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## DINING TABLE AS A MEMORY PLACE

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## INTRODUCTION

This article relates a simple object that serves as a support for daily meals at the dining table and how it can enter a socio-cultural context. Eating is a human need, because without food, there is no life expectancy. It is a human custom to get together to eat, since the dawn of human civilization. This meeting can generate countless results, from a family caress to cultural construction. Not to mention that sitting at the dinner table is a social phenomenon, understood by stages, from nutrition to the one in which individuals build memories together, with those who undergo the same situation. The symbology of a dining table is more than just an object that you have in a corner of the room so that you can support the food to be consumed.

## FOOD AND NUTRITION

According to Predraza (2004, p. 3) "Food is a basic need, a human right and simultaneously a cultural activity, permeated by beliefs and taboos, distinctions and ceremonies" it is seen that food is a basic need to live, so as necessary as breathing, or even as the function of the heart, pumping blood through the human body, which is also supported by Carneiro (2003, p.1), who state: "food - after breathing and ingestion of water, the most basic of human needs. And still returning to the thought of Pedraza (2004), who claims that food is something beyond a necessity, it is a human right, because without it there is no life, food constitutes the fuel that moves the human body. Another possible view of food can also be a cultural view, which is also addressed by the author, and can be interpreted in the way it is made or even consumed. Soon Bonin and Rolim (1991, p.76) understand that: "Food transcends the mere ingestion of calories necessary for the maintenance of biological

organisms, constituting a complex cultural practice built from the symbolic thought of a social group."

If food is thought only in the nutritional sphere, it will not be possible, for example, to verify the cultural contributions of a people or the formation of memories of a certain society. In some ethnic groups, food is treated as sacred, in festivals, celebrations, cults, sacrifices and ceremonies, to worship or thank a certain type of food, thus managing to form a web of meanings for those individuals who belong to the same group, showing that nutritional function, even though it is extremely important, is just the beginning of an in-depth study of what food really means.

The connection of human beings with food begins inside their mother's womb, the placenta plays a central role in pregnancy. Even before the grant, her body prepares to house, protect, and nurture new life. It is through the umbilical cord that the baby is connected to the placenta, which is its basic system of access to the nutrients it needs for subsistence.

When the baby comes out of its mother's womb, a food journey begins, starting with breast milk, which is produced by its mother. It is worth mentioning that the child when born does not have teeth, thus making it impossible to grind food. Soon after breastfeeding, the phase of eating baby food begins, a food that is between solid and liquid, preparing to encourage chewing for the child's development. Having learned to chew and with complete dentition, the time has come to prelude solid foods, a phase in which adults usually start introducing food within the context of the family, since "special" food is no longer necessary.

Cascudo (1883, p.44) *apud* Almeida (2006) says that "eating is an organic act that intelligence has made social", based on this author, and it is possible to understand the

depth of eating, of fueling your body, which is also participating in a society, and such an act is permeated with affection, wisdom and everything that surrounds a “dinner table”. On the other hand, it is possible to understand what the meaning of food really is; an ingredient for building food or an organic form that proposes to nourish, forming a chain of meanings, showing a deeper side of food. For Álvarez (2005, p.11):

(...) human food is a social and cultural act where the choice and consumption of food bring into play a set of ecological, historical, cultural, social and economic factors linked to a network of representations, symbolisms and rituals.

Therefore, food is a factor of paramount importance for human historical cultural formation, since eating can be done individually, but it is customary for it to be done in a group. Reinforcing this thought, Mintz (2001, p. 31) says that:

Food behavior is directly linked to our sense of self and our social identity, and this seems to be true for all human beings. We react to the eating habits of other people, whoever they may be, just as they react to ours.

So eating is not just a biological act, but a social phenomenon, having various effects from the exchange of information to more complex connections of social belonging.

The physiology of taste, by Brillat-Savarin (1995), deals with man and food, as “it is not a cookbook, but a gastronomy” (SANTOS, 2005, p. 165), showing that there is a much greater relationship between man and food, much more than just satiety of the body, and yes, food can become a protagonist within human history. “The eating habits and practices of social groups” (ARAÚJO, 2016, p.4) are linked to the constitution of culinary traditions, often making the individual see himself within a sociocultural context, integrating himself to “a certain identity, reaffirmed by gustatory

memory” (ARAÚJO, 2016, p.6), this idea is explained by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1997).

The act of eating involves several characters, among them food, which is one of the main characters, bringing with it various loads, such as cultural, memory, nutritional, among others, and for Da Matta (1987, p. 22):

Not all food (considering that which can provide us with nutrients) can be transformed into “food”, as it is not part of our habits: “food” is the food that will be ingested. “Food” is only what is socially and culturally accepted within a certain group of individuals. They choose what to eat, when, how, where and with whom, depending on numerous factors such as beliefs, social values, culture, customs, etc...

As for Santos (1997, p.160) “it is not enough that something is edible, for it to be effectively consumed. A series of biological, psychological, cultural and social conditioning is necessary for a step to be taken”, which explains the human preference for a certain food group, and such preferences make these groups come together just to eat or to talk, exchange experiences or other things. Within this statement, it is possible to observe that “a dinner table” was never the target of a war, but it was probably the stage for the decision to make one. It is also possible to understand that food can be seen as a reason for meeting people, because in addition to the need for nutrients, the individual needs the company of his peers, and for Santos (1997, p.160):

is determined not only by environmental and economic contingencies, but also by mentalities, by rites, by the value of the messages exchanged when eating food together, by ethical and religious values, by intergenerational transmission (from one generation to another). ) and intra-generation (transmission comes from outside, passing through culture with regard to traditions and reproduction of behaviors) and through individual and collective psychology that ends up influencing the

determination of all these factors.

Since it is a much more complex relationship than getting together to eat than it really is. When the individual meets with his peers, probably in addition to eating, he will talk about his life, thus exchanging experiences, experiences and even feelings, and with a simple act of sitting and talking, a range of feelings, affections and feelings can be built. also memories.

Eating habits resist change, even if profound, in the social environment. Emigrants, for example, although they abandon some of the traditions of their country of origin, remain faithful to culinary traditions. There is a symbolic link between these food traditions and the motherland. Conscious or not, more often, unconscious – when ingesting food, individuals act to reaffirm the criterion of identity. Food containing a symbolic value is offered to compatriots and with that there is continuity in this relationship, a form of communion (SILVA, 1999).

Eating habits are rooted in the culture of all peoples, since in addition to nutrition, this act is a cultural construction, therefore, it is permeated in the construction of memory. In addition to the search for satiety, the individual can go after a “dinner table” to seek an answer to his concern, or even in search of family advice.

[...] the meal probably began to exist after the human species stopped nourishing itself with roots and fruits. The preparation and sharing of the meat required a group or family gathering. The meal is thus ‘the ritualization of food sharing’. For this very reason, it has become so rich in symbols. The human tendency to share food, the basic idea of hospitality, would have originated when man developed the ability to kill large prey. This type of hunting often forced association. Still not knowing other conservation methods, in addition to cooking, he was forced to consume the game rather quickly. This would encourage him

to share the product of his work with other hunters and families and, of course, expect reciprocal gestures. That was how hospitality at the table was born. [...] The culinary habits of a nation do not result only from the survival instinct and man’s need to feed himself. They are expressions of its history, geography, climate, social organization and religious beliefs. Thus, the exaltation of some dishes from the mother’s cuisine, or from the country of origin, even when mediocre, can last a lifetime and tasting them sometimes generates surprising mental associations. Eating habits have deep roots in the social identity of individuals. They are, therefore, more persistent habits in the process of acculturation of immigrants (FRANCO, 2001, p.21-24)

It is possible to observe within all this discussion that food is of paramount importance, from the nutritional context to the cultural touch. It is important to point out that eating together is a social force that brings people together, and that within this relationship there is an exchange of experience and experience, thus achieving the construction of a new thought and a new memory. With the exchange between those involved in food, new events are generated and such events generate memory. Food still plays a supporting role within this context, but the interactions of those involved are an important cultural aggregator.

## MEMORY AND FOOD

What is memory and how can it be defined? It’s a very simple question, but it carries a lot of theory within it. The definition can be seen by several authors as: “Memory can be understood as the ability to relate a current event with a past event of the same type, therefore, as an ability to evoke the past through the present” (JAPIASSÚ, 1996, 178), so seen from this perspective, it can be seen that memory can be an evocator of past feelings, or a starting point so that what had

already happened can be experienced for a moment. Or by Polack's view (1992, p.5) which mentions that "memory can be a factor of amalgamation of a society and determinant of conducts across the social group" and also, the referred author:

[...] memory is a constituent element of the feeling of identity, both individual and collective, insofar as it is also an extremely important factor in the feeling of continuity and coherence of a person or a group in its reconstruction of identity. itself (POLACK, 1992, p.5).

In addition, memory also serves to "reinforce feelings of belonging and social boundaries between collectivities of different sizes" (POLACK, 1989, p. 4). The feeling of belonging can be seen by various actions, from a typical dance or even food. Within the food ceremonies it is possible to see that people gather around the table for countless reasons, but they all refer to the simple act of eating.

The table, soon ceases to be a simple support that helps with food and becomes a social meeting point, a meeting that refers to places of memory that is defended by Nora (1993, p. 9) who says that "memory becomes rooted in the concrete, in the space, in the gesture, in the image, in the object". It is an almost biological act of the social being, an act that is to sit at the table to be able to eat your food, the company of your spouses is important, so that it is not just an intake of calories, but a social encounter.

There are places of memory, places particularly linked to a memory, which can be a personal memory, but can also not be supported by chronological time. It could be, for example, a childhood vacation spot, which remained very strong in the person's memory, very striking, regardless of the actual date on which the experience took place (POLLAK, 1992, 202).

This assertion by Pollak (1992) reinforces

that the individual may have memory interlacements with some respective place. The place in question is precisely a "dining table", a place that in some traditional families has felt sacred and also methodical, however, with the advent of the modern world it has not been so used, either due to lack of time or other reasons. reason, such as a social gathering. But those who submit to go to the table and have their meals have the opportunity to create memories together with their peers, perhaps a funny story that is accompanied by a sweet dish or even a sad story that refers to a bitter coffee.

Affective ties promote these links between feelings experienced at that moment and the resulting mood state, so if good news is told and if the individual is eating a special dish, he will probably remember the feeling while he eats that food, reinforced by Ricoeur (1985, p. 8):

[...] "remembrance" [...] provides the feeling of temporal distance; but it is the continuity between the present, the recent past, and the distant past, which allows me to go back without breaking the continuity of the lived present to the most remote events of my childhood.

Food can be used as a starting point for remembrance, evoking a memory, be it good or bad, linked to this, it is possible to visualize where the meals are made, which in this article is called the dining table, showing that the place also has a great importance within memory and mainly within remembrance, such meaning can be explained by Nora (1993, p. 12):

The places of memory are born and live from the feeling that there is no spontaneous memory, that it is necessary to create archives, organize celebrations, keep anniversaries, pronounce funeral eulogies, notorious, because these operations are not natural.

Still following the thought of Nora (1993),

the complex relationship of social beings that sit at the table is also a way of remembering what was lived together or separately, such acts are practiced from the beginning of time to the present day. An example to be cited is that of the Catholic communion, because Jesus about to be handed over for his crucifixion took some unleavened bread and shared it with his disciples and raised a feeling saying: “- Take this all and eat, for this is my body that will be handed over for you, do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). With this attitude, Jesus instituted a place of memory for all those who follow such a religion. In all Masses of the Catholic religion, the elevation of the Body and Blood of Christ is carried out, so that the last supper in the person of Jesus Christ is remembered.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

If food is a necessity, because without food there is no way for the human body to perform all its functions, the energy that puts the entire human system in motion comes precisely from food. But food does not only offer nutrients, it is also an important factor within a constructive cultural relationship. For he is the reason why people come together to feed themselves, then interact with their fellow men.

The act of sitting at the table is not a simple act of comfort, but a constructive act, especially when you have something to share, be it a thought, story or even a daily event. Representing the relationship between eating and forming culture at mealtime, the “dining table” was put in check. Not because of its usefulness, or even because of its literal meaning, because in some cultures the table is replaced by a rug on which the meal is made, but the feeling of sitting down with the family and having a meal is the same as a conventional table. And the most important thing about this relationship is precisely the

cultural construction that can be built during the meal. The encounter in a food court, transcends much more than the literal sense, and manages to be a social phenomenon.

This phenomenon is in line with the theory of memory formation, thus making the meal a place of memory. It being composed of those who submit to gather while eating. Another relevant factor in the relationship between the social being and the dinner table is precisely the memories that can be made while meals are taken. Such memories refer that that place can be an evocator of feelings soon of memories as well.

It is then possible to understand that food is important, but what comes with it also has great meaning, as this relationship can build part of the culture, memories, feelings, traditions, among others. Also the dinner table or the place where meals are made are of relevant contribution of memory formation, therefore they are places of memories.

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