

GASTROMANIA ON ITALIAN TV

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Abstract

By turning on the TV, at any time of the day or night, one can come across programs in which food is the undisputed protagonist. Actually, the presence of food on TV is not a contemporary phenomenon, but it goes back to the origins of television. Over time, the way of narrating food has been transformed, as well as the role attributed to it and the values (gastro-nomic and social) associated to it.

In this paper, after having traced a historical overview of Italian food television programming, we focus on the analysis of four recent programs. The objective is to understand how settings, rhythmic and temporal scan-sion, and the distribution of roles among the various actors involved con-figure narratives with well-structured mechanisms and convey different ways of understanding cooking, the role of the chef, and the relationship with the audience at home.

Keywords: gastromania, semiotics, culinary TV Show, structural anal-ysis, typology

Giant cakes, chocolates of all kinds, traditional dishes, exotic recipes, but also cooks that help revive the fortunes of restaurants on the brink of failure, ordinary people who aspire to become great chefs, great chefs who challenge ordinary people to cook, or even obese people who undergo rigid diets, extravagant characters who swallow exaggerated amounts of food, extremist travellers who taste disgusting at first sight dishes, housewives in the limelight showing off their workhorses in the kitchen. All this and more is food on TV, an invasion of ultra-kitchen in formats, genres, and iterations as varied as ever. We will focus in this paper on the link between food and television, trying to understand some of the dynamics of the functioning of this interesting and composite part of contemporary *gastromania* (Marrone 2014a).

1. Old media and new programs

In the beginning it was a monopoly¹. In 1954, the year of the debut of TV in Italy, Rai broadcast from only one channel (Rai1) and only in certain time slots. Public television, based on the British model of the BBC, aimed to inform, entertain and educate the viewer, in a pedagogical communicative pact. The state-owned company assumed ambitious and important tasks: to help solidify the foundations of a united Italy, to support the process of literacy of Italians, to make known the beauties of the *Bel Paese*, to provide information in the most objective possible way, to grant the public moments of spectacle that still had to remain balanced, measured, and without excess. In this context, in 1957, the first TV show dedicated to food was the *Journey in the Valley of Po in search of genuine foods*. The host, Mario Soldati, spent twelve episodes travelling along the Valley discovering authentic flavours in small family-run companies. The operation that underlies this program is doubly important: on the one hand, in fact, it elevates food products to a “star” worthy of becoming part of the media world, on the other it explains its characteristics, tying it to the discovery of local tastes, culture and, in some ways, tourist practice. The connection between food and tourism finds fertile ground and inaugurates a trend that, via a number of experiments, link Soldati’s prototype to the more recent TV shows as *Anthony Bourdain: Journey of a Cook*, *Unti and bisunti* etc.

With the breakup of the monopoly and the entry of commercial TV, the rules of television programming were deeply modified. Competitive logic

¹ On the history of Italian television cf. Grasso (1992, 2008); Monteleone (2009).

forces Rai to adapt to the “Americanization” of private TV. Consequently, entertainment becomes a priority alongside the so-called “flow TV” (Williams 1974). Flow TV is based on the attempt to smooth the separations between the different shows, in order to dispel the nightmare of the change of channel, made easier by the introduction of the remote control. In the eighties, *Salt, pepper and fantasy*, conducted by Wilma de Angelis (true forerunner of Benedetta Parodi), combines the prevailing commercial logic with a utility component, illustrating in each episode simple recipes made with sponsored products always well in sight.

Over time, television genres (cf. Grasso, Scaglioni 2005; Grignaffini 2012; Freccero 2013; Menduni 2008) lose their defined boundaries and all programmes begin to be filtered, and will continue to be filtered, more and more markedly, by entertainment. In the nineties, for example, there is *Kitchen*, conducted by Andrea Pezzi broadcast on MTV, in which the presenter at each episode meets a famous guest and together they perform a recipe and in the meantime chat about work and private life.

With the new millennium, there is a further turning point. Thematic channels allow you to overcome the concept of heterogeneous and variable schedule constrained by time slots and days of the week. Instead they provide homogeneous programming, directed to an audience less and less generalist and increasingly niche. On the other hand, in the entertainment field, a new sub-genre, the reality show, will tend to cannibalize all shows, permeating its pseudo-realistic spirit and winking at the *voyeur* viewer (Sfardini 2009). These phenomena lead to the emergence of channels such as *Gambero Rosso* and *Alice*, which offer round-the-clock programs dedicated to food. On the other hand, successful formats have been imported to Italy with alternating outcomes in terms of audience and tv criticism: not only *Masterchef*, of course, but also *The Chef*, *Nightmare Restaurants* etc.

Between the stellar audience and the refined gastronomists that just cannot digest so much success (Petrini once defined *Masterchef* a case of “gastronomic pornography”), food today is going crazy on TV and spreading epidemically between generalist TV and thematic channels. It is impossible to propose exhaustive investigations in this regard, and difficult to stem the field.

On the one hand a first distinction certainly concerns programs entirely dedicated to cooking, while on the other hand those in which, while speaking of other matters, food fulfills a fundamental function². In many TV series, for example, the way the characters dine and their meal rituals

² About food and Tv cf. Dilorenzo (2012), Viviani (2013).

convey their identity traits and deep values. For *Inspector Montalbano*, for example, the meal is a priority moment, on which to focus and perhaps involve other practices (investigations can also slow down in the face of a succulent arancino). Food becomes the focus of his actions, the final object towards which to strive and merge. Consumption is solitary and silent, just as if to encourage a time dilation of this fundamental moment (Marrone 2006, 2012). If for the Inspector refectation is slow tasting, progressive assimilation, and increasing satisfaction to focus on, in *Dexter*, instead, food represents mere nourishment, something to be used when you just can't do without it. Eating is an interstitial practice, instantaneous and still subordinate to other major activities. Dexter munches a sandwich in the car while looking for some potential victim, abandons his meal without having finished it when he receives some business call, consumes fast dishes in different places. The idea of food-feeding is taken up in the opening credits to put a parallel between two "basic" needs of the protagonist: the morning breakfast routine runs in parallel with another customary and equally ritualized practice - that of killing. In *The Sopranos*, the dishes serve to strongly emphasize the provenance of the mafia Italian-American family protagonist of the story. The characters feed on strictly Italian ingredients, frequent Italian restaurants, prepare Italian dishes and often haunt the cuisine of the origins. Above all, they are always eating. The protagonist is almost continuously looking for some juice or some slice of ham, opening and closing the refrigerator continuously. This ritual gesture becomes a brand that punctuates his actions, as well as the rhythm of the episode. In this vein, in short, it would be interesting to look at how the style of food consumption of a certain character provides indications for decoding its distinctive features.

Even if you want to look only at on food-focused shows, the landscape that comes out of it is vast, with examples covering some of all genres. Some texts are fully included in the field of *information*, that macro-genre in which you provide the public with news related to extra-television reality, adopting a whole series of communication strategies aimed at providing a reality-effect (think *Eat Parade*, Tg2 column, or *Gusto*, similar appendix of Tg5).

There are also several programs focused on *the educational side*, where, taking up the idea of service TV, the goal is to educate, instruct, and make known aspects of food and wine in cultural terms (consider, for example, those shows in which well-being declines as a proper nutritional regime or to all that strand of documentaries to discover the eating habits of others).

Then there are the *TV series*, which are texts based on a form of storytelling. Contrary to what happens with documentary, they presuppose a communicative pact in which expectations of truth are suspended. In 2012 the flagship network of Mediaset airs *Welcome to the Table*, a TV series entirely centered on the world of restaurants, interpreted, among others, by Fabrizio Bentivoglio and Giorgio Tirabassi, as two opposed restaurant owners.

Finally, it is the *entertainment* genre, the king of TV, as we have seen, that takes different forms (game shows, talk shows, reality etc.) - from *Masterchef* to *Bake off* passing through *Cake boss* and *Hell's Kitchen*, entertainment and food seem to bind in an indissoluble way.

In fact, a classification of food and wine transmissions by gender can only be a starting point, often valid in principle but questionable and refutable for analytical purpose. Hybridization, the mix of genres, in fact, is now the norm on television. *Obese: A Year to Save My Life* is a reality, but it borders on the educational. The episodes show, in fact, not only the stories of human cases in which excess food has become a pathological condition, but also always an understated educational warning connected with the enormous sacrifices to which they are forced to undergo to restore good fitness. Similarly in *Unti and Bisunti*, chef Rubio challenges a street food expert to a cookery competition (exemplary feature of the game show), but at the same time gives popularity to local food and wine typicals (and we are still at the educational). The examples could easily go on. On the other hand, to further complicate this already twisted panorama, there are complex connections that the different television texts establish between them. They end up referring to one another and overlap in certain aspects: Parodi invites as a guest Cracco, one of the judges of *Cooks and Flames* becomes team leader of *The Chef*, Barbieri is judge of *Masterchef* and *Masterchef Junior*, Bastianich also presents a music program to relax from food.

2. Culinary competitions

While zapping between a talent and a talk show, between a documentary and a game show one is struck that in the face of an explosion of spectacular flambees, of pan juggling and awkward frying in front of the cameras there is no counterbalance of taste. On TV, as it has already been noticed, *everyone cooks but no one eats* (Marrone 2014a). Or rather, you taste, you judge, you nibble, you test, you feel but you do not give in to that great gastronomic pleasure of long tasting, of savoring, the slow encounter between food and body. There are mostly subjects put to the test, intent on demon-

strating their skills, and people scrupulously focused on making judgments about the work of others, in sanctioning, for better or worse, those high moments of media cooking show.

It seems, in fact, that one of the key elements for the success of a culinary show is the *challenge* (Greimas 1983), and this is why we will be talking here about four programs that put this mechanism in place, although they do so in very different terms. These are:

- *Cooks and Flames*, aired since 2010 on La7D channel and conducted by Simone Rugiati, where in each episode two contestants compete in four tests (“handiness”, “skill”, “creativity” and “presentation”);
- *Ale against everyone*, aired on Sky Uno since 2012, in which the media star Alessandro Borghese and two members of the same family prepare two versions of the same recipe and are blind judged by three jurors selected from Sky subscribers;
- *Benedetta’s menu*, conducted by Parodi since 2011 on La7. Here, after the creation of dishes, prepared alone or with the help of famous people or experts-regular guests, and after moments dedicated to the decoration of the table, there is the Salvacena, that is a challenge against time aimed at making a dish in just eight minutes, before the beginning of the TV news. Each episode is based on a single theme that serves as a telematic connector among the different recipes proposed (“cheap recipes”, “unique dishes”, “menu during the harvest” etc.).
- And, clearly, *Masterchef*, the well-known culinary talent contest, in which aspiring chefs put themselves in competition in a series of single and team trials under the rigid gaze of the judges.

Starting from the most superficial and manifest aspects (the spatial setting of the studio, the definition of times and rhythmic trends, the actors involved in the stories), we will gradually descend towards the deeper sense. We will attempt to show how each of these texts makes its own certain culinary conceptions, conceives differently the relationships that are created between television and “external world” and consequently different potential reasons for their popularity with the public.

The choice of the corpus fell on cases of success which are all in some way connected. After watching numerous TV shows, it was realized, in fact, that they are all reminiscent of each other, as if they were thought of in relation to each other, according to a system of analogies and structural dif-

ferences. Whether these relations were actually intentionally thought of by authors and format-makers does not count here, what matters is, as always, the effect of meaning that comes with it, the actual dialogue that, whether they like or not, the programs establish.

The comparative analysis will be based on Greimasian structuralist semiotics and will follow the levels of the generative trajectory of meaning (Greimas, Courtés 1979). At the discursive level, we will consider the spatial, temporal and actorial dimensions, showing how they are not mere figurative or aesthetic additions but elements that, by configuring the story, create meaning. As far as enunciation is concerned, we will focus on the communicative pacts proposed to the enunciatee, showing how each TV show attempts to involve audiences in very different terms. At the narrative level we will identify the distribution of actantial roles and the narrative programs on which each program focuses. Finally, at a deeper level, we will see what values underlie the different texts — the values that relate back to different philosophies and ways of conceiving of cooking.

We are certainly aware that the analysis that follows does not exhaust the current model of television programming. The aim is to provide models and instruments of analysis of general scope, therefore applicable to other cases that, for reasons of space, was not possible to deepen here.

3. Homes, classrooms, restaurants, TV studios

In *Benedetta's menus* everything is located in a space³ that reproduces the domestic environment, with a spacious kitchen, in which a large part of the program takes place, but also a dining area, used to show how to furnish the table. There is also a hybrid area in which the studio audience is located and that in a certain sense works as a living room. Behind the kitchen, a window in the background suggests the presence of a little garden, which our eyes cannot access, but which nevertheless remains assumed. In the 2011 edition this mimesis of domesticity was even more accentuated. There was no studio audience and Parodi in each episode entered the house from a door with shopping bags in hand welcoming the audience to what she called “her home”. The opening formula is replaced in the following year's edition with a “welcome to my kitchen” — a greeting that helps to focus attention on the central space of the program that for synecdoche represents that of the entire house. In the second edition, the reality of television of the

³ An introduction to the semiotics of space is in Giannitrapani (2013).

program is emphasized. Where we seemed to follow a fragment of Parodi's private life caught in its becoming, here the enunciation device is well on display (public presence, cameras and studio assistants not hidden, etc.).⁴ If it is true that the kitchen is delimited by the hob and a peninsula, elements that frame the space as a marked utopian place. On the other hand there are no real limits. The house is structured as a large open space, the studio audience has full visual access to all environments. If for some reason an ingredient or a culinary tool is missing, Benedetta has just to turn around and retrieve it in some furniture behind her and she herself moves to the studio/home going to meet the public and overcoming the weak thresholds that seem to exist. Continuity prevails (Fig. 1–6).



Fig. 1: The extensive kitchen of *The Benedetta's menu*.



Fig. 2: The studio reproduces a home structured as an open space.



Fig. 3: The large and almost continuous spaces allow Benedetta to have everything necessary at her fingertips.



Fig. 4: The dining room where creative ways to set the table are shown.

⁴ In this sense, the effect of the reality show has progressively softened, if you consider that in *Cooked and Eaten*, a program for which *Benedetta's menu* is a continuation, Parodi actually cooked in her own home, then proposed for lunch to her family what was cooked in front of the cameras.



Fig. 5: The studio audience has full visual access to all environments.



Fig. 6: Parodi moves freely in the studio, erasing distinctions between environments.

In *Ale against everyone* the game takes place essentially in two rooms: on the one hand the thematic space of the kitchen, in which the challengers prepare their usual delicacy; on the other, the heterotopic space where the judges are located (Fig. 7–8). The two rooms are connected by a glass door but remain mutually impermeable (Fig. 9). Only at the end of the program all the actors will meet to hear the verdict and discover the winner. The editing only emphasizes these distinctions with a game of cross-fades that allow you to move from one space to another without traveling distances. Only rarely do the shots give the viewer a perception of the overall articulation of the studio. The discontinuity is re-proposed within the kitchen. Here the challengers are arranged frontally in two symmetrical but distinct sections, precisely to emphasize the mutual estrangement of the challengers, and to emphasize the competitive mechanism in a typically polemical configuration (Hammad 2003). To blur this otherwise excessive separation, there are the movements of the presenter who sometimes crosses the border to give advice or reveal small tricks to the competitors. On the other hand, already in the logo (Fig.10), we find this double discontinuity thematised with a fork that divides the two challengers (“Ale” on one side and “against everyone” on the other) and a horizontal band that emphasizes the names and at the same time isolates them (as if to reproduce the distinction between the space of the kitchen dedicated to the challenge and the space of the dining room destined for judgment). It is the discontinuity, therefore, the distinctive feature of the program, as shown also by the shots composed of multiple juxtaposed images (Fig. 11).



Fig. 7: Ale's kitchen, with two symmetrical and distinct stations that emphasize the competitive device of the show.



Fig. 8: The heterotopic space of the sanction where jurors make their judgments on the plates.



Fig. 9: Judges and challengers are placed in two different rooms, separated by a glass door.



Fig. 10: The logo also proposes discontinuity with a fork separating the two challengers and a horizontal band that seems to repropose the separation between the kitchen and that of judgment.



Fig. 11: In some shots, the discontinuity of the juxtaped images chimes with the spatial discontinuity of the study.

In *Cooks and Flames* the studio reproduces a bistro, a place of catering by definition informal and convivial. Multiple sites are obtained within an irregularly shaped single environment, full of different furniture elements. The sites are distinguished from each other thanks to spatial elements. The two competitors are positioned behind two long tables, arranged diagonally and converging towards a vanishing point. This articulation already dampens the competitive mechanism, to emphasize rather a entertainment

and showy value (Hammad 2003). The challengers do not face each other (as happens in *Ale against everyone*), but are directed towards the judges, the studio audience and the viewer at home. Behind the stations, there is a dedicated pantry corner, paratopic supply space, delimited by a transparent curtain. The three judges are in the centre in front of the contestants, placed in a clearly marked position. They are arranged around a red round table, framed by a design with carpet effect on the floor and oversized by a huge design chandelier composed of glasses. Unlike the presenter, the judges are static and the spatial arrangements only emphasize their role as supreme addressees. Behind them, in a scattered order and on different levels, the studio audience, sit at tables set with bread baskets, water, wine jugs, glasses. The irregular arrangement, slightly amphitheatrical, does not produce an effect of disorder, it rather accentuates the informality of the environment. Overall, the sense of non-discontinuity prevails, only weak thresholds signal areas used for different functions (judgment space, performance space, supply space, viewing space). The thresholds can be crossed, and in any case the space is dynamized by the presenter who is always standing, moving, linking the environments and, with them, the actors in play (Fig. 12–17).



Fig. 12: In *Cooks and Flames*, the studio represents a bistro.



Fig. 13: Competitors are arranged on two converging tables and are directed towards the judges and the public.



Fig. 14: The pantry, behind the kitchen station, is delimited by a transparent curtain.



Fig. 15: The central and marked position of the judges.



Fig. 16: The audience in the studio, placed in a scattered order and made to sit in tables.



Fig. 17: Rugiati moves continuously through the studio.

Masterchef is first and foremost a place, a place one wants to enter at all costs, and which one does not want to leave for anything in the world. It is a microcosm accessed through specific rites of passage (rigid selections, delivery of the apron, triumphal entrance through the door etc.) and which you leave through parallel and inverse expulsion mechanisms (inflexible negative penalties, return of the apron, discharge) (Marrone 2013a, 2014b). The spatial articulation of the studio is complex. It is a classic cooking classroom, with parallel rows of equipped stations, a space dedicated to the sanction in which the participants lay their dishes made, a balcony for competitors who at that time are not participating in the competition and a pantry placed in a different room but adjacent to the “classroom” (Fig. 18–21). In addition, the places for the team challenges vary from time to time, but they generally reproduce the same articulations of the studio. Overall it is a space that denies continuity. The competitors, although very close to each other, never invade the seats of others. The pantry is accessible with explicit authorization. At the table dedicated to sanction you go to when summoned (because you have been very good or, on the contrary, very bad). In the balcony there are only some specific categories of competitors and only under certain conditions. Despite its overall unity, the space is well marked and, above all, crossed according to precise and rigid rituals.



Fig. 18: *Masterchef*'s studio reproduces a kitchen classroom.



Fig. 19: At the top, a balcony for competitors not participating at that moment.



Fig. 20: The pantry is located in a room adjacent to the classroom.



Fig. 21: The judgment space.

4. Relax or tension? Question of Rhythms

The temporal dimension flows in a relaxed way in *Benedetta's menus*. Dishes are prepared in a short but not predefined time. There are no tensions of any kind. The flow of the programme is simply underscored by the succession of tests that create a recognizable rhythm for the loyal viewer. The situation is reversed in the last eight minutes, in which Parodi has to prepare the “Salvacena” [rescue dinner] recipe before the news begins. While a stopwatch in plain sight starts the countdown, the protagonist removes her high-heeled shoes, replaces them with more comfortable ballet flats and begins panting. At this stage time becomes central, it is a real antagonist reiterated by the host, marked by the stopwatch, and constantly reminded by a voice-over (often of a member of the Parodi family) inciting and harassing with phrases such as “there is a minute left to the Tg!”, “come on, auntie there are 4 minutes left, you’ll never make it”, “Mom, there are 3 minutes to the Tg!”. The unexpected is always lurking, the difficulty of the task and the stress that comes with it are emphasized so as to be almost caricatured, while the overall atmosphere, on the other hand, always remains playful (in the last seconds even the audience does the countdown aloud, clapping their hands in time, and then dissolve into a smug applause, in what becomes a daily culinary “New Year’s Eve”).

In *Ale against everyone*, chiming with the spatial dimension, we have a binary time: that (predefined) of the only challenge and an open, relaxed and (apparently) indeterminate time for the judgment (in the dining room each juror expresses in a relaxed atmosphere his/her opinion about the dishes). An internal scan of the culinary preparation is given to the accompaniment of music, which is also binary. Each of the two challengers, in fact, chooses a song that is the background to the preparation and matches the recipe. The chef always prefers rock music, families alternate different genres. At the time of the official sanction, however, only the verdict

of the judges is heard, while a musical background and a series of shots/counter-shots are used to highlight the tension between the competitors, in contrast with the relaxation with which the improvised food critics express their opinion.

In *Masterchef* time is an essential component of the challenge mechanism. Each round takes place in a predefined and mandatory time frame. The judges constantly emphasize and verbalize the passing of minutes and, as the deadline approaches, editing, shots and facial expressions insistently emphasize an increase in tension. Each test ends with a ritual. At the striking of the gong the competitors must raise their hands and clap them in the air (Fig. 22), a gesture that marks the end of the round and at the same time is a small positive self-sanction for the work that, for better or worse, has been completed. A timely moment of a reduction in tension that marks the end of the performative-culinary phase and the beginning of the imminent sanction. The crucial importance of this moment is underlined by an episode of the second edition, in which a contestant adds a trickle of oil to her preparation after the gong. This led to controversy among the contestants, moments of great hesitation for the judges called to decide whether and to what extent punish the aspiring masterchef and, above all, popular uprising on twitter, in which more or less ironic messages spread with the hashtag *#oilgate* (“no trace of the #OILGATE on the front pages of the newspapers. Shame!”; “ I admit it: at breakfast I added sugar in the coffee out of time secretly from my wife. #OILGATE”).

At the time of the judgment the tension is raised, once again thanks to a rhythmic switch. Where the first phase showed hurried subjects, busy between frying and cooking, here the judges stretch the time, play with delay, long pauses and suspense, once again underlined by the editing, which create suspense, both in the competitors, and in the audience at home. Where in *Benedetta's menu* the countdown becomes a ritual moment preparatory to the joyful and always euphoric closing of the episode, here the gong marks the passage between two different tensions, based on acceleration (preparation) and slowing down (sanction). The temporal dimension is thus continually fragmented, partitioned, as a musical syncopations, prolonged delays and contracted anticipations that deny continuity to the full service of a strongly passionate discourse.



Fig. 22: End-of-test ritual: At the striking of the gong, the contestants must raise their hands and clap them in the air.

In *Cooks and Flames*, as well as in *Masterchef*, there are a series of time trials, but the temporal dimension, although relevant, is poorly marked and not very verbalized. The clock ticks in the overlay at beginning and at the end of the test. It only marks the beginning and the end of the round, the contenders do not see it, it is a tool available to the presenter and the audience at home. Competitors can count on a few seconds to do their shopping and a few minutes to prepare the dish, but these limits seem more to be linked to the needs of the television medium, than to competitive mechanisms. In any case, time is definitely free from tensive scanning, there are no *hurry-ups* by anyone and, in complete contrast to *Masterchef*, there is a certain flexibility. If one participant finishes before the other, the last to finish is waited for. If the competitors are in trouble the presenter concedes an extra minute to finish the preparation (“I give you 30 seconds more because I love you”), on the other hand, other times he asks to finish early (“I would like, to be proud of you, for finishing a little earlier”). Other times he still plays to the compensation between heats (“if you finish a little earlier, I give you more time for the next round”). In this way the temporal discontinuity assumed by the succession of the different tests is always denied by the presenter who aims rather to establish an overall balance of the episode.

5. Alone or in company: (more or less) convivial cooking techniques

Benedetta Parodi is the undisputed protagonist of the program. She is the only narrator and has an absolutely primary role in the scene. At an actantial level she is a subject, always active. She cooks, gives advice, sets the table, and makes decorations. The “Salvacena” [rescue dinner], after

all, is also a challenge with herself, a challenge that shows the myth of the difficult-to-reconcile thematic roles of the working woman and the woman dedicated to the kitchen and that, punctually, Parodi wins (Panosetti 2013). The level of expertise staged is varied during the episode. When no other actors are present, Benedetta is a fully competent subject, endowed with *knowledge* and *know-how*. The unexpected is always lurking, but the difficulties are overcome without embarrassment in front of the cameras. They are even functional to the narrative construction of the character. Overcoming them with alternative solutions only seals the skill of our darling TV lady. When there are celebrities from the world of entertainment in the studio, theoretically the host should give them the scepter of the subject to play the role of simple helper. In fact, however, she is often forced to restore her role as a subject, taking charge of the situation in front of people who are clumsy and unexperienced in culinary art (and again her role as an expert is strengthened). On the other hand, compared to the regular guests of the show, Parodi has a lower level of knowledge. For example, she does not know how to make cocktails with the bartender, she does not know how to answer the pressing questions of the fish expert when asked how to recognize a hake from a cod. She shows difficulty in tinkering with the floral decorations suggested by the florist and so on. The mechanism is clear: in this continuous oscillation between knowing and not knowing, between teaching and learning, the host also shifts from the role of competent enunciator to that of a curious enunciatee who, just like her audience, wants to know, understand and then replicate. On the other hand, her know-how is never technical, but, in fact, daily. She cares little for the rules of perfect dish, indifferent to the provenance of the ingredient, rather related to the art of arranging, which makes her look like “one of us”, one who does not stand on an unattainable pedestal. This is also why during the preparations she talks of cooking, but also, inevitably, of herself and her private life (“my mother used to cook like this”, “my daughter Eleonora likes this dish” etc.). The complicity with the viewer is a logical consequence of this approach.

Then there is the studio audience who, from being a simple bystander, ends up with an active role in the show. They become the manipulative addressee, encouraging Benedetta, now judges who express judgments (always euphoric) about the dishes, now observers interested in receiving advice, who actually turns out to be informants already equipped with a knowledge (“Benedetta, excuse me, I wanted to ask you: in the batter could you add a little yeast so that the vegetables swell?” — “Yes, in fact, I was thinking about that, too”). Finally, there are the actors while not physically present in the program, still presupposed: friends and acquaintances, but

also simple fans, also engaged in providing suggestions to Benedetta (“this trick was taught to me by that guy”, “this recipe was given to me by that other guy”), also involved in this narrative structure of which Parodi is constructed as a simple spokesperson and in which the kitchen emerges as a depositary of collective cultures to be shared passionately together.

In *Ale against everyone* we are faced with a classic duel. The gauntlet is already launched in the program’s⁵ trailer, where Borghese assumes the role of manipulative addressee who implements a classic program of provocation, questioning the supposed competence of the adversaries. However, the chef, ironically putting himself on the line, is above all an anti-subject, a person against whom the audience can cheer in the name of a glorious victory to be awarded to those who, like the public at home, dream of defeating the renowned expert, the institutionally consolidated competence. On the other hand, the judges, a man, a woman and a child, common people also go against the classic hierarchies, by expressing themselves using a common language and trying to translate their taste sensations (“Of the red dish I like the pasta, how it is made. Of the green dish I liked the way they put it...and that’s it”). The dishes, however, are always both good. It is only the nuances that determine the outcome of the competition. The judges are the lucky winners of a draw among Sky subscribers: being part of the jury then has nothing to do with food discourse, but rather with media discourse.

Ale against everyone therefore stages a self-referential television world, tightly closed in space and focused on the mechanism of the game. On the surface, a tribute to anti-technicism and anti-competence (of judges and cooks). There is, however, in the background a rhetoric that saves the figure of the protagonist. Ale is at a numerical disadvantage compared to the challengers and the judgment, in fact, is not expressed by experts. During the challenge while ordinary people are overconcentrated, the chef is confident, rambling, singing, dancing and even giving advice to his opponents. It is a bit like when adults make children win to make them happy, actually reinforcing their role. Ale (sometimes) loses and pretends to be sorry in front of people who are in principle not very competent.

In *Masterchef*, the challenge is more complex, both in the number of participants involved and in the types of skills required. The players in the game must demonstrate competence, creativity, and cold blood. They must be able to create dishes from a certain number of ingredients (Mystery box), they must know how to cook a certain cut of meat or a certain fish

⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZvMpjgIRbU>.

(Invention test), they have to recognize on sight the weights and names of vegetables, spices or cheeses (Pressure test), they must be able to work in teams (Team challenges). They must know cooking techniques, ingredients, preparation times, principles of hanging, in short, over the course of the episodes, they must construct and prove their skills as great chefs.

The competitors are the main actors of the program. They are initially presented for their thematic role (lawyer, policeman, vet, housewife etc.), but over time we learn to know pathemic propensities (the arrogant, the whiner, the sensitive, the playful etc.) and character traits (there are those who show themselves loyal to a companion they consider a friend, those who have no scruples in doing the dirty on a colleague, etc.). Sometimes we discover some details of their private life, but this in the advanced stages of the program and never in terms as accentuated as in other reality shows focused on the passionate dimension and for this defined *emotainment* (think of *Surprise! Surprise!*). The contestants are not only the heroes of this tale, they are also, the addressees of themselves. They constantly reiterate a self-induced manipulation based on the *wanting to do* (“I want to become masterchef”, “I do not want to go out today, because I want to win this program”) that over-determines the one based on the *having to do* dictated by the judges (“for this test you have to prepare this”, “you have to prove you are up to it” etc.).

The competitors are very different people, but they all share a common dream — that of becoming a masterchef — and are all characterized, at a passionate level, by a certain amount of ambition, when not by real arrogance. In a kind of confessional, they always say that “they want to win”, “they will not go out”, “they will make it”, without ever questioning their skills. Skills possessed partly a priori (strict selections allow access only to those who already know the fundamentals of culinary art), partly developed on the go, during the show. The development of the *knowing* and the *knowing-to-do* of the competitors is a *conditio sine qua non* for remaining in the race, but it is not thematized, it is not discussed. The participants do not train as in a real talent (think of programs like *American Idol*, in which the training occupies a relevant space), we never see them in class, and the judges themselves are not even mentors. Yet, in the course of the program, one realizes that there is a kind of gradualness in the challenges. In the very first episodes, for example, the competitors are asked to peel a big amount of potatoes in a certain way, demonstrating a kind of basic pre-competence. In the last episode the future masterchef and his deputy must prepare a top meal inspired by the principles of haute cuisine. A path, in short, aimed at building the figure of the *gastromediatic hero* and that assumes, without

staging it, an exponential increase in skills. It is as if we were shown an accelerated apprenticeship that in a way contradicts that rhetoric of slowness, of starting from the bottom to get to the top with dedication and patience that all great chefs, after *Masterchef*, are increasingly bothering to emphasize.⁶

From a cognitive point of view, the tactical-strategic dimension of the game is given to us by the confessional space or the voice-over. Thanks to these explanatory moments, the viewer becomes an accomplice to the character, learns to know him and to know his motivations that might otherwise seem unreasonable. Thus, the competitor who during the Invention test can choose the ingredient that everyone will have to prepare, decides not only on the basis of his propensities and abilities, but also (and perhaps above all) considering the weaknesses of his most fearsome opponents. In this way, he/she builds a simulacrum of the antisubject; a game, on the other hand, perfectly understood by the unfortunate challenger on duty.

In an episode of the second edition, Tiziana, who later, not surprisingly, was to be crowned *Masterchef*, wins a round that gives her the advantage of knowing in advance some secrets of the recipe that everyone will have to cook during the next test. As a skilled strategist, she starts trying to think about what her opponents will do (they will try to copy her), and then sets in motion a staging to throw them off. The dish in question plans to pass the shrimps through the oven for a few minutes, and for this reason the lawyer decides to fry the shrimps and store part of them which she will put them in the oven only in the last few minutes. She sets in motion a lie, makes a certain culinary technique seem appropriate when it really isn't. The other participants, knowing that Tiziana has the advantage, try to peek and emulate the steps of her and begin to fry the shrimps and resoundingly blunder the dish. Despite this, Tiziana will rank second after Maurizio, who will be rewarded "for the passion put in the realization of the recipe".

⁶ To read in this sense Bottura's judgment, that programs such as *Masterchef*: "They do not push to understand the importance of apprenticeship, but they delude themselves on shortcuts that do not exist in this hard work. You have to know how to pull the pastry with the humility and strength of the women of the past who invented pastries with crumbs because there was nothing else to eat, and do not ask to master all the matches in a short time. It angers me to know that my gas stationer wants to leave the job to spread out on TV." Or think, again, of Massimiliano Alajmo's statements that the "bad TV teacher" is "that of shows that disguise themselves as competition, in which dishes and recipes actually serve to talk about something else... They show shortcuts. They deceive the public: the spectator is told 'You can become a great cook, you can earn, you become famous, you write books. You just have to defeat an opponent in front of a camera.' Mere performance... you get the idea that the kitchen is that stuff there."

A particularly interesting sequence that perfectly shows how the key to becoming a masterchef is always in this complex balance between passionate and cognitive regimes, between purely culinary skills and generalized *savoir faire*.

Then there is the trio formed by Cracco-Bastianich-Baribieri, multi-starred chefs, incurable seducers, cynical judges of the competitors who make negative comments and are short on compliments. The competence of the judges is solid and absolute. They cognitively analyze the the flavor and decompose the dish in reverse (“you feel the aftertaste of...”, “the consistency is not right”, “the skin comes off easily and therefore the cooking time is appropriate”). They use technical language, by assumption, and even just by looking at the result, they are able to trace the merits and defects, to explain the reasons for any errors. They stage a sanction that starts from the cognitive regime, from a predefined grid of gastronomic values, and then moves on to the sensory regime, based on perceptions. In other words, they base their judgment on the *tasty*, on the figurative recognition of elements, putting in parentheses the *flavorful*, i.e. that synesthetic, multisensory perception which escapes culturalized classifications (Marrone 2013b). Or they do not talk, they taste, they nibble and let their bodies speak with disgusted facial expressions, dishes pulled in the air, spits, gestures of contempt. Just as it is the body that incorporates the food, in the same way it is the body that speaks and emits sanctions (Fig. 23–25).



Fig. 23: Somatic sanctions: Bastianich fails to ingest the dish by the competitor.



Fig. 24: Negative sanction is expressed through a facial expression of disgust.



Fig. 25: The dish pulled in the air summarizes the negative judgment.

In *Cooks and Flames* the two competitors compete by alternating preparations that usually trace the typical sequence of a menu (they start in the first round with a starter or a first course and end in the fourth round with a dessert). The four tests follow a chiasm organisation. The skill in the kitchen, meant as the real realization of a recipe, is in fact shown in the second and third tests (proof of skill and creativity), whereas the other two challenges concern respectively a kind of pre-competence to prove and the presentation. The first test, in fact, that of manual ability, consists in creating a

calzone with a ready-made dough, frying a squid, in short, demonstrating a basic *know-how* that will later be taken for granted. The last test, that of presentation, consists instead in creating a dessert that the judges will not taste, but will simply evaluate for its outward appearance. In this sense, each episode of *Cooks and Flames* summarizes the path of construction of the gastronomic hero that in *Masterchef* unfolds throughout an entire season: from the zero degree of manual skill (which in *Masterchef* we find in the first episodes), to the construction of original dishes, to finish with the taste combined with the visual aesthetic (as we have seen, the aspiring *Masterchefs*, in the course of the episodes, present increasingly refined dishes). A rhetoric of talent built through hard work, is contrasted with one of talent as a quality naturally possessed (innatism).

The jury is mixed and has a varying degree of competence. It is composed in fact of a food and wine critic, and therefore a technician, a food blogger, whose authority is not institutionalized, but legitimized by his being social and trendy, and an actor with a passion for food, therefore, like the public at home presumably, a simple enthusiast. The judges are never extremely critical, they always manage to grasp something good in the dish. They express themselves with an informal language that only for very brief moments becomes specialized and even the final vote, written with the marker on the table and expressed on a scale from one to five, does not seem to interest anyone much. They mainly speak in terms of subjective expressions, not configured as a logical result of steps correctly performed by competitors, but rather as an interweaving of perceived tastes and personal propensities (“granted that I am a great fan of this fish and in these preparation it brings out its best [...] If I think of the ‘diavola’, I think about the taste I’m feeling right now in my mouth... it’s yummy”, are, for example, the words of the food blogger Chiara Maci). During the rehearsals, the judges chat with the host, talk in light-hearted terms about cooking, their experiences, make jokes, and tell their own stories about how they would have prepared the dish in question. In this way, their role fluctuates between that of an accomplished judge and potential competitor, between current intended expert and acting subject in power. The game show mechanism is tenuous and goes along with a talk show effect.

The presenter is a good host who puts everyone at ease. He talks to the jury, but also to the contestants. He shows an interest in their private lives and tries to favor them in every way. He is not an addressee, but an accomplice helper who provides both legitimate aids (each competitor at each episode can ring a bell and ask Rugiati to do something in his place), and illicit help (he adds a little salt out of time pretending not to be discovered,

he proposes alternative solutions in the face of inconveniences, he takes ingredients from the pantry that the competitors have forgotten etc.). As for the temporal dimension, a certain flexibility emerges that brings the program closer to *Benedetta's menu* and differentiates it considerably from the rigidity of *Masterchef. Cooks and flames* is the realm of tension-free competition, of relaxation, of the pleasure of the game. Just as he helps the challengers, Rugiati also helps viewers by providing them with recipes, reiterating that the program also serves to show that “you can prepare good dishes in a short time and at a low cost”.

6. A pleasure to watch and a sense of cooking

Benedetta's menus is almost a tutorial, enriched by narrative elements aimed at engaging the public. In order to reinforce the cookbook-effect, after the live demonstration given by the host, there are summary tables with the necessary ingredients, accompanied by a vocal summary synchronized to explanatory images (Fig. 26). In general, it is the denial of precision that dominates. The host often expresses herself with the conditional (“I would add”, “I would season with a little oil”), dampening the figure of the omniscient cook-presenter and nourishing this effect of coarseness.



Fig. 26: The summary tables of the recipes prepared.

Gastronomy is not an exact science. You can actually make fun of haute cuisine and the principles that underlie it (the fish expert at one point pours a sauce into a dish in a completely random way and says “I put it like this, haute cuisine style...” and Parodi replies, “What a fool, and I’m also listening to you!”). Culinary art is the art of arranging, of showing a bit of *bricoleur* creativity (“I used instant baking powder for salty cakes, but if you don’t have one you can use other kind of yeast, the one with vanilla. Just put a teaspoon of it... it is not that you feel a lot the taste of vanilla.”), both in the creation of recipes and in the decoration of the table, for which they often use recycled materials (sheets of old disused books, piggy banks already

used). There is no need to worry about the use of a frozen ingredient, nor does the presentation of the dish seem to matter much. Complicity with the audience at home is assured. They are comforted by seeing situations similar to those in the home (unexpected events, hassles, challenges against time), seduced by being able to consider themselves on a par with an expert (moreover belonging to the world of entertainment), involved in a tantalizing proposal of reversal of attantial roles (sometimes Benedetta makes recipes suggested by the listeners, becoming herself a mere executor). The audience watches to replicate and Parodi is a presenter who can dictate the basic principles of culinary literacy. The space-time continuity of the program runs parallel to the continuity between presenter and audience, to the flexibility required in the kitchen, and to the fluidity of daily life. Television and the outside world stand on the same plane and almost overlap.

In *Ale against everyone*, the priority is not so much food discourse, but rather media discourse, centered on the playful mechanism and treated in ironic terms. The irony already emerges in the program's launch commercials, which are based on parodies of western films and mafia films,⁷ in which culinary tools replace guns and revolvers. Cinematic quotes are also rich in the episodes, with the host who, just before launching the challenge, at each episode says: "At my signal, unleash hell!", with an obvious reference to *Gladiator* (Scott 2000). Typically the program's introductory text is trailed as well:

"He is handsome, he is young, he is technological, he is the most rock chef in Italy. In the kitchen he is strict, demanding, precise and creative, but all this is no longer enough for him. He wants the challenge, and families are ready to challenge him. A single kitchen — a chef on one side, a family on the other — two different preparations of a single dish, the one chosen by the family. Which one will be the best? A jury of cooking enthusiasts will decide. Who's the chef? But it's him, Ale... Ale against everyone! Will the families be able to beat him?"

Alessandro Borghese is defined and loves to define himself as a "rock chef". As we have seen, music plays a key role in the program, not just as a background, but actor co-star, along with food, of each episode. It is a way to sympathize with the challengers (who make themselves known thanks to their tastes, food and music together), an identity mark of the Borghese brand (it also plays a certain importance in his other programs), and is used as a way to engage and retain the audience. Viewers can, in fact, try

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZvMpjgIRbU>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iv05ryFwbGE>.

to guess, thanks to a series of clues scattered on social media, the song chosen by the host for the episode of the day. It is a perfect convergent and cross-platform culture that aims on the one hand to praise the media machine, on the other to consolidate the image of the chef by building intermedial coherence (Jenkins 2006).

On a superficial level, *Ale against everyone* carries on the myth of good cuisine within everyone's reach. As we have seen, simple enthusiasts replace the star chefs of *Masterchef* in the judgment of taste and ordinary people can defeat established chefs. This good-natured rhetoric of the anthem to the beginner is, however, somewhat disavowed in favor of the construction of a figure of a chef who knows how to play. He is someone who can afford to start from a position of disadvantage and yet win in most cases, who disjoints and is shown to have fun precisely because at the end of the day he knows he is superior. It is the television mechanism, the game for game's sake, the construction of who is more and more media oriented and less and less culinary that is fundamental.

Also in this case, the discontinuity that we found in the spaces and times of the program finds a perfect reflection in the conception of a clear break between television and the outside world. The rules of the game serve to provide for fun during the episode and have nothing to do with what is outside. Ordinary people are there, heroes for a day, in a fantastical extra-ordinary world that works precisely because it is a momentary escape. Ale does not want to help the viewer to cook, he simply wants to entertain them. The same tension staged when the jury's verdict is expected it is mocked, disproportionate to what is at stake.

It is by this pervasively ludic mechanism and by the cognitive superiority that lies ahead of them that the audience is seduced. Along with the implied enunciator of the program, the audience is the only one to be endowed with full knowledge. They know more than the judges (i.e. the backstory that occurred during the preparation) and they know more than the competitors (knowing in advance the comments of the jurors). They enjoy the pleasure of omniscience, a bit like Columbo's fan who knows in advance who the murderer is. The viewer cares about knowledge, knowledge of the game, knowledge of the television mechanism, not culinary know-how.

Denying what happens in *Benedetta's menus*, in *Masterchef* the competitive spirit reaches its apex and the cookbook-effect is diminished, indeed cooking almost ends up vanishing. Suggestions about preparations are segregated in *Masterchef Magazine*, a daily strip and the appendix of the program. The episodes never contain any advice or suggestion about preparations to the audience at home and the only culinary notions, which

emerge incidentally at the time of sanctions, are of a high level. Here, too, as in *Ale against everyone*, the spectator is involved by the mechanism of the game. However, as often happens in reality shows the horizontal narrative line, i.e. the link between one episode and the other, introduces a *soapizing* dimension that invites the viewer to continue watching, episode after episode (Demaria, Grosso, Spaziante 2002; Grignaffini 2008). In order to determine this fictional effect the more and more specific focus on the competitors contributes, as well as the exclusion of the audience from the story (there are no interpellations, the cameras are not shown, it is the editing that leads the narrative etc.).

Contrary to what happens in *Ale against everyone*, the game does not remain confined to the media arena. What counts also, and perhaps above all, is “what comes next”, how all the competitors will manage their promising future. The “reality”, so to say, despite being visually not very present, is always there, presupposed and looming. “Would you behave like this if you had a restaurant?”, “We wish you to continue because you proved to have talent”, the judges insist. There is a rift between TV and the world, but this rift is not clear-cut. The world is something else, but it exists and is contemplated, at least as an assumption, in the television narrative of *Masterchef*. The game has its own rules, its own defined limits, but not everything ends with the end of the program, competitors can become TV stars, established chefs or fall back into anonymity.

Cooking is considered an exact science, it involves technique, but also strategy. Inventiveness and creativity are placed at the service of a cognitive dimension, which must try to prevail over everything else and, in particular, on some passions: never panic, never exaggerate, never flaunt excessive arrogance, never give up. It is the rhetoric of fatigue, of rigidity, of being constantly tested, of falling into mistakes and learning to stand up without help. The program tells us about the hard work of a chef (Giannitrapani 2013b).

In *Cooks and Flames*, the good-natured, relaxed atmosphere of the actors involved overshadows the mechanism of challenge and play. Rather than bitter competition, it is a confrontation, in which both participants are always good, in which the food discourse is a pretext, a topic of conversation, a cue to activate interpersonal relationships in a convivial atmosphere (as convivial as the atmosphere convened by the bistro). Familiarity becomes the identifying feature of the program. It pervades all relations and cancels out hierarchies. The presenter becomes a helper of the challengers and of the audience at home, he descends from his pedestal almost cancelling out his superior competence. The judges simply express opinions, they dispense votes over

the sufficiency and, at the end of the episode, they go out to meet the contestants starting to chat before the images fade to the credits.

The viewer is also very familiar with the show, not only because of the convivial atmosphere, but also because they are so familiar with the rituals of the episode that he ends up knowing inside out. For example, they know that Rugiati during the second test will first speak with one competitor at a time, making them explain the recipe they are making, then he will approach the judges and make them say what they would have cooked, if they were in the place of the participants. In the meantime he will provide a recipe himself, then he will talk again with the competitors, but this time of their private life and so on. Even the beginning of each episode is punctuated by a ritual formula: “One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well”. A quote by Virginia Woolf that is also an anthem to nourishment as a source of energy, as a daily routine, an indispensable prerequisite of any activity.

Cooking within the program is relaxed. It is a pleasure to create and to stage what you normally do in everyday life. Thus, the TV and external world are, if not overlapping, at least on the same wavelength, hence the attempt to highlight a utility component of the program that joins the ludic mechanism of the game (in one episode a contestant thanks Rugiati for a suggestion and he replies: “Of course! I do it more than anything for those gentlemen who are behind that camera there and who want to take the recipes home”. In another episode a judge says that the program is a kind of “visual aperitif” that makes you want to cook at home and Rugiati goes on to say “also because you see that with 10–12 minutes of time you can cook well, spend little, eat healthily and especially with taste”), which is also a clear cookbook-effect (Rugiati provides one or more recipes during each episode, fig. 27).



Fig. 27: Summary of the recipe provided by the presenter.

In short, the viewer becomes attached to *Cooks and Flames*, enjoys the relaxed atmosphere, watches and, if he or she wants to, can also replicate what he or she sees, and is pleased to see his or her expectations met in a game in which the important thing is to participate and everyone, after all, is a winner.

So, *Ale against everyone* bets a lot on the game, *Benedetta's Menu* encroaches on edutainment, *Cooks and Flames* drifts towards the talk, while in *Masterchef* there are contaminations with TV series. Each program plays at hybridizing different genres and differs from the other in the ways we have partly shown. Thanks to these differences the audience of passionate telegastrospectators increases and the trend of food on TV continues to rise, feeding from and on the social sphere.

Summing up the differences between the programs we will have:

	<i>Benedetta's menu</i>	<i>Masterchef</i>	<i>Ale against everyone</i>	<i>Cooks and Flames</i>
Space	Home (continuity)	Classroom (non-continuity)	Television studio (discontinuity)	Bistro (non-discontinuity)
Time	Fluid and relaxed (with counterpoint of the Salvacena)	Strongly punctuated, rigid syncopated	Binary	Flexible and poorly punctuated
Judges and sanction	Studio audience (always clapping)	Star chefs (somatic or cognitive sanction)	TV and cooking enthusiasts (non-technical sanction)	Technicians and enthusiasts (euphoric sanction, opinions)
Conductor's role	Subject	Addressee	Antisubject	Helper
Viewer	He wants to replicate	He wants to watch	He wants to enjoy the challenge	He wants to look and, at the occasion, replicate
Cookbook-effect	++	--	-	+
World/TV relationship	Conjunction	Non-conjunction	Disjunction	Non-disjunction
Culinary values	Cooking as the art of arranging	Cooking as a gastronomic science	Cooking as a pretext to play	Cooking as relaxation, pleasure to create and to get involved

7. Beyond TV

As a conclusion, we would like to focus on this last aspect: TV shows go beyond the boundaries of the screen. They circulate in society, they are transformed with and thanks to it. Therefore, we ask ourselves: what happens to these texts when they begin to circulate in that bubble of sense that is the semiosphere? And what quotes, direct or indirect, are triggered in these transfers? Let's take some examples.

Not only was *Masterchef* one of the most tweeted television programs ever, but also one of those that has generally been talked about the most. On March 10, 2013, *Repubblica* published the news of Carlo Cracco apologizing to a couple of customers of his Milanese restaurant dissatisfied with a service that was not up to the name of the place. The chef had no choice but not to charge the bill to his customers, apologizing to them through a note (Fig. 28) which was promptly reported (and relaunched in social media) by newspapers and blogs. In the transition from the television world to the extra-media world we see a reversal of attantial roles. The Michelin-starred chef becomes a simple operator, moreover not very competent, while the role of sadistic judge is transmitted to ordinary people. The customer is always right, even the greats make mistakes and so Cracco can soften the rigidity of his character.

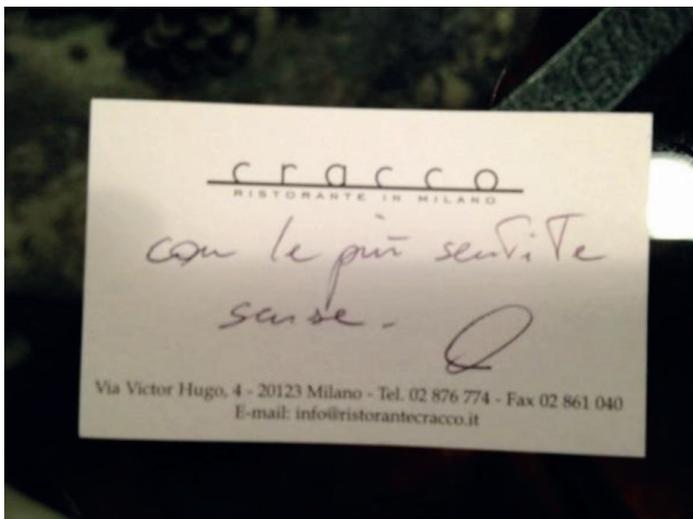


Fig. 28: Cracco's apology ticket in response to complaints from some customers.

If this example shows a character who focuses on an identity made up of small variations that, by contrast, strengthen character, in other cases the focus is instead on an identity created by difference. As we have seen, Alessandro Borghese is defined and likes to define himself as a “rock chef”, thus quoting Davide Oldani’s “Pop” so well-known in the restaurant world. The musical theme is retained, but reversed in terms of references and consequent effects of meaning. It is perhaps no coincidence that Oldani himself has been called to take the field in the gastronomic television arena for *The Chef*, another culinary talent.

Every great Italian TV chef then seems to be inspired by (or having his own double in) an American model, from Parodi who explicitly mentions Nigella Lawson among her models, to the easy parallel between Cracco and the even more ruthless Ramsey. It was then easy to foresee that the Italian management of *Hell’s Kitchen* was entrusted to Cracco, who will ride even more in the footsteps of his overseas twin. The developments of media personalities are perhaps appreciated in America, where Ramesy, pioneer of the gastro-television indigestion, presents, in addition to *Kitchen Nightmares*, also the similar format *Hotel Hell*. Here the protagonist tries to improve not a restaurant, but, precisely, an accommodation facility. The competence widens, the role migrates, the intermedial character is so ingrained that he can abandon his primary field of action, the kitchen, to demonstrate instead his organizational-managerial skills.

Finally, there are cases which do not remain strictly in the media sphere, but become socio-semiotic in their own right, demonstrating in fact the complex interactive connections between what happens on TV and what happens outside it. In a protest against the *Culinaria* initiative, organized by the City of Rome in the old covered market of Garbatella, a banner was displayed with the words “Masterchef in televisione. Sul mercato decide il rione” [Masterchef on television. On the market the neighborhood decides] (Fig. 29). Or, again, it is no coincidence that several newspapers report a boom in enrolments in hotel school as a *Masterchef* effect. Because, as it is well known, the various gastromanias complement and strengthen each other.



Fig. 29: Banners protesting against an initiative of the City of Rome.

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