



GASTRONOMICALLY CORRECT: MCDONALD'S AND GLOBALIZATION OF THE TABLE

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Gastronomic identity is declared in the plural, since there are many traditions at the table and each one exists in the constant nexus of mixture and hybridization with the others. Each identity exists, in itself, as a never definitive result of a process by which it intertwines or—to remain in the field of culinary metaphors—mixes with the others.

It is true that in the past, if we were to venture into the "archeology of taste," this rich cultural plurality linked to food traditions tended, in some cases, to degenerate into forms of culinary nationalism, whereby each people considered itself to be the bearer of a sort of eno-gastronomic primacy. In this regard, some have coined the category of "gastronomic nationalism," although in truth, even if cuisine is fundamental for drawing the political and cultural boundaries of national identities, culinary traditions never existed, originally, in a national form, being instead regional inheritances, as Mintz has shown. In any case, gastronationalist policies have also manifested themselves because of the tendency of States to use the recognition of their own food heritage as an instrument for their own politics, for their own recognition in the international arena and in the sphere of what is usually defined as "gastro-diplomacy," thus alluding to the practice that takes advantage of the relational nature of food and seeks to consolidate and strengthen ties at the political level.

In the apotheosis of a sort of "*boria delle nazioni*," as Giambattista Vico's *New Science* might have labeled it, the English thought they were superior because of their roast beef, the French because of their *grande cuisine*—Camembert, in particular, became a Gallic "national myth"—or the Italians because of their variety, unique in the world. Very often, this plurality encouraged a fruitful desire to experience and know what was different, and thus an intercultural dialogue mediated by the food heritage of each people.

In this sense, Mennell's study of the gastronomic difference between the English and the French, an emblem of the diversity of the two peoples, is still essential. Montanari, for his part, ventured to support the suggestive thesis according to which the identity of Italy was born at the table long before the political unification of the country took place. Moreover, Ortensio Lando, in his *Commentario delle più notabili e mostruose e cose d'Italia ed altri luoghi* (1548), describes with an abundance of particularities and details the gastronomic and oenological specialties of the various Italian cities and regions. And the most famous Italian cook of the 15th century, Maestro Martino, listed in his recipe book *Romanesco* cabbage and Bolognese cake, Florentine eggs and so many other local specialties that, in fact, were forging the Italian identity at the table.

Coherent with its ideology, global-capitalist de-imbolization finds in the suppression of enogastronomic identities and in the removal of their historical roots a fundamental moment of its own. Even the table is overwhelmed by the processes of post-identitarian and homologous redefinition essential to the rhythm of turbo-capitalist globalization.

For this reason, very often we witness the substitution of the foods in which the spirit of the peoples and of the civilization of which we are the children—red meats, cheeses, wines, local and village foods— with substitutes created ad hoc. and, more precisely, by food produced by faceless and rootless multinationals, the same ones that regularly finance the operators and agencies that "scientifically" decide what is healthy and what is not, prolonging the hegemonic connection between capitalist market and the techno-scientific system.

In this way, within the framework of the new and "indigestible" gastronomically correct order, tastes tend to become increasingly horizontal on a planetary scale, annihilating the plurality and enogastronomic richness in which the identities of peoples are rooted: if the current trend is not counteracted, a single homologated way of eating, deprived of variety and diversity, will be created, or, if preferred, a global *sentire idem* which will be presented as the gastronomic variant of mass consensus. Foods historically rooted in the identity heritage and traditional roots of peoples—there is, in fact, a *genius gustus* as well as a *genius loci*—will be replaced by foods without identity and without culture, integrally desymbolized, the same in all corners of the planet, as is already happening in part. This allows us to maintain that the gastronomically correct is the dietetic variant of the politically correct, just as the "single dish" becomes the equivalent of the single thought. The dominant economic order produces, in its own image and likeness, the corresponding symbolic and gastronomic orders.

Their common denominator is the destruction of the plurality of cultures, sacrificed on the altar of the monotheism of the market and the model of the individualized and homologated consumer, submissive to that "big cart" which is the successor of the Orwellian Big Brother. The pedagogues of globalism and the architects of neocapitalism, with an unprecedented dietary paternalism founded on the order of medical-scientific discourse, seek to reeducate peoples and individuals in the new gastronomically correct program, that is, in the new globalized menu that, composed of approved foods, often incompatible with the identities of the people, is presented by the administrators of the consensus as optimal for the environment and health, unlike traditional dishes, ostracized as "harmful" in all respects.

This supports, also on the food level, the thesis of the "Marxian-Engelsian" *Manifesto*: Capital "has stamped a cosmopolitan imprint on the production and consumption of all nations," pushing them towards that homologation which is the negation of internationalist pluralism. Food de-sovereignization, directed in the name of gastronomically correct globalism and multinational interests, is piloted by the cynical stateless lords of profit-making, thanks also to the use of specific biological tools, such as pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, as well as recourse to the practices of genetic engineering. Thus, *exempli gratia*, one can explain the use of "genetically modified organisms" (GMOs), which genetically contaminate natural species, sabotage conventional agriculture and deprive peoples of their food sovereignty. They thus force them to depend on multinationals, which supply them with patented seeds and substances, protecting in the abstract, at the level of ideological propaganda, the health of all and, in concrete terms, the profit of a few.

According to what has been explained above, food has historically always been a fundamental cultural and, specifically, intercultural vehicle, revealing itself as the simplest and most immediate way of decoding the language of another culture, in order to enter into contact with it and its customs. The elimination of local food specificities is, for this very reason, consistent with the ongoing disintegration of any authentically intercultural relationship, replaced by the monoculturalism of consumption: the historical multiplicity of tastes rooted in tradition is replaced by the unity of ahistorical and aprospective tastes of the globalized menu. After the limitation of "what can be said and thought" through the imposition of the new politically correct symbolic order, the new regulation of "what can be eaten and drunk" is now imposed, more and more furiously, according to the hegemonic global-elitist order of the neoliberal oligarchic bloc.

If in the past, cuisine also determined cultural identities, today, especially since 1989, it tends to cancel them out. Traditional foods rooted in the history of peoples are more and more frequently replaced—because they are no longer considered "suitable"—by those delocalized and "global fusion" foods that, devoid of identity and history, give rise to an artificial and nomadic diet, uprooted and culturally vacuous, that homogenizes both palates and heads; a diet that, however—the strategists of consensus assure us—respects the environment and health.

With the unsurpassed immediate power of the image, a scene from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò* (1975)—a film conceived *ad hoc* to be horrible and obscene, just as horrible and obscene is the consumer civilization it photographs—can be worth more than any articulate conceptual description. The scene is set in one of the most macabre "infernal circles" of which the film is composed and which, in turn, is

meant to be an allegory of consumer civilization and its errors: the inmates of the Villa dei Suorti are condemned to eat excrement.

The coprophagic act thus becomes the very symbol of the market society, which daily condemns its docile and unconscious *ergostuli* to eat the shit connected to the commodity form, a simple and apparently banal object, which nevertheless crystallizes in itself all the contradictions of capitalist society, beginning with the one linked to the antithesis between use-value and exchange-value. Dragging Pasolini "beyond Pasolini," that macabre and scandalous scene seems to find its further confirmation in the new gastronomically correct tendencies of the global market society that, without any violence other than the glamour of manipulation, forces its own servants to the coprophagic gesture.

Food in the age of global-capitalism is usually managed by multinationals and offshore companies, which manipulate taste and control the abandonment of everything that is plural and not modeled *ex profeso* by the new uprooted and flexible lifestyle. In this context, McDonald's (the unsurpassable paradigm of "non-place," called into question by Marc Augé—and one might also add, of "non-food") represents the quintessential figure of gastronomic globalization and of the culinary imperialism of the single plate triumphant after 1989: a single way of eating and thinking about food, of distributing and presenting it, of producing it and organizing work, naturalizing a gesture and its conditions of opportunity in something as evident and obvious as the air we breathe.

But McDonald's itself embodies the profound meaning of globalization also from another point of view, identified by Ritzer and expressed in his consideration that "it has become more important than the United States of America itself." McDonald's, in fact, represents the overwhelming power of supranational capital, today—by power and specific strength, by recognition and by attractive capacity—above the traditional national powers which, precisely for this reason, are unable to govern it and, not infrequently, are strongly conditioned by it.

That the well-known globalist fast food represents the figure par excellence of capitalist globalization seems to be supported, moreover, by the fact that the two yellow arches that form the stylized "M" of its logo are today, in all probability, more famous and better known than the Christian cross, the Islamic crescent and the American flag itself. Universal merchandising is confirmed, even iconographically, as the great religion of our present in terms of diffusion, number of proselytes and ability to conquer souls even before bodies. That is why the yellow McDonald's arches, no less than the contoured Coca-Cola

bottle, represent the symbol of globalization as "bad universalism" and, at the same time, the privileged target of gastronomic anti-imperialism.

As Marco D'Eramo emphasizes, biting into a McDonald's hamburger may, at first glance, seem an obvious and natural gesture. With its standardized flavors, its mustard and ketchup, its pickles and onions, the same from Seattle to Singapore, from Genoa to Madrid, served in the same way and by waiters dressed in identical uniforms, the hamburger seems always and everywhere the same, almost as if, anywhere in the world and at any time, it were ready to materialize at the customer's request; almost as if it were the natural way of eating and, for that very reason, it generated everywhere identification and a sense of familiarity.

Like the table Marx wrote about in the opening sections of *Capital*, the McDonald's hamburger also now appears as an obvious and trivial object that, however, if analyzed from the point of view of "exchange value" and sociality, of the division of labor and the standardization of the way of eating, is revealing of the whole volume of meanings and contradictions that innervate the capitalist mode of production in the era of neoliberal globalization.

In this regard, the advertising slogan chosen by McDonald's in Italy a few years ago deserves some consideration, albeit telegraphic: "It only happens at McDonald's." The formula promised a unique and unrepeatable experience, which is still offered, always the same as itself, in all McDonald's around the world. Moreover, it augurs an out-of-the-ordinary experience that, in fact, coincides in everything and for everything with the increasingly widespread standardized experience of food consumption in this time of gastro-anomic globalization.

It would be quite right to identify the McDonald's hamburger as the very effigy of globalization from any perspective from which it is observed: whether it be that of the homologation of knowledge and flavors, or that of the capitalist rationalization of the way of managing production and the social organization of labor, McDonald's perfectly embodies the new spirit of capitalism, its combined disposition of uniformity and alienation, of reification and exploitation which, instead of receding in the name of dreams of better freedoms, become as vast as the space of the world, becoming the image of reified and low-cost happiness.

Proof of this is that, a few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first McDonald's fast-food restaurant opened in East Germany, in Plauen, where the first mass demonstration against the

communist government had taken place. Such an event, on a symbolic level even before the material one, marked with strong impact the sudden transition from real socialism to capitalist globalism, from communism to consumerism.

Two typical examples of flexible globalization are intertwined in the McDonald's diet. On the one hand, we have the presence of standardized foods, without cultural roots and accessible to all. And on the other hand, the flexible organization: a) of very fast dishes, consumed at the most diverse times of the day, b) of places conceived as *non-lieux*, as mere uninhabitable passing points, and c) of workers, subject to contracts with a very high rate of flexibility and low qualification.

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