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Memory and the Quest for Authentic Foods

Authenticity is an evaluative term, and to claim that a food is authentic is to offer an independent reason to enjoy it. But, what makes a food authentic and what is attractive about authenticity? In this paper, I offer some considerations on authentic foods in the attempt to address these questions.

I start by distinguishing the meaning of 'authenticity' when referred to foods from the meaning of the term when used to connote individual agency, including both single actions (e.g. a musical performance) or a more general lifestyle. In doing this, I stress the importance of the social dimension of authentic foods, ultimately rooted in a widespread memory of a recipe and in an appreciation for it.

Hence, I move to consider the relationship between the two meanings of 'authenticity' when it comes to authentic foods. Specifically, I argue that authentic foods, in order to be reproduced and enjoyed, call for authentic individual choices. I do so by pointing out three reasons why authentic foods typically elude any tentative of being pinned down through well-defined, fixed recipes. The reasons deal with the multiple origins, indefiniteness, and the multiple societies that may enjoy the recipe for an authentic food.