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Debora Viviani*

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1. Author/s information

* Department TESIS, University of Verona (Italy)

2. Contact authors' email addresses

* debora.viviani@univr.it

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Food, mass media and lifestyles. A hyperreal correlation

Debora Viviani

Debora Viviani

University of Verona (Italy), Department of Time, Space, Image, Society - Section of Sociology

Corresponding author:

Debora Viviani

E-mail: debora.viviani@univr.it

«The spectacle in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life.»
(Debord, 1994)

Abstract

Food is now fashionable, a social phenomenon that interests consumers and represents their lifestyles.

The aim of this essay is to analyse the representation of food in leading television programmes. It takes shape from the premise that since food is an element of material culture and therefore a vehicle of postmodern culture, it both symbolizes and is the result of a process of transformation that follows the guidelines of the concept of simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1976; Viviani, 2008).

Does the representation of food in these television programmes confirm this vision of food? Does the representation of food in the media comply with the logic of the simulacrum?

The study uses the characteristic aspects of the concept of simulacrum (Viviani, 2008), to compare two different food-based television genres: traditional cookery programmes and cooking shows. These were chosen because they are the most representative broadcasts and have high viewing figures.

The results highlighted that food is a simulacrum in the most recent kind of cooking programme (referred to here as shows). In general, food clearly enjoys strong autonomy with regard to context. As food and cooking are impersonal decontextualized components, the way that they are reproduced is mediated and unnatural, carefully planned as part of games and strategies typically used in the media world. Food is not experienced or reproduced as such, but becomes a trick to focus attention on the importance of pleasure, power, astuteness, cleverness and beauty. It is therefore clear that this attempt to reproduce reality has been formulated and carefully planned in order to eliminate what is deemed not to be of interest to the viewer, what does not comply with the broadcast times. This falsity in the form of predetermination derives from the intention to maintain a high level of audience interest and thereby create a process of programme loyalty that keeps the viewer glued to the screen, with the idea of seeking entertainment and ongoing excitement.

Its value is no longer anchored in the material dimension of taste and is more closely related to its appearance and symbolic meaning (food-diet; food-nature; food-beauty). The result is an interesting connection with the virtual world, to the point where food is not experienced or reproduced as such, but pertains to lifestyles grounded in pleasure, excitement, power, astuteness, cleverness and beauty.

In keeping with literature on the subject, this study confirms the growing interest in food that is related to the field of wellbeing and the current economic dynamics. What is interesting to ascertain is that, like many other elements of postmodern society (Viviani, 2008), food is the result of a process of simulation that is increasingly leading us towards a hyperreal construction of society through dynamics that involve people and influence their lifestyles, daily lives and the way in which they represent themselves to others.

Keywords: food, media, hyperreality, simulacrum.

1. Food as a leading player in the media

Food is now without question the subject of debate on many different fronts. As an element of material culture (Appadurai, 1996), it symbolically encapsulates and represents the widespread social dynamics in our society (Secondulfo, 2012; Secondulfo and Viviani, 2013).

Firstly, as previously mentioned (Secondulfo, 2011), the growing focus on body care combined with a different perspective fostered by the new concept of health (Turner, 1984, 2002; Featherstone, 1991; Le Breton, 2004), has not only modified the position occupied by food in our daily lives, but also changed the way it is represented and its symbolic world (Delamont, 1995; Montanari, 2004; Maffesoli, 2009).

For example, ISTAT data show that Italians have an increasingly health-conscious attitude to food¹, with dietary choices that seem to favour natural products and a consequent rise in the number of farmers' markets and organic products (Sassatelli, 2010). This choice is driven by greater attention to the well-being of the body and the rising symbolic value of that which is "natural" in contrast to that which is artificial or created. It is not just that bodily health is related to what we eat; the very representation of a healthy body is closely connected to dietary dynamics. Food can be for losing weight or getting fat, providing nutrition for the body or the spirit, a manufactured product or natural food, etc. It therefore takes on different nuances that mediate and represent the symbolic flows (Featherstone, 1991, 1994; Turner, 2002; Secondulfo, 2013).

Dietary style – our everyday relationship with food – is often perceived as an unproblematic process. However, it is important to understand that food lifestyle today is the result of individual choices dictated by tastes and trends.

As it is no longer only rooted in the biological sphere, but involves the subject completely, it has a strong impact on the processes of identity building, belonging and identification (Setiffi, 2013).

This new leading role is also confirmed in the world of communications and the mass media.

Television has been interested in food since its beginnings – just think of all the different food adverts, some of which have become legendary (Codeluppi and Colombo, 1994; Semprini, 1997; Codeluppi, 2013). Television has always been an effective communications tool that influences and creates habits among Italians, but which, as a major vehicle of information, also reflects the social context and any transformations in progress within it. Interest in food is also demonstrated by the proliferation of television programmes that teach us how to cook (anything from desserts to complete meals), explain how to lose weight or implement strategies to revive the fortunes of a restaurant. There are cookery programmes and shows with contestants who challenge each other "to the last dish", etc. The television schedule has turned into a kind of menu.

How can we account for this transformation of food into a major media star?

Interest in food on several fronts² has burst onto the scene in the media and virtual world. Besides the spread of cooking blogs, what is most evident is the way that programmes dealing with food have invaded the television schedule. In addition to the different types of programme already mentioned, another significant development is the launch of the Gambero Rosso Channel on digital television, exclusively dedicated (24 hours a day) to the world of food.

The aforementioned relationship between food and well-being has certainly influenced these changes, but in my opinion two other important phenomena should also be considered.

Firstly, Italians now eat most of their meals at home (ISTAT, 2013) because of the ongoing financial crisis. Eating out has therefore been replaced by lunches or dinners at home or by home-made packed lunches at work. Therefore, Italians are more likely to find themselves in the kitchen, although it might not be in order to cook restaurant-style meals.

Secondly, changes in the family unit and family dynamics, with more single people or young couples, have undoubtedly modified shopping patterns and cooking methods. While housewives used to be almost totally responsible for the house and family, with the time and ability to make desserts, pasta, etc. by themselves, the current economic situation means that both members of a couple have to work and have less time available to dedicate to making meals.

² There is also the debate on diets and eating disorders.

Starting from the assumption that interest in this subject is constantly on the rise, it is interesting to highlight that the representation of food in the media has changed. The symbolic mediation activated by the world of communications through food is different and designed to focus attention on diverse aspects.

As we shall see, there is a close correlation between the media representation and the social depiction of food, a correlation which follows the guidelines of the logic of simulation. As an element of material culture (Appadurai, 1996, Secundulfo, 2012), food both transforms and reflects consumer lifestyles at the same time. The representation of food in the media is a good example of this.

2. Food mania in the media. A comparison between genres.

2.1. 70s – 80s: the TV debut of food

The first programme that focused attention on food was Mario Soldati's *Viaggio lungo la valle del Po*, broadcast in 1956³. It was neither a cooking contest nor a programme that taught how to cook. In a way, *Viaggio lungo la valle del Po* was the predecessor to *Linea Verde* or *La domenica del villaggio*, programmes that present food, dishes and recipes as symbolic representatives of a place, whether a village or city. Local character is therefore the central element of this programme, where food is highly representative of the habits and customs of a specific place.

The first real cooking programme, *Colazione allo studio 7*, dates back to 1971. It was broadcast by RAI from 12.30 to 13.30 on Sundays and was presented by Luigi Veronelli (Dilorenzo, 2012).

The seventies were:

- years of economic crisis;
- years of terrorism,

and Italian families wanted to return to the home and daily life, as they were symbols of love and security. To this end, *Colazione allo studio 7* seemed to meet its audience's needs, responding to the spirit and demands of the social context. *Colazione allo studio 7* was a contest between two regions and their cuisine, and is reminiscent of football matches between teams from different areas. Four contestants, who were expert chefs or cooks from another field, represented two regions and challenged each other by making typical dishes during the programme. While one contestant was making the dish, the other had to answer quiz questions and taste food. The dishes were judged by celebrity guests.

In subsequent series, the importance of women as the main kitchen users led the programme makers to choose different contestants; housewives or househusbands⁴ appeared instead of cooks in order to reflect everyday life and allow the audience to identify with what they saw.

If, as previously mentioned, media communications try to satisfy the needs of their audience by using a language that can easily be recognized and interpreted by those watching, what has changed today in the way that food is experienced?

While early television programmes focused attention on food as an element that:

- “must be taught” (food education);
- represents a society, place or city (local character),

the current television schedule neglects these two aspects, even though food is widely presented in a variety of different ways. Aldo Grasso writes: “TV is now harmful to food because it no longer knows how to ask questions; everything is taken for granted in its trivial world. Addressing cultural issues means knowing how to connect one event to another, link one type of food to an area or associate a wine with a story. The choice is quite deliberate: TV must never ask too many questions, otherwise people will get bored and change channel.”⁵. Why is this the case?

³ Two years after the birth of Italian television.

⁴ It is interesting that more and more applications from men wishing to take part have arrived over the years. This might seem surprising, but it is true that women have entered the world of work and achieved professional emancipation during the same period, forcing men to share the household chores.

⁵
http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2004/ottobre/11/Cibo_televisione_Soldati_alle_grandi_co_9_041011052.shtm
1

How is food presented, what languages and visual expedients are used and why? There are currently a number of different programmes on television that show competitions between professional or amateur cooks or simply teach how to cook⁶. It is interesting to note that although these programmes are all successful, they have completely different characteristics.

The next stage of this essay analyses some food-based television programmes divided into two categories:

1. television programmes in the kitchen, where the logic of television is closely related to food and the preparation process;
2. cooking shows, where the dynamics surrounding food follow the strategies of television communication

The first group of programmes includes *La prova del cuoco* (RAI), *Gusto* (Mediaset), *I menu di Benedetta* (LA7, SKY) and *Cotto e mangiato* (Mediaset).

The second group features *Masterchef* (SKY), *Hell's Kitchen* (SKY) and *Cucine da incubo* (SKY).

To make the analysis easier – it would have been impossible to carry out a completely exhaustive study – the programmes chosen are the most representative ones and those that have recorded or are currently recording the highest viewing figures.

2.2. *TV in the kitchen v. cooking on TV*

The first clear difference between the two groups of programmes is the aspect of time. The programmes in the first category are broadcast at around lunchtime or dinnertime – some of them are regular in-depth features during the news.

Cooking shows, on the other hand, are broadcast away from mealtimes; whether in prime-time slots or in pre-recorded format on digital channels, they are not associated with eating lunch and/or dinner. Furthermore, time is an essential element in the development of the programme itself in the second category, as contestants have to create and cook their dishes within a time limit, with a (sometimes giant) stopwatch counting down the seconds. The role of the ticking stopwatch is to put contestants under pressure and the worst one is duly eliminated. A good example of this is *Masterchef*, where contestants are not allowed to do anything when time is up – indeed, time runs out to the cry of “Hands up!”.

If we compare the two categories, the people involved (presenters, contestants, audience) are not only different, but are also presented in a different way.

We will begin with the contestants⁷. In keeping with the general spirit that typifies the genre, television programmes in the kitchen (the first category) feature not only chefs but also housewives or young people. It is interesting to note that the different contestants – housewives, pensioners or others – in programmes such as *La prova del cuoco* on the Italian national network take part for the fun of having a different experience. Episodes are self-contained and the contestant is assisted by a chef. It is more of a game than a competition and the main apparent aim is entertainment – for the viewer too – with light-hearted moments, songs and dancing that involve the female presenter directly.

There is a different atmosphere in cooking shows.

These are real contests with a tangible sense of tension, where the winner goes on to the next episode. The contestant takes part to win and become a chef, so the prize is success. The presenters of this type of programme are represented in a completely different way. In *Cucine da incubo* and *Masterchef*, the presenter is both a chef and a highly authoritarian figure who uses strong and sometimes even vulgar language, because, as Joe Bastianich of *Masterchef* says: “No one gives you anything” in life⁸. These shows are dominated by role playing – the dynamics seem to be like a job interview, where the winner survives through skill because he or she can work against the clock and is strong enough not to

⁶ Many other television programmes will be overlooked here. The aim is to focus attention on two major genres, chosen for several reasons:

- The most popular;
- The most similar to each other.

⁷ Clearly with reference to contest-based programmes.

⁸ <http://www.kataweb.it/tvzap/2013/01/22/noi-cattivi-in-tv-cosi-cuciniamo-i-concorrenti-1014042/>

give up or get disheartened. It recalls the dynamics implemented in the world of the American Marines; these programmes are gastronomic versions of *Full Metal Jacket* (Dilorenzo, 2012).

It is thanks to these dynamics that the chefs (no longer just cooks)⁹ have become stars in their own right. They have the ability and power to decide the fate of a contestant by establishing whether or not his life will change. They are both strict and austere in their judgments. They do not wear a chef's uniform but the latest designer clothes or dinner suits, in order to emphasize their authority and move away from the image of simple cooks.

The presenters of the programmes in the first group are decidedly different, as they are nice, likeable, down-to-earth figures¹⁰.

They symbolize the housewife, a tidy woman who takes care of the way she looks without exaggerating. As previously mentioned, there is a cook but only as an aid to the contestant. This confirms the difference between the two figures. In the first group of programmes the cook wears a uniform and operates in the on-set kitchen helping contestants, while in the second group of programmes the same figure is impersonal with regard to the context. The look in question is sought-after and trendy and their clothing has nothing to do with a cook's uniform; it is not needed as the cook does not actually cook and does not get dirty. His role is to make his knowledge, experience and fame in the culinary world available to the contestants, although they then have to act alone without help. After all, in famous restaurants this type of chef is the person that supervises, organizes the kitchen and adds the final touch to dishes.

These different figures and the time of broadcast indicate a different target audience. For traditional cooking programmes they are people who live and work at home such as housewives, while for cooking shows they are single people or young couples who enjoy watching such programmes in the evening and try their hand at making the dishes at another time. As we have seen, the presenters also represent different categories of people.

The final element to consider is the context. The setting of the programmes in the first group is an everyday kitchen and the language used is simple, putting both the contestant and the spectator at ease. As previously mentioned, the times, methods and dynamics are those of food and cooking, and television adapts to them.

On the other hand, it is difficult to recognize one's own kitchen in the setting for cooking shows. In *Masterchef* the competition unwinds on a stage, where state-of-the-art cookers are lined up like desks in a classroom. There is no studio audience and the only people present besides the chefs that present the programme are the eliminated contestants who observe from above. In this case, cooking is a pretext for show business, an element which is almost a stage prop or side-dish.

In summary, if we compare the two television genres analysed, there are a few significant differences (Tab.1).

⁹ blog.paperogiallo.net/2012/02/non_voglio_fare_il_cuoco_non_voglio_fare_il_cameriere.html;
http://www.corriere.it/spettacoli/11_dicembre_09/grasso-fil-di-rete_dbf122bc-222b-11e1-90ea-

¹⁰ See also the essay by Luisa Stagi.

Tab. 1 – *Cookery programmes vs. cooking shows*

	PROGRAMMES IN THE KITCHEN	COOKING SHOWS
<i>Temporal dimension</i>	Link with the context Programme time connected to meals Real cooking times	Decontextualization of space-time Time functional to game (stopwatch)
<i>Presenter</i>	Women (stereotype of the housewife)	Men
<i>Contestants</i>	People from everyday life Down-to-earth people not looking for fame	People who want success
<i>Cooks</i>	Dressed in chefs' uniforms They help contestants	Smart trendy clothes Chefs
<i>Food</i>	Contextualized (link with the local area or seasons)	Decontextualized (no reference to culinary culture)
<i>Setting</i>	Familiar In the kitchen Familiar dynamics between people	Contest On stage (cookers arranged like classroom desks) Power dynamics between people

3. Cooking shows: food to watch

While attempting to maintain an objective position without making any value judgments about the proliferation of this type of show, we cannot avoid noting that the replication of these programmes and their great success is based on narrative and aesthetic expedients that are representative of the current society. The representation of food that emerges moves away from the traditional vision to emphasize another important aspect; the logic that characterizes these programmes is based on criteria and constructs that can easily be interpreted by the audience and which follow the aesthetic taste¹¹ that is widespread in society.

The theory (Viviani, 2008) has been put forward that the current society corresponds to an analysis grid that can be compared to the concept of simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1974, 1976). Indeed, the aspects deriving from analysis of the concept can be used to interpret various postmodern phenomena (Viviani, 2009).

Specifically, the concept of simulacrum refers to the following categories of analysis: (Viviani, 2008)

- falsity in the reproduction process, which reproduces in a false way. The falsity is not in the result (copy), but in the process that creates the copy, simultaneous and identical to the original;
- non-randomness and predetermination, as the simulation process is deliberately deceitful. Although every little element appears to be an element of the natural process of reproduction, it has been specially designed and created to deceive the subject. There are no unforeseen emotions in the possible responses.

- immortality, because it is directed towards infinity and a never-ending pleasure, which is based on the ongoing search for personal satisfaction, in accordance with a dynamic that operates in the consumer world (Lipovetsky, 2007; Jameson, 2007);

- hyperreality, as although a real situation and real logic are represented, the limits and defects of reality are eliminated. The reality created in this way is cleansed of all imperfections and irregularities.

Can these aspects be used as a key to understanding this television genre? Can food in the media be read and interpreted through the aspects that characterize the concept of simulacrum?

If we continue our analysis of the two television genres using the interpretative grid that emerges from the concept of simulacrum, we see that there is a big difference between the two categories. What is most evident is that television programmes in the kitchen (the first category) are strongly rooted in

¹¹ Addressing aesthetic taste can open up many horizons of analysis. See Viviani D. (2014).

reality. Indeed, every element and every aspect recalls time schedules, people and dynamics from the real world, with all its unexpected events and anomalies.

The four dimensions that characterize the process of simulation are well represented in cooking shows (the second category).

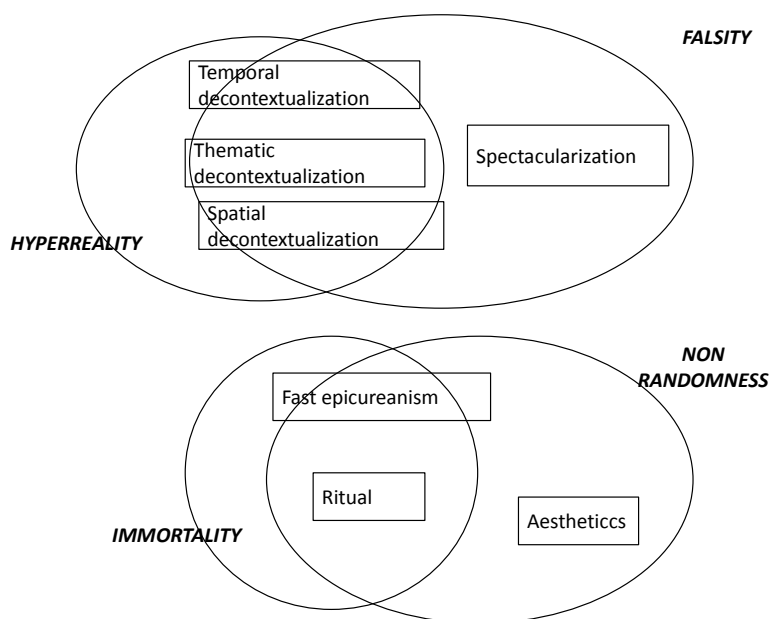
The analysis shows that the communication strategies – the way that food is represented – are the result of a non-random process that aims to create a perfect programme in terms of aesthetics, dynamics and time schedules. Nothing is left to chance.

These programmes are characterized by certain important aspects:

1. Temporal decontextualization. There is no temporal context (lunch, dinner, etc). Time is only a functional element of the game (stopwatch);
2. Spatial decontextualization. Although these are cooking programmes, the traditional setting (the classic kitchen counter) is not important and is not even foregrounded. Paradoxically, there might not even be a kitchen;
3. Thematic decontextualization. There is no historical-social contextualization. Food is not part of a narrative (food education, local character), but an expedient to create entertainment. The presentation of the dish and the combination of ingredients are essential elements, but nobody eats¹².
4. Fast Epicureanism¹³. Food is served like at a party and the show has a fast time schedule including crying, laughing and suffering together with the contestants. It is a succession of emotions taken in small doses.
5. Ritual. There is a sequence of well determined stages. The ritual consists of steps that are always the same, but experienced in a different way every time.
6. Aesthetics. The look of the presenters, the way they present themselves and their language all point towards the aesthetic dimension. Similarly, camera shots focus on details and seem to enter the dish.
7. Spectacularization. Every little detail becomes a spectacle. Gestures, mimicry and language: every element provokes a reaction and is created in order to trigger an emotional response.

If we superimpose the typical categories of the logic of the simulacrum over the characteristics that emerged from the analysis of these programmes, there are certain points of correspondence. (Fig.1).

Fig. 1 – Cooking shows and aspects of simulacrum: correlations.



In general, food clearly enjoys strong autonomy with regard to context. As food and cooking are impersonal decontextualized components, the way that they are reproduced is mediated and unnatural, carefully planned as part of games and strategies typically used in the media world.

Food is not experienced or reproduced as such, but becomes a trick to focus attention on the importance of pleasure, power, astuteness, cleverness and beauty. It is therefore clear that this attempt to reproduce reality has been formulated and carefully planned in order to eliminate what is deemed not to be of interest to the viewer, what does not comply with the broadcast times.

The result is partially reproduced reality with elements that are real but placed in situations intended to create a result that is sometimes forcibly real.

This falsity¹⁴ in the form of predetermination derives from the intention to maintain a high level of audience interest and thereby create a process of programme loyalty that keeps the viewer glued to the screen, with the idea of seeking entertainment and ongoing excitement.

These are the same dynamics implemented in social spectacularization: pleasure, beauty, emotions, staging and perfection¹⁵ (real or presumed). The content – in this case food – is chosen, experienced and represented in keeping with the form of spectacle (Debord, 1967). Food becomes something to watch.

Traditionally, as the value of food was connected to its flavour, it was always tasted by the subject. In this way, a rapprochement was created between subject and food. Now, however, the quality of food is closely linked to its appearance, allowing a certain detachment from the consumer.

It can be placed and experienced in any time and place, losing all material value, but is appreciated for its colour, combination with other food and the setting into which it is introduced. It is no longer food as an element linked to the dimension of physical health or as a symbol of a particular area or specific habits and customs, but hyperreal food¹⁶, stripped of its traditional value¹⁷.

4. Food today: trendy or a trend-setter?

Food is now fashionable, a social phenomenon that interests consumers and represents their lifestyles.

However, food also creates trends. The consumer is drawn ever closer to the world of food by the ongoing proliferation of television programmes and media attention. Food takes on increasing importance as it has a number of different symbolic representations (food – diet, natural food, food and cooking, food for a healthy body, organic food, etc.). For this reason, it not only represents consumer lifestyles, but is also part of their structure – by making certain specific choices, consumers work on themselves and their social representation.

With reference to the logic of structure-form, the current interest in food creates a closed circle reminiscent of these dimensions.

Firstly, the appeal of food is due to certain changes in the subject's lifestyle¹⁸. The media world and the interest in food mirror current lifestyles.

Secondly, the appeal of food now fostered by the media is a self-sustaining process. Spectators are involved in the programmes and therefore in food, because the narrative strategies and expedients in media communications are taken up by subjects and give them pleasure. In this case, the media world structures current lifestyles and increases interest in food.

¹⁴ In this case, the term false is not meant as a judgment - falsity is fiction. The deceitful aspect of that which is false is not emphasized as the untruthful representation of something original and real; falsity is in the process of reproduction that reproduces reality. Indeed, although reality is reproduced in a coherent way, the reproduction process originates from mechanisms and dynamics that make it artificial. The fact that it is forcibly real makes it false.

¹⁵ These characteristics are the key that distinguishes the figure of the cook (first category) from the figure of the chef. Indeed, the chef is a personality, a star in his own right, who also looks after the way he presents himself and dresses.

¹⁶ There are also numerous cooking blogs and a growing number of smartphone applications that allow the user to do the shopping or cook a dish after selecting ingredients in the house.

¹⁷ See also the essay by Michelangelo Pascali.

¹⁸ As explained in section 1.

This relationship takes shape in the aesthetic experience, with correspondence between the internal, a self-sustaining attraction, and the external, a created attraction.

That which is external to people is not extraneous to them, but draws their attention to it by means of aesthetic attitude, the inclination to embrace what we are faced with in a visual way, identifying specific perceptual characteristics in the object (Desideri, 2004) and applying both a social interpretative approach and an individual one, as it is the result of individual choices and, at the same time, social transformations.

Food is offered through a form of communication that represents it in a way that the subject likes. The aesthetic experience related to food therefore represents a transition between the internal and the external (and vice versa) authenticated by pleasure (Levinson, 1996) and taste.

The subject recognizes, understands and uses the same codes that are defined when this representation of food is constructed. Aesthetic taste therefore becomes one of the subject's experiences, in which the urge to see intersects with being seen. The dimension of the observer is itself visible, and is therefore part of general visibility (Viviani, 2014).

This recalls the dimension of material culture to a significant extent. Lifestyles, values, principles and even the subject are represented by food and, in the specific case analysed here, by the communications created around it. Food is therefore the visible part of culture and an integral part of society, as it represents its relationships, lifestyles and habits (Secondulfo, 2012), actualising the relationships created mainly in the field of self-reported consumption (Secondulfo, 2012; Viviani, 2013). People use food to construct and work on themselves and their image. Food in the media: towards a new form of socialization? Conclusions and new hypothesis.

With regard to the original question, the analysis presented here has shown not only that food can now be interpreted as a simulacrum, but also that this perspective is confirmed by the way it is represented in the media.

Cooking shows, a television genre enjoying great success, construct strategies, dynamics and relationships around food that create a kind of hyperreal situation. Indeed, they strive for aesthetic perfection and pleasure through food, which is no longer important in terms of its functional value because it is rooted in the biological dimension of the subject, but as a promoter of the lifestyle now required by the subject. Decontextualized with regard to reality, its value is given by its symbolic meaning. Food helps to construct the social representation and identity of the subject.

If the consumer dynamics of food seem to be mainly linked to the individual dimension, as the reflection of a subject and his or her social representation, does it mean that the relational value that has always characterized the ritual nature of food no longer exists? Does food still create relationships?

The author feels that the relations activated by food are mainly transmitted not by the food itself or the act of eating, as it traditionally happened (Douglas, 1985), but by the means of communications that have made food a leading player. As Debord writes (1994): "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images."

Now included as a star in programmes that reproduce the dynamics and relationships of real life, food is used to create individual recognition, which is then transformed into genuine socialization among the people who watch these programmes.

This is not the right place to address the latter important aspect in depth, but the spread of this type of cooking programme is part of the larger branch of lifestyle television (Setiffi, 2013). Whether it concerns the home, clothes, health, beauty or food, nothing is superfluous and everything is useful.

Viewers relive their everyday lives with problems and situations that they have experienced or might experience in the future. This process of recognition makes socialization possible. Food, make-up and the home are only tools or expedients.

With regard to the relational value that has always been recognized in food, the social relations in this case are therefore mediated by the means of communications. It is through the way it is represented that mechanisms of self-representation are created around it in the subject. However, this is not all.

Programmes that highlight food-based problems, situations and experiences allow each viewer to identify with what is seen. Individual reality, experienced by those present in the situation, becomes social on the basis of the mechanism activated by reality TV. Indeed, according to the logic of simulacra, relationships are created on a new virtual plane, in a similar way to what happens, for example, on the Internet and in social media.

It is not possible to establish the truthfulness or validity of these relationships, and I do not intend to assess them here, but it is important to highlight that food responds to the logic of simulation like any other current social phenomenon and in these terms has a new relational value (Secondulfo, 2007, Viviani, 2008).

Food creates new relationship mechanisms which are mediated by the means that reproduces them, in this case the media. As a message, food talks to us and transmits meanings, concepts and lifestyles (Secondulfo, 2012). We listen and observe, but we do not eat.

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