

## THE MYTH AND THE SACRED IN THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL STRUCTURES

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### *Abstract*

In his volume *Social Myths and Collective Imaginaries* (University of Toronto Press, 2017 – original edition: *Raison et déraison du mythe: au coeur des imaginaires collectifs*, Editions du Boreal, 2015), Gerard Bouchard affirms that in the act of its constitution a social myth requires a “process of mythification” which, through series of proceedings and mechanisms does emerge in the collectivity.

To outline all the characteristics of this process, the author based his research “in part on theory and in part on empirical observation from the results of various studies, mainly in the fields of sociology, history, and communications”.

Inside this process of mythification, the sacred plays a fundamental role: it is that element able to transform representations lying at the core of the collective imaginary up to the rank of authentic myths, in particular social myths. A social myth, for Gerard Bouchard, can be distinguished from founder myths or cosmogonical myths because it builds up a representation of key elements of the collective imaginary, whether regarding ancient times or contemporaneity.

It is important to notice and to remember that nowadays, a myth takes advantage of the sacred as its principal element even if it doesn't possess religious aspects.

One must then wonder why the sacred is positioned higher than the sacredness coming from cults, rituals or religious traditions.

What are the characteristics which confer this substantially incontrovertible power?

Gerard Bouchard gives us a series of answers: the sacred deals with a kind of authority, which confers to feelings and social representations such a strong hold that it builds a basin of commonly felt values called super-consciousness, akin to a divine consciousness. Moreover, it deals with something located over the realm of rationality and that requires a cognitive shift. It is about a *quid* which distinguishes myth from the others social representations. Lastly, it can concern something like taboos and what sociality removes.

Looking at these definitions it is possible to add and compare those proposed by Gregory Bateson in his *Angels fear. Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred* (Bantam, 1987) written with his daughter Mary Catherine. In that book, released posthumously, Bateson makes an acute recognition about the sense of the sacred and its power inside human life. We believe it might be useful to compare Bateson's thinking to Bouchard's because both authors notice how the power of the sacred would remain unchanged even without religion.

Some of Bateson's proposed definitions about the sacred concern its aspect of "connecting structure" (which is similar to Bouchard's concept of super-consciousness; moreover the sacred is defined like a dimension to be respected (like the untouchability of Bouchard); lastly, for Bateson, the sacred is akin something impossible to communicate (this can be compared to Bouchard's cognitive shift towards the realm of irrationality).

After focusing on the concept of the sacred itself, this paper aims to encompass all the characteristics making this topic so important inside the process of mythification.

The behaviour of the sacred is, first of all, a kind of non material authority, a drape that covers instances, objects, physical or metaphorical places and so on, and that confers them the peculiar power of untouchability. Untouchability is the most powerful extrinsic characteristic of the sacred, because it allows it to go through all the steps which, from the basin of the collective imaginary, reaches the forge of the authentic social myth. For an object, a place, an instance, an ideology, becoming metaphorically untouchable, means that it will no longer have obstacles on its way to modifying the social and the political order of a community (whether local communities or planetary ones).

If we admit this eventuality, we can understand how on one side, myth could be acting as social incentive towards processes of unpredictable size and flow; on the other side, how the sacred contains in itself an extraordinary disruptive power.

Strictly speaking, sacralizing something means allowing it to play a role, inside a social myth, capable of changing the political order and the connotations of an entire society, bringing it both towards its potential improvement and (like past history, the recent one and contemporaneity remind us) towards serious disruption of the whole planet balance.

This paper will focus on these aspects to show how even inside the most secularized society - e.g. the western world - the sacred plays a fundamental role and determines the coming into being, the consolidation, the transformation and the decline of all the social myths capable of displacing human communities towards previously unthought directions.

The paper will also examine the decisive role of power in its definition/redefinition of worldwide political assets, as well as it becomes interwoven with the dimension of the sacred.

The social structures are thus modified in a way never seen before. We can consider, for example, how in peculiar time periods political leaders, in front of an impending social disruptor, position themselves as

saviours, as if they were “men of light, mortal deities that, time after time, protect their people from demons which threaten them and question their economical welfare and way of life”, as Paolo Bellini writes in *L'immaginario politico del salvatore. Biopotere, sapere e ordine sociale* (Mimesis, 2012).

Doing so leaders espouse an extremely ancient myth (the symbolism of light and the Manichean display light-darkness) which, from the birth of the western civilization, reappears everytime a societal political asset is about to endure a drastic change.

The symbolism of light is a clear example of a myth becoming untouchable by virtue of its sacred nature, while concurrently capable of surviving secularization.

Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this paper is to show the dynamics of power within the political assets of the current world and as they relate to the sacred component imbuing them.

**Keywords:** myth, mythological machine, sacred, numinous, political structures, contemporary world.

## 1. Introduction

The myth and the sacred remain matters with a very active role, although sometimes they play it in an underground manner, hidden from immediate evidence, even in our contemporary society; especially within those social structures that are the political orders, movements and parties.

This is true despite it being evident that an alleged or wished-for original time in which the myth manifested itself as a hypostasis of the sacred never happened; that is, the myth and the sacred have always been purely human matters, connected to intimate aspirations or to conscious or subconscious needs, to which reality, in its concreteness and brutality, is not, to this day, and has not always been able to respond.

The myth and the sacred, together or as individual instances, imbue the dynamics of the political institutions with their own citizenship in a much stronger and deeper way than it may seem; in fact, it could even be claimed that every political structure which carries a certain amount of resonance in the community and in the social sphere, whether it be favourable or unfavourable, is covered and surrounded by mythological and sacral elements.

The present article shall focus first on the peculiar connotations of the terms “myth” and “sacred”, that we want to consider when dealing with their active significance within contemporary political dynamics; that is, a myth seen as an impersonal instance, relentlessly acting, that could come close to the concept of “mythological machine” that was coined by Furio Jesi; on the other hand is a concept of sacred which is partly close to Rudolf Otto’s numinous and partly to the connecting structure of Gregory Bateson, id est something that logically precedes the typical sacral garnishment of institutionalised religions.

After these due premises, the article shall analyse some specific contemporary political scenarios, underlining the mythical and sacral components with which they are imbued, therefore highlighting that the more these instances act at the basis of the political terrain, the more it increases its power of cohesion and its capacity to engage the masses.

## **2. A few clarifications on the concept of myth**

The myth represents an instance whose origin is constantly procrastinated: “the myth is always posthumous” writes Fulvio Carmagnola in his *Il mito profanato* [The profaned myth]<sup>1</sup>: that is, although it has the function of referring to an original reality, in order to found and justify the present, once something gets defined as myth, and told as myth, it is already at a considerable distance from itself and from its presumed origin: there is not a more authentic *Ur*-myth of which the myth put into logos would be a dead repetition. This is to clarify that the myth does not refer to a primordial truth that is then repeated in the political structures as well as in the collective imaginary; it is, however, intimately connected to the imaginary, so that it is co-established with it, continuously and in every age.

Even being this far from the hypostasis (seen as a manifestation of the primordial coincidence) or from the epiphany (understood with the connotation of being an event of emanation and transcendental origin), the myth (and, nonetheless, the sacred or the sacral component of the myth itself) remains an instance with which a man cannot deliberately sever all relations. Or also, and above all, with which he, even in an unwitting and unconscious way, interacts and towards which he directs the orientations of his own actions and feelings.

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<sup>1</sup>Fulvio Carmagnola, *Il mito profanato. Dall'epifania del divino alla favola mediatica* (Milan: Meltemi, 2017), 155.

We would therefore like to begin from a perspective on myth that sees it as an instance, but as an instance acting in an impersonal way, id est not dictated by subjective wilfulness.

Within this approach, a certain connotation of the mythos-logos dichotomy proves useful, as suitable to highlight how, at the basis of a mythical tale, there is a reiteration (not because a primordial phenomenon repeats itself, as we were saying) of the encounter, ever-present at every instant, between the human subject and the pre-linguistic or non-linguistic real. This encounter represents the nub of all that can be called unspeakable but, at the same time, through this encounter the parable of signification for the human subject begins: from that moment, incessantly repeated, for man nothing can occur without being said, and it is precisely this that determines a dynamic of separation from the concreteness of primary needs. In this way, we have tried to underline how, within the mythos-logos relation, the myth would be the real of the logos, whereas the logos can be interpreted as mythology itself.

But in what sense, Real? The only original aspect, id est connected to the dimension of the *archè*, is this encounter, hence not an origin that unfolds in a hypothetical and specific time X, but that unspeakable origin of every moment that always gets tamed by pigeonholing it in the world of the logos. That logos that is “always redemption and deprivation together”<sup>2</sup>, so that while it makes the human subject self-reflected, at the same time it deprives it of a direct relationship with the immanence of the event, turning the event into a perennial tale about itself, instead of recreating, reconnecting, the unique and authentic point of the encounter with the world, in the authenticity of the living present.

From this point of view, the gods themselves assume the character and the value of the real, since “they are a manifestation [of it] (...). Now, every passage of this manifestation to a symbolic order takes us further away from the revelation of the real”<sup>3</sup>. What is the point, at this juncture, in quoting a sentence by Jacques Lacan? With this statement, we want to maintain that the logos, by narrating the mythos, by telling it through signifiers and transforming it into a narrative, makes it inevitably symbolic, that is, belonging to the world of metaphorical relations, where every lemma incessantly

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>3</sup>Jacques Lacan, *Il seminario. Libro VIII. Il transfert 1960-61* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), 58.

shifts in its reference to its meaning, in an endless drift, and in doing so it inexorably pushes it away from its evenemential character, id est from the contingent encounter which is alive and material.

In this connotation, symbolic assumes a particular significance, that is, not so much relative to the practice of “corresponding to” of an object in relation with a reality that is undoubtedly wider and fuller of meaning; but relative to the incessant action of the language (logos) which transforms the immanent matter of the world into pure signifier-signified relations.

The “mythological machine”, a concept coined by Furio Jesi in the Seventies and very fitting in this context, is always running and there is no real distinction between genuine myth and technicised myth, authentic myth and lower-level myth (to go with Kerényi). Actually, “there is no myth but a technicised myth”<sup>4</sup>, all myths have always been produced by the machine. Within this framework the mythological machine and the mythological materials take on the character of concepts which are structurally and profoundly different from the collective unconscious and from the archetypes; first of all, this happens because we are not talking about transcendental basins where the immaterial essences that characterise and give meaning to man and his actions end up, but about an anonymous and impersonal mechanism, strictly immanent, that acts without pause and relentlessly, as an agent of production of the human perception.

Observing the myth through the lenses of the mythological machine, as Carmagnola explains, puts between brackets the question of the truthfulness of the myth itself, it becomes irrelevant whether what is told by the myth is “true”; actually, in the more-than-likely possibility that no myth refers to a reality of primordial events, it is necessary to understand what made (and still makes) the aforementioned mechanism work. The myth uses the illusion of its truthfulness as an ingredient suitable to make it efficient, but not by choice of an individual human subject: “every mythological fact is therefore a presumption of its own origin in itself”<sup>5</sup>.

Analysing the mythological machine, one could wonder whether it is humanistic, id est, whether man himself, without realising it, thus we could say unconsciously, is the producer of the myths which he then believes or that he ends up embodying; or whether the machine is a veritable *automaton*, a non-human, in-human device/contraption that incessantly produces mythological matter. We believe the

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<sup>4</sup>Carmagnola, *Il mito profanato*, 87.

<sup>5</sup>Furio Jesi, *Materiali mitologici. Mito e antropologia nella cultura mitteleuropea* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 112-13.

answer lies somewhere in the middle, that is, the mythological machine represents both a product of the unconscious and an automatic impersonality, precisely because the unconscious refers more to the order of the *automaton* than one thinks: it does not fit *into* the subjects or *in* the community nor in any external place separated from transcendence, as Lacan would say, it is out there and occurs where the symbolic exchanges happen.

### 3. A few clarifications on the concept of sacred

We could start from the classical definition of sacred distilled, in his homonymous volume, by Rudolf Otto<sup>6</sup>; in that book, he makes the famous distinction between the sacred and the numinous, which could have the same significance as the one we previously analysed, between myth and logos, id est, one would be the shapeless and anonymous matter of which the second would represent the formalisation, the ascent to the rank of concept. The numinous, according to Otto, would precede the sacred as such, having to do with a dimension with a strong emotional tone, elusive to definition and very close to the effect of proximity with a sort of real and proper epiphany of the divine. As we have previously stated, within the perspective we are pursuing in this article, this age or crucial moment in which the divine actually manifested itself in its staggering potency, thus giving rise to the feeling one would feel in the presence of the numinous, and that, when compared to it, would make the sacred amount to nothing but a stale institutionalised reproposal, never existed. In spite of this, the important aspect in Otto's analysis is the one connected to feeling, that is, to something that exceeds its conceptual definition. With regard to the sacred, it is useful to keep in mind that conceptual definitions fall, with a concept we do not get to the sacred, and this is why it becomes very difficult to outline its essence and its scope.

Within this numinous/sacred dualism, the issue of the unspeakable comes into play: a mystery (which is subject to the dimension of a cult or a rite, for example) is described as unspeakable because it does not make itself known as something you say but as an act, a praxis, it does not have a metalanguage, it has nothing to do with what is hidden or concealed, but with something that is of the order of pure appearance, without a discourse on it, a post-discourse (meta-); Fulvio Carmagnola writes in this

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<sup>6</sup>Rudolf Otto, *Il sacro* (Milan: SE, 2014).

regard, referring to Giorgio Agamben's essay on *kore*<sup>7</sup>: “the *arreton* is what does not have a metalanguage, or «a definitory discourse», and is a «threshold», that is, a point of passage, of communication: it structures and connects, instead of «separating»”.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to this aspect connected to the unspeakable, the primordial sacred (id est, Otto's numinous) presents a character of strict immanence, even possibly having the characteristics of a pure event, far from being placed in an allegedly separate and distant dimension, as it appears through the tardiness of religion (for example, Christianity and its “heaven above”); the immanence of the primordial sacred would have more the flavour of a radical change of perspective: “the same region, the same scenario otherwise seen”.<sup>9</sup>

At this point we would like to introduce the definitions of sacred that Gregory Bateson proposed, after a long course of study, about that field before which the man of science hesitates, since he understands he finds himself before something that eludes every stigmatisation and every attempt at a concept, and unite them with the issues tied to what, in the mystery and in the unspeakable, has the opportunity to connect instead of divide, for instance between the thing and its “defining discourse”. Gregory Bateson, from his position as an atheist and as a scholar attentive to the cybernetic language of the living, attributes some peculiarities to the concept of sacred that overlook any form of religion, belief or transcendental dimension.

The most meaningful definitions that Bateson proposes regarding the sacred outline it as a dimension that “inspires respect”, id est, with which one should not interfere, “a sense of everything one can approach only with awe”<sup>10</sup>, even within totally secular contexts; moreover, the sacred has to do with the impossibility of communicating something, that is, of a dimension in which awareness and wilfulness would keep the significance of its sacral component in check: “there are a lot of issues,” Bateson writes, “and many circumstances in which *conscience* is undesirable and silence is golden, so that secrecy can act as a *sign* to indicate that we are approaching a sacred ground”<sup>11</sup>; it is important

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<sup>7</sup>Giorgio Agamben – Monica Ferrando, *La ragazza indicibile. Mito e mistero di Kore* (Firenze: Mondadori Elekta, 2010).

<sup>8</sup>Carmagnola, *Il mito profanato*, 74.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>10</sup>Gregory Bateson, *Dove gli angeli esitano. Verso un'epistemologia del sacro* (Milan: Adelphi, 1989), 224.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.



to underline how, in dealing with the topic of secrecy and non-communication, the anthropologist stretches from the area of a phenomenology of the rite to the behaviour of genes in the transmission of characters, in particular within his criticism to Lamarck; finally, the sacred is seen as a “connecting structure”, id est a structure that is able to hold together the different levels of the biological world (intended in a broad sense as the world of life): from those that refer to the structure, to those of pure flow. It is essentially “an integrated fabric of the mental process that encompasses our whole life” and within which “the richest knowledge of a tree”, to make just one example, “includes both the myth and botany”<sup>12</sup>.

It is by looking at this “integrated” perspective about the sacred that we would like to examine some contemporary political structures, even where commanding respect gets so distorted and twisted that it no longer bears any connection with the purity of the numinous that Otto theorised. This, once again, to show how the mythological machine and the sense of the sacred are two instances that go beyond any moral or value-related judgement or any dichotomy between a presumed good or a genuine myth and an evil or politically-technicised myth.

As we shall see, in politics, what lasts touches the imaginary and the bodies full of impulses of the subjects, even when this has led, and could still lead, to the worst forms of totalitarianism or to the recent populist manifestations.

#### **4. At work in contemporary political structures: from the myth of the Saviour to the *leghista* imaginary**

After starting once again by mentioning our disagreement with the Kerényian assertion that there is a genuine myth characterised by spontaneity and immediacy and a political myth in which instead an artificial, built *ad hoc* project wins, we would like to review some of the contemporary political structures in order to see the mythological component and the sacral aspect of which they are imbued in action. As a matter of fact, we believe, in agreement with the thought of philosophers like Jean-Jacques Wunenburger<sup>13</sup>, Jean-Luc Nancy<sup>14</sup> and Paolo Bellini, that being able to recognise the myth

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<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, 301.

<sup>13</sup>See Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *Filosofia delle immagini* (Torino: Einaudi, 1999).

<sup>14</sup>See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe - Jean-Luc Nancy, *Il mito nazi* (Genova: Il nuovo Melangolo, 2013).

that lies behind a specific political *leader*, as well as a party or even a regime leader, helps to understand which needs and intimate tensions of the community have been intentionally or unintentionally touched, after serious planning or in a spontaneous way, thanks to a peculiar historical period. Indeed, if a political coalition moves or is moved by the collective imaginary (and the opposition may as well coincide) it is not relevant to know whether the myth they are drinking from finds its roots in a remote past or represents a collection, a gallimaufry and a mishmash of disparate and recently-gathered mythological material.

By focusing on them, it will be useful to show how those who have had the greatest impact and have been followed by the masses have been those where the mythical and sacral component has played an essential role, even when they had declared themselves completely secular. As a matter of fact, it bears repeating that the sacred overlooks institutional religions and any other form of worship, since it represents an instance which is much more inherent when it comes to subjectivity.

A political orientation, a party, the behaviour of a leader, have more impact when they base their action on a rhetoric that belongs, implicitly or explicitly, to a well-rooted myth of the society or, even more, where this myth includes, in its interior, a component related to the concept of sacred, as we summarised in the previous paragraph. As we have already shown above, something that the community perceives as sacred makes certain peculiar chords of their subjectivity resonate, chords that have something to do with respect, awe and a sense of union and belonging.

It can thus be analysed, *in primis*, the myth of the Saviour, as it appeared in the figures of Silvio Berlusconi, Barack Obama, but also, less clearly, in the economist Mario Monti. In this regard, we will use the discussion on the subject that was theorised by Paolo Bellini: the Saviour would be, in this discourse, a non-religious figure more related to the myth of Prometheus than to the one incarnated by Jesus Christ; this because the figure in question would come into play in the dynamics between power and knowledge, and such a dynamic has always remained partially or totally concealed within a Christian framework. The myth of Prometheus, instead, brings to the fore a figure capable of stealing from the jealous custody of the gods a practical and functional knowledge and bringing it to his people of men, to free them from the yoke and the darkness of ignorance. Within this mythical framework, different and possible figures of political *leaders* are possible, belonging to parties of opposite, and even contrasting, mould. A common trait surely remains the fact they bring, to a technological civilisation, the promise of a practical knowledge (therefore, of something useful)

that will eradicate the chaos and mayhem in which the civilisation itself has precipitated. Paolo Bellini writes, in this regard: “in the case of a technological civilization (...) the Saviour (...) is often the custodian of a knowledge and a strength that do not concern the spiritual and transcendental dimension connected with the salvation of the soul (...), rather its specificity resides in empirical, technical, material and political knowledge, that is tapped by the power to restore an order after crises and conflicts of various kinds”<sup>15</sup>.

In this way, very different and heterogeneous figures correspond to the imaginary of the myth of the Saviour: for instance, a hyper-rhetoric mass-mediatic, self-styled dispenser of material wellbeing like Silvio Berlusconi, or, vice versa, an austere technical economist like Mario Monti, or, to keep to Italy, even the current minister Matteo Salvini fits well the imaginary of this kind of myth: the key consists in identifying the figure of an enemy (a social but also an immaterial one) and presenting themselves as the person who, in the eyes of the community, will be able to defeat it, bringing to the citizens what they need or intimately desire. So Berlusconi promised pensions and prosperity, warning against the “communism” of the left parties; Monti proposed to lead the country with a policy of *austerity* to avoid the economic imbalances caused within the nation by the aforementioned Berlusconi government and, globally, by the dynamics of the speculative real estate bubble and the proliferation of the subprimes in the United States; in the latter case, the enemy was more ascribable to a lifestyle rather than to a single person/party.

Nowadays it is easy to recognise in Matteo Salvini’s policy another blatant and glaring example of the myth of the Saviour: the common enemy is mainly the extra-European immigrant and the Promethean “fire” that the *leader* of the Lega would have the ability to bring to the citizens consists in expulsion or rejection policies. Regardless of the ethics of this *modus operandi*, what is interesting to note is the position occupied by the *leader* in question, who, by injecting himself into a dialectic with foreigners, in which the latter is perceived as an enemy, and by using well-selected news facts to his advantage, is able to increase the consent of the citizens that turns him into an icon of salvation. As appears evident, by adorning themselves with the mantle of such a myth, political parties and structures almost always receive an immediate response from the citizens, precisely because the

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<sup>15</sup>Paolo Bellini, *L'immaginario politico del salvatore. Biopotere, sapere e ordine sociale* (Milan-Udine: Mimesis, 2012), 27.

dynamics of the gnostic symbolism of light and the consequent conflict between light and darkness are brought into play, within which the *leader* injects himself as the figure that once and for all will solve the conflict, also and above all leveraging what, on the darkness side, is more capable of scaring and upsetting the community of citizens.

In the United States of America a similar situation can be observed both in the ex-Republican President George W. Bush and in the Democratic Barack Obama: whereas the former, with a very clear reference to the gnostic dichotomy, used to refer to certain states of the Middle and Far East by calling them “the axis of evil” (in particular, Iraq, Iran and North Korea) and thus was able to justify his war initiatives with the goal of saving the nation from the coming of the darkness; the latter, through the usage of a much more amenable and less harsh discourse, presented himself as the one who would finally bring dignity, consideration and standing rights to all the minorities of the country (whether they were ethnic, sexual or disability-related minorities) that until that moment (also because of the previous Republican legislation) had remained in the material impossibility of asserting them. Paolo Bellini writes in this regard: “Obama (...) in the United States built his electoral campaign on a redeeming and resolute action, which was based, *inter alia*, precisely on the recognition of the identities and expectations of many ethnic components of the American people. Not by chance, in his speeches to the nation and in his writings, he expresses his arguments by listing, in certain passages, the plural identities of his people or specifying a set of symbolic objects with strong identity values”.<sup>16</sup> Getting back to the Italian political structures of the last few months, what can the character of Matteo Salvini show us in the light of psychoanalysis and drive theory? The *leader*, according to Freud, moves the ideal of the people, therefore their desire, while today populism and in particular the figure of the *leader* of the Lega arouse and stir the bodily drives, or, rather, legitimise the visceral dimension of the subjects; in this way, it is more of a question concerning pleasure than desire.

As Matteo Bonazzi writes in the collective volume *L’immaginario leghista*: “the obscenity that characterises today’s political life is not so much an offense to our moral conscience. Rather, it reveals a truth about us (...). It depends on the way we will be able to respond to this embarrassing,

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, 94.

disorienting revelation. It no longer says «I, the truth, speak»; it rather says «I, the truth, enjoy»<sup>17</sup>. This passage is telling us that what certain political ties move, or, rather, are moving in our most recent present is something that has to do with what, in the imaginary, is more connected to pleasure, a pure drive, than something inherent to ideals and desires.

Is it then possible to say that when the myth gets from the symbolic dimension to the imaginary one, its consequences shift from acts of desire to acts of enjoyment? And what can be interpreted as enjoyment in this context? The symbolic dimension corresponds to that in which the myth, narrated as logos, contains all those stories that “found a social community or establish «meaning» in accordance with a classical definition”<sup>18</sup>; to affirm that it, the myth, has fallen to the imaginary register would then mean placing it within that headless machine of production of feelings that is precisely the imaginary (in a connotation which is close to the Lacanian thought, among others). Having reached this collocation (nearby the aforementioned headless machine called imaginary<sup>19</sup>), the myth would no longer move the ideals of the community, because what directs it is no longer desire (the authentic, although unconscious, engine that moves subjects or collectivities), but rather the contingency of the enjoyment, id est that drive that moves the subject (or the whole social community) and, even though it does not act in favour of its economy or for its protection, it cannot be kept in check. The enjoyment-related issues, in fact, do not act for the good of the subject or the community, they are rather, at least at times, deadly impulses, but of which the same subject (and the same community of subjects) cannot do without; their economic value is, as a matter of fact, ascribable to the Freudian Todes trieb, which he theorised in 1919 in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*<sup>20</sup>.

It can therefore be stated that, among the most recent political realities of the West, Salvini’s *Lega* President Trump’s America most of all show this empire of the drives; Matteo Bonazzi writes, again:

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<sup>17</sup>Mario Barenghi – Matteo Bonazzi (eds.), *L'immaginario leghista. L'irruzione delle pulsioni nella politica contemporanea* (Macerata: Quodlibet Studio, 2012), 206.

<sup>18</sup>Carmagnola, *Il mito profanato*, 12.

<sup>19</sup>You can find this definition of Imaginary inside texts and reaserches of a group called OT/Orbis Tertius, born in the University of Milano Bicocca at the chair of Fulvio Carmagnola. See Matteo Bonazzi - Francesco Cappa (a cura di.), *Fantasma, OT/ORBIS TERTIUS Ricerche sull'immaginario contemporaneo – numero 1* (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2009); Matteo Bonazzi - Francesco Cappa (a cura di.), *Pop porn – Critica dell'immaginario porno* (Milano: et al., 2009).

<sup>20</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Al di là del principio di piacere*, in *Opere di Sigmund Freud (OSF) vol. 9. L'Io e l'Es e altri scritti 1917-1923*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1986).

“after all, if the prepolitical object that captures our enjoyment is ambiguous, it is necessary to try and move the imaginary inscription that blocks its operativity”<sup>21</sup>, so an ethical component comes into play, when the imaginary drifts and from the steadfast harbours of the symbolic instances it is deviated towards the songs of the sirens of enjoyment.

Finally, very recently, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger analysed the set of mythological tiles used by another *leader* of our contemporary society: the French President Emmanuel Macron. Macron, according to the French philosopher, went beyond embodying the imaginary of a single mytheme, but used all the mythemes that France has adopted and known throughout its history as a nation-state. In the political dynamics of the French president there would be present, therefore, nine political mythemes: from the Protean Machiavellian prince, able to simulate every kind of pathos for diplomatic purposes, to a personification of Napoleon Bonaparte, even at a biographical level; from the figure of Odysseus, bearer of that *metis* which can easily turn from cunning into deception, to that of the Greek god, the intermediary between the human world and the divine, as well as the custodian of the mysteries, Hermes.

The difference between such a figure of politician and the one that, for instance, is embodied in Italy by Salvini would be found not in the incomplete adhesion (or participation) of the French president himself to the myths he is embodying, thus ending up, in the words of Wunenburger, as a dead patchwork of myths, the perfect figure of a politician who just lacks the truthfulness of his policies. That is, what matters is not the truthfulness of the myth behind the action and the single political *leader* or party to which he belongs, but the truthfulness of the instances that move it. If politics do not rely on myths that flow in the veins of their people, or that belong to their history, or if they do not rely on what, for the people, holds the value of sacred, it cannot bear a hold on that people themselves.

It is unthinkable that a scenario of this kind becomes the norm, or may this be the dawn of a new era in the knowledge-power dialectic, where the myth, the sacred and the imaginary can and are able to be used *ad hoc*, depending of the situation, on the contexts and on the circumstances, until they generate in the community a series of new, planned and answers which are absolutely unrelated to the unifying dimension of the symbol?

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<sup>21</sup>Barengi – Bonazzi, *L'immaginario leghista*, 206.



Sesto San Giovanni (MI)  
via Monfalcone, 17/19



& Ass. AlboVersorio Edizioni  
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via Martiri di Belfiore, 11

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