

FOR A HISTORICAL CRITICISM AGAINST MEDIA POWER HISTORY VS. INFORMATION

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Abstract: *When the organizer of this Conference¹ had proposed the guidelines of the topic under consideration, climate, history and information, I asked myself: how can I offer a contribution, from my position and expertise, especially on the information side, and in general on communication and philosophy? Yes, climate, history and information... But yes - at a certain point I understood the possible key to my intervention, worthy of some interest: not "climate, history and information", simply compared, but more directly "history versus information": that is, trying to follow the line of a real contrast that, on the climate as on the rest, seemed to emerge between the reasons, we would say, of History and the concrete current implementations of the so-called "Information".*

FIRST PART: INFORMATION AND POWER

I. The informative statement and its moments of "revelation"

It is a question of understanding how, in fact, we find ourselves forced today to recognize a real negative trend that has emerged over the course of recent decades and connected to the so-called "information", an often abused fetish concept to be brought back into the broader context that contains it, that is, the vast phenomenon of "communication", and more specifically modern, technological mass communications. In fact, information would be one of the fundamental macrogenres within mass

¹ This essay was prepared on an initial occasion for the History Conference 2021 - How the climate has changed our history, Rome 27-28 November 2021, then subsequently developed and written for the Conference Proceedings, edited by Giovanna Canzano, forthcoming, in 2024, at Solfanelli Editore.

communications themselves, that part defined by a peculiar enunciative modality based on the factuality of its messages², i.e. on a reading contract of such messages connected to states of the world are real, and not fictional (as happens with the fictional enunciative modality, relating to the narrative macro-genre referring to plausible, possible, but not real facts). If on the one hand the alteration of information, in this ever-changing multimedia context, is the result of a natural "hybridization of genres" which does not always necessarily lead to negative developments, on the other it is difficult from a detached glance do not register, as mentioned, a very serious problem regarding the status of power and the ambiguous and distorting role of this information genre within contemporary society. An analysis, however rapid, is therefore necessary in this decisive step; it will therefore be what we will now propose, through an essential scheme for different integrated moments of "revelation".

In certain aspects, it is possible to trace the "denunciation" of the dangers connected to communication - as well as to the debate sparked by the Frankfurt School, or by contemporary anthropological views - already to the pressing critical reading proposed, immediately after the mid-60s, by Guy Debord in his book which has become classic in its own way *The society of the spectacle*³: if the word "spectacle" is replaced by the other word "communication", it is largely possible to transfer representations and meanings in a fairly coherent way from one to the other, where Debord with the concept of spectacle thought he had identified, we would say, the new mechanism of capitalist functioning, the spectacle itself being for the French philosopher "the new mode of relationship" and the renewed constitutive logic of capital in society advanced industrial.

We could say that time, in the following decades, has basically confirmed Debord's intuition to a large extent, but in fact replaced "spectacle" with the more generic but perhaps also more seductive concept of "communication", which really invaded the advanced industrial

² "Factual" is contrasted in this with "fictional"; two fundamental modes of enunciation, according to the French scholar Francois Jost, completed by a third mode of enunciation, that of the "ludic". It may be useful to consult F. JOST, *Realità/Fizione. The Empire of the False*, Il Castoro, Milan 2002, as well as a look at the works of Gianfranco BETTETINI, audiovisual semiotician and theorist of media enunciation.

³ G. DEBORD, *The society of the spectacle, and Commentaries on the society of the spectacle*, Sugarco, Milan 1990. The original French edition was from 1971

imagination, penetrating with its aura of modernist liberation into a thousand areas, from the economics of management to the commercial-advertising context, up to naturally covering the areas of the cultural industry, which has now become entirely "communication", as such. And here is the first type of "revelation", that is, a sort of quantitative revelation with respect to the invasion that communication - bringing with it its major macro-genre, information - has ended up imposing at all levels for some decades now, determining its decisive prevalence in every social sphere, from the political to the economic dimension, in the meantime also transfiguring every cultural dimension with its touch and passage. Communication, and information with it, we must admit have become an expanded and overwhelming system, even more so since, with the advent of the presumed liberating revolution of the digital and informational society⁴, the technotronic dimension has increasingly welded the communicative acts of human beings to infrastructures and industrial equipment.

On the one hand, communicative expansion develops through an uncontrolled production of "discursive flows", which however run parallel, on the other hand, to an equally powerful extension of the media production structures themselves. The alternation between the sound of the word and the silence that gives it meaning, the separation between representation and its reality, in such a context of omnipervasive communicative occupation, increasingly risk being confused, if not lost, in a communicative noise. which, the more it grows and expands, the more it loses its strength of sense and meaning, and therefore of information. A theme addressed since the 1980s by Jean Baudrillard⁵, for example, when he noted the almost "entropic" horizon of the communicative life of contemporary society, surprised to lose, every day more, the very strength of its devices of signification and symbolic production. An information void looms, according to the French sociologist, establishing a process of "entropic prevalence", we could say, of noise over meaning.

⁴ Perhaps among the best and most up-to-date analyzes on digital, and as an authoritative introduction to the informational society, is that proposed by L. MANOVICH, *The language of new media*, Olivares, Milan 2002

⁵ The anthology contained in J. BAUDRILLARD, *The dream of merchandise*, Lupetti, Milan 1994-2002, can be a good summary of Jean Baudrillard and communicative themes. But it will also be worth returning to one of the most evocative texts by the French author, such as J. BAUDRILLARD, *Simulacres et simulation*, galilée, Paris 1981

The increasingly pervasive sensation that the techno-communicative development of the contemporary world was producing an obsessive horror vacui⁶, a fear of silence and of the communicative void to be filled at all costs and at all times, seen from another sphere such as the aesthetic-artistic one, accompanied in turn the observations of a philosophical master like Gillo Dorfles, faced with the multimedia and compulsive "spectacle" of the end of the last century. An effective synthesis of this "quantitative and invasive revelation" of communication is offered by the more or less contemporary reflection of another author who is little known in Italy, Lucien Sfez, who in his *Critique de la communication*⁷ - to which we will return later - addresses precisely this problem: the concept of "communication" expanded without any more limits ends up coinciding with the limits of society itself, defined, as we then often began to say, as the "communication society", that is, a society that has become communication. But, having reached this point, for Sfez there is a risk of ending up in what he called a "tautisme", that is, a sort of tautology with no outlets, a space with no depth or value, which however also allows a fundamental sensation, that is, that of a "totalizing" claim pertaining to communication as such towards every occupyable social space, of a certain totalitarian implication that can be felt when passing through its coils.

One striking fact in this regard is that what in Sfez at the end of the last century was still, perhaps, a sensation or a metaphor, in these times instead resonates tremendously, almost like a prophecy: that aspect on the totalitarian quantitative level of communication which had aroused the attention of the mediologist of the time seems today to reveal itself in a clear way and at various levels, in the current heavy information context, in Italy as often in the West if not in a large part of the world; an increasingly exclusionary, liquidating and mystifying media context. The intimate totalitarian element, predicted to push the expansive engine of communication more than twenty years ago, today seems to reveal itself on the level of exclusive and oligarchic control of media production, as well as on the level of information control of its produced contents; quantitative revelation, thus, offers the tangible awareness of an uncontrollable drift of the communicative-informative processes in our society, both in terms of the loss of meaning in its uncontrolled flow, and in terms of the multiple

⁶ G. DORFLES, *Horror Pleni. The (In)civilization of noise*, Castelvecchi, Rome 2008

⁷ L. SFEZ, *Critique de la communication*, Seuil, Paris 1988-1992

control - on the contrary - of the effects of meaning and persuasion that a new type of power, over time, has evidently been able to develop in the industrial management of messages, thus constituting the force of a certain "totalitarianism" always at work in, and above, the flow itself.

All this brings us directly to the second movement of revelation to be addressed here, that is, to an economic-political revelation regarding the production system of media content and, in general, communicative content as such. It is certainly not an unknown story that, from the beginning, the electronic media and the printed paper itself are mostly organized and produced by a few monopolistic subjects, starting with the State, whose "public service" has represented for decades the only formula of management and control of the radio-TV sectors in many countries around the world. At a certain point, a prejudice and an illusion emerged, when with "openness to private individuals" it was believed that this sphere of communication would become a kind of 'free' and pluralistic space, stimulated by "free competition". What happened instead, revealing itself more than thirty years ago in America, and not long after also in Italy and Europe, is the increasingly invasive establishment of a system of increasingly vertical, oligarchic and monopolistic controls of the media - which from the public service to the private network has always reconstituted strong lobbying cartels of interests, and above all control, of communication itself. It is a broad subject, but we are especially interested here in one aspect, namely the "propaganda system" that derives from it: it has been well reconstructed by the analyzes of Noam Chomsky, who deduced from those analyzes at the end of the last century, a real, renewed theory of propaganda⁸.

Time has then worsened this situation, also because this monopoly of a few subjects and lobbies of TV, radio, film productions, newspapers in the "democratic" West - with serious situations, in Italy at most, of conflicts of interest, etc. - it then also expanded into that territory believed to be free and liberating, i.e. the web. The decisive word here is "concentration", a phenomenon which is therefore anything but plural and open, at least in its proprietary aspects: in which the quantity of capital, the strength of money, has ended up prevailing once again, as well as the alleged "commercial interest" imposed by the sponsors, on the possibility of true "cultural

⁸ A contemporary "propaganda model" is proposed in the essay N. CHOMSKY, E.S. HERMAN, *The consensus factory*, Marco Tropea publisher, Milan 1998

freedom". Despite the multiplicity of channels, information and culture have for years appeared debased and emptied of their strength and value.

II. The "revelation" of Declarative Power

Now, however, a real leap in quality has taken place before our eyes compared to all this. In the past two years, in fact, at least observing the phenomenon from Italy, the "democratic" status of the media seems fatally worsened, in the almost tragic and tangible experience of a systematic exclusion of every different opinion, in almost all those media places more or less central to communication, a phenomenon parallel to a disturbing censorial dilution of the information itself. But it is not a random or temporary "worsening", without, we would say, systemic consequences; no, it is a real structural and functional change relating to the media themselves. In the "pandemic" phase, a new type of power has emerged, what we will originally call "declarative power". It is based on an established link - without any further interruptions - between the government sphere and the media sphere: the executive decisions of the institution pass without any critical or documentary treatment as they are to the media, which return them augmented by propagating them, identical, for all possible times and spaces of their domain. The alleged "dialectical", pluralistic scaffolding of the mass media, all the dialogic aura of these dapper lay priests supposedly called "journalists" has been transformed into an oppressive gallery of continuous declarative demands, which are imposed by governments and their decrees without filters in the annoying media rumors, in fact without changing substance from one area of this movement to another.

On the one hand, it is as if that limited periodic mission of Advertising Progress or of the various institutional spaces on television or radio during electoral campaigns and the like, managed by ministries or parties for short episodic clippings, had expanded from those small limited spaces practically to entire television-media schedule; on the other hand, we see how the romantic presentation of themselves as "watchdogs of democracy" by journalists and their class has been completely reversed into "pro-government watchdogs". Mind you, we were saying "governmental sphere" - not "State", or simply "political sphere": since the axis of Institution-Media continuity that has emerged today does not develop through a broader relationship, we would say, with the instance-function parliamentary of the

Discourse, with a profile that is at least basically debate-based and of pluralistic guarantee, but rather with the Government Apparatus, and with its governmental instance-function of the Discourse, directly executive as such, decree-making and decision-making as it wanted to be and could become. Here is the point: the now privileged order of Discourse is not, as we were saying, the dialectical-dialogical one, but the executive-declarative one, which changes the current supposedly democratic communication scenario in Italy in a much more serious sense. In fact, the communication flow imposed with the presumed emergency declares - it does not "discuss", it orders - it does not "propose", it decrees - it does not "advise and debate". We could say with a joke about it, the "three Ds" of the new despotism: Declare, Arrange, Decree.

Here then is the rise of a renewed type of power, Declarative Power, imposed by the fatal union of Government Power and Media Power united, with their peculiar model and order of discourse. What in fact every time "declares" and imposes the disposition of reality, and no longer "discusses" its merits.

This is a dizzying epochal change, which will undoubtedly have to be reversed as soon as possible, if a glimmer of freedom and livability is to be recovered, for the unfortunate generations who have happened upon a similar transition of system and power. In the meantime, we see how the victim most affected by this restructuring imposed by the Declarative Power is precisely information: here, around it, a complex textual struggle has been unleashed, the result of which increasingly appears to be a new era of censorship, as of silencing or hiding everything that dissents or changes the "scripts" designed by the dominant lobbies and then made to descend, through the coils of the named Declarative Power, in the daily work of government-media propaganda that derives from it. The expansion of the lobby-government-media structure finds its emblematic fulfillment in Declarative Power, in the process of political-economic revelation of the power connected to communication.

This "new level" is only a further figure of this same "political-economic revelation" which already emerged, as we said, several decades ago. What was already glimpsed and suspected in past decades has therefore been revealed in reality, but the problem of "communication" and "information" has certainly manifested itself even more seriously in such a capitalist-technological society; and not only that, because if we observe even more carefully the many deteriorating phenomena that have now

been revealed, we see how two theoretical fetishes that have so far been taken for granted, namely that the economic constraint of profit was - in the fatal relationship between audience and sponsor - the major indisputable cornerstone of contemporary media functioning, and that this media evolution spoke a language of the "people" for a "representation of the people", that is, it was based on the lowest and easiest tastes present in society (the lowest common denominator), now it is reveal themselves to be cornerstones that have been completely refuted by the facts. In fact, we have seen how, in order to tyrannize over privileged contents, forms and moral directions, the media system has calmly done without both the audience and the contents coming from the "people" or the populace on which, if anything, every day it was a question of bringing down that indigestible mixture of terror, morality, and spasmodic tones, typical of current continuous infotainment.

III. Physiognomy of the Media Story and "fake-news" ideology

A further way of problematic disclosure of the media, now called into question, deepens and explains these processes even further: this time it can be assumed as a textual-discursive revelation, that is, modulating the observation of media functioning through an analysis of its modes of narrative construction. Following an Italian newspaper or TV news program these days actually means filling yourself with continuous alarm, proceeding in a tom-tom of anguish with a fearful psychophysical attempt at sound, rhythmic and narrative envelopment. Not only, as seen, does the Media Discourse - increasingly, in fact, tailored to the television one, by all the other media - take on the arrogance of Declarative Power, but his Daily Story, moreover, appears that of one polarized scheme, quite simple as well as obsessive, since it is resolved by a simple game of constant binary oppositions: in an interpretation that would deserve worthy theoretical insights in further research interventions, we hypothesize here that the functioning of said "media stories" develops following a dynamic contrary to that of "literary stories". That is, instead of unfolding from an original intuitive nucleus in the long extensive narrative material, through an opening-draft which gradually unfolds, unfolding as happens in the work of a novel, story or essay accomplished, on the contrary the Media Story lives by contracting, that is, offering itself in easy identical repeated reading patterns, and whose strength therefore does not lie in the narrative

evolution and in the scriptural plot that opens up to the author's elaboration and thus becomes a text extended, but in the closure itself, and above all in the bewitching game of the weight of everything that is not precisely extended/extended, but presupposed, that is, in its implicit presuppositional force⁹. Once the basic concept words have been found with respect to, for example, the "narrative" on emergencies, conflicts, political positions, etc., the media then build their characteristic story on them, offered in the formula of a scheme that is all the more effective the more identical it is to itself, each time it is repeated.

We don't have too much space here to show and reason about illuminating examples in this regard, but it will suffice to say that the Media Report on the climate, during these years for some time now, has presented itself in the form of a pure scheme, we would say oriented, in which every time the mantra of "climate dangers" is repeated - the favored formulaic scheme in discursive terms - with its now usual specific declination as "climate change". To the point that, for some time, it has only been enough to say "climate" to imply - in the always active game of presuppositions, induced by every act of language - "climate change" itself, as such. The same goes for the presumed/real war scenarios: saying "Bucha massacre" at this moment also means/implies "crime of the Russians" - indeed, "the Russians have (always, anyway) been criminals"; where finding the formula also means soliciting, in reality, a whole underlying imaginary, always liable to be recalled from the depths in the game of the most intimate psychological references to the population to which it communicates.

Within these evolutions there are well thought out operations of conditioning and neurolinguistic orientation, evidently as old as the world but increasingly acute and updated in the hands of those who try to "penetrate", as much as possible, among the conditioned minds of the population. But after such a rapid examination, we can still see how the status of information filtered by techno-tronic means has matured into a transversal space of domination and heavy social conditioning, now far from any credibility and claim of "honest ability to inform".

⁹ Studies on the presuppositional force of language are primarily due to the works of Paul Grice, on whose author and topic one can consult G. COSENZA, *La pragmatica di Paul Grice. Intentions, meaning, communication*, Bompiani, Milan 2002

The analysis just proposed relating to the functioning model of Media Stories, however, is certainly not an inconsistent digression with respect to the economic-political revelation of information as a system of power, from which we started just above: since it is precisely through the extension as far as the eye can see of this media-information sector controlled by a few oligarchic and monopolistic centres, that it becomes possible to construct a similar series of "schematic-narrative" operations, which in fact are very poor in documentary quality and as mentioned are always based on easy opposition binary good-evil in the representation of the world and things. That is, the quantity of repetitions fills the poverty of the representations, in an effective game precisely because, in the meantime, the communicative-informative control system has concentrated in a few properties and equally few wills; the quantitative extension of the same properties accompanies and allows this oriented polarity - in an ideological, political and moral sense - of information which has become a "schematic narrative", condensed and concentrated.

In relation to this, a mention should be made of the claim of these times, coming from the same monopolist government-media axis, to establish, as already noted above, a kind of "ministry of truth", in the hairy undertaking of giving a perpetual hunt for the so-called "fake news", wherever they are, especially among the so-called counter-information and the depths of social media. Here, just by liquidating the matter for a few words here - the question deserves important in-depth analysis - we will say that, in reality, if we look at this question with a critical textual-analytical eye we understand how it is precisely the functioning of information reconstructed above, based on the type of the "Media Story" just recognized in its "schematic-oppositional" features, to show the true and essential problem of contemporary informative textuality, because it is precisely the poverty identified in the Media Story itself that characterizes the most equivocal, misleading and mystifying model of "information". In this schematic attitude, in fact, the always punctual and always central operation is the decontextualization of the contents reported: by maliciously selecting the specific contents to be "informed" about, much, too much information connected to these contents themselves is overlooked, and whose informative reporting, in reality, would completely change the meaning and orientation of the narrative as such.

When, for example, I overlook the fact that many doctors, following the independence of their knowledge and decisions, went to treat

presumed "covid" patients at home, always saving them all, in fact I simultaneously allow the "dominant narrative" - that is, the one based on the idea of the existence of a "covid" that is treatable, perhaps, only in hospital and with often negative or tragic results (hence the implicit parallel need for the "vaccine") - of continue their work, which at this point turns out not to be "information" but rather real propaganda. The problem emerging here does not seem to be so much achievable behind the false trail of fake news, a poor concept compared to a real phenomenon, and which seems above all to operate on the side of this political-media Declarative Power - but rather by reasoning on the work of textual decontextualization so fatally widespread in the current spasmodic and insistent multimedia communication production.

Even the climate, in this sense, can serve as a coherent example, since when the fact that in some parts of Greenland the ice on the coasts is neglected in some parts of Greenland is more extensive than before, or that the average temperatures of Paris, A few summers ago, London or Berlin were lower, or at most similar, to those of always - as a professor at the Mercati Traianei showed us, with projected data in hand, at the end of a Roman Summer, already a few years ago - the The entire ideological system relating to "global warming" can easily continue without too many consequences, especially when in the meantime the UN itself, perhaps with the parallel help of some catchy phrase or title introduced in National Geographic documentaries, contributes to this stereotypical narrative scheme (since the media oligarchy coincides with the diplomatic and political one). On the contrary, if the greater wealth of data, information and contextual extensions of the discourse could better circulate in public opinion, at the claimed center of the media, the increase in general awareness in public opinion itself and in populations would be very different, so more worthily informed - that is, recontextualized in content - and therefore also more critical and prepared¹⁰.

¹⁰ In this re-proposal of our essay, we can here in Note insert, updating the problem, some further illuminating references on the merits, such as for example the birth and growth of a real "academic movement" to contest the false scientific nature of the alleged "climate change", as can be deduced for example from this interview with a Full Professor of Applied Geology and Geological Risks at the Sapienza University of Rome: The climate emergency does not exist. Word of 1500 scientists. Conversation with prof. Prestininzi, 5 June 2023, reported in the magazine "Start Magazine", web address:

IV. The multi-perspective paradigm of History

Here, then, an essential comparison can begin to be proposed between similar narrative-textual poverty imposed by the current dominant information-media model and the basic models of the historiographical work: since the schematic module inherent to the Media Story finds, already at just a first glance surface, precisely in the manner of scientific and textual construction-reconstruction by historiographical writing, a kind of its opposite, that is, a model that finds in the accumulated documentary development, in the open multi-perspective of comprehensive views, in the patient elaboration of possible reconstructions of the facts | the only possible compass and paradigm of one's own episteme, of its sensible possible proceeding, and of being able to present itself as such.

Making, studying, disseminating history means - if one does not remain in the simple propaganda operation - moving through a spirit and direction that is very contrary to any schematic reductionism, in a constitution in itself founded on the critical explanation of the past time completely opposed to the presentation simple and bipolar dualistic, as happens instead in current information. If the schematic reduction of the Media Tale is reduced to small presumed concentrated truths, the work of the historian and the historiographical work instead always unfold through a scientific position of constant openness, in a continuous updating whenever possible of critical reopening - in the face of large or small reconstructions of history, as well as of one's own experience, which can always be rethought and reinterpreted through the work of time, combined with the strength of memory¹¹.

In this sense, the work of history by definition and essence is constituted as a path of elaboration, documentation as well as interpretation - and it always culminates with portions on offer of multipolar critical constructs, such as perspectives of constant rethinking towards the past. Elaboration, what instead seems to be missing from the agitated and

<https://www.startmag.it/energia/lemergency-climatica-non-esiste-parola-di-1500-scientiati-conversazione-con-il-prof-prestininzi/?fbclid=IwAR3OPmT71Z-rG22RC8h4iLLLLRZGiHBn2vc9BMiggVQeaXFFnEc3OSLBp5xA>

¹¹ In many respects an essential author in the reflection between history, memory and story was Paul Ricoeur, whose far-reaching volume can be highlighted here: P. RICOEUR, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Seuil, Paris 2000

agitated noise of current industrial communication, and its more equivocal and cumbersome daughter information - and now so polluting, in the widespread social mind.

Frequenting history, even better observing, means positioning oneself in relation to reality mostly by following residual traces, initially starting from simple spies, but capable of revealing - perhaps only in part - the paths that could open up behind them. Once again, a method contrary to the schematic absolutism of popular media shouting, in which everything is presented instead as if reality appeared whole, immediate and total in the face of the gaze and its revelation; while in the game of traces that the "text of history" leaves behind itself, the parallel game of hypothesis and the possible rediscovery of remote realities dispersed in the depths of history itself opens up, as Carlo Ginzburg's applied reflection¹² on the matter has shown, master of history as investigation of the trace, and of historiographical intuition starting from the small residual spies left by time, in search of the true, the false, the possible.

PART TWO: MARIO PERNIOLA AND HIS ANALYSIS "AGAINST COMMUNICATION"

I. On "Communicative Despotism"

In several respects, we could more or less close our Information-History opposition at this point with the examinations carried out so far. But it is worth enriching this path by recalling a further, precious critical reference which is completely relevant to the reflections brought into question thus far, if not as a true seal of acute philosophical recomposition on the entire question. We are talking about an original and not distant contribution, but largely already ignored and forgotten, developed by a great contemporary Italian thinker, Mario Perniola, who in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s proposed a concentrated dissertation entitled, emblematically, *Against communication*¹³: a text that is sometimes very complex to deal with, and whose placement is in turn not entirely obvious,

¹² C. GINZBURG, *Myths, spy emblems. Morphology and history*, Turin, Einaudi 1986. On the Italian theorist and historian, see also C.GINZBURG, *The thread and the traces. True False Fake*, Feltrinelli, Milan 2015

¹³ M. PERNIOLA, *Against communication*, Vol. I and II, Einaudi, Turin 2004

since Perniola's thought in this sort of contemporary militant pamphlet does not address the communicative problem on the level of political-economic observation, or of analysis of some more specific contents. Rather, it seems to move on the deepest levels, among the essential drives of the communicative organism as such: we could then define this memorable contribution of the Italian master as that of a philosophical unveiling, capable of enriching if not completing in the best coherent way way the path of "critical revelation" of information followed thus far, during our intervention.

As can be seen from the title, Perniola's is not a "conciliatory" dissertation, but a real philosophical corpus to reconstruct the negative profile of a real polluting space that has become a central device of contemporary society, where "communication" is recognized as a pretentious and dominant factor in the very heart of this multimedia era, in the equivocal and abused function of its claimed "cultural" position. What is affirmed instead, according to the Italian thinker, is a real "communicative populism", which every day, crossing shreds of cultural effects and disseminated knowledge, glides over the cognitive territory with its continuous noisy flow, actually suffocating and repressing every concrete exercise of reason and culture.

What lies behind a claimed superficial pluralism in one's media spaces turns out to be rather a basic principle of exclusion: it acts in the very essence of the communication society, to exclude - by principle itself - all the forms that Perniola defines as "autonomous mediation", i.e. that which is based on the freedom and autonomy of individual judgement. Well before the sensational evidence revealed in recent times bordering on inquisitorial fanaticism, in the media Perniola already recognized almost twenty years ago a space of extreme and systematic polarizations, essentially foreign to tolerating as such any irreducible temporality and spatiality of the work of the spirit, which instead precisely in the continuous work of mediation - we said above: of elaboration, in relation to historiographical work - seeks and finds the real product of culture, knowledge and learning. The forms of mediation live by combining the work of critical ability with that of the strength of imagination, offering in following these paths each time finally a response to experience, an outcome of the spirit called in our tradition "knowledge", later "culture".

Through the coils of communication wrapped up and imposed in a thousand spaces of contemporary relationships, however, what the

philosopher calls a real communicative despotism is affirmed: but, be careful, it is not implemented through a simple exclusionary operation - what Perniola would still have attributed to strength of the "ideologies" capable of maintaining as such a contact with a "determination", that is, a relationship with something specific - but through the appearance of a "totalizing appropriation" of every aspect as well as its opposite, in the intrusive and false democracy of momentary attention, "vitalistic, instantaneous and sudden"¹⁴. As Perniola says, "communication therefore seems to put values out of play not by opposing them, but by appropriating them", since it "escapes any determination", "aspires to be simultaneously one thing, its opposite and what lies in between between the two opposites"; communication in this sense turns out to be "totalitarian to a much greater extent than traditional political totalitarianism, which also and above all includes anti-totalitarianism. It is global in the sense that it also includes that which denies globality."¹⁵ Therefore, communication actually aims at the dissolution of "all contents".

On the other hand, communication understood in this way is distinguished both from the possibilities and developments of what, a few years ago, was called the "new economy" - the one founded on a strategic reconfiguration of informational capital - and from the evolutions connected to the so-called cognitive society, that is, the new possibilities for the growth of intellectual power in the post-industrial era, as the situation seemed to present itself at the turn of this new century. But what happened precisely at that moment - and recorded by Perniola with extraordinary acuteness, almost at the same historical moment - was the ability of the power to "play the card of populist vitalism", insinuating precisely through the work of communication a debasement from within that same "intellectual and liberating power" made up of "informational capital", and available almost without limits in the era of networks: here comes the birth of Communicative Despotism as such, distinct and contrary to cognitive society since it implements "a strategy aimed at enslaving not only professors, scientists and journalists, but also all sorts of intellectuals and specialists with claims to autonomous legitimation"¹⁶.

Precisely here the attack on the "autonomous mediation" mentioned above begins to operate, in a systematic spoil system action, through what

¹⁴ *Idem*, p. 23

¹⁵ *Ibidem* p.9

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p.26

we could call the reconstitution of the Apparatus, in every management area of the different social spheres. Following Perniola's analysis, there emerges an implication of power that has now sensationally revealed itself, in almost tangible terms, compared to fifteen or twenty years ago, in which communicative populism is welded to the bureaucratic power of the apparatus, we would say to unified networks - in the monotonous hypervisible noise imposed by Declarative Power - finally revealing itself as a "manifestation of false consciousness" that appeared once more on the scene of history. In this sense, the Italian professor said, the essential work of communicative despotism is "barring the way to the proponents of the cognitive society, rejecting any discussion of magnitudes and values and envisaging the universe of communication, that is, a world without judgments and without legitimate evidence, in which the strong, endowed with unspecified powers (and often not specified because they are illegal), immediately prevailed over the others"¹⁷.

These words, written around 2004, take on an almost sinister aspect when faced with the disturbing "spectacle" of the false "scientific" theater shown by television in the era of the health emergency, which itself evidently operates with a similar Communicative Despotism, since what this pseudo-medical spectacle has shown is precisely a fatal bond between the obsessive information flow and a world, we would say, beyond judgments and without legitimate proof, paraphrasing Perniola's words, an organic bond moreover to that between its inquisitorial daily protagonists who appeared on the scene and the universe of their properly "strong, endowed with unspecified powers" and presumably illegal instigators, who in fact at the end of every false television debate "have immediately gotten the better of the others". While, regarding the current coverage of the Ukrainian war, the representation of the central media - those that we previously called "generalist" - appears even more obsessive and maniacal, despite claiming itself in that space of presumed "progressive openness" with which it always claims to present itself, but in this revealing precisely how "the very civilized West" becomes "through communication the place par excellence of obscurantism, despotism and barbarism"¹⁸.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p.24

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p.21

Seen from the perspective of discourse analysis applied to the observation of the "television word" several years ago¹⁹, this same despotic and obscurantist situation revealed today is confirmed in turn, in the impressive dominant representation in which, a system of media and communication offered through a thousand channels and apparently multiple distinct voices, however corresponds each time to a single narrative identical, to finally remain alone on the field; a deceptive "democratic representation", already promised by the talkshow at the time in its proclaimed direct access granted to the people in the territories of communication, and which in reality constituted and constitutes instead a selection in the sense of the poverty of the contents and of the representations themselves, as the aforementioned Mininni and Ghiglione already demonstrated in this regard in their psycho-linguistic works, applied to this "fictional communication" created by "social" television, the ambiguous direct contact.

II. Claim of immediacy and absolute transparency

The claim of immediacy between media space and social space, the true foundation of communicative populism, corresponds to a parallel and constant claim of absolute transparency that the media themselves would like to attribute to themselves in the face of the complex manifestation of reality: again Perniola underlines this aspect capable of bordering on the pathological of the contemporary communicative drive, in its claim to "say everything" and in some way "be everything" almost as if in an aspiration for the absolute, which also recalls Sfez's reflections regarding the aforementioned totalitarian "tautisme" and the same claim of transparency, reported by the French author to the communication itself. And in fact, Perniola, in the wake of the masters of psychoanalysis, especially Lacan, fully ventures a similarity between a certain functioning attributed to psychosis and the functioning now recognized to communication: since in this alleged absolute embrace with the world, all-encompassing and all-encompassing, the communication ends up recalling, as in the Freudian case of Schreber, the psychotic's ability to dissolve all differences,

¹⁹ See the works in this regard by G.MININNI, R. GHIGLIONE, *La comunicazione finzionante. I, television*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1995, and P. CHARAUDEAU, R. GHIGLIONE, *La parole confisquée. Un genre télévisuel: le talkshow*, Dunod, Paris 1997

superimpose himself on any otherness of reality, fleeing from the world but at the very moment in which he merges with it.

In this regard, one might think of the peculiar situation created during the long days of the health quarantine, when the television-media apparatus attempted to immerse itself completely in the epidemic drama - but, at the same time, the true curative, epidemiological, more broadly social reality that in the meantime it resisted and existed in the world in that context it was not even able to detect this apparatus in the slightest, nor even more so to explain the reasons and the complex existential divergences, so to speak; because the totalitarian attitude of communication was able in those moments - totalitarian also at a governmental and political level - to unfold without limits, revealing every communicative space precisely as marked by a similar psychotic tendency, in which while one claims to touch, deepen and exhaust the representation of the world, the world itself is completely missed and eluded by this representation itself. And as Perniola already taught, this "psychotic" condition of communication destroys as such the order of the symbolic: in fact it tends to deny the value of proof - the "doctors who cure", the real pandemic data omitted, or those on the climate, equally hidden - as well as that of true rational discussion and challenge, not called to confront but rather repressed or silenced through omission. The double psychotic procedure already intuited by Perniola was revealed in contemporary information communication in the full implementation of his procedure, based on two successive movements, the first that of "taking everything" of the world, the second following that of "excluding everything" - that is to say, to merge with the world, on the condition, however, of denying it.

This overall movement based on negation thus neutralizes the reality that is proposed and opposed to it, thus revealing at the same time its essential inability to "stay in the conflict", that is, to tolerate the very unveiling of the complexity of the world, and therefore of not having an authentic inter-esse - that is, interest as the ability to "stay in being". Every authentic difference of being and spirit escapes in this way, just as the enunciating subject itself tends to escape²⁰, who in the role of host-opinionist at the center of the media arena lets his assertions come and go in the fleeting whim of the moment, being guaranteed because, as

²⁰ How ambiguous and elusive the positioning of the "true enunciator" on television can be, observed through the semiotic-discursive perspective, was also addressed in G. BETTETINI, *La conversazione audiovisiva*, Bompiani, Milan 1984

mentioned above, "strong, endowed with unspecified powers". We could add - in the wake of the aforementioned psychoanalytic views - as dominated by an "imaginary and narcissistic ego". The dissolution of all contents implies, then, the true catastrophe of every possible symbolic order.

Referring to Freud, rather, Perniola identifies the profitable life of the symbolic order itself in the ability to think opposition, to practice/tolerate opposition and contradiction, since opposition as well as ambivalence reside in the deepest depths of the language and the psyche, as demonstrated starting with Freud. The symbolic order, the strength of real knowledge cannot ignore this oppositional and ambivalent opening, in its authentic being and proceeding.

At the same time, the Italian thinker recovers the entire tradition of the arts, philosophy and above all aesthetics, conceived as spaces in which knowledge is applied and proceeds through the continuous exercise of successive and distinct degrees of recognition of reality, developed and protected in the wise order of discretion. Discretion, the attitude of wisdom, modulates the true cognitive approach to reality, distilled in the subtle arts of moderation and disinterest through which to advance by degrees and distinctions in the revelation of the world, each time described and reconstructed in its symbolic order following the patient work of interpretation and understanding over time, of temporality left to the work of hypotheses and infinite possibilities.

PART THREE: UNDERSTANDING IN INFO-TECHNOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL TIME BY KOSELLECK

I. Technology and oblivion. The critique of communication by Lucien Sfez

Understanding over time, an exercise in the order of cognitive discretion, now allows us to return to the strength of History, as opposed to the current perversion of Information. Sfez himself in his aforementioned study also noted a progressive divergence, between a line of "society with memory" and another line, developed by technological automatism, characterized by being a "society without memory", which Sfez directly

connected to the evolution of "communication"²¹. This contrast repeats the possible one - although not necessary - between machine and organism: the first determined by a condition-continuity of a "being done with", the second determined by a "being inside/being in the environment" - and which he finds precisely in information what "links" him to the surrounding world. Information is what binds the parts, therefore, and in doing so offers an order of awareness, that is, in the consciousness of the parts and their functional union in this re-understood manner. In this way, Sfez identified the importance of maintaining, in the face of the new world of automated machines, characterized by use without memory, an essential space for the "society with memory", still capable of giving meaning to experience and, therefore, to practice the work of historiographical reconstruction and historical memory, in a still and always decisive function.

Symbolic mastery can only arise with the awareness of the unity of the process capable of conceiving and evoking the links between the parts, and therefore of bringing out, in this way, a sense and meaning oriented towards the experience. Having conscience and awareness, ultimately, reveals itself as the human ability to maintain memory with its links that produce symbolic meaning, thus reserving precisely for the exercise of history an insurmountable bulwark against any possible technological or ideological alienation.

In recent times, Paul Connerton has developed a similar reflection²², with the precious contribution that the time of techno-communicative evolution has in the meantime produced since the years of Sfez's essay, a reflection in which the English scholar highlights the problematic tendency in hyper-technological society to keep the spaces of memory and the awareness of history active, in a context in which "modernity forgets" very easily and oblivion is intimately reconnected to the cycle of consumption itself, in which the almost instantaneous speed of processes - which in today's times often transforms places, objects, situations very quickly - can eliminate precisely that consciousness that memory was able to build and maintain.

²¹ L. SFEZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-35

²² P. CONNERTON, *How modernity forgets*, Einaudi, Turin 2010

II. Reinhart Koselleck and *Historica* as historical consciousness of the multiple in action

We thus reach the final lines of this intervention, calling into question a worthy conclusive reference capable of framing our convocation of History in an "anti-Informative" function. History, in fact, we have evoked here in the title of the intervention as "Historical": an original category developed by the great German historian and thinker Reinhart Koselleck, through which he proposed a "theory of the conditions of every possible history", following as such the "bilaterality proper to every history", and thus outlining a "theory of historical times". The basic idea of a story as an open space of possibilities, of a territory of memory full of oppositions and contradictions - to quote Perniola - finds a fundamental reference in the rich work of the German author, where the different conditions of possibility of history, a starting from finitude, each time they encounter both the inevitable partiality of every historiographical reconstruction and the equally inevitable basic openness that the work of history always maintains in front of itself²³.

In a work capable of crossing several essays and subsequent elaborations²⁴, Koselleck proposes a view of historical consciousness that is a clear bearer of the perspective and existential complexity of things in the world: for example, in concepts such as that of *Zeitschichten*, that is, historical time thought of as multiple time of multiple stratifications, connected to that of *wiederholung Strukturen*, that is, "historical structures that repeat themselves", as "geological" elements of social life capable of resisting over time even great transformations, within the same society. An

²³ Regarding the fruitful dialectic between interpretation and history, see the stimulating dialogue in R. KOSELLECK, H.G. GADAMER, *Hermeneutics and history*, Il Melangolo, Genoa 1990

²⁴ We owe to our companion in philosophical adventures Diego Fusaro the interception of Koselleck's work, the lesser-known and mostly untranslated one, of the German original: see in this regard Fusaro's dense essay entitled *The concept of historical temporality in Reinhart's reflection Koselleck*, in D. FUSARO, *Modernità e futuro in Reinhart Koselleck*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2012. Of Koselleck himself, at least R. KOSELLECK, *Zeitschichten* should be noted. *Studien zur Historik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2000, R. KOSELLECK, *Future past: for a semantics of historical times*, Marietti, Genoa 1986, and the intervention in *Begriffsgeschichte, Sozialgeschichte, begriffene Geschichte. Reinhart Koselleck im Gespräch mit Christof Dipper*, in "Neue politische Literatur", n. 43 (1998)

intense reflection to understand the constant tension between the infinite "eventual vortex" and the "anthropological constants" we would call meta-historical characterized the thought of the German historian, whose heritage of notions accompanies today the richest awareness when thinking about history, its conditions of possibility, its methods of functioning and value, of which the Historic becomes the comprehensive category of reference.

What then characterizes the representation and information regarding the climate at this moment, when the news speaks, or when a certain Klaus Schwab expresses himself, for example, almost always seems to be the most inferior statement into which communication has fallen as up to now in these pages we have reconstructed it in its problematic and equivocal parable, a phenomenon whereby information has become a propaganda moment bordering on the psychotic. An exclusionary situation based on a stereotyped narrative of reality, characterized in turn by a fundamental lack - that of an adequate recourse to the decisive categories of history - or "Historical" - even better to be called into question. A clear example of this current fundamental contrast is the media narrative of the war in Ukraine: it, through the propaganda of a Western imperialist ideology, flattens out by definition into the decontextualized instantaneity of a few supporting images-emblems, parallel to the few, schematic words- concepts with which to exhaust the very representation of that reality, promptly reduced to a binary oppositional scheme, concerted on a good-bad outcome that is already arranged. Even by hastily deleting various articles or testimonies from their own historical archives regarding the true profile of power in Ukraine - because they attest to something different from the narrative scheme prevailing now - some Italian newspapers or Western newspapers have revealed something disturbing about themselves, demonstrating the existence in oneself both of that "bad conscience" identified above at the bottom of Communicative Despotism, and of traits perfectly consistent with the "psychotic functioning" which in turn flashes in the deepest communicative drive.

But a simple cognitive operation, based on a minimum historiographical recovery and historical memory relating to the places of the Ukrainian and Russian conflict allows the displacement, if not the upheaval, of the Media Story itself: becoming aware of a conflict that in reality has already been going on for eight years at least, acquire knowledge of the many attacks suffered by the Russian population in those

territories often affected by the Ukrainian power during these same years, broaden one's gaze to the historical legacy of the Ukrainian lands subjected to tsarist and then Stalinist power, to the cultural complexity of the "many Russias" existing in the ethnic and historical perception of those spaces, for example, allows each time to recompose the most complex picture of the situation and to be able to arrive, if anything, at something of that autonomous mediation referred to, capable of bringing judgment and awareness²⁵.

The Declarative Power, as we have at the moment identified and described it only with a few traits, today seems to infest the space of more or less official information through many, too many of its own "official versions": from narratives - "Media Stories", how we have renamed them - health, terrorist or climate emergencies to the alleged pollution of agriculture and related "eco-compatibility", from easy reading schemes of the war in Palestine or Ukraine to the old opposition "progressivism" - "autocracy", and the like. On this complex situation, where a decontextualized representation to the point of falsification and manipulation now dominates the information territory, the testimonies could be almost unlimited, which we refer to a more in-depth and elaborate study.

Precisely the historical operation, the calling into question of History and Historica allows us to break the noisy flow of Information which has become alienation of the spirit and conscience. The cognitive operation of History, then, constitutes the healthiest exercise to distance oneself from the pathological immediatism imposed as a psychological pollution of attention by Communicative Despotism at work every day, with its new topic and its new obsession of the moment.

In truth, there are many dangers that loom today over the Western civilization of which we are heirs, often hidden in areas of our spirit believed to be progressive, in methods and perspectives with a liberating and falsely renewing aspect. Communication, with its sharp-edged information genre, has revealed itself to be one of these areas, moreover since its inception as a concept and as a project tinged with an uncontrolled utopian and

²⁵ In this regard, Italy is preparing the translation of a very recent work by the scholar Maksim Grigoriev, already translated into English, on the history of Ukraine, considered by various specialist observers to be more complete and less partial than the current one. mostly propaganda proposal at the center of public opinion. The publisher Sandro Teti is preparing the Italian publication

totalizing claim²⁶, which then often relapses into dystopian and totalitarian realities.

At this moment, then, the good use of historical perspective, of its taste by definition cultivated by a thousand differences and continuous openings, can offer a safeguard from Communicative Despotism. History reveals itself to be the true science of the multiple in action, and a thaumaturgical bulwark against the coils of any alleged transparency or immediacy of declarative and impositional Information, which it contrasts with the taste for nuances, the pleasure of the fragment, the play of coexisting differences. It constitutes the true cognitive model disposed to the art of the possible and the possible, a virtuous exercise focused on the whys, as well as the what and the how.

And on this path, the critical action of an ever-vigilant Historian can truly represent a sort of "science of the people" capable of protecting them from the psycholinguistic work of Power, which has today become an insidious programmer of informational anguish and mental conditioning - since knowing and controlling the past, as Milan Kundera said in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*²⁷, is the only truly fatal writing that the work of power would always like to sequester.

²⁶ In this regard, see the works of the great communication historian Armand Mattelart, among which we can mention A. MATTELART, *The invention of communication. The ways of ideas*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1998, but also the theoretical and historiographical fresco present in A. MATTELART, *History of planetary utopia*, Einaudi, Turin 2000

²⁷ M. KUNDERA, *The book of laughter and oblivion*, Adelphi, Milan 1991. The volume by A. GIANNULI, *The public abuse of history*, can also coherently approach the theme. *How and why political power falsifies the past*, Guanda, Parma 2009