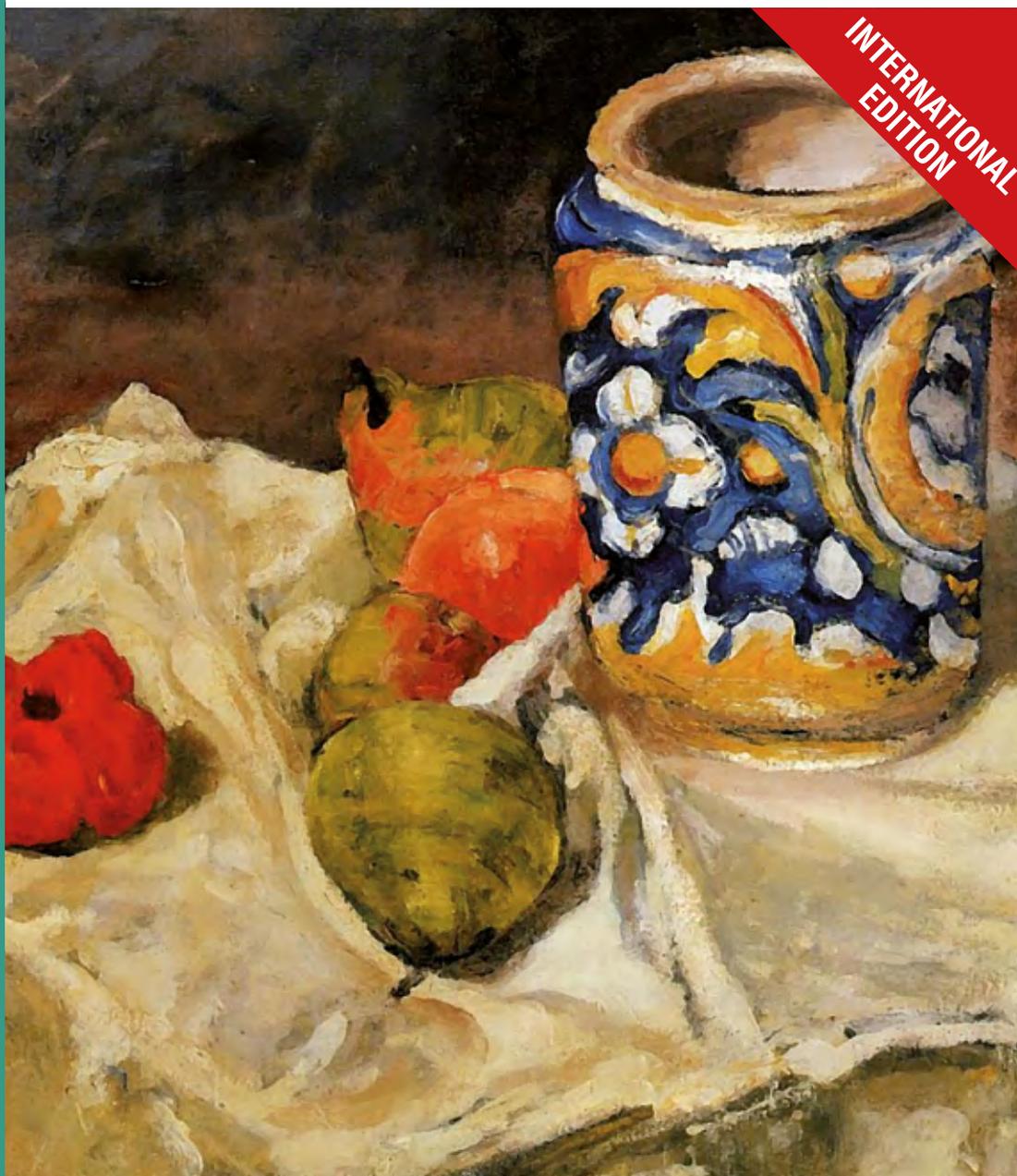


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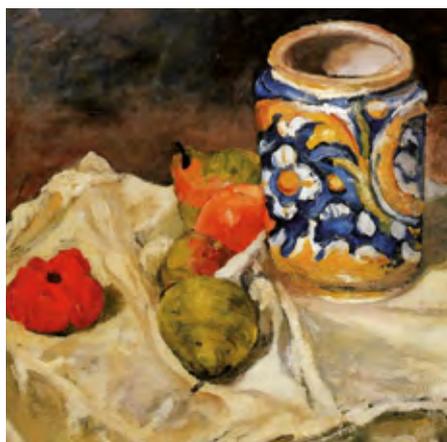
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EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: *Graphic elaboration of a detail from Still life with Italian earthenware jar (1874) by Paul Cézanne; private collection*

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Conviviality and friendship *will return among us*

by Paolo Petroni

President of the Accademia

*In the food and restaurant sector,
many problems remain unresolved.*

Shortly before mounting the scaffold, Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, had this to say: *"It is through hardship that we each discover who we truly are"*. We might paraphrase that wise observation by saying that *"It is in times of trouble that human stupidity truly shines through"*. And silliness has indeed abounded in these days of seclusion, in every country, at every level. Details are unnecessary, as we must all surely have perceived this phenomenon; but, apart from the horror of the many unattended corpses of the victims, **two words, at least, will remain etched in our memories: 'fragility' and 'friendship'.**

*Friendship and vulnerable age
will remain in our memory*

Around a third of the population, namely those over sixty, have been defined as **high-risk, to be protected and confined at home until further notice** for their own good. Until a few months ago, these people were the pillars of society: scientific luminaries, politicians, actors, journalists, professionals and even simply grandparents formed the core of civil society. Suddenly they became vulnerable creatures to protect. A very dangerous, as well as daft, concept, which undermines the ethos of equality. **The second word which will remain with us, at least in Italy, is 'friendship'. Cicero wrote: "Friendship is one of the best things granted to humanity".**



Even earlier, **Aristotle** declared that *"Without friends nobody would choose to live despite possessing every other resource"*. And we Academicians well know the crucial value of friendship and of **conviviality**, whose etymology is from the Latin *'con + vivere'*: 'living together'. Some, judging by the Italian government's new social distancing regulations, may accord fourth-degree in-laws, though we may never have met them or even know who they are, precedence over friends. Beyond these general considerations, **many doubts and problems remain unresolved** in our own food and restaurant sector. We read numerous frantic restaurateur interviews proposing fiscal and behavioural measures to adopt, but things will only normalise when the virus has vanished, either spontaneously as has been known to happen, or through medicines and vaccines.

*Restaurant guides will probably
not come out this year*

We must admit that a surplus of restaurants exists today: in Italy there are over 112,000 full-service restaurants and 35,000 carry-outs (e.g. pizza or chip shops). More spring up every year, but statistics tell us that **a sobering 75% of newly opened restaurants are shuttered within 5 years**. Too much improvisation, too much underwhelming food, too much competition in streets and neighbourhoods crawling with eateries. When restaurants resume full operations, many, through natural selection, will not reopen.

What fate awaits restaurant guides? We know that most (the Michelin guide, published later, is an exception) of the '2021 Guides' should be publicly available in September and October 2020. However, they are printed before summer, using assessments made in 2019 and the first two months of 2020. Yet things ground to a halt in March. How many restaurants will reopen? The food guides will probably not appear this year. The guide sector was already in hot water; this may be the catalyst for abandoning print in favour of constantly updateable online formats. The Academy too, having begun a wholesale revision of the *Good Table* guides, has paused this in the face of prevailing uncertainty. Many venues are setting themselves up for carry-out and home delivery, but for us Academicians, restaurants aren't merely a means of obtaining re-heatable food to satisfy our hunger; **they must be places of conviviality and gathering**: words that will remain forbidden for a while, but which will surely be with us again.



Redesigning the future

by **Elisabetta Cocito**
Turin Academician

Having rediscovered forgotten dishes, in future we might like to find them in restaurants.

Our current predicament will alter us considerably, and not just, as many optimists declare, by giving us a chance to reflect on certain distortions in our society and behaviour: necessity, rather than mere willpower, will reshape our habits. History itself will force us to adapt, in every aspect of every field. This event caught us by surprise, blindsided us, clipped our wings, trapped us in a mental and physical bunker; we all react as best we can, drawing on our financial and cognitive resources. A dis-

cussion of wholesale upheaval is beyond our scope here, but we might focus on our particular domain: **cuisine and meals, which face numerous, inevitable changes.**

We know how much restaurateurs, with varying success, have invested in their training and eclecticism, perhaps supported by a kitchen crew or, for the smaller operators, depending only on themselves or a few relatives or partners, to stake out a patch of the fluid magma that is the restaurant world. Consider, for ex-



ample, those that had recently opened restaurants (Turin has several examples), who cruised contentedly thinking they could count on a solid clientele and reputation, or who had just expensively redecorated.

The restaurant world will also have to change, prioritising concreteness

Swept away like a house of cards demolished by the first breath of wind - a malignant, invisible wind that knocked us all over. **Some restaurateurs had indeed built card castles, ostentatious but fragile**, balancing precariously on a knife-edge, betting everything on appearance but hollow inside: dishes created only to impress, jumbled flavours not always blending harmoniously, sometimes infelicitous design and flimsy substance. These, I think, are destined to founder, since a no-nonsense era awaits us, and restaurants will have to revamp themselves to survive. There will surely be a silver lining. Starting over will be hard, in any case, for everyone; there will be **restructuring costs** to comply with regulations motivated by public health, and this will clearly take time. Beyond the technical aspects, I think modalities of preparing and selling food will be altered by recent events, as this period of enforced domesticity modifies not also habits, but also tastes. **Before the coronavirus, statistics had long documented precipitously declining sales of bread and pasta**, forbidden by certain diets; today, flour and yeast are highly desirable goods and social media are flooded with photos of fragrant home-made bread and *focaccia*, alongside plates of pasta. This is assuredly not because bread and pasta are missing from shops, but because we have more time at our disposal, and families are gathered willy-nilly, united in the fear of today and uncertainty of tomorrow. **We have rediscovered the ritual of breakfast**: with cafés closed, we must perforce prepare our own coffee, finally unshack-



led from nefarious industrial pastries and packaged sugary fatty snacks for our children. Might be manage, at least partially, to maintain these good habits? **And what is more reassuring than kneading dough**, perhaps together, and preparing dishes which previously had, because we were too busy or distracted by other matters, been archived in our 'forgettery'?

Newly appreciating home cooking and traditional cuisine

Truth be told, even before these devastating events, a re-evaluation of home cooking and traditional food was evident, and in restaurants too: a 'step back' (or forward?) of sorts with respect to the many inventions created more to please the eyes and our vanity than to satisfy our palates. I think, and this is of course a personal opinion, that restaurants in Italy will take their cues from our home kitchens when choosing their future paths. We have learnt to appreciate foods that we had forgotten; we became experimenters, dusted off old household notebooks, and undertook projects that

we never imagined were within our capabilities. Social media now pullulate with photos of home-made tagliatelle, grandma's apple pie, and many other mouth-watering creations proudly displayed. My impression is that **our feet are back on the ground**, and we should roll up our sleeves and prioritise concreteness, at table too. This may mean **more satisfying, less elaborate and, importantly, less expensive dishes**.

This last will be one of the many important issues facing restaurants: when we eat out again, we will pay more attention to costs, and restaurants will have to offer encouraging prices to restart their business. Food, pleasant meals and excellent beverages form a vital part of the Italian economy and we will surely do our part to remind everyone, contributing to the revitalisation of a sector which is now seriously suffering.

Restaurants, though changed and revamped, will rise again, and we Academicians, with our competence, our convivial gatherings, and the confidence inspired by our gastronomy and the food chain which brings excellent products to our tables, will be there to lend a hand.

Elisabetta Cocito



Imagine a world without salt

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

This apparent 'public enemy number one' of health should simply be used in moderation.

Praised for centuries, now disparaged. Poor salt. The 'white gold' of millennia, after untold centuries of precious service to humans, salt has become humanity's 'public enemy number one', a culinary Al Capone to be banned from the table. **Every day, salt is attacked**, tried and condemned by newspapers, television, radio and the internet. No health column, medical jour-

nal, Health Ministry circular and WHO proclamation refrains from pointing the finger against this coronary serial killer, this arterial assassin, this mass murderer of kidneys, heart and brain. Titles unreservedly denounce: "Salt is unhealthy". *Saperesalute*: "Excessive dietary salt harms the heart". *Corriere Salute*: "Too much salt favours inflammation and illness". Italy's Ministry of Health: "Moderate salt in bread avoids arterial hypertension". Is anyone in those hallowed ministerial halls aware that the 'health' for which they work - *salute* in Italian - is etymologically related to salt - *sale*? Giovanni Ballarini, the Academy's Honorary President and a Professor Emeritus at the University of Parma, explains this in an article written for the Georgofili Academy: "Since antiquity, salt

has been indispensable. The Latin word *sal*, 'salt', is related to *salus*, 'health', and *salubritas*, 'healthfulness'; and the Italian and Latin greeting *salve* wishes the recipient a healthy day".

In antiquity, salt represented vital energy and moral fortitude

In antiquity, salt was the symbol of vital energy and moral and spiritual fortitude, and was considered able to prevent misfortune. **Homer called it "divine", Plato "a substance dear to the gods"**. It sealed friendship and hospitality. **Ulysses offered bread and salt to the wayfarer appearing at his door. Pliny the Elder gave it equal importance to our star: "Nothing is more useful than sun and salt"**. For **Cassiodorus** it was more precious than the yellow metal: "Some may not desire gold, but there are none who don't desire salt". **Khalil Gibran** raised it heavenwards: "There must be something strangely sacred in salt. It is in our tears and in the sea".

Removing this white gold from the history of humanity would reduce it to a squeezed-out husk. Religions, myths, commerce, voyages, discoveries, wars, cities, peoples, alchemy, golden ages - all swept away like a house of cards. The Roman consuls would never have constructed the **via Salaria** ('Salt Road') from Rome to modern-day Ascoli Piceno. **Meat and fish would spoil without salt-curing**. We would be bereft of salt cod, sardines, capers and *carne salada*: the 'salt meat' of Trentino. Just fish bones and putrefaction. Without salt, **workers**





would have no salaries. Though it's been centuries since these were paid in fistfuls of 'white gold', that etymology remains. Invoking salaries, the Parisians raised barricades during the Commune of 1871 and the Muscovites wrought the October Revolution of 1917. Marx, Lenin and Keynes, father of macroeconomics, founded their doctrines and revolutionary sentiment on salaries.

Over-forties may remember 'Sali e Tabacchi' ('salt and tobacco') shops. Only the State could sell either of these. Without the salt monopoly (in force until 1972) in Italy's history, national debt would have reached the moon. Blessed sodium chloride crystals, which not only preserved capers and anchovies and rendered polenta, minestrone and cutlets palatable, but also let us long retain the illusion that all was well! If only we Italians had more 'salt in our pumpkins', as we call intelligence! We would surely have noticed that those who swore they were exerting themselves to serve the people were, instead, salting the wounds of the First Republic and ploughing its fields with salt.

*Pliny the Elder:
"No civilisation fails to produce
and consume salt"*

Our Mediterranean civilisation's Pillars of Hercules are made of salt. "There is no civilisation without the production and use of salt", asserted Pliny the Elder. He may have had hardened arteries, but he was the Leonardo of the ancient world, the Einstein of the Caesars. **Desalinate language and literature, and we would lose masterpieces,** mottoes, proverbs

and salacious words. Dante would not have written the Divine Comedy had he not felt "come sa di sale lo pane altrui" (how salty is foreign bread). Without salt, we would all be *sciocchi*: Italian for both 'unsalted' and 'silly'. Italians speak of "rimanere di sale", 'being struck salt-still', by extraordinary events - as with Lot's disobedient wife who turned to see Sodom in flames while fleeing the city, and became a pillar of salt. Even the word of God would - sacrilege! - be upended. In Leviticus 2:13, **Moses** decreed: "And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." And in Matthew 5:13 Jesus calls his disciples "**the salt of the earth**". Without salt, the map of the world would be mutilated. Italy would lose its heel, *Salento*. *Salsomaggiore* would vanish from Emilia. Gone would be the river Salsola in Puglia and the Piedmontese towns of Sale (Alessandria) and Sale delle Langhe. In Austria, there would be neither *Salzburg* nor its river, the *Salzach*, nor yet its region, the *Salzkammergut*, all named for the rock salt extracted from the surrounding mountains. The map of the USA would lose Salt Lake City and its Great Salt Lake. Mexico would lose *Salinas* and Argentina the *Rio Salado*. We could go on.

For centuries, salt was respected and considered a powerful ally against evil influences and nefarious people. In his *Last Supper*, Leonardo placed an upturned salt cellar, a bad omen, before Judas. The Japanese still sprinkle salt over their thresholds after an unpleasant person has departed. "Salt is a magnifying glass for flavour", a wise person once observed.

Without 'white gold', there would be no gastronomy. **We would have neither sauce nor salami** (both etymologically related to salt). Goodbye, Made in Italy. Farewell, cured meats: Parma and San Daniele ham, *coppa* from Piacenza, Venetian *soppressa*, *zampone* from Modena. No more tempting strings of salami festooned over the roof-beams of vaulted cellars. No more *lardo di Colonnata*, *cotechino*, *culatello*, sausages, *bresaola*, *ciuiga*, *finocchiona*, *luganega*, *mortadella* and *mortandela*. 'Farewell, unequal peaks known only to those who have feasted thereon' - as Manzoni might verify if his *cime* were the edible 'Genoese peaks' (*cime genovesi*) of stuffed meat rather than the more imposing geological formations to which his beleaguered *Betrothed* famously and poignantly bid adieu. May Manzoni, who adored local calf's head preparations, forgive our gastro-poetic licence. Goodbye to pasta, pizza, risotto, *stracotto* (pot roast), and asparagus dipped in extra-virgin olive oil and salt. Goodbye *pestume*, the fresh seasoned meat which goes into salami, known in my area as *tastasàl* ('salt-tasting'), an ingredient in the lordliest risotto.

*Without 'white gold' there would
be no gastronomy*

'Salt to taste' is enough to transform a half-kilogramme of pasta tubes into a splendid plate of *maccheroni* with tomato and Monte Veronese cheese. A generous pinch is indispensable in the extra-virgin olive oil smeared on a regal Florentine steak fresh off the grill. Salt is poetry; salt is love, and love songs too. Deprive Gino Paoli of his classic hit "Sapore di sale" ('Taste of Salt') and he himself plummets in value. Salt is the value added to human emotions and principles. What would friendship, love, and pride be without a modicum of salt? Moral of the story: **include salt on your table, in harmless moderation** - indeed, *cum grano salis*: 'with a grain of salt'.

Morello Pecchioli



A table in Paradise

by **Paolo Petroni**
President of the Academy

This is the title of an acclaimed biographical docufilm about the famous, recently departed Tuscan restaurateur Sirio Maccioni, owner-operator of Le Cirque in New York.

Sirio Sirio Maccioni was a unique character in the twentieth-century restaurant world. He was well-known, but perhaps not as well as he deserved. **He was not a 'star system' chef, nor an innovator of far-fetched culinary creations;** he was not a television personality, though stunning, more than his look-alike, John Wayne. He was a consummate restaurateur, charming to his diners, supremely elegant, **a master of hospitality**, always present, unfailingly affable, with a formidable eye and a gaze which directed the front-of-house personnel with unwavering precision. His only possible peer: Arrigo Cipriani of Harry's Bar in Venice.

Since Sirio was Italian, we considered **his restaurant, Le Cirque**, to be a purveyor of excellent Italian cuisine; but its name implied French cookery, though in fact it **offered hybrid, international food, a French-Italian mix** often supplemented by original elements, yet **always using first-rate ingredients and meticulous care**. When he founded it in 1974, a high-class Italian restaurant was anathema: our cooking was then considered 'cheap' and confined to Little Italy, and its main-

stay was the famous 'spaghetti with meat-balls'. He once confided in me that with spaghetti, however well prepared, he would not go far. **Instead he assuredly did go far.** When still very young he had left Montecatini Terme, where he had been born into a peasant family in 1932, to seek his fortune in Paris. He arrived at the Florence restaurant, where he was entrusted with secretly diluting wine, "But in precise proportions, so nobody would notice", he would laughingly recount. There he met his countryman Ivo Livi, from Monsummano Terme, who was already famous by the name of **Yves Montand**, and often ate in that *trattoria* with his then-girlfriend, **Edith Piaf**. Montand immediately introduced him to far more celebrated restaurateurs. One experience followed another, working in a succession of dining rooms until he reached New York, accompanied by his **beloved and beautiful wife Egidiana**, a former opera singer and a stellar cook.

Illustrious diners frequented his restaurant

The topic of Maccioni invariably brings up the illustrious guests at his restaurant: **Presidents of the United States** (particularly Ronald Reagan; also a young Donald Trump), A-list actors (**Robert De Niro and Woody Allen** were good friends), writers, entrepreneurs, stunning models and even **Pope Wojtyła**. They weren't there for the food, which was delicious and contained the best ingredients (Maccioni would import the celebrated Colonnata lard in his suitcase), but for the ambiance, the clientele and, especially, him. He oozed style and **inimitable savoir faire**, always present, never



overbearing: **a friend who set people at ease.**

Over the years he had to change location three times. The first was at the Mayfair Hotel; then, under the name 'Le Cirque 2000', he moved into the Villard Houses, the seat of the Archdiocese of New York, contiguous to the Palace Hotel; finally, in 2006, he moved to the Bloomberg Tower, closing in 2018 because of exorbitant rents (\$50,000 a month).

He then ceded his brand to an Arab company which opened 'Le Cirque' restaurants around the world (Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, Abu Dhabi, New Delhi, Dubai, Mumbai, Bangalore). For his children, and alongside them and his wife, he opened the less formal, more Italian Osteria del Circo, again in New York.

He never wanted to open a restaurant in Italy since, he said, there wouldn't have been sufficient clientele for lunch and dinner to keep a restaurant like Le Cirque profitable.

Sirio passed away peacefully aged 88 at his house in Montecatini, where he spent increasing amounts of time: his hometown, which he had once left, and greatly loved. With Maccioni's loss, the sun has set on an irretrievable era in the restaurant world.



Facing the emergency in the restaurant sector

by **Andrea Vitale**

Honorary Academician for Milano Navigli

The pandemic has shown us how unprepared companies of any size are to manage potential emergencies and their ramifications.

What can we learn from the current emergency? If we detect a significant analogy with our celebrated civil defence bodies in the learning experience for companies, and more generally for our productive and organisational infrastructure, we might, without being argumentative, acknowledge how unprepared we were on so many levels, and how complex it is for small, medium or large businesses to maintain readiness.

This drives the present and future **need for creating one or more 'emergency managers'** - or even an entire new cross-company category of duties for managers, directors or section chiefs

dealing with security, quality, production, logistics, payroll and personnel. What we need is **a plan or a real, vigilant task force**, which is cohesive, up to date, and above all, trained to solve potential problems arising from emergencies.

Delivery and carry-out are the only possible ways for restaurants to operate

The European Food Safety Authority has confirmed that there is no evidence thus far that food can be a source or vector of the virus. However, **Covid-19 has dev-**





astatingly affected the restaurant sector because of its effects on the health of those interacting during food preparation or distribution and their potential transmission of the virus among themselves and to customers, and vice-versa. The primary necessity for maximal containment of potential contagion sources has occasioned restrictions on public food and beverage consumption, de facto limiting restaurant operations to delivery and carry-out.

Without warning, restaurants have suddenly had to take swift action to face an immense challenge and, I daresay, a fundamental 'struggle for survival' which forcibly **transformed them into food preparation and delivery businesses**. Workers in that sector have had to, and must, be not only excellent selectors of raw materials, competent and informed chefs, and masters of hospitality familiar with health and safety rules and procedures for storing and serving food and beverage, but **also technicians knowledgeable about food transport methods, booking systems and delivery organisation** (including remotely), food packaging, and preparation of foods suitable for transport.

Of paramount importance, nowadays, are the different and new facets of food hygiene and safety during preparation and serving (in which Italy excels on a world level) which food vendors will have to learn, such as transport methods or delivery containers.

The WHO is very conscientious about food transport and delivery

Through its new guidelines of 7 April 2020 (*Covid-19 and food safety: guidance for food businesses*), the WHO has indeed

paid close attention to food transport and delivery, retail sales, and handling of goods on display, using studies of how the virus can survive on food surfaces or containers.

Even the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) has pronounced itself on this, with a manual published on 8 April (*Covid-19 and Food Safety: Questions and Answers*), containing all the principal information about procedures to follow in every stage of the food chain in order to implement and maintain the high food safety standards guaranteed thus far by EU norms, even during this serious crisis. Its key principles of hygiene, traceability and risk prevention (as in e.g. Regulations 852 and 854 of 2004, Reg. 178 of 2002, and Reg. 625 of 2017) are in any case widely applicable, and their thorough and indispensable character is manifest even in these trying circumstances.

The expansion of the functions required of operators in the sector, as detailed by norms and standard practice, necessitates

and will necessitate, in my opinion, the presence of a new support figure for restaurateurs or food business directors, namely what we could - as in the introduction to this brief piece - call an 'emergency manager'.

The figure of the 'emergency manager' would be useful even after the virus is defeated

We may expect this figure to be integrated into our panorama, **enriching the sector with expertise and functionality. With streamlined and increasingly interdisciplinary operative and productive procedures**, 'emergency managers' could remain useful even when - soon, we hope - our chief 'worry' will be choosing the most suitable restaurant for our cravings or the occasion being celebrated.

Andrea Vitale

