



ON EATING INSECTS, OR DISGUSTING GLOBALIZATION

Posted on April 1, 2024 by Diego Fusaro



For some time now, the EU has been pushing for Europeans to willingly accept larvae and insects, worms and flies in their diet—the gastronomically correct single dish, a variant of the politically correct single thought. This is a decisive moment in the deconstruction of European identities, starting from the table.

It can be affirmed that the entomophagic gesture is not only not part of the table traditions of the European peoples, but has historically almost always been the object of social repugnance. The reasons must be identified in the symbolic sphere. To tell the truth, from a purely material point of view, there are no reasons that prevent eating insects, larvae or crickets. In a "technical" sense, they are perfectly "edible."

In terms of nutritional properties, for example, insect meat, which is very rich in micronutrients (protein, vitamins, minerals and amino acids), is equivalent to red meat and poultry. And, as Harris reminds us in *Good to Eat* (2011), one hundred grams of African termites contain 610 calories, 38 grams of protein and 46 grams of fat. Furthermore, Franz Bodenheimer, in his study *Insects as Human Food* (1950), documented the existence of human "insectivores" on all major continents.

Even in terms of environmental impact, the reasons for eating insects would be "acceptable": the "feed conversion ratio," which establishes how many kilograms of feed are needed to produce 1 kilo of meat, is 10:1 for cattle, while for insects it is 1:1. Therefore, from ecological parameters, the advantage would be appreciable.

The same objection according to which insects, being covered by a hard substance, chitin, could be difficult for man to digest, would not be convincing: for the same reason one should not eat shrimps or some other shellfish. Even the argument that insects should not be eaten because they could transmit diseases falls apart easily, if one considers that, without proper care, also sheep, pigs, cattle and chickens can transmit them, and that, above all, through cooking and proper "cooking" (roasting, frying, baking, etc.) the problem can be solved in one case as well as in the others. In short, as paradoxical as it may seem, insects are not "dirtier" or more "infectious" than many of the animals we usually eat.

Why, then, has there always existed in Europe a deep-rooted suspicion, usually deriving in repugnance, towards entomophagy? Harris's materialism in his *Good to Eat* (Op. cit.) and, in particular, his theory of "residual utility" may provide a possible hermeneutical key. In his view, it does not seem appropriate to

eat those animals that are most useful when alive. This is the case, for example, of the cow in India. But also the dog of Westerners, used to carry out functions of companionship and vigilance. However, animals that are counterproductive to raise, such as the pig for Jews and Muslims, are not eaten either. If the animal not consumed does not even produce utility, then it becomes an "abomination" (as we have just said, this is the case with the pig for Jews and Muslims, unlike the cow for Indians, which, on the contrary, is considered "sacred" for its utility).

Following Harris's reasoning, entomophagy is not among the tastes of Europeans because the advantage to be gained from the capture and preparation of insects is decidedly limited compared to that of large mammals or fish. In accordance with his theory of the "maximum profitability of food research," Harris explains that hunters or gatherers were only interested in species that allowed them to obtain the maximum caloric return in relation to the time spent foraging. For this reason, in the tropical forest, where few large animals are found, entomophagy is profitable, in contrast to what historically occurs in Europe, where goats and sheep, pigs and poultry, fish and cows abound.

This would be another reason—Harris concludes—why entomophagy is alien to the customs rooted in the history of the Old Continent. It should be added that, not being part of European food consumption habits, insects and larvae become strictly useless and also cause harmful effects: they destroy crops (think of locusts, traditionally understood as "divine punishment"), eat our food, sting us, bite and prick. And this tidy sum of causes brings as a consequence that, even, they come to be perceived as more "abominable" than the pig can be for Muslims and Jews. In the syntax of Lévi-Strauss, they are not "good for thinking" and, moreover, only generate bad thoughts.

So why does the EU insist on making us eat something that is outside our culture, using insistent advertising campaigns and such tenacious propaganda?

We propose two interpretations, reciprocally innervated. On the one hand, there is the Social Question: from the point of view of the dominant groups (the turbo-capitalist power elite), worms and larvae, crickets and insects of various kinds could guarantee the possibility of having food at low cost for the increasingly precarious masses, offering them this resource, however fragile, to alleviate hunger. And this, for the neoliberal oligarchic bloc, from a paternalistic perspective, could prove to be of vital importance, in order to contain the explosion of conflicts and antagonisms difficult to tame that would derive from new and possible waves of hunger in the pole of the losers (hunger, as we know, is historically the first vector of insurrections).

On the other hand, there is the Identity Question: the spread of entomophagy, directed from above and ingeniously presented as a fashion spontaneously generated from below, seems to represent the non plus ultra of the processes of disidentification at the table and, if you will, also the fundamental moment of the dynamics of that deconstruction of identities and cultures, of traditions and tastes that is functional to the unlimited expansion of the commodity form and its expressive functions. The memory of the macabre coprophagous banquet staged in Pasolini's *Saló* (1975) is once again prophetically instructive.

The disidentification of gastronomy strongly contributes to the more general disidentification of man in the time of his technical reproducibility, which I have dealt with extensively in *Difendere chi siamo. Le ragioni dell'identità italiana* (Ed. 2020).

Capitalist production gradually deprives local communities of their crop varieties, which are the result of their own intelligence developed over time to solve the problem of hunger, and replaces them with varieties dictated by the market order. It thus deconstructs food sovereignty and imposes forms of consumption that promote the industrialization of agriculture, instead of the protection of local producers and biodiversity, of traditions and typical products. The result is an accelerated degradation of the environment, a planetary homologation, a barbarization of public life, an increasingly marked asymmetry in the access to resources between the Center and the Periphery of the world.

The topic was pioneered by Jack Goody in his *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (2017), where he devotes ample space to the epochal change implemented on food production after the Industrial Revolution. The genesis of an "industrial cuisine" has produced an irreversible impact on the culinary style at a global level: the progressive mechanization of production processes and the continuous technological development—explains Goody—have determined a homologation of the food diet, which has initially focused only on the West, to then proceed to run across, in cascade, the rest of the planet.

In this sense, "food de-sovereignization" does not only mean the cosmopolitization of food production and consumption, more and more detached from territories and nations, identities and cultures; it also alludes to the growing subtraction of control over food and its production from local communities and peoples.

This contributes to the loss of the relational and communal function of food and gastronomy, which is redefined as a succession of mere unstable forms for perennially isolated individuals in perpetual

movement. And, at the same time, the cultural and symbolic value of the different dishes is annihilated in the name of their purely nutritional character.

"Modern man," wrote Heidegger, "no longer needs any symbol (Sinnbild)," since everything is reabsorbed in the power of production as the only source of meaning (hence the theologoumenon "the market demands it of us"). The level of enticity survives only as a background of production and traffic and, for this very reason, "all possibility and all need for a symbol disappears." The pantoclastic fanaticism of the freemarket economy accepts no symbols other than the icons of merchandise, of gadgets and, in general, of any tautological reference to the entropic order of the civilization of markets.

From this derives the gray monotony of the indistinct, which is presented as a consumerist homologation of identities and, in turn, as the planetary triumph of the single thought as the only admitted thought. The different, who does not accept to disidentify himself and become homogeneous to the other of himself, is declared sic et simpliciter illegitimate and dangerous, violent and terrorist.

This is the essential characteristic of technocapitalism as coercion to the equal. In Heidegger's words, "the im-posed (Gestell) puts everything with a view to the equal (das Gleiche) of the orderable, so that it constantly re-presents itself in the same way in the Equal of orderability." In this sense, das Gleiche, "the equal" or, better still, "the homologated," is the uniform, the disidentified, the quantitative indistinct which, serially substitutable, figures as the only profile admitted by the unlimitedly self-empowered will to power. By virtue of the processes of technocapitalist "uprooting" (Entwurzlung) and planetary homologation, everything becomes serially indistinct and usable: nothing is itself anymore, when everything is interchangeable in the form of the universal equivalent proper to alienation without borders.

Liberal-globalist nihilism first neutralizes cultures and identities (the moment of Disidentification). Then, once they have lost the capacity to resist through neutralization, it includes the disidentified in the model of global market homologation: and redefines them according to consumer micro-identities, produced ad hoc to be functional to the New World Order (moment of homologated Re-identification). This is what I have called "Neutralizing Inclusion."

From this derives the image of the current tribe of the last men, confined in the borderless technospace of the cosmopolis in integral reification: a single uprooted multitude, a single vision of the world, a single deculturalized culture, a single forward-looking perspective, a single falsely plural mass

monologue. And, therefore, a single uniform and alienated way of eating. And also repugnant. To paraphrase Chairman Mao, Globalization is not "a gala dinner," either.

Diego Fusaro is professor of the History of Philosophy at the IASSP in Milan (Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies) where he is also scientific director. He is a scholar of the Philosophy of History, specializing in the thought of Fichte, Hegel, and Marx. His interest is oriented towards German idealism, its precursors (Spinoza) and its followers (Marx), with a particular emphasis on Italian thought (Gramsci or Gentile, among others). he is the author of many books, including *Fichte and the Vocation of the Intellectual*, *The Place of Possibility: Toward a New Philosophy of Praxis*, and *Marx, again!: The Spectre Returns*. This article appears courtesy of [Posmodernia](#).

[Featured](#): *Grangers vs Hoppers*, cartoon by Henry Worrall, ca. 1874-1875.
