

3. Living Food Heritage, the Experience of Taste, and the Discursive Construction of Authenticity

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Abstract

[EN] This contribution offers a theoretical-philosophical and semiotic reflection on living food heritage, starting from the experience of taste and from its aesthetic, cultural, ethical, and discursive articulation. The central hypothesis is that food heritage can be reduced neither to a repertoire of typical products nor to a static archive of practices to be preserved unchanged. Rather, it should be understood as a dynamic process of transmission, incorporation, recognition, and resignification, in which sensible experience, cultural memory, social practices, and processes of meaning-making continuously interact. From this perspective, food does not function merely as nourishment or as an economic object. It activates pleasure, knowledge, memory, rituality, sociability, belonging, and relations with territory, making possible a form of embodied experience through which history and culture are also internalized. Taste therefore represents a privileged threshold for understanding the living character of food heritage. Drawing on the philosophy and aesthetics of food, the article considers gustatory experience as a stratified practice in which perception, education, memory, and cultural knowledge contribute to the recognition and valorization of food. Tasting a product may thus become a form of cultural ingestion, insofar as the experience of flavor opens onto the material and symbolic world that makes that product possible: landscapes, techniques, forms of labor, rituals, memories, and collective practices. In this sense, living food heritage does not coincide with the final object alone, but also with the practices and relations through which it continues to be produced, transmitted, and experienced in everyday life. At the same time, the article situates this reflection within the field of food semiotics, considering food as a culturally organized system of signification. Culinary practices,

taste, conviviality, naming, and representation contribute to constructing the value and recognizability of food, while also determining what may appear authentic, traditional, local, or representative. In dialogue with semiotic approaches to culinary objects, taste, sociability, and food discourse, the analysis therefore considers heritage as a process in which material practices become culturally intelligible and transmissible. A further line of inquiry focuses on the discursive construction of authenticity. Through the notion of the absent referent and an interpretive use of several Derridean concepts concerning naming, generalization, difference, and the archive, the article examines how food discourse can select, foreground, conceal, or simplify the elements that participate in the construction of heritage. Such concepts are not treated as theories originally developed for food semiotics, but as interpretive tools for analyzing the selective effects of discourse and the ways in which labels, narratives, branding, and processes of authentication organize the visibility and cultural value of food. Ultimately, the article argues that living food heritage should be understood as a relational and dynamic field in which experience, memory, tradition, discourse, and visibility are continuously negotiated. Authenticity, accordingly, does not correspond to an immutable origin or to a pure repetition of the same, but to a situated and dynamic continuity through which practices and meanings remain recognizable while continuing to transform.

Keywords: *Living food heritage, Semiotics of food, Taste, Authenticity, Cultural memory.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, food heritage has emerged as one of the most significant sites in which questions of identity, culture, territory, and tourism intersect. Food, indeed, is no longer conceived merely as a nutritional resource or an economic product, but as a symbolic device capable of narrating places, communities, traditions, and memories. From this perspective, therefore, speaking of living food heritage does not mean referring to a set of fixed objects to be preserved in an immutable form, but to a web of practices, knowledge, gestures, rituals, narratives, and daily reactivations through which food continues to produce meaning.

This is precisely where the theoretical problem of this contribution is situated. In what sense can food be understood as heritage without being rigidified into a museum-like or purely celebratory form? The hypothesis guiding these pages is that living food heritage is constituted in the intertwining of experience and discourse, embodied practices and processes of signification. Food becomes heritage not only because it preserves memory or evokes tradition, but because it is lived, recognized, named, and transmitted within cultural frameworks. Taste therefore opens onto pleasure, knowledge, memory, conviviality, and territory, while discursive practices select and make visible certain elements, leaving others in the background and contributing to what appears authentic, traditional, or representative.

Within semiotic research, food has long represented a privileged field for investigating the ways in which cultural values, distinctions, and identities become organized through sensible materials and practices. From Lévi-Strauss's analysis of culinary transformations and table manners to Greimas's reading of the «soupe au pistou» as the construction of an object of value, food emerges not as a mute substance but as a culturally organized field of signification (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1968; GREIMAS 1983). More recent studies in the semiotics of food have further emphasized how preparation, consumption, taste, discourse, and convivial practices participate in interconnected processes of meaning-making (MARRONE 2016). Living food heritage can therefore be approached as a semiotic process in which material practices become culturally recognizable, transmissible, and negotiable.

The methodology adopted is theoretical-reflective and develops through a dialogue between the aesthetics of taste and the semiotic analysis of food-related

processes of signification. The first dimension concerns the philosophy of food experience, especially in relation to the notions of pleasure, knowledge, memory, tradition, and everyday life (PERULLO 2016: 49, 115, 118). The second concerns the performativity of language and the role of naming practices in the symbolic construction of reality, with particular attention to the device of the absent referent elaborated by Carol ADAMS (1990: 90-93), here reread in a discursive key, and to several Derridean nodes connected to the *animot*, *différance*, the archive, and processes of generalization (DERRIDA 1996; 1997; 2006).

Such an approach responds to the need to treat taste and discourse as intertwined dimensions of food heritage. Taste emerges within aesthetic, ethical, and cultural coordinates, while language participates in organizing experience, selecting what deserves attention and making objects available for recognition and valorization. Food heritage can therefore be understood as the site in which lived experience takes discursive form and discourse, in turn, shapes transmission and re-elaboration.

Starting from this framework, the contribution develops in three movements. The first reconstructs taste as an experience that exceeds nutrition and opens onto knowledge, memory, and cultural ingestion. The second explores food, tradition, territory, ethics, and everyday life as dimensions of a living practice. The third focuses on discourse in the construction of authenticity, showing how language may preserve and transmit but also conceal, generalize, and symbolically consume. The overall aim is to show that living food heritage is both embodied experience and semiotic-discursive construction.

2. Taste as an experience, beyond nutrition

2.1. Pleasure, knowledge, and the stratification of gustatory experience

One of the most persistent difficulties in thinking theoretically about food heritage concerns the long philosophical devaluation of taste. In the Western tradition, it has often been relegated to an inferior rank, too close to the body,

need, and contingency to be recognized as a site of knowledge. From this derived a double marginalization, that of taste in relation to other senses considered more noble and that of food in relation to cultural objects deemed more worthy of reflection. And yet, precisely what for a long time justified its devaluation allows us to understand its theoretical specificity. Its proximity to the body, to ordinary life, and to the concrete intake of the world makes taste a privileged threshold through which to question the relationship between experience, memory, culture, and signification.

From a semiotic perspective, this revaluation also means treating taste not as a private sensation, but as a culturally organized form of meaning. Greimas's analysis of the «soupe au pistou», for instance, shows how a culinary object acquires value within a network of practices, relations, and cultural codifications rather than through its sensible properties alone (GREIMAS 1983). In the same direction, the semiotics of taste emphasizes how perception and signification are intertwined within culturally mediated practices of preparation, recognition, and consumption (MARRONE 2016).

In this direction, taste cannot be reduced to a simple physiological act. It involves pleasure, perceptual education, habit, comparison, recognition, and memory, opening an experiential field that does not remain confined to the sensory instant, but extends into a form of relation with the world (PERULLO 2016: 49, 115, 118). The pleasure that accompanies eating, indeed, does not coincide with pure instinctual satisfaction. It orients preferences, produces judgments, recalls memories, constructs expectations, and disposes the subject toward what it takes in. Even when it manifests itself in an immediate form, it never remains entirely closed in on itself. Every tasting introduces a trace, every flavor leaves an imprint, every alimentary encounter modifies at least in part the way in which a body learns, selects, and remembers.

Reducing food to its energetic function therefore leaves out a decisive part of alimentary experience. Food enters the body already accompanied by cultural frameworks, expectations, narratives, and affective sedimentations. Its everydayness, far from diminishing its philosophical relevance, is precisely what makes it theoretically productive (PERULLO 2016: 49). Taste should thus be understood from ordinary life rather than ennobled by distancing it from it .

Gustatory experience, moreover, is not exhausted in immediacy. It can transform itself, deepen, acquire thickness, passing from direct pleasure to a

more complex form of relation with food. Perception becomes refined, memory thickens, knowledge intervenes and makes visible qualities that cannot be grasped without exercise. Alongside the most immediately describable characteristics of a food, there are others that require attention, comparison, sensitivity, and learning. The balance, harmony, finesse, persistence, and character of a dish or a wine are not given as purely objective data, but emerge within a formed experience, capable of recognizing articulations that would remain mute to a hurried gaze or tasting (PERULLO 2016: 82-83). It is in this sense that taste can also become knowledge. Not only because it allows one to distinguish better, but because it brings one into contact with the world that the food carries with it.

Cooking, from this point of view, does not simply produce edible objects but organizes a practice in which gesture, sensitivity, technique, care, and knowledge converge. Eating a dish prepared with precision and sensitivity can arouse emotion, curiosity, and a transformation of perception. Rather than assimilating cooking to the arts, this means recognizing that alimentary experience can activate cognitive and affective processes that exceed the mere use of the object (PERULLO 2017: 22-27, 57).

Within this framework, the link between taste and memory assumes a decisive role. Flavor is not only what is consumed in the present, but what can reactivate sedimented temporalities, restoring presence to apparently distant worlds. The Proustian reference to the madeleine makes this dynamic exemplary. The taste of the sweet dipped in tea does not remain confined to immediate sensation, but opens a passage, bringing back to the surface a past that was not available to consciousness in voluntary form (PROUST 1913). Food thus shows that it preserves an embodied memory, capable of re-emerging through sensibility and of restoring to presence bonds, places, affects, and atmospheres. If food heritage is living, it is so also in this sense, because it continues to live in the flavors that pass through bodies and in the memories that such flavors reactivate.

2.2. From tasting to cultural ingestion

Taste does not open only onto memory, but also onto a form of knowledge that may be defined as cultural. It is here that alimentary experience encounters

the theme of heritage in a particularly incisive way. Tasting, indeed, does not refer only to the sensible quality of a product, but may lead toward the territory from which it comes, toward the history that made it possible, toward the technical gestures that transformed it, toward the social practices that accompanied its production and consumption. Food is not simply something that is consumed, but something that is interpreted, learned, and incorporated. This passage from sensible experience to cultural meaning also recalls Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis of culinary practices, in which food transformations and table manners operate as systems through which a culture organizes differences, relations, and forms of social intelligibility (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1968).

Here the idea of cultural ingestion becomes useful. Knowing a food means not only recognizing its flavor but entering into relation with the culture it conveys. Eating can become an embodied access to the world of the other: the gastronomic journey is not merely a consumption of difference but an experience of place through flavors, techniques, materials, rhythms, and rituals (DESCARTES 1637: 77).

From this point of view, the connection between food and landscape is particularly eloquent. A product never refers exclusively to individual taste, but to an intertwining of geographical, climatic, historical, and social factors that orient its form. The case of wine is, in this sense, emblematic. It carries with it the territory, the conformation of the soil, the climate, the cultivation techniques, the methods of harvesting, and the material and symbolic culture of a community. Knowing wine therefore also means knowing the landscape that generated it and the forms of life that accompanied its production. Flavor thus becomes the vehicle of a memory of place, and taste is transformed into a way of entering into relation with a historically situated geography.

In light of all this, food heritage cannot be reduced to a brand, label, or abstract distinctive sign. If, indeed, food is the site of cultural ingestion, heritage does not coincide only with the final product, but with the set of conditions, gestures, techniques, and relations that this product summons. It includes the hands that cultivate, the knowledges that transform, the landscapes that affect the matter, the times of maturation, the practices of sharing, the forms of work and waiting. Food does not represent a culture from an external position, but makes it pass through the body of the person who tastes.

It is also for this reason that a gastronomic reflection cannot be limited to

the abstract flavor of food. To question food means asking where it comes from, which hands cultivated, transported, transformed, and cooked it, which material and symbolic conditions made it possible. What is tasted is always more than taste itself. It is a constellation of practices, relations, and worlds that flavor makes perceptible to those who know how to dwell in the experience without consuming it too quickly (PETRINI 2017: 318-319). From this perspective, living food heritage is not a simple repertoire of products, but the sensible and cultural continuity of a set of forms of life.

2.3. Indifference as a critical threshold

To fully understand the living character of food heritage, however, it is not sufficient to dwell on pleasure and knowledge. It is also necessary to consider that threshold of experience in which food tends to be reduced to function, to fuel, to an opaque presence that does not deserve attention. Indifference, in this sense, does not coincide with a total absence of experience, but with an impoverished form of the relationship with food, in which perceptual thickness, cultural resonance, and ethical questioning diminish (PERULLO 2016: 115, 118).

This is what happens, for example, when eating is conceived in exclusively instrumental terms, as occurs in some practices strongly oriented toward performance, efficiency, or control of the body. In these cases, food may appear as pure gasoline, as functional support, as a ready-to-use object, separated from its own history and context. Such an approach, although understandable within certain logics, tends however to neutralize food, to deprive it of memory, territoriality, and relationality, thus predisposing a form of generalization that makes it easier not to see what that product implies. When eating becomes only function, it becomes easier not to see the work in the dish, the territory in the ingredient, the living being in the meat.

Indifference, moreover, is never entirely neutral. Even where food seems reduced to pure utility, deep symbolic codes, cultural narratives, and social associations continue to operate. The very opposition between virilized foods and devalued foods, between foods associated with strength and foods perceived as weak, shows that eating always remains traversed by representations that exceed its merely functional dimension (ADAMS 1991;

2006). Indifference, therefore, should be understood as a historically and culturally situated form of inattention. It does not erase meaning, but allows it to operate without being questioned.

For this reason, living food heritage also requires a struggle against indifference. Transmission alone is insufficient: heritage remains alive only insofar as it is experienced with attention, memory, and openness to its relational thickness. When food is reduced to pure function, heritage risks becoming opaque, repeated without being inhabited.

3. Food, tradition and territory, heritage as a living practice

3.1. Conviviality, rituality and transmission

If taste opens memory and knowledge, food heritage also takes consistency thanks to the repetition of shared practices. Food is inseparable from conviviality, rituality, and the times and rhythms through which a community organizes its own life. Preparing, serving and consuming food does not only mean satisfying a biological need, but also inhabiting a social grammar, taking part in an order of gestures, recognizing occasions, marking transitions, consolidating belongings. In this sense, food heritage is inseparable from the forms of life that transmit it. This relational dimension is also central to Landowski's semiotics of taste, which situates gustatory experience at the intersection of *esth  sie* and sociability, thus emphasizing that tasting acquires meaning within modes of interaction with others and with the sensible world (LANDOWSKI 1998).

The experience of taste is often inscribed in shared practices and ceremonial devices. A cup of tea, a festive meal, or a codified way of serving can turn a minimal gesture into a site of cultural transmission. Eastern ritual practices linked to tea show this clearly: what matters is not only what is drunk, but the gesture, rhythm, posture, attention, and memory involved (LAM KAM CHUEN 2002). Sensory practice thus condenses discipline, belonging, and continuity.

This makes it possible to clarify that food heritage never coincides with an abstract recipe or with the final result alone. What is transmitted is rather the concrete becoming of the practice, its rhythm, the way in which a gesture is reiterated, corrected, refined, learned. One does not inherit only a product, but a way of preparing it, sharing it, waiting for it and recognizing it. Heritage is living precisely because it cannot be separated from the bodies that perform it and from the relations that make it meaningful. It is not a static deposit of formulas, but an embodied memory that is renewed every time someone repeats that gesture, reactivates it and, in doing so, slightly transforms it. For this reason too, food knowledge very often passes through doing, imitation, proximity and attention to detail. The gesture and the discourse that accompanies it are not truly separable. One learns by observing, repeating, correcting, staying beside those who already know. It is in this concrete, situated transmission that food heritage most clearly shows its living character. Every attempt at protection or valorization that reduces it to a simple external description therefore risks losing something essential, since what must be preserved is not only the content of a practice, but also the way in which it continues to be inhabited (LEROI-GOURHAN 1964-1965).

3.2. Territory, ethics and forms of the living

Thinking of food as living heritage also means removing it from a purely aestheticizing vision. The link between food and territory does not concern only the charm of the landscape or the seduction of authenticity, but involves the material and ethical conditions of production. In this sense, the questioning of food cannot stop at the pleasantness of flavor or at the evocative force of tradition, but must extend to the concrete forms of the relationship between humans, environment and other living beings.

The idea that the pleasure of eating cannot be separated from responsibility toward the earth, toward those who cultivate and toward modes of production is decisive, because it prevents food heritage from being transformed into a simple tourist image detached from the real conditions of its existence. A heritage can truly be called living only if it remains connected to sustainable practices, to non-destructive relations with the environment, to conditions of production that do not silently consume its material bases (PETRINI

2017: 14-16, 143-148). Otherwise, valorization risks becoming a form of abstraction, capable of symbolically celebrating what, on the concrete level, it contributes to eroding.

Here too, taste performs a relevant theoretical function. If food is understood in its experiential thickness, it becomes more evident that pleasure, knowledge and ethics are not independent spheres. What we eat does not offer us only sensory satisfaction, but carries with it the way in which it was produced, the relations it activated, the consequences it implies. Living food heritage does not preserve only flavors, but a certain idea of the relationship between bodies, places, environment and living beings. For this reason, defending a heritage does not mean simply preserving its image or prestige, but questioning the conditions that make it just, habitable and transmissible.

The ethical dimension intensifies further when one takes into account the fact that food heritage does not exist in a historical vacuum. Phenomena such as waste, the hoarding of resources, ecological pressure and productive acceleration directly affect the very possibilities of continuity of traditional practices (MUSELLA & VERNEAU 2017). Even the product most closely linked to a territory and to a local memory is now inscribed within global networks of pressure that modify its conditions of existence. Speaking today of living food heritage therefore means asking, following Petrini (2017: 147-153), how it can remain such without becoming complicit in forms of devastation that compromise its material bases. In this sense, heritage is not simply something to celebrate, but something to rethink critically within the limits and urgencies of the present.

3.3. The symbolic force of everyday life

A decisive trait of living food heritage consists in its rootedness in everyday life. Unlike many other cultural goods, food is not limited to being observed or visited, but is prepared, shared, ingested, incorporated. It enters bodies, marks the times of the day, structures ordinary occasions and recurring events. Precisely this proximity can make it invisible, make it appear banal or secondary. And yet it is precisely in daily repetition that food heritage preserves an essential part of its symbolic force.

Every repeated gesture, a handed-down recipe, a beverage prepared according

to a certain rhythm, a food linked to a particular occasion, a flavor that signals arrival in a place, renews the relationship between memory and present. Heritage lives not only in celebratory moments, but above all in the micro-practices that allow a food culture to continue to exist without needing to make itself exceptional. Continuity does not depend on the monumentalization of food, but on its permanence in the ordinary forms of life.

It is precisely the philosophical revaluation of the everyday that makes this point visible. Ordinarieness does not impoverish taste, but restores to it its place within a reflection on food capable of recognizing its theoretical density. Applied to heritage, this intuition leads to an important outcome. The living character of food heritage does not depend on its exceptionality, but on its capacity to remain incorporated in normal, repeated, apparently minor practices (PERULLO 2016: 49). Where a culture continues to cook, taste, share and recognize certain flavors, heritage remains alive even without immediately taking on the solemn form of celebration.

From this also follows a critical consequence. Preserving, in the case of food, does not mean fixing a form once and for all, but allowing a set of practices to continue to produce meaning without being separated from its vital context. A rigidified heritage risks turning into an image, into a normative repertoire, into a simulacrum of authenticity. A lived heritage, instead, remains practice, relation, experience, memory in act. The passage from tradition to heritagization is therefore always delicate, since it can protect and valorize, but can also abstract, simplify and normalize. Keeping open the connection between heritage and everyday life thus becomes a fundamental condition for preventing its musealization.

4. Language, authenticity and the discursive construction of heritage

4.1. Food heritage as an effect of discourse

If food heritage lives in experience, then it also takes shape in discourse. No food becomes traditional, typical, authentic or representative without also

being narrated and signified as such. There is always a symbolic work that selects, stabilizes, valorizes and makes certain traits recognizable, making them appear particularly significant. Authenticity, from this point of view, cannot be understood as an immediate given, but must be thought at least in part as an effect of language.

This does not mean that everything is arbitrary or purely constructed. It means, rather, that the material and sensible dimension of food never enters social space alone, but always arrives accompanied by discursive frameworks that orient its perception and value. To say that a product is true, genuine, local or traditional already means placing it within a grammar of recognition. For this reason, food heritage does not coincide only with a deposit of practices, but also with a form of representation.

From this perspective, the concept of the absent referent elaborated by Adams is particularly useful. Language, indeed, can transform a specific entity into a generic object, making it more easily available for symbolic and material consumption through processes of objectification, fragmentation and generalization (ADAMS 1990: 90-93). In the case of meat, for example, the concrete animal is removed from discourse and replaced by terms that erase its singularity. Reread in a broader key, this mechanism allows us to grasp a decisive aspect also for food heritage. Every narrative of food selects what must remain present and what can be left in the background. Some elements are highlighted, others attenuated, still others excluded from the scene of representation (GRANDI 2022: 178-181).

Reflection on the connection between consumption, domination and the erasure of the living makes it possible to broaden this analysis further. Food never presents itself as a neutral object. Even where it appears as a simple available good, it carries with it power relations, criteria of valorization, forms of exclusion and dynamics of naturalization (ADAMS 1991; 2006). This is particularly evident when the authentication of a product ends up concealing precisely what makes it possible, from material labor to technical mediations, from the bodies involved in the supply chain to the historical tensions that traverse its production. Food heritage also lives from these subtractions, these silences and these simplifications, which do not annul its value but show its discursively constructed nature.

4.2. Visibility, concealment and generalization

Applied to food heritage, the device of the absent referent makes possible a critical reading of forms of authentication. When a food is elevated to an identity symbol of a territory or a community, the question always arises of what is shown and what is withdrawn from visibility. Every shared image of the product, indeed, implies a selection. The work that makes it possible, the technical transformations that have modified its form, the contaminations that have traversed its history, the economic tensions that condition its circulation, and the conflicts that accompany its official definition may remain at the margins.

The strength of heritage also consists in the capacity to produce recognizable and shared images. However, precisely this strength can translate into a particularly effective simplification. The typical product may appear as a pure and immediate expression of the territory, while awareness of its historicity, of the mediations that have shaped it, and of the processes of adaptation and exchange that traverse it is attenuated. Authenticity, then, is not opposed to construction. Rather, it constitutes a particularly persuasive form of it, capable of presenting itself as original.

Derridean reflection is used here as an interpretive tool rather than as a theory originally developed for food semiotics. Its relevance lies in making visible the selective effects of naming: the way in which discourse organizes differences, produces categories and, in doing so, can reduce heterogeneous singularities to apparently homogeneous identities. Applied to food discourse, this perspective makes it possible to interrogate how names, labels and narratives of authenticity organize the intelligibility of a product before its material consumption. Naming does not merely record reality, but can compress a multiplicity of singularities within abstract categories that make them uniform, administrable and more easily available to certain logics of power. The reference to the *animot* shows this passage clearly. An irreducible plurality of living beings is enclosed in a word that makes them uniform, levels them and delivers them to an order of discourse that neutralizes their difference (DERRIDA 2006: 46, 71; 2008; 2010). Something analogous can also happen to food heritage, when the category that names it ends up replacing the concrete richness of its variants, its gestures, its contexts and its bodies.

The problem of the archive is also connected to this dynamic. Every operation of conservation does not merely preserve, but orders, selects, hierarchizes, establishing what can be remembered and what will remain marginal (DERRIDA 1995). Heritagization functions in an analogous way. It decides which version of tradition must prevail, which traces deserve to be made accessible, which practices must be recognized as legitimate and which, instead, are destined to weaken in the shadows. In this light, authenticity cannot be thought as self-sufficient purity. Every culinary tradition is traversed by alterity, translations, contaminations, exchanges and differences that inhabit from within its presumed compactness (DERRIDA 1996; 1997).

4.3. From naming to symbolic consumption

The question, however, does not concern only concealment. Language also participates in a process of valorization that makes certain products consumable in a broader sense than the material one. What has been made anonymous, available, separated from its own singularity and its own history is more easily consumed (ADAMS 1990: 90-93). Extended to food heritage, this intuition makes it possible to understand how food heritage too may sometimes be consumed as image, as territorial sign ready for branding, tourist promotion or a rapid use that does not require a real contact with the living practices from which that sign emerges. This process has a specifically semiotic dimension. Fabbri, reflecting on the transformation of food within mass culture, emphasizes the role of advertising and mediated representation in manipulating alimentary signs and renewing the image of products, to the point that food increasingly circulates not only as substance but also as sign (FABBRI 1991). In this sense, branding does not merely communicate an already constituted culinary object: it participates in constructing its value, visibility and cultural recognizability.

Eating, in this sense, is never a purely natural act. It is a gesture charged with alterity, relation and responsibility. Every alimentary consumption implies a taking of position with respect to the living, to territory, to bodies and to the conditions that make what is ingested possible. Precisely for this reason, heritage can be both an occasion of knowledge and a form of neutralization. It can open a sensible and cultural access to a community, to a memory and

to a place, but it can also be reduced to a valorisable image, to an elegant and simplified sign, ready for a symbolic consumability that leaves in the background the density of the practices from which it comes.

In this framework, fragmentation acquires particular importance. It should not be understood only as material division, but as a discursive operation that breaks certain chains of meaning, making one part emerge and obscuring others. Following Derridean *différance*, where the referrals that would connect the product to its history, to labor, to the living, to the tensions of production and transmission are interrupted, what remains becomes more easily readable, marketable and celebratable. Heritage authentication then appears marked by a structural ambivalence. On the one hand, it makes a cultural good recognizable, protects it, valorizes it, favors its transmission. On the other, it can produce an abbreviated version of its meaning, more available to celebration and consumption.

4.4. Toward a dynamic notion of authenticity

In light of what has emerged, authenticity must be thought in dynamic terms. It does not coincide with fidelity to an immobile origin, but with the capacity to maintain a significant relationship between experience, memory and transformation. A food can remain authentic not because it repeats itself identically, but because it continues to be recognizable within a living web of shared practices, knowledges, relations and narratives.

From this derives a double critical need. Food heritage must be removed both from pure commodification and from an excess of normative fixation. In the first case, food is consumed as an emptied image, made available to a rapid and standardized valorization. In the second, it is rigidified in a prescriptive form that weakens its vital context and reduces its capacity to transform itself. In both cases, something of its processual nature is lost. Recognizing the centrality of gustatory experience and, at the same time, the constructive force of discourse instead makes it possible to imagine another path, that of a heritage that remains alive precisely because it is practiced, incorporated and continuously resignified.

One could then say that food heritage is not simply what a culture possesses, but what a culture continues to do, taste, remember and narrate. Its living

status depends on the circulation between body and language, between gesture and memory, between sensible presence and shared narration. In this oscillation, food heritage preserves its force, avoiding both dissolving into pure consumability and rigidifying into a simulacrum of tradition. Authenticity, in this perspective, is not the immobile reproduction of the same, but dynamic fidelity, the capacity to keep open a significant continuity between what has been and what continues to transform itself.

5. Conclusion

The path developed has sought to show that living food heritage cannot be adequately understood if it is reduced to a collection of typical products or to a simple identity narrative. Food becomes heritage, in a strong sense, when it is thought as embodied experience and as a practice of meaning. Taste indeed opens onto a complex constellation of pleasure, memory, knowledge, ritual, conviviality, ethics and knowledge of territory, while heritage takes shape within discursive devices that name, select, authenticate and, at times, conceal.

From this point of view, food heritage is neither an immobile essence nor a purely arbitrary invention. It should rather be understood as a relational and dynamic process, in which sensible materiality, cultural memory and symbolic construction are intertwined. The idea of cultural ingestion has made it possible to highlight that food offers a peculiar form of access to culture, since what is tasted is never only food, but also territory, history, gesture, labor, belonging. In parallel, recourse to the device of the absent referent has made it possible to clarify that every food heritage is also the result of operations of visibility and invisibility, through which some dimensions are celebrated and others left at the margins.

Thinking of food heritage as living means, then, removing it both from a purely museal logic and from a purely mercantile logic. Its vital character does not depend on the fixation of an original form, but on the possibility that practices, knowledges and memories continue to be experienced, inhabited and renegotiated in the present. In this sense, authenticity should not be

sought in a presumed immobile purity, but in the dynamic continuity between tradition and transformation, between experience and narrative. Food heritage lives as long as it remains capable of being eaten, remembered, shared and newly signified.

Such a conclusion is coherent with the theoretical horizon within which living food heritage is discussed today. If it is truly a space traversed by tensions between mythologization and living practices, between strategic narratives and everyday uses, then the theoretical task does not consist in resolving such tensions once and for all, but in showing how they constitute heritage itself. Food heritage does not remain living despite these dynamics, but precisely through them. It is in the continuous negotiation between memory and present, between territory and translation, between experience and discourse, that it maintains its cultural force. For this reason, a philosophy of food heritage should not limit itself to celebrating its symbols, but critically question the processes through which they continue to form, transform and ask to be inhabited.

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