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The Politics of Pasta: *La cucina futurista* and the Italian Cookbook in History

Danielle Callegari

Perhaps the most important culinary tract of the entire early modern period, Cristoforo Messisbugo's *Banchetti, Composizioni di vivande et apparecchio generale* [Banquets, Compositions of Courses, and General Table Design] established the head of the kitchen as a powerful court figure and marked the moment in which western European dining had truly moved from medieval to modern. The text, which circulated in manuscript form before being published posthumously in 1549, explains in painstaking detail everything required to stage a court banquet, including recommendations regarding temporary décor, music, theatrical performances, poetry readings, games, and finally concluding with various recipes ranging from pastry castles to molded life-size eagles.¹ Of the ten banquets, three dinner parties, and one feast Messisbugo describes specifically, perhaps the most memorable account is a private court supper held in May of 1529 at the palace of Belfiore, and hosted by the Archbishop of Milan, Ippolito d'Este. Dinner was preceded by the performance of a farce and a concert, and then musicians accompanied a troop of dancers in a galliard as guests prepared for the first course. In addition to the extensive table decor and the gardens themselves, fifteen free-standing sugar sculptures of the gods had been erected and set in and around the diners for their visual delight. As a special surprise, after the ninth and final course was lifted, the meal recommenced from the beginning, creating a double-feast that concluded after eighteen courses. In his essential study of dining practices from antiquity to the present, Roy Strong lists just a portion of one course of the meal to demonstrate the elaborate nature of the food served. The second course included, but was not limited to: "trout patties, halved and spiced hard-boiled eggs, sturgeon roe, pike spleens and other fish offal fried with orange, cinnamon and sugar, a boiled sturgeon with garlic sauce emblazoned with the cardinal's device, fried bream, wheatstarch soup, pizza with flaky pastry Catalan style and small fried fish from the river Po."² Strong observes further that what is truly remarkable about the overall account is how "each course had its own particular music or form of spectacle, all perfectly integrated into the serving of the food in a way that we would categorize in modern parlance as a happening."³

¹ Cristoforo Messisbugo (or Messi detto Sbugo) was actually the successor of the first recorded Italian *scalco* (head of kitchen and dining), but he remains among the most memorable icons of early modern court dining. His *Banchetti* continued to be essential reading for the *scalco* or *trinciante* well into the eighteenth century and is still considered a key moment in the evolution of the cookbook as a genre, as well as evidence that the initial move from medieval to modern in European dining can be traced to the Italian court in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. For the original text see Cristoforo Messisbugo, *Banchetti, composizioni di viuande et apparecchio generale* (Ferrara: Giouanni de Bughat et Antonio Hucher compagni, 1549). For more on the innovations Messisbugo produced that revolutionized dining habits at the Este court and beyond see, for example, Lucciano Chiappini, *La corte estense alla metà del Cinquecento: I compendi di Cristoforo Messisbugo* (Ferrara: Belriguardo, 1984); Barbara Di Pascale, *Banchetti estensi: la spettacolarità del cibo alla corte di Ferrara nel Rinascimento* (Imola: La Mandragora, 1995).

² Roy Strong, *Feast: A History of Grand Eating* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 130.

³ *Ibid.*, 130. Strong is among the scholars who count the Messisbugo *Banchetti* as the marker of a turning point from medieval to modern dining in Western Europe. The historiographical importance of this particular part of the Messisbugo text is further discussed in Michel Jenneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 52-54.

The significance of the *Banchetti* does not lie solely in the insight it provides into the intricate and advanced nature of sixteenth-century Italian dining. To be sure, Messisbugo's primary goal while writing the *Banchetti*, which begins with an extravagant dedication to Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, was hardly to record recipes for posterity. The tract is carefully constructed to inflate the position of the *scalco* at court, masking its real intent with the humility of the genre and the work it describes. Messisbugo introduces the text as a product of his "basso e rozzo ingegno" [scarce and clumsy talent] yet he is careful to mention that he won't waste time "a descrivere minestre d'ortaggi e legumi . . . che son cose da vile femminuccia" [describing soups of roughage and beans . . . which are things for common women], hinting at his very serious purpose.⁴ He met with striking success—Messisbugo was elevated to the level of Count Palatine and retained his impressive power until the end of his life, long after the duke had died and taken his protection with him.⁵

As Strong's anachronistic use of the term "happening" to describe Messisbugo's musical banquet indicates, the codification of early modern Italian dining ceremonials left a lasting impression, still exercising its influence centuries later. Indeed, Italian Futurist banquets are also often described anachronistically as "happenings," the most common translation of *serata* but also specifically referring to the dinner portion of the evening, as a sort of happening within a happening.⁶ The Futurists had begun staging their *serate* even before the publication of the original Futurist Manifesto in 1909, but the official Futurist entry into the culinary world actually occurred much later, marked by F.T. Marinetti and Fillia (Luigi Colombo)'s publication of the "Manifesto della cucina futurista" [Manifesto of Futurist Cooking] in the December 1930 issue of the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, which appeared again in the more frequently cited January 1931 issue of *Comœdia*.⁷ This was followed by the spring inauguration of the first Futurist restaurant in Turin, La Taverna del Santopalato [Tavern of the Holy Palate], and finally by Marinetti's triumphant 1932 publication of *La cucina futurista* [The Futurist Cookbook], a full-length collection of Futurist recipes, framed, exactly like the Messisbugo *Banchetti*, within a narrative account of the most successful Futurist dinners.

Though of course the Futurists, and especially Marinetti, were notorious for contradictory and sometimes nonsensical appropriations of the past, citations of long-standing literary and historical traditions included, the "Manifesto della cucina futurista" and *La cucina futurista* use this tactic with a decidedly clear objective. By modeling on the past here Marinetti drew upon the surprising power invested in the Italian cookbook and used it to invest his nutritional project with a defined political objective, forging the foundation for a Futurist-fascist marriage and also reaffirming his own place of leadership in the cultural program of the regime. Despite Günter Berghaus's observation that "Marinetti's artistic policies of the years 1923 to 1930 were

⁴ Cristoforo Messisbugo, *Banchetti*, 2-3. All translations are my own where not otherwise noted. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized where necessary for clarity.

⁵ Following the circulation of the completed manuscript of the *Banchetti*, Messisbugo was raised to the Palatinate, a position of extraordinary power for a man who started out in a kitchen scullery. In addition to the Count Palatine's typical judicial power and administrative duties, Messisbugo was a close confidant of the Duke and enjoyed full access to the court's finances. Strong, *Feast*, 134-35.

⁶ Though the term "happening" might be used to describe any of the Futurist events that exemplify "art into life," Claudia Salaris, for example, finds it to be the best descriptive of the Futurist dinners themselves, underlining that the banquet slowly became the primary event within the *serata* in the early 1930s. Claudia Salaris, *Cibo futurista: Dalla cucina nell'arte all'arte in cucina* (Rome: Graffiti, 2000), 20-31.

⁷ The full text of the "Manifesto della cucina futurista" is reproduced in the edition of the monograph used for reference here, F.T. Marinetti and Fillia (Luigi Colombo), *La cucina futurista* (Milan: Longanesi, 1986).

characterized by an often desperate desire to gain recognition by the new regime,” and Cinzia Sartini Blum’s insistence that we recognize futurism as “instrumental in the development of Italian politics toward fascism,” the xenophobic tirades or hyper-masculine recipes in the culinary manifesto and subsequent cookbook are sometimes read, like the texts themselves, as exclusively avant-garde experiments or even as genuinely light-hearted, rather than an organized and calculated attempt to speak to the new fascist leadership.⁸ However, as the Mesisbugo example demonstrates, the Italian cookbook as a genre was first and foremost conceived as a subtle but formidable political tool, and tracing its lineage only confirms its continued use in this vein.⁹ While Marinetti may have imitated certain elements of the early modern archetype by coincidence, recent research in Italian gastronomical history can establish that in his choice of genre Marinetti displays a conscious attempt to harness its potential as a vehicle for political gain.

The debt the Futurist cookbook owes to a more ancient tradition of theatrics and staged dinners has not gone unnoticed. Berghaus has compared Futurist theater, banquets and *serate* to the early modern stage, especially the ten directives to achieve the “pranzo perfetto” [perfect lunch], which are all remarkably similar to what we see in the Mesisbugo *Banchetti* and other early modern tracts. The stimulation of all five senses, the frequent use of the element of surprise, and the complete integration of atmosphere and alimentation were taken for granted by the Renaissance *scalco* as self-evidently essential to a successful meal.¹⁰ An emphasis on simultaneity in Marinetti’s first directive, “un’armonia originale della tavola (cristalleria vasellame addobbo) coi sapori e colori delle vivande” [an inventive harmony of the table (glassware tableware decor) with the flavors and colors of the dishes], and his seventh directive, “L’uso dosato della poesia e della musica come ingredienti improvvisi per accendere con la loro intensità sensuale i sapori di una data vivanda” [the measured use of poetry and music as improvised ingredients that accentuate the flavors of each delivered course with their sensual intensity], appears in the earlier tract as well. The *Banchetti* emphasizes repeatedly that to recreate the musical dinner it was necessary that “i musicisti [rimassero] continuamente a sonare, e a cantare, fino a tanto che durò la cena” [the musicians continued to play constantly, and to sing, for as long as the dinner lasted].¹¹ The final Futurist tenet—“La creazione dei bocconi simultanei e cangianti che contengano dieci, venti sapori da gustare in pochi attimi” [The creation of simultaneous and fleeting bites that contain ten, twenty flavors to enjoy for a very few moments]¹²—seems tame in comparison to many of the recipes included in the *Banchetti*, which often employ the use of several dozen ingredients in the preparation of just one element of a given course.

In her exploration of Futurist food and art, Claudia Salaris confirms that many of the themes found in the Futurist cookbook can be traced to well before the sixteenth century, all the way back to antiquity. Many of the Futurist dinners seem to recall the *Satyricon*, particularly the

⁸ Günter Berghaus, *F.T. Marinetti: Critical Writings*, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006), 366; Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F.T. Marinetti’s Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1.

⁹ On the genesis and reception of the Italian cookbook see, for example, the section entitled “*Comunicare la cucina: i ricettari*” in Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari, *La cucina italiana: storia di una cultura* (Rome: Laterza, 1999), 185-220.

¹⁰ Günter Berghaus, “The Futurist Banquet: Nouvelle Cuisine or Performance Art?” *New Theatre Quarterly* 17, no. 65 (2001): 3-17.

¹¹ Mesisbugo, *Banchetti*, 9.

¹² Marinetti and Fillia, “Manifesto della cucina futurista,” 33.

“Pranzo di Capodanno” [New Year’s Lunch] during which a live turkey was set free on the table as the diners took their first bites of a cooked one.¹³ More unusual, however, is the first meal described in *La cucina futurista*, “La cena che evitò un suicidio” [The dinner that prevented a suicide], in which Marinetti, Fillia and Prampolini reportedly rushed off to rescue a recluse friend from depression provoked by the loss of his lover. The story begins with a determinedly Futurist Marinetti at the wheel of his car, taking curves “chirurgicamente” [surgically], but things quickly take a turn. He encounters “pini ombrelliferi offerti al Paradiso” [stone pines offered up to Paradise] and “cipressi diabolicamente infusi nell’Inchiostro dell’Inferno” [cypresses diabolically inscribed in the ink of Hell] before coming upon not a villa, but “una vera Reggia” [a true palace]. After feverishly working through the night to create a Futurist meal that will liberate their friend from his suicidal thoughts, the men collapse onto cushions and furs to discuss erotic hunger in an unreservedly symposiastic setting.¹⁴

Even in the decidedly less chimerical “Manifesto,” Marinetti often falls back on common themes from early modern literature. Though he suggests that someday the State will provide the public with pills or powder that contain all necessary nutrition, he qualifies the use of these innovations:

Invitiamo la chimica al dovere di dare presto al corpo le calorie necessarie mediante equivalenti nutritivi gratuiti di Stato, in polvere o pillole, composti albuminoidei, grassi sintetici e vitamine. Si giungerà così ad un reale ribasso del prezzo della vita e dei salari con relativa riduzione delle ore di lavoro. Oggi per duemila kilowatt occorre soltanto un operaio. Le macchine costituiranno presto un obbediente proletariato di ferro acciaio alluminio al servizio degli uomini quasi totalmente alleggeriti dal lavoro manuale. Questo, essendo ridotto a due o tre ore, permette di perfezionare e nobilitare le altre ore col pensiero le arti e la pregustazione di pranzi perfetti.¹⁵

[We call the chemist to his duty of quickly delivering the necessary calories to the body through nutritive equivalents provided free by the State, in powder or pills, consisting of scleroproteins, synthetic fats, and vitamins. In this way a true reduction will be seen in the cost of living and wages with a relative reduction in work hours. Today only one worker is required for every two thousand kilowatts. Machines will soon constitute an obedient proletariat of iron steel aluminum at the service of men by then almost totally relieved of manual labor. This labor, having been reduced to two or three hours per day, will allow for the perfection and nobilizing of the remaining hours with thoughts of the arts and the foretaste of perfect meals.]

Here the most Futurist concept yet introduced in the Manifesto, a new foodless form of nutrition, is not the end but the means by which men will have more leisure time with which to enjoy finer quality, real-food meals. Marinetti even employs the verb “nobilitare” [to make noble], with its

¹³ Marinetti and Fillia, *La cucina futurista*, 188-90; Salaris, *Cibo Futurista*, 6.

¹⁴ Marinetti and Fillia, *La cucina futurista*, 9-20.

¹⁵ Marinetti and Fillia, “Manifesto della cucina futurista,” 29.

acutely medieval connotations, to describe his idealized life of artistic reflection and perfect lunches. Indeed, Salaris points out that for this last point it has been falsely assumed that Marinetti was mostly inspired by the Marxist suggestion that a shorter workday was the first step toward the “reign of liberty.” In reality, Marinetti was undoubtedly aware of the commonality of the trope he was drawing upon, which appeared in even the earliest utopian literature, from Thomas More who reduced the working day to six hours in his *Utopia*, to Tommaso Campanella who preferred four.¹⁶

The “Manifesto” further called for the end of mediocrity in pleasures of the palate, the abolition of traditional recipes (referred to here as “miscela”), the removal of volume and weight as evaluators of food, and above all, the elimination of the “pastasciutta, assurda religione gastronomica italiana” [pasta, the absurd Italian gastronomic religion].¹⁷ The introduction of vaguely scientific terms like “miscela” [mixtures] might lend a colder, sterile tone to the recipes, but Cecilia Novero underlines that the Futurist use of “formulas” implies a tie to ancient substantialist beliefs about nutrition.¹⁸ Similarly, while the last directive appears to fall under the broad umbrella of the intentionally provocative and nutritionally forward-looking, it in fact turns to an even more distant past. The infamous “crociata contro la pastasciutta” [crusade against pasta] was doubly appealing to Marinetti, who could count on it to be both broadly incendiary and a reinforcement of the violent masculinity his Futurism proposed. Attacking the pasta-heavy diet, he draws upon a component of dietary consciousness that predates even Renaissance proposals for its eradication, a crusade that had begun with the fall of Rome, as the Frankish influence trickled down from the north. With the Franks, particularly following the “Carolingian Renaissance,” came the northern European emphasis on meat as the primary sustenance for strong men. The Mediterranean taste for bread products, and above all pasta, was quickly characterized as a weakness.¹⁹ No doubt anticipating the special attention this ingredient would draw, Marinetti dedicates three pages of the cookbook to creating a false genealogy of pasta and reinforcing his anti-grain stance. Blaming first the Ostrogoths in Ravenna for its original introduction, Marinetti then points his finger at “quel cialtrone rumoroso dell’Aretino” [that noisy buffoon Aretino] and his “muse in carne e ossa procacissime” [bosomy muses in the flesh] for reiterating its prominence in the Italian diet in the sixteenth century.²⁰

¹⁶ Marinetti almost certainly read Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Tommaso Campanella’s *Città del sole*, but beyond what Salaris mentions he was also probably familiar with Erasmus’ reflections on the ideal ratio of work to leisure in a day, and of course Cicero’s fundamental discourse on *otium* vs. *negotium*. Salaris, *Cibo Futurista*, 40. On the same subject, the similar utopian tendencies in Marinetti’s and Charles Fourier’s writings on food have been discussed at length by Enrico Cesaretti, “Traces of Past Utopias in The Futurist Cookbook,” *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* 14, no. 7 (2009): 841-56.

¹⁷ F.T. Marinetti and Fillia, “Manifesto della cucina futurista,” 2.

¹⁸ Cecilia Novero “Futurist Banquets,” in *Antidiets of the Avant-Garde: From Futurist Cooking to Eat Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 10. Where Novero uses “formulas,” the English “mixtures” might also be substituted, which again evokes a medieval connotation.

¹⁹ Massimo Montanari discusses this phenomenon in detail in the third part of *Storia dell’alimentazione*, defining “modelli alimentari” and noting that the Romans considered the classical “pane e vino” food for the civilized, but as their influence waned the “barbaric” conception of meat as “il nutrimento per eccellenza” was increasingly integrated into the southern European diet, Massimo Montanari, “Romani, barbari, cristiani. Agli albori della cultura alimentare europea” in *Storia dell’alimentazione*, eds. Jean Flandrin and Massimo Montanari (Rome: Laterza, 1996), 213-42. Bridget Henisch also touches upon this trend, though she focuses mostly on its effect on northern Europe, in Bridget Henisch, *Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 28-58, esp. 31-33.

²⁰ Marinetti and Fillia, *La cucina futurista*, 50-55.

The sometimes egregious contradictions between *passéist* elements and announced avant-garde intentions in this text do little to distinguish the culinary writings from other Futurist experiments, but as Sartini Blum's suggests, the tendency to compartmentalize these, and to classify Futurist works as either apolitical and truly avant-garde or demonic precursors of fascism, has undermined more nuanced readings of many Futurist works, among them *La cucina futurista*. Even those scholars who have troubled the presence of what Sartini Blum usefully labels the "recycling of the past" have agreed that the overall innovative quality and real applicability of the manifesto and cookbook are their defining features, eventually classifying Futurist food as a forerunner of nouvelle cuisine.²¹ Salaris tempers her lengthy introduction to the many precursors of Futurist cuisine, insisting that though the precedent existed, in no way does it "togliere all'assoluta originalità della proposta gastronomica futurista" [take away from the absolute originality of the Futurist gastronomic proposal].²² On a similar note, Lesley Chamberlain, in the introduction to the first English edition of the cookbook, chides her former self for having read the book the first time without understanding its subtly transgressive nature and its success at using food as a medium to transform "art into life." In retrospect she concludes, "No other cultural movement has produced a provocative work of art disguised as easy-to-read cookbook."²³ Including it among her "antidiets," Novero gives substantial space to the potential implications of the text with respect to the complicated political context, but she too concludes that the culinary manifesto and subsequent monograph are a real response to the bourgeois coddling of nineteenth-century cuisine and a sincere, if belated, push to expand the Futurist program out to the masses and into the quotidian.²⁴

Whether *La cucina futurista* is ultimately representative of a truly avant-garde experiment or not, Marinetti's heavy sampling of traditional sources cannot be read as another document of his tendency to present a complicated, apparently conventional but essentially progressive take on an existing genre. While Marinetti's reliance on ancestral recipes might be dismissed as superficial, his emulation of past authors' intentions is almost certainly not. It is important to note that the Este court *scalco* Mesisbugo was not an exception but the most renowned of many chefs/heads of kitchen who relied on the published recipe collection as a stepping-stone toward greatness. The tried and true method was also made famous by the equally celebrated Bartolomeo Scappi, who achieved fame and a post as the pope's private chef with his *Opera dell'arte del cucinare* [Complete Work on the Art of Cooking] (1573), and the Venetian *scalco* Domenico Romoli, with his encyclopedic text, *La singular dottrina* [The Singular Doctrine] (1560).²⁵ Though the condition of the court *scalco* in the midst of the isolating microcosm of the court is at best a rough parallel for the Futurist exponent, it suggests a more illuminating comparison. Where Mesisbugo hoped for and succeeded in advancing an

²¹ Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism*, 1-3, 137.

²² Salaris, *Cibo futurista*, 5.

²³ Lesley Chamberlain, introduction to *The Futurist Cookbook* by F.T. Marinetti, ed. Lesley Chamberlain, trans. Suzanne Brill (San Francisco: Bedford Arts, 1989), 12.

²⁴ Novero, "Futurist Banquets," 1-52, esp. 1-12.

²⁵ On the successes of Mesisbugo and Scappi, as well as other illustrations of this phenomenon see Strong, *Feast*, 129-209; Jadranka Bentini, et. al., eds., *A tavola con il Principe. Materiali per una mostra su alimentazione e cultura nella Ferrara degli Estensi* (Ferrara: Gabriele Corbo Editore, 1988); and also Ken Albala, *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of the Late Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Scappi's *Opera* has recently been translated into English, and the ample commentary notes overlap with Romoli's work as well, in Bartolomeo Scappi, *The Opera Of Bartolomeo Scappi: l'arte et prudenza di un maestro cuoco*, trans. and comment. Terence Scully (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

individual career in the transparent and rigid hierarchy of his time, Marinetti aspired to maintaining and expanding cultural prominence for both himself and his movement more generally, within a changing power structure and over the span of several decades. Moreover, the exploitation of the cookbook genre for political gain did not begin and end with court culture, and though the early modern effort was likely their prototype, the Futurists had a much more recent, and more important, model.

As Marinetti set out on his own food experiment, possibly the most important culinary text written in Italy since Messisbugo's *Banchetti*, Pellegrino Artusi's *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* [Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well], was only just reaching the apex of its long ascent toward becoming the most popular cookbook Italy had yet seen. The book, written and published by Artusi in 1891, was in every way a quintessential cookbook by modern standards, a hefty tome that included step-by-step recipes and casual anecdotes. It was a work that would become the fundamental source for Italian home cooks as well as the ultimate representative of Italian cuisine to the international public.²⁶ Artusi's text brought to light the rich Italian culinary history that had been obscured by the passage of time and the dullness of Romantic-era cooking in Italy. Artusi also emphasized the Italian Renaissance court as the primary ancestor of the avant-garde in food, and he affirmed that French dominance in the eighteenth-century culinary world was actually owed to earlier Italian archetypes.²⁷ He did this with clear instructions and practical tips for an imagined audience that more closely resembled real home cooks than ever before. Artusi even dedicated the books to his two cats, whom he remembers rubbing up against his legs as he tried out his recipes, waiting to be the first to taste them.²⁸

The quaint and seemingly old-fashioned nature of Pellegrino Artusi's *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* has led most readers to assume Marinetti's text is above all a rejection of, or even an explicit rebuttal to, his most recent predecessor in cookbooks. As Chamberlain summarizes it, "Historically *The Futurist Cookbook* had a single function as a cookery book: it explicitly challenged all that was established by Pellegrino Artusi in *L'arte di mangiar bene*, the summit of nineteenth-century family cooking."²⁹ Clearly Marinetti intended to do away with some antiquated elements he believed Artusi advocated in his recipes—as he quotes Fillia, "È finito il tempo delle pietanze di Artusi" [The time for Artusi's dishes is over].³⁰ Still, it would be a mistake to trust Marinetti's statement of rejection, just as it would be wrong to underestimate the depth of Artusi's project and the subtlety of the genre itself, which was not unknown to either author. To begin, *L'arte di mangiar bene* was the first cookbook with Italian recipes, written in Italian, and addressed to Italians. As Luigi Ballerini explains in his introduction to the Artusi text, "During the last decades of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, French cultural supremacy permeated every aspect of Italian life, particularly gastronomy. From an Italo-centric point of view, the phenomenon can be viewed as

²⁶ Luigi Ballerini has provided a valuable introduction to the English translation of *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene*, detailing bibliographical information on Artusi as well as contextualizing the work. Luigi Ballerini, "Introduction: A as in Artusi, G as in Gentleman and Gastronome" in *The Science of Cooking and the Art of Eating Well* by Pellegrino Artusi, ed. Luigi Ballerini, trans. Murtha Baca and Stephen Sartarelli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), xv-lxxiv. For more on Artusi's work see again Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari, "Comunicare la cucina: i ricettari," 185-220.

²⁷ Ballerini, "Introduction," xxvii.

²⁸ Artusi, *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene*, v.

²⁹ Chamberlain, introduction to *The Futurist Cookbook*, 20.

³⁰ Marinetti, *La cucina futurista*, 89.

a kind of abdication, political as well as ethical.”³¹ *L’arte di mangiar bene* was thus revolutionary in its own right. It bears noting that Artusi was forced to publish his book himself, as no major editor would have him because of his “unorthodox” style and the unlikelihood that he would find an audience. Artusi placed a surprisingly modern emphasis on hygiene, dedicating his entire first chapter to cleanliness in the kitchen and even incorporating accurate nutritional advice, despite the fact that the science of nutrition was wholly undeveloped in Italy at the time.³² His sometimes frivolous banter might have been an idiosyncrasy of the author, but it also made his book feel familiar and less intimidating to the emerging bourgeoisie he pictured as his audience.

More importantly, in keeping with the earlier usage of Italian cookbooks, *La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene* was far from innocuous reading for bored housewives. Artusi’s work was the climax of his conscious effort to renew Italian interest and pride in cooking as a means to complete the Risorgimento campaign, convincing the home cook that recipes from all regions were a part of the shared repository of Italian cuisine and were achievable in the capable hands of any Italian cook. Artusi hoped to continue the work of unifying the country by integrating Italian cuisine, simultaneously evoking its glorious past and giving space to the peninsula’s various regions. As Piero Camporesi’s 1970 study demonstrated, the importance of *La scienza in cucina* was not limited to its useful, unique nature. On the contrary, “in a discreet, subterranean, impalpable way—first in the kitchen and then in the collective unconscious, in the unfathomed depths of the popular mind—it unified and blended the motley collection of peoples only formally identified as Italians.”³³ With the calculated exploitation of the cookbook format, *L’arte di mangiar bene* intended to reach the hearts of the Italian people through their stomachs. Ballerini describes the success of *L’arte di mangiar bene* in this way:

Artusi’s book was [. . .] much more effective in bringing about a modicum of social harmony than were the heavily ideological and frequently high-brow novels—chief among them Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*—that thousands of young men and women were forced to read in school, in the vain hope that this exercise would transform them from young Sicilians, Venetians, or Romans that they and their forebears had been into young Italians. Unlike those novels, which emphasized uniformity, Artusi showed how the preservation of diversity does not contradict collective interests. It is perhaps this validation of diversity operating within the boundaries of a nation both ancient and newly established that gave the book its most genuine political value.³⁴

³¹ Ballerini, “Introduction,” xxvii.

³² Carol Helstosky points this out in her article, which seems to be the only publication that directly compares the Artusi cookbook with Marinetti’s, with a goal of emphasizing the similarities between the two authors’ intent and acknowledging a political interest behind both. She concludes that the main purpose of Marinetti’s text is “to criticize the fascist regime for not doing enough for the Italian people” (115), but in her further work on the subject she too notes that the Futurists supported at least the Fascist emphasis on rice in their grain program: Carol Helstosky, “Recipe for the Nation: Reading Italian History Through *La scienza in cucina* and *La cucina futurista*,” *Food and Foodways* 11, no. 2 (2003): 113-40; Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil: Food and Politics in Italy* (New York: Berg, 2004), 78-80.

³³ Piero Camporesi, “Bourgeois Cooking in the Nineteenth Century: Between Tradition and Renewal” in *The Magic Harvest: Food, Folklore and Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 115 [ital. orig. Piero Camporesi, *La terra e la luna: alimentazione, folklore, società* (Bologna, 1980)].

³⁴ Ballerini, introduction to *The Science of Cooking*, xxi.

This project was not conceived in ignorance of the complex Italian culinary past; it was directly inspired by it. Artusi and others had even participated in the “rediscovery” of many of the first cookbooks in their effort to cultivate public interest and inform the Italian people that food and cookbooks had once been the ultimate manifestations of Italian greatness. Among the first to be unearthed were the *Frammento di un libro di cucina del sec. XIV* [Fragment of a Fourteenth-Century Cookbook], published by Guerrini in 1887; the *Libro di cucina del secolo XIV* [Cookbook from the Fourteenth Century], published in 1889 by Ludovico Frati; and *Ricette di cucina del buon secolo della lingua* [Cooking Recipes from the Good Century of the Tongue], again from Guerrini, in 1890.³⁵ These books demonstrated not only a splendid past of fine dining, but furthermore a highly developed use of the genre to convince, influence, and even manipulate. In Messisbugo’s time of self-fashioning and self-promotion, the cookbook represented an opportunity for one man to flourish at court; in Artusi’s time of precarious nation building, it represented an opportunity for one man to help unite a divided people. For Marinetti, the cookbook could instead be both things: a gesture of goodwill toward the leader of the rising regime who might support his individual advancement, and a vehicle for validating his personal brand of Futurism with a wider audience.

To be sure, some of the attempts to ingratiate himself to the new dictator in *La cucina futurista* are entirely overt. The *Manifesto contro l’esterofilia* [Manifesto against Love of Foreign Things] is incorporated directly into the text as part of a larger section entitled “Contro la cucina del grande albergo e l’esterofilia” [Against Luxury Hotel Cuisine and Love of Foreign Things] condemning any interest in the foreign and lauding nationalism.³⁶ Marinetti also felt compelled to include an entire appendix, essentially a mini-dictionary, of Italian neologisms to combat the invasion of non-native vocabulary in food language. What was previously a “bar” became a “quisibeve” and the “cocktail” once served there was now a “polibibita.”³⁷ Like his recipe for Roman fasces formed from celery on beds of rice, the inclusion of a letter from Mussolini in which he refers to Marinetti as “my dear old friend of the first Fascist battles” is unambiguous in its purpose.³⁸

More remarkable are the muted but unmistakable characteristics of *La cucina futurista* that create a parallel between the carefully veiled unification plan in Artusi’s cookbook and the concrete political aspirations Marinetti expresses under cover of a recipe collection. These become more obvious when one considers less notable Futurist forays into food. Though Marinetti and Fillia’s “Manifesto della cucina futurista” and *La cucina futurista* are by far the most memorable Futurist contributions to culinary history, in reality the avant-garde had begun considering the table as a venue for showcasing the applications of their ideas much earlier. Berghaus points out that the Futurists began experimenting with food in a public setting as early as immediately following the publication of the original Manifesto in 1909, noting that the January 1910 *serata* at the Politeama Rosetti in Trieste concluded with a backwards dinner:

³⁵ Ibid., xxiv.

³⁶ Marinetti and Fillia, *La cucina futurista*, 70-7.

³⁷ Ibid., 247-52.

³⁸ Ibid., 145. Marinetti reproduces this letter that Mussolini wrote him in response to his invitation to an earlier dinner at the Caberet Diavolo.

Coffee
 Sweet memories on ice
 Marmalade of defunct glories
 Mummy roast with professorial liver
 Archeological salad
 Goulash of the past
 Explosive peas with the sauce of history
 Dead Sea fish
 Clotted-blood soup
 Entrée of demolition
 Vermouth³⁹

Jules Maincave, to whom Marinetti gives a fleeting nod in his own *Manifesto della cucina futurista*, had published *La cuisine futuriste* already in 1913, and Apollinaire had written in multiple publications on Futurist and Cubist inspired meals, coining the term “gastro-astronomisme” in 1912. In fact, Marinetti, Fillia, Depero, and others had already developed and published “Culinaria Futurista: Manifesto” in *Roma Futurista* in May of 1920, hence Marinetti himself had previously engaged with the same project.⁴⁰ Augusto Chesne Dauphiné notes that Marinetti had been remarkably more playful in his original approach, later suggesting that the term “cucinario” should replace the original “culinario” in the title, “perché sa di culo.”⁴¹

In contrast, the more serious nature of *La cucina futurista*, frequently accused of being a haphazard jumble of ingredients meant only to shock, can be seen in many of the recipes in Marinetti’s book which are at least theoretically pleasing to the palate when realized; some are quite simple and surprisingly un-artistic in their ingredients and presentation. Though on the very first page of *La cucina futurista* Marinetti promises, “Questa nostra cucina futurista regolata come il motore di un idrovolante per alte velocità, sembrerà ad alcuni tremebondi passatisti pazzesca e pericolosa” [Our futurist cuisine guided like the motor of a seaplane at high speeds will seem crazy and dangerous to some fearful *passèists*], he later adds an unexpected reassurance that, “esse invece vuole finalmente creare un’armonia tra il palato degli uomini e la loro vita di oggi e di domani” [it instead aims to finally create harmony between mens’ palates and their present and future lives].⁴² This harmony did not escape those who actually made use of the recipes in the collection. In *Italian Food*, her comprehensive volume that was crucial in importing Italian cooking methods to northern Europe and America, Elizabeth David incorporated not one but several recipes by Marinetti, all translated verbatim from *La cucina futurista*. Though some of these recipes could be painted as curiosities, the recipe David chose for the Milanese classic *costolette* [breaded veal cutlets] is Marinetti’s, and she also includes the dessert Marinetti entitled “Mafarka” (after his first novel), which is in reality nothing more than a

³⁹ Günter Berghaus, “The Futurist Banquet,” 4. Berghaus finds the menu in Aldo Palazzeschi, *Incendiario* (Milan: Edizioni Futuriste di ‘Poesia,’ 1910), 21.

⁴⁰ Irba, “Culinaria futurista: Manifesto” *Roma futurista* 3.83 (May 1920). As Cesaretti points out, relying on Salaris, even Maincave’s *La cuisine futuriste* already seems to bear the marks of Marinetti’s influence, Cesaretti, “Traces of Past Utopias,” 853 n. 3.

⁴¹ Augusto Chesne Dauphiné, “L’annuncio della morte di Gabriele,” with a note from F. Tempesti, *La Gola* (July-August 1987), cited in Salaris, *Cibo Futurista*, 82. The play on words is lost in English, as the Italian “culo” [ass] lends the phonetic similarity to “culinario” [culinary].

⁴² Marinetti and Fillia, *La cucina futurista*, 5.

traditional rice pudding, made delicate with a hint of orange blossom extract. What stood out to David is less the absurdity of the cookbook than the unexpectedly practical suggestions demonstrating a natural evolution of diet alongside other customs. David was also one of few later readers to explicitly distinguish a fascist valence in Marinetti's work, warning that "behind the amiable fooling...lurked a sinister note: the fascist obsession with nationalism and patriotism, the war to come."⁴³

Indeed, in his recipes Marinetti is also careful to indicate specific Italian brands that should be used—"patriotic references to Italian products" as Chamberlain generously terms them—among them, Cirio tomatoes, Ricasoli Chianti, and Gavi Pinot Grigio.⁴⁴ At times other product choices that appear inconsequential, particularly staple items, prove to have loaded meanings. In considering the "bodily regime" of Italian fascism, Karen Pinkus underlines that *La cucina futurista* picks up very directly on one of the most notable fascist campaigns in the food industry: increased consumption of sugar. Observing the "embrace of sugar, and of the nervous energy associated with the consumption of sugar" in the text, she affirms that the Futurists at least incidentally supported the fascist promotion of sugar and the stimulation it provided.⁴⁵ Moreover, though Pinkus classifies the "crociata contro la pastasciutta" as contrary to the fascist grain program at the time, anti-pasta rhetoric would seem to coincide comfortably with the new dietary regulations. As Pinkus herself observes, the fascist concern over grain production manifested itself in the infamous rice campaign: "the propaganda offices launched a campaign to promote rice over pasta, reeducating vast sections of the population to accept the former as its national dish."⁴⁶ In fact, Marinetti not only promotes rice over pasta in *La cucina futurista*, he also further attempts to attribute the rising Italian interest in rice directly to the "Manifesto della cucina futurista": "Oltre alle molte adesioni di cuochi, igienisti e artisti, la polemica sulla cucina futurista diede vita a tutta una serie di articoli e di studi sulle qualità del 'riso,' alimento italiano che deve essere sempre maggiormente propagandato ed usato" [Beyond the many cooks, hygienists, and artists who have subscribed to it, the polemic over Futurist cooking gave life to a whole series of articles and studies on the quality of 'rice,' an Italian food that must be increasingly promoted and employed].⁴⁷

Precisely what Marinetti hoped to obtain from these efforts is, in keeping with a true Futurist mode, somewhat more ambiguous. The evident desire to use the cookbook to earn attention and approval from the contemporary power structure does not confirm that Marinetti intended for the Futurist cuisine to reaffirm and elaborate upon a specifically fascist vision. The overlap between his own nutritional regime and that of Mussolini only points to a potentially meaningful coincidence of interests, rather than exposing the politics of Futurism as fascist once and for all. Moreover, just as his early modern predecessors, who fawned immoderately over their patrons while sometimes mocking them delicately in their works, it is always possible to imagine the presence of sarcasm in the sycophantic remarks Marinetti directs toward Mussolini. Indeed, in the same affirmations of the fascist dietary regime and the cult of the body, Novero

⁴³ Elizabeth David, *Italian Food* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 66.

⁴⁴ Chamberlain, Introduction to *The Futurist Cookbook*, 20.

⁴⁵ Pinkus points out that the regime declared sugar an autarchic product and planned to farm it in the Ethiopian highlands, with the specific intent of using it to inspire this "nervous energy" in the native population. Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising Under Fascism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 89-92.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97. See also Helstosky's confirmation that the pro-rice rhetoric of Marinetti supports the rice program that had been in effect since the 1928 founding of the Ente Nazionale Risi and the establishment of a national day for rice propaganda, in Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil*, 78-80.

⁴⁷ Marinetti and Fillia, *La cucina futurista*, 57.

sees Futurist reservations over the politics of state fascism, and she concludes that the consignment of their “final--and most important, because most basic--revolution of sensibility” to a humble cookbook is a mockery of the attempt to codify and collect culture in permanent documentary form.⁴⁸ The choice of a cookbook, however, is precisely what corroborates the desire to engage with contemporary political powers, and Novero proposes that *La cucina futurista* might be read as a testimony to the Futurist intent to complete the cultural revolution of fascism in tandem with the political project already underway.⁴⁹

At least echoing the popularity of Artusi’s work, *La cucina futurista* enjoyed remarkable success, particularly within the Futurist conception of accomplishment. The response to Marinetti’s provocative efforts may never have been more satisfying than with his culinary project. Shortly after the diatribe against the pastasciutta was published in the manifesto and pronounced at several subsequent banquets, Italians from all walks of life began to dive headlong into the battle. Even the international media took notice. Articles appeared in the *Reinisch-Westfalische Zeitung*, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, and *Le Petit Marseillais*.⁵⁰ The *London Times* published a handful of responses, some in the form of absurdist poetry, and a lengthy article entitled “Italy May Down Spaghetti” came out in the *Chicago Tribune*. A piece that appeared in the *Herald*,⁵¹ “Spaghetti for Italians, Knives and Forks for All are banned in Futurist Manifesto on Cooking” is reproduced in its entirety in the cookbook:

Marinetti, father of Futurist art, literature and drama, has just issued from Rome a manifesto launching Futurist cooking, according to word received yesterday in Paris. Practically everything connected with the traditional pleasures of the gourmet will be swept away.
No more spaghetti for the Italians.
No more knives and forks.
No more after-dinner speeches will be tolerated by the new cult.⁵²

The response of the Italian press was less curious and more outraged. On December 12, 1931 a special edition of *La settimana modenese* was released in anticipation of Marinetti’s visit to Modena.⁵³ Included along with a number of satirical cartoons depicting the Futurist founder as half-airplane, half-man, was a brief, poetic defense of tagliatelle:

Le tagliatelle? O futurista, senti:
quale cosa vi è al mondo più FUTURA?
Spariscon tosto se son PRESENTI
anche se son PASSATE di cottura.

⁴⁸ Novero, “Futurist Banquets,” 7, 21-22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-9.

⁵⁰ Marinetti also claims articles were written in Budapest, Tunis, Tokyo and Sydney, but the existence of only the ones cited here has been confirmed by Salaris (*Cibo futurista*, 44-51).

⁵¹ Marinetti calls it *The Herald* but he is actually referring to the *New York Herald Tribune*, the reincarnation of the *Herald* after 1924.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵³ “L’arrivo di Marinetti” *La settimana modenese* II, no. 50 (12 December 1931).

[Tagliatelle? O futurist, listen: what could be more FUTURE than them? They disappear as soon as they are PRESENT even if they are PAST their proper cooking time.]

Shortly thereafter, a group of women from L'Aquila wrote a "lettera-supplica" [plea-letter] begging that Marinetti retreat from his position on macaroni, and the score for a song in praise of pasta, "Macaroni," appeared in a Pugliese literary magazine mocking Marinetti. Even the duke of Bovino, then mayor of Naples, couldn't resist getting personally involved in the controversy. When interviewed regarding the Futurists' demand for the abolition of pasta, he affirmed to a reporter, "Gli angeli in paradiso non mangiano che vermicelli al pomodoro" [The angels in paradise eat nothing but vermicelli with tomato sauce]. This, Marinetti later responded in the cookbook, simply confirmed his understanding of the monotony of paradise and of the life led by the angels.⁵⁴

Assuming none of these reactions carries with it an accusation of any kind of political agenda, either fascist or otherwise, if Marinetti did wish to communicate an ambassadorial message with his cookbook, the public seems to have missed it. More revealing, however, is the reaction of the non-Marinetian Futurists, who wrote in *Nuovo Futurismo*:

Precisiamo: il Futurismo ufficiale marinettiano, com'è impostato oggi, non è serio, né può essere preso sul serio; anzi con le sue eccentricità, le sue buffonate e le sue interminabili polemiche discredita agli occhi del pubblico l'arte futurista . . . il manifesto della cucina futurista, la campagna contro la pastasciutta, quella per il cappello e altre del genere hanno discreditato il movimento futurista, poiché sono state e sono vere pagliacciate. Né doveva mescolarsi all'arte la pancia e le sue esigenze.⁵⁵

[We clarify: the official Marinettian Futurism, as it has been imposed today, is not serious, nor can it be taken seriously; on the contrary, with its eccentricities, its pranks, and its interminable polemics it only discredits Futurist art . . . the manifesto of Futurist cooking, the campaign against pasta, the one against hats and others of that nature have discredited the Futurist movement, seeing as they were and are complete foolishness. Nor should [Marinetti] mix his belly and its demands with art.]

This indictment of Marinetti's "pancia" [belly] and its uncontrolled demands supposedly comes in response to the Futurist leader's nonsensical and especially unsophisticated deviation from the serious artistic program the true Futurists supported. Yet it seems arbitrary at best to decry *La cucina futurista* as the most improbable or provocative of all Marinetti's experiments, and as such their characterization of the cookbook as an exercise in clowning around cannot be taken at face value. The accessibility, usefulness, and pure practicality of its contents would not have eluded them, even if its self-conscious place in a lineage of Italian cookbooks *cum* political tools

⁵⁴ Marinetti and Fillia, *La cucina futurista*, 137-38.

⁵⁵ "Serietà in arte," *Nuovo futurismo* I, no. 30 (May 1934) as cited in Salaris, *Cibo Futurista*, 51.

might have. Marinetti's estranged fellow Futurists may not have intended their rejection of the culinary text as a discreet disavowal of the political agenda it masks, but in distancing themselves in no uncertain terms from the project, they nonetheless also refuse the invitation to participate in whatever success might come of this new approach. Marinetti, on the other hand, is ultimately quite unequivocal regarding his purpose in publishing a cookbook: "Non a caso questa opera viene pubblicata nella crisi economica mondiale di cui appare imprecisabile lo sviluppo ma precisabile il pericoloso pànico deprimente. A questo pànico noi opponiamo una cucina futurista, cioè: l'ottimismo a tavola" [It is not by chance that this work is being published during a world economic crisis in which development seems inexplicable but dangerous, depressing panic explicable. We oppose this panic with a Futurist cuisine, that is: optimism at the table].⁵⁶ Rereading him in the key of his predecessors in the genre, we find Marinetti's optimism can only be due to his certainty that his Futurist cuisine will earn him a place near the head of the freshly set table.

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⁵⁶ Ibid., 6.

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