FOOD & OUR RESILIENCE

by Peppe Mastruzzo

VILLARCEAUX – JULY 2019
overshoot day

- Earth Overshoot Day marks the date in the year when we have used more resources from nature than ecosystems can regenerate
- this year we are using 1.7 Earths; through overfishing, overharvesting, and polluting more than Earth can absorb, in 2019 Earth Overshoot Day comes today, on July 29th
Country Overshoot Days 2019
When would Earth Overshoot Day land if the world’s population lived like...

Source: Global Footprint Network National Footprint Accounts 2019
the ethos of homo oeconomicus

economic activity is separate from moral values

individuals naturally and rationally seek to maximize profit

this jungle attitude & maximizing behaviour eventually increases the welfare of the community
values, communities, and unfinished commodities

artisanal food is an “unfinished commodity” as defined by Heather Paxson, Professor at MIT, in her book *The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America*
food as a private good

- food is part of a complex balance between agriculture, environment, health and culture
- on the contrary, markets regard food as a mere product (food as a private good makes hunger still triumph in a world of lavishness)
WHY IS IT?
from China to the Amazons

- 800 million pigs slaughtered yearly
- 8 million hectares of soy monoculture
- 80 million tons of Amazon soy to produce Chinese pork
the locust corporation

- financial powers jump to follow soy and pigs
- in 2008, Goldman Sachs diverts assets from derivatives to food chains, buying 25% of Shuanghui, which in 2013 buys Smithfield Foods, the world largest pig and pork producer
finance and hunger

• in 2008, the price of all 25 main raw materials increased at the same time; while usually some prices rise and others fall, this increase in unison is unique in history

• no particular natural event took place in 2008: no floods or droughts that triggered that increase in the price of rice or wheat

• the cause was the huge mass of capital fleeing from the subprime mortgage collapse
today finance is an end in itself

- the role of finance as serving the economy is lost, and finance today means making money out of money quickly
- hence the gigantism of financial markets: in 1990 Wall Street was as big as 35% of US GDP; before the crisis in 2006 it exceeded 350%
- i.e.: there is a hypertrophic mass of purely speculative transactions whose expected profits largely exceed real production profits
casino-finance & catastrophe

instability is the essence of casino finance, not just a side effect: speculators buy just to make prices go up and then sell at a higher price – the greater and quicker the increase, the more they will gain; the greater the disaster, the more lucrative the game
hunger!

since there are no rules on speculating against food prices (and hunger!) the food market, naturally subject to price fluctuations, becomes an ideal hunting ground
the Wall Street bull

- financial speculation has disastrous effects on the worldwide production of agro-goods
- a rational and fair production of food is a general concern to be protected by international law against private transnational interests
the little bull (torèt)

today:

785 million lack proper access to drinking water

(WHO & UNICEF, Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene – Updated on June 14, 2019)

Over 820 million are chronically undernourished

Hunger is on the rise in almost all African sub-regions, making Africa the region with the highest undernourishment, at almost 20%.

Hunger is also slowly rising in Latin America and the Caribbean (almost 7%).

In Asia, Western Asia shows a continuous increase since 2010 (more than 12%).

Considering also moderate levels of food insecurity, over 2 billion people do not have regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food, including 8% of the population in Northern America and Europe.
the ethos of the commons

• the “commons” are spaces, services and goods functional to the protection both of basic individual rights and vital public interests

• they are crucial for the free development of the individual as a human being
global commons

• some commons go beyond a local perspective to reach a global dimension:
  • natural commons such as great water reserves, a clean environment, climate stability, biodiversity, and the ozone shield
  • human-made commons like transnational infrastructures (the internet)
  • global policy objectives like peace, security, sustainability, monetary and financial stability
global commons are essential for a fair and “regenerative” world; they satisfy the need of the present generation without foreclosing options for the future ones; yet, they are underprovided due to the lack of national and international regulation
a world of commons

• great migrations of capital, goods and people challenge the distinction between national and international issues

• issues like labour exploitation, inequality, food scarcity, and climate change enlarge beyond state borders the duties of nations, making them transnational

• global commons should be enjoyed in an inclusive and non-rival way, while their situation is critical for depletion & lack of legal safeguards
food as a human right

food is a basic human right crucial for peace and security, humanitarian assistance, innovative sources of financing for development, monetary and financial stability

UN (2003), *Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development, Final text*
UN (2008), *Doha Declaration on Financing for Development*
food as global knowledge

food produces various utilities both as a cultural good and as a material good generated by (agri)cultural techniques

a shared knowledge about food production and preparation that guarantees the ecological cycle of life is a global commons
the city as a commons

• citizens collectively produce different kinds of values and can decide which of them will remain commons and which will be turned into a commodity, e.g. language, ideas, art, products.

• can we make food into a commons resource?
“There is a great variety of small-scale food production systems which feed the greater part of the world’s peoples, using a modest amount of land and producing less waste. Economies of scale end up forcing smallholders to sell their land or to abandon their traditional crops.” (Laudato Si’, 129)
a local future

- local diets can be a basis for a regenerative policy on agriculture and food
- they protect local products and labour
- they promote the knowledge of the local environment and the culture of the territory, and provide the basis for their collective protection

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Terra Madre

“A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress. Frequently, in fact, people’s quality of life actually diminishes – by the deterioration of the environment, the low quality of food or the depletion of resources – in the midst of economic growth, and talk of sustainable growth usually becomes a way of distracting attention and offering excuses, absorbing the language and values of ecology into the categories of finance and technocracy.” (Laudato Si’, 194)