EPOCHAL CRITICALITIES AND SYMBOLIC DISPERSIONS OF BELONGING. POLITICS AND IMPOLITICS IN OUR TIME

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Abstract

The contemporary political scenery has been defined, in fact, the place of disaffection from politics, perhaps also because of this radicalization of its paradoxes and uncertainties. One could speak of an unpolitical deconstruction of the individual and the community, but we would almost find ourselves facing an irremediable breakdown, a self-dissolving short circuit to doing politics and also to undoing politics.hIn the linguistic-symbolic game of the construction of an increasingly polysemic reality, we should ask ourselves whether it is possible to reconstruct a properly *political* order of life and thought or if, by now, the interhuman connection space must necessarily be configured as *unpolitical*.

Keywords: Politic; Impolitic; Epochal Crisis; Belonging; Symbolic.

The progressive transformation and, in some ways, the disjointed relationship between philosophical theorization and real politics, pose a question about what orientation and what tools of philosophical analysis can still apply to the new political order in the third millenium.

This question brings to the fore the most immediate consequences of the decline of some political and philosophical models of the Western tradition.

A critical situation that can be found, for example, in the oscillation between relativism and omnicentrism, and which makes increasingly uncertain and elusive the determination of *demos* and therefore the same connotation of democratic citizenship, in its relationship with a global citizenship and a world-system whose legal, political and economic profiles pose complex and urgent questions.

A crisis, therefore, not only political but also existential and philosophical, "which invests the very possibility of identifying a community and therefore makes it difficult to raise the same awareness of the participation of the subject in the community"[1]. Moreover the political change linked to international relations between states cannot neglect the continuous rearrangement, for example, of some borders not only territorial but economic-political ones, causing real alterations of the system or social systems, or a fracture between this and the distribution of power.

The evolution of philosophical political thought and the critical reflection about its results have always required times and distances to rethink the categories to face the search for new languages of knowledge and interpretation of phenomena; but today's acceleration of changes in public space, and the social issues connected to it, seem to allow no breath to thought and, above all, to reconfigure a collective consciousness: contemporary thought, by eliminating any question of meaning, seems to dismiss the problem of legitimacy of all relevance by transforming politics into a "self-referential" activity.

And the real meaning of self-reference, beyond its epistemological neutrality, consists in converting every ontological question into a simple functional description of events, in which, however, a decision-making power still celebrates, despite everything, its effectiveness.

Along with legitimacy, the plausibility of the question on the relations between civil society and political society also disappears: the representativeness of the institutions - in this theoretical and practical horizon - actually begins to enter the archive in which questions about sense have now been placed.

Furthermore, we must consider the more and more marked divergence between the pursuit of the goal, individual or common, and the wondering about the meaning of this commitment, which strongly penalizes the sense and the real possibility of a society to rule the transformations taking place and direct them towards a shared project.

The contemporary political scenery has been defined, in fact, as the location of the disaffection from politics, perhaps also because of this radicalization of its paradoxes and uncertainties.

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[1] See, J. HABERMAS, *La costellazione post-nazionale,* Feltrinelli, Milano, 1999*,* p. 19. But the nostalgia of the community is at the same time the place where the subject is afraid of losing himself because he is afraid of losing his specific subjective perimeter in it "nell'esposizione a ciò che ne interrompe la chiusura e lo rovescia all'esterno", as "vertigine, una sincope, uno spasma nella continuità del soggetto"(R. ESPOSITO, *Communitas,* Einaudi, Torino, 1998, p. XVII).

One could speak of unpolitical deconstruction of the individual and of the community, interpreted by Cantarano as "the tragic of modern politics understood as the need to construct and reconstruct a form in inexhaustible decomposition, and groped to give representation to what is subtracted from every representation"[2] .

But in this sense, we are facing with an almost incurable caesura, a self-dissolving short circuit in doing politics and also in undoing it.

And it almost seems that there is a renewed attraction for *impolitics*; or for the myth of the impolitic, a trend connected more and more closely to the phenomenon of populism, considering this term according to an abused and often generic or imprecise meaning, without taking into account, among other things, the social and historical context in which it is used[3].

Considering it (populism) only as a degenerative problem of democracy does not take into account its meanings and applications throughout history. In this essay it is impossible to trace its meanings, but we should consider it at least in three different dimensions: as an ideological character, as a strategic mechanism and as a socio-cultural content.

Political populism is a symptom of the great trasformation of democracy[4]: the transformation of the democratic political system into plebiscite forms based on the alleged omnipotence of a majority to which one speaks to the belly and not to a rational decision-making ability.

If popular consensus is the only source of legitimization of political power, the entire democratic constitutional system is in crisis.

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[2] G. CANTARANO, *La comunità impolitica*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2018, p. X. And yet, "precisamente per l'antinomia che si diceva prima, questo apparente stallo non esime dal porre domande ulteriori" (ivi, p. XI). Here, the sense of nihilism as nonsense becomes the aporetic heart of being something rather than nothing, and leads to re-read that "nothing" of nihilism as a "inappartenenza originaria" that preserves individual and community by a common belonging. A "prospettiva tragico-degenerativa", that opens up further questions about the possibility of removing politics from its unpolitical destiny. See also, J. BOHMAN, *Democracy Across Borders: From Demos to Demoi, Cambridge*, MIT Press, 2007.

[3]See, N. URBINATI, *La democrazia sfigurata. Il popolo tra opinione e verità*, UPE, Milano, 2014; C. MOUFFE, *The Democratic paradox*, Verso, New York,2000; Id., *On the Political,* Routledge, New York, 2005.

[4] See, E. LACLAU, *Populism: What' s in a Name?,* in *"Populism and the Mirror of Democracy",* edited by F. Panizza, Verso, London, 2005, pp. 32-49; ID., *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London, 2005; see also, J.-W. MULLER, *Cos'è il populismo?*, UBE, Milano, 2017; *Populism and the crisis of democracy*, vol. II, edited by G. FITZI, J. MACKERT and B. S. TURNER, Routledge, New York, 2019.

In fact, there has been talk of a process of deconstitutionalisation of the Italian political system, where we see the loss of individual constitutional values and in the collective imagination of the vision of a democratic and civil society.   Many scholars speak of a crisis of constitutional democracy due to a populist involution of representation.

As L. Ferrajoli observes, today there seems to be a crisis in an involutionary and deconstructive sense, but the "disease of Italian democracy" should serve as a lesson for the future, as the current phenomena of political personalization, confusion and concentration of powers and dismemberment of the public space can perpetuate in the absence of adequate guarantees and effective cultural antibodies, in ours as in other countries[5] .

Because of its fragility and pathologies, democracy is today described as disfigured, poisoned, sick, failed, dissociative [6].

Thinking of democracy as a political paradigm similar to the sticks of Shanghai, where a minimal vibration is enough to undo everything[7], is associated with the idea of a decline in politics, which Emanuele Severino believes caused by the dominance of a technique which is the coherent and extreme consequence of the path of the West: an inevitable inversion whereby technique, as a means of achieving ideological purposes, would become itself the purpose[8].

A technology that reorganizes the social impulse and becomes its multiplier, transforming the real world into a digital world and altering the efficiency potential of collective cognitive processes[9].

We must therefore ask ourselves if it is possible to reconstruct a properly *political* order of life and thought or if by now the inter-human connection space should necessarily be configured as *unpolitical*.

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[5] See, L. FERRAJOLI, *Premessa*, in *Poteri Selvaggi. La crisi della democrazia italiana*, Laterza, Rom-Bari, 2013.

[6] See, D. ANTISERI, E. DI NUOSCIO, F. FELICE, *Democrazia avvelenata,* Rubbettino, 2018; A. GIOVAGNOLI, *La democrazia malata*, Rubbettino, 2015; R. DE MUCCI, *Democrazia dissociativa*, Rubbettino, 2013.

[7] See, R. DALTON, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices*: *The Erosion of Political Support in the Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 30- 52; see also, R. SIMONE, *Come la democrazia fallisce*, Garzanti, Milano, 2015. About "Causes, Symptoms and Trajectories of Crises" of democracy, see W. MERKEL, S. KNEIP, *Democracy and Crisis. Challenges and Turbulent Time,* Springer, 2018, pp. 15-19 e passim.

[8] See, E. SEVERINO, *Il tramonto della politica*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2017.

[9] See, J.SCHWANHOLZ, T. GRAHAM, P.-T. STOLL (edited by), *Managing Democracy in the Digital Age: Internet Regulation, Social Media Use and Online Civic Engagement*, Springer, 2018, pp. 50-68; see also, A. PILATI, *La catastrofe delle elite. Potere digitale e crisi della politica*, Guerini e Associati, Firenze, 2018.

In the linguistic-symbolic game of building an increasingly polysemic reality, political discourse seems to have relegated the definition of a truthful line to marginal option[10].

Perhaps there is something deeper that prevents politics from legitimizing itself and from seeking that identity lost in the tangle of forces in which it struggles, as if the essence of politics has withdrawn into the folds of its imbalances, in an excessive pleonastic hyper-politicization.

Where can we find, therefore, the reasons not to fall into *impolitics*? Trying to think about the possibility of its regeneration in the value of law requires specularly to free the juridical thought from the shallows where it ran aground, and in this circularity, apparently with no way out, modern man has to engage himself, and do not think to take action only from the outside. In the process of demystification of reality from its imitations and falsifications, it is necessary to identify, from a global point of view, the strengths for a turnaround[11].

If we look at its internal relations, the State has proven to be substantially inefficient, unable to meet the needs of an articulated, pluralistic and extremely complex society, leaving room to some forms of local autonomy and to particularistic claims, and sometimes assuming the signs of a paternalistic welfare state.

But are the tendencies towards bureaucratization, digital power and oligarchy inevitably destined to empty democracy of its essential meaning and its own justification?[12]

Such a question on the profile of a post-modern state creates strong divergence and autonomy between the forces on the inside, almost a sort of distancing from the center as a reference point. Thus the loss of sovereignty has widened the sphere of politics beyond the limits of the state itself, to the point of investing the same civil society.

Therefore, almost axiomatically, with the progressive disappearance of the State as the place where the whole political life is concentrated, also the so-called civil society seems to dissolvesas the sphere of private relationships born at the beginning of the modern age at the same time as the State.

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[10] Murray Edelman in *The Symbolic uses of Politics* shows as "Pratically every political act that is controversial or regarded as really important is bound to serve in part as a condensation symbol (…) Political acts, speeches, and gesture, involve mass audiences emotionally in politics, while rendering them acquiescent to policy shifts through that very involvement" (M. EDELMAN, *The Symbolic uses of Politics*, University of Illinois Press, 1985, pp. 7-15).

[11] See, A. CATANIA, *Manuale di filosofia del diritto*, ESI, Napoli, 1995, p. 161.

[12] See, A. J. TEBOHO, *Identify and Sort: How Digital Power Changed World Politics,* Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 37-49.

We cannot even ignore the epochal phenomenon known as the "*loss of the future*" that marks a critical point in the possibility of building a new horizon for the coexistence of peoples and cultures. The *loss of the future*, as a loss of a projectual dimension, entails a flattening of the present as a defense, a reflux, a grip and a psychological backlash against the change and the risk of uncertainty connected to it[13].

In the case of the encounter with the different, with the *other* in each of its densest anthropological, axiological and transcendental configurations, the condition of disorientation can translate into an encirclement syndrome, and lead to forms and patterns of cohesion inwards as a response to everything we perceive coming from outside.

But this projectual dimension cannot leave aside the question about the means and the purposes of political acting, because it is precisely the uncertainty in the relationship between means and purposes that leads us to seek a dialectic that, while recognizing the principle of uncertainty as unattainable, is looking for the relationship between intention and action.

Since means and purposes interact each other, "the realistic will of efficacy can concern non-moral means that risk corrupting the moral purpose"[14]: the matter of ethical contradictions and antagonistic morals brings us back to the conflict of duties connected to the plurality of duties and connected, in turn, as Max Weber well observed, to the polytheism of values that inevitably conflict each other.

Here we are placed centrally in the slippery terrain of the double branching of ethics, the one we define deontological, as obedience to the rule, and the teleological one, as obedience to purpose.

Antagonisms and uncertainties that have their roots in human thought as contemporarily one and multiple, able to separate what is united, but also to reconstruct and re-aggregate what is divided. In short, dysfunctions and contradictions within the systems seem to characterize the search for new structures in a global feeling of uncertainty and constant changing.

If we ask ourselves about the reasons of this difficulty in achieving equilibrium, the discussion shifts on problems concerning man in general and the conceptions of life that he produces and that concern him.

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[13] About this, see F. RICCI, *Le afasie politiche del tempo e dello spazio*, in T. SERRA, F. RICCI, *Le afasie della politica. Achille e la tartaruga*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2013, pp. 127-136.

[14] See, M. WEBER, *La scienza come professione,* Einaudi, Torino, 2004.

In other words, it is necessary to consider that interpretative difficulties are generated when we forget that the categories created within the western world, as in any society, are neither abstract lucubrations, nor universalizable categories, but are part of a dialectic reality-idea, practice-theory, which must itself find the right point of balance, since from this dialectic comes a vision of man defining also the structures and the juridical-political visions.

Here then is the essential problem of our time: the need to conceive a thought that takes up the challenge posed by the complexity of the real, that is, that captures the bonds, the interactions and the reciprocal implications, the multidimensional phenomena, the realities that are once solidary and conflictual, like democracy itself, a system which, while regulating them, feeds on antagonisms[15].

But how is this possible within the framework of a social poly-contextuality anti-unitarian and polycentric, therefore not attributable to any unity of observation and interpretation?

Certainly the challenge of complexity marks a cardinal point in the expanded and variegated horizon of the current polymorphous, multi-contextual, polycentric, reticular societies. And these new social forms, with a view to systems complexity, are functional to the very reorganization and realignment of differences and partialities.

In this ambivalence that seeks complementarity, the construction of a symbolic order has been, since ancient times, a specifically human activity not only aimed at creating shared meanings, but also, in effect, to act and think action, to produce culture: establishing and sharing relationships of power, creating social bonds and their collective representations through the generative and regenerative power of the symbolic.

And in this sense the symbolic dimension, which by its nature involves and unifies the components of collective living in their rational and psycho-affective dimensions, reveals itself as the keystone for an ethical thinking that is, in itself, a reconstitution of a link between separateness and hybridization, between donation and subtraction, between parts and everything, between reality and creative imagination[16].

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[15] See, T. SERRA, *La democrazia redenta. Il cammino senza fine della democrazia*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2001, pp. 11-28; ID., *La complessità del mondo contemporaneo,* in *Lo Stato e la sua immagine*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2005, pp. 41-45 e passim.

[16] See, P. BOURDIEU, B. THOMPSON, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1991.

Through thought and symbolic activity we return to the ancient and original co-belonging of the human to rational and mythical thought, infiltrating each other, protagonists of a noosphere considered as "conductor and messenger of the human mind": which allows us to communicate with the world and with ourselves even while moving away from each other: "With its knowledge, its myths, its beliefs, its ideas, the noosphere participates recursively in the ring of the self-organization of society and the individual" operating in a transformative and transfigurative way on reality[17].

In any case, a lack of integration between the cognitive world and the affective world separates that symbolic link, which characterizes or refers to the substantially original nature of the human being, which is in itself empirical and transcendental.

And the risk of such a split reminds us that existence is always a relationship to something else, in a weaving of contingency and transcendentality, of conscious and unconscious, of rational and emotional, resumable in the symbolic dimension[18].

Therefore the problem of the criticality of the present becomes a political problem that involves the decision-making capacity of the human being, which must be able to throw, independently, a bridge between the past and the future, and cannot do it without philosophy being closely allied with the practice to become politics.

However, planning means that, to fill this gap, that is, to live also the present, without exhausting it in its contingent aspect, we cannot take refuge in our past or in its refusal, but we must understand it and accept it, searching what not yet expressed in it and its potentiality[19].

In this sense Symbolics, which by its nature involves and unifies the components of collective living in their rational and psycho-affective dimensions, is revealed as the keystone for an ethical thinking that is reconstitution of a link between parts and the whole, between reality and creative imagination.

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[17] See. E. MORIN, *Il metodo. L'identità umana*, Cortina, Milano, 2002, p. 25

[18] Writes Butitta: "C'è stato un momento in cui l'uomo ha dischiuso gli occhi alla percezione del mondo, dell'altro diverso da sé. Riconoscendosi come creatura distinta e speciale, e non solo capace di manipolare tecnicamente il reale, ma di spiegarlo e gestirlo intellettualmente. L'uomo guadagnò così una forma superiore di consapevolezza della realtà che lo pose innanzi al mistero dei fenomeni, alle forze ignote e imprevedibili contro le quali andavano garantite la sua esistenza e quella della specie" (I. E. BUTITTA, *Verità e menzogna dei simboli,* Meltemi, Roma, 2008, p. 12). To know more about symbolics of politics, see G.M. CHIODI, *Propedeutica alla simbolica politica I* (2006)*, e II* (2010), Franco Angeli, Milano; Id., *La coscienza liminare. Sui fondamenti della simbolica politica*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2011.

[19] All this puts in relation the discrepancy existing between the potentialities belonging to each individual and the realization of these potentialities in a communicative context in which, however, not all individuals belonging to the social context get actively involved in.

Relating politics and the social imaginary through the forms and figures of symbolic power means rethinking the forms and languages through which the collective vision of the society and democracy in which we live consolidates[20].

The imaginary articulates a thought that is expressed through symbolic images organized in a dynamic way, determining the perception of space and time, through material and institutional constructions, mythologies and ideologies, collective knowledge and behavior. But in the era of global flows of information and representations of reality on a planetary scale, what are the new paradigms of the collective imaginary?

On which presuppositions and symbolic paradigms is participatory reality and the myths of belonging built today? Is the tradition of archetypal models still compatible with the new frontiers of technodigital and robotic future?[21] Questions that we must face without reservations.

And therefore, if we still want to talk about a crisis, perhaps we should be worried about the loss of imaginative and perspective capacity able to attributing meaning to the present, which corresponds, as a counterpoint, the growth of collective rituals as a way to escape from the indomitable precariousness and changeability of bonds, principles, governments.

But from here another wide horizon would open up, and a further path that I refer to other future explorations.

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[20] About this, see F. SCIACCA, P. BELLINI, E. S. STORACE (edited by), *Simboli, politica e potere*, Alboversorio, Milano, 2018.

[21] See, M. D'AMATO, *Telefantasie. Nuovi paradigmi dell'immaginario*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2007, pp. 15-18. On the relationship between digital networks and social change, see also M. CASTELLS, *Comunicazione e potere,* UBE, Milano, 2017.

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