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What Is a True *Ribollita*? – Memory and the Quest for Authentic Food

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Abstract – The paper muses over what makes a food authentic. The suggested answer builds over the dual – collective and individual – character of recipes. First it is argued that recipes typically have a collective origin and a collective nature, evolving over time and thus creating a tradition. On the other hand, it is showed that each dish requires an interpretative effort on the part of the cook and, at times, of the table companions. Ultimately, a food is deemed authentic only when prepared and enjoyed in a way that is at once creative, inspired by an appropriate insight of the tradition, and carried on with the intention of prosecuting it. Finally, it is contended that a judgment of authenticity rests upon the opinion of a collectivity of people who are appropriately acquainted with the food. The last section offers some remarks concerning the authenticity of industrial foods.

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1.

From Taste to Authentic Foods

When musing the taste of a food, we ought to keep separate its physiological from its epiphenomenal character. The *physiological character* of a food is the bodily phenomenon accompanying a tasting experience, that is that complex event involving a wide array of bodily organs, including the brain. Taste, under this perspective, is a chapter of physiology: its features can be measured, recorded, and compared by the use of a wide array of instruments. On the other hand, the *epiphenomenal character* of taste is concerned with its purely experiential aspects: those that a subject goes through while eating and of which she can become aware by patiently directing her attention towards her 'inner states'.

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The two characters are epistemically independent. Well before scientists were able to explain what goes through one's body while – say – indulging over some fine chocolate or sipping a glass of precious wine, humans engaged in heated disputes regarding the worthiness of their 'inner' experiences. At the same time, one may study the physiological aspects of taste for her entire life, but never introspect what she goes through while eating. A judgment concerning the physiological character of taste is typically an 'external truth': what grounds such judgment is open to public and can in principle be tested by anyone; for this reason, I shall also call it a third-person judgment. A judgment concerning the epiphenomenal character of taste is an 'internal truth': it eludes the world of phenomena that lies open to public access; its source is the first-person experiential realm, and any third-person information typically strikes as foreign to it.

With this I am not ruling out the possibility that the two characters be existentially entrenched: perhaps the epiphenomenal aspect could not exist without the physiological one being in place; perhaps they are but one and the same event devised through different (and maybe irreconcilable) perspectives. What I am claiming is that we may gather information about one character while ignoring the other, and that this we have done in the past. This is – too – a practice possibly subject to change: perhaps in the future our judgments regarding the epiphenomenal aspects of taste will by and large incorporate physiological concepts (which tendency can already be detected).

The two characters play different roles in aesthetic judgments. Now, any form of judgment, because of its very own nature, can be expressed only by means of some concepts. When it comes to providing an aesthetic judgment about a given food, the physiological character provides a limited range of conceptual resources. It is certainly relevant whether our

experience is being pleasingly 'misguided' by additives whose goal is to trick our taste buds; but, a full appreciation of a food requires a good deal of considerations that are foreign to third-person discourse. The epiphenomenal aspects of taste, on the other hand, fill in for some precious information. This will not be limited to the so-called sensorial perceptions, such as those expressed in the concepts 'hot', 'textured', or 'sapid'. Concepts that more overtly wear a social origin on their sleeves are part and parcel of the epiphenomenal vocabulary as well, such as 'exciting' or 'boring', 'exotic', and 'authentic'.

Finally, when judging of the aesthetic worthiness of a food, most of us do not limit ourselves to its appearance and taste. From time to time, considerations that exude these aspects and delve into what I will label the *background information* may come in handy: Is it meat, fish, or vegetable that we are eating? Who produced *it*? Under what conditions? Who is selling it to me and how did it get *here*? Will I be able to consume it in its entirety? How will it affect my body and temper? How will it affect others'? What environmental changes may ensue? Is this a one-time exceptional situation or is this really a *routine* meal?

In this paper, I concentrate on a specific aesthetic concept: authenticity. Roughly speaking, when we deem a food as authentic we reckon that some of its qualities are appropriately connected to a certain tradition. The ability to spot authentic foods has gained much momentum in latest years along with the globalization of cultures and the constant quest for novel or exotic foods.¹ If told that what you are served is not authentic, your experience – even if epiphenomenally pleasant – may suddenly lose its thrill. But, what does it take for a food to be authentic? Or, how to tell authentic from non-authentic foods?

The answer suggested in the sequel builds over the dual – collective and individual – character of recipes. First it is argued

¹ See, for example, (Heldke, 2003).

that recipes typically have a collective origin and a collective nature, evolving over time and thus creating a tradition. On the other hand, it is showed that each dish requires an interpretative effort on the part of the cook and, at times, of the table companions. Ultimately, a food is deemed authentic only when prepared and enjoyed in a way that is at once creative, inspired by an appropriate insight of the tradition, and carried on with the intention of prosecuting it. Finally, it is contended that a judgment of authenticity rests upon the opinion of a collectivity of people who are appropriately acquainted with the food. The last section offers some remarks concerning the authenticity of industrial foods.

2.

Making Ribollita: Milieu and Evolution

Let's start our inquiry with an example, a traditional dish known as *ribollita* (which in Italian stands for: 're-boiled'), originated within the agricultural society of central Tuscany (a region in central Italy). Here is a preliminary version of the recipe.

A Ribollita's Recipe

Ingredients

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ✓ Cannellini beans; | ✓ One cauliflower; |
| ✓ A bunch of parsley; | ✓ Three Swiss chard leaves; |
| ✓ A bunch of celery; | ✓ A few string beans; |
| ✓ One red onion; | ✓ A few green peas; |
| ✓ Two carrots; | ✓ Two or three zucchini; |
| ✓ [Pancetta]; | ✓ Two potatoes; |
| ✓ A quarter of a black <i>nero</i> | ✓ 1 kg of stale rustic bread; |
| cabbage; | ✓ Salt; |
| ✓ One Savoy cabbage; | ✓ Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO); |

Preparation

- Cook the cannellini beans in a separate pot, with a substantial amount of broth;
- In a pan, warm up some EVOO and add parsley, celery, onions and carrots finely chopped;
- (Richer variant: cook for a few minutes, then add pancetta);
- Cook for a few more minutes, then add all other vegetables;
- Cook for about fifteen minutes;
- As the food thickens, add broth from the cannellini pot;
- Cook for about one hour;
- Slice the bread in thin slices and simmer each slice in the soup's broth;
- In a large clay bowl, distribute the stewed vegetables so to create an even layer; cover the layer with the simmered slices of bread; then place another layer and cover; repeat until the bowl is filled;
- Let the whole thing sit for at least one day, then warm up in a pan with just a little of EVOO and serve warm.

I got this recipe from my mother, who learnt how to make *ribollita* from my grandmother, who in turn had apprenticed with her mother in law ... Yet, is this recipe authentic?

Besides a long-standing acquaintance with the dish, I chose this example as it patently embodies two key traits of a recipe: its *milieu* and its evolution. Central to the first is a community of people who created, exchanged, and passed on to future generations the recipe. At times, the recipe may play a key role in keeping the community together; other times, this function is played by geographical, religious, political, or cultural factors. The *milieu* of a recipe is, hence, that web of agents who share it.²

We shall stress since now the collective nature of recipes. Indeed, most times recipes do not have *an* inventor – who invented *prosciutto*, or *mozzarella* or *jambalaja*? Most importantly, even when we have a name, the recipe's identity is not necessarily fixed by that act of original creation. Suppose that Francesco Procopio dei Coltelli was indeed the inventor of ice-cream; certainly, the standard of authentic ice-cream departs from his original recipe in a number of respects: from the basic ingredients to the tools that are used to produce it. The reasons why such changes are tolerated

² As we shall see later on, we could here say that the *milieu* of a recipe is a web of agents who share a certain practice.

lies in the fact that the authenticity of a recipe calls for creativity. We shall come back to this issue more below.

As a connected community of people will typically inhabit a homogeneous territory and use its resources to nourish its members, a *milieu* typically ends up being associated to a relatively small region. *Ribollita* is associated with central Tuscany; other examples include recipes such as *cacciucco* (a fish soup typical of Livorno, Italy) or *alheira* (a sausage made with a number of meats but pork typical of Mirandela and, more generally, inland northern Portugal) as well as items whose *milieu* is enforced by law, like Parmigiano Reggiano, Vinho do Porto, or Champagne. Regardless of the origins, however, the boundaries of a recipes' *milieu* can be quite indeterminate without undermining its status. *Pizza margherita*, Italian-style vanilla ice-cream, cheddar cheese are examples of recipes whose *milieu* is arguably scattered throughout the earth. On a par with the communities that create them, food *milieus* are not stable through time: they can spread, merge, or collapse. Sometimes they spread so much and for so long that the *milieu* of a recipe is no longer confined to a well-defined territory.

As the rate with which people, their practices and ideas travel around the globe grows faster, recipes' *milieus* come to be less and less identified with a specific territory. Some regard this as a threat to the preservation of authentic culinary traditions; by moving out of a region the identity of the ingredients would change, and hence the recipe. I believe, however, that our culinary traditions prove this opinion wrong. *Pizza Margherita* – to cite and example – arguably counts as a specific recipe; according to some, it was invented in 1889 by Raffaele Esposito during a visit of the Queen Margherita of Savoy; indeed, today *pizza Napoletana* has been bestowed the *status* of Traditional Speciality Guaranteed within the European Union. However, since 1889 the recipe has traveled the world, and it has lost its original *milieu* despite the efforts of some to keep it tighter. Thus, not only we have a boundary between a *pizza Margherita* prepared in accordance with the Neapolitan recipe and one which is not; there is a boundary also between a generic *pizza Margherita* and what such a thing is not. More generally, as migrants carry their ideas and practices with them, they adapt these to the new environment. As we shall see, not every adjustment of a recipe should be deemed as legitimate; however, sometimes location may be forgone in the presence of an appropriate insight.

This discussion brings us directly to the second trait of a recipe I wish to stress: their evolution. On a par with ideas, fashion, and societies at large,

recipes change through time. If you go around Tuscany asking for 'the' *ribollita* recipe, you face substantial variety: nearly every person will proudly proclaim to have *her own version* of the recipe – and it is likely that, unless you are close to her, she won't give it away to you that easily. My aunt, for example, despises the use pancetta (and has a few more tricks she won't reveal ...); my grandmother used prosciutto and added a prosciutto bone to the broth. Indeed, it can be imagined that, as a recipe spreads out, differences grow great. It's a matter of creativity, which is called to re-interpret others' ideas and – often – one's own history too.

At the restaurant “Da Delfina” (located on a gentle, green hill in Artimino, near Florence), Carlo makes a (state of the art) *ribollita* that is strikingly parsimonious in its use of EVOO. He argues that the *ribollita* recipe originates from a *milieu* where EVOO was very precious and, for that reason, the use people made of it at the time was tight. As he aims to be in keeping with the practice of the community within which *ribollita* first originated, he sticks to their use of it. (Fittingly, one of the rooms of the restaurant was once an EVOO deposit and still bolsters an inscription remarking the preciousness of EVOO: "A.D. 1704. This vase was made to collect the oil being *this great* rotten, and in it [vase] [oil] should be often collected, and any time that this happens it should be cleansed so that the oil will be good. It was finished on June 10 of the above mentioned year at the time of Gio. Ristorini.")³

On the other hand, people in Massarella – a town of a few hundreds inhabitants also sitting on a gentle hill and still in the province of Florence – hold on to a different creed. Since 1971, each year they host a “*Sagra della Zuppa*”, that is a festival of the *zuppa di pane* (literally: 'bread's soup'), the dish from which *ribollita* is then derived. And their version is not so frugal in the use of EVOO. Most of the *massigiani* (thus are called the town inhabitants) are or have been farmers; when I questioned them regarding their version of the recipe more than one argued that the use of EVOO they make is in keeping with its availability: “If our ancestors would have had this much EVOO, they would have used it too; hence, our recipe is in keeping with the gist of the traditional recipe, even if departing from past practice.”⁴

³ "A.D. 1704. Questo vaso fu fatto per racorre in esso l'olio essendo guasto questo grande et in esso si deva racorre spesso et ogni volta che è raccolto si deve ripulire perché così l'olio sarà buono. Fu terminato il dì 10 Giugno del suddetto Anno al tempo di Gio Ristorini." I thank Carlo and Valentina for, respectively, letting me use the quote and passing it along to me.

⁴ It should be said that my mother and grandma would agree with this. On my part, I'm still undecided. On the one hand I'm attracted by the end result of Carlo's interpretation, as it sits

Things change, and to keep track of their identity through time is often a tricky business. Our very own lives are not much different. As Maria grows older, differences with her past stages accrue; is *she* really the same person as before? Or, think about the evolutionary history of biological organisms (probably the most fitting analogy with recipes). Any new cell and any new generation produce small differences, that with time may give rise to substantial changes. When does a speciation event occur? So is with recipes: as they are passed along, varieties multiply and at some point we are faced with our question – Should *this* recipe be considered authentic?

3.

Disruptive vs Legitimate Modifications

We are slowly entering into the heart of our question. We acknowledged that recipes have a specific *milieu* and that they evolve with time. Authentic foods embed that constant struggle between past and future, tradition and innovation; their interpretation not only is an exercise in historical creativity, but it mirrors how we position ourselves within society as well as our social status.⁵

Yet not any change, not any interpretation can go. Some are *legitimate*, while others are plainly *disruptive*: this is the distinction I wish to introduce now. Recipe modifications such as the ones elected by Carlo or by the inhabitants of Massarella seem to belong to the former category; for an example of the latter, let us turn to an example coming from a well-known American 'food star', Rachel Ray. Here is the recipe she gives for *ribollita*, borrowed from her website (choices departing from a more 'standard' interpretation of the recipe are in italics).⁶

Rachel Ray's Recipe:
Ribollita in 30 minutes!
Ingredients

well with the need some of us have to limit the fats/calories intake. On the other hand, a part of me wants to give in to that temptation – EVOO tastes good! I guess, for now, it may come down to the occasion, i.e. to the table companions and the overall meal menu.

⁵ These issues have been insightfully discussed in (Bourdieu, 1984).

⁶ <http://www.rachaelraymag.com/Recipes/rachael-ray-magazine-recipes/rachael-ray-30-minute-meals/Ribollita>.

- ✓ 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO)
- ✓ 4 thick slices pancetta (not smoked) *or bacon (smoked)*
- ✓ 4 to 6 garlic cloves
- ✓ 1 medium to large onion
- ✓ 2 medium carrots
- ✓ 1 medium zucchini, thinly sliced into rounds
- ✓ Salt and freshly ground pepper
- ✓ 1/2 cup dry red wine (a couple of glugs)
- ✓ *One 15-ounce can petite diced tomatoes*
- ✓ *{Several vegetables missing}*
- ✓ *6 cups beef stock (such as Kitchen Basics brand, available in boxes)*
- ✓ 4 cups chopped or torn stale bread (about 1/2 pound)
- ✓ *Two 15-ounce cans small white beans (smaller than cannellini beans), such as Goya brand*
- ✓ 4 cups chopped kale or chard
- ✓ *1/2 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese*
- ✓ *10 leaves fresh basil, torn*

Preparation

- *Heat a soup pot over medium-high heat. Add the EVOO (3 turns of the pan), then add the pancetta and cook for 4 minutes. Add the garlic, three-quarters of the chopped onion, the carrots and zucchini and season with salt and pepper. Cook the veggies for 7 to 8 minutes, then add the wine to deglaze the pot. Stir in the tomatoes and stock and bring up the heat. When the soup boils, reduce it to a simmer and stir in the bread and beans. Pile the greens into the pot and wilt them into the soup.*
- *Simmer the ribollita for 5 to 10 minutes, stirring the soup as it simmers, until it thickens to a dense stewlike consistency. Turn off the heat, adjust the seasonings and ladle into shallow bowls. Top each bowl with some of the grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, an additional drizzle of EVOO, a spoonful of the reserved raw onion and some basil. Pass around the remaining cheese at the table.*

Rachel Ray's version of *ribollita* diverges from recipes such as those offered by Carlo, the *massigiani*, or my family's in a number of respects. There are some key vegetables missing; Parmigiano, which is not quite specific to the *milieu*, was added to the mix; but, most remarkably, the preparation is quite different. The usage is to let the *zuppa di pane* sit for at least one night before being enjoyed; and the *ribollita* is but a *zuppa di pane* which has been re-

heated according to a certain procedure; how can Rachel Ray prepare a *ribollita* in thirty minutes?

Clearly, Ray is targeting her recipe to a cut of American society, whose lifestyle would probably prevent the introduction of such a time-consuming recipe as the one of *ribollita*. Her operation, in this sense, mirrors the society within which she operates, interprets its needs, and aims at introducing some new practice in it. But, the question still stands – is Ray's a legitimate interpretation or is it disruptive? More generally, this seems to me the major challenge to any explanation of what makes a food authentic: *How to tell a disruptive from a legitimate modification?*

To answer this question, we need first to consider a more general problematic, namely: What is a recipe?

4.

Recipes as Eating Practices

In order to answer this question we may start dissecting the concept of a recipe. Thus, we would recognize three components to any recipe:

- i. *Ingredients;*
- ii. *Preparation;*
- iii. *Setting.*

The ingredients can be individuated at a more or less fine-grained level; a quick look at packages in any supermarket would reveal that the metaphysics of food is not always carried on at the same 'ontological level'; some packages, for example, would just say 'flour', while others would specify the kind or origin. And, there are even those who claim that some key ingredient lie at the subatomic level.⁷

Similar considerations apply to the preparation. While some can limit themselves to few generic indications, others have requirements that involve even the materials of pots, pans, and utensils, or their brand.

Finally, the setting is an elusive concept. It includes the time of the day, of a week or date (e.g., breakfast food or Christmas food); the type of place, such as home, restaurant, pic-nic, airport, field, wood ...; any utensil, such as brick oven, metal knife, strainer ...; the table companions – family

⁷ See especially the research on nanopathologies carried on by Antonietta Gatti and Stefano Montanari, as in (Gatti and Montanari, 2007).

setting, romantic setting, fast food setting, co-workers; and the atmosphere – rustic, elegant, lounge ...

It would be futile, however, to try and nail down a list of the aspects for each recipe. Firstly, because it would be difficult to do so (even for a specific realization of a recipe). For example, in the ingredient list my mother gave me for the *ribollita*, no specification of the type of salt was made, nor of the variety of potato or swiss chards: should these items come from a specific region? What characteristics should they have? What if these varieties will go extinct or interbreed with other varieties? ... While to fill in *many* details for the purpose of generating a memory may be very useful, to fill in *all* the details would pose questionable restrictions over the cook's creative process. Secondly, a list would render most modification either illegitimate (if we regard it as an entity whose identity is fixed once and for all) or, conversely, legitimate. In other words, what a recipe is cannot be pointed out by providing a cluster of necessary and sufficient conditions specifying exactly which ingredients, actions, or settings are proper. A judgment of authenticity is an overall assessment of a food, whose standards are subject to revision as the recipe evolves.

For these reasons, I would like to take a much more pragmatic stance and defend the view that *a recipe is an eating practice*, which embodies multifarious aspects of a community's life. Thus, if we want to define whether a recipe is authentic, we have to evaluate whether the practice *tout court* that we are confronted with is authentic. So, now the question becomes: How to evaluate whether an eating practice is authentic?

5.

Traits of Authenticity: Memory and Authentic Interpretations

Bearing in mind that it is the practice as a whole that we are to evaluate, let us now delve more into the hodge-podge of tradition and innovation that confronts us when we wish to prepare an authentic recipe. First of all, as a tradition is a form of collective memory, we shall say more about the kind of memory embedded in a recipe. We shall, then, take up on the means of innovation proper of recipes, rooted in the transient nature of food that renders the re-enactment of a recipe an exercise in creativity. As we shall see, however, not any creation will do: besides appropriately carrying forward a memory, the authentic food will also reflect an interpretation of the dish which is 'true to the circumstance.' My ending proposal will hence be that

authentic dishes are products of authentic interpretations that aim at re-enacting certain memories.

On the one hand, the practice embedded in a recipe functions as a multi-level *memory*. By 'memory' here is intended a piece of information that an agent is (in normal conditions) *capable* to retrieve. The information may both take the form of a third-person or of a first-person judgment. By playing an active role in an eating practice (as a cook, server, or table companion), an agent can bring back to mind her past experiences and sensations; but, the practice is also a re-enactment of the actions of those who no longer exist, a way to reconnect with them and with their environment.

Of momentous importance, in this context, is the memory which is involved in the cooking process. Much of the information embedded in a recipe is not only descriptive, but also practical (in baking recipes there may be, in proportion, much more descriptive information than there is in cooking recipes). We encounter here a key aspect of an authentic recipe, namely that the memory it carries forward has to be transmitted not only through a book or a story, but also through an appropriate apprenticeship. In order to learn how to prepare an authentic food, a teacher who is an authentic cook of the recipe is then needed. *Authentic foods are only those that are prepared by following a practice learned also through an appropriate apprenticeship.*

When it comes to table companions, the practice embodied in an authentic food may pose less severe requirements. But, it would be a mistake to look upon them as petty. First of all because table companions need to have some basic knowledge of the practice they are engaging in, if they want to perform it authentically. For example, you need to know how to use chopsticks, if you want to eat authentic sushi; and you need to know that pasta is not a side dish, if you want to eat authentic Italian pasta. Indeed, in many restaurants that aim at serving authentic foods, servers or cooks instruct clients as to how to enjoy the food. As Norbert Elias has shown long ago,⁸ table manners are complex social norms; that we perform them quite spontaneously is no indication of the extent of cultural legacy they pass on. Finally, some meals – such as a Seder or a traditional wedding – may require a sophisticated knowledge on the part of the table companions, knowledge which often is anything but spontaneous.

⁸ (Elias, 2000: Part II, Chapter 4).

Let us now turn to the innovative face of a recipe. Every time that we prepare a food we need to adjust our dish to the circumstance. This is even starker in the case of authentic recipes. My grandmother used to add some prosciutto and the prosciutto bone to the broth because prosciutto was the most readily available meat and because that made the recipe nutritionally richer (a key element in consideration of the setting in which the dish was enjoyed). A cook that is such will be able to interpret the practice that she learnt and to reproduce it authentically.

The authenticity that is required in order to innovate an authentic recipe, hence, is interpretative authenticity. Approximately, this could be defined as *an agent's conscious uptaking of certain behaviors in a circumstance with the conviction that they will best represent her in that circumstance*. In the case of authentic foods, the cook (or table companion) will prepare (enjoy) the food with the conviction of re-enacting the tradition in a way which best suits *her* circumstance.

Sometimes there plainly is no way to fit the circumstance, for lack of ingredients, tools, or other key conditions. (And this may well be the occasion for the birth of some new recipes.)⁹ But, the more controversial cases are those in which the claim of authenticity is advanced, while it is doubtful. Ray's case is among those. Her goal seems to be the one of fitting the dish to the American lifestyle, where food needs to be prepared in a short amount of time and available ingredients of dubious quality abound. In this case, I would argue however that the intention is disruptive of the *ribollita* recipe, as it proposes a too abrupt alteration of the dish in terms of ingredients and preparation. Indeed, the recipe is mostly justifiable only in light of marketing interests: although she most likely had an appropriate apprenticeship, her intention is not the one of following the eating practice she learnt; it is rather to appeal to her viewer's eating practices. For these reasons, I believe she is describing the recipe of a dish other than *ribollita*.

⁹ A nice example in this class is the *alheira*, a dish born within the Jewish community of inland northern Portugal at a time when the Inquisition persecuted its members. Braced between the attempt to keep their diet free of pork meat and the need to publicly conceal their identity, they came up with a sausage representing (mimicking) an authentic Portuguese pork sausage, while containing all sorts of meat (veal, chicken, turkey, rabbit, duck, partridge) but pork. Invented to overcome a threat, the *alheira* is nowadays recognized as authentic Portuguese dish – emulating another authentic recipe. (And the example gets even more interesting when we add that – as it appears – it is becoming customary to adjoin some pork meat to the *alheira* mix.) I thank Tommaso Piazza for pointing out to me this example.

Table companions will also have to follow the practice authentically; they will have, in other words, to adapt it to their situation. Certainly, when a dish is foreign to one's eating practices, if one aims at appreciating the authentic recipe, the effort has to be made to retrieve some of the memory behind the dish. This may be done by asking the cook, but often also by delving into the *milieu* in which the dish is typically enjoyed. At other times, the interpretation required is less daunting, but it may still be relevant. Thus, if you are eating with plastic forks, you may not be able to enjoy the spaghetti in the same manner (e.g., for taste and quantity-per-bite) you are used to do with a metal fork; if you are having a *minestrone alla genovese* in a very warm american house, you may enjoy it at a lower temperature than you would have in Genova; *et cetera*.

6.

Who judges of the authenticity?

The view I am proposing stresses the first-person's relevance in the obtainment of an authentic recipe; however, Ray's case shows that good intentions might not be enough to make a recipe authentic. So, the problem arises: Who judges the authenticity of a recipe?

To answer this question we shall appeal to the collective character of a recipe. As this typically has no one author and no one representative, but a community of practitioners, the judgment of authenticity will in general be demanded to members of such community. Certainly, the cook will play a key role in the judgment of authenticity, as she can put forward data that are crucial to it. Then, there may be some recognized experts, whose opinion may be kept in higher consideration. In the end, however, as a recipe is a social product, its appraisal is open to all those that in some plausible way regard themselves members of the producing *milieu*. These, collectively, should have the final word.

Something must be said also regarding the more general standards that may be used in judging of the authenticity, part of which will gauge tradition and part innovation. The former (tradition) depends on the accuracy within which the memory carried forward by a recipe is portrayed – Have all available ingredients been included in the recipe at hand? Did the preparation sufficiently resemble others that are deemed authentic?

For the latter (innovation), it seems to me that the intention of perpetuating a recipe is compatible with those modifications that are motivated by some of the three following rationales. The first being the

retrieval of historical memory. It may happen that certain ingredients, tools or table manners, once included in the authentic recipe, were foregone or lost for quite a while; the cook or table companion that were to retrieve them (in a way which is fitting to the circumstance), would hence introduce an innovation for its contemporary community which is in keeping with the authenticity. Carlo's recipe for *ribollita* fits this category: his choice is motivated by an appeal to the tradition.

The second rationale is the *amelioration of taste by standards analogous with the ones of the originating milieu*. Adding *pancetta* or a *prosciutto* bone to the *ribollita*'s recipe may improve its taste – some *milieu*'s member could say; if the change is tolerated by the other members, it could then become part and parcel of the authentic recipe.

The third rationale relates to *food or tools availability*. If a certain food or tool is no longer available to the community, it may be in keeping with the authenticity of the recipe to replace it; however, not any loss can be tolerated (a *ragout alla Bolognese* without *ragout* simply cannot make it), and which ones should is a call which pertains to the members of a recipe's *milieu* who are found in that circumstance. If the members of the community associated with *ribollita* will deny the authenticity of Ray's recipe, this shall be regarded as disruptive.

Here we encounter, however, a complication.¹⁰ It seems, indeed, that there may be cases in which members of a community may comply with standards of judgment that do not seem sound for reasons that may be detected also by outsiders. Consider for instance the case of an entire community, which is the only keeper of its recipes, and which suddenly and permanently has to abandon its homeland for an ecological niche with a dramatically different food availability. Its members will carry along the memory and the knowhow of their traditional recipes, yet the new conditions may force them to reinvent the dish. Now, suppose that the community will continue to use the same old terms for the new dishes and that, slowly, the (comforting) conviction will grow that these indeed authentically represent the eating practices of their ancestors. Shouldn't we say, contrary to the experts' judgment, that the new dishes are not authentic?

Or, consider another case. A major subsection of the *ribollita*'s community of experts comes to regard Ray's recipe as authentic (as a result – say – of their lifestyle becoming analogous to the one of Ray's audience). On

¹⁰ I am indebted to Tommaso Piazza for raising this objection to me.

the basis of what I suggest above, it seems that in this case Ray's recipe should be regarded as authentic *tout court*; basically, the recipe would be split in two quite distinct sub-recipes, as a species may be divided into quite distinct sub-species.¹¹ Again, however, the intuition of an outsider might be that the community members are *wrong* in their judgment.

The two examples show that the normative force underlying the judgment of a recipe's authenticity may be weak. I believe that cases such as those are rather far-fetched, as it is unlikely that no group of community members will realize the mistake and warn her fellows against it. Still, my account refrains from deeming the dishes in such scenarios as inauthentic. Although this may at first strike as unsatisfactory, I believe it is much in keeping with the nature of the entities at hand. Recipes are practices, and authentic recipes are practices which, among other things, are regarded in a certain way by the practitioners. That the latter may get it wrong, and perhaps persevere in their judgment even when otherwise advised, is as legitimate as the (freely made) choice of a community to elect a patently corrupted governor. A food and its preservation is of its practitioners' own making.

7.

Authentic industrial foods?

Over the past twenty-five or thirty years, most of the food consumed in developed countries was industrially produced. This means, among other things, that there is at least one generation who is accustomed to eat industrial foods. These foods are typically produced in specialized laboratories, following procedures that cannot be (or: cannot easily be) followed at home or in a restaurant. Indeed, it seems plausible to argue that industrial foods fashion an altogether separate category of foods.¹²

Specific to industrial foods is that, once devised, recipes are executed through schematic processes, which leave little or no room to the people who produce them. Because of such seemingly more monotonous nature, the question arises of whether the concept of authenticity pertains to them at all;

¹¹ Gelato or pizza Margherita may be cases in point here, as they arguably have sub-recipes. For example, there is a tradition of making gelato that forgoes the use of egg white and another that accords a fundamental role to it.

¹² Much has been written on the specifics of industrial foods. For an overview, see (Nestle, 2006), (Nestle, 2002), (Pollan, 2008) and (Pollan, 2006).

in other words: *Can industrial foods be regarded as authentic or non-authentic?*

Although this issue may deserve a more proper treatment than the one I will be able to allot here, I will argue that concerns of authenticity apply to industrial foods as well, albeit they do so in a peculiar manner. Here are three traits that set those recipes apart. (i) They are produced by an undersized and (thus far) atypical class of 'cooks': these are the chemists who work in industrial foods' labs, trying to come up with new, inexpensive and marketing-driven, recipes. (ii) Their *milieu* is constituted by a wide range of consumers. Industrial foods, indeed, target a wide market and have a longer lasting shelf life than their non-industrial counterparts. The number of consumers who can be regarded as sufficiently expert is thus usually quite larger than the one of a non-industrial food. (iii) The evolution of their recipes is made out of fewer, but more abrupt changes. Think, for example, of how the Coca-Cola recipe has evolved since 1886 when John Pemberton introduced it, or at the evolution of the recipe of a *chewing gum* since 1848 when John B. Curtis introduced the State of Maine Pure Spruce Gum.

8.

Conclusions

Whether a given dish is authentic or not, in the end, is a collective judgment that stems from a consideration of the ways it represents and innovates a tradition. Authentic foods are only those that are prepared by following a practice learned also through an appropriate apprenticeship. But, they require first-person authenticity too, that is an agent's conscious uptake of certain behaviors in a circumstance with the conviction that they will best represent her in that circumstance. Authentic dishes are products of first-person authentic interpretations that aim at re-enacting certain memories.

Finally, if at times all of this still leaves you at a loss when it comes to *determine* whether your experience is authentic or not, relax, enjoy it, and try to peruse all its aspects; the answer is not just up to you and it may come in due time.

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