academic audience and reach the wider public*

In our current, third phase, we face a **new challenge: transcending self-reference.** Our activities and efforts must move beyond a purely Academic milieu and reach the outside world and its wider audience. **Our website, smart phone apps, restaurant guide, national recipe book, and newly revamped magazine** are all instruments that broaden the Academy's global reach. Even our many conferences and studies at the local level, often with contributions from Regional Study Centres, must find relevance to current issues.

*Influencing regional food systems, making
the most of products and their places of origin*

History and memories are essential elements, but we must also consider our agricultural heritage, our cheeses, our sea and lake fishing, our foods' places of origin; we must note our strong points and influence regional food systems. Our prizes (a representative example: the Dino Villani prize) are seldom used and little known. Our Academicians must not simply be fee-paying members; before joining, they are not examined by a Commission as in the Club des Cent, yet they must feel as if they had been. **Academicians must all feel that they are bearers of a mission**, not mere diners (often scarcely attending) at convivial gatherings. Their contribution is crucial to the development of the Academy's mission.



Tipsy, Nio and the others

by **Elisabetta Cocito**
Turin Academician

Intelligent robots are waiting tables at restaurants, preparing cocktails in bars and greeting hotel guests: what future, then, for humans?

Mechanisation has completely altered our lives, our consumption styles and, consequently, our work structure.

As at the dawn of the industrial revolution, today society is experiencing another time of crisis, if not an anthropological paradigm shift, caused by **the steady encroachment of 'intelligent machines' increasingly capable of replacing humans**, able to perform vast amounts of work unassisted. The fear is that this trend could mean a progressive decline in human employment.

In our specific field of interest, namely the

food and restaurant sector, we can cite representative examples, some recently introduced and some in place for several years.

This robot can prepare hundreds of hamburgers in an hour

For instance, we are witnessing the appearance **in fast-food restaurant chains** of robots capable of preparing hundreds of hamburgers per hour, **slicing vegetables and bread and assembling them into sandwiches**.

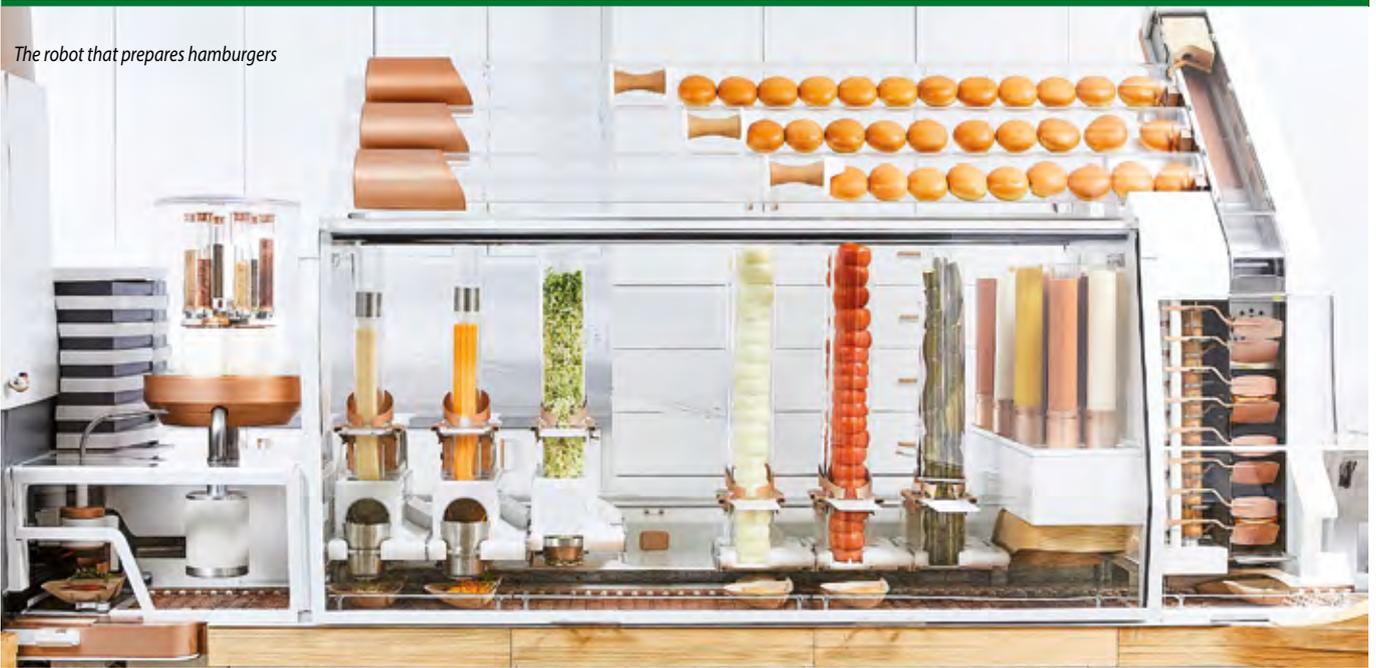
In Turin, interest has recently been sparked by the creation of **Tipsy, the bartending robot** which masterfully shakes perfectly dosed ingredients into flawless cocktails. Tipsy began working on selected Royal Caribbean cruise ships and then continued its career in some casino bars in Las Vegas. Its cost is high for now, and few Tipsy units are currently operating, but enough to worry casino bartenders, who, predicting its future propagation which might threaten their jobs, have asked for greater guarantees of protection.

A brilliant career may also await Nio. Nio is an acronym for 'needs ice only', and its name alone reveals something of its nature: it involves **bagged single-dose cocktails** (Negroni, Vodka sour etc) which only need added ice to be enjoyed. Nio arose from Google's need to reduce service personnel when organising a global event with many attendees, consequently requiring swift beverage preparation. **Nio piques the interest of travel organisers, large-scale hotels, and wedding and company event planners** attracted



The robot Xiao Ai at the Gran Caffè in Rapallo

The robot that prepares hamburgers



by reduced personnel costs, leading us back to that painful issue. User-friendliness should not be overlooked, and sleek packaging is even tempting private customers. Small-scale home deliveries allow hosts to serve their assembled guests using reliable products, avoiding the risk of attempting to mix drinks themselves with potentially disappointing results. Other examples can include a robot concierge who greets hotel guests at reception or a **mechanised waiter serving pizza**.

Xiao Ai is a robot, 1.70 metres tall, which delivers orders to tables

At the Gran Caffè in Rapallo (Genoa), I met **Xiao Ai**, a robot 1.70 metres tall, with an apron and a coloured neckerchief, which delivers the orders dictated by customers to a human waiter. The food is placed on **a tray in the 'hands' of the robot, which travels along a rail to deliver it** to the correct table, returning later to collect the tray, thank the diner and take its leave. Xiao Ai and its twin, sent directly from China, **can together serve up to 60 tables**. The owner of the Caffè points out that at the moment these two 'intelligent machines' are there simply for entertainment and no employee will be replaced by these cordial and solicitous robots. Even more futuristically, the Chinese e-commerce firm JD.com has opened the

first almost entirely robot-run restaurant in Tianjin. Within the 400 square metres of the X Cafe, which can accommodate **100 guests**, all procedures, from ordering to food preparations and plating, are entrusted to robots and AI. In the kitchen, however, there is still one human for every five robots, to avoid errors. I think that in Italy the only defence against automation-driven employment reduction will be to rely on tradition, supplemented, however, with innovation and the ability to combine artisanal expertise with technology. Personalisation and high-quality, non-standardised work are always prized internationally. Though **technology has admittedly enhanced performance** in pre-program-

med activities, for the first time in history it is encroaching, through artificial intelligence, on an immaterial realm: the mind. Nonetheless, observes the physicist and nanotechnology expert **Roberto Cingolani**, if we use 'natural' rather than artificial intelligence, the result - for instance, in our case, the creation of a dish - will always be somewhat variable: our intelligence, characterised by unpredictability and an emotional dimension, will always make us different from AI. Humanoid machines will try to replicate our vision, hearing and sense of touch, but at least for now they will have difficulty replacing the synergy of mind, heart and body which is the basis for creativity. **Elisabetta Cocito**



Tipsy prepares cocktails



Tullio Gregory, *the philosopher of taste*

by **Giuseppe Benelli**
Lunigiana Academician

“Through traditional and regional culture we may once more understand and appreciate the world of taste”.

The philosopher Tullio Gregory passed away in Rome on the 2nd of March this year, aged 90. He made crucial contributions to the history of philosophy with his research on mediaeval Platonism, Descartes, the Libertines, 17th-century atomism and Montaigne. Particularly well-known is his high-school textbook, published by Laterza and co-written with Francesco Adorno and Valerio Verra. His principal scholarly endeavours have been **teaching in the University of Rome and working on the Treccani Encyclopaedia and at the Accademia dei Lincei**. His most original personality trait was manifested through his foundation of the *Lessico Intellettuale Europeo (European Intellectual Lexicon)*, wherein he concentrated on lexical problems in the history of ideas.

Considering his lifelong dedication to academic pursuits ‘in the service of reason’, his passion for cooking, of which he wrote on several occasions, may seem

odd. A great gourmet, **he defended gastronomy “as a cultural fact”**, to the point of according equal rigour- writes **Antonio Gnoli** - to “the Cartesian *cogito* and the history of tomatoes, Montaigne and Luigi Carnacina, the ‘thinking self’ and the ‘eating self’”. For the inauguration of the Tomato Museum in Collecchio, he tackled the history of the ‘golden apple’ - the literal meaning of the Italian *po-modoro*, ‘tomato’ - by recounting the adventures of this now ubiquitous plant. And as a defender of culinary tradition he drafted the ‘Philosophical Menus’ for the Philosophy Festival in Modena.

He drafted ‘philosophical menus’, connecting them to the culinary traditions of Modena

In this very capacity I first met him in Modena, in connexion with the Festival which he co-founded in 2001 with his friend Remo Bodei. For eighteen years Gregory conceived menus ingeniously blending the festival’s annual philosophical theme and the culinary traditions of Modena. That year, too, he had created an itinerary on the topic “The truth is served” in eight menus.

With elegance and a stern demeanour, the “Professor” **illustrated each menu’s dishes and underlying philosophy**. His cultural references were adroit and precise, as was, a fortiori, his acknowledgement of **the cooks, representatives of “a glorious and ancient priestly lineage”**. “Being a cook requires no less professionalism than being a philosopher”. As we dined together, conversing about



his library containing approximately thirty thousand volumes and his traditional boiled-meat cart reclaimed from a tavern in Emilia, upon discovering my origins in Lunigiana he told me about his mother who came from Vezzano (La Spezia), the enchanted village of Mario Tobino's *Brace dei Biassoli* (*The Embers of the Biassolis*), which, from a height, embraces the confluence of the Magra and Vara rivers.

For Gregory, the cuisine of Modena is important because of its history, "both aristocratic and democratic", characterised by the **primacy of dough** used for *lasagne, tortelli, tortellini* and more. The pig, that most encyclopaedic of animals, is also served in countless variations: *gnocco fritto* (fried dough made with lard), *tigelle* (bread roundels) with lard, *gramigna al torchio* (twisted long macaroni) with sausage, *cotechino* (a large fresh sausage) and sweet-and-sour pig's trotters. The axiom "nothing is created or destroyed, but merely transformed" is exemplified by the pig, whose every part, noble or humble, is used, wasting nothing. The traditional mixed boiled meat (*bollito misto*), accompanied by green sauce and varieties of *mostarda* (spiced candied fruit condiment), attains the loftiest culinary heights, while the winning aromas are those of mixed roasts of cockerel, guinea fowl and pork shoulder. For the most dedicated foodies, he suggests a wondrously metamorphic interlude of **crunchy fried meats, calzagatti** ('cat socks': bean and polenta fritters), **vegetables, fruit and cream**. Fish lovers can dive headlong into the glories of *baccalà* (salt cod), eel and the 'poor man's fish' which invigorate the mind.

He analyses flavour through his frequent symbolic references

In his article "Per una fenomenologia del gusto" ("Towards a phenomenology of taste"), Gregory analyses taste through frequent symbolic references, whereby food "inhabits a realm of intellect and fantasy where men and gods, profane and sacred, the living and the dead can meet,



infusing it with values which transcend its material nature".

The philosopher prefers the flavours of food "in their stability, as they lie seductively on our tables, **becoming the object of entirely sensual experiences**". Wine, miraculous, a symbol of conviviality and civility, whose discovery the great myths attribute to Dionysus and Noah, **represents "knowledge, wisdom, the very word of God"**. The various configurations and expressions of taste represented in banquets and groaning tables throughout history reflect the structures of each culture and a sign of respect and friendship. **"At table - he writes - we concretely experience the culture of civility**, and so it has been ever since Plato's *Symposium* and the Last Supper. The table is the place of tolerance par excellence, where we speak freely and Reason is triumphant. It is also a meeting point. All this is now at risk. We have fast food, whereas we are losing **the ritual of gathering round the family table** with parents and children talking about their day. We often see tables with groups of solitary people, bent over their tablets and smart phones while the television blares. A 'social' solitude".

Which is best: creative or traditional cuisine? The philosopher has no doubt: **"The first is a cuisine of improvisation. The other is the only one with value.** Even France, which invented the exorable *nouvelle cuisine*, has recoiled and now promotes its traditional cuisine". After all, **creativity is a rare gift in cooking**, as in other fields of knowledge: "if you are no Einstein, follow Newton's laws, and don't overreach". **Traditional cooking is connected with location and season**, unlike creative cuisine which "places everything on the bill and nothing

on the plate". In truth we are witnessing **a net decline in taste**, in the attempt to dethrone a resplendent gastronomic tradition. "Hence the **apologetics of minimalism**, of the calligraphic exercise, the **fascination with empty plates**, the symbolic value of the fragment. A cuisine aiming to 'provoke wonder' and surprise: a new Baroque, destroying the splendour of the setting, has birthed gastronomic nihilism".

"A multifarious traditional civilisation, where true artisans of taste have taken refuge"

This nihilism is the habitat for the ideal of emaciated, anorexic beauty. "Here - writes Gregory - food has lost all value, becoming insipidly graphic. At the other extreme, the triumph of fast food debases flavour with malodorous minces and squalid fried fare. In between lies a multifarious traditional civilisation, often of peasant origin, lately the refuge of several authentic artisans of taste as an overall sensual experience, encompassing the reality of food, its physical entity and its values". And it is from here, **from this traditional and regional culture, that one may once more understand and appreciate the civilisation of taste**. Thus at the table, for Gregory, one can find "that intact, pleasing, gentle, fragrant reality that we may not merely contemplate but also taste, as the mediaeval mystics intended". Thus, through the pleasure of the feast, "we find the embodiment and the triumph of the absolute, the good, the pleasant, the beautiful, in their historical manifestations".

Giuseppe Benelli



Baudelaire's fried potatoes

by **Giovanni Ballarini**

Honorary President of the Academy

Many claim their discovery, demonstrating their success.

Who invented fried potatoes? One might as well ask who invented hot water - but there is a difference, because many claim this, if not momentous, at least delicious discovery. Much has been written about whether they are safe to eat. It is also commonly known, or so it is asserted, that frying in fat, already known in ancient Greece whose frying pans have even been found, only became widespread in Europe during the Middle Ages, well before the arrival of the potato, a vegetable of scant flavour which may benefit from frying, according to the saying whereby 'even a slipper can be delicious if well fried'. It should be pointed out, in any case, that **the multitude of 'paternity claims' for fried potatoes makes them all doubtful**, while demonstrating the success of this food, as nobody would eagerly accept paternity of a failure.

The presumed discovery of fried potatoes is the subject of a Franco-Belgian dispute - or even war.

The presumed discovery of fried potatoes is the subject of a Franco-Belgian dispute

The Belgians cite a manuscript from 1781, recounting how the Walloons enjoyed frying small fish from the Meuse river, but substituted potatoes cut into the shape of small fish when fishing was hindered by the frozen river in winter. Hence the *Frietsmuseum* (**Fried Potato Museum**) dedicated to the history of the potato and the production of Belgian fries, located in **Bruges, in the Saaihalle palace**, formerly a base for Genoese merchants. The French, instead, maintain that fries were





invented in Paris in 1789, **during the French Revolution**, following a campaign initiated by **Antoine Parmentier** to promote the tuber in France.

As for Italy, fried potatoes receive no mention in that era's culinary treatises, including those by Antonio Giuseppe Pagani (1785), Don Felice Libera (an 18th-century manuscript from Trentino), Vincenzo Corrado (1801), Vincenzo Agnolletti (1832), and Francesco Chapusot (1846), clearly because, even if they did exist, chips were a food of the common people.

Their informal or democratic nature is illustrated by accounts of the poet **Charles Baudelaire** (1821-1867), who, as recounted by his biographers, would munch fried potatoes from a paper cone while strolling along a Paris boulevard: "Un jour, Baudelaire prenait un bain de soleil sur le quai d'Anjou, tout en croquant de délicieuses pommes de terre frites qu'il prenait une à une dans un cornet de papier, lorsque vinrent à passer, en calèche découverte, de très grandes dames amies

de sa mère, l'ambassadrice, et qui s'amuserent beaucoup à voir ainsi le poète picorer une nourriture aussi démocratique" (One day, Baudelaire was sunbathing on the Quai d'Anjou while munching delicious fried potatoes which he took one by one from a paper cone, when three grand ladies, friends of his mother the Ambassador's wife, passed by in an open carriage, and were much amused to see the poet nibbling such a democratic food).

America can take credit for commercialising the round, thin, crispy version

America can also take credit, if not for fried potatoes, at least for a specific variant thereof: the very thin crispy ones, **attributing the discovery to George Speck**, also known as George Crum (1824-1914), though similar recipes exist in American cookbooks from the first half of the 19th

century. **George Crum in any case has the merit of having commercialised round, thin and crispy fried potatoes**, giving rise to the legend whereby one day the wealthy financier Cornelius Vanderbilt, eating at the Moon's Lake House restaurant in Saratoga Springs where George Crum worked, was unsatisfied with his fried potatoes and sent them back to the kitchen three times. Crum then sliced the potatoes very thinly, fried them so crisp that they could not be eaten with a fork but only by hand, and then heavily salted them. The restaurant became famous for this. Thereafter, George Crum opened his own restaurant and began commercialising these crisps, which **were sold in packets from 1920**. Still in the USA, in the mid-20th century potato-derived products similar to fried potatoes began appearing, including **Pringles**, which today are sold around the world with a yearly revenue approximating a billion dollars. Initially named 'Pringle's Newfangled Potato Chips', later simplified to Pringles, they are thin and crispy, contain under 50% potato, and **have a distinctive shape**, geometrically defined as a hyperbolic paraboloid, **which adapts well to the shape of the tongue, enhancing enjoyment** of their crunchiness and assuring their success. Today fried potatoes, in their manifold variants, are popular around the world, maintaining their informal character as a street food eaten from a paper cone.

Giovanni Ballarini



Charles Baudelaire



Will some foods disappear?

by **Andrea Vitale**
University of Milan

The agrifood industry favours commercial produce that impoverishes tables and fields.

The FAO recently published a report on a worldwide study entitled “The State of the World’s Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture”, with rather **disconcerting results about current conditions and the probable future scenario faced by agricultural and food production**. Based on data from 91 countries, the study suggests that **the biodiversity underlying our food systems is disappearing** due to globalisation and modern distribution systems which favour large quantities and standardised produce. Economies of scale, rationalisation and standardisation represent, by now, the *diktats* with which agriculture must comply to avoid being excluded from the

dominant paradigms of large-scale food processing and distribution.

The FAO’s ‘alarm call’ cannot be ignored

The FAO’s ‘alarm call’ cannot be ignored if we consider **what is happening in Italy under our very eyes**.

Italian agriculture includes over 1,500 medium, small or very small agribusinesses, mostly with 3-6 employees, representing the last bastion in defence of produce variety and the traditional food heritage that has always set our country apart.

Biodiversity at risk: the patata turchesa of Abruzzo





Realistically, however, the majority of these businesses or micro-businesses are destined for extinction, as their production cannot sustain adequate profits or even cover production costs; or else they must survive by capitulating to hegemonic market forces.

Consider, for example, the statistics whereby in this century, **three of every four fruit varieties in Italy have disappeared**, and notwithstanding the numerous types of beans, apples and peppers, the technological standardisation of agriculture has favoured **uniformity of cultivated plants**.

Indeed, Coldiretti, the foremost Italian association of direct cultivators, has emphasised that “in the past century there were 8000 fruit varieties in Italy, whereas today we barely reach 2000. Of these, 1500 are considered endangered”. The FAO report also informs us that of the approximately 6000 plant species cultivated for food, fewer than 200 contribute substantially to worldwide food production, and only 9 account for 66% of total production.

Bread is made using flours created in industrial laboratories

Another significant example involves a food as essential as so-called ordinary bread. In the vast majority of cases, it is made using flours created in industrial laboratories that have completely standardised its flavour and **have de facto sidelined flours from ‘ancient’ grains**, such as emmer, oats and barley, into the preparation of ‘niche products’ which manifestly do not give their producers a competitive market share. For these reasons, the Universities of

Milan, Foggia and Marseilles are studying the increasingly feasible possibility of making bread from fava beans, chickpeas, peas and other pulses, which are not only protein-rich but also believed capable of sufficient yields for many years to come.

Sadly, the loss of biodiversity affects the entire food supply chain and just as harshly afflicts the livestock sector.

In the livestock sector, nearly two million animals have disappeared in the last decade

Coldiretti also estimates that 1.7 million cows, pigs, sheep and goats have disappeared in the last decade, and that the future looks bleak for 38 breeds of sheep, 24 of bovines, 22 of goats, 19 of horses, 10 of pigs, 10 of fowl and 7 of donkeys. All this is because in Italy alone, approximately 38% of small agribusinesses have closed in recent years, while the number of ‘large’ or ‘very large’ agribusinesses has increased by 44%.

Indeed, worldwide livestock production chiefly depends only on around 40 animal species: a tiny group which provides the vast bulk of meat, milk and eggs. The food industry, therefore, favours a commercial selection which impoverishes tables and fields.

This clearly means and will mean, as predicted, not only the extinction of animals no longer useful to the system - the problem, even more intricately, likewise encompasses **very many fish species** - but also **the disappearance of ingredients essential to regional traditions, causing these to vanish too**.

This is an even graver prospect if we recall that one of our nation’s many trea-

asures is the guarantee of widely varied and regionally distinctive agriculture and food products deeply rooted in local traditions and also, undoubtedly, crucial to our diverse food culture. This last is paramount to the Academy to which we proudly belong and through which we take pleasure in broadcasting our message daily: **let us ever more conscientiously safeguard small and very small food producers** and processors because therein abides not only the history but also the near future of foodstuffs and the defence of biodiversity.

Andrea Vitale



Campanina apple of Emilia



Trombetta courgette from Liguria