

THE TECHNOLOGICAL IMAGINARY OF POWER AND THE MYTH OF THE SAVIOUR

by **Paolo Bellini**

Università degli Studi dell'Insubria - Varese, Como

Abstract

This brief essay intends to examine the technological imaginary of power in light of the fragmented identity that is investing Western civilisation. The most evident expression thereof is the mediatic dramatisation of any kind of narratives and symbols. In particular, this study is aimed to illustrate how the emergence of the myth of the Saviour is a symbolic form consistent with the important cultural and social transformations brought about by the new technologies.

Keywords: Power, Imaginary, Myth, Saviour, Technology

Introduction

No reflection on political power and social organisation carried out *sine ira et studio*, that is to say as much as objective as possible and free from any ideological influence, cannot do without considering the relationship between power and collective imaginary in building up the identity and legitimisation processes of the political and social system. This dialectic procedure, in which imaginary and power influence and modify one another, stems from time immemorial, determining the origin myths and cosmogonies that lay the foundations for all the myths and religions¹. It is no accident that: «When Romulus had duly attended to the worship of the gods, he called the people together and gave them the rules of law, since nothing else but law could unite them into a single body politic. But these, he was persuaded, would only appear binding in the eyes of a rustic people in case he should invest his own person with majesty, by adopting emblems of authority. He therefore put on a more august state in every way, and especially by the assumption of twelve

¹ See M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. by W.R. Trask, Harper and Row, New York, 1963.

lictors»².

Broadly speaking, Roman civilisation represents the fundamental paradigm of the interaction between political and religious power, which has moulded the collective imaginary of Western culture. As is in the UK today, though only formally, the King was a political, military and at the same time religious leader in ancient Rome³. This tradition was then resumed after passing from the Republic to the Empire, when Augustus became Pontifex Maximus in 12 B.C.⁴. Afterwards, with the gradual spread of Christianity, the Roman Emperor Constantine, by summoning and inaugurating the 325 A.C. Nicea Council, took an interest in the theological disputes over the nature of God of that time⁵. This notwithstanding, he thought he did not own any ecclesiastic-charismatic authority, but *only secular a deo*⁶. Religion and politics, therefore, both when they emanate from a common centre where civil and religious powers coincide and when they are separately managed, represent the two fundamental factors that have always been contributing to making up a shared imaginary. The latter is, indeed, along with power, one of the original elements that concur to qualify human existence. Thus religion as well as politics cannot but have to do with the exercise of power and the regulation of collective imaginary, on which the adhesion to a set of shared values that play a role in structuring and maintaining social order depends. Religion and politics, therefore, have always been the two original places through which power establishes social organisation. They structure both its social dimension, meant as the whole of hierarchical and asymmetrical relations that regulate the relationships between individuals, groups and classes within a given social order, and the whole of contents being as they are ideological and mythic-symbolic narrative forms, which give any society/community an identity common denominator. In the past, and until the

² T. Livio, *The history of Rome*, trans. by B. O. Foster, William Heinemann, London, 1919 (Book I, chap. 8), <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus:collection:Greco-Roman> – 2011.

³ See P. Cerami – A. Corbino – A. Metro – G. Purpura, *Ordinamento costituzionale e produzione del diritto in Roma antica. I fondamenti dell'esperienza giuridica occidentale*, Jovene editore, Napoli, 2006, pp. 14-19.

⁴ See S. Mazzarino, *L'impero romano*, Laterza, Roma – Bari, 2010, p. 63.

⁵ See op. cit., pp. 543-549.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 548.

development of systems of mass communication, the production of collectively significant narratives was an exclusive privilege of a small group of religious and civil institutions, which were clearly recognisable and identifiable in ordered and hierarchical groups. Such institutions were delegated to control and efficaciously re-elaborate the collective imaginary, since they held the sole capacity to formulate messages and commands which could reach out to each individual. Thus, with regard to the Greek *polis*, one can argue that: «The kaleidoscopic city world was a constellation of inter-independent spaces, organised and regulated by sacred principles, on which religious, civil and political interests converged; the latter constituted a unique and indivisible reality to the Greeks. This physical place was defined by monumental buildings that were loaded with a strong symbolic value, such as the Acropolis, the seat of the *poliadis* divinity, the *agorà*, a public meeting place and ideal centre where a hero's bones often rested, the altar where the sacred fire was kept on burning, the continuous water fountain, the *archèia*, the seat of the magistrates, and the theatre. All this gave life to an ideological dimension where the citizens codified their own identity to differ not only from the barbarians, but also from the inhabitants of the other Greek cities, by means of the common celebration of worships and feasts»⁷. As the above reported text shows, it is evident that, in spite of the various places where the manifold aspects of Greek public life symbolically concentrated, the identity dimension was strongly influenced by the individual and collective devotion to the religious sphere along with the exercise of civil power through the bench and the ritual and spectacular horizon arranged within the citizen space.

Contrary to the past, thanks to the advent of modern civilisation and, above all, to the exponential development undergone by mass communication technologies in the last two centuries, passing as they did from off- to online modalities, there has been a lot of increase in the power centres that can influence collective imaginary and social organisation as efficaciously as – or even more efficaciously than – the most traditional religious and civil institutions.

Thus the States and the most ancient religions that speak through their own institutional and mediatic channels go hand in hand and overlap with autonomous power centres, such as large corporations and the so-called economic, social and political international institutions. As a

⁷ *Mondo classico – Europa precristiana* in *Storia delle religioni*, a cura di G. Filoramo, La Biblioteca di Repubblica, Roma, 2005, Vol. 8, p. 82.

consequence, the emergence of new and numerous power centres that can access any kinds of communication means, gave and is still giving rise to a different geography as regards the collective imaginary, since it mobilises identities, life styles and collective narratives, which are sometimes inconsistent and contradictory. This cannot but relevantly affect social organisation, which, if on the one hand refers to empirical and structural elements such as the organization of production and exchange systems⁸ alongside the institutional articulation typical of any political body, on the other no doubt depends on identity and symbolic mechanisms that are determined on an emotional and imaginative level⁹.

In a recently published essay¹⁰, we have analysed the dominant narrative form which is taken by the collective imaginary within technological civilisation. In this paper, instead, we would like to more deeply focus on the value contents and contradictions implied in the modalities through which images, symbols and collective narratives are moulded in the framework of Western civilisation's mediatic production. In this respect, it is necessary to look at the multiplicity and organisation of the means that convey such mediatic contents. These, as McLuhan¹¹ has masterly taught and De Kerckhove has in turn reinforced, are not neutral as far as the message is concerned; they rather affect it since they transform the *brainframe*¹² and, consequently, the conscious structures as well as

⁸ «The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness» (K. Marx, *A contribution to the critique of political economy*, trans. by N. I. Stone, Charles H. Kerr and Company, Chicago, 1904, p. 11).

⁹ See. G. Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire: introduction à l'archétypologie générale*, Paris, Dunod, 1984.

¹⁰ See P. Bellini, *La Mythopie*, in *Mythopie techno-politique. Etat-nation, empire et globalisation*, trad. de O. Weyer, Mimesis France, Paris, 2011, pp. 39-64.

¹¹ See M. McLuhan, *Understanding media: the extensions of man*, Routledge Classics, London, 2001.

¹² «A brainframe is something different from an attitude or a mentality, though being it as well and much more. Although structuring and filtering our worldview, it is not exactly a pair of specific glasses – since the brainframe never lies in the superficial structure of consciousness, but in the profound one» (D. de Kerckhove, *Brainframes. Mente, tecnologia, mercato*, edited by B. Bassi, Baskerville, Bologna, 1993, p. 11).

the *forma mentis* (mentality) of the receiving subject, who is considered the recipient of the message and the active user of the tools aimed at its dissemination.

Dominant forms and electronic tools

The advent of electronic tools has generated an out-and-out revolution of the communications means and their systemic organisation. This has in turn given rise to a noteworthy change, which has unfortunately not been thoroughly studied as yet, in the modalities through which the pair mind/brain interprets reality, produces categories and paradigms suitable to one such aim and organises the contents of phenomenic experience¹³. One can already note macroscopic phenomena such as a different approach to interpersonal relationships. For instance a diverse modality to build human relationships after the arrival of mobile telephony can easily be noticed. This not only changes the interaction modalities in that they become more pre-determined, but it also introduces a subtle dimension of constant anguish caused by the everlasting reachability of anyone of us. Moreover, after the advent of even more sophisticated tools that can guarantee a portable web access (e.g. i-phone, i-pad, etc.), we are now witnessing the emergence of an irresistible desire to permanently be connected in order to cultivate any kind of relationship as well as boundlessly amplify the bulk of information at our disposal. Not only, we can also observe a progressive shift of the existential gravity centre from the material towards the virtual horizon. The latter allows planning and performances that are deemed impossible in the empirical dimension, which is influenced by the limits and weight of material reality. *Second life* and *Facebook* are the most evident examples of such a trend. The first *in nuce* (in the embryonic stages) represents a real opportunity for the development of human relationships based on the artifice and on the voluntary dimension. In *Second life*, indeed, the desires to be and to appear prevail against the real being of the person; this is because anyone freely decides how he/she wants his/her *avatar* to look like to the others as well as the precise characteristics it must own, when a totally virtual and imaginative self projection is at stake, which can sometimes differ a lot from the real individual and from his/her physical and moral qualities. *Facebook*, instead, clearly shows us, in a detuned modality as opposed to *Second life*, not only that appearing prevails on being and on willing to be, but also, and above

¹³ See D. de Kerckhove, *The architecture of intelligence*, Birkhäuser, Boston, 2001.

all, it underlines the attempt to eliminate the barriers between public and private spheres. Many users, indeed, driven by a sort of electronic narcissism where the dimensions of the appearing and the intriguing unceasingly overlap with everyday existence, tend to project on one such platform their own private mental sphere, in real time entrusting to their reference community thoughts, desires and practices once jealously confined to their conscious realm and, at worst, whispered to a far smaller circle of friends, family members and confidants. Private messages, though often trivial and silly, along with photos where the protagonists are snapshot in various situations, evidently testify to, as opposed to the past, that a new porosity between the public and the private spheres has come into being. Beside these phenomena that express a change in the dominant mentality, which is conveyed by the new mediatic tools, it is necessary to consider, then, that such communication means tend to organise themselves according to patterns based on aristocratic networks¹⁴, that is to say those reticular systems whose inner components are unequally interconnected. These have hubs endowed with several connections as well as simple points with very scant links¹⁵. The *par excellence* model is the web, where such a disparity is evident¹⁶. This reticular morphology influences not only mass communication systems, but also social structure itself and it reminds of the noosphere¹⁷, which was predicted by Theillard de Chardin. In this case, a new form of social planetary articulation is at issue, which, going beyond the traditional boundaries of the nation-states, re-organises the existence of millions of individuals according to new logics and founding narratives. From a structural viewpoint, we have analysed and interpreted such reticular dynamics

¹⁴ See M. Buchanan, *Nexus. Small Worlds and Groundbreaking Science of network*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York – London, 2002.

¹⁵ « In striking contrast to small-world networks of the egalitarians kind, these networks with hubs might be better described as *aristocratic*, as only a handful of elements posses most of the networks links» (op.cit, p. 119).

¹⁶ See op.cit. pp.73-89

¹⁷ «But mankind was already outlined and linked up. Since the age of the reindeer the peoples had been little by little finding their definitive place, even in matters of details. Between them exchanges increased in the commerce of objects and the transmission of ideas. Traditions became organised and a collective memory was developed. Slender and granular as this first membrane might be, the noosphere there and then began to close in upon itself,...» (P. Theillard de Chardin, *The phenomenon of man*, trans by B. Wall, HarperCollins, New York, N. Y. 1975, p. 206).

in many works and essays¹⁸; they create asymmetric relationships between individuals, social and ethnic groups, nation-states, international organisms, corporations, various types of economic organisations, federal unions and multinational states, according to the number of their connections and the capacity to activate them or not mono- or bi-directionally. Here we would rather like to interpret such phenomenon following a value and identity slant, striving to show which symbolic meanings are conveyed by the web. The symbolism of the net¹⁹ has peculiar characteristics that well describe its nature; in ancient Rome the net was the retiarius's typical weapon; he was a type of gladiator who used the net to bridle and defeat his enemies²⁰. In general, the net is a magic weapon that can immobilise and seize someone/something and that can be compared to the indestructible steel spider web forged by Hephaestus (Vulcan), which allowed him to punish Ares (Mars) and Aphrodite (Venus), who had been betraying him for a lot of time²¹, catching them in the act and then holding them up to the gods' scorn. Within the Jewish-Christian tradition, furthermore, the net can be a symbol for anguish²² in both the Old and the New Testaments, an unequivocal sign of divine action²³, which gathers together all the men left after the Last Judgment to make them access

¹⁸ See P. Bellini, *Mythopie techno-politique. Etat-nation, empire et globalisation*, op. cit.; *Cyborg, potere e ordine reticolare*, Metabasis.it (online), Year II number 3, 2007. (www.metabasis.it).

¹⁹ See J. Chevalier – A. Gheerbrant, *Net*, in *Dictionary of symbols*, trans. by J. Buchanan-Brown, Penguin Books,

London – New York, 1996.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ «And when Hephaestus heard the grievous tale, he went his way to his smithy, pondering evil in the deep of his heart, and set on the anvil block the great anvil and forged bonds which might not be broken or loosed, that the lovers might bide fast where they were. But when he had fashioned the snare in his wrath against Ares, he went to his chamber where lay his bed, and everywhere round about the bed-posts he spread the bonds, and many too were hung from above, from the roof-beams, fine as spiders' webs, so that no one even of the blessed gods could see them, so exceeding craftily were they fashioned. But when he had spread all his snare about the couch, he made as though he would go to [Lemnos](#), that well-built citadel, which is in his eyes far the dearest of all lands» (Homer, *The Odyssey* trans. by A.T. Murray, William Heinemann, Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, 1919, vs. 272-285).

²² See J. Chevalier – A. Gheerbrant, *Net*, in *Dictionary of symbols*, op. cit.

²³ *Ibidem*.

the Kingdom of Heaven²⁴. As these examples testify to, the net is a wrapping object, which is often endowed with magic properties and stands for both the passage towards the concreteness of a spiritual action and for any wrapping technique, as in Hephaestus's story; indeed, it is able to unveil a secret and to bridle an adversary or an object in order to take control of it. All these meanings are particularly proper to describe the many nets, and the mediatic one above all, that wrap our planet. The Internet and the web, for instance, can be considered two reticular sets that make the spiritual strength of a collective and global conscience that is now developing concretely visible. On the one hand, the Internet, meant as a whole of multiple connections that can be compared to neuronal ties, while on the other the typical virtual dimension of the web, thought of as the mature spiritual fruit of the simultaneous interaction of billions of individual consciences, give an impression of being at the presence of a novel and interesting phenomenon. In this respect, the net has inspired many and diverse hypotheses, such as the collective or connective intelligence postulated by Levy²⁵ and De Kerckhove²⁶. However, beside these morphologic readings, which lead to more or less organicistic interpretations, there is another aspect of the reticular phenomenon that emerges thanks to the interpretation of its inner symbolism. Indeed, nets not only connect and, as was already hinted at earlier on, create new and diverse power hierarchies, but they also potentially convey an effective control system, which is organised both on the empirical and on the collective imaginary level. Exactly as in the Gospel tale mentioned earlier on, where the net, in that it symbolises divine action, allows to separate the good from the wicked, or as is the case with Hephaestus, it unveils what is hidden; thus it virtually allows, connecting billions of consciences one another, a near totalitarian control over the bodies as well as the thoughts that are offered to collectivity and to anyone is

²⁴ «Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet, that was cast into the sea, and gathered some fish of every kind, which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach. They sat down, and gathered the good into containers, but the bad they threw away. So will it be in the end of the world. The angels will come forth, and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire» (*World English Bible*, Rainbow Missions, revision of the American Standard Version of 1901, <http://ebible.org/bible/web>, Matthew 13, 47-50).

²⁵ See P. Levy, *Collective intelligence: mankind's emerging world in cyberspace*, trans. by R. Bononno, Perseus Book, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1997.

²⁶ See D. De Kerckhove, *Connected intelligence: the arrival of the Web society*, edited by W. Rowland, Somerville House, Toronto, 1997.

willing to patiently investigate. In particular, it can represent a valid tool to mould, thanks to multiple mediatic channels (i.e. radio, TV, web, which are by now reticular, interconnected systems), planetary collective imaginary. This is not only because, as de Kerckhove reminds us of, our *brainframe* is influenced by the instruments we use to communicate and interact with reality, but also because such means convey contents, narratives and symbols that determine the value horizon and our identity.

Technological imaginary and social organisation

In other words, there exists a collective imaginary conveyed by the main mass communication systems, which are more or less consciously joined in by everyone, which influences the way we look at reality and interpret the most relevant historical events. In particular, it is interesting to analyse some symbolic contents and constellations emerging on a collective level. A first fleeting observation testifies to a planetary flourishing of symbolic themes that are rooted in the myth and in a bulk of very different tales and narrations. Within Western society, for instance, we are witnessing the dramatisation of most of its symbolic-mythic legacy (from Greek-Roman myths to Medieval stories and to the eighteenth-century gothic atmospheres to climax in the hybridisation between tradition and technology, which is typical of science fiction), as well as an impressive production of new and interesting symbolic forms. However, this holds true for other cultures, like the Chinese one, which reactivate their specific mythic-symbolic legacy through epic tones; it also proves to be even more so true for all those mediatic productions that originally and imaginatively hybridise diverse and often distant cultural traditions. This is the case with such cinematic sagas as *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, and all the remakes that draw on Greek and Roman mythologies. Such narratives are then accompanied by all the information and communication products meant to sensitise public awareness of historical facts that influence the development of human civilisation. Apparently, these narratives seem to be very distant one another as for form, typology and contents; and, indeed, they partly are, since the former aims at entertaining or – when works of art are at stake – at stirring more profound feelings and thoughts than a simple and immediate emotional involvement; while the latter intends to inform and stick to reality. However, it can be noted how at a mediatic level the worlds of information and entertainment have both in common a general overlapping and - at time inconsistent and arbitrary - jumble of symbolic elements that often puzzle

the recipient, continuously involving him/her with contradictory messages. On the one hand, for instance, the refusal of war and violence, as instruments to solve (interpersonal as well as international) conflicts, is hymned; on the other, the relentless global mediatic and spectacular production keeps on insisting on violence, conflict and war as typical ingredients of its own narrative creation. It even comes to the paradox of condemning war and violence, while at the same time arousing public curiosity through images of mutilated bodies, as was the case with the spectacular display of the former Libyan dictator Gheddafi's tormented body. A contradictory and paradoxical rhetoric is thus achieved, through which citizens and peoples are brought up according to an Orwellian-like pattern²⁷. In other words, a refined and advanced form of the standard Machiavellian strategy is at issue, according to which: «Therefore it is unnecessary for a prince to have all the good qualities I have enumerated, but it is very necessary to appear to have them. And I shall dare to say this also, that to have them and always to observe them is injurious, and that to appear to have them is useful; to appear merciful, faithful, humane, religious, upright, and to be so, but with a mind so framed that should you require not to be so, you may be able and know how to change to the opposite»²⁸.

Anyway, this contradictory and paradoxical tendency has to come to an agreement with the ruling classes' needs to mould collective imaginary through contents consistent with their own political formula²⁹ so as to legitimise the exercise of power. With regard to the specific case of Western civilisation, one can notice how contemporary spectacular narratives reflect, amplify and contribute to shaping a socially fragmented society, which more evidently expresses itself through numerous and incongruous mediatic identities. This goes beyond a generic and ordinary mediatic dramatisation of the liberal-democratic formula, which is always associated with such generic ideals as justice, equity and harmony. At the collective imaginary level, one can therefore notice a basic

²⁷ See G. Orwell, *1984*, New American Library, New York, N.Y., 1983.

²⁸ N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by W. K. Marriot, eBooks@Adelaide, University of Adelaide, 2002, cap. XVIII (<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/machiavelli/niccolo/m149p/>).

²⁹ «... ruling classes do not justify their power exclusively by de facto possession of it, but try to find a moral and legal basis for it, representing it as the logical and necessary consequence of doctrines and beliefs that are generally recognized and accepted» (G. Mosca, *The ruling class*, trans. by H. D. Kahn., McGraw – Hill Book Company, New York and London, 1939, p. 70).

emptying of the ethical and moral contents typical of the bourgeois civilisation and of its subjectivity, and a consequent (though not necessarily judicial and formal) weakening of the liberal democratic political views. This does not mean, however, that the most relevant elements of such a political ideology are automatically destined to vanish; on the contrary, they acquire new meanings by readjusting to the passing of time and identities. In one such context, after the totalitarian *hangover* that characterised the first half of the twentieth century, we are thus witnessing the reconstruction of the myth and of the symbology of the Saviour at an imaginary level. This seems to be willing to revitalise, by re-modernising them, the ideals of the liberal democracies, periodically trying to merge the extreme value and symbolic fragmentation generated by technological civilisation with the exercise of a charismatic leadership.

The Saviour

According to van der Leeuw³⁰, the myth of the Saviour is conveyed through the following tracts: birth and miracle epiphany, act of salvation, resurrection and *parousia*³¹. Such narrative pattern is resumed in a secular sense within the political horizon of technological civilisation, whenever critical periods require difficult choices or when a renewal of the political class is inevitable. This is the case with Italy, for example, which was influenced by the fall of the Berlin wall in that the whole institutional political system was brought into question. This was based on the opposition between a large *Partito Comunista*, which was forever doomed to be at the opposition due to the alliance system, which Italy was an integral part of, and a party with democratic and Christian overtones (*Democrazia Cristiana*), traditionally associated with the United States of America, which the government actions rested on. In the early nineties, with the advent of a new judiciary season that implicated forefront politicians like Craxi, Andreotti and Forlani, the power system then dominating collapsed quite quickly. This apparently left the newly-born *Partito Democratico della Sinistra*, that gathered together the heirs of the dissolved *Partito Comunista*, with no competitors, a fact that doomed it to thoroughly affect the Italian political life. The managers of the old *Partito*

³⁰ See G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in essence and manifestation*, trans. by J. E. Turner, Harper & Rowe, New York, N. Y., 1963.

³¹ See op. cit., pp. 106-114.

Comunista, who were basically saved by the judicial authority and were leading the novel political party, which was hastily created from the ashes of a by that time hackneyed ideology, appeared to be destined to take office after fifty years of tolerant waiting. Judicial power had indeed reset the previous managing class and left a power vacuum that was to be filled as quickly as possible. However, such a project was hindered by Silvio Berlusconi, who then entered the field³² presenting himself with the typical characteristics of the Saviour, accusing his adversaries of any kinds of moral and ideological vileness³³ and evoking a new Italian miracle³⁴. In this sense it is as if the leader wiped the slate clean to the benefit of his people, showing himself on television as a secular icon and a desacralised epiphany of a *divine* Saviour. To this mediatic display, there immediately followed the act of salvation, which was represented by a constitutional reform that fell through, and by the continuous evocation of the communist peril, the earthly reincarnation of the Devil, which Berlusconi showed to courageously and firmly oppose. During his long political season, then, he did not lack the time of the re-birth either, when he renewed, in an extremely difficult political phase, his party by changing its name and turning it from *Forza Italia* into *Popolo della Libertà*. To this, a significant episode he was victim of added up; he was attacked by an unbalanced man, who hit him in the face with a statuette, a fact that allowed him to embody the image of the bloody Christ, thus denouncing the hatred campaign orchestrated against him and taking on the typical attitude of a divinity that forgives his aggressor³⁵. The example of Berlusconi, that well dramatises the symbology of the Saviour, thus represents an extremely powerful narrative possibility which is embodied by other leaders too, who at times dress the part of it; this is because

³² See G. Parotto, *Sacra Officina. La simbologia religiosa di Silvio Berlusconi*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2007.

³³ See *Discorso di Berlusconi a reti unificate del 1994*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OIQ762Qh-A>, 2011.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ See *Premier colpito al viso dopo il comizio «Sto bene, sto bene». Ma resta in ospedale*, in *Corriere della sera*, 13/12/2009, http://www.corriere.it/politica/09_dicembre_13/berlusconi-colpito-al-viso-da-manifestante_0cd154c4-e80e-11de-8657-00144f02aabc.shtml; *Berlusconi: perdono Tartaglia ma spero non lo liberino subito*, in *Corriere della sera*, 23/12/2009, http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2009/dicembre/23/Berlusconi_perdono_Tartaglia_spero_non_co_9_091223004.shtml

they want to gather a consensus during difficult historical periods and also because they aim to shape a collective identity able to attract the most varied human groups. Recently, still in Italy, the myth of the Saviour, after a long Berlusconi season, seems to be once again embodied by the Prime Minister Mario Monti. This represents the latter's technocratic and serious variant, definitely opposed to his predecessor's more Baroque-like style and symbology. Contrary to Berlusconi, furthermore, Monti's enemy *par excellence* is not a given human group (i.e. *the communists*, according to Berlusconi's language) qualified by a presumed cultural and ideological affiliation anymore, but a set of factors depending on economy performances and consistent with the *sober* and severe style of his character, based on a nineteenth-century bourgeois identity.

Anyway, such myth (the Saviour), told with very different modalities as regards the context and the reference cultural codes, holds the fundamental function of transfiguring the empirical contradictions through which Western civilisation is inner struggling after the advent of globalisation. In particular, there is an attempt at hiding the fact that political decisions proper tend to be neutralised and, even worse, driven by the economic sphere, which is seen as a dimension subject to its own objective and unchangeable rules. It is though often omitted that, contrary to the laws of nature, the economic ones do not depend on human beings' will and are not unchangeable either; they rather adhere to precise asymmetric logics of power, work exploitation and control of the available resources.



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