The Transparency of All Things

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I

In this paper I wish to discuss a few of the attributes of Politics *[il politico]* at the junction between the Modern and Postmodern ages. Let me begin by making the following assumptions:

A) The Modern is both the apology of the subject and the dissolution of its individual freedom;

B) The Modern is where this socialization takes on "liturgical values," which are supposed to negate the mysteries surrounding social and collective existence;

C) This negation explains but doesn't solve the tragic recourse to supreme and sublime beings *[entità]*;

D) This negation substitutes theological *ratio* with that which disenchantment discloses.

Therefore, if each theodicy can be secularized and god's presence in the world dissolved, what becomes of this transparency

[Translated from the Italian by Anne Holdstock]

of all things? How far does Politics, as decisions, still condition rationally human destiny?

In search of an answer, I will start with J. A. Schumpeter. If we respect the interpretive rules of economic theory, this intention may seem rather strange. However, let's assume that these rules are not completely reliable (Zanini 1987 & 1988). If this hypothesis is true, one question raised by Schumpeter appears to anticipate all the others. According to this Austrian scholar (Schumpeter 1954), all political rationalities in modern society are inspired by rational *forma mentis*. Yet when in opposition to one another, it does not necessarily follow that the outcome of the confrontation is itself rational; indeed, the effects are not rationally explainable. So the question becomes: How are we to interpret modern events? In other words: What would happen to the transparency in a world in which god is disclosed, transfigured into a being who governs on the basis of the instrumental rationalities of things?

II

There are, of course, many possible answers. I'll begin by saying that, in Schumpeter's view, the position which argues for a resistant theological substratum in Politics (Marramao 1983) is not at all clear. This process of secularization, however undoubtable it may be, is based on yet another illusion: that the nihilism inherent in the logic of Politics induces an efficient rationalization, which in a sort of instrumental disenchantment can seize the time of decision—abandoning thus any idea of redemption to the metaphysics of resentment. Such a solution presumes that, beyond the impossibility of an earthly redemption, there remains an efficient, albeit arbitrary, answer: a game of possible decisions. In reality, both this possibility and the fact that it may have a decipherable sense, or that there are any rules at all for the game, remain questionable. Therefore, neither the observation on secularization processes, nor the assumption that the sacred has even "higher" coefficients of resistance to oppose to rationalization, seems to offer a full answer. In some way, modern disenchantment discloses more and yet implies, without paradox, fewer solutions. I think this is the meaning of the undecidable conflict shown by Schumpeter.

In fact, Schumpeter leaves us with an unsolved puzzle: the modern relationship between economic science and political system. Schumpeter, one of the greatest scholars of the dissolution

of neoclassical theory, had understood the political terms of this dissolution without, however, deducing from them "logical" political consequences. The reasons for this loss can be briefly summarized. Believing in the action of the single entrepreneur—far more representative than economic theory has shown—Schumpeter did not refer to a Nietzschean figure, but to a Schopenhauerian individuality, which is the basis for the relationship between the will of the subject (his business ability) and the representation of this will (its economic explication). Along this path, however, having measured the distance between the logical nature of economic variables and the socio-logical nature of the political variables, Schumpeter reaches a real metaphysics of the Modern. Yet he cannot solve the doubleness of the Modern between individuality and socialization (to use Weberian terminology). Therefore, since Politics is unrepresentable according to economic *recta ratio*, it escapes from the subject entrepreneur and, in escaping him, confirms its socialization, its loss of a singular sense. Will and representation are displaced: the former due to the loss of all individuality "centered" in itself (think of Sombartian *Entseelung)*, the latter due to the consequent impossibility of the logical representation of what is the willful action of the single subject.

Schumpeter's arguments may of course seem marginal to the initial problem, but what is interesting to observe is its paradoxical effect. The puzzle cannot fail to produce, after Weber, the clear knowledge that the representatum, the rationality of doing, is not lost because its forms are hidden, because they are in fact evident. And what is evident itself does not need to be represented, for the simple reason that nothing can be added to what is already evident. And even before Schumpeter, already in Marx, this is the true meaning of the unfolding of real submission. Utmost submission is no longer realized through forms of equivalence since it expresses, in its "natural" being, disproportion as the only unit of measure. By analogy, in Wittgenstein, the limits of language are in play. How can we enlighten what is already light, or whose lightness escapes our "sensors"?

In Schumpeter, however, neither Marxian, nor Wittgensteinian knowledge is present; it is not by chance that he accepts the role of "prophet." The puzzle of the Modern is only avoided. The fact that the conflict is undecidable leaves no room for rational expectations, but this gives rise to a void, which Schumpeter tries to fill, in a Schopenhauerian way, with enlightenment, or prophecy. Sidestepping the puzzle, however, in no way removes the

paradox, which is basically this: the more transparent the modern condition, the more unlikely its government, since nothing can be said which is not in the things themselves (Virno 1986): nothing, except inauspicious prophecy.

The simple mechanism of secularization of the Modern, on the other hand, does not explain what Schumpeter backs away from, as it doesn't explain if and how what is itself light is also in itself clear—not to mention "sensible." Schumpeter's paradox is usefully provocative, perhaps because it is solved only partially in the realization of the Modern, anticipating, in spite of everything, some essential lines of escape.

III

These themes are present also in Heidegger (1977). For example, in *The Age of the World Picture*, he writes: "Science as research constitutes itself only if truth is transformed into the certainty of representation." Since Descartes, and including Nietzsche, this is the course of the subject, which decides its accomplishment. The representation, the formation of an image of the world, "the configuration of representing production"—as Heidegger himself affirms—is the means by which man tries to be a being "who counts as a rule and canon for every being." In the end, the struggle between the different visions of the world expresses the calculating power of the subject, its "dominating the world," which causes and ends in the "absorption of modern essence in obviousness."

In my opinion, this obviousness, as it spreads in an incalculable way, does produce a shadow "which escapes representation"; but this shadow, rather than enunciating "something else whose understanding is denied to us today," seems to solve itself in a total transparency which escapes representation, not so much because it is obscure, but because it is too enlightened, clear, obvious.

It is sufficient to underline here the crucialness of the obvious as the image of the modern world, and, even before, the constitution of the modern world as the representation of images. For the question remains: What relationship does man's public destiny, Politics as human destiny, have with a world where the incumbent image of a god is not only returned to earth but, even before, disclosed according to the instrumental rationality of the things themselves?

IV

I would like to try to answer this question starting with a typical concept of political science: the secret. Often, it is well known, democratic political criticism has appealed to and calls on "transparency" as the essential criterion of modern democracy. Interpreting a typical demand of emancipation movements, the abolition of the secret has always appeared as the essential criterion of publicity, belonging to the public, and therefore subject to public criticism.

Without meaning to deny or simplify what hails from a complex tradition of thought (Koselleck 1959), I would like to observe that probably the appeal of transparency, of the publicity of the choices of the executive power, has never been a suitable concept for "another" democracy. In other words, I think it has been a concept *appropriate* to the absence of secret: a kind of harmless paradox.

It is sufficiently clear, however, that secretiveness does not preserve a secret, but rather invents the conditions which ought to keep a secret—if there is one. Often, the appeal to transparency is a question of method with respect to substantially known contents—if not, indeed, obvious. Of course, transparency had a different weight for the bourgeoise parliaments that sprung up after 1848, when modes, times and channels of information and the multiplication of information were different. But even in those times, the demand for transparency was not used for enlightenment, but to force confession. Basically, the demand asked that instrumental modes of action be represented, because the action itself was known. Secretiveness was blamed for the failure of representation, and secretiveness was blamed for the failure of democracy. Actually, the absence of secrets, clarity, characterizes most contemporary democracies. In fact, transparency is not a criterion of discriminating value at all.

It is worthwhile pointing out that the philosophical nature of my affirmation simply wishes to state that it is very difficult to deny evidence to what things show because, in general, democracy is a political regime where the exhibition of obviousness is constant—even if this is not an intrinsic merit, but a historical acquisition.

Let us refer for a moment to recent experience. The deprivation of the authority of parliaments—incorrectly called the "crisis" of representative institutions—is manifest; the left wing appeals to transparency in decision making: but what is it that remains

obscure, or unsaid? Absolutely nothing. Not only: it is just at the moment when executive power shows its greatest certainty, representative capacity, that the demand for transparency becomes pure, insignificant dialectical expedient.

V

Of course, to draw hasty conclusions from this would be improper. Therefore, I will just underline the passage: man's public destiny and modern Politics may become the "business of a few" simply because they are evident to everyone. The greatest transparency has paralyzed any demand for clearness. For this reason, it is also difficult to charge any one political system with the absence of rationality; more simply, one could blame it for its criteria of instrumental rationality. In conclusion, taking up the result of the Schumpeterian paradox again, we may see how the undecidable conflict is actually a tragic determinant.

How far, then, does modern Politics rationally condition human destiny? It is one thing if by modern Politics we mean the mass of experiences which has characterized the world up to a given time, before ours. It is a different question if we accept the definition of our times as the impossible accomplishment of the Modern. In the latter case—leaving aside the validity of the "passage," true or presumed, possible or not, between Modern and Postmodern—we might say that it is not really Politics which conditions human destiny, but its operative techniques. On the other hand, if we say this, we would reaffirm a hidden truth, a shadow which holds promise. In the age of its accomplishment, modern Politics, in fact, deeply conditions human destiny, but without any rationality; rather, it conditions human destiny in the most complete obviousness, or transparency. This is the reason why the human condition is tragic, but for the same reason, the tragedy is a kind of salvation (Negri 1987).

VI

Having unveiled god, this secularization ripened in the Western *ratio* has removed all secrets. The *deus absconditus* is dissolved: man's destiny is completely disenchanted and therefore completely conditioned by tragedy. But in this tragedy, man does not expiate any existential or mystic condemnation: it is man's social, historically determined condition. This destiny is not singular, it is collective. The absence of the secret forces us to live our destiny

collectively. It is not the destiny of a people, it is my, our destiny: it is difference, not solitude. The absence of secrets forces us to live publicly every moment, total transparency bares any sense of shame.

In some ways, we are propelled toward an aesthetic of the tragic perfectly described by Lyotard (1983). The babel of languages, the exponential growth of rationality, the lack of fixed referents rather than relativizing the power of saying, of being transparent, amplifies its relevance. One must not stop in the shade: the shade, like silence, is a way of saying that speaks louder and states more violently what it would like to hide. But it does not talk about us: it does not speak to us. Languages talk about themselves, Politics celebrates its techniques. All this is really America (Baudrillard 1986), empire of gigantism: nothing is simpler, and therefore impenetrable—as Heidegger says— everything is tragic, consuming itself in public, giving rise to an aesthetic of the tragic in its accomplishment.

Having mentioned Lyotard, we are inevitably reminded of Wittgenstein: the mystic situated not only in the accomplishment of linguistic transparency, but where language is no longer man's. In fact, in the end the game becomes exasperated: it says too much, it alludes to too many senses—the mystic is necessary enchantment. Nevertheless, an aesthetic of the tragic, if it is true that it describes human destiny as a difference and not as solitude, seems to invoke positively what in Deleuze, for example, is the thought of difference: turbines of active forces.

Is there no longer a sublime? Of course, a secularized god is a jealous, vengeful god. But he too, in this obviousness, is destined only to transparent liturgies to keep a semblance of a mystical, ineffable body. On the contrary, to imperfect bodies belongs the sign of difference and contingency. The great Cartesian fiction is dead, the omnipotent subject is dead: after Foucault, the attributes of the *ratio* to the perfect body are disclosed. But because of this, the unfinished accomplishment of the Modern leaves a much more significant paradox unsolved: an ensemble of collective subjects, whose bodies speak, whose reasons listen.

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