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“NOW THAT’S ITALIAN!”:

REPRESENTATIONS OF ITALIAN FOOD IN AMERICAN POPULAR MAGAZINES, 1950-2000

Few things identify Italy and Italians (and home and abroad) as food. Food occupies center stage in many popular representations of Italian national culture, and the market of *Italian Food* (i.e., the food represented, perceived, and exchanged as “Italian”) has reached global dimensions. Since food is a cultural artifact, imbued with meanings and values, the cross-cultural consumption of Italian cuisine is a significant marker of the way in which others see and imagine Italy and the Italians. Everyday, massive numbers of consumers in different places purchase commodified Italian identities in a culinary form. What are the images and symbols that *Italian Food* conveys and why are attractive? How these images and symbols have been changing over time and for the effect of what forces? Given the size of the American market for *Italian Food* and the role of the United States as a site of production of internationally distributed images in the second half of the Twentieth Century, the case study of the consumption of *Italian Food* in postwar America is essential to any historical approach to these issues. The case study also makes an interesting example of changing mechanisms of “consumption of the Other” in contemporary America.

The paper aims to delineate how *Italian Food* has been constructed as a cultural commodity in postwar United States through the analysis of representations of *Italian Food* in American popular magazines.¹ In the first half of the Twentieth Century, the American response to *Italian Food* was conflicting. Predominantly, however, *Italian Food* was seen as a culture in need of rationalization and control. As late as the 1950s, the cross-cultural consumption of *Italian Food* was mostly limited to a handful of popular items of which American food industry had developed a “rationalized” version. Since the 1970s, finally, along with the availability of a great variety of foods and eating out options, the cultural difference inherent in *Italian Food* has come to be highly regarded, signalling – for the first time – a total coincidence of the culture and the economic interests responsible for its commodification.

The paper addresses two historical and theoretical problems – the case for a radical transformation in the nature of consumption occurring within the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism; and the globalization of food cultures. The paper concludes that 1) in the last three decades, the “culturalization” of consumption has significantly enlarged the quantity of knowledge

¹ For the purposes of this paper, popular magazines are defined as periodical publications directed to the general public, written in non-technical language, heavily illustrated, and containing advertisements.

available on *Italian Food* culture, thus contributing to challenge previously established stereotypes and cultural hierarchies; and that 2) the fact that formerly distant places of production and consumption have been brought together in networks of interaction has been less a cause for cultural homogenization, local resilience, or hybridization, than for an increasingly global intelligibility of *Italian Food* culture.

Theoretical Background.

Social theorists of postmodernity pointed out that a switch in emphasis from the production of goods to the production of symbols has characterized the emergence of late capitalism. The value of commodities has no longer been shaped by capital, raw material and labor alone, but more and more by the symbols and meanings projected into them by the mass production of images. The boundaries between “high” and popular culture blurred. Everything became a sign in a system of signs, and hence, cultural.² The very nature of consumption changed accordingly. Growing individualization and disentanglement from formerly critical social constraints (in particular class) have required everyone to partake in the creation of individual lifestyles and identities. In late capitalist societies, the freedom (or, for some critics, obligation)³ of choice within an unparalleled variety of consumer options - including a great selection of foods, cooking styles, and eating places - established itself as the typical form of self-expression and self-creation.⁴

The discussion about globalization and the deterritorialization of food culture, while correlated, has produced less conclusive claims. The debate has revolved around theories that either 1) see globalization as a fundamentally homogenizing process (popularly known as MacDonalidization), 2) stress the “power of resistance” of local cultures, or – more often – 3) insist on the local reworking and contextualization of “global food” through hybridization or creolization.⁵

² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1991; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989.

³ The theory of contemporary food consumption developed by French social anthropologist Claude Fischler underlines the negative aspects of the encounter of a consumer freed from social bonds with “a wider range of possible foods, including exotic ones,” available all the year-round thanks to the post-industrial, delocalized food system. The demise of rules and norms regulating social behaviors (including what, where, when, with whom, and how food should be eaten) would leave the individual alone with the responsibility of selecting among foods that are anonymous and of unknown origins - a heavily anxiety-ridden task. The deriving “gastro-anomy” is, for Fischler, an appropriate metaphor for the contemporary condition of global disorder. Claude Fischler, “Food Habits, Social Change and the Nature/Culture Dilemma,” *Social Science Information*, 19, 1980.

⁴ Zygmunt Baumann, *Freedom*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1988; Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London, Sage, 1992; Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990.

⁵ For an account of the debate and the related bibliography see David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat*, London, Routledge, 1997.

The paper frames the representations of *Italian Food* in American popular magazines into these theoretical perspectives, in order to verify them. Do such representations offer evidences of the radical transformation in consumption patterns that theorists of social change have claimed happened in the United States roughly around 1970? Which of the contested theories on the global circulation of food cultures actually applies to the case of the cross-cultural consumption of *Italian Food* in America, as represented in popular magazines? What was the effect of changing consumption scenarios, as defined by the theories of social change and food globalization, on the construction of identities and differences articulated by narratives of *Italian Food* in popular magazines?

Sources, Methodology, and Findings.

In the period of time stretching from 1950 to 2000, American popular magazines dealt consistently with *Italian Food*. A search for the term “Italian Cooking” in *The Readers’ Guide To Periodical Literature* produces 635 articles, recipe columns, and restaurant reviews. In researching the paper, the analysis has been limited to four women’s magazines (*Good Housekeeping*, *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, *McCall’s*, and *Woman’s Home Companion*), seven general interest magazines (*The New York Times Magazine*, *Collier’s*, *Look*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *People*, *Newsweek*, and *Esquire*), one travel magazine (*Holiday* [*Travel Holiday* since 1978]), and one fashion magazine (*Vogue*). Of course, these sources don’t tell us anything about actual consumption patterns, as not necessarily readers tried the suggested recipes or visited the recommended restaurants. Nevertheless, the images, ideas and directions in food choice with which popular magazines provide consumers are relevant. Studies on modern consumerism pointed out that the anticipation of pleasure constructed by magazines and other media is a fundamental component of consumption, as consumers “seek to experience ‘in reality’ the pleasurable dramas they have already experienced in their imagination.”⁶ In the case of cross-cultural modes of consumption, such as tourism or “foreign” food consumption, it has been observed that consumers experience the signs of the culture of “the Other” comparing them with signs (or stereotypes) they derived from various discourses on that particular national or ethnic group. Empirical research showed that the values and meanings that consumers attach to foreign or ethnic foods depend on the position of the consumer with respect to the multiple images and representations about food “origins”, “destinations” and “travels,” by which she/is is surrounded. Popular magazines supply a considerable share of those images and representations.⁷

6 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London, Sage, 1990, p. 13.

7 Ian Cook, Philip Crang, Mark Thorpe, “Biographies and Geographies: Consumer Understandings of the Origins of Foods,” *British Food Journal*, 100, 3, 1998, p. 162-167.

The paper borrows the concepts of *social histories* and *cultural biographies of things* from the work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai.⁸ Appadurai encourages thinking about things as having an autonomous social life. Following the “paths” of goods from production to consumption it is possible to appreciate how their cultural meaning and economic value change in the different social contexts where they circulate - as different players at different points of the chain of transactions renegotiate the meanings and values of what they exchange. I use Appadurai’s terminology loosely, to define the narrations about the spatial-temporal origin of foods and organization of eating events rendered by popular magazines, and hence, to shed light on the way American consumers have been exposed to *Italian Food* as a medium of cultural difference. The assumption is that the more articulated are the biographies, the more the discourses on foods and eating out experiences are culturalized. When more information is given and more signs are conveyed, a thicker stratum of meanings is communicated.

The paper makes the argument for a significant shift occurring between the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

In the 1950s, popular magazines evaluated *Italian Food* basically for its taste, appearance, nutritional and gastronomic value, convenience and price. The latter element was important, as magazines’ narratives of *Italian Food* were modulated on the social class of their readerships. With the exception of middle-class magazines, historical and geographical descriptions of the origin of Italian foods mainly focused on their American “trajectory.” Magazines insisted on few popular and readily available Italian foods - many of which were produced on a mass scale by national industries - and on the role of Americans of Italian descent as reliable “cultural intermediaries.” The process underlying the representations was one of appropriation and rationalization of a “foreign product,” whereas its original producers were ideologically placed in a pre-rational, and hence culturally subaltern position. Overall, the emphasis was put on the functionality of *Italian Food*, and, in compliance to the Fordist logic of production and marketing, on the *regulation* of difference.

During the 1970s and after, as the availability of *Italian Food* in America greatly increased, and the cultural distance between the consumer and the goods lessened, the biographies of foods became much more far-reaching and detailed in time and space. A much greater variety of ingredients, recipes, and eating practices were represented in popular magazines. Cooking styles went “in” and “out” of fashion very quickly. Emphasis fell less on the inherent qualities of foods, and more on what they communicated symbolically, in terms of “tradition,” “novelty,” “originality,” “distinctiveness,” and so on. The social class of the readership was no longer a major

⁸ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in Id. (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

concern for magazines’ food writers, as good taste was supposed to be a basically classless notion. Established cultural authorities that knew how to discriminate between and validate foods and preparations were given an unprecedented importance. *Italian Food* became a terrain where readers could exercise their competence, distinction, and good taste according to their own individual style. Authenticity, formerly a less imperative issue, became a key concept and primary measure of value in the consumption of *Italian Food*. In any field of activity (shopping, cooking, eating out), insightful readers/consumers were expected to discern the authentic food, recipe, or restaurant from the inauthentic. Assumptions of cultural hegemony were no longer detectable. Diversity became an absolute value, and popular magazines actively engaged in the *production* of difference.

These findings are largely consistent with the theoretical claims of a major change in consumption practices and meanings occurring after the 1960s. In fact, the paper suggests that because of the increasing “culturalization,” concern for authenticity, and resort to authoritative expertise, contemporary cross-cultural consumption of *Italian Food* has become a significant exercise in the understanding of cultural difference. The high prize that the industry of symbolic production has put on diversity as a means of self-creation has stimulated a pervasive quest for authenticity. Admittedly, the quest is fated to be unsuccessful, as no full comprehension of the cultural and social context of which food is expression can be accomplished (if only because those contexts continuously change and the “search for authenticity” itself “threatens” the authenticity which is sought after). Nonetheless, the need for authenticity requested an investment in knowledge so great, inclusive, and sophisticated that it easily results in some form of comprehension of cultural differences, and in the contestation of conventional assumptions.

As regards to the debate on the globalization of food culture, the analysis substantiates a dialectical position in respect of homogenization/resistance/hybridization approaches. The changing representations of *Italian Food* in American popular magazines suggest that what it has actually happened is the “globalization of diversity.”⁹ Differently from what occurred under Fordism, when cultural difference was felt as positing obstacles to the rationalization of production, culinary cultural difference is nowadays an important asset for both transnational capitalism and the global cultural industry operating in the *Italian Food* sector. The ambition of these forces is to make differences in culinary cultures more intelligible to a potentially global public. In this sense, it has already been endeavored a massive effort in cultural communication. Thus, the homogenizing force behind the globalization of *Italian Food* resides rather in the structures of communication of

⁹ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Globalization As Hybridization,” in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities*, London, Sage, 1995.

cultural difference, which tend to make the “authenticity” and “diversity” of *Italian Food* universally understandable.¹⁰

To formulate some working hypotheses about the actual meaning of the culturalization of *Italian Food*, in terms of its influence on the construction of identities and differences, we have to frame the representations of popular magazines into the social contexts in which they were cast. In the first section, the paper provides an account of the origins of cross-cultural consumption of *Italian Food* in America. On the one hand, the section shows that some Americans in the early decades of the Twentieth Century actually aimed to suppress *Italian Food* as an expression of cultural difference. On the other, it shows that the demand for diversity and authenticity in *Italian Food* and the efforts of corporate industry to profit from it, though very different quantitatively and qualitatively from later examples, are far from being new, “postmodern” phenomena. The second and the third sections of the paper deal directly with the representations of *Italian Food* in American popular magazines, in the 1950s and in the period post-1970 respectively, contextualizing them in the changing relationships between consumer society and cultural diversity in postwar United States.

Excursions to Little Italy, 1890-1950

Since the Eighteenth century a number of wealthy Americans had loved the food they ate while travelling the Italian peninsula. Thomas Jefferson ordered a pasta machine to make in Monticello the same macaroni he tasted in Italy; and in the years of his diplomatic mission to France, Benjamin Franklin wrote in a letter: “If I could only find in any Italian travel a recipe for making Parmesan cheese, it would give me more satisfaction than a transcript of any inscription from any old stone whatsoever.” Nevertheless, the *Italian Food* most Americans first encountered was a local creolization of some of the many regional culinary traditions that immigrants imported in the country at the turn of the Twentieth century. Transatlantic exchanges of foods and eating practices have grown so intense thereafter,¹¹ that, in historical perspective, the “center” and the “periphery” may be seen as gradually collapsing into a transnational food culture flow¹². As a result, the *Italian*

¹⁰ I borrowed the notion of “structures of common difference” from Richard Wilk, “Learning To Be Local in Belize: Global Systems of Common Difference,” in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, London, Routledge, 1995.

¹¹ Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1919; Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, London, UCL Press, 2000.

¹² No transnational history of *Italian Food* has been undertaken so far. Nor major historians of Italian food culture have considered creolizations as integral to their subject. In their recent and excellent study, *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003) Massimo Montanari and Alberto Capatti go back as far as the Sixteenth Century to find the existence of a collective (if elitist) idea of a national food culture, one that only the emergence of regional cuisines at the turn of the Nineteenth Century could threaten. The framework within which

Food that Americans have been consuming in the past century is not only a historically changing set of meanings and values, but also an increasingly transnational culture. This aspect is witnessed by the biographies of *Italian Food* in American popular magazines, which frequently shift in time and space, from the present to the past and from one side of the Atlantic to the other.

In the first half of the Twentieth century, however, the object of cross-cultural consumption was the cuisine that immigrants structured from different sources into a coherent pattern within dense urban immigrant enclaves. In *Little Italies*, food culture resulted from thick networks of face-to-face relations. Immigrant family and community were the spaces of consumption where distinctive ethnic eating habits were shaped. Food took center stage in Italian American culturalism, by way of the creation of a new tradition, replete with collective rituals and myths of the “Old Country.” And by developing a quasi-monopoly system of production and distribution, immigrant entrepreneurs helped to complete a relocalization of *Italian Food* in America.¹³

The taste (and distaste) for *Italian Food* in America fell to a great extent under a characteristic paradigm of modernity: a tension between a vision of the culture of “the Other” as in need of civilization; the attraction for the primitive, the genuine, the sensual; and, finally, the drive to appropriation and rationalization for profit purposes.

Between the 1910s and 1920s, progressive reformers, equipped with newly developed concepts of home economics and nutritional science, tried to change the eating habits of Italian immigrants, supposedly unhealthy and economically inefficient. Italian one-pot dishes were believed to be of poor nutritive quality, spices allegedly favored alcoholism, and shopping for expensive imported products in neighborhood independent stores was criticized as wasteful. The rationalization of the diet was seen as a crucial step to make poor and uneducated immigrant workers “fit for America.” Reformers’ efforts were resisted and largely unsuccessful, but they were not reversed until the Depression and wartime rationing, when the food habits of the Italian

Montanari and Capatti organize their discourse is a well-established one: the territorial foundation of (authentic) culture. The qualities of foods cannot be disconnected by their actual local provenience. A cuisine is a cuisine because there is a community of people in a specific space that cook it, eat it, discuss about it. A structure of shared knowledges and feelings about it is there to allow those discussions to take place. In this sense, thinking of a national cuisine is a political action that draws both cultural and spatial limits (Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30, 1, 1988). To be sure, Montanari and Capatti accurately acknowledge that Italian cuisine, as any other food culture, is the product of continuous material and intellectual exchanges with and borrowings from the outside. Still, what has happened to it when it has crossed cultural boundaries pertains, in their vision, necessarily to a different history.

¹³ Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2001; Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1998; Simone Cinotto, “‘We Ate as a Family’: The Social Significance of Food in Italian Harlem,” in R. Baritone (et al.) (eds.), *Public and Private in American History: State, Family, and Subjectivity in the Twentieth Century*, Turin, Otto, 2003.

immigrants, based on fruit, vegetables and other non-meat items, were eventually deemed to be cheap and nutritious.¹⁴

Among the earliest Americans to “discover” *Italian Food*, were artistic and political avant-gardes, a group numerically marginal but rich in “cultural capital”.¹⁵ Prominent among them were Greenwich Village’s bohemians, who shared the neighborhood (bound to become a major attraction for the nascent tourism industry) with an animated Italian immigrant community. Through cross-cultural consumption of *Italian Food* in smoky restaurants where “dago red” wine was generously served during Prohibition, bohemians of Greenwich Village rebelliously departed from Victorian asceticism in name of self-expression and self-realization, in a way that closely resembled the consumption of African American culture in Harlem during the Jazz Age. In a pattern that has often been equated with that of the counter-culture of the 1960s, the bohemian revolt against the Protestant ethic of consumption eventually created a market for a variety of new products, paving the way for a dramatic expansion of consumer culture.¹⁶

It took about a decade for *Italian Food* to reach the mass media. Popular magazines such as *The Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* began to introduce *Italian Food* to middle-class Americans as a fun, acceptable transgression. In the 1930s, for fractions of the urban middle-class, “eating the Other” at the Italian restaurant became an exciting, transient digression from modern daily life, by way of the immersion in a “pre-modern,” disorderly (but safe) world.¹⁷ The middle-class Americans who patronized Italian restaurants faced what contemporary scholars of tourism define “staged authenticity.”¹⁸ Restaurants selectively drew the material for their discourse and aesthetics from Italian culture, immigrant culture, “highbrow” culture, and American popular culture. The human agency of cooks and waiters was fundamental, as they were implicitly requested by consumers’ demand to “act” Italian. Food itself was tailored on the “American business”: menu often revolved around standardized formats that were thought to please non-Italian customers. Dining on spaghetti and meatballs at a restaurant run by a black-mustached cook would eventually become such a blandly exotic experience to be portrayed in Disney’s cartoon *The Lady and the Tramp* (1955).

¹⁴ Harvey A. Levenstein and Joseph Conlin, “The Food Habits of Italian Immigrants in America: an Examination of the Persistence of a Food Culture and the Rise of “Fast Food” in America,” in Ray Browne (et al.) (eds.), *Dominant Symbols in Popular Culture*, Bowling Green Popular Culture Press, 1990.

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.

¹⁶ Mike Featherstone, “The Body in Consumer Culture,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 1, 2, 1982, p. 21.

¹⁷ On the “attraction of the sites of ordered disorder” as a long-time feature of modernity, see Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism*, London, Sage, 1991, p. 125.

¹⁸ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 9.



In short, the urban middle-class response to *Italian Food* in the first half of the Twentieth Century was framed by contrasting attitudes, both inherently modern in character: a cross-cultural consumption entangled with a rebellious, nostalgic or “touristy” quest for authenticity, and, on the opposite, the desire to dismantle traditional habits in the name of rationality and progress.

However, for most non-urban, lower and middle-class Americans, cross-cultural consumption developed on more pragmatic grounds. As soon as the late 1920s, Heinz, Campbell (*Franco-American SpaghettiOs*), and Chef Boyardee (sold by its Parmesan founder Hector Boiardi to American Home Foods in 1946) began to manufacture mass-produced, canned versions of the most popular Italian food, spaghetti in tomato sauce. By way of the translation into corporate terrain, the ethnicity of the concoction blurred: firms marketed their products to a wider audience emphasizing production over supply-side, and highlighting the low cost, convenience and uniform quality of canned spaghetti, not its cultural heritage.

From the vantage point of the early 1950s, the process initiated with contested encounters with the culture of “the Other” resulted in the rationalization, domestication and incorporation of a few selected elements of *Italian Food* into a hegemonic “American food system,” and in the transformation of those elements into mass-market products. The “mechanical reproduction” of *Italian Food* was to set the terms of cross-cultural consumption in the 1950s, as we find it represented in popular magazines. It is to that discourse that we, finally, turn.

Selling “Italianness” To One-Dimensional Men, 1950-1970

Postwar American consumer society was largely an effect of an epochal deal between government, labor, and business. In a Keynesian economic vision, high wages, mass market, and extensive private consumption had to be the instruments to build consensus at home and fight communism internationally¹⁹. In order to achieve the goal of a mass market that included potentially everyone, however, cultural and behavioral differences in American society had to be eroded. Advertising, now implemented by psychological and sociological research, focused on the creation of a national image for products and brands, on the superiority of manufactured over homemade products, and on the homogenization of a market still heavily segmented along ethnic lines.²⁰ Popular magazines, increasingly dependent on advertising revenues, were preminent vehicles of such marketing strategies.

¹⁹ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, New York, Knopf, 2003.

²⁰ Stuart Cohen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1976.

A good starting point to observe how popular magazines dealt with *Italian Food* in the 1950s is the case of pizza. Before the war, most non-Italian Americans were completely unfamiliar with it. A 1930 guide to dining out in New York defined it “a inch-thick, potato pan-cake, sprinkled with Parmesan cheese and stewed tomatoes.”²¹ In 1947, *The New York Times Magazine* introduced readers to a recipe for making pizza at home, claiming that the Italian specialty, a favorite in New York’s Little Italies, “could be as popular a snack as the hamburger, if only the Americans knew more about it.”²² The prescience is astonishing, as a national market for pizza was created overnight. The same process of appropriation, naturalization, and “mechanical reproduction” on a mass scale that had been applied to spaghetti was completed in a matter of months, in a much smoother way, and for a larger market. And certainly pizza owed its quick success to the technological advances of giant food processing and marketing – then in their heyday - as much as to its reliance on the same culinary triangle (dough, tomato sauce, melted cheese) popularized by its predecessor, or to the image of Italian eating places as informal and enjoyable.

Popular magazines significantly contributed to the mass marketing of the new item. They gave accounts of the Neapolitan origins of Pizza. The most recurrent story (as told by Italian American pizza makers in Manhattan, who were interviewed *en masse* in those days) was that, around 1746, King Ferdinand of Bourbon casually noticed a baker making dough into flat, round pies. The king loved the pizzas and ordered the baker as the royal cook. Pizza - magazines were quick to recognize - had a long and glorious tradition in Naples. Nevertheless, the modernization that it was undergoing in America was just making it better. When President Eisenhower, by saying out of his heart that he had eaten better pizza in New York than in Naples, “caused an international incident” with touchy Italians, *Collier’s* readily, if implicitly, took side with the President. The best pizza was American-made.²³

Magazines told about the ingenuity of independent Italian Americans who were raising big profits out of pizza in unlikely places like Odessa, Texas.²⁴ But what they mostly focused on was the ability of the food industry to take an unknown foreign dish, rework it in spotlessly clean factories, and deliver it to Americans from coast to coast as a delicious, cheap, and uniformly produced snack food. The might of food processing companies was not to be concealed to the readers, but stressed. In 1956, *The New York Times Magazine* reported, “in New Jersey a belt-line

²¹ Rian James, *Dining in New York*, New York, John Day Company, 1930.

²² Jane Nickerson, “Hot, Hearty Pizza,” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 25, 1947, p. 42-43.

²³ Herbert Mitgang, “For the Love of Pizza - An Old Italian Treat Is Sweeping the Nation – It’s a Meal-in-a-dish So Succulent, Composers Have Written Songs About It,” *Collier’s*, March 7, 1953, p. 67-70.

²⁴ Richard Gehman, “Crazy About Pizza – Call It Tomato Pie, Pizza Pie or Just Plain Pizza, This Delectable, Pungent Italian Concoction Is Giving the Hot Dog a Run for the Money as the Favorite American Snack,” *Saturday Evening Post*, November 30, 1957, p. 32-60.

assembles pizza as if they were General Motors tanks. Dough shell goes on line, plop goes cheese, squirt goes tomato sauce, shake goes oregano, plastic wrappers enfolds, label stamps, boxed, next.” The author of the article defined the mechanization of pizza production a progress to be accounted to “the American way of life, the free enterprise system and the capitalistic interplay of supply and demand.”²⁵ No attempts were made, either, to hide the repetitive and demanding labor involved in the mechanized pizza production. A 1953 *Collier’s* article featured a picture showing working women assembling and wrapping pizzas on a fast assembly line, with a remarkable confidence in the aesthetics of Fordism, the magic of science and technology, and the consumer interest in convenience and uniform quality. Finally, the global provenience of ingredients, far from being the cause of concern it is nowadays, was underscored as a proof of capitalist inventiveness. The pizza that Nino Food Products, Inc. of Newark, New Jersey, flied in thousands a week to Ohio, Illinois and Michigan, was “a real international pie: plum tomatoes from California, olive oil from Castelvetro in Sicily, and pure black pepper from the Pacific area.”²⁶

In adherence to a consumer culture focused on family, home, and domesticity, magazines provided readers with much advice about making pizza at home. The target of articles, recipe columns, and ads were women imagined as constantly seeking out new, simple, but a little intriguing cooking ways to please their husbands and children. Mass-marketed products were there to satisfy feminine urges for self-gratification. In alternative to the frozen product, shoppers could buy in any supermarket a “packaged pizza-pie mix containing the flour mixture, yeast and the pizza sauce with cheese either in it or in another envelope.”²⁷ In 1958, Fleischmann’s Yeast hired “Mrs. America” to advertise “Pizza Pronto,” a recipe for pizza from biscuit mix, from the pages of *Good Housekeeping*.²⁸ As *Look* wrote in a 1954 article, illustrated with pictures showing how to eat pizza correctly, “pizza pie has become an American citizen – here to stay.” Magazines made sure that the message was clear with headlines such as “Yankee Pizza” (*Good Housekeeping*), “The Americanized Pizza” (*Look*), and “Pizza Pies... the American Way” (*Woman’s Home Companion*).²⁹

Arguably, pizza was a product intrinsically fit for mass consumption. However, other food biographies reveal that the process of selection and incorporation was a structured endeavor, whose

²⁵ Herbert Mitgang, “Pizza a la Mode – In Many Variations Italy’s Famous Pie Now Rivals the Hot Dog In Popularity,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 12, 1956, p. 64-66.

²⁶ Herbert Mitgang, “For the Love of Pizza.”

²⁷ Dorothy Kirk, “Pizza Pies... the American Way,” *Woman’s Home Companion*, September 1955, p. 42-43.

²⁸ *Good Housekeeping*, October 1958, p. 149.

²⁹ Hedda Poli, “Yankee Pizza – Pizza Pie Is an Italian Triumph That We’ve Imported With Joy – But There Are Americans Ways To Make It – Here They Are,” *Good Housekeeping*, August 1951, p. 152; “The Americanized Pizza... and How To Eat One – An Italian Dish Rivals the Hot Dog,” *Look*, November 1954, p. 114-115; Dorothy Kirk, “Pizza Pies.”

politics of value was centered on the attenuation of difference through displacement and relocalization. American rationality and technology were bound to be the weapons that ensured a hegemonic position in conditions of intercultural exchange. A 1957 *Look* article noted that the annual American production of Italian-style cheese had surpassed ninety million pounds, five times the imports from Italy, and was of no inferior quality: “the cheese devotee has a wide choice – freshness and flavor guaranteed, thanks to vacuum-sealed transparent-plastic packaging.”³⁰ American women were encouraged to make their own lasagna or veal parmigiana at home, as long as they used convenient canned and packaged products, mass-marketed by American industries. Middle-class American consumers were rapidly made acquainted with the idea of the convertibility of *Italian Food* into a product for mass consumption.

Magazines helping to introduce *Italian Food* into the mass-market looked at Italian Americans as ideal endorsers. In the “real world,” *Little Italies* were disappearing, with all their glamour and nastiness, and second- and third-generation Italian Americans were moving in numbers to the suburbs. Those who remained in the inner cities were presumed to be “defending” their neighborhood from racial integration *and* decay. Italian Americans seemed to have just the right amount of cultural capital. They were intelligible and still different; not so distant in space and time as their European counterparts, but not yet completely assimilated. Also, some of the most stylish celebrities of the period came out of their ranks. As a result, popular magazines dealing with *Italian Food* featured interviews with local Italian American restaurateurs, surveyed the shopping habits of working-class Italian American families (in the popular “How America Lives” section of *The Ladies’ Home Journal*), and signed up Italian American women “who can cook” as guest writers or advisers. People of Italian descent have the amount of knowledge that derived them from everyday practice, and that was enough to imbue *Italian Food* with an identity. In this perspective, “authenticity [was] not the province of experts and exoteric criteria, but of popular and public kinds of verification.”³¹

The dishes featured in mass-circulation magazines, in fact, were overwhelmingly the classics of Italian American cuisine. When, in 1956, the middlebrow *New York Times Magazine* published an article on Italian foods that were not based on olive oil, garlic, and tomato sauce (*bistecca alla valdostana e risotto alla milanese*), it entitled it *Italy’s Other Dishes*.³² The “construction” of Italy, as a place in space and time, through recipe columns and food reportages was mainly a prerogative of magazines intended for an audience with a higher spending power,

³⁰ “New American Favorite, Italian Cheese,” *Look*, June 11, 1957, p. 82.

³¹ Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” p. 46.

³² Jane Nickerson, *The New York Times Magazine*, March 28, 1948, p. 32-33.

such as *Vogue* or *Holiday*. Before the introduction of commercial jet flight in the 1960s, overseas travels were a sign of “conspicuous consumption” in itself. Exclusivity, not authenticity, brought distinction to those who explored *Italian Food* at its source, and fashion and travel magazines offered representations in which the closeness to the authentic was often de-romanticized in front of a direct approach to pleasure. What really counted was that in Italy it was possible to get excellent *hearty* meals (a characteristic that positioned *Italian Food* somehow in opposition to the refined and intricate French haute cuisine, that was then revered as the world’s greatest), in breathtaking sceneries (Florence, Venice, and the Neapolitan Riviera being magazines’ favorites). In 1950, in an article entitled “Florence With a Fork,” *Holiday* journalist Ruth McKenney reported the magnificent food she had eaten in a Florentine restaurant. But she also recalled “the mixture of awe, disbelief and considerable relish” in her approach to food, her perplexity for the menu in Italian, and her bewilderment for the behavior of “authentic” Italians: “The bearded party next to us had his napkin tucked into his celluloid collar, ready for action; across the aisle a rakish character, was attacking a plate of *antipasto* with what may be defined as gusto. You could hear the noise and uproar at 200 paces. Also he had his hat on.” The encounter with “the Other,” and its food, was articulated within a distinct structure of power and class. “Considering that a similar meal in New York City, not one tenth as well cooked, nor so beautifully served, would have cost perhaps four times as much, the price was no great - for us. It would be add up to more than a day’s wage – for the great majority of Italians. [...] Our *tortellini alla bolognese* cost us about 350 lire – for an Italian, the price of a pair of baby shoes.”³³ Overall, in the 1950s, even high-status magazines would not attempt to write histories of *Italian Food* with the capital H, as will often be the case with future representations, but would frequently indulge in an ethnographic/anthropological storytelling, which located “the Other” in a remote place and secluded past.

It was not be until the 1960s, with the advent of sophisticated food commentators, such as Craig Claiborne of *The New York Times Magazine*, that popular magazines recognized the structural complexity of *Italian Food*, and began to shape detailed biographies of foods as points of reference of its cultural status. By then, however, the very nature of consumer culture in the United States was significantly changing.

The Cultural Turn and the Authenticity Issue, 1970-2000

At the end of the Sixties, difference and diversification were concepts that ranked very high in the agenda of consumers, producers, advertising specialists, and mass media. Indeed, the fact that a

³³ Ruth McKenney, “Florence With a Fork – A Woman Who Is No Mean Cook Herself Discovers Some of the Finest Cooking in the World,” *Holiday*, October 1950, p. 17-20.

prize on diversity was put both on the consumption and the production side, has led historians of American consumer culture to conclude that, in the long run, the “attack on conformity and celebration of expressive individualism” of the 1960s and 1970s provided corporate business with new goods to be sold, new styles to be advertised, and new markets to be harvested.³⁴

Doubtless, the dissatisfaction with mass consumption and the social environment that it had produced was widespread in American society, as witnessed by the popularity of books like Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* or Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. The critique of conformity, the search for self-expression, and the antagonism toward the homogenizing effects of mass consumer culture lied at the core of the many social movements that emerged in the 1960s. At the same time, emphasis on difference came also from the marketing industry. As soon as the late 1950s, marketers realized that mass market, as such, was inefficient and led producers to compete almost exclusively on price, thus eroding profits. The new credo had that diversification had to be enforced in a twofold direction: “segmenting the mass,” and inventing new products. Market segmentation was to be pursued by means of new technical instruments (notably, demographics) to target the right consumer with the right product. Especially important was the role of advertising in letting the consumer experience consumption as an act of personal development, achievement, and expression of her/his own “uniqueness.” Then again, the power to select from a greater variety of consumer products would enable consumers to think about consumption in terms of choice, creativity, and self-construction.

Historians of consumer society maintain that the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism in the 1970s triggered the impressive expansion of information, mass media, and advertising industries. In the United States, the empty space created in the economy by the partial relocation of the manufacturing sector overseas was filled by the service sector, and by cultural industries whose fundamental task was the production of difference. The diversifying tendencies in both marketing and consumer demand heavily affected popular magazines as well. General interest magazines were most penalized (magazines like *Life*, *Look*, and *Saturday Evening Post* also suffered intensively from TV competition), while a plethora of new, highly specialized journals gradually appeared. Two formerly obscure bimonthly magazines like *Gourmet* and *Bon Appetit*, for example, were revived as big editorial successes in the mid-seventies; *Cooking Light* was launched in 1987; and by

³⁴ Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000.

1995 there were at least two national magazines completely devoted to *Italian Food - Italian Food, Wine & Travel* and *Journal of Italian Food & Wine*.³⁵

The food industry was itself a target of the countercultural attack; being variably accused to sell banal, uniform and standardized food, rich in fats, sugar, additives and other potentially dangerous chemicals; to spoil the environment; and to exploit workers in poorer countries. The emergence of a taste for ethnic foods in America in the 1970s was, thus, partly a legacy of the cultural climate of the 1960s, as dissatisfaction for the rationalization of the food industry created the conditions for the rising demand of more traditional foods. Various emerging social subjects fostered the trend. The “ethnic revival”, borne out of second- and third-generation European immigrants’ discontent with a purely “American” identity, provided a sizable amount of ethnic food consumers, as white ethnics typically started to search for their “roots” from the kitchen. Ethnic food also appealed to segments of society such as politically motivated or otherwise unconventional young people; “new gourmets” that had grown tired of the formalism of French haute cuisine and looked for something new, genuine, and simpler; and portions of an educated, urban and suburban middle class which developed a curious, cosmopolitan attitude (the latter could be considered the counterpart of the Italian restaurant-goers of the 1930s).³⁶

Like the consumer revolution as a whole, the ethnic food explosion of the 1970s was set in a contradictory framework, oscillating between promises of creativity, cosmopolitanism, and authenticity, and shadows of manipulative corporate exploitation. On the one hand, the long-term interest in “ethnic” and “foreign” cuisines in America can be associated with the desire to explore and consume cultural difference, and with the growing tolerance and appreciation for cultural diversity in American society. On the other, the corporate desire to create market niches and diversify production resulted in the proliferation of “contradiction in terms” such as ethnic fast foods, frozen microwavable ready-to-serve ethnic meals, ethnic-theme chain restaurants, raising questions on the capacity of the giant food industry to invent and promote, for marketing purposes, a “homogenized difference”, a simulacrum of diversity deprived of any meaningful content.

From the late Sixties on, major trends of change were identifiable in the representations of *Italian Food* in popular magazines. 1) Difference was generally highly prized and never considered subversive or problematic. *Italian Food* was regarded as an established, if multifaceted, food culture, no longer to be selectively dug out, but to be further perused and interpreted. 2) Magazines

³⁵ Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck (eds.), *Women’s Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*, Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1995.

³⁶ Warren J. Belasco, “Ethnic Fast Foods: The Corporate Melting Pot,” *Food and Foodways*, 2, 1, 1987; Harvey A. Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Modern Eating in America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993.

followed and helped to create short-lived fashions. New foods, cooking styles, and eating out experiences were reviewed at an accelerating pace. 3) In magazines targeting the urban middle class (like *Vogue*, *Travel Holiday*, and *The New York Times Magazine*) or the food enthusiasts (like *Gourmet* and *Bon Appetit*), representations became increasingly concerned with the cultural and social contexts of production and consumption. In a characteristically postmodern “erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture,”³⁷ many restaurant reviews and recipe columns contained in-depth historical and geographical analyses of foods and eating practices. Even though women’s magazines continued to pay much attention to the caloric contents, convenience of preparation, and cost of foods, “authenticity” was a buzzword that resounded in representations of *Italian Food* of all kinds of popular magazines.

Ephemerality - the rapid modification of taste for specific foods and eating experiences – was a constant factor during the decades following 1970, as much as the emphasis on the correlation between food, place of origin, and historical heritage. In the early 1970s, *Italian Food* benefited from the growing public concern for the relation between nutrition and health. The Mediterranean diet gained wide popularity on the outbreak of the cholesterol scare. The bestseller which launched the fashion, *How To Eat Well and Stay Well: The Mediterranean Way* by Ancel and Margaret Keys, was in fact a quasi-scholarly cultural geography of the Mediterranean as much as a cookbook.³⁸ The book and the diet undoubtedly played on the sensual fascination with an area that had been for centuries the subject of writers of the Northern European, Anglo Saxon literary tradition.³⁹ Magazines’ representations heavily relied on the evocative power of the Mediterranean image. In a 1977 recipe column on a Sicilian meal, *The New York Times Magazine*’s Nika Hazelton claimed that “The food of Sicily has been influenced by the island’s many conquerors – Greek, Roman, Norman, Arab, Spanish and French – and so is surprisingly varied. We find the flavour of Greece in the spaghetti [*alla siracusana*], the Arab influence in the stuffing of the meat roll and the colorful decoration of the cake.”⁴⁰ Echoes of the millenarian heritages of *Italian Food* resonated in many articles in the early 1970s. *Holiday* hosted food historian Waverley Root, who wrote that “The foundations of Italian cooking were laid by the Etruscans, the Greeks and later, the Saracens.”

³⁷ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodern Culture and Consumer Society,” in Simon Malpas (ed.), *Postmodern Debates*, New York, Palgrave, 2001, p. 22-36.

³⁸ Ancel Keys and Margaret Keys, *How to Eat Well and Stay Well: The Mediterranean Way*, New York, Doubleday, 1975.

³⁹ Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy*, New York, Routledge, 1993.

⁴⁰ Nika Hazelton, “Sicilian Variations,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 1977, p. 67.

Root proceeded in mapping the Italian territory with different wines, ingredients and preparation techniques, while a gastronomic map of Italy visualized the notions expressed in the text.⁴¹

More meticulous representations called for the identification of *Italian Food* with “the food of Italy” and the dismissing of “old-fashioned” Italian American cooking. As one food critic put it, by then, “spaghetti and meatballs were entirely too pedestrian and too redolent of family potluck suppers and the neighborhood Neapolitan restaurants.”⁴² Consequently, the focus moved on the so-called “Northern Italian cuisine.” “For refinement in Italian food, one looks to the North,” wrote *The New York Times Magazine*, as soon as 1972.⁴³ An apparently widespread taste for creamy sauces helped *spaghetti alla carbonara*, *risotto*, *polenta*, and other soft and buttery foods with a putative “north of Rome” origin becoming food writers’ favorites in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁴⁴

The trend was overturned later in the 1980s, when magazines praised Italian regional cuisines that make use of olive oil, herbs, greens and other lighter ingredients.⁴⁵ The endorsement of Alice Waters and other cooks of the “new Californian cuisine”, who were self-admittedly influenced by the image of seasonality and freshness emanating from *Italian Food*, were important in establishing this style.⁴⁶ So successful was Genoese pesto that no later than 1987 Stouffers begun marketing a frozen linguini with pesto entrée. “Tuscan cuisine” was a particular favorite among the “regional cuisines” (in 1987, *Esquire* devoted an entire page to the Tuscan soup *ribollita*);⁴⁷ just while popular travel and fiction books were constructing Tuscany as an idyllic escape and a site of anticipated pleasures. In the 1990s, chain restaurants would claim to having adopted the “Tuscany look” for the interior design of their replicas of Italian *trattorias*.⁴⁸

The New York Times Magazine reviewed New York restaurants specializing in the traditional cuisine of Valle d’Aosta⁴⁹ or in the local specialties of the town of Merano in Alto Adige, explaining readers that “some of the recipes can be traced back hundred of years; other

⁴¹ Waverley Root, “The Italian Table – It’s More Than Pasta, Veal, Tomatoes, Olive Oil and Garlic – In Fact, It’s One of the World’s Greatest Cuisines,” *Holiday*, July 1970, p. 30.

⁴² Sylvia Lovegren, *Fashionable Food: Seven Decades of Food Fads*, New York, Macmillan, 1995, p. 322.

⁴³ Raymond A. Solokov, “Florentine Finish to Genovese Dish,” *The New York Times Magazine*, July 2, 1972, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Florence Fabricant, “Risotto and Polenta Join the Menu,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1980; M.H. Reed, “Italian Cooking on the Right Track,” *The New York Times Magazine*, October 19, 1980; Craig Claiborne and Pierre Franey, “Buon Appetito!,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 31, 1988.

⁴⁵ John Martin Taylor, “Distinctive Italian Fare, Liguria,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 27, 1989.

⁴⁶ David Le Boutillier, “Cucina Italiana & New American Cuisine,” in Giannino Malossi (ed.), *Volare: The Icon of Italy in Global Pop Culture*, New York, The Monacelli Press, 1999; Craig Claiborne and Pierre Franey, “Rolling in Dough,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 3, 1982.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Sahatjian, “Waiter, What’s That Ribollita Doing in My Soup?,” *Esquire*, November 1987.

⁴⁸ Scott Hume, “Transfer to Tuscany,” *Restaurants & Institutions*, March 15, 2002, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Eric Asimov, “Conjuring Up an Inexpensive, Informal Italian Spot,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 1, 2000.

dishes result for *da Merano*’s own combination of ingredients. This mixture of tradition and individual creativity exemplifies today’s culinary news from Italy.”⁵⁰ The field reportages by Mark Bittman of *Travel Holiday* and Molly O’Neill of *The New York Times Magazine* examined the culinary systems of different subregions of Italy, connecting the origin of foods with the natural resources, microclimate, material culture and history of the areas in question. In 1991, *Vogue* published an article on “Italian Food in Italy, Italian Food in America, and a Classic Italian Food You Can Bake in Your Own Kitchen,” which, while designed to give readers the recipe for *focaccia*, consisted in fact in a review essay of the academic literature on the history of *Italian Food* in America.⁵¹

By that time, however, *The New York Times Magazine* noticed that, “Americans have begun to reacquaint themselves with the opulent food of the Italian South.”⁵² While the new millenium was approaching, the Italian restaurant business experienced “the rise of the family-style restaurant, which served portions by the bucketful, called for huge groups, replicating a nostalgic image of big, boisterous Italian-American families.”⁵³ The revival of an imaginary *Little Italy*’s conviviality was consistent with the spectacularly rising demand for comforting representations of the past (even of somebody else’s past), a process that historians have been studying for the last fifteen years.⁵⁴ But considering that the “family image” of the Italian American cuisine significantly built on Hollywood classics of cinematic nostalgia like Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* (1970) and Martin Scorsese’s *Goodfellas* (1990), the retro Italian American food fashion could be regarded as enacting a “nostalgia of the nostalgia” or a “representation of a representation of a representation.”⁵⁵

With the fashions in *Italian Food* coming full circle, and with the apparent near exhaustion of signs on which the industry of the production of difference can draw, the concept of authenticity emerged as the pivotal notion in the representations of *Italian Food* in popular magazines. As late as the 1960s, the consumption of “authentic” *Italian Food* at its source was a matter of distinction per se, and only a handful of connoisseurs possessed the capital of knowledge required to discriminate between foods, wines, recipes, and preparations. But in the last decades, the time-space compression that lies at the foundation of globalization pulled the production-consumption ends much closer, and *Italian Food* underwent a rapid process of deterritorialization. Year-round

⁵⁰ Corby Kummer, “Italy’s Alta Cucina,” *The New York Times Magazine*, June 15, 1986.

⁵¹ Jeffrey Steingarten, “Italian Food in Italy, Italian Food in America, and a Classic Italian Food You Can Bake in Your Own Kitchen,” *Vogue*, April 1991, p. 344-350.

⁵² Nancy Harmon Jenkins, “Salute to Summer’s End,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 23, 1987.

⁵³ Eric Asimov, “If the Italian Theme Seems to Have Its Needle Stuck,” *The New York Times Magazine*, June 21, 2000.

⁵⁴ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985; Raphael Samuel, *Theaters of Memory*, New York, Verso, 1994.

⁵⁵ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 145.

availability (“supermarkets from Atlanta to Albuquerque carry dozens of different olive oils”)⁵⁶ and easy reproducibility (as exemplified by Stouffers pesto and franchised Tuscan *trattorias*) allowed a multitude of middle-class (and even lower middle-class) consumers to have access to once exotic commodities. The politics of value of *Italian Food* began to focus more and more on the issue of authenticity, exactly while authenticity itself joined the regime of scarcity.⁵⁷ According to Dean MacCannell, the demand and value of authenticity merely grow in step with the increasing complexity, fragmentation, and individualism of modern society: “Modern man [sic] has been condemned to look elsewhere, everywhere, for his [sic] authenticity, to see if he [sic] can catch a glimpse of it reflected in the simplicity, poverty, chastity or purity of others.”⁵⁸ While the quest for authenticity may have existential reasons, what it is important to note here is that the notion of authenticity has become a fundamental gear in the machine of production of cultural difference. As a form of cultural discrimination that is projected into goods, authenticity has achieved the status of commodity per se.

Commenting on *The Splendid Table: Recipes from Emilia-Romagna, the Heartland of Northern Italian Food* by Lynne Kasper, a cookbook that won all the major prizes in its category in 1993, *Newsweek* noticed that authenticity had come to dominate the culinary discourse, becoming the most important term of assessment of food value. “*The Splendid Table* may look like an excursion into history, but it captures today’s culinary Zeitgeist so perfectly it could be tucked into a time capsule dedicated to the food fetishes of the 1990s,” *Newsweek* wrote. “Kasper spent ten years researching and writing about the food of Emilia-Romagna, the area where Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, Prosciutto di Parma and balsamic vinegar originated. Clearly, she’s obsessed – publicizing her book at a recent specialty-foods show in New York, she served her admirers chunks of a sublime Parmigiano-Reggiano doused with a rare balsamic vinegar, all the while lecturing passionately about how the vinegar was made. But this obsession with glorious traditional ingredients makes her utterly contemporary. These days the most with-it chefs look to the past, seeking out farmers who use Old World methods to come up with produce, poultry and cheese of exactly the quality Kasper revels in. What’s really old-fashioned nowadays is to rely totally on modern agriculture.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Doug Brown, “Haute Cuisine,” *American Journalism Review*, February/March 2004.

⁵⁷ As Walter Benjamin famously asserted in the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), the end of the “uniqueness” of a cultural product, the status that defines its authenticity, threatened its aura (or authority), as “reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.” Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Id., *Selected Writings*, Cambridge, Belknap, 1996 [1935].

⁵⁸ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York, Schocken Books, 1989, p. 41.

⁵⁹ Laura Shapiro, “Feasts for Cooks and Readers – Two Prize-Winning Cookbooks, One Trendy, One Traditional – But Which Is Which?,” *Newsweek*, July 19, 1993, p. 54.

Holding a talk on traditional rural products in a fancy specialty-foods show in Midtown Manhattan may seem paradoxical. Critics of food globalization, in fact, point out that while globalization brings together in one place a variety of different culinary cultures, “it does so in such a way as to conceal almost perfectly any trace of the labour processes that produced them, or the social relations implicated in their production.”⁶⁰ Indeed, popular magazines have not dealt much with labor conditions and class relations in the production of *Italian Food*, but this doesn’t diminish the significance of the cultural industry’s investment in the appraisal of authenticity. The lack of focus on the spectacle of industrial work (that, as we have seen, was a feature of the representations of the 1950s) was partly due to the fact that recent narratives on *Italian Food* typically concentrated on niche productions, family restaurants and farms, local shops and trades, as opposed to industrial agro-food businesses. In 1984, the restaurant critic of *The New York Magazine* Mimi Sheraton investigated the entire production complex of the Sicilian caper, visiting the packing company in a tiny town of the Valtellina, and defining the whole experience, “if not exactly the search for the Holy Grail,” really intriguing and fascinating.⁶¹

Finally, magazines stressed the willingness to surrender to the culture of “the Other” as an indispensable requirement in the quest for authenticity. The mark of distinction would befall over the possessors of a cosmopolitan attitude. When Jeffrey Steingarten of *Vogue* immersed himself for a week in the kitchen of an “authentic” restaurant near Mantua, he was offered “a long-simmered stew of horsemeat and onions in red wine called *stracotto di cavallo*. [The cook] was afraid that I would be offended by the horsemeat stew, as most Americans are, but the five Mantuan cookbooks in my new collection all included recipes for horse, donkey, and ass.”⁶²

High demand for authenticity has called for acknowledged specialists to do the crucial work of authentication. After 1970, many magazines’ food writers have specialized in a particular cuisine (as in the case of the above mentioned Mark Bittman, Molly O’Neill, and Nika Hazelton with *Italian Food*). Popular magazines have increasingly resorted to cookbook authors, professional cooking instructors, and other recognized authorities as advisers for their articles. As the bond between food and the material, social, and cultural context of production has become essential in the discourse on authenticity, magazines have promoted cooking schools taught in Italy by celebrity cooks like Marcella Hazan and Giuliano Bugialli.⁶³ In general, the epistemological status achieved

⁶⁰ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 300.

⁶¹ Mimi Shearton, “The Giardiniera Caper,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 1, 1984.

⁶² Jeffrey Steingarten, “Family Fare – In the Mantua Region of Italy, Three Generations of Santinis Have Transformed Dal Pescatore into a Restaurant Acclaimed Around the World – JS Seeks Out the Local Secrets Behind Their Innovative Cuisine,” *Vogue*, June 1994, p. 222-233.

⁶³ Ann Barry, “Learning To Cook in Bologna *La Grassa*,” *The New York Times Magazine*, September 12, 1976, p. 52-53; Delia Orlando, “Italian Simmer Vacation – At This Cooking School on the Neapolitan Riviera, You’ll Learn



by the concept of authenticity in *Italian Food* has requested specialist knowledge and accountability by the authority that authenticates as much as “authenticity” in food itself.

Kitchen Magic – And You’ll Get To Lick the Bowl,” *Travel Holiday*, January 1999; Meg Grant, “Marcella Hazan,” *People Weekly*, April 20, 1998, p. 107-110; Dulcy Brainard, “Marcella Hazan: Educating America’s Palate,” *Publishers Weekly*, November 3, 1997, p. 244-245; Steingarten, “Italian Food in Italy.”