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*The ambivalence of individual behaviours in daily life
between emotions and rationality*



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Abstract

The sociology of emotions teaches that emotions, feelings and passions play an increasingly influential role in contemporary social dynamics. Both collective and individual life make use of such states in a twofold manner: as tools for communication and as means of encounter (with others and with one's self). However, from messages introduced and channelled through media and new media to the conversations taking place in the public sphere, the ambivalent situation of the *sentient actor* – that is the actor who mediates between the emotional and the rational sphere in the construction of his social acting – emerges: on the one hand, he is the object of an emotional bombardment, which tends to invalidate his critical ability to analyse the social reality because of the homologation to collective thought and actions; on the other, the actor himself has the possibility to use emotions, feelings and passions in an 'intelligent' way: as tools for communication and comprehension of the social reality, as means of information and sensibilization of the public opinion and as magic lenses through which individualization and identification are made possible. The main object of this essay is to review contemporary examples of social acting in support of the sociological argument proposed above. As a corollary to this, I will argue that today, more than ever, it is necessary to take care of one's emotional-sentimental states: to analyse them with intelligence and reasoning so that they may become the tools through which modern man acquires consciousness of himself, of his existence and his relationship with others.

Keywords : emotions, public sphere, everyday life, social acting



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1. The ambivalent relationship between emotions and rationality contaminating the public sphere

Our daily life is steeped in emotionality, characterized by a mixture of various and polymorphous emotional-sentimental states which influence both individual and collective behaviours, attitudes, thoughts, actions. We often act following an inner state of the moment ('I did it out of envy', 'my jealousy is to blame', 'it is the affection I feel for him which makes me behave this way', 'I follow him because I love him', 'I felt so embarrassed that I left', etc.) as if we were purely emotional subjects, without critical sense and ability. On the other hand, a number of situations in which our social actions appear devoid of colour can be acknowledged, guided by a purpose-oriented rationality, in weberian terms, which seems impermeable to the emotional states experienced by the acting subject, who assumes the form of a *goal automaton*, exclusively concentrated in achieving his aims ('he can put his emotions aside', 'he does not have any feelings', 'his cynicism protects him from suffering', 'his heart is made of ice', 'in order to be successful he must ignore his heart', etc.).

Let us immediately establish that the two ideal types just sketched do not find a total confirmation in the social reality surrounding us. Not so rigidly, at least. An exclusively emotional or exclusively rational social action cannot exist. As easy as it is for each of us to recall numerous examples as the ones given above, from within the context of our social circles, late modern social reality is much more polymorphic than it may at first appear. It tends to conceal the shades of emotionality and rationality in social action, the multiple objectives to meet, the biunivocal relations between the individual and groups, the ambivalent forms of social acting. Emotions and reason-rationality play the role of perpetual antagonists on the stage of late modern social acting (Crespi 1999). When an action appears to be exclusively characterized by a strong emotion, a deep feeling or an overpowering passion, it is still possible to detect the rationality behind that particular gesture. Viceversa, when we analyse certain behaviours labelling them as deeply rational, as a type of purpose-directed social acting, critical and thoughtful in evaluating the best path to take in order to reach a specific goal, we can observe the emotional drive present in any social actor. This happens because, as the sociology of emotions teaches us, the emotional and the rational individual are two souls in the same body (with differing percentages depending on the context in which the subject is acting) (Thoits 1995: 25-64): some late modern social actions present perhaps more evidently the union between emotionality and rationality, the two sides of the coin which correspond to contemporary social acting. The late modern individual therefore corresponds to the *homo sentiens* (Hochschild 2013), that is a subject who acts *with* emotionality and rationality.

The sentient man, however overpowered and enveloped in emotional-sentimental states not always easy to handle and manage (Lacroix 2002; Cerulo 2009), knows the power provided by his critical ability in the handling of such states: he knows that these are tools of communication and encounter, both in collective and individual life, both with the others and with himself. He knows how important and necessary it is to mediate between his emotional-sentimental states and his critical ability. He knows how advisable it is to grasp that intelligence of emotions which would provide him with a greater understanding of the social situations he acts and finds himself in, as well as with a deeper relational ability (Nussbaum 2004).

Emotions evidently belong to the public sphere. They are characterized as an element which continuously allows us, on the one hand, to create and model the object of our emotions and, on the other, it identifies us as emotional subjects. The emotional discourse takes shape as a situated social practice (Abu-Lughod 1990), which makes it possible for us to construct ourselves as beings pervaded with emotions in constant relation with the thing, the event or the person present in the social and cultural context in which we act. I believe that such ‘emotional relationism’ creates a biunivocal relationship between emotions and knowledge. Between states of feeling and interpretation-comprehension of the reality surrounding us. Heidegger had already argued that ‘every understanding is always emotional’ (*alles verstehen ist immer befindliches*) (1927: 625; cited in Gargani 2003: 29). What we feel within a particular context causes us to act in one way instead of another. And, conversely, what happens in the social environment we belong to provokes particular emotions. This happens, in my opinion, precisely because emotions are hermeneutical tools with a twofold direction: towards ourselves and towards the spheres of reality and the subjects within which and with which we daily navigate. As Aldo Giorgio Gargani (30) wrote: ‘[...] knowledge is inaugurated by the thematization of emotions. Emotions constitute the repertory of modalities according to which man acknowledges the world, that is the horizon of his possibilities. Emotivity constitutes the existential paradigm of man.’

One of the key points in my consideration is the following: how to manage these emotions, feelings and passions without being overpowered by them, handling them with critical sense and ability to discern within the public sphere, where it is necessary to deal with argumentation? How, in other words, to balance emotions and rationality in the actualization of contemporary conversational practices, whether public or private? Far from finding a definitive and exhaustive answer to this question, the aim of this paper is to reflect on the topic by reviewing two forms of collective social acting recently appeared in contemporary society. My hypothesis is that, within this public emotional (and reactive, quoting Walter Privitera 2012) spheres, the sentient actor today finds himself entangled in a situation of *emotional postmodern ambivalence*: on the one hand, he is the object of an emotional bombardment, which could invalidate his critical ability to analyse the social reality because of the homologation to collective thought and actions; on the other, the actor himself has the possibility to use emotions, feelings and passions in an ‘intelligent’ way: that is as tools for communication and comprehension of the social reality, as means of information and sensibilization of the public opinion and as magic lenses through which individualization and identification are made possible. He is the intelligent controller and beneficiary of emotions, sentiments and passions and, at the same time, a potential victim of their mediatic or collective explosion.

2. Emotional commotions: emotions generating a re-birth of thought

In recent years we have witnessed events characterized by a marked emotional drive. Movements, demonstrations and collective actions through which participants’ particular emotions were channelled and shared as tools of critique and social commitment. Hundreds of thousands of individuals have marched through the streets to make their voice heard, to manifest their rights, to

claim a change of the status quo, to invite those in power to reflect on the economical, civil and political state of the country. I am here referring to both global movements such as *Indignados* and *Occupy Wall Street*, and revolts which resulted in a change of government, as has been the case in North Africa and the Middle East.

The *Indignados* social movement (also known as *15-M*), generated in Spain as a form of peaceful protest against what was perceived as the wicked economical policy of the Zapatero government, which had brought thousands of families to their knees. During the administrative elections on the 15th May 2011, a multitude of Spanish citizens poured out into the streets, shouting 'We are not puppets in the hands of governors and bankers', to make their voice heard, to ask for a more participative democracy, to shake the whole country from the slumber it appeared to have fallen into. The images of the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, peacefully occupied for whole weeks by common citizens with tents and camps voicing their indignation, are indelible from collective memory.

The *Occupy Wall Street* peaceful protest movement, started in New York in 2011 and developed through demonstrations, marches, seminars and assemblies held near Zuccotti Park, shares similar features. The name of the movement clearly refers to the New York Stock Exchange, considered the symbolic epicentre of world finance and therefore of the economical and social iniquity perpetrated against the majority of the world population following the contemporary crisis. Unlike the *Indignados modus operandi*, the *Occupy Wall Street* militants rarely occupied Zuccotti Park for continuous periods of time. The participants would usually gather there on specific moments or pre-fixed days in order to participate in an event, to organize or discuss something, to share moods, emotional states.

Both in the *Indignados* and the *Occupy Wall Street* case, the protesters' actions were imitated by other individuals in various cities all over the world, with the aim of creating a protest and critical reflection network on the serious worldwide socio-economical situation.

The main focus of our discourse is to highlight the correlation between emotions and reason-rationality within the two movements. The main emotion propelling these subjects to action underlies the very name of the Spanish one: indignation. Indignation for the state of affairs, for a series of policies, behaviours, attitudes, choices and actions on the part of world rulers. Indignation spurs social action. An emotion that signals the non-acceptance of a state of affairs (in this case a diffused economical policy), regarded as contrary to the collective morality of a global society and oppressive and economically unendurable in the course of daily life.

Indignation is a murmur, the voice of awareness, a mixture of passion and rationality which drives hundreds of thousands of citizens to state: 'I do not accept this.' I will not passively accept what is happening. I shall not be a party to this situation. I will not let silence conceal your actions.

This emotional culture, which has kept together in militancy (and continues doing so, albeit with less intensity) citizens in places often extremely far away from one another, has major rational consequences. I experience indignation as I reflect on what is happening, because I feel something is not working or violates the rules, the values, the spirit guiding my community. We could therefore argue that reason (intended as *Vernunft*, the ability to comprehend the existent and evaluate it critically) is an aid to indignation in its manifestation. As Gabriella Turnaturi writes,

Those who are indignant at the damage done to the other's dignity experience indignation because they feel their own dignity damaged and because they want to return to a reason-driven living. Where reason is not rational order, but the reason of existence [...] Indignation propels to act outside of oneself, to share, to act internationally. Those who are indignant, differently from those who are enraged, do not act in their own name and for their own selves, they move from themselves with a strong idea of the other, with the strong belief that one's own sense of dignity cannot be separated from the dignity of the other. Indignation stems from personal involvement and generates involvement with the person. The involvement is doubly personal as it is born out of cases, events, which affect real people, and because it can only be acted in first person. (2008, 267)

Among *Indignados* and *Occupy Wall Street* there are many sentient individuals. Subjects who act within the public sphere created with emotional intelligence, through a reflexive and critical emotionality that drives them to channel and share a common feeling of protest and non-acceptance of the existing reality, accompanied by rational and tangible actions which aim at improving living conditions (or at least, reflecting deeply on them). Quoting Luc Boltanski (2003), we could say that these individuals move from the verbal word to the acting word, and from an individual involvement to a collective one, with a view to fulfill a common goal.

Such 'improvement' could have been obtained in some countries of the Middle East and North Africa in which, following the revolts of the so called 'Arab Spring' (Vairel 2011), we have witnessed a modification of the form of government (Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Libia, Tunisia). Differently from the two movements discussed above, these revolts have not been peaceful (since late 2010 until now), but often characterized by violence, armed fights, suicides, on the verge of a civil war¹ (which effectively took place in some cases).

What I want to underline is the emotional drive present in and channelled through these protests. Firstly, through the modality of development of such collective actions (marches, strikes, demonstrations, processions, acts of civil resistance but also dialogues and face to face and online conversations etc.), overwhelming emotions such as indignation, empathy, sympathy have easily spread among the protesters which shared a marked opposition to the despotism and authoritarianism exercised by the rulers. Furthermore, because of the turn the events took, these emotions were replaced by negative passions such as rage, hate, anger which caused common citizens to transform, at given times, in an uncontrollable crowd (whose actions have, nonetheless, proved functional to reaching the aim of the revolts).

In sociological terms, we can analyse such attitudes using Gabriel Tarde's social theory and its laws of imitation based on the pair belief-desire (Tarde 2012). We can therefore argue that the Arab revolts were managed and controlled by 'leading subjects' (Tarde 2011) who, by the use of a charismatic language, forms of religious leadership, an intelligent use of the public sphere and social networks, made it possible for hundreds of thousands of protesters to follow them. The latter, strongly *desiring* a radical change of their life conditions, *believed* the best solution to be following

¹ Rather than movements, – as Marc Lynch clarifies in *The Arab Uprising. The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (2012) - it is necessary to speak of long-standing, ongoing, social processes which seem to have reached their peak in the 2011 revolts.

the leaders of these revolts, becoming a crowd and therefore, in some cases, behaving in a purely emotional way, without rationality (physical fighting during the processions, the hurling of stones and objects, self-immolation). And yet, these events involve a sentient individual, that is to say a subject who agrees to manifest, share and spread (be it wrong or right) certain emotions spurring social action, emotionally confident that this will be the best way to reach his goal. The suicides or self-immolations occurred during these revolts testify to this attitude (some individuals, deeply committed to and believing in the revolt, decided to sacrifice their own life for the cause, conscious of the fact that, considered the social context in which such gesture would be carried out, they would have become martyrs for the cause and their gesture would have fuelled the revolt), as well as the the internet, which the same subjects, members of the crowd, would employ once their individuality had been re-appropriated (their online individuality, at least, by using a Facebook or Twitter nickname etc.).

Secondly, the emotional drive channelled in these revolts, manifested through the wise use of social networks (particularly Twitter) on the part of numerous participants: the planet was informed about the development of events through 'tweets', which made it possible to turn the attention of worldwide public opinion towards what was happening, to tell episodes of daily life and to create forms of emotional intelligence (the emotions of participating, solidarity and sharing accompanied by a reflection on what was happening) within the citizens who followed the events from all over the world (and the emotional drive channelled through the revolts of the Arab Spring proved decisive in inspiring the creation of both the *Indignados* and the *Occupy Wall Street* movements).

To sum up, in the examples analysed above we witness the emergence of the sentient man's social acting, comprising of emotions and rationality. According to the following process, described in broad terms: 1) the subject analyses the socio-political-economical situation of his own country and reflects on its effects on his own daily life → such analysis causes the subject to experience certain emotional-sentimental states (towards a law, a policy, a person, an institution, etc.) → the subject shares what he feels and thinks with others (birth of the movement, of the association, of the group) → such emotional collectiveness gives shape to a series of public actions and initiatives (appropriate to the context) in order to awaken public opinion and rulers, with the aim of improving their daily life → the emotions felt by the participants extend to the audience, the observers, the readers, the listeners, etc. who, in turn, can become actors (widespread collective commitment) → the emotional sharing generates reflection among the movement participants and a critical analysis, among the leaders at least, on the state of affairs: they can modify the emotions shared according to the evolution of the situation (such is the case for the Arab revolts, where there is a shift from positive to negative emotions with the aim of 'forcing' the situation, taking advantage of the worldwide public opinion's attention, to reach what in their eyes was the most significant goal: a government change).

Sentient actions, then. The interplay of emotions and rationality in a process of comprehension and critique of the surrounding social reality, aimed at a goal-oriented social commitment.

3. *“I feel good about...”. Emotions and rationality in politicians’ tactics.*

If common citizens, mixing emotions and reason-rationality, undertake individual and collective actions in order to awaken those in power and public administration, the politicians as well, albeit from a completely different perspective in terms of status, display an integrated use of their emotions and their rationality in their social practices.

Their social acting is characterized by a marked ambivalence: on the one hand, we seem to be before subjects who do not fear to show emotions in public and to share with the citizens what they feel, their individuality, as if revealing what the political, professional mask conceals did not worry them; on the other, however, in the light of a deeper analysis, it is possible to discover how often, behind such apparently emotional behaviours, subtle rational tactics aiming at the acquisition of consent unfold.

In order to understand what has just been argued, it is necessary to make a rapid historical survey of the relationship between emotions and politicians in the last century, looking at significant examples.

Roughly until the early ‘90s, the politician was required to keep the public sphere and the emotional-private sphere separate. Emotions could not be shown in public. The politician had to appear self-confident, without fears or existential sorrow, endowed with charisma and decision-making skills, of course but not emotionally weak, that is to say not keen on displaying emotionality in public (anger, sadness, distress, euphoria, love, etc.). Except in extraordinary situations, the politician must embody virtues characterizing the good representative: simplicity, confidence, moderation, austerity, sobriety. Some examples support our thesis: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the President in a wheelchair after having lost one leg to poliomyelitis, kept his disability hidden in public in order to show the American nation confidence and strength; in 1972, the United States senator Edmund Muskie had to withdraw his candidature after he had been seen crying in public; as far as Italy is concerned, one only needs to think about the emotional dullness of the speeches and public behaviours characteristic of the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy) politicians, etc.

Since the early ‘90s, we witness an emotional upheaval affecting the rules of politicians’ public behaviour. It is possible to identify the man responsible of such change in Bill Clinton, president of the United States of America from 1993 to 2001 who, with his behaviours and his rhetoric, will influence the emotional manifestations of many Western politicians.

Clinton immediately presented himself as an unusual president: he regularly attended counseling sessions, had emotional public behaviours (from playing sax on TV wearing sunglasses and with an experienced jazzman’s charisma to swimming in Rio de Janeiro with the champion Pelè), he publically talked about the difficulties of his marriage and his childhood’s taboos (his father was an alcoholic and drug addict). However, his actions following the so called ‘sex gate – Monica Lewinski scandal’ marked a change in the public behaviour of politicians.

In 1998, after being accused by the White House intern of having had sexual intercourse with her, Clinton did not shield himself behind denials and ‘no comments’, and did not let the situation be exclusively handled legally (the ‘impeachment’ ghost was rising behind him). He did much more. He used the enormous potential of communicative media and, making an appearance on a

popular cable tv show, he admitted to have had ‘inappropriate’ intercourse with Miss Lewinski. He admitted cheating on his wife. He confessed, looking lucidly into the camera, to be weak, as every American citizen. Clinton publicly manifested emotions and weakness that made him equal to the American people. By such gesture (which he would repeat on numberless occasions in future years, with contextualized variations, and upon which he would build his career as a great communicator) he stated to be as weak as any other human being and to feel good about sharing such weakness, in order to exploit the therapeutic power of dialogue, of confrontation and collective feeling (the sentence he started all his monologues-confessions with, ‘I feel good about...’, has become legendary).

Clinton – and here is the rational component – admitted to be guilty, confessed his weakness and nearly cried but he did not seem to feel shame. This is an important distinction to make. Admitting his mistake, he apologised to the United States on TV, opening his private emotional-sentimental states to the worldwide public and employing a strongly emotional language, able to involve and affect. If he had felt shame the rehabilitation process, both individual and collective, far from becoming a TV show, would have proved much longer and articulated. At the same time, it is as if by apologising publically, or rather acting out a public apology, he got rid of the weight on his stomach, as if a TV show were enough to make peace with the dominant morals, put idle matters aside and think about state affairs. From that moment, in each occasion, in all the crucial passages of the impeachment, Bill Clinton apologised, asked for forgiveness thus gaining more and more sympathy on the part of his electors. The apologies rhetoric, a penitent expression, the employment of an emotional and emotive language had their effect. The President of the United States appeared to the majority of American citizens as ‘one of them’, as one who makes mistakes, asks for forgiveness and puts things right.

The sincerity of Clinton’s emotions and words is not the focus of our interest here, and it would be rather complex to assess the sincerity of an emotion, especially on the political stage (as Ronald Reagan once said to a young man asking him for advice: ‘Son, in politics sincerity is everything. If you can pretend to be sincere, you have made it.’). What is crucial is the social acting of the subject. The acting itself, as we have just highlighted in the case of Clinton, comprises of emotionality and rational tension towards the achievement of a goal.

The striking gesture of the President of the United States – the manifestation of emotions only apparently negative (being weak, easily influenced, inconstant), the eagerness to communicate to millions of people his own being human, *as* and *with* the others, neither invincible nor impenetrable – triggers a series of behaviours apparently tending towards emotional sharing and the moving closer together of the politician and the citizen. Since that day in 1998, the political man increasingly appears as the one who *must* manifest his own emotions and sentiments in public in order to be closer to common people, in that perspective of participation and ‘therapeutic’ politics which encourages subjects to share what they feel without confining themselves to formality and the distances of the institutional role (Nolan 1998).

Such therapeutic politics have had, throughout the years, excellent protagonists and imitators of Clinton such as Tony Blair, Silvio Berlusconi and Barack Obama (as well as a great number of senators protagonists of the various presidential conventions) (Furedi 2008).

However, the highlighted behaviour must not deceive. As true as it may be that the private emotions and sentiments of politicians are displayed, revealed to the public without reverential fears or preoccupation of being branded negatively, it is also true that many of these manifestations follow a pre-established script, are timely expressed in the appropriate situations and moments, those most functional to the achievement of success on the part of the politician, or to go up in the surveys when difficulties arise. And so, often advised by efficient spin doctors, ghostwriters and emotional trainers belonging to their staff, the sentient professional individuals put into practice their social acting: on the one hand, they tend to continuously manifest emotions. Deeply conscious of being subjects acknowledged by the citizens, they are concerned with always appearing emotionally affected, to participate sentimentally to the discourses which they find themselves involved in and the problems which are presented to them, to share something with the citizen. In Lacroix's words: 'they must adequately respond to the emotive demand of public opinion. They will not be exempt from showing themselves as humans, compassionate, empathic. [...] Collectivity recognizes itself in men who are capable of vibrating.'

On the other hand, however, they set in motion what I defined as political-mediatic dramatization of emotions and sentiments (Cerulo 2012: 285-297): playing with emotional sharing, with the appearing sentimentally participative to the event, the discourse or situation in which they find themselves acting, with the constant acting on a stage (Meyrowitz 1995), politicians perform the emotions and sentiments most adequate to the moment (employing, *ça va sans dire*, the mediatic potential at their disposal (Miller 2004)). By adequate it is meant especially functional to the achievement of a personal goal: the gain of consensus, the increase of reputational capital, the remedy to a mistake, the preservation of the acquired status or its increase etc.

Various films in recent years – George Clooney's *The Ides of March* or Johnathan Demme's *The Manchurian Candidate*, to mention two – just as some ethnographic researches into the life of politicians, tell in detail episodes which confirm what has been argued here.

From the tears of the Italian minister Fornero following the presentation of the pension cuts, to Obama's singing in the course of a recent speech, from John McCain's insults during the last presidential campaign to Berlusconi's plastic smiles, such theatrical employment of one's emotional-sentimental states can be observed in numerous episodes. However, without focusing on a specific study of each individual case, it is noteworthy how, through the study of politicians' daily life, the sentient acting of these actors, who show a continuous use of emotions and reason-rationality in the making of their social practices, emerges.

4. Media and new media: examples of emotional cyclothymia

Another example of emotional ambivalence is provided by the use of media and new media in late modernity. On the one hand, individuals are overwhelmed with voracious, shocking, omnivorous emotions which often impair the ability to critically reflect of the subjects, who cannot detach themselves from what they observed or heard and finally accept, and homologate to, the collective meaning channelled by the medium. And yet, at a closer look, it is possible to detect the other side of the ambivalence, in which the subjects use certain media as a space in which to

manipulate emotions with intelligence, to share what has been felt, experienced inside, and to 'rationalize' it thanks to the interactional possibilities offered by the medium.

Television is relevant to the first case, social networks, forums and blogs to the second. Let us proceed in order.

Let us think about some talk or reality shows broadcasted on Italian television channels. A group of people, who should be more or less known to the audience, participate in a pseudo-discussion in a TV studio on a topic which should be of collective interest (but is often only gossip) or are filmed 24/7 within a specific environment. In these cases, it seems as if the emotions manifested have been programmed beforehand. Foreseen before being manifest. In order to participate to the show, therefore, the subject must display only those emotions which have been pre-packaged by the authors of the show, merchandise to which the house audience (who often has no power of intervention within the discussion) is attracted. These shows sell emotions in order to provoke emotions and simultaneously sell, through the emotion-commodity, their own product. Informational TV programmes are increasingly required to employ always more emotional languages and images, constantly augmenting the dose for an emotionally addicted audience which looks for ever stronger emotions in the market and in public speech, having lost contact with its own.

We are before spectators who are so emotionally overwhelmed that the sense of the public speech itself is distorted: instead of producing a social confrontation between diversity and common values, voyeurism, a wild support of one or another protagonist, a sort of neo-sentimentalism focusing on the trivial aspects of daily life, a lack of listening to and comprehension of what is being listened to are generated, also because of the voices' overlap with no respect for one's turn to speak and the shouting often present in these shows (Lowney 1999).

We could argue to be before a commercialization of emotions, a direct consequence of the reality proposed by the television medium. A sort of cathode ray orthodoxy tending towards an emotional deviation from the real, as the aim of such TV programs is less to inform than to encourage participation, to increase that audience which represents the only commercial measure of the worth of a TV show. With respect to this, another example is provided by the news and informational programmes' treatment of the recent financial crisis. For several months, in Italy, we have been witnesses to surreal television speeches focusing on commenting the daily value of the Spread, as if our lives depended on that number. Experiencing emotional convulsions, Italians followed the programmes terrified by that word and by the number with which it could be associated, completely relying and depending on the words and attitudes of the current opinionist who played the part of the soothsayer predicting the daily tragedy of the crisis.

A great number of subjects, with no background in economics and lacking basic financial knowledge, lived for months and months a daily reality in which the term 'Spread' recurred in dialogues, lines of reasoning, at work, friends' and family meetings. And all of this very often without turning to critical reflection in the analysis of speeches and sentences heard on TV, on the contrary letting the (often negative) emotions of the opinionists overwhelm them.

A relevant point to reflect on is that we are talking about a form of emotional media sharing, involving disposable emotions, constructed by others. Created *ad hoc* for the media situation in which the encounter takes place. Affected emotions, dependent on contingency, on the news of the

day (Spread reaches 400 and the news are given with negative emphasis and drastic tones). Shocking emotions which have no time for sedimentation and contemplation. The individual's contact is therefore no longer with his interiority, rather with an artificial self which acquires the forms of an emotional dramatization performed on the media's stage with the main goal of gaining profit (audience). In other words, it is as if we lost our sensitivity towards our own interiority, as if the layers of feeling which constitute our emotional sphere were thinning. In Lacroix's words: 'the strong feeling bulimia is accompanied by an anaesthetized sensitivity. We are very moved, but we no longer know how to feel.' (Lacroix: 11). Therefore, unable to comprehend our emotions in depth, and rather letting the media-commercial flux and its influence on the emotions experienced in a specific situation transport us, it is understandable how a reduction of the activable states of feeling could lead to the de-structuring of the person, a numbing of sentiments, a stiffening of life at a sensorial, vital and mood level, with a consequently more accentuated role of the pulsional and appetitive poles. Excitability rhymes with lack of *con-fidens* (lack of trust) towards one's own emotions and this leads to a decrease of that necessary axiological structuring in the daily attempt to give a sense to the reality surrounding us and in our interaction with the others.

Many emotions channeled through these shows are lacking in depth, remaining at such a superficial level that sedimentation and the consequent drive towards a true individual and collective reflection, are made impossible. We are before displayed, rather than discussed, shouted out, rather than in dialogue, emotions. The subject, shocked (not rationally involved) by the impact with the commercial flux of emotions, flattens and finds no space and time for a deeper exploration of what he feels, to distinguish between what is his and what is pre-packaged for him by others and, consequently, to discuss this in public. In this sense, public discourse is indeed the pre-destined victim of such emotional TV commercialization, as the ability and time to use emotions as tools of understanding and mediation between the I and the other vanish, instead encouraging the chaos of noise, images, words demeaned by shouting and broken sentences. In the name of the audience, the ability to reflect is suppressed.

The other face of the ambivalence can be detected in examples coming from the use of social networks, particularly Facebook, forums and personal blogs.

While television often stimulates a commercial and univocal emotivity, hardly ever allowing for an interaction, the web allows for a connective emotionality, as it generates a biunivocal relationship among the individuals: if we think about social networks, forums and personal blogs, for example, an externalization of one's self can be observed, as these are environments in which it is possible to manifest one's moods, share one's feelings and solidarize with the other without the fear of becoming liable to the attachment of a social tag (the latter is only relevant to the virtual identity, the one adopted on the web). A space in which to tell and tell about oneself.

Here is the ambivalence. The web, unlike what emerged from the previous analysis of talk and reality shows, stands out as one of main places of manifestation of one's emotions. An environment in which to confess, listen, share, communicate. In any case, a place for narration. A slice of reality in which there is always someone telling and someone listening, even if not at the same time and with multiple languages. With a peculiar feature: unlike what happens in the course of daily, ordinary face to face conversations, in virtual spaces a free and profound manifestation of one's

emotional-sentimental states can take place, as many of the limitations and social conventions present in other situations are missing.

The point is that in a social network, a forum or a blog, the narrative act is rather free. The only rule is to express oneself in a language that can be understood by the users of that program. Other than that, the narration is hardly ever restricted: one can be blunt or lie without shame, to express oneself in perfect Italian or get carried away with insults or dialectal uses, to communicate through images or sounds or write out pages and pages of thoughts. Most importantly, it is possible to fully manifest one's emotions, to let oneself go, to open the Pandora's vase each of us carries within, and to communicate one's self to the others.

In this case as well, we witness an emotional overwhelming and a meddling of private and public. In the case of personal blogs, in particular, we are in the presence of 'personalized communities' (Wellman 2001: 227-252), which are built on I-centred networks, on the free and conscious choice of the social actor, and not imposed by superindividual boundaries of belonging. In these virtual places, we observe what I would define as a re-appropriation of one's feeling. What is felt inside is conspicuously manifested and, simultaneously, such emotional-sentimental states are discussed with others. Furthermore, thanks to the extended times for replying, reading and reflecting which the web allows for, emotions are manifested, shared and discussed, and this in turn allows one to ask questions about their characteristics: what did you feel? When? Towards whom? How did you behave?

Unlike the TV medium, which often bombards us with violent and overwhelming emotions, leaving us neither the time nor the ability to pause and think, social networks and personal blogs allow for the the affirmation of an emotional intelligence, a therapeutic and rational handling of inner states.

5. Public sphere, emotions and rationality: the Donato Bergamini case

Another example of the compenetration between emotions and reason-rationality in late-modern man's social acting, as well as of a deep civic commitment, is provided by an episode, or rather a trial, which has taken place in the city of Cosenza in the last four years. The space in which such phenomenon takes shape are the cafes, the 'third place' *par excellence* (Lasch 2001), an interstitial place in between the domestic and professional environments, in between each individual's intimate-private and public spheres (Oldenburg 1989).

As recent ethnographic research shows, the cafe appears nowadays as a place in which different forms of sociality take shape: public sphere, sociability, flirt, social capital (Gruening 2013; Gatta 2012; Cerulo 2011). If we focus on the first, we can examine what happened in a given context, such as Cosenza, and use it for our analysis.

Let us begin with the story. It is the end of 2008 and in various cafes of the centre a group of men, aged between 20 and 40 years old, start gathering once a week in order to discuss the 'Donato Bergamini case'. Donato Bergamini was a young footballer from Cosenza, who died in 1989 in still unclarified circumstances (in a rather hurried, as we will see, trial of the time, his death would be labeled as suicide). These men, about ten in the first weeks, talk about the so-called 'suicided

footballer': the eldest, aged around 40, tell the story, narrate Bergamini's football skills, recall his personality; the youngest start asking questions, wondering why so much mystery surrounds his case, why nothing is being done in order to find out the truth if it is true there are so many shadows in this story. A double trial, therefore, begins: on the one hand, emotional sharing of the young footballer's story; on the other a tendency to use the public sphere in order to understand what happened and, above all, what can be done about an issue regarded as being of collective interest (more specifically, interesting for that given collectivity).

Going deeper in our analysis, it becomes evident how this is not exclusively about unravelling the mystery of a footballer's death, as much more is at stake: the truth is discussed and the tendency is towards the search for it. To uncover the truth means, at the core, to tighten the community bonds among citizens and strengthen the collectivity on the basis of a fundamental ethical value, as well as honouring the young footballer.

And so, as the months go by, meetings continue and participation is constantly increasing. The news spread in a city which had forgotten neither the sad incident nor Bergamini's smile and dozens of citizens, each with a different social status, start joining the meetings: students, clerks, lawyers, hooligans, journalists, lecturers, writers, politicians, unemployed etc. Everybody listens, many making an effort to build the public sphere with both rational and emotional argumentations on a matter of collective interest. Some provide, and some recall, further details, some undertake research on the journalistic sources of the time, some start proposing practical action towards uncovering the truth. The cafe space soon proves unsuitable to contain everyone and in early spring the street opposite the cafe starts being used. The wave of the issue is, however, far-reaching and invades the web: a Facebook page, *Verita' per Denis* ('Truth for Denis') is created, providing spatial-temporal ubiquity and allowing anyone to join this public sphere, to give his/her opinion on the subject and contribute to its discussion.

The news reach the Bergamini family, living the province of Ferrara, who, after an initial sense of bewilderment and rejection (the father refusing, twenty years later, to re-open a very painful page of his life) decide to join the conversation. Bergamini's sister goes to Cosenza and, positively impressed with the affection shown to her by the Calabrian citizens ('Anywhere I went, upon hearing my surname, strangers were hugging me with tears in their eyes' - from a private conversation with Donata Bergamini), she decides to employ a lawyer in order to gather further evidence and re-open the case, hoping to wash away the stain of alleged suicide. All is subsequently made official in a highly attended public demonstration, held in the streets of the Brutian city on 27th December 2009, in which hundreds of people claim for 'truth for Donato Bergamini'.

In Bergamini's sister behaviour we can already detect a sentient action. At a first glance, we would seem to be before a form of affective acting, *à la* Weber: overwhelmed by the positive emotions received from the citizens of Cosenza, she decides to act out of the affection shown to her brother and to do justice to his memory. However, in the act of employing a lawyer to gather new evidence there is much rationality: there is a manifestation of emotional intelligence, a transposition of emotions experienced in practical acting, rational towards its aim, we could say. This appears to me as an example of emotional rationality: emotions are rationally channeled towards the achievement of a goal; in Weberian terms, an affective action is postponed to a rational one in

relation to both the aim and the value (the search for truth). What appeared as an affective or emotional acting, will prove extremely rational in its consequences.

Let us continue. In the summer of 2010, in order to help the family financially with the investigation and legal expenses, fundraising begins: in various cafes of the Cosenza province, moneyboxes appear, the face of Bergamini depicted on them, and the request for a spontaneous contribution. In order to make donations, a bank account is opened. The cafe where the meetings began is still the headquarters of the debate (face to face public sphere) along with the extremely popular Facebook page (mediated public sphere).

Between autumn and winter conversations and initiatives continue, as well as the lawyer's work, and the 'Bergamini case' gains national resonance (the case is followed by national news, TV shows such as *Chi l'ha visto?* dedicate several episodes to it, the staff from *Sky Sport Italia* is sent to Cosenza, etc...)

In June 2011, the Castrovillari (CS) attorney requests an official re-opening of the Bergamini case, hypothesizing voluntary murder. The case is newly investigated and, in the past months, the trial has begun again.

The importance of conversation in the public sphere and the impact argumentation and conversations held in cafes can have on the structures of society, powerfully emerge from this example. The case under analysis is certainly exceptional because encounters and conversations in the cafe led to the re-opening of a trial. And yet, it is significant for our analysis.

Yet again we are before sentient individuals who mix emotions and reason in social acting. We have just seen how relevant this is in the case of Bergamini's sister. However, the same argument could be applied to the other participants to the encounters. Enfolded in emotional states of participation to the young footballer's story, the subjects were able to channel such emotionality in the construction of a public sphere which led to a twofold rational acting: towards the goal and towards the value. The goal was the re-opening of the trial (although in the first months this seemed utopian) or, in any case, the fundraising to support the Bergamini family; the value consisted in the tendency towards the truth, the ethical value which should be the foundation of a community.

This form of emotional intelligence or emotive rationality, we could even say of positive emotional ambivalence, appears again: despite its being initially enfolded in a series of emotions, the individual manages to look deeper into them, listen to them, let them become tools of encounter, communication and understanding of the social reality, as well as encouraging social acting.

In our example, the ethical sharing which caused citizens of Cosenza with often extremely different social backgrounds to unite in encounters, conversations and actions, was possible thanks to a particular emotion: empathy. Through the conversation on the Bergamini case different personal experiences, the different biographic trajectories of citizens who often did not even know one another, met. And yet, as the initiatives continued, and by going deeper into the question, their feeling became shared. Once Bergamini's sister was met in person, it became possible for many to perceive the empathy and put it into practice, this being the emotion which allows us to put our experience and our body in contact with another individual's:

empathy means widening one's experience, making it capable of welcoming the other's pain or joy. [...] Empathy is not a cognitive or representative act, rather [...] a mode of feeling. [...] Empathy digs into

experience. It makes something happen, deepens the experience by revealing its quality as living relationship.’ (Husserl 1989; Boella 2009: 43,44, 72)².

There was empathy among the dozens of citizens who could confront with one another, unveil themselves, unite, protest, cry for a value: the truth, in order to honour a young symbol.

To sum up, there was a shift from the initial conversation (for some already characterized emotionally by the memory of Bergamini) to the sharing of one or more emotions created by the story and the discovery of events. Such emotions contributed, in turn, to give new lymph to the conversations and argumentation adopted in the generated public sphere. Empathy, in particular, made it possible for many subjects to share a feeling and, through a conversational confrontation, to reflect on the actions to be performed in order to tackle an issue of collective interest. A conversation-reflection which generates emotions. Emotions which lead to new forms of reflexivity and a rational acting equally filled with emotional nuances.

Once again, emotions and reason-rationality emerge and play a major role in the social practices of the sentient individual. Besides logics and diachronic precedences, what I wish to underline is the presence of both in the process of creation and enactment of forms of social acting, public spheres and actions of civic commitment.

Reviewing the proposed examples, we have seen how a positive use of the emotional ambivalence in which the late-modern individual is increasingly involved can be propaedeutic to social well-being, the strengthening of values bonds among individuals and an improvement of one’s daily life.

In this sense, handling one’s emotions with care means listening to their meanings (both manifest and recondite), considering them as intelligent tools in the daily practices of comprehension of the social reality, as necessary props in the processes of individuation and identification. Today, in the midst of the most serious financial world crisis of the last century, with increasingly fragmented societies, weak in their function as guarantors of social cohesion and an evident individual struggle to maintain strong and lasting social ties, taking care of one’s own emotional-sentimental states is, I believe, more necessary than ever. This does not necessarily mean turning towards extremely expensive psychoanalytical therapies or psychoactive drugs. It means, on a more basic level, being intelligent with one’s emotions. Knowing how to tune them to the situation we find ourselves in. Listening to them in order to use them to our own advantage. Neither repress them nor ignore them (‘there is more reason in your body than in the best knowledge,’ as Nietzsche prophesised), using them instead as rhabdomancy wands in our daily interactions. Let them settle, cool down, in order to understand the message they intend to transmit to us, the meaning they convey beyond the appearance they initially manifest.

² For Husserl, for example, empathy represents *the act* which assures us of the existence of the others and their perspectives, an exchange of experiences which is the proof that ‘the world outside of us’ exists. (Husserl 1989). On this point, Laura Boella (author of the quotation) clarifies that the empathic state is constituted by three fundamental moments: 1) the physical encounter with the other; 2) the role played by the imagination, which should lead to an understanding of the other; 3) the transformation of oneself following the recognition of the other and the opening of our experience’s horizon (Boella 2009: 43, 44, 72).

Being aware that the emotional-sentimental states are always individual and social resources to draw from means analysing them with intelligence and critical sense in order for them to become the tools by which contemporary man may become aware of himself, of his own existence and his relationship with the others.

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