

From Hybridisation to Transfiguration towards Communicracy

A Subject, actually, a never seen before Subjectivity is emerging in history, and now only technological innovation might be able to make it live and release it into the world.

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A common topos of the social sciences, journalistic speeches and all the rest of the wise rhetoric, which still believes itself responsible for world governance or in other words, for the “thinking the world”, is political crisis. However, decisively more significant is the perception of the politician which emerges from the viscera of the collective experience, where the fabric of a social life is woven and the codes and languages of the imaginary collective are developed. In this viscous area, in which it appears difficult to extract well defined identities, forced to establish abstract projected trajectories, it is rash to neglect the cultural significance of “banal life” in as far as we discover the most blatant signals—considered scandalous by many—of the progressive saturation of the politician (Maffesoli, 1992).

In fact, social mutation is perhaps one of the few laws that can be constantly applied to historical evolution. The politician, who constituted the heart and soul of the social organization beginning from the 18th century, is now a sign devoid of meaning, struggling to lay claim to its own role, and in an increasingly embarrassing manner finds it hard to obtain recognition for its original sacredness. Social energy is no longer projected towards the external, it no longer chooses to fit into political projects. It refuses to settle on meta-narrations (Lyotard, 1979), it escapes from the rigid structure of the nation states, resting on itself instead, re-evaluating and even making the *hic et nunc* of daily life sacred; activating a constant play of mirrors with the icons of the collective imaginary and avoiding the abstract and quite heavy morals of the modern power-knowledge (Foucault). There is no need for particular sociological studies in order to be aware of this common sentiment, it is enough, as Morin wisely suggested, to walk down the great boulevards of mass culture, to listen to the “chatter” that noisily comes from the cafes, to decode the most pregnant symbols of the post-modern imaginary. To this end, it becomes even more effective to compare the communicative platforms and the worlds of life, which many believe to be unhinged; asynchronous, if not in apparent conflict, so as to record—even among the many differences—an indicative convergence that is first of all anti-politics and in a more radical manner—a term that serves to indicate its vocation; secretly productive of new worlds—“trans-politics”.

The thousands of Internet websites dedicated to mocking, insulting and re-writing the politician; the tired and nonetheless incessant television images full of satire, are no longer concentrated on exhibiting a King’s body or a star’s figure, as much as the “naked life” of the common people, even if in an more palatable manner. The *games* and the irreverent remarks that are bounced around sms, the ignored electoral posters, ridiculed if not openly damaged, are also signs of a telluric landslide: the great Diaspora of political representation, the refusal of a democratic “fetish” and the desire to bring back the elements obscured by western modernity, the imaginary, the ludic, the sensitive, the body in its many expressions, the emotions of daily life.

This is what D. H. Lawrence tried to express using the scandalous figure of Lady Chatterley: “Give me the democracy of touch, the resurrection of the body! Not that she understood the significance, but it comforted her, as incomprehensible things sometimes do” (2003:80). It is interesting to note the manner in which the author concentrated his attention, in this

case, on three particular elements. “Touch” as the root and the heart of collective life, the “resurrection of the body” to signify the urgent necessity to free his humours from the bio-political pressures that want to label him in a particular order and within a project. It is not by chance that the unconventional figure of the woman who offends the morals and conventions of the bourgeoisie, does so by betrayal and the pursuit of tangible pleasures. This is how the premise of the great democratic pedagogical model is announced as well as how the virus of its corruption and the elements of its distortion-surmounting are liberated.

The strength of the paradox: right at the moment in which the political-democratic western model appears to be the last warrantor of possible order and happiness, the same people that are supposed to acclaim it with enthusiasm, avoid it; that is, if they don’t openly reject it. Ubiquitous and permanent war is the only strategy through which the large part of the ruling classes, that simulate western representation, are able to expand/impose democratic paradise; using the instrument *par excellence*, which in this model is negation! This is where the paradox becomes even more diabolic. Democracy is exported as an absolute good, just to be able to refuse it later in the name of security within the democratic states. However, this operation was conducted without considering the unyielding way of life, in the sense of the “resistance of the flesh” that is ever more opposing the plots of imperial wars and the ideologies that subtend it. The society of consumption, the cybercultures and at the same time, the civil populations of the countries *prized* with democratic fetish, refuse, and the package is stamped with “return to sender”. In fact, they have already elaborated imaginary trans-political forms of life, which avoid and ignore the dynamics of power; bearers of another symbolic order. War is expressed, as Carl von Clausewitz suggests, as the continuation of politics with other means. Or in a more precise manner, it openly manifests the bio-political vocation of the modern, that in other periods could have been channelled through dress and rhetorical strategies that are less blatantly violent (at least in its forms).

Here is the obscure hybridization of the modern politician, the first of two faces of the new centaur: the warrior, the keeper of the Absolute Good. The angel who takes arms against the irreversible “battle of the worlds” with the spirit of the crusaders. The only strategy which will allow political order as we know it to survive with its powers and privileges intact, is by sharpening its arms and by producing the obedient subjects that it needs on site (Hardt / Negri, 2004). In order to act in this manner it is fundamental to falsify the social scene in a practically absolute way. It is necessary to revive the Manichean conflict between two imaginary objects, the result of a perverse imagination on the part of those who want to continue to dominate the world and to make it work according to plans that are easy to control: “us” versus “them”. It is of little importance that, in reality, socially untreatable subjects don’t exist anymore in a receptacle of collective identities, unless it is in a tribe (often not necessarily physically aggregated in a stable territory, as the nets bear witness to), a community of affections, an area of temporary autonomy or a concentrated group in a specific place. It is of little importance that post-modern culture comes out of the point of implosion of the modern dichotomies: mass/elite, man/woman, east/west, person/politician, writer/reader. The hybridization of the politician with the warrior signals that the consensus towards constituted order is no longer natural. It is not immanent to the anthropological configuration of the post-modern way of life. On the other hand, it contains within itself a trans-political “will of power.” Together with the increasingly evident desire to restore the specific role of social productivity to accelerated communication (refined by new media), to mediums such as blogs which allow a creative destruction of that which was the public bourgeoisie sphere (Habermas, 1989).

Behind the warrior-politician hybrid it is easy to catch a glimpse of a world that techno cultures perceive as obsolete and progressively moving forwards, approaching demise. Already in 1964 McLuhan wrote: “Not even all the conservatism in the world can pose a symbolic resistance to the ecological assault of the new electric media” (1964). Media, as the expression of the collective imaginary, accelerates the dissolution of the politician and supports the emergence of new idiosyncratic objectivities to its order (Abruzzese, 1996). Our contemporaneity announces, in an exceptional way, the progressive tendency/knowledge of daily culture to re-appropriate communication technology in a creative way, and more in general of all the system of objects (Maffesoli, 2003). This allows, for example, for the web to become the symbolic territory *par excellence*, in which to elaborate forms of life, culture, new and irreconcilable relationships, with the cornerstones that have supported western modernity: order of the nation-states, rigid and pre-established identities, political representation, ideology, the knowledge-power of the few above the conversation-connection of the many. This is why in reality the hybridization of the politician manifests a weakness, it secretly alludes to its imminent catastrophe, produced on a large scale by the instruments that it elaborated itself in order to guarantee itself eternal survival. For the same reason, bio-politics is obligated to aim towards bio-power: from a system that is happy to survive it becomes machinery that tries to replicate within the people, to produce life instead of just managing it. As Baudrillard so brilliantly suggested, the collective imaginary is unresponsive to any type of totalitarianism (1978); it does not allow itself to reduce to the categories of power and turns itself into a show, no matter what attempts to apply pressure may be undertaken. Those which were defined in the past as “alienated masses” with a contemptuous tone, which were transformed with time—in the scientific vulgate—into the public, consumers, masses or smart mobs, are now none other than “disjointed” subjectivities (Appadurai, 1996, 1998), ready to shamelessly signal their own unwillingness to accept any direction, law, knowledge external to their expanded body, far from their own experiential forms and projected into an abstract future. If we wish to understand the transfiguration of the politician, we cannot do anything but concentrate on the plots and on social relations, on the imaginary, on communications, on parties, on tragedies and on the banalities that become the catalytic and unleashing factors of social energy—the structural elements of being together through which a re-enchantment of the world is triggered (Maffesoli, 2003). From all of this “nothing” emerge the fragments of new time, from the effervescence of daily life—from its ludic and Dionysiac aspects and from the “non sense” of horizontal communications—from body to body of “connected intelligence” (De Kerckhove, 1997) we can see the forms of liquid, transitory and weak power that are corroding the steel cages of modernity.

We have thus far described the first face of the centaur, the dark side of political contemporary hybridization, the one that is mixed with the image of the warrior. Next to it the seductive and resplendent aspects of power stand out. In order to balance the aggressiveness of the former and at the same time embrace and to try to absorb the pull of the post-modern imaginary, the politician transforms into a spectacular body. Television suggested that the politician “cool down”, (McLuhan) or melt the rigidity of his/her image and the peremptoriness of the transmitted content in order to leave margins for intervention in the message for the spectator. As Meyrowitz showed, the television screen and the structural characteristics of his message, as well as the culture that it supports, favour the discussion of traditional generational and gender divisions, as well as the exhibition of the private face of the political leader (the lateral stage, Meyrowitz, 1985). This latter is progressively pushed to show itself as a common man instead of as a hero. As it is evident, we have gone beyond this. The centrality of the show has, in fact, invested in all of the social spheres, without entering into

the apocalyptic prospective foreseen by Guy Debord (1994), who imagined this device as an instrument, serving constituted power and capable of imposing in a light and subliminal manner, the codes of dominion on its spontaneous acceptance.

We are faced with a *spectacular power*, with a political universe that in order to satisfy its own saturation, exhorts the languages of the collective imaginary, it confuses itself with the *stars* of mass culture and coherently exhibits, in a newspaper-like fashion, the passions, humours and the excesses of the *body*. The week before the recent vote in Great Britain, Mrs. Blair chose to reveal the English Prime Minister's adeptness as a lover, capable of being able to perform "five or six times per night". He is also capable of having his toned, hairy chest on the first couple of pages of the national newspapers and on the TV sport shows. After the 9/11 catastrophe, President G. W. Bush embraced the Hollywood-like tones and wore the same outfits at the head of state in "Independence Day", naming war actions after videogames and echoing the epic tone of the crusades. During the last electoral campaign he accompanied his weak and deficient speeches with the show of a "happy family" ready to support him; dressing progressively more like a cowboy. Recently, so as to not disappoint the audience, Mrs. Bush came in unexpectedly (!) in the middle of a press conference referring explicitly to the show "Desperate Housewives" (it is not by chance that there is a constant tendency to establish a link with a television image), stating that at the end of the day she too is a housewife, desperate and neglected by her husband, who falls asleep at 9 p.m. every night (when the body of the politician is no longer capable of attracting the attention of the distracted public, family members are made to move in a scientific manner. These then act as prosthetics; as a system through which to continue the performance of the ordinary life of the chief, of his affections and of his life stories, very similar to those of the average man). In Italy, Silvio Berlusconi transformed his political adventure into a "beautiful story" from the beginning, making his own political body work as a simulacrum of the television image, so repressed and marginalized from the traditional Communist and Demo-Christian political elite (Abruzzese, Susca, 2004). The *Cavaliere* bases his communicative strategy on the communion and the seduction of the electorate, transforming every political reason into a spectacular event, into an emotional show or into a blunder that makes the public laugh. We could go on and on, including cyborg-Schwarzenegger, minute sex-gate details, the charisma and the strong personality of Sarzoky and many others. All of this goes to show the spectacular magnetism of the political body, which forms a pair with its warrior-like transmutation. Here is the centaur-body of the last stage of the politician: half warrior and half star. Never before in politics has the body been both the message and the receiver of communication at the same time. It no longer aims to elicit reflections, nor does it wish to gain adherents to projects or abstract speeches, but it wishes to provoke empathy, emotive contamination and love from the public. The political content no longer has any other relevance and is barely used as a pretext. A governmental plan rarely gives back the soul of a coalition and increasingly more often tends to be a reflection of the opposing coalition. At the same time, the way in which things are communicated and the symbolism through which the body of the leader is acted become essential. The body becomes an affective and symbolic container, whose aura tries to contact the latest content of the political speech, endeavouring to draw it nearer to itself: people that one wants to govern and reproduce in one's own image and likeness.

However, the spiralling of the show is difficult to control by those who manage the communication flows; the productive consumption and the creative destruction that constitute the axes of post-modern consumption practices, in which, symbolic imagination applies constant pressure on the "distraction-destruction" pair (Susca, 2005). The politician, in choosing to

confuse him/herself with stars and merchandise as a means of survival, has inevitably predestined him/herself to face the same end as any other cultural object: consumption in the etymological sense of the term (destruction, dissipation, waste). The paroxysmal ostentation of the political body is not only a sign of its power, but the announcement of its irreversible crisis, where the disseminated bodies of the global flows of communication are re-vindicating their space and time, in the global flow of communication, in the nomadisms and tribalisms, in the circulation of sex, in the ludic, tragic and ephemeral times that signal our era. Here are the constructive pieces of our rising post-modernity. Here is the flesh of the society of communication, the cultural practices and the subjectivity that they suggest, through an aimless path, a new affirmative bio-politics, yet the tumultuous pressure of the bodies cannot be absorbed into Leviathan, nor can it be integrated inside abstract projects that transcend the naked quotidian and its frenetic and disorganized rhythms. Politics in the era of its digital reproducibility brings with itself the dissolution of the frame of modern power and the fatalistic “becoming the politics of the public.” The last political hybridization coincides in this manner with the dissolution and the transfiguration of the Subject of power that has sustained modernity in the live flesh of culture, in the subjectivity, that until now, has not existed and has not had a History; in those people that many lovely souls stigmatize as the new Barbarians (Abruzzese, 1996)

The trans-political power of cyber culture specifically resides in its natural vocation to discard itself from the categories of the politician and to orient its own living on this side and on that of the politician, starting with existing, consuming and communicating. The hybridization of the spectacular-warrior politician is the last desperate attempt to preserve an already incoherent order with social plots while unconnected to the anthropological mutation in progress. The web and its images bring with them a new trans-political paradigm, the inevitable passage from democracy to *communicracy*: a system that rests on the images of the grass roots *community*, on the creative and recreational strength of horizontal and glocal *communication*, on the *communions* that are constantly celebrated around fetishes, symbols, afflictions and the games of daily life. If it is true that the term brings one back again to the dimension of power, it is also pertinent to highlight that we are dealing with a *weakened* power (Vattimo, 1998), proportionally and fundamentally dissolved in the interaction that permeates daily life; a power free from its modern connotations, transcendence, abstraction and the projection of an ideal future (Maffesoli, 1992), which instead is reconfigured on horizontal parameters which Castells defines as the a new “morphology” of being social. In a society thus re-defined as “the power of the flows, confirms its priority over the flows of power” (Castells, 2002, p. 535).

Communicracy, therefore, is a form of liquid power of post-modernity just like democracy was the solid respective of modernity. From the hybridization of the spectacular-warrior of the politician, we slide, on the electro-cultural waves of post-modernity, to its dissolving transfiguration. “Here is the world of the beginning of the world: the space of the *partes extra partes*, without anything that dominates or sustains it, without any object of its destiny, which takes place only as immense body *pressure*.” (Nancy, 1993). Behind the mask of power we see a shadow appear on the scene, a teeming mass of people and an indistinct bellowing announce its own arrival: the bio-political pressure of the flesh of culture.

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