

Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

The Italian Kitchen as a Site for the Practice of Autarchy and Fascist Intervention

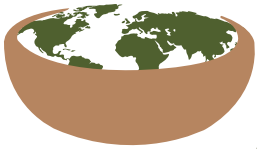
SUE SAMUELSON AWARD FOR
FOODWAYS SCHOLARSHIP

1st PLACE WINNER 2013

By: Diana Garvin

Food demonstrates how power works through narratives of design. It complicates the idea of an all-powerful government monolith by revealing the local variations of manufacturing, construction, and financing for state enterprises. Fascist Italy provides a particularly fruitful time and place for the analysis of gender and culture for two reasons: first, because the self-mythologizing tendency of dictatorships boosts the production of material culture and offers a wealth of materials to study, and second, because the period presents a hyperbolic cultural moment that makes subtle phenomena more readily observable to the historian. In mid-to-late 1930s Italy, the kitchen emerged as a primary domestic site for Regime intervention. With Benito Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 and the onset of the League of Nations' economic sanctions against Italy the following month, promotion of autarchy, or economic self-sufficiency, meant that female labor such as shopping, gardening, and cooking took on a heightened political charge. On the national level, the regime introduced a raft of policies aimed at rationalizing and modernizing Italian industry. By reducing imports and increasing production, the regime believed Italy could attain the economic self-sufficiency and increased imperviousness needed in the event of war. Popular magazines and books translated these policies into recommended practices for everyday life.

Autarchy did not originate as a food-based policy. Stemming from the League of Nations' sanctions following Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia and the establishment of Italian East Africa, autarchy promoted the production and consumption of Italian goods, both material (linoleum) and abstract (Italian labor, Italian language). For example, F.T. Marinetti introduced Italian terms for English and French words, turning the "bar" into a "quisibeve." But when autarchy entered the home, it headed straight for the hearth. In this article I use Italian Fascist period culinary magazines and cookbooks such as *La Cucina Italiana*



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

and Dalla Cucina al Salotto, as well as kitchen designs from architectural journals such as *Domus*, to illustrate the daily political interplay between individual women and the State in the private sphere. Ultimately, I argue that modern kitchen design in 1930s Fascist Italy evokes bids to rationalize unruly bodies and work. Specifically, I examine the interplay of the national and the personal by analyzing how popular cookbook authors such as Delia Notari, and prestigious designers such as Ignazio Gardella, translate the State's concern for autarchy, or economic self-sufficiency, into calls for rationalization, or streamlined production, in individual kitchens. Because the kitchen constituted a female workspace for the preparation of raw goods for familial consumption, and because the majority of the family budget went towards food, promoting autarchic eating provided a key means for the regime to encourage Italians to participate in this key aspect of Fascist politics.

The kitchen is the room of the house used for cooking and food preparation, and traditionally some form of hearth would have constituted the center of activity. In 1930s Italy, depending on the family's socioeconomic level, either the woman of the house or a female cook typically tended to this domestic labor. Beyond these general commonalities, however, one cannot speak of a typical Italian kitchen. During this period both popular and elite publications targeted the kitchen as a household site ripe for modernization. Large-scale city and town planning projects, such as the construction of the Fascist New Towns in the Pontine Plains and the sventramento (gutting) of Rome aimed to promote hygiene and smooth flow through the body of the city. Erecting public housing blocks forced state-funded architects to grapple with the question of which material elements should comprise Italy's new, ideal kitchens. They connected specific concrete traits to abstract ideas of backwardness and irrationality. Large, dark, dirty, disorganized kitchens emerged as the foes of rationality. Although careful not to disparage the well-kept country kitchen, many publications privileged new organization and use of this space by advocating electric stoves over open fires and the eating of family meals in a separate dining room. They prescribed windows for light and ventilation, autarchic materials for ease of cleaning, and electric appliances for saving time. Modern kitchens conceived as small, tidy, light-filled workspaces also required efficient labor practices. Both this domestic space and its associated agent, the cook, emerged as targets for modernization. In fact, the cook's movements in the kitchen received as much attention in these texts as the room's design.

On June 14, 1925, Mussolini launched the Battle for Grain to liberate the Italian population from the "slavery" of foreign bread. This campaign focused on increasing promotion and consumption of non-standard grains such as rice, and to a lesser extent on decreasing consumption of pasta and bread. A blend of propaganda, news media, and the arts all



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

carried these messages to the populous. Stripping bare to the waist, Mussolini cast himself as a virile farm worker to join in Sabaudia's first wheat threshing in July 1935, a bit of political theatre memorialized on the cover of that month's issue of *La Cucina Italiana*.

On a literary arts front, Mussolini's famous poem "Amate il pane," "Love Bread," encouraged Italians not to waste this precious product, while F.T. Marinetti's invective "Contro la pastasciutta," "Against pasta," in *La Cucina Futurista* maintained that eating pasta diminished speed, aggression, and virility, all aspects of the Marinetti's conception of the ideal modern Italian man. Fascist efforts to drive down grain consumption began quite early, in the mid-1920s, while concerted efforts to increase domestic production and utilization of raw materials emerged in a second wave of political and print activity in the late-1930s. Many Italians, particularly southern Italians, resisted the official line that rice offered superior nutrition and flavor due to lingering associations that linked rice and the privations of World War I when the government distributed it as a bread substitute. Further, incorporating rice into the southern Italian diet ran directly counter to the traditional foodways of the region where pasta predominated and rice was considered an undesirable foreign foodstuff (Dickie 2010). Fascist intervention in this culinary arena further intensified with the arrival of League of Nations' sanctions in October 1935 (Helstosky 2004).

One might be tempted to make the argument that rationalism constitutes the means to promote autarchic practices in the kitchen. After all, embracing rationalism and autarchy would likely require changes in architectural design and food preparation practices. They share the common goal of eliminating waste in the kitchen and promoting productivity and economy, albeit on a household scale. But these concepts do not equate, and writers discuss them in different terms. One key difference lies in the respective results of rationalism and autarchy for the nation. While advocating autarchic practices in individual households ultimately aids the Italian economy, the promotion of rationalism in individual homes does not offer a similarly obvious benefit on the national level. Further, architectural writers engage more often with the goal of rationalization, whereas household manual writers evoke autarchy with greater frequency.

However, given the obvious affinity between these concepts, we must ask what larger projects they collectively support. How do rationalism and autarchy link to the question of the body and the national body? Foucault shows that power over life centers on a conception of the body as a machine, and that such power is essentially "a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies" (Foucault 1977). In the case of the 1930s kitchen, we



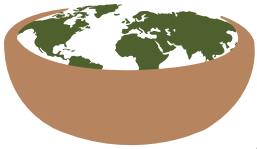
Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

see the application of power to productive ends rather than deductive ends. While the intensity of these terms may initially seem incongruous when applied to the banality of the kitchen, we must remember that this is the level at which life, and thus power, is situated and exercised. By attempting to influence the design and use of the kitchen, the regime endeavors to seize time and control of bodies move. As such, rationality and autarchy bring the regime's application of power into the very heart of the home. This treatment imbues food preparation with the form of "life-administering" power.

Evidence of food's role as a form of life-administering power emerges from analysis of the leading architecture magazines *Domus* and *Casabella*, as well as housekeeping manuals such as *Dalla Cucina al Salotto: Enciclopedia di vita domestica*. Together, these publications articulate the proper design, organization, and use of the Italian kitchen in the mid-to-late 1930s according to two different demographic cohorts of writers that divides along lines of gender and profession. Male architects tended to write for these magazines as an extension of their design work, whereas women crafted housekeeping manuals largely based on their personal experience of maintaining a home. Whereas *Domus* heralds the editorial board's sympathy to Fascism, even including Benito Mussolini's lauds of their editor in a special feature, housekeeping manuals and cooking magazines tend to invoke Fascism in depersonalized terms to set the scene for autarchic "how to" guides. Popular cooking magazines aimed at women, such as *La Cucina Italiana*, occupy an extreme position on the spectrum of engagement with Fascist politics. While many popular magazines, such as *Bellezza* and *La donna italiana*, would occasionally include regime-friendly articles such as autarchic fashion spreads, *La Cucina Italiana* constitutes a unique case of a hobby magazine's adherence to state dictates.

The founders and editors of *La Cucina Italiana*, Delia and Umberto Notari, openly supported the Fascist regime by promoting Mussolini's autarchic campaigns with reader contests and letters to the editor. Delia Notari, not Umberto, pushed for the creation of *La Cucina Italiana* and controlled the editorial slant of the magazine as Director. A widow of engineer Joseph Magnaghi, Delia née Pavoni married Umberto Notari and appears to have shared his pro-Fascist politics. During her tenure as Director of the magazine from November 1929 to December 1934, she encouraged contributors to incorporate recipes for autarchic eating to support the regime. Umberto Notari's adherence to Fascist political doctrine appears to have developed in his early 20s, during his collaboration with F.T. Marinetti on the magazine *Poesia*. His enthusiasm for social conservatism in general, and Fascist racial policy in particular, manifested in many of his publications from *La donna 'Tipo Tre'* to his signature on *Manifesto della razza*



Digest

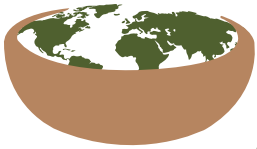
a journal of foodways & culture

and Panegirico della razza italiana. Proponents of Fascism from the art world such as Massimo Bontempelli, Ada Negri, and Margherita Sarfatti contributed articles as well.

Many *Domus* magazine articles feature ideal kitchens economically inaccessible to the vast majority of Italians, but advice columns addressing women, such as those from architect Ignazio Gardella, provide directives for rational kitchen design and use that could be more broadly applied. Hailing from a family of architects, Ignazio Gardella graduated in engineering from the Politecnico di Milano in 1928. Together with university acquaintances, he helped create the Italian Modern Movement before turning to Rationalism. His work in this realm, featuring autarchic building materials, found early success in several architectural competitions, such as the 1934-38 *Dispensario Antitubercolare* di Alessandria and the 1944 *Milano Verde Plan*, featured in the pages of *Domus*. His work sought to economize the cook's time, space, and effort in the kitchen in the name of abstract goals such as modernism. Housekeeping manuals address a far broader socioeconomic group and largely try to help women cope with the effects of Fascism, namely the 1935 League of Nations' sanctions that rendered shopping and cooking a daily challenge. While both exclusive and popular magazines, as well as many democratic housekeeping manuals, all demonstrate outward support for Fascism, the latter also provide tactics and strategies for negotiating its occasionally negative effects on the household larder.

In their differing prescriptions for kitchen design and its everyday use, *Domus* and *La Cucina Italiana* tend to point to what Michel De Certeau would call "tactics," whereas *Dalla Cucina al Salotto* resorts to "strategies," (De Certeau 1984). In this culinary context, one might consider tactics the cook's creative use of the kitchen, whereas strategies suggest a more rigid, prescribed use for the space. Along these lines, we must bear in mind that even popular texts such as cooking magazines and housekeeping manuals cannot tell us how Italian women actually organized and used their kitchens. Such a statement goes beyond the scope of this project and would entail extensive ethnographic research. What they can tell us, however, is how writers and publishers publically performed Fascist political affiliation while prescribing actions for the female public to make practicing its policies less burdensome on a daily basis. Further, by examining architectural plans for and photographs of ideal kitchens, we can see how abstract calls for modernity and rationalism took physical form in the kitchen.

Kitchens are designed, in that architects create them, but kitchens also design: their material qualities influence the behavior of those who work within them. Managing this space amounts to manipulating the cook by dictating not only the



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

materials and organization of her surroundings, but also how she interacts with objects in this location through the variant series of actions involved in food preparation. The home serves as a process rather than a pure physical form in that it serves as a sort of institution, not unlike a factory or a clinic. On a daily basis, the kitchen conditions the cooking, and the cooking conditions the cook.

What might account for these repeated calls for intervention in the kitchen and its daily use? Why do writers recommend modernism and rationality as the solutions? Recurrent themes of economy and science link these concepts to writers' characterizations of the modern and rational kitchen as one that saves space, time, effort, and money. In this ideal rational kitchen, the cook's agency and inspiration vanished. Like automatons, they are to take only prescribed steps, thus eliminating all waste. They become one more elettrodomestico, an electronic servant. Promoting abstract concepts as panaceas for such concrete issues suggests that there is more at stake in the 1930s Italian kitchen than one family's supper. Indeed, the intensity and pervasive rhetoric of this concern for creating a rational kitchen evokes larger political discussions of the day, namely the Regime's call for autarchy.

Narratives of Rationalism in the Kitchen

Domus articles taking the kitchen as a central subject pervasively employ the trope of rationalism but they rarely define it. Rather than expressing the architectural style of Rationalism, rationalism in this context evokes Taylorist dictates meant to save space, time, and money while improving hygiene. In other words, it domesticates Rationalism by decreasing its scale of application from the factory to the kitchen by reworking concepts meant to improve factory efficiency to the private home. "Parliamo un po' della cucina, razionalmente," "Let's talk a little about the kitchen, rationally" goes the title to an authorless August 1937 Domus article. This phrasing evokes the recurrent slippage in kitchen articles between advocacy for rationalism as Taylorized work and the promotion of logic over emotion. The only other space to continually receive this type of treatment is the office, suggesting that this type of rationalism specifically targets places of work for intervention. These articles tend to treat the office as a factory for white collar male workers. In all three spaces--the office, the factory, and the kitchen--the worker disappears. The text uses the noi form, which obscures differentiations between the speaker and the addressee in phrases such as, "Quanto abbiamo descritto è l'essenziale per la cucina," "What we have described is essential for the kitchen." Collective pronoun use can alternatively refer to the author alone, as it does in the former sentence, or to



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

“noi Italiani,” “us Italians,” in a preceding paragraph that exhorts Italians to embrace electric kitchen appliances as the Germans have. The author takes advantage of the slippery linguistic properties of “we” to increase his authority and evoke collectivity as necessary to his purpose. Office articles treat the worker as sex-neutral unless describing a specific position such as typist or overseer. By contrast, kitchen articles always assume a female worker. When the type of work evokes the worker’s gender, gender targeting appears in differing form of address. When speaking of male workers, writers often use hypothetical sentence structures to suggest and entice. For example, the conditional tense predominates, evoking the possibility of choice for the male worker. By contrast, articles regarding female workers use the imperative tense to issue direct commands. This division suggests the view that respect for the worker’s agency depended partially on their gender. While articles called for all workers to rationalize their activities, they approached male and female workers with different language.

We also see this discourse divide play out in the focus and content of individual articles. In contrast to articles primarily concerned with the office, the call for kitchen rationalization often accompanies a negative recollection of antiquated kitchen design. Writers often contrast these traits directly in the text, pointing out the superiority of linoleum over stone, electric stoves over open fires, small rooms over large ones, wall-flush furniture over central orientation, and white and blue wall-tiling over darker colors. Articles concerning the kitchen further include prescribed sets of location-specific practices for how cooks should move within the space, while office-centric writings do not. Gardella frequently advises cooks to maintain an erect posture even while sitting, and to move from table, to stove, to sink so as not to waste energy with extra movements. This differentiation suggests that narratives of rationality in the kitchen involve gender and class elements absent from those regarding office structure, an assumed bourgeois male, and therefore neutral, space. Rationalism emerges as a sort of cure for the messiness of food preparation overseen by women, and articles often conflate women with disorder by treating them as an unruly element in need of surveillance and discipline. Such rhetoric also evokes the regime’s *sventramento* (gutting) campaigns in population-dense, working-class neighborhoods which sought to improve the city’s hygiene as though it were a living body. These articles treat the kitchen, a space of female work, as a room particularly prone to irrational practices. Irrationality links with the room’s darkness and dirtiness, with unnecessary waste, and with old-fashioned practices and postures. Articles prescribe modern remedies, often in the form of autarchic materials and methods, to order this threateningly disorderly space.

Saving time, money, and space functions as a concurrent goal for the extension of



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

autarchy into the kitchen in architecture magazines. Commonalities such as optimizing labor while diminishing and eliminating waste and controlling women's actions in the domestic sphere link these bids for economization. Promotion of economy evokes the need to change individuals' daily habits for the benefit of the nation. The premise that each Italian kitchen functions as a microcosm of the national larder imbues household food choices and preparation with enormous power and symbolic significance. As such, rationalism, economy, and autarchy constitute both strategies and goals, both the means and the ends for controlling this private space of production. In Foucault's words, the regime's interventions in the home might be described as "a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault 1977:137). Because food and cooking directly affect the biological existence of the population, the kitchen emerges as an ideal locus for the exercise of power over the national body, with women bearing the brunt of this bid for control.

The Kitchen's Invisible Service

Both *Domus* and housekeeping manuals treat the kitchen as a space of invisible service to the rest of the household. The significance of the relationship between the kitchen and the house derives from its evocation of an analogous bond between the house and the nation. Power over life in the realm of the kitchen can thus be understood in terms of power over the cook's actions and power over the nation's eating habits. In other words, power intervenes at two levels: that of the body as a machine--the "anatomy-politics of the human body" (Foucault 1977:139)--and the national body, through regulatory controls of the body as machine. One of these regulatory controls is the seemingly contradictory characterization of the kitchen as a space of seamless, invisible labor that, though segregated from the rest of the house and occupying a low rung in its hierarchy of rooms, nonetheless permits the daily processes of the house to function. In short, these texts treat the kitchen as both vitally important, but utterly lacking in social prestige. It is a space of labor and function, rather than leisure and display.

Domus editor and architect Gio Ponti implicitly states that the kitchen and the bathroom hold equally low stature, placing them last in both text and print coverage, that is, when they are shown at all. Dining rooms and living rooms predominate at the expense of these functional spaces. As an architect, industrial designer, teacher and publisher, Gio Ponti's prolific publications rendered him a towering figure in the field. After founding



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Domus in 1928 and serving as editor until 1941, he left to establish and serve as editor of *Stile* until he returned to *Domus* in 1948, remaining in the post until his death in 1979. As a professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano from 1936 until 1961, Ponti served as mentor to many young designers and his architectural designs also helped form the modern skylines of Turin and Milan. Smaller in scale but broader in scope, Ponti's product designs could be found in many high style stores. The semi-public nature of the dining and living rooms that Ponti designed means that they serve as theatre backdrops, creating a performance space for the family to demonstrate sophistication to their guests. Lighting recommendations in an October 1935 article exemplify this tendency to treat these rooms as staging areas. Ponti points the ideal orientation of the bedrooms on the eastern side of the apartment block, perfect for morning light. Rays hit the dining room by mid-afternoon shining a spotlight on the kitchen's output, but not on the kitchen itself. This room remains in the dark, literally and metaphorically. Ponti relegates the kitchens and bathrooms "a nord esclusivamente, "exclusively to the northern side" (Ponti 1935:15) where light cannot penetrate. Being backstage, kitchens and bathrooms hold lower stature. They merely support social display by concealing the work and mess involved in food preparation, clean-up, and bodily processes. *Domus* appears to deemphasize these spaces because they are "private," but what shared characteristic makes them unsuitable for public viewing? For Ponti, the answer is functionality: kitchens and bathrooms contain the efforts required to affect glamour in dining and living rooms. After all, glamour by definition suggests effortlessness. By privileging coverage of practically all other rooms over kitchens in both the amount and order of text, as well as in the building architecture, Ponti evokes the idea that the ideal kitchen should perform invisible work in service of the rest of the house. Kitchen work was hidden due to its associations with the subaltern. Because lower-class women typically cooked, cleaned, and served the food in middle and upper-class households, the pervasive cultural distain for the female gender and low social classes attached to the spaces in which they worked, and to the types of labor that they performed.

Family Economy and National Economy

Similarly and more explicitly, Ignazio Gardella articulates this conception of the kitchen as invisible service to the rest of the house in his inaugural January 1939 column on home economics, "I Servizi della Casa," which focuses exclusively on the kitchen. He echoes the sentiment that the kitchen serves as a place of work, "di un determinato lavoro, importantissimo nell'economia della famiglia," "of a specific work, extremely



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

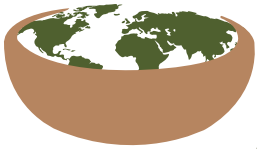
important in the family economy” (Gardella 1939a:56). Of course, this phrasing means more than just money. Family economy can also refer to the functionality of the family unit. In this article, Gardella treats the two as definitions as inseparable, suggesting that improving one benefits the other. In this holistic view, rational kitchen design, coupled with rational cooking methods, thus benefits the family purse.

Gardella seems to believe that many architects equated associated characteristics such as practicality and functionality with undesirable aesthetics. He responds to this perceived denigration with an impassioned defense of rationalism, and its “incandescenza lirica,” “lyrical incandescence,”

Per quell’equivoco, c’è chi, quando si occupa dell’arredamento della propria casa, accetta magari per il bagno, la cucina e gli altri servizi, un arredamento moderno (che sarà quasi sempre un brutto moderno di maniera), ma vuole poi per il ‘salotto’ e la ‘camera da letto’ un arredamento un po’ ‘meno moderno’ se non ‘antico’ del tutto.

By mistake, there are those who, when they set about furnishing their own house, accept modern furnishings (and it will almost always be an ugly manner of modern) perhaps for the bathroom, the kitchen, and the other functional rooms [servizi], but then want for the ‘living room’ and the ‘bedroom’ slightly ‘less modern’ if not completely ‘old-fashioned’ furnishings (Gardella 1939a:4).

Gardella notes and then argues against this pervasive equation of modernity with service and functionality, as well as antiquity with display and comfort. Working rooms such as kitchens and bathrooms receive modern treatment because, unlike living rooms and bedrooms, they are meant to improve work rather than to promote enjoyment. In the context of style and its emotional effect on the room’s inhabitants, functional and decorative rooms often represent binary opposites. Gardella suggests that denigrating the modern is a “mistake,” in that modernism too can offer aesthetic pleasure. However, the fact that he must address this issue suggests that many homeowners disagreed. In this paragraph, and in others, Gardella along with Delia Notari, Vanna Piccini, and others writing on the kitchen, fuses rationalism with modernism. These writers treat the rational kitchen as modern. Both descriptors emerge as potentially joyless, unsurprising given their close association with the idea of utilitarianism and work. In characterizing the connection between cooking and finances with labor market terms of work and economy Gardella evokes the intimacy of the connection between consumer choices made in private homes and their effects on the national economy.



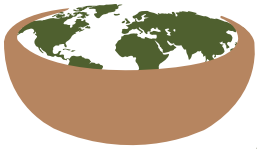
Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

The home often served as a synecdoche for the homeland. This symbolic relationship elevated private choices of Italian food product selection to a matter of national importance. Lidia Morelli went so far as to introduce the 1935 reprint of her popular housekeeping manual *Dalla Cucina al Salotto: Enciclopedia della vita domestica* by addressing how the sanctions affected the vocabulary she could and could not use in her book. She had worked as a linguistics and literature teacher before going on to become a writer and journalist. Morelli published the first edition of *Dalla Cucina al Salotto* in 1905 under the pen name Donna Clara, but abandoned this practice as her writings on household management rose in popularity and prominence. *La Stampa*, *La Casa Bella* (which later became *Casabella*), and *Petit Point* all published her work during her lifetime. Morelli also enjoyed success as on the radio, taking part in the ironically titled Florentine program “*Abbassa la tua radio, per favore*,” “Turn down your radio, please.” Speaking to “the readers of today” in a note dated 18 November 1935 she explains that words such as *marmitta norvegese*, *salsa ginevrina*, *sformato inglese*, *pagnottine scozzesi*, baking powder, *bridge*, and *tè alle cinque* were perfectly permissible “quando un vocabolario estero non voleva dire ‘appartenente a Stato ostile e sanzionista,’” “when foreign words didn’t mean ‘belonging to a hostile, sanctionist State” (1935:1). In other words, Morelli classifies all foreign elements of cookery--from phrases, to habits, to foods--as outdated. Her stance towards this attitudinal change is one of consent: she casts the situation as one of moral choice for the housewife, thus elevating the stakes of Italian food purchases. Directly connecting linguistic autarchy with autarchic cooking, she claims to be pleased that this shift not only resulted in the “innocent rebaptizing” of certain food terms, but also led to newly positive attitudes towards Italian products and the culinary industry. For example, in *Manifesto della cucina futurista*, F.T. Marinetti suggested that the foreign-sounding bar ought to be retired in favor of his Italian neologism *quisibeve*, “here one drinks.” Whether or not these were truly Morelli’s opinions or if she merely felt compelled to perform obeisance in this public text matters less than this text’s overwhelming popularity. Morelli’s articulation of linguistic questions as being less important than kitchen methods and market choices casts autarchy for the *massaia* (housewife or country woman) as a set of practices grounded in the material world.

Interestingly, Morelli recommends rationalism as a means to promote autarchy, a practice that bleeds into the simple cleaning suggestions this manual provides. Turning the constraints of the sanctions into a personal challenge for her readers, she notes her regret that certain recipes do not evoke the recent turn towards autarchy in the kitchen,

migliore sarebbero se più adatte ai tempi, se semplificate o cambiate, secondo



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

un regime fatto più severo. Ma confido nel buon senso, nell'ingegnosità delle lettrici per una scelta sensate, per una sostituzione razionale ... e razionata.

It would be better if [these recipes were] more adapted to the times, simplified or changed, according to a regime that has become stricter. But I rely on the good sense, on the ingenuity of the readers for a sensible choice, for a rational, and rationed, substitution (1935:2).

It is interesting to note the ambiguous nature of the word regime, alternately meaning a governmental, domestic, or dietary regime. Terms such as adaptation, simplification, and change signal the actions to be taken by the reader in the kitchen, but they also involve a high degree of mental work to shift from simply enacting a recipe's commands or recreating a passed-down dish. The repetition of sense and sensible, rational and rationed, stands as a bulwark against the wanton wasting of time and goods. Rationalism and rationing thus come together in service of autarchy. And yet, Morelli devotes far more frequent attention to the benefits of rationalism as a hygienic, or even moral practice, than she does to rationalism as a means to promote autarchy. Maintaining a clean home and a clear conscience trump calls for aiding the national economy. Ultimately, Morelli's depiction of rationalism as a means to practice autarchy reveals a stronger emphasis on the homemaker's needs and wants rather than those of the nation.

A dedicatory letter following Morelli's note on the sanctions juxtaposes modernity and old-fashioned ways in the kitchen. To open this letter, she claims, "Non sono laudatrice dei tempi antichi," "I'm not one to laud the old days," despite the now-common necessity of "questa vita nuova dal ritmo acceleratissimo," "this new life of very accelerated rhythm," to keep up with "nuove mode, nuove gusti, nuovi progressi, nuovi orientamenti," "new ways, new tastes, new progress, new orientations." Although she does not use the term rationalism, Morelli refers to the synonymous phrase *scienza pratica* as a key element of modernity in the kitchen with an animating effect in the *massaia*. Although one might expect that a manual promoting obeisance to the regime's calls for autarchy in the wake of the sanctions might address the homemaker as a passive object to be molded by dictates, this is not the case.

Morelli instead argues in favor of rationalism in terms of its benefits to the reader. These practices render her "attiva, abile, energica, capace di affrontare e di risolvere da sola una difficoltà o un pericolo," "active, able, energetic, capable of confronting and resolving alone a difficulty or a danger." She ascribes agency to the homemaker. This narrative provides an example of a phenomenon common to nineteenth-century American cookbook narratives examined by Andrea Newlyn (1999), wherein women present themselves as paradoxically empowered by their relegation to the domestic sphere. According to Newlyn, in these



Digest

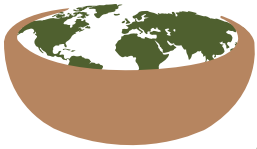
a journal of foodways & culture

cases “cookbooks situate the kitchen as an emancipatory space in which women could transcend traditional identities and control how domestic spaces were deployed” (1999:38). Morelli thus characterizes the reader as what Newlyn would term as “an agent of reform who restores an otherwise marred domestic landscape” (1999:38). The very title, *Dalla Cucina al Salotto*, encapsulates a dynamic narrative insofar as it evokes movement from one state to another, from the chaos of the private kitchen to the equilibrium of the relatively more public salon. But unlike the writers of *Domus*, Morelli begins her consideration of the household in the kitchen before moving into the dining room, the living room, etc.

This ordering proves all the more interesting given her acknowledgement of the relative social esteem accorded to both spaces, the salon being a “un luogo ridente, pulito, elegante,” “a laughing, clean, elegant place,” and the kitchen being “semibuio, grigio, e disordinato,” “half-darkened, gray, and disorganized” (Morelli 1935:26). To combat this troubling state she advises surveillance, but of an infrequent sort so as not to offend the cook’s sensibilities (*suscettività*) or to get oneself dirty (*insudiciarsi*). These two suggestions evoke an uneasy division of authority between mistress and cook over the kitchen space and cooking, a division that refracts definitions of cleanliness and hygiene through the prism of domestic work and social class.

Engaging in food preparation seems to mark the worker (the cook) and the workspace (the kitchen) as unclean, and thus in need of surveillance to maintain a suitable level of hygiene. Morelli suggests that while the cook should constantly work, the mistress should only periodically survey this work. Some dirtiness on the part of the cook must be expected given the messy nature of kitchen tasks, but the lady of the house must avoid spending time in the kitchen to avoid personal contamination. However, in inspecting the kitchen, the housewife is to “fa capolino,” “peep in,” (Morelli 1935:26) to assess the cleanliness of the room. Concern with cleanliness emerges in terms of aesthetics, in the desire to keep the kitchen “nitida e inodora” “clean and odorless” so as to make it a pleasant and clean space. So while the end state of cleanliness is appreciated, it is the constant act of cleaning, or the material itself, that marks a kitchen as hygienic rather than merely “clean.” Because the cook’s livelihood marks her as unclean, incessant cleaning provides a sort of ongoing awareness of, and penitence for, the material conditions of this position.

This trope’s frequency and its attendant rhetorical intensity point to a fear of sickness originating from this potentially unclean space. Morelli goes so far as to recommend that the cook wear “una tunica simile a quella d’infermiera, che la guerra fece entrare quasi in ogni casa,” “a tunic like those worn by nurses, made to enter almost every house by the war” (1935:56). Dressing the cook in the style of a nurse turns the kitchen into a sort of clinic. This garment, accompanied with a white cap also modeled on nurses’ garb,



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

promotes hygiene by dint of being easily washable and because their odor-absorbing capacity protects one from nausea. The color white also enabled the lady of the house to make an instant, material surveillance of the kitchen's cleanliness by displaying dirt. Concern for kitchen odors, here and in *Domus*, appears in frequent instructions to open windows and aerate the kitchen. Although these texts often describe kitchen smells as unappetizing and embarrassing for the hostess, some manuals, such as Morelli's, conflate this distaste with bodily ailments, thus bridging the gap between questions of taste and health. As Feminist theorists Janet Price and Margrit Shildrik suggest in *Feminist Theory and the Body*, "the female body is intrinsically unpredictable, leaky and disruptive" (1999:2). Treatment of the kitchen as a potentially dirty, overflowing space recalls the messy, uncontainable female body. To maintain and contain female space and female bodies, manuals recommend medical techniques of surveillance and dress. This move suggests that the kitchen functions as a sort of clinic, where boundaries of private and public may be defined and solidified by architectural plans.

But the kitchen is not only a clinic, it is also a battlefield: the cook fights a host of abstract enemies, ranging from dirt to hunger. Given the political backdrop of impending war, Morelli's characterization of the cook as a soldier casts the cook in a heroic light and lends gravity to her work. Morelli frequently deploys this portrayal in the context of providing the cook with the necessary tools to do her job, be it proper garments or utensils, stating that "Allo stesso modo che non si può esigere da un soldato che ben combatta se lo si lascia senza armi, non si potrà pretendere da una cuoca che estrinsechi le sue abilità, se non avrà sottomano le efficacissime armi per la lotta contro la fame," "In the same way that one cannot expect a soldier to fight well if you leave him without weapons, one cannot expect a cook to express her abilities if she does not have very effective weapons for the fight against hunger" (1935:49). Morelli's analogy heightens the cook's similarities to the soldier by repeating the word *armi* twice, rather than relegating weapons to soldiers and whisks to cooks. Such an analogy also underscores the multivalent connection between the warfront and home. Because many families had a soldier at the front, emotional as well as economic ties stretched across the public sphere and the private home.

To aid her in this fight, autarchic materials and rationalist practices help the cook to save time and energy. Morelli recommends Italian-produced linoleum as a covering for the kitchen table, as it is both impermeable and washable. White walls and cupboards provide a "methodo più moderno e igienico," "a more modern and hygienic method" (1935:46) to "impedire un viavai ingombrante e un perditempo in cucina," "prevent awkward comings and going and a waste of time in the kitchen" (30). Casting kitchen architecture, color,



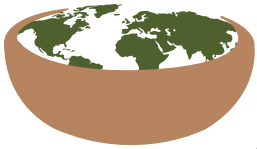
Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

and furniture as a method rather than as a tool ascribes agency to the space, giving it the power to impede or enhance rationalist and hygienic practices. We see the central importance of time in Figure 2, one of Morelli's ideal kitchens. The caption reads, "This kitchen set-up, anything but large and awkward, arranges everything according to its function." Concern for spatial and temporal organization marks this kitchen. The camera angle, centering on the kitchen clock, suggests as much. Like a factory's clock this timepiece set high on the wall marks the rate at which the cook completes her daily work. To make the most of a few pieces of rational, practical, easy to clean kitchen furniture, Morelli suggests building a small kitchen, eliminating excessive ornamentation and creating a functional and more hygienic space. As this caption suggests, examples of modern kitchens partially derive their value from contrast against older kitchen design, revealed here as "large and awkward" spaces where function inconveniently followed form.

In contrast to the older forms of kitchen design that Morelli critiques, appliances take on an increasingly central role in the modern kitchen. They possess quasi-agentive status, suggested in the term *elettrodomestici*, "electric servants," which places their role somewhere between that of weapons and auxiliary forces in the war for hygiene. As very few Italian kitchens possessed appliances until the late 1940s, Morelli's description of this kitchen's tools suggests an ideal rather than a commonality. Women remain their commanding officers, "Così preparata ad attaccare l'ignobile lotta contro l'unto, la servetta - o la massaia - si accinge coraggiosamente e con l'ausilio di armi adatte, a debellare il nemico," "Thus prepared to attack the ignoble struggle against grease, the maid - or the housewife -- courageously gets ready, and with the auxiliary of appropriate weapons, to defeat the enemy" (1935:56). Although Morelli denigrates this act of cleaning as ignobile, her extended metaphor promotes the cook to the level of military general complete with an auxiliary defense at her command.

In the modern kitchen, the stove takes the place of the open fire. This shift reflects a more general move from visible to invisible cooking, as the fuel source can now be hygienically enclosed in a smooth, metal container. As this photograph and Figure 3 demonstrate, the stove holds chief importance, "tiene - è evidente - il primo posto," "has, it's evident, the first place." In particular, electric stoves with four burners serve as the ideal standard, as electricity burns without a trace as compared to gas or wood. Mentioning this attribute first, she also suggests that electricity's inherent hygiene is reason enough to convert from another type of hearth. She further characterizes electricity as practical and easy to adopt. Morelli suggests that form indicates function in the context of stoves, that solid materials and construction assure regular function



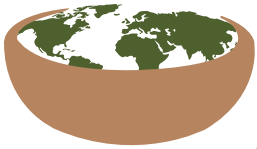
Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

and steady flame. Discussion of old-fashioned wood-burning stoves evokes the context of war due to the rarity and price of newer models. Political events once again enter the kitchen through economics, and Morelli offers modernity in the form of electricity as the ideal solution, and antiquity in the form of wood as a suitable back-up.

Both photographs (Figures 2 and 3) also evoke how raw materials play a role in linking autarchy with hygiene in the kitchen. Morelli, like the writers of *Domus*, depicts material type as the most important consideration in selecting kitchen dishes and utensils, as shown by her kitchen necessities list, and demonstrates similarly intense interest in the use of autarchic materials for flooring, walls, and plumbing. Linoleum reigns chief among these, due to its ease of cleaning when contrasted with old-fashioned stone floors. Morelli similarly decries the use of copper as unnecessary and outdated, especially when iron can be cheaply had and steel does not oxidize. Aluminum receives special attention, “Più conveniente ... privo d’ogni pericolo, di cui si spiega il grandissimo attuale favore ... e si pulisce con la massima facilità,” “More convenient ... and without any danger, which explains its current great favor ... and one can clean it with the greatest of ease” (1935:47). In “The Romance of Caffeine and Aluminum,” Jeffrey Schnapp points to the 1930s as the “golden era of aluminum designs for the kitchen and the beginning of Fascist Italy’s pursuit of domestic autarchy” (2001:245). He further notes how aluminum kitchen products evoked abstract concepts of “lightness, speed, mobility, strength, energy, and electricity” (Schnapp 2001: 245). Morelli’s description suggests that these characteristics bespeak scientific modernity in the kitchen. She goes on to say that laboratory tests conducted in Glasgow demonstrated that no food can alter aluminum utensils. Although Morelli painstakingly highlights the virtues of linoleum and aluminum, two autarchic materials par excellence for their utility in the kitchen, she makes her argument based on their ease of cleaning rather than their domestic production. Indeed, she invokes foreign scientific proof to promote Italian materials.

Given that she speaks of autarchy explicitly in the introductory letter and in photo captions, the omission here seems to speak to the primary importance of what utility these materials offer in the private sphere rather than their economic benefits to the Italian nation. For example, a photo of a chrome-nickel blend used in a sink receives the compliment, “E’ orgoglio nostro che li costruisca una veneta italianissima acciaieria,” “It is our pride that a very Italian, Venetian steelworks constructs it” (Morelli 1935:48). This exclusion does not, however, undermine the link between the kitchen and the national larder. As noted previously, her introductory letter proves her awareness of and concern for the kitchen in terms of national concerns. Rather, Morelli’s focus on



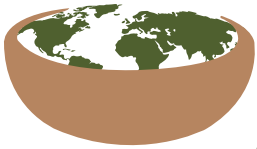
Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

autarchic materials in the kitchen demonstrates focus on the element of the equation of greatest interest to her audience. What she offers in these recommendations are sensible tips that also serve a national end. Purchasing aluminum and linoleum could be seen as patriotic if the reader chose to identify her actions in this way, but Morelli does not force the point by drawing this connection in her discussion. In pointing to practicality rather than politics, Morelli allowed her readers maximum flexibility to define the extent of their political involvement for themselves. Choosing aluminum could be practical and/or political, and Morelli left it up to the reader to select her preferred justification. But while dual narratives provide a strategy for negotiating the extent to which the kitchen equals the national larder, Morelli does not question the connection itself. Regardless of the justification for selecting autarchic materials, this recommendation supports national goals of economic self-sufficiency.

This focus on autarchic materials emerges in more strident terms in Morelli's third image of an ideal, upper-class kitchen. Morelli says of the photo, "Kitchen, this one large and complete, where from the walls in washable rubber material to the glass and metal furniture to the floors in linoleum, everything is a perfect expression of hygiene." *Domus* frequently featured kitchens, including this one, designed by leading Rationalist architect Piero Bottoni, considered to be an authority on kitchen design. Piero Bottoni was one of the leading practitioners of Rationalism, serving from 1929 to 1949 as the Italian delegate to the International Congresses of Modern Architecture, and *Domus* featured many of his kitchen designs in the mid-1930s. These articles, like Morelli's book, generally assume that a cook works in the kitchen rather than the lady of the house. Rarely do articles describe this figure in the third person as the *cuciniera* (cook). *Domus* articles directed to the lady of the house tended to address her in the second person, as we see in the monthly invitations to participate in the *Concorso Cirio* of 1935, one of Italy's first national cooking competitions for homemakers. This shift suggests that most *Domus* articles on kitchens, which use the third person to describe the cook, refer to a servant rather than the lady of the house. To an even greater extent than Morelli, *Domus* writers tended to focus on how design ameliorates cooking, while obscuring the figure of the cook.

While Figure 2 also appeared in *Domus*, the caption does not. Not only are the materials hygienic, but their dimensions promote health as well. Morelli applies findings from the scientific and medical world to kitchen work, noting that one must consider the relationship between the cook's stature, height, and the work to be done, as well as the need to conduct work while sitting straight rather than standing or bent over. The kitchen above not only provides a stool for work at the kitchen table, but it also places



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

the workspaces in a logical order from preparation at the work table, to cooking at the stove, to cleaning at the sink, to waiting to be served at the final counter under the cupboards. Connecting “minore spreco di fatica e di salute,” “less waste of effort and health” (Morelli 1935:60), Morelli suggests that the Taylorist approach to kitchen work evoked by this photograph leads to improved hygiene. The kitchen also moves from an irrational to a rational space through realization of the manual’s directives.

Conclusion

In Fascist Italy modernity and tradition came together under the aegis of autarchy to highlight what is at stake in the aesthetics of kitchen objects. With the onset of the League of Nations’ economic sanctions against Italy and the regime’s responding call for autarchy to neutralize this threat, questions of domestic production and consumption assumed a heightened importance. Therefore, the promotion of autarchy crossed spheres, encompassing the public via linguistic translations and pushes for increased productivity in factories, farms, and mines, and the private via calls to the home cook to get more out of less. She was to Taylorize her movements as if in a factory to get more work out of less physical energy and to make judicious decisions with food products, providing the family with more nutritional energy out of less food.

The regime generally did not concern itself with making these dictates explicit. Rather, authors and designers translated the regime’s broad calls for autarchy into specific practices for their readership. Economic prudence and trendiness also played significant roles in shaping popular aesthetics. Within the general frame of obeisance to the regime via promotion of autarchy, designers took variant approaches with regards to how such consent manifests in prescribed actions. While the intensity of terms such as “modernity,” “rationalism,” “autarchy,” and “consent” may initially seem incongruous when applied to the banality of the kitchen, we must remember that this is the level at which life, and thus power, is situated and exercised. By attempting to influence the design and use of the kitchen, multiple demographic groups, including both individual citizens and representatives of the state, endeavored to seize time and to control how bodies moved.

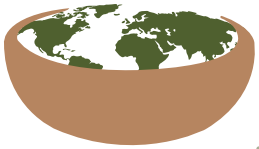


Digest

a journal of foodways & culture



Kitchen photograph (Dalla cucina al salotto; enciclopedia della vita domestica [1935, p.13]).



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture



Arch. Piero Bottoni. Cucina, questa, più grande e completa, dove dalle pareti in materiale gommato lavabile ai mobili di vetro e metallo, agli scaffali in linoleum, tutto è perfetta espressione di igiene.

Piero Bottoni, Kitchen photograph (Dalla cucina al salotto; enciclopedia della vitadomestica [1935, p. 14])



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

References Cited

- Anonymous. 1933. Parliamo un po' della cucina razionalmente. *Domus*.
- De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dickie, John. 2010. *Delizial! The Epic History of the Italians and their Food*. New York: Free Press.
- Domus, ed. 1937. *Il libro di casa 1938*. Rome: Cirio.
- _____, ed. "Servizio razionale." *Domus*. Oct. 1935, 24-25.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gardella, Ignazio. 1939a. I servizi della casa: la cucina. *Domus* January.
- . 1939b. Consigli tecnici per la casa. *Domus* May.
- Helstosky, Carol. 2004. *Garlic and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy*. Oxford: Berg.
- Morelli, Lidia. 1935. *Dalla cucina al salotto; enciclopedia della vita domestica*. Turin: S. Lattes.
- Newlyn, Andrea K. 1999. Challenging Contemporary Narrative Theory: The Alternative Textual Strategies of Nineteenth-Century Manuscript Cookbooks. *The Journal of American Culture* 22 (3): 35-47.
- Pinkus, Karen. 1995. *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising under Fascism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ponti, Gio. *Attrezzature del lavoro*. *Domus* February 1939.
- _____. *Avvenire*. *Domus*, July 1940.
- _____. *Casa M. a Milano*. *Domus*, October 1935.
- _____. *Un appartamento risistemato a Milano*. *Domus*, November 1938.



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Price, Janet, and Margrit Shildrick. 1999. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. New

York: Routledge.

Schnapp, Jeffrey T. 2001. The Romance of Caffeine and Aluminum. *Critical Inquiry* 28 (1): 244-269.



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Notes

¹ In *Dalla Cucina al Salotto*, Lidia Morelli provides an intriguing illustration that divides middle-class household costs by months of work required for their payment. Food requires four and a half months of the yearly salary, whereas the second most expensive bill, rent, requires only two (Morelli 1935:Figure 71).

² This poem was widely reproduced across different forms of Italian print media in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Many household manuals, including *Almanacco della donna italiana* 1941, included a decorative plate of this poem.

³ In contrast to *Domus'* standard article formats, this text appears as an untrimmed newspaper clipping, "L'Elogio del Duce al Dott. Gianni Mazzocchi editore della nostra rivista," *Domus* (Jan. 1940):21.

⁴ This socially conservative notion of work space typified such publications during the 1930s. Further, the Italian approach largely parallels conceptions of the office in other countries, such as the United States.

⁵ "Questo tempo di 'sanzioni' ha veramente un alto valore morale, del quale dobbiamo compiacerci," "This time of 'sanctions' has a high moral value, of which we must satisfy."

⁶ She claims, "sono io sono la prima a rallegrarmi che questo abbia fine," "I am the first to delight in the fact that this has happened."

⁷ By 1935, the cover already heralded its distinction of "50 migliaia," fifty thousand sold.

⁸ Karen Pinkus plays upon this haziness in titling her work on Fascist period advertising *Bodily Regimes*.

⁹ Tending towards hyperbolic terms and phrasing on this topic, Morelli weaves the following vignette, "La minuta dei pasti s'indovina al primo entrare. Ahimè ... l'odore ... vi danno un senso di nausea, di sazietà, di ... miseria!" "One guesses the dinner hour upon entering the door. Alas ... the smell gives them a sense of nausea, of satiety, of ... misery! (1935:25).

¹⁰ For an example, see Anonymous, *Parliamo un po' della cucina, razionalmente*, *Domus* (Aug. 1933):30.