

The Great Transformation Three Centuries Later

Double Movement, 'Marketspeak' and Sacrifice

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We have nothing to fear but fear itself
Franklin Delano Roosevelt

In this article I make four main points. First, that the populist inclination to blame the victim severely misconstrues the nature and implications of the current crisis. Secondly, core among these implications and re-reading Karl Polanyi, is the likelihood that in the age of hegemonic capitalism there may be no 'countermovement' in response to the disruptions produced by the market utopia. From this possibility emerges, in my view, the intellectual imperative of tackling a 'new great transformation': something that Polanyi could not foresee. Thirdly, I look at 'marketspeak' as the discourse that may have effaced the sources of the 'countermovement' by re-construing society itself as ontologically dependent on the market – rather than as an entity capable of defensive response – construing freedom as insecurity and the 'citizen' as 'consumer'. Finally, I point to the rhetoric of sacrifice as the point of saturation of 'marketspeak' and to the problem of violence, associated with it, a core element in the political significance of this crisis and a dilemma that the leaders committed to the preservation of the market utopia cannot afford to ignore.

I. Crisis and truth

Times of crisis have inherent elements of ambivalence and what for some is a problem, for others is an opportunity. The difference depends on where we stand or, more precisely, on the set of conditions which defines our relative position in society.

The reason why I believe we need to discuss this crisis, its meaning, its origins and especially its possible outcomes is that the direction of change, emancipative

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or repressive, depends on the social construction of the crisis itself – the way people think, write and talk about it. Discussion, in this view, is a way to tackle ambivalence, and, ultimately, to influence the outcome.

If the interpretation of a crisis is in itself a form of communicative behavior with political consequences, one problem is in stipulating the nature of truth claims that can be credibly associated with such an analysis of the current crisis.

The kind of truth associated with this interpretation is presumably rather close to what Slavoj Žižek, quoting Jacques Lacan, called ‘an engaged truth, measured not by its factual accuracy but by the way it affects the subjective position of enunciation’ (Žižek 2010). In this perspective, considered in terms of the social construction of engaged truths, the discussion *about* the crisis, its origins, nature and consequences, is a form of intervention *on* the crisis: a communicative strategy in the competition for control over the distribution of values in society – the essence of politics. I will start by discussing the following question: who should we blame?

For individuals as well as communities in distress, the allocation of blame performs at least two important functions. First, it gives the crisis a cause or a motive, and helps individuals to make sense of the situation and to accept the sacrifices requested of them. Second, it helps to channel collective anger and frustration toward a legitimate target – not necessarily the real culprit.

On a few occasions, during the debate on the Finnish contribution to the financial rescue of Greece, I had to listen to derogatory comments targeting the laziness of the Greeks or, in some cases, the consumerism of the Americans and other culture-specific features of those people accused of being responsible for the sacrifices asked of the small but hardworking population of Finland.

I think these comments are instances of a cognitive response, known as the ‘blame the victim’ attitude. When people feel incapable of helping or unwilling to help the victim of some dramatic occurrences – like in rape – they sometimes react by blaming the victim rather than the victimizer (‘she should not have worn that miniskirt...’). In social psychology, this form of behaviour is explained in terms of a defensive response against the sense of impotence or guilt associated with the incapacity or unwillingness to help the victim.

When the crisis spread to Europe and threatened the common currency and even the institutional integrity of the European Union, further targets of blame became the people of Italy, Spain and Ireland for being the ‘soft belly’ of financial Europe, France and Germany for not finding an agreement on how to save the rest of Europe, the European Central Bank for not having been sufficiently proactive in supporting the national banking system, and more recently Germany for not wanting to ‘save’ Greece.

It should be obvious enough that, the Greeks, Spanish, Americans and the people in the West and elsewhere are the victims and not the cause of the crisis. But, if one cannot blame the victim, then who else can be blamed?

In order to play the functions described above, not all the targets of blame are equally suitable. Concrete objects like individuals and groups are better targets,

nicely visible and easier to grasp, than immaterial ones. Thus, the class of US brokers, which until 2007 operated the subprime mortgage deals, or the brokers all over the world who let those 'toxic assets' circulate in the financial system (in the form of mortgage-backed securities [MBS]) are pretty good targets. Institutions are a bit less concrete but still suitable targets. These may include the US government, which allows the financial market to run unregulated, and the banking system that managed to speculate on those high-risk assets, prioritizing the possibility of profit over the interests of their clients (and of the global financial system, with insight!). Finally, there are immaterial objects like fate or 'bad luck' or, more seriously, the rules of the financial system and even the culture of capitalism: the shared values, implicit knowledge and unwritten norms that constitute and distinguish capitalism from other ideologies.

Different targets of blame are open to different interpretative avenues of the crisis itself and, most importantly, different prescriptions concerning the possible remedies.

Because individuals are concrete objects and ideas are not, in this crisis the tendency is to blame individuals' (or groups of individuals') behaviour in the financial world, rather than the ideas and rules of capitalist finance itself.

If we blame the insolvent US citizens who were hoping to buy their homes, we may feel rewarded by the idea that these people (about 1, 2 million nationwide) have already been punished for their ignorance and lost their homes. In order to avoid similar mishaps from occurring in the future, it should be established that ignorance, at least in financial affairs, is a crime (probably against humanity, if one considers the range of implications). If we blame the US government or the banking system, our targets are much less vulnerable but surely more influential for the future. Furthermore, if we decide to blame the rules and culture of capitalism, our target is a difficult one but, as I suggest, one worth engaging if our goal is not to scapegoat but to avoid similar crises from occurring in the future.

The question of whether ideas can be blamed for the deeds of those inspired by them is a tricky one. We usually blame Nazism and Communism, and not only their leaders or followers, for a wide range of atrocities. On the other hand, we do usefully distinguish the ideas from their interpretations, for example, when we discuss the relationship between Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms with Christianity and Islam respectively.

In line with this interpretation, some are inclined to distinguish the idea and rules of financial capitalism from the behaviour of its agents and, for example, to claim that the 'rules of the system' are fundamentally right, but some people or institutions have abused them.

If this is true, the avoidance of a further crisis would require tighter vigilance on the proper compliance with the rules: a prescription that can be based only on the belief that the self-regulating market is, in reality, not self-regulating at all, and that the intervention of the State or other agencies is necessary to compensate

for the excess of capitalist accumulation (Stiglitz 2001 [1944]) or, in our terms, to compensate for the wrong use of the right rules.

But if the self-regulating market must be regulated, it also means that the idea of a self-regulating market, and the rules associated with it are patently wrong.

Another and a bit more political line of argument develops from clarifying in what sense the ‘rules of the system’ can be right or wrong.

At least two meanings seem relevant here: one pragmatic, and the other ethical. In the first meaning the ‘right’ rules are those that can secure the reproduction of the system or at least that do not bring about its collapse. In this sense, the rule of profit is right until it does not ‘kill’ the source of profit itself. In a more ethical sense, ‘right’ refers to the utilitarian principle of seeking the maximum benefit with the minimum cost. Here the rules are right if and when the benefits are greater than the disadvantages. If it could be proved that capitalism actually benefits a few to the disadvantage of the many, one should conclude that the rules of capitalism are ‘wrong’ on ethical grounds, whilst on pragmatic grounds, and including the moderation clause, these rules may still be ‘right’.

From this point of view, the rules of financial capitalism are ‘right’ in the pragmatic sense of allowing the reproduction of the system, if one accepts the idea that there is nothing wrong in taking financial advantage of people’s desires *and* as long as one does not take too much advantage of that. However, the weakness of the ‘right rules but wrong use’ argument, once one accepts the idea that banks and financial organizations exist not to serve people in general but to help selected individuals and institutions to accumulate profit, is in the question of ‘how much?’ which is both crucial and elusive.

The crisis started because a financial ‘tool’ devised to lure individuals with low income (and pursuing the illusion of becoming a house owner) into agreements that would allow banks to take advantage of them eventually malfunctioned. Some major users of this ‘tool’ collapsed, in practice, because exploitation exceeded the capacity of the exploited to be exploited. With hindsight, this kind of practice was no doubt a mistake. However, from a pragmatist point of view, it was the same kind of mistake committed by the torturer who manages to kill the subject before the information he is being tortured for can be extracted. As a more experienced torturer should know the breaking point of the victims, a more experienced financial broker should know the point at which the debtor cannot repay the debt and be moderate – not out of moral consideration but merely out of self-interest.

In practice, one is tempted to think that, at least in financial capitalism as we know it today, it is not illegal to be dishonest – as long as one is not too dishonest.

The argument that the rules of financial capitalism are ‘right’ and one only has to concern oneself about its users is tempting, but applied to the current crisis it has at least two flaws.

Firstly, if the rules are right but some users are wrong, then the state or other authorities do not need to revise the rules but just punish the misusers. However, this is not what is happening. In fact, state intervention– and most notably that of

the US – so far has been directed not at punishing the greedy ones or alleviating the damage for the victims, but rather to save the financial institutions from the consequences of their deeds (and to help other states to save their own institutions).

Secondly, the crisis started in the US but spread quickly world-wide. This means that we cannot blame only US capitalism for the European and world-wide effects of the crisis. If the European and global financial system cannot isolate and reduce the effects of the financial crisis that originated in the US, I would suggest that something is wrong with capitalism in whatever version it is applied: *the rules cannot in fact reproduce the system.*

If one dares to blame the rules of the financial game and the institutions that support them, rather than the victims of both, one has to address the question of compliance: how is it possible to enforce such a system? Or more precisely, on which grounds may one hope to succeed in asking people to make sacrifices to preserve a system that ultimately considers them as resources to be exploited?

II. Great transformations and double movements

If crises are construed as opportunities for change, a question worth asking is: what kind of change? Looking deeper into the political implications of the current crisis it is useful to recall the work of Karl Polanyi and his description of the 'great transformation': the changes that accompanied the rise and fall of the ideology of the self-regulated market between the 18th and mid-20th century.

One of the main points in Polanyi's analysis is that an economy based on the self-regulating or 'free' market has disruptive effects on society in so far as it enforces the marketization of the constitutive elements of society itself – for Polanyi land, labour and money. In his analysis, Polanyi describes the transformations associated with the initial marketization of society in the early stage of capitalism. He describes the problems related to it, the increased poverty and the resistance of society to these changes, and ultimately the disappearance of traditional society.

As is well known, Polanyi coined the term 'double movement' to express the core dynamic of the 'great transformation'. For at least a century, Polanyi notes, modern society has been ruled by a 'double movement: the market expanded continuously but this movement was met by a counter-movement checking the expansion in definite directions' (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 136). Albeit necessary to protect society from the working of the self-regulated market, this 'double movement' produced the tensions that eventually brought about the crisis and collapse of that social order.

Nineteenth-century civilization was not destroyed by the external or internal attack of barbarians; its vitality was not sapped by the devastations of World War I nor by the revolt of a socialist proletariat or a fascist lower middle class. Its failure was not the outcome of some alleged laws of economics such as that of the falling rate of profit or of underconsumption or overproduction. It disintegrated as the result of an entirely different set of causes: the measures which society adopted in order not to be, in its turn,

annihilated by the action of the self-regulating market...the conflict between the market and the elementary requirements of an organized social life provided the century with its dynamics and produced the typical strains and stresses which ultimately destroyed that society. External wars merely hastened its destruction. (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 257.)

The logic of the double movement implies that, if and when the marketization of society surpasses a certain threshold, social forces start a countermovement aiming at the protection of society from the disruptive effects of marketization.

In its simplicity, the mechanism described by Polanyi possesses at least three features that make it interesting and influential in the debate about the current crisis. First, and quite simply, it supports predictions concerning the outcome of the crisis in terms of a 'natural' movement, possibly primed by the State, to protect society and to regulate the financial market. Second, and more interestingly, this logic configures a set of binaries that affect not only the way we think about the problem but also the nature of the solutions that become available. As Christopher Holmes notes (Holmes 2013), this invite a serious reflection on the 'politics of the possible' and, the 'discourse of transcendence' that more or less implicitly accompany the interpretation of 'double movements'. Thirdly, and even more interestingly, the logic of the double movement and the binary (-ies) it constitutes, suggests the possibility of a 'return of the political' because it is evocative of the distinction between 'friend and enemy' that Carl Schmitt designed as 'the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced' (Schmitt 2007 [1936], 26).

It is therefore in the spirit of an intellectual provocation, and perhaps of the need to cope with the frustration of the 'post-political' effacement of dissent and antagonism, that I would like to bring the reader's attention to the following possibility: What if the apparatus empirically performing 'protection' in the 'double movement' script will not play its role in this crisis? What if the balancing mechanism has collapsed under the pressure of globalization? What if the neoliberal onslaught has effectively resulted in the incapacity to "see the market as a part of the broader economy, and the broader economy as part of a still broader society" (Stiglitz 2001 [1944], xv)?

Perhaps more soberly, this possibility is ventilated by Gareth Dale, an authoritative student of Polanyi's work. Discussing 'Neoliberalism and the countermovement today', Dale offers an extensive review of the arguments of those that seek in Polanyi's approach the interpretative key to make political sense of the current crisis (Dale 2010, 207–234). At the end of that review, he offers three reasons why the argument of those expecting the Polanyian countermovement in this crisis may be in fact too optimistic:

The first is that it misreads the current policy shift. There is, at the time of writing, little sign of the world's ruling classes blaming capitalism or even neoliberalism...for the global market meltdown. The second...is that it misidentifies the causes of the postwar golden age...It is not neoliberalism but capitalism that lurches from crisis to crisis, and to think that the replacement of neoliberalism by an étatiste species of capitalism

would inaugurate a new golden era is to overestimate the ability of the state to engineer prosperity...Thirdly and finally, this expectation overlooks the degree to which changes in the global economy over previous decades contributed to the failure of Keynesian and étatiste techniques in the 1970s. (Dale 2010, 231–233.)

The last order of change, Dale notes quoting David Kotz (Kotz, 1999), is associated with globalization: a process that “transformed big business from a supporter to an opponent of the interventionist state”. (Dale 2010, 233)

In a final comment about the durability of the ‘neoliberal project’, Dale warns the reader that

I am not suggesting that the amassing of powerful business support behind it guarantees its continuation in perpetuity, but it does suggest that for neoliberalism to meet its demise powerful social movements would be required. (Dale 2010, 234.)

When Polanyi declares that his thesis “is that the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society” (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 3), he discusses the ‘annihilation’ of society as a possibility intrinsic to the working of this utopia. If we take the possibility of the end of the double movement seriously, then we should also be prepared to discuss the annihilation of society on both conceptual and practical grounds. If the apprehensions of Dale and others deserve to be taken seriously – and I think they do – then we must consider something I would like to call the ‘new great transformation hypothesis’: the proposition that in this crisis the double movement may not be working anymore, at least not in the terms described by Polanyi, because after the end of the Cold War the discourse that supports the utopia of the self-regulating market – or ‘marketspeak’ – has become hegemonic: a political discourse that effaces all the other competing political discourses. It was at this time, as Josef Stiglitz notes discussing the actuality of Polanyi, that the political inhibitors to the full expression of the forces supporting the marketization of society were removed (Stiglitz 2001 [1944]). But it was also at this time that the saturation of political discourse by ‘marketspeak’ brought about the “unipolar world... the absence of legitimate alternatives to the dominant hegemonic order” and “the lack of political channels for challenging the hegemony of the neo-liberal model of globalization” (Mouffe 2009, 552).

To discuss this possibility I would like to take a closer look at ‘marketspeak’, its symbolic power and its capacity to erode the sources of an effective ‘countermovement’ to the marketization of society. In the concluding section, I will discuss sacrifice and saturation as the initial moments of a ‘new great transformation’.

III. 'Marketspeak' and symbolic power

The marketization of society is a cultural process based on communicative practices with at least two significant features. The first is aptly described by Polanyi and consists of the progressive erosion of society brought about by the reduction of societal values to market values. The second feature, which in my view has reached a greater relevance today, is the discursive re-construction of the social as *ontologically dependent* on the market. In Polanyi's description, the influence of the market utopia depends on the power of elites. What I suggest here is that, after the end of the Cold War, the power of that utopia is supported by a discourse – 'marketspeak' – that naturalizes the idea that society depends on the market, that (mis)construes freedom as risk and transforms 'citizens' into 'consumers'.

Broadly speaking, 'marketspeak' is a way of thinking and communicating about important aspects pertaining to the organization of human life. More technically it is a discursive practice capable, as such, of creating, supporting or challenging relations of power depending on the 'market' and its discursive formations. It is also a pedagogy: a way of educating and training people to make sense out of important aspects of our life in relation to the 'market'. In its educational capacity, for example, 'marketspeak' not only establishes the 'market' (it does not matter here whether it is in its 'self-regulating' or 'regulated' versions) as an authoritative agency with strong transcendental connotations and with 'growth' as its physiological state. It also legitimizes the operations of the 'managers', 'leaders' and other social profiles invested with the capacity to interpret the market's 'will', 'needs', 'anxiety', etc., and, therefore, it legitimizes their influence in directing, sanctioning, supporting or punishing the behaviors of individuals and groups in society.

In this interpretation, the influence of 'marketspeak' is not only, nor primarily, a reflection of the influence of the ruling class or other elites but a form of 'symbolic power'. This is a form of power that Pierre Bourdieu describes

as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost identical magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization. (Bourdieu 1991, 170.)

A good example of this power at work is that of (US-based) financial rating agencies. In the conditions of the global economy, these agencies are most influential actors: their pronouncements are endorsed with the authority of self-fulfilling prophecies. They are the holders of both the carrot and the stick, having the practical possibility of praising or punishing governments and societies for their greater or lesser compliance with the rules of global capitalism – as expressed by the 'mood' of financial markets. And this is an extraordinary power that in a time of crisis can fatally damage the national economy of most states.

For all those who want to challenge or even resist the influence of ‘marketspeak’, an important question is to understand the nature and origins of its symbolic power. If we follow Bourdieu, the influence assisting the ‘pronunciamientos’ of rating agencies does not reflect the power of the market but rather the power of the belief in the market. This is the idea, in Bourdieu’s terms, that

symbolic power does not reside in ‘symbolic systems’ in the form of an ‘illocutionary force’ but that it is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e. in the very structure of the field in which *belief* is produced and reproduced. What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them. And words alone cannot create this belief. (Bourdieu 1991, 170)

The symbolic power of ‘marketspeak’ allows the logic of the market to spread and to regulate a growing part of ‘the social’ and, at the same time, to justify this intrusion. In other words, the power of rating agencies merely reflects a (great?) transformation that has already occurred: the acceptance of national societies to be regulated according to the interests of global corporate finance. As Bourdieu put it:

For symbolic power is that invisible form of power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it. (Bourdieu 1991, 164.)

If symbolic power is construed as a form of power dependent on beliefs supporting legitimization and on the complicity of the subjects, what are the beliefs, legitimacy and ‘complicities’ associated with ‘marketspeak’?

In human affairs, complicity is usually brought about by a commonality of interests, hopes, or even apprehensions and one may usefully ask when and how the very idea of the market performed reassuring functions, originating the possibility of legitimization of a social order based on it. Earl Gammon, for example, with the intention of outlining ‘a post-rationalist approach to international political economy’, suggests that the belief in the self-regulating market can be seen as an ‘aggressive response to anxiety... regarding social order’ (Gammon 2008, 251). Locating the origins of the self-regulating market in the collapse of the Natural Moral Economy in early 19th-century England, Gammon addresses the limitations of Polanyi’s technological determinism on the matter while, at the same time, identifying the grounds on which both legitimizing beliefs *and* complicity can be established. More precisely, Gammon explores

the role of aggression and anxiety in the genesis of the market as a mechanism for the ordering of social relations...crucial to the ascent of the market civilization was the reconception of the market as a mechanism for the deliverance of secular retribution, replacing beliefs in a supernatural agency at work in the social economy. The market as

a redistributive mechanism...was more than just the negative sanctioning of productive inefficiency. It was an expression of a desire to punish and objectify those who resisted or stood in the way of the creation of a new technological utopia that was supplanting conceptions of a natural moral economy. This aggressive pursuit of the market in Victorian England...was directly related to the anxiety stemming from the failure of the long-standing project of natural theology (Gammon 2008, 255.)

Equipped with affective and even moral power, the 'self-regulating market' becomes the secular canvass on which one may express the hopes and fears associated with the problems of social order, the occurrence of social conflict and ultimately the possibility of social change. In this light, the symbolic power of 'marketspeak' is construed on beliefs that legitimize the influence and actions of those that sought to address these hopes and fears, as well as, to take advantage of them.

It is in this capacity, as a discourse capable of inspiring an ideal goal and of bringing about the conditions of its attainments that 'marketspeak' accompanies and supports the marketization of society, performing functions of control and communicative re-construing of society itself (in fact, re-production for control!), of the values, relations, institutions, etc., and all that Polanyi may have considered 'the elementary requirements of an organized social life' (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 257).

In this process of communicative re-construing of social life, however, 'marketspeak' inhibits the possibility of an effective countermovement by affecting the meaning of freedom, by familiarizing the individual as 'consumer' rather than 'citizen' and ultimately by bringing about the 'end of politics' – if this concept is meant to describe the competition for control over the distribution of values in society. This competition is dissolved because the complicity associated with the symbolic power of 'marketspeak' establishes the consensual attribution of control to the 'market', making the distributions of values in society an administrative matter: a question of 'management' and not of political competition.

Already in the 1960s, long before the end of the Cold War, Herbert Marcuse described the effects of this dissolution in his *One-Dimensional Man* (Marcuse 2002 [1964]). Many fundamental aspects such as 'the paralysis of criticism', the 'closing of the political universe', the 'defeated logic of protest', etc., are echoed today, sometimes implicitly, in the discussion about the post-political and its features – for example, the excess of consensus that terminate politics (Rancière 2001, 32; Mouffe 2009), or the reduction of government to administration (Swyngedouw 2007; Žižek 1999, 198), etc.

As for the meaning of freedom, while Polanyi could not anticipate the dissolution of politics into management, he did however point to the 'institutional separation of politics and economics', which 'almost automatically produced freedom at the cost of justice and insecurity' (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 263), and to the 'meaning of freedom' as the unresolved dilemma at the root of liberal utopia (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 266).

In Polanyi, the ideology of the self-regulating market construes economic freedom as the only 'real' freedom and the one that has to be defended with the sacrifice of other freedoms

Free enterprise and private ownership are declared to be essential of freedom. No society built on other foundations is said to deserve to be called free. The freedom that regulation creates is denounced as unfreedom; the justice liberty and welfare it offers are decried as a camouflage of slavery. (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 265.)

Democratic regimes need a certain idea of freedom to deal with the problem of change: the possibility of transformation in ways that do not undermine the integrity of the community. The problem of freedom within democratic discourse is the problem of identifying the sustainable balance between the needs of the individual and those of the community. Part of the solution to this problem is the idea that freedom can be effectively defined in terms of rights and duties or entitlements assisted by the force of law and by the consensus of the majority.

The notion of freedom as construed in 'marketspeak' however does not emerge from the problem of managing social change but rather from the utopian expectation of removing the problem of change itself:

Clearly, at the root of the dilemma there is the meaning of freedom itself. Liberal economy gave a false direction to our ideals. It seemed to approximate the fulfillment of intrinsically utopian expectations. No society is possible in which power and compulsion are absent, nor a world in which force has no function. It was an illusion to assume a society shaped by man's will and wish alone. Yet this was the result of a market view of society which equated economics with contractual relationships, and contractual relations with freedom. (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 266.)

Once confined within its narrow managerial connotation, freedom loses its connection with change and becomes 'unfreedom': a regime in which consumerism is a form of social control (Marcuse 2002 [1964]).

Thus the problem of the 'meaning of freedom' is transformed into the problem of social change. But to understand the influence and function of 'marketspeak' in inhibiting the forces that could trigger a Polanyian 'countermovement', we should keep in mind that the social identity of individuals – citizens, consumers, slaves, voters, enlisted, etc. – is (almost by definition!) a social object that exists only as a result of communicative practices. The 'citizen' and the 'consumer' are two characters of different discourses: the socio-political discourse that addresses issues of power and freedom in terms of rights and duties and 'marketspeak' that addresses issues of personal profit and interests in terms of markets and exchange value.

The discourse that reproduces the 'citizen' is a process where problems of social order and political power are addressed while the discourse that reproduces the consumer reduces the individual 'power' within a egoistic notions of 'interest' and 'participation' to the private act of consumption.

The age of the citizen is the age of politics and the democratic competition for control over the socio-political order. The age of the consumer is the age of a hegemonic order that rules individual lives according to managerial criteria and allows no change in the fundamental structure of society.

In this light, the downgrading of 'citizens' to 'consumers' occurs as a result of the erosion of the socio-political discourse to the advantage of 'marketspeak'. This erosion ensues from discursive practices, the mobilization of power/knowledge, the selection of relevant issues and the addressing of social problems within conceptual frameworks that ultimately invite the individual to behave as a consumer, rather than a citizen: to concentrate on personal interest and private consumption, and to disregard opportunities for active participation in the political process.

Dale reports that Polanyi himself, in the essay 'Community and Society' published in 1937, describes the corruptive capacity of the market in moral terms as follows:

The market acts like an invisible boundary isolating all individuals in their day-to-day activities, as producers and consumers. They produce for the market, they are supplied from the market. Beyond it they cannot reach, however eagerly they may wish to serve their fellows. Any attempt to be helpful on their part is instantly frustrated by the market mechanism ...Under such a system human beings are not allowed to be good, even though they may wish so. (Dale 2010, 10–11.)

If the nature of the problems we let ourselves be concerned with affects our intellectual and spiritual life and the way we evolve as individuals and in relation to others, the commercial saturation of the public communicative space must have consequences on the way people perceive themselves and their relation with the social world.

For Jean Baudrillard this is the state of affairs in the 'age of simulation', a time in which the political is effaced by the destruction of meaning.

Today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising. All original cultural forms, all determined languages are absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten. (Baudrillard 1994 [1985], 87.)

From a different perspective, but recalling Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 1983), Andrew Wernick suggests that "cynical privatism and mass apathy can even be construed as a sign of resistance" to a communicative environment saturated by the logic of promotional culture (Wernick 1991, 192).

The invitation to construe individual social identity as consumers rather than citizens is supported by a carrot and at least a few sticks. The carrot is the promise of material opulence, of an enhanced 'buying power' and participation in consumerist rituals that manage to keep the fear of scarcity at bay while developing a convenient ontological dependency in which 'being is reduced to having' (Wernick 1991, 35)

and life to the 'good life' of mass consumption "in defense of which the opposites are united" (Marcuse 2002 (1964), 259).

The sticks are primarily fears: fear of scarcity, fear of failure, of exclusion and even punishment. If education is reduced to the training of skilled labour rather than the formation of individuals able to participate actively in the social and political life of their community, it is no wonder that finding a job is the main source of anxiety amongst the younger generation.

Health and illness, raising a child, getting a decent education, taking care of the elderly are domains of life that individuals are increasingly asked to deal with not in terms of civic entitlements but in those of private consumption, buying services at market prices and getting the quality that their 'buying power' allows them to get.

The fact that some diseases, for example, the seasonal flu epidemics, are typically discussed in terms of lost working hours, and the advisability of vaccination is addressed not primarily in medical terms (the consequences on people health) but in relation to the advantages for the national economy reflects a specific standpoint that enforces a new and unchallenged interpretative consensus. In practice, we are trained to perceive health and illness not as conditions requiring public assistance but as forms of waste deserving public sanctions. We are persuaded to accept the social construction of these realities from the perspective of a discourse that construe the individual not as a value or an end in herself but as a resource in the production process.

In this light, 'I don't want to pay for someone else's health problems' is a sentence with an ambivalent meaning. It signals the rejection of the responsibilities accompanying the identification with a community but also, and perhaps more deeply, the fundamental sense of insecurity, impotence, and ultimately the weakness of the individualized individual who cannot care about anyone other than himself.

We are forced into adopting the identities predisposed by 'marketspeak', and participate in this discourse. Few of us discuss our children's illnesses primarily in terms of 'lost working hours' but this is also changing, and working parents, pressed by managerial 'leaders' are invited to look at their life prioritizing their company's interests. We can't afford to ignore a point of view that ultimately puts 'growth' before 'life', which reduces the quality of life to economic growth.

IV. Sacrifice & Saturation

If 'marketspeak' has successfully eroded, perhaps completely, the forces that should initiate the 'countermovement', what can we expect from the future?

As part of the 'new great transformation' hypothesis I would like to suggest here that the rhetoric of sacrifice, as used in the communicative management of this crisis, is an important and ambivalent signal for at least three reasons.

First, the notion of sacrifice is socially meaningful and politically relevant (e.g. for strategies of legitimization in political discourse [Reyes 2011]) because

it participates in the identity discourse: the practice for the social construction of collective identities and Anderson's 'imagined communities'. In this capacity, this notion performs at least three functions: (a) it creates the (belief in a) collective identity as a symbolical representation of a community defined by participation in the sacrifice itself and its meaning; (b) it makes this community a 'sacred community', a social object endorsed with transcendental meanings and emotional values that reach far beyond the meanings and values of its individual members; and (c) it establishes a ritual – the ritual sacrifice of individual interests and values – which reproduces the community, the identification of its members with its symbols and, therefore, the use of those symbols in political discourse (e.g. 'saving the Euro to save the Union').

Secondly, and consequently, the activation of this notion signals the reaching of the paradoxical point at which, after having effectively eroded the social grounds for a countermovement, 'marketspeak' now tries to re-constitute the community to preserve the rules of the system against the effects of its own working. In a rather clumsy way, the rhetoric of sacrifice tries to mobilize 'consumers' in support of capitalism at a moment when the rules of capitalism are showing their dangerous inadequacy to manage the world. As nationalism was a discourse that created the Nation and the desire to die for it in the conflicts caused by nationalism itself, capitalism is now realizing that it needs the notion of sacrifice to compensate for the damage brought about by its own discourse. If this operation were to succeed – and luckily there are serious reasons for doubts – the end result may well be the enforcement of some sort of a global identity based on the market utopia (an object which will perform the same functions of discursive legitimization of violence that the 'international community' performed in the 'humanitarian wars' of the 1990s).

Thirdly, the mobilization of 'sacrifice' activates the discourse of political violence. This discourse is also constitutive of political identity and quite inspirational when it comes to discussing the practical implications of the 'new great transformation' hypothesis. The reference to sacrifice do not only solicits identification with a group and the prioritization of the collective over the individual interest. It also unveils the violence connected with this solicitation and, more radically, introduces the problem of the social control of violence: the legitimization of the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence. For example, if the rhetoric of sacrifice is looked at through the lenses of the 'surrogate victim mechanism' (Girard 2005 [1972]), the upsurge of this rhetoric may also signal a more or less conscious effort to re-direct the violence that is growing in the system.

the violence directed against the surrogate victim may well be radically generative in that, by putting an end to the vicious and destructive cycle of violence, it simultaneously initiates another and constructive cycle, that of the sacrificial rite – which protects the community from that same violence and allows culture to flourish. (Girard 2005 [1972], 98.)

The activation/mobilization of 'sacrifice', therefore, brings the problem of violence, and new elements of ambivalence, into the discursive management of the crisis. For the leaders/managers of a system based on injustice, the problem of violence is primarily that of establishing and justifying criteria to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate violence. This problem is important not primarily on moral but on pragmatic grounds: it has to do, so to say, with the cost-effectiveness of violence. If the legitimacy of violence is interiorized by the victim as 'sacrifice', the same violence reinforces the community and the authority of its leaders. If, however, the exercise of violence is perceived as unjust, the authoritativeness of both is undermined and the possibility of antagonistic violence increases. This possibility, even as a mere possibility, reproduces the fundamental problem of violence on a greater scale, with greater risks, greater costs and more uncertain outcomes.

A system based on injustice is ultimately based on fear and the function of sacrifice is not the removal of fear but rather its management. Despite all its functionalities, (Stocchetti 2007) fear is an ambivalent resource. In the 'new great transformation' the ideologues of failing capitalism appeal to 'consumers' for the surrogate functions of a 'countermovement' which is nowhere in sight, and ask for sacrifices in an effort to re-constitute identities that 'marketspeak' has almost completely eroded. But one may recall what Jean Baudrillard wrote discussing '9/11', and suggest that, in the conditions of hegemonic order, the meaning of violence expressed in those attacks

goes far beyond hatred for the dominant world power among the disinherited and the exploited, among those who have ended up on the wrong side of the global order. Even those who share in the advantages of that order have this malicious desire in their hearts. Allergy to any definitive order, to any definitive power, is – happily – universal... Very logically – and inexorably – the increase in the power of power heightens the will to destroy it...When global power monopolizes the situation to this extent, when there is such a formidable condensation of all functions in the technocratic machinery, and when no alternative form of thinking is allowed, what other way is there but a *terroristic situational transfer*? It was the system itself which created the objective conditions for this brutal retaliation. By seizing all the cards for itself, it forced the Other to change the rules. And the new rules are fierce ones, because the stakes are fierce. To a system whose very excess of power poses an insoluble challenge, the terrorists respond with a definitive act which is also not susceptible of exchange. (Baudrillard 2003 [2002], 6–9.)

The violence described by Baudrillard is not the violence that belongs to the logic of the political – the logic in which actions are still meaningful in relation to the friend-enemy distinction. Rather it is a response to the logic of 'dissuasion' and to the 'surgical' violence with which the hegemonic power enforces its order: the virtual war Baudrillard described in antithesis to von Clausewitz, that is, 'the absence of politics pursued with other means' (Baudrillard 1991, 21, translation mine).

It is a subversive violence not because it challenges the hegemon but because it precisely refuses even that minimum level of complicity necessary to constitute the challenge as a binary. The terrorist violence described by Baudrillard cannot be defused by the opening of ‘political channels for challenging the hegemony of the neo-liberal model of globalization’ and expressing ‘legitimate dissent’ (Mouffe 2009, 552). It is, in fact, a form of violence that does not seek ‘victory’ over the hegemonic power but offer self-sacrifice to achieve its ‘humiliation’.

To understand the rest of the world’s hatred of the West, we have to overturn all our usual ways of seeing. It is not the hatred of those from whom we have taken everything and given nothing back; it is the hatred of those to whom we have given everything without their being able to give it back. It is not, then, the hatred bred of deprivation and exploitation, but of humiliation. And it is to humiliation that the terrorism of September 11 was a response: one humiliation for another. (Baudrillard 2003 [2002], 100.)

And humiliation, if looked at from the point of view of this discussion, is indeed ‘the worst thing for global power’ (Baudrillard 2003 [2002], 101) because it is an effective way to destroy the symbolic power of the discourse that supports its hegemony.

If the current crisis is looked at through the speculative lenses of the end of the double movement or ‘the great new transformation’ hypothesis, one should also be prepared to discuss the discontinuities that the rhetoric of sacrifice and the conditions of saturation introduce in the analysis of change. In this analysis, as I tried to argue, the role of violence is ambivalent and elusive but ultimately fundamental. Through the same rhetoric of sacrifice, but taken at its deepest and most radical roots, it constitutes the possibility that the ‘countermovement’ to be expected in the current crisis is not one aiming at the protection of society but rather one aiming at the destruction of the discursive order of the market utopia in its Neoliberal form.

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