

**BIODIVERSITY AND THE ART OF LIVING.
FOOD AS AN AESTHETIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL
EXPERIENCE**

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the relationship between biodiversity and the art of living through the lens of food, understood as both an aesthetic and environmental experience. It begins by examining the current biodiversity crisis and the proliferation of industrial food systems, which contribute to unsustainable and unhealthy lifestyles. The aesthetic dimension of eating is then analyzed in light of “aesthetic capitalism” (Böhme) and the greenwashing practices it often entails. Within the theoretical framework of Everyday Aesthetics (Berleant, Saito), the essay proposes an alternative food culture and experience grounded in the concepts of engagement and care. Drawing on the Greek notion of *diaita* — understood not simply as a dietary regimen but as a harmonious and mindful way of life — the essay reinterprets gastronomic experience as an embodied and situated aesthetic practice, capable of integrating sensoriality, ethics, and sustainability. In this sense, nourishment is no longer reduced to a consumable object but is redefined as a form of *aisthesis*: a mode of sensitive knowledge that respects and fosters both natural and cultural biodiversity.

Keywords: biodiversity, everyday aesthetics, environmental aesthetics, food aesthetics**BIODIVERSITÀ E ARTE DI VIVERE. IL CIBO COME ESPERIENZA ESTETICA E AMBIENTALE**

Il presente saggio esplora il rapporto tra biodiversità e arte del vivere attraverso la lente del cibo, inteso come esperienza insieme estetica e ambientale. Si apre con l'analisi dell'attuale crisi della biodiversità e della proliferazione dei sistemi alimentari industriali, che contribuiscono a stili di vita insostenibili e malsani. La dimensione estetica del nutrirsi viene quindi esaminata alla luce del concetto di “capitalismo estetico” (Böhme) e delle pratiche di greenwashing che spesso lo accompagnano. All'interno del quadro teorico dell'Everyday Aesthetics (Berleant, Saito), il saggio propone una cultura e un'esperienza del cibo alternative, radicate nei concetti di coinvolgimento e cura. Riprendendo la nozione greca di *diaita* – intesa non semplicemente come regime alimentare, ma come stile di vita armonioso e consapevole – l'esperienza gastronomica viene reinterpretata come pratica estetica incarnata e situata, capace di integrare sensorialità, etica e sostenibilità. In questo senso, il nutrimento non è più ridotto a mero oggetto di consumo, ma ridefinito come forma di *aisthesis*: un modo di conoscenza sensibile che rispetta e promuove la biodiversità naturale e culturale.

Parole chiave: biodiversità, estetica quotidiana, estetica ambientale, estetica alimentare

1. INTRODUCTION

Aesthetics – understood not as a theory of beauty or detached contemplation, but as *aisthesis*, a form of sensitive and situated knowing – offers a conceptual framework for exploring how food mediates our relationship with biodiversity.

The term “biodiversity” – a contraction of “biological diversity” – was first introduced at the National Forum on BioDiversity (Washington, 1986)¹ and gained broader recognition with the publication of the eponymous volume edited by biologist Edward O. Wilson². Since then, it has become a central notion in ecological and scientific discourse, referring to the variety of living forms on Earth – not only at the level of species, but also of ecosystems and genetic heritage. However, the cultural significance of this natural plurality has much older roots, extending back to the traditions of Western philosophical thought.

Already in the Greek world, we find a conception of reality as an ordered multiplicity. In Plato, the richness of being – its ontological fullness – is conceived as a unifying force that gives coherence to every possible form³; a notion later systematized by Arthur Lovejoy in the twentieth century through his theory of the “principle of plenitude” – the idea that every possible form of existence must find realization – developed in *The Great Chain of Being* (1936)⁴. It is above all in Aristotle, however, that biological diversity takes on an explicit role within a classificatory framework grounded in observation and scientific systematization.

In *Parts of Animals* (I, 5, 645a), Aristotle argues that even the humblest or seemingly unpleasant living beings deserve respect and attention, as they are expressions of *physis* – nature itself understood as a rational and ordering principle⁵. This appreciation of diversity also carries an aesthetic dimension: in every living being, one can perceive the beauty and intrinsic dignity of all forms of life.

In contemporary discourse, the concept of biodiversity has become a field of tension between ecological protection, economic exploitation, and symbolic representation. Since the 1980s, its diffusion in the media and public culture has coincided with growing concern over ecosystem collapse, species loss, and environmental contamination. Yet precisely because of its resonance, the concept has also been absorbed into simplified narratives, often shaped by consumer logic or political communication. In this context, it becomes important to consider not only the biological dimensions of biodiversity, but also its cultural, perceptual, and symbolic aspects – particularly in relation to food. Food is not merely sustenance or an economic commodity: it is a form of relationship between humans and nature, a sensory and affective experience that reflects worldviews, agricultural practices, and ways of life. It represents a nexus where biology, everyday aesthetics, and ecological awareness converge.

The aim of this essay is therefore to explore food as an aesthetic and environmental experience. After framing the crisis of food biodiversity as a consequence of agro-industrial systems and examining the dynamics of food aestheticization within the context of so-called “aesthetic capitalism,” this essay argues that

¹ The term “biodiversity” was proposed by Walter Rosen in 1985, during the preparatory work for the “National Forum on BioDiversity,” which would be held the following year in Washington. Cf. D. Takacs, *The Idea of Biodiversity. Philosophies of Paradise*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1996; D. P. Faith, *Biodiversity*, in “The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy” [online] 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/biodiversity> accessed March 10, 2025.

² The proceedings of the conference, edited by E.O. Wilson and F.M. Peters, were published two years after the Forum (*Biodiversity*, National Academy Press, Washington D.C. 1988). See also E.O. Wilson, *The diversity of life*, Belknap University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1992.

³ M. Oksanen, J. Pietarinen (eds.), *Philosophy and Biodiversity*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2004.

⁴ A. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2010.

⁵ A. Borghini, E. Casetta, *Filosofia della biologia*, Carocci, Roma 2013, p. 97.

food becomes a privileged site for rethinking our relationship with biodiversity – not only in terms of sustainability, but as a daily practice of care. Distancing itself from approaches that focus primarily on health or culinary trends, it frames eating as a form of atmospheric dwelling and temporal resistance, integrating somaesthetics, ecological awareness, and philosophies of care.

Within this perspective, eating is first presented as an embodied experience, emphasizing the value of perceptual engagement and care as forms of sensitive relationship with the world. The focus then turns to local food, understood as a tangible expression of biodiversity, where the value of authenticity is interwoven with place, memory, and slower forms of conviviality and experience. Finally, the Greek concept of *diaita* is explored as an “art of living,” in dialogue with the philosophies of John Dewey and Richard Shusterman, in order to outline a model that combines environmental sensitivity with the pleasures of taste.

Through this exploration, food becomes a privileged lens through which to understand how biodiversity can not only be protected but also lived – through everyday aesthetic practices that integrate sensoriality, ethics, and a sense of belonging. Seen in this light, the aesthetics of biodiversity is a form of *aisthesis*: not a theory of beautiful forms, but a way of perceiving, inhabiting, and transforming the world.

2. THE BIODIVERSITY CRISIS AND THE CULTURE OF INDUSTRIAL FOOD

The progressive standardization of foodscapes and dietary patterns is one of the most evident effects of food industrialization. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, the so-called “Green Revolution”⁶ marked a major turning point in agricultural systems on a global scale. Initiated in the United States and later exported to developing countries, it introduced high-yield hybrid varieties, synthetic fertilizers, and chemical pesticides, with the aim of increasing agricultural productivity and reducing hunger. However, this model led to a dramatic reduction in agricultural biodiversity: thousands of local varieties disappeared, replaced by a small number of crops selected primarily for their yield.

One of the earliest and most influential critiques of environmental pollution is found in Rachel Carson’s landmark book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962. The title – evoking the growing silence of spring-time countryside compared to previous decades – signals the gradual disappearance of numerous animal species, especially songbirds. The book highlights how the systematic use of pesticides, particularly DDT, has contaminated soil, water, and food chains, producing deep and lasting consequences for both human health and ecosystem balance. Carson reflects especially on the expression “control of nature,”⁷ which she sees as emblematic of a mindset based on the belief that nature must be subordinated to human needs. It is precisely through the use of such terms that a worldview becomes evident – one that shapes scientific and productive practices. Carson also warns against the danger that science, in developing modern and powerful weapons, may end up turning them not only against insects, but against the Earth itself.

⁶ The term “Green Revolution” was coined in 1968 by William Gaud (then director of the United States Agency for International Development) to describe a series of agricultural innovations introduced from the 1940s onward and accelerated after World War II: hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and intensive mechanization. While this process significantly increased global agricultural productivity, it also led to a sharp reduction in biodiversity and serious environmental imbalances. Cf. V. Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution. Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics*, Zed Books, London 1991; P.L. Pingali, *Green Revolution: Impacts, limits, and the path ahead*, in “Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences”, 109, 2012, pp. 12302-12308.

⁷ R. Carson, *Silent Spring*, Mariner Books Classics, Boston (Mass.) 2022.

Along similar lines, Vandana Shiva⁸ has highlighted how the industrial agricultural model is grounded in what she calls a true “paradigm of war,” where insects, wild plants, and non-selected varieties are treated as enemies to be eradicated. In her view, the technical-agronomic language itself reflects and reinforces an oppositional logic that regards the Earth as an inert substrate to be exploited, rather than as a living organism to be respected – a logic that has had devastating consequences for ecosystems and peasant cultures. As an alternative, Shiva proposes a new agricultural paradigm based on cooperation with nature and the “Law of Return,” according to which every living being participates in a cycle of reciprocity. Agriculture, in this perspective, should not be an extractive process but an activity of co-creation with the Earth, where knowledge arises from practice and participation in the web of life.

The importance of restoring a harmonious relationship between human activity and the rhythms of nature is emphasized not only by ecopolitical approaches such as Shiva’s, but also by aesthetic perspectives. In particular, Emily Brady⁹ refers to a “dialectical relationship” to describe the dynamic interaction between humans and nature as expressed in the agricultural landscape. While industrial agriculture tends to produce visually uniform environments – lacking in character and disconnected from local identity – certain forms of small-scale traditional farming offer a more participatory and sustainable alternative. These practices promote biodiversity and encourage a deeper connection to the land, including through a direct relationship between those who grow food and those who consume it.

It is therefore clear that the loss of biodiversity is not only an ecological issue but also a loss of perceptual meaning – that is, a weakening of the symbolic, cultural, and sensory significance of food. The products of the contemporary agro-industrial system often appear disconnected from their ecological and cultural contexts, standardized, and designed primarily for storage and distribution rather than for meaningful sensory experience. Their aesthetics are artificially constructed: packaging, colors, shapes, and slogans are meant to replace the lived experience of taste, origin, and seasonality. In this process, the connection with the environment – and with those who inhabit and cultivate it – is severed, as genuine relationships are replaced by abstract representations¹⁰.

The act of eating is increasingly reduced to a predominantly visual experience, often mediated by digital devices, which obscures the actual conditions of food production – conditions that are frequently unsustainable from both ecological and social perspectives. This shift in aesthetic and sensory culture affects not only sight: industrial logic also reshapes taste and smell, promoting a homogenization of flavors and aromas through the widespread use of additives, artificial flavorings, and standardized sensory codes. As Elena Mancioffi observes, even the olfactory dimension of food is subject to strategies of design and control, with atmospheres (or *osmospheres*) carefully constructed to evoke emotions and steer consumer behavior in both domestic and urban spaces¹¹.

In multiple works, Michael Pollan¹² has extensively criticized the food industry and denounced the ideology of “nutritionism” along with the systemic logic of industrial food production. He argues that modern diets – characterized by ultra-processed products, reduced biodiversity, and the erosion of cultural food

⁸ V. Shiva, *Who Really Feeds the World? The Failures of Agribusiness and the Promise of Agroecology*, Zed Books, London 2016.

⁹ E. Brady, *The Aesthetics of Agricultural Landscapes and the Relationship between Humans and Nature*, in “Ethics, Place & Environment”, vol. 9, n. 1, 2006, pp.1-19.

¹⁰ D. Fargione, S. Iovino (eds.), *Contaminazioni ecologiche. Cibi, nature, culture*, LED Edizioni Universitarie, Milano 2015.

¹¹ E. Mancioffi, *Osmospheres. Smell, Atmosphere, Food*, Mimesis International, Sesto San Giovanni (MI) 2023.

¹² M. Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, Penguin Press, New York 2006; Id., *In Defense of Food. An Eater’s Manifesto*, Penguin Press, New York 2009.

knowledge – have not only harmed public health but also disrupted our embodied and cultural relationship with food. In this context, the biodiversity crisis also emerges as a crisis in our sensitive and responsible relationship with both food and the environment. To reclaim the aesthetic value of food, then, means to rediscover a form of embodied knowledge in which beauty is not found on the surface but rather in the web of relationships that link nature, culture, and the living body.

3. AESTHETIC CAPITALISM AND GREENWASHING: AESTHETICS AS CONSUMPTION

In the context of late capitalism, aesthetics has assumed a central role in processes of production and consumption. As Gernot Böhme emphasizes in his *Critique of Aesthetic Capitalism*¹³, we are living in a phase in which goods are no longer consumed merely for their use value or exchange value, but for their staging value. In this perspective, the notion of “atmosphere” becomes particularly significant – an idea that Böhme places at the core of a new aesthetic theory centered on the *Leib*, the living and sensing body¹⁴. According to Böhme, atmosphere is a sensory and affective quality that arises from the relationship between an environment and the perceiving subject. Although originally developed in the context of stage set design¹⁵, the concept of atmosphere has since expanded into fields such as architecture, design, advertising, and consumer culture.

Contemporary consumption increasingly relies on the ability of objects – and experiences – to evoke atmospheres, identities, and ways of life. The aestheticization of food is not inherently negative: attention to presentation, color, texture, and plating can enhance the meal as a multisensory experience. However, when this aestheticization is absorbed into the logic of spectacle, it risks producing a form of staging that replaces the embodied relationship with nature and culture with a superficial representation, driven by desire.

This dynamic is also insightfully analyzed by Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy¹⁶, who refer to it as “artistic capitalism” – a phase in which aesthetics permeates every sphere of production and consumption, turning every object into a spectacle and every experience into design. According to the two scholars, aesthetic enhancement has become a central strategy of contemporary marketing, generating a widespread sense of beauty but also a certain perceptual superficiality.

Food, in particular, has become one of the main vehicles for the aestheticization of everyday life and, at the same time, one of the preferred domains of value-based marketing – a commercial strategy that links products to values such as ethics, sustainability, or culture, reinforcing the consumer’s identification with a shared ideal or worldview. This is especially evident in the phenomenon of “greenwashing,” that is, the strategic use of ecological elements in corporate communication¹⁷.

Terms such as “natural,” “sustainable,” or “local” are often conveyed through a clean, reassuring, and stylized aesthetic that obscures the real conditions of production and reduces sustainability to a mere sur-

¹³ G. Böhme, *Critique of Aesthetic Capitalism*, Mimesis International, Sesto San Giovanni (MI) 2017.

¹⁴ G. Böhme, *Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics*, in “Thesis Eleven” n. 36, 1993, pp. 113-126.

¹⁵ G. Böhme, *The Art of the Stage Set as a Paradigm for an Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, in “Ambiances. Environnement sensible, architecture et espace urbain” [online] 2013, <https://journals.openedition.org/ambiances/315> accessed March 18, 2025.

¹⁶ G. Lipovetsky, J. Serroy, *L'esthétisation du monde: Vivre à l'âge du capitalisme artiste*, Gallimard, Paris 2013.

¹⁷ The term “greenwashing,” coined by Jay Westerveld in 1986, refers to the strategic use of ecological language and symbols by companies to enhance their public image without adopting genuinely sustainable practices. Cf. M. A., Delmas, V. C. Burbano, *The Drivers of Greenwashing*, in “California Management Review”, vol. 54, n.1, 2011, pp. 64-87.

face attribute – by contrast, “organic” refers to a certified category of food regulated at the European level by strict criteria, whereas the other terms frequently lack clear legal definitions and can be ambiguously employed in marketing¹⁸. In this context, values originally tied to a conscious and ethical approach to food risk being emptied of their meaning and reduced to vacuous labels, instrumentalized to support a generic “green” trend¹⁹.

Contemporary society increasingly integrates ethics into consumption: the consumer feels “better” not by actually changing their lifestyle, but by purchasing products that carry a reassuring ethical aura. The risk, therefore, is that biodiversity itself may become an “aesthetic attribute” – a value conveyed through images, packaging, and visual narratives, rather than a guiding principle for agricultural and food practices. Visual communication, especially through social media, contributes to this shift. Food that is photogenic – perfectly plated, chromatically harmonious, set in an apparently natural context – comes to replace real food: grown, cooked, and shared. Following the reflections of Jean Baudrillard²⁰, one might say that aesthetics becomes disembodied, detached from lived experience, and turns into simulacrum – that is, an image without a referent, a sign emptied of reality. In this context, the act of eating risks being reduced to a visual and aestheticized form of consumption, disconnected from the body, the environment, and their mutual entanglement.

Aesthetics, from this perspective, should not be reduced to a decorative surface, but reclaimed as a way of inhabiting the world. This shift calls for a deeper understanding of food as an aesthetic experience – one that engages the senses, the body, and practices of care.

4. THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF FOOD: BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT AND CARE

This reorientation lies at the heart of aesthetic reflection on food – a field that, while particularly active today, began to take shape in the late 20th century. Two main directions can be traced in this discourse. On the one hand, several scholars have analyzed the processes of aestheticization that transform food into a visual spectacle, often shaped by the logic of advertising, media, and design. In this perspective, food is increasingly mediated through stylized images, elaborate packaging, and curated narratives that align it with the artistic model. Bridging the gap between aesthetic theory traditionally focused on the fine arts and the lived, embodied experience of eating, Carolyn Korsmeyer criticizes the marginalization of taste and touch in favor of sight, and argues for a reevaluation of the so-called “lower senses” as central to aesthetic experience²¹.

On the other hand, a growing number of thinkers have emphasized the importance of recovering the experiential, multisensory, and situated dimensions of food, in line with the philosophical legacy of John Dewey – among them Arnold Berleant, Nicola Perullo, Richard Shusterman, and the theorists of Everyday

¹⁸ See Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labelling, and the European Commission’s FAQs on organic rules: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-production-and-labelling-products/organic-rules-faqs_en.

¹⁹ M. C. Caimotto e A. Molino, *Anglicisms in Italian as Alerts to Greenwashing: A Case Study*, in “Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines”, vol. 5, n. 1, 2011, pp. 1-16.

²⁰ J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1994.

²¹ C. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (NY) 1999.

Aesthetics²². Dewey conceived aesthetic experience as continuous with the rhythms of everyday life, rooted in bodily activity and shaped by interaction with the environment. Building on this foundation, Berleant²³ proposed a radical shift from the model of detached contemplation to one of “aesthetic engagement” – an immersive and relational mode of perception. His critique of aesthetic distance laid the groundwork for a broader rethinking of the aesthetic as participatory, embodied, and context-sensitive. Aesthetic appreciation, he contends, is not confined to art but emerges whenever individuals direct perceptual attention to their surroundings. This view has been especially influential in environmental aesthetics, where Berleant is a central figure²⁴. The environment, whether natural or built, is not a passive backdrop but a dynamic field of interactions. Experiencing it aesthetically goes beyond visual evaluation; it becomes a multisensory, participatory process. We do not merely observe a landscape as if it were a painting – we live it by walking, smelling, listening, touching, and breathing. This legacy is further developed within the framework of *Everyday Aesthetics* – most notably by Yuriko Saito²⁵ – who has redirected attention to ordinary activities such as cooking, walking, or caring for spaces and objects, understood as meaningful aesthetic experiences woven into the routines of daily living. This approach offers a renewed way of thinking about food, grounded in lived experience and everyday practice.

Applying this model to food, we can view eating as a paradigmatic form of engagement. Cooking, kneading, smelling, tasting, and sharing a meal are gestures that involve the whole body, as well as memory, imagination, and relationships with others. When not reduced to automatic consumption or digital spectacle, food activates a mode of perceptual attention that is, in every sense, aesthetic. From this perspective, taste and smell play a central role in deepening sensory involvement, fostering an intimate and direct connection with both the environment and the food itself²⁶.

A further articulation of engagement can be found in Yuriko Saito’s notion of care²⁷. For the Japanese-American philosopher, care is a daily attitude that finds beauty in maintenance, attention, and responsibility. Applied to food, this means respecting seasonality, the origins of ingredients, and the people who produce them. Seemingly modest actions – such as cooking or choosing what to buy – can become expressions of care when approached with awareness and respect for the ecological and social networks we are part of.

This intertwining of perception, care, and responsibility finds further articulation in the work of Nicola Perullo²⁸. In his view, the aesthetic dimension of food is an embodied ecological relationship, grounded in the affective and sensory qualities of our interaction with what nourishes us. Aesthetics, from this perspective, is not about formal judgment or detached enjoyment, but a mode of co-existence – a way of “being

²² The distinction between two different experiences of food is explored in N. Perullo, *Can Cuisine Be Art? A Philosophical (and Heterodox) Proposal*, in S. Bottinelli and M. d’Ayala Valva (eds.), *The Taste of Art: Cooking, Food, and Counterculture in Contemporary Practices*, University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville 2017, pp. 23–44, and in E. Di Stefano, *Che cosa è l’estetica quotidiana*, Carocci, Roma 2019.

²³ A. Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1991.

²⁴ A. Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1992, p. 170: «Perceiving environment from within, as it were, looking not *at* it but being *in* it, nature [...] is transformed into a realm in which we live as participants, not observers. [...] The aesthetic mark of all such times is not disinterested contemplation but total engagement, a sensory immersion in the natural world».

²⁵ Y. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007.

²⁶ E. Brady, *Smells, Tastes, and Everyday Aesthetics*, in D.M. Kaplan (ed.), *The Philosophy of Food*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 2012, pp. 69–86.

²⁷ Y. Saito, *Aesthetics of Care. Practice in Everyday Life*, Bloomsbury, London 2022.

²⁸ N. Perullo, *Estetica ecologica. Percepire saggio, vivere respon sabile*, Mimesis, Sesto San Giovanni (MI) 2020.

with” things and others – that involves engagement, responsibility, and mutual transformation²⁹. Through the senses, memory, and care, the subject not only perceives the world but inhabits it responsibly, activating an everyday form of ecological sensitivity.

5. LOCAL FOOD AS AN AUTHENTIC AND SITUATED AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

In light of the concepts of engagement and care, the experience of local food emerges as a paradigmatic practice capable of generating an embodied, authentic, and situated aesthetics – one that is deeply rooted in respect for biodiversity. This is not merely a responsible choice from an ecological or health perspective, but a sensitive relationship with place, where nourishment is interwoven with perception, memory, and cultural context.

Foods that originate from a specific environment are not merely sources of nourishment; they are tangible expressions of a *terroir* – understood not only as a set of geographical, climatic, and agronomic conditions, but also as a reflection of local biodiversity, embedded in shared practices, knowledge, and tastes. Choosing ingredients that grow in the places where we live, or in territories we can directly know and experience, means establishing a direct relationship with the environment – one that is sensory and interactive, extending far beyond mere consumption and taking the form of an aesthetic mode of dwelling.

While the promotion of local food is often framed in ecological terms, it is also possible – as Matthew Adams³⁰ points out – to advance distinctly aesthetic arguments. The pleasure of eating a dish in its place of origin, or of recognizing a landscape through its flavors, forms part of an experience that engages the senses, identity, and one’s relationship with the world. To support this view, Adams cites chef René Redzepi, founder of the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen, who insists on using only local ingredients because, in his words, his cuisine is inseparable from the place and time in which it is created³¹. This suggests a deep symbolic connection between ingredients and geography, grounded in the value of authenticity – understood as a coherence between food and the ecological and cultural context that gives rise to it. While haute cuisine is often associated with the aestheticization of food as visual spectacle, it is important to acknowledge that many fine dining restaurants – Noma being just one prominent example – are deeply engaged in the exploration of locality, seasonality, and biodiversity. Far from reducing food to a staged object, these approaches seek to honor the authenticity of ingredients, foregrounding their cultural and ecological specificity. In such contexts, refined presentation coexists with a sincere commitment to quality raw materials, artisanal knowledge, and the meaningful integration of food into a broader narrative of place and tradition.

Authenticity – historically situated and capable of fostering meaningful connections – which characterizes local food, can be further explored in relation to Walter Benjamin’s concept of “aura”³². In traditional works of art, the aura is what guarantees their unrepeatable uniqueness, tied to their *hic et nunc* – their original position in space and time – as well as to the historical memory they embody. However, this expe-

²⁹ N. Perullo, *Aesthetics Without Objects and Subjects. Relational Thinking for Global Challenges*, Bloomsbury, London 2025.

³⁰ M. Adams, *The Aesthetic value of local food*, in “The Monist”, vol. 101, n. 3, 2018, pp. 324-339.

³¹ R. Redzepi, *Noma: Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine*, Phaidon, London 2010 cited in Adams, *The Aesthetic value of local food*, cit., p. 326.

³² W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, Second Version, in *Selected Writings 1935-1938*. Vol. 3, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London (England) 2002, pp. 101-139.

rience is grounded in a certain reverential distance, which separates the artwork from the viewer, while at the same time affirming its singularity and ritual character.

In a seemingly paradoxical way, authentic food generates its own form of aura – not through distance, but through sensory proximity and lived experience. When we taste a local ingredient, we are immersed in a daily gesture that, while bodily and immediate, also activates historical memory, cultural geography, and embodied tradition. In this sense, the aura is not dissolved by contact but regenerated through engagement: food tells the story of a landscape, a season, and the hands that have transformed it. By contrast, standardized and spectacularized food reconfigures the aura by stripping it of experiential depth. It no longer arises from ritual value, but is staged as a visual effect, constructed through the codes of display.

The process of commodification that turns the local into the exotic, the genuine into an “Instagrammable” experience, and aura into brand results in the loss of authenticity. As Dorota Koczanowicz³³ observes, products and experiences packaged as “authentic” for global or tourist consumption generate a paradox: the more authenticity is sought, the more it tends to disappear. The tourist in search of a *trattoria* – a small, traditional Italian eatery perceived as “authentic” and untouched by tourism – inevitably turns it, by their very presence, into a tourist destination. Authenticity thus becomes a volatile commodity – constantly pursued, yet systematically undermined. From this perspective, as Lisa Heldke³⁴ emphasizes, authenticity can be reclaimed not by returning to some imagined original purity, but as a dialogical and transformative experience, grounded in context and relationship.

Yet this dialogical approach becomes more complex when the subject is not a local inhabitant but an outsider, such as a tourist. How can one meaningfully engage with local food traditions without falling into the trap of simulated authenticity or exoticism? The answer may lie not in seeking an “authentic” dish in itself, but in cultivating an attitude of openness, contextual sensitivity, and humility – acknowledging the cultural distance while remaining attentive to the stories, gestures, and relationships that surround food practices. In this way, authenticity is not a fixed attribute to be consumed, but a relational process to be approached with care.

In today’s world, shaped by the logic of speed and replicability, the diversity of tastes and traditions is often sacrificed in favor of homogenization. In this context, designations of origin such as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), PGI (Protected Geographical Indication), and DOC (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata*) are not merely regulatory or bureaucratic tools; rather, they constitute institutional efforts to safeguard the auratic uniqueness of local food. By formally recognizing the historical depth, territorial specificity, and sensory quality of certain products, these certifications seek to protect the bond between a given food and its landscape of origin – resisting the loss of meaning brought about by global standardization.

When we eat a local product, we do not simply experience its taste or texture – we enter into a relationship with the landscape, climate, and culture that have shaped it. An artisanal cheese, for example, is not merely a collection of flavors and raw materials, but a form of life sedimented over time – an embodied knowledge that carries the imprint of generations and environments. From this perspective, the choice of

³³ D. Koczanowicz, *The Aesthetics of Taste: Eating within the Realm of Art*, Brill, Leiden 2023, esp. Chapter 7 (*The Taste of Authenticity*), p. 188.

³⁴ L. Heldke, *But Is It Authentic? Culinary Travel and the Search for the ‘Genuine Article’*, in C. Korsmeyer (eds.), *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, Berg, Oxford 2003, pp. 385–394: «Authenticity is not a quality that a dish possesses; it is a quality of the relationship between a dish, the people who make and eat it, and the context in which it is consumed» (p. 390); «The more I seek out the ‘genuine’ experience, the more I impose my own framework of expectation, and the more elusive the genuine becomes» (pp. 387–388).

the local, the typical, the genuine carries not only aesthetic value but also a critical and countercultural one. It resists both the neutralization of taste in industrial production and the artificial aestheticization promoted by global food media³⁵.

Against the dominant rhetoric of “beautiful food” – symmetrical, glossy, perfectly plated, often the result of artificial selection or genetic modification – it is necessary to rediscover a beauty that is imperfect and alive, revealed in the coherence between form, content, and context. Even this polished aesthetic, however, is increasingly being replaced – or complemented – by a counter-trend that celebrates rawness, rusticity, and apparent imperfection. Yet this too can lend itself to aesthetic staging, where “naturalness” is carefully curated to evoke authenticity, simplicity, and artisanal values.

A peasant stew, wood-fired bread, or a seasonal soup tells the story of a landscape, a community, a shared time. This is a beauty that goes beyond appearance, rooted in memory, conviviality, reciprocity, and in a slower temporality that allows for a fuller, more mindful experience. Slowing down, then, means attuning to the rhythms of nature and of everyday life – recognizing biodiversity not only in ingredients, but also in gestures, timescales, and relationships that resist homogenization.

Within this framework, cooking and sharing a meal take on aesthetic and political significance³⁶: they become practices of care and acts of resistance against the serialization of food. Valuing local ingredients, peasant knowledge, and traditional techniques means defending not only biological but also cultural and symbolic biodiversity. This is the vision promoted by the Slow Food movement, founded by Carlo Petrini. Within this approach, the “good” cannot be separated from the “clean” and the “fair”: gastronomic pleasure is inseparably linked to ecological sustainability and social justice. This triad also implies a broader reflection on accessibility, since not everyone enjoys the same freedom to choose what they eat in a system shaped by economic inequality³⁷.

Still, every meaningful food practice – however modest – can be an expression of biodiversity and a form of everyday resistance. Simple dishes made with “poor” ingredients carry the weight of memory and cultural specificity, embodying ecological sensibility and forms of shared, lived knowledge.

6. *DIAITA* AS AN ART OF LIVING

The aesthetic and temporal dimensions of food become particularly evident when we shift our gaze from domestic or rural contexts to the urban stage of street food. Although often associated with speed and informality, street food is frequently grounded in culinary memory, shaped by vernacular expertise and local rhythms. It may be prepared with modest ingredients, but it speaks of place, continuity, and creative adaptation. Its temporality may be fast, yet its roots are slow – embedded in inherited gestures, specific places,

³⁵ E. Di Stefano, *Food: Ordinary Practice or Extraordinary Experience?* in L. Giombini, A. Kvočka (eds.), *Everydayness. Contemporary Aesthetic Approaches*, University of Prešov, Prešov – Roma TRE Press. Rome 2021, pp. 161-173.

³⁶ R. Sassatelli, F. Davolio, *Consumption, pleasure and politics: Slow Food and the politico-aesthetic problematization of food*, in “Journal of consumer culture”, vol. 10, n. 2, 2010, pp. 202-232.

³⁷ Structural inequalities often make ecologically rooted food options less affordable than ultra-processed industrial ones. Aesthetic and ethical engagement with food thus requires not only awareness but also material conditions that enable participation. The art of living, to be truly inclusive, must intersect with questions of redistribution and food justice. On the socio-economic inequalities that limit access to healthy and sustainable diets, see M. Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, cit. particularly for his analysis of how industrialized food systems make processed products cheaper and more accessible than biodiverse or ecologically sustainable alternatives.

and shared practices. What distinguishes authentic street food is not the speed of ingestion, but the temporal depth of its preparation, its symbolic embeddedness, and its connection to the everyday rhythms of local life. In this sense, street food can generate a situated aesthetic experience – informal yet meaningful – where authenticity arises not from refinement or slowness per se, but from contextual coherence and performative embeddedness in a living culture. Even when consumed quickly, such foods can reflect a form of daily art of living insofar as they express embodied knowledge, cultural continuity, and a situated relation to place.

From here, we can trace a conception that is both ancient and strikingly relevant today – a view of the relationship between nourishment, the body, and the environment grounded in the Greek notion of *diaita*. This term did not simply refer to a dietary regimen, but to a harmonious and balanced way of life. In light of pragmatist aesthetics, *diaita* can be reinterpreted today as an art of living in which eating becomes an integral part of an ethical, aesthetic, and relational practice. As John Dewey suggests, aesthetic experience is not confined to the domain of art – it can emerge in any aspect of daily life, whenever sensation, action, and thought are consciously integrated. In *Art as Experience*³⁸, Dewey emphasizes that even a meal, when lived attentively, can carry full aesthetic value: what matters is not only the final result, but the entire process that precedes and surrounds it – from the choice of ingredients to their preparation, from the environmental setting to the act of sharing. Aesthetic experience thus appears as an emotional and intellectual unity that brings meaning to ordinary gestures.

Moving in this same direction is Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics³⁹, which places the lived and felt body (*soma*) at the center of aesthetic, ethical, and cognitive experience. Everyday bodily practices – eating, cooking, breathing, walking – when performed with awareness, become opportunities for self-cultivation and for sensitive interaction with the world. In his essay *Somaesthetics and the Fine Art of Eating* (2016)⁴⁰ Shusterman develops a nuanced analysis of the “art of eating” as a mindful and embodied practice, distinguishing it from the mere act of ingestion. Eating, he argues, is a temporal, performative art akin to music or dance, which engages multiple senses – including proprioception and kinaesthesia – and can foster both aesthetic pleasure and somatic health. Crucially, he emphasizes the temporal dimension of eating: not merely as a succession of courses, but as a choreographed sequence of actions – smelling, chewing, swallowing, breathing – whose rhythm and coordination shape the aesthetic quality of the experience. Drawing an analogy with theatre, he suggests that the act of eating is not simply about the food (the “script”) but about the way it is performed: a corporeal interpretation that transforms nourishment into a meaningful event. This performative temporality, far from being superficial, becomes a mode of attention and self-cultivation. It invites us to reclaim eating as an art of presence – where the rhythm of the meal mirrors a rhythm of life attuned to body, others, and environment. His reflections also highlight the value of digestion and somatic well-being: good food – even when not visually perfect – is that which supports health and vitality. In this light, the aesthetics of food emerges as an embodied cultural practice, capable of fostering awareness, belonging, and respect for biodiversity⁴¹.

³⁸ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, Capricorn Press, New York 1958.

³⁹ R. Shusterman, *Body Consciousness. A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008.

⁴⁰ R. Shusterman, *Somaesthetics and the Fine Art of Eating*, in S. Irvin (ed.), *Body Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, p. 262-264.

⁴¹ R. Pryba, *Somaesthetics and Food*, in “Journal of Somaesthetics”, Vol. 2, n. 1 and 2 (special issue). 2016 [online]. Available at: <https://somaesthetics.aau.dk/index.php/JOS/issue/view/138>. [accessed: 10. 4.2025]; D. Koczanowicz, *The Aesthetics of Taste: Eating within the Realm of Art*, cit. , esp. Chapter 4 (*Somaesthetics and the Art of Eating*), pp. 98-116.

Diaita, then, is not a nutritional prescription, but a practice of living that places the body at the core of meaningful experience. It is a continuous exercise in relating taste, ethics, and the environment – where sensibility becomes a mode of thought and a daily gesture of responsibility.

This paradigm finds a particularly emblematic expression in the Mediterranean diet, understood not merely as a nutritional regimen but as a food culture grounded in seasonality, plant-based variety, and conviviality. The Mediterranean diet can be reinterpreted as a form of relational care and resistance to the temporal acceleration and spatial disintegration of contemporary life⁴².

Numerous studies highlight its value as a sustainable and resilient dietary model, capable of integrating individual health with environmental responsibility. A compelling synthesis of this approach is offered by the “double pyramid” model – nutritional and ecological. Alongside the traditional food pyramid, this model places an inverted ecological pyramid that ranks foods according to their environmental impact. What emerges is that the healthiest foods are also those with the lowest ecological footprint. In other words, what is good for the body is also good for the planet. Shifting dietary choices toward healthy and sustainable models such as the Mediterranean diet has the potential to improve both human health and the health of Earth’s ecosystems⁴³.

From this perspective, *diaita* becomes a mindful practice for inhabiting the world with care – one that restores meaning to minimal, everyday gestures, grounded in the awareness that food is never separate from life, from the landscape, or from others.

7. CONCLUSION

The reflections developed in this essay have shown how food, far from being a merely physiological necessity or object of consumption, represents a crucial interface between aesthetic perception, ecological awareness, and everyday experience. Unlike most studies that treat food either as nutrition or cultural heritage, this essay has proposed an aesthetic-pragmatic approach to biodiversity, grounded in relational practices and sensorial engagement. By rethinking our relationship with food through the lens of biodiversity, we uncover a broader horizon in which care, slowness, and sensoriality become conditions for a sustainable art of living.

From the critique of agro-industrial homogenization to the rediscovery of local food as an auratic and relational experience; from the concept of *diaita* as a lived aesthetic ethic to the somaesthetic insights on taste and embodiment, the essay has aimed to recompose the fragmented relationship between humans and nature through the humble yet vital gesture of eating.

This reconstruction has also acknowledged that food practices are never abstract or neutral: they unfold within material, cultural, and economic conditions that shape the possibilities of access, awareness, and care. For this reason, any aesthetics of food that seeks to go beyond lifestyle must also attend to structural issues – including justice, redistribution, and education.

⁴² L. Armato, *Dieta mediterranea come terapia culturale*, in “Dialoghi Mediterranei”, no. 74, July 2025. The article connects overeating to a broader existential and cultural void in modern societies. In this perspective, the Mediterranean way of eating is not only a health model, but also a cultural and spiritual antidote to the “non-places” and “non-foods” of global industrial modernity.

⁴³ M.L. Truzzi et al., *Mediterranean Diet as a model of sustainable, resilient and healthy diet*, in “Progress in nutrition”, vol. 22, n. 2, 2020, pp. 1-7.

In this light, the aesthetics of biodiversity is not a theory of beautiful forms but a practice of care – for the body, for others, and for the Earth. It is an invitation to inhabit the world more slowly and attentively, recognizing that the way we eat can transform not only ourselves but also our shared ecological future.

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