THE NEW TECHNOMAGICAL REALISM AND COMMUNICRACIES

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Abstract
This article explores the emergence of a new paradigm: technomagical realism. At the intersection of media, digital mythologies, and affective rituals, it analyzes how technomagic reshapes culture, aesthetics, and politics. The modern social contract collapses in favor of emotional communicracies based on shared symbolic intensities. Public opinion gives way to public emotion, where images, sensations, and immediacy become the new foundations of reality.

> «Mysticism is just tomorrow's
> science dreamed today»
> — Marshall McLuhan

1. Introduction

The rites, ceremonies, and effervescence typical of the sacred manifest in digital cultures not only through the proliferation of new cults and the online updating of traditional religious forms but also—and especially—through the spiritual elevation of objects (Houtman, Meyer, , 201), practices (Carolyn, 2014), or ephemeral, playful, and dreamlike images (Susca, 2016). In most cases, the figures involved evoke lived experience in its most sensitive and immaterial nature: its flesh (Esposito, 2004); (Henry, 2000) and its imaginary (Durand, 1963). This is the ultimate expression of what Émile Durkheim called the «social divine (Durkheim, 1912)» from which emanates a plethora of small churches characterized by low institutionalization and high symbolic and emotional density (Maffesoli, 2020).

In this sense, digital sociality acquires the decisive ability to transfigure ordinary life, the realm of the profane, into a kind of mythical and mystical experience bordering on the sacred in its wild dimension (Bastide, 1975). The relationships emerging from contemporary media, physical, and symbolic landscapes reveal a capacity to unite what is separated in time and space—a faculty once reserved for spiritual, esoteric, or mystical orders (Davis, 1998).

Thus, the culture of connection, sharing, and always-on disseminates a set of symbolic experiences reminiscent of religious mysteries (Campbell, 2012) into profane spheres. This imaginary alters the modern relationship between technology and society according to a paradigm we will define as technomagical (Weber, 1922).

The pagan-like communions (Weber, 1922) celebrated by the new rites of media and contemporary sociality nourish a form of belief involving the sharing of secrets (Simmel, 1994), emotions (Weber, 1922), and community-based styles founded on the dimension of the «common (Virno, 1994).» Beyond the multiple myths and countless icons occupying privileged spaces within communication flows, it is always the social body—and the body itself—in harmony with the system of objects and signs, with the realm of the living and non-living, that is exalted by digital liturgies and crowned with the radiance of a glorious body.

The very data of life (Turner, 1974), far beyond secularization and disenchantment, are thus sacralized: flesh and its voluptuousness (Attimonelli, Susca, 2016), matter in its sensitive and sensory essence (Perniola, 1994). In this landscape, media become the new totems of being-together. Indeed, when technical reproducibility extracts the aura from the work of art, the public gradually becomes its object and subject, emerging as the protagonist of an aestheticization process indistinguishable from its sacralization.

The cult of the internet (Breton, 2000), with all its embedded ideology (Musso, 2003), awakens new forms of fetishisms, utopias, legends, and idolatries. These demonstrate how the devices in question are not mere technologies serving a rational, functional politico-economic project but rather existential territories destined to channel and host a kind of «unproductive life (Bataille, 1949); (Joron, 2009) «— that is, desires, sensibilities, and impulses irreducible to the idea of progress and traditional grand narratives.

In the wake of such collective imaginaries, we propose to examine to what extent and in what ways the public opinion underpinning Western and modern culture (Habermas, 1962) gives way to a public emotion where reason no longer directs the senses but where the senses orient thought. We then observe the shift from a paradigm based on the individual and abstraction to another focused on the «we» and empathy (McLuhan, 1964)—or rather tele-empathy—where the spatiotemporal model of ubiquity, proximity, and synchronicity becomes paramount.

The fundamental difference explored here concerns the unprecedented perspectives of imaginaries around which contemporary bonds coalesce: the collective effervescence, adhesions, and beliefs springing up between streets and mediascapes no longer project the social body toward an elsewhere—the perfect society, salvation, celestial or earthly paradise—as was the case until the 1970s.

Instead, they are crowned with sacredness in the sense that they allow individuals to connect, merge, and vibrate in unison in the present, immersing themselves in the world in the most intense and embodied way possible.

This holds true, with all its paradoxes, even when these experiences are inextricably linked to the cult of consumption (Obadia, 2013) and the ephemeral (Pace, 2018). In such a condition, faith is no longer oriented toward the future. It does not rest on abstract figures and concepts. On the contrary, it becomes an experience anchored in the hic et nunc (Haynes, 2012), in daily life both online and offline (Castells, 1996), devoted on one hand to material and sensory dimensions and on the other to an immaterial universe close to imagination and dreams.

To grasp this mutation, we must describe and interpret this paradigm shift between technology as conceived from the Renaissance to the mid-20th century (Simondon, 1953-1983) and contemporary technomagic—the source of new types of enchantments, trances, possessions, fetishes, fantasies, and emotional drifts.

2. The Power of the Imaginary

The material foundations of collective life in the modern era were gradually shaken or even destroyed during the transition from the 19th century to the second half of the 20th century, as the social body—a raw mass transformed first into labor-power and then into the working class—became both spectator and consumer (Abruzzese, 1973).

The society of consumption, entertainment, and leisure rides the emotional wave that pulls daily life downward, exhorting unproductive expenditure (Bataille, 1949), waste, and the exaltation of oneiric impulses. Social systems quickly realized they could not remain on the margins of such tremors or neglect them. These tremors thus became the target toward which integration strategies were directed to defuse the intrinsically anti-institutional risks posed by crowds intoxicated with hedonism and the cult of the ephemeral.

Politics devised strategies to adapt the rationality of its domination, infusing it with measured doses of non-rationality, passion, and pleasure to harmlessly channel social needs focused on disengagement. This involved opening institutional doors while preventing the expression of the destructive instinct inherent in their Eros:

> *«Instinctual satisfaction within the system of unfreedom helps perpetuate the system. Such is the social function of the rising standard of*

living in the rationalized and internalized forms of domination» (Marcuse 1964).

The ogics of consumption and, later, the spectacle tend to coordinate and orchestrate the festive and destructive impulses of the masses—the eternal entanglement of distraction and destruction—within the productive order. This is framed not in terms of progress rhetoric, the quality of rational-legal structures (Weber, 1922), or the reasons of historical ideologies, but rather through the seduction of commodities and shows, the enjoyment derived first from their contemplation and then their consumption.

If it is true that pleasure and the actions it unleashes escape the social order to exalt the body with its accursed share, the rationality of domination tends to regulate (Weber, 1922) its use to tame its fundamentally subversive nature (Marcuse, 1973). A passage from Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment is illuminating in this regard:

> «*Thinking originates in the movement of liberation from this terrible nature, which was finally entirely subjugated. Enjoyment is, as it were, its revenge. In pleasure, men free themselves from all thought and escape civilization. Ancient societies provided for a communal celebration of such returns to nature. Primitive orgies are the collective origin of enjoyment. (...) Only with the progress of civilization and Reason does fortified subjectivity and consolidated domination reduce the festival to mere farce. The masters introduce the notion of rational enjoyment, as a tribute paid to nature not yet fully mastered; they simultaneously attempt to neutralize enjoyment for their own use and preserve it in the higher form of culture. For the subjected, they attempt to dose this enjoyment when they cannot deprive them of it entirely. (...) The evolution goes from primitive festival to vacations.*»

The years since the publication of this work highlight the untamable nature of the recreational spirit emanating from daily life in its irresistible tension toward radical fulfillment—a paradoxical will to power oscillating between alienation and self-assertion.

Undoubtedly, the crisis forming the backdrop of recent misalignments between elites and the social body—from the Yellow Vests to various No-Vax and No-Mask movements, Friday for Future, the Sardines, Occupy Wall Street, and Extinction Rebellion—is rooted in the obsolescence of the myths of work and progress. These are replaced by new magical adhesions replete with initiation rites, totems, and ecstasies, relating to Mother Earth, the Web in all its forms, the system of objects, and everything referring to the body and daily life.

Thus, at the margins of social utopias, grand universal truths, and established moralities, unfolds a spectrum of ethics and aesthetics oscillating between mainstream and underground, secreting layers of sociality modeled on connective affinities beyond time, space, and classical cultural belongings: fans, gamers, role-players, ravers, YouTubers, influencers, hackers, slackers, flâneurs, TikTokers, meme-makers...

Beyond the multiple nuances distinguishing them, these figures feed new mythologies that can only partially be traced back to the criteria and logics of the narratives underlying contemporary societies. Consequently, these societies appear emptied of legitimacy, unable to bond with the social body and fruitfully nourish the collective imaginary.

3. The New Monster

The most manifest symptom of the ongoing catastrophe is the proliferation of monstrous figures and barbaric invasions in contemporary politics. Putin, Trump, Salvini, Le Pen, Meloni, Orbán, Milei, Zemmour, Johnson, Grillo, Bolsonaro, and all other tele-populists indicate—beyond the programs parroted during electoral campaigns—the cultural earthquake shaking the foundations of our social systems, recalling Antonio Gramsci's words:

> «*The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born. Now is the time of monsters.*»

It is no coincidence that these characters draw symbolic resources not from the semantic basin of politics but from sorcerers, pirates, anarchists, trigger-happy types, or cowboys, blending archaic references and specters of the future. The attraction they exert is directly proportional to the destructive and spectacular scope of their message, to their promise to overthrow the status quo by welcoming the anti-political impulses coursing through the collective imaginary.

This is why, fundamentally, they are not suited to govern. And when they obtain political responsibilities, they cannot maintain consensus for long and soon reveal themselves for what they are: simulacra of social change (Susca, Kerckhove, 2008). They are offspring of the cultural industry destined for the use and consumption of a public animated by an unconscious vocation for distraction and destruction, cultivated more for their oneiric scope than for any pragmatic aim.

The political programs of tele-populists matter far less than the spells, chimeras, seductions, and all other communicative tricks supporting them—these are even their primordial content—transfiguring

political rationality into a kind of neo-mysticism with pagan and occult undertones, in a style oscillating between carnivalesque and trash.

Such operations contribute to desacralizing the symbolic structures of modern power, precipitating the advent of other semantic regimes in tune with ways of feeling forged in the laboratories of the imaginary and electronic media.

Upon closer analysis, we see that the crucial step toward this horizon was taken before the advent of tele-populism, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. It was, in fact, the society of the spectacle (Debord, 1967) that impetuously unleashed phantasmagorias, dreams, affections, passions, and desires constituting imaginary explosives—or rather time bombs—capable of attacking the heart of bureaucratic, charismatic, and traditional power as dissected by Max Weber (Weber, 1919).

If it did not promote «all power to the imagination,» to borrow the slogan of the 1968 protesters, it nevertheless conferred a power close to the sacred upon collective imagination and its performances, without these being coordinated under the aegis of hegemonic cultures. Hence their barbarism, a side effect with consequences still largely unexplored, since they operate in the folds and wounds of daily life.

> *«Thus, we find ourselves today connected to a vast fund of knowledge, even as we have not learned to think. In fact, quite the opposite: what was meant to enlighten the world plunges it, in practice, into darkness»* (Bridle, 2018).

4. Use of technology: restitution processing speed, claimant inclusion

The communions of communities, whatever they may be, around communicative dynamics crystallize just as many communicracies—powerful symbolic frameworks circumscribed to certain situations, to precise spaces and times of lived experience. Fundamentally, these are kingdoms that, from a chat room or line, a hashtag, a piece of sidewalk, or a clandestine club, restore meaning to those who inhabit them.

This alchemy occurs independently of the contents conveyed by the media in question, according to a surrealist principle whereby the imaginary (Baudrillard, 1981); (Durand, 1963), following the intuitions of William Shakespeare, André Breton, Leonora Carrington, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Karin Andersen, and Marion Peck, actualizes a landscape more real than reality.

The examined process refers to the symbolic surplus distinguishing the social body in its flirtation with spectacular commodities, shop windows, screens, and images. On the other hand, in line with interpretations provided by Karl Marx, Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, and Massimo Canevacci, the transfiguration of the material value of production triggers a fetishism toward objects and services offered by the market (Marx, 1857); (Benjamin, 1982); (Canevacci, 2022), which take on a sacred and oneiric aura distant from their political and economic referents.

Indeed, the dreams made to glitter by the understanding between consumer and commodity rarely correspond to the structure serving as their backdrop—except during the brief golden episodes of industrial revolutions, as was the case with the first world fairs. On the contrary, there is something refractory to all restraint that always escapes the system's rationality: excesses of excess testifying to the foundational anarchy agitating the spirit of crowds since their appearance in European metropolises of the 18th century up to their current digital incarnations.

Thus, the accursed share evoked by Bataille prowls between the underground of daily life and the surfaces of the cultural industry, in deep accord with the collective unconscious. Its clandestine work is the most unintelligible—and yet most fundamental—sociological datum of our time.

The unproductive values, to borrow the terminology of the French sociologist and poet, unleash desires, pleasures, and attitudes irreducible to the laws of political economy but conforming to the ancient anthropological principle of celebrating life not as an accumulation of wealth but in connection with the losses it generates. In modern culture, this principle is oriented toward voluptuous consumptions (Cafelato, 2003) and media experiences between the fantastic, the marvelous, and the extraordinary—existential dimensions now less dominated by the myth of progress and abstract reason than by the ethics of leisure (Morin, 1962), where the morality of Prometheus fades in the name of Dionysus's creative disorder (Maffesoli, 1982).

Although inscribed in a well-regulated project, the doses of entertainment inoculated into the social body by the society of the spectacle—with the immediate effect of sacralizing the profane and vice versa—ignite appetites that overflow the rational framework of this project. These are directed toward pagan idolatries recalling the golden calf of the Bible, around which Moses, upon returning from Mount Sinai, finds his people in revelry.

This is why the discourses of many politicians, intellectuals, and journalists stigmatize as barbaric the dangerous contours of consumer society, mirroring the furious reaction of the Hebrew prophet faced with the festive lasciviousness to which his people had abandoned themselves.

«And as he came near the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing. Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf they had made and burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it. Moses said to Aaron, 'What did this people do to you, that you have brought such a great sin upon them?' Aaron replied, 'Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. They said to me, «Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.» So I said to them, «Let any who have gold take it off.» They gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf» (Maffesoli, 1982).

Making a tiger's leap to our era, in the wake of thinkers from Walter Benjamin to Alberto Abruzzese—who updated this passage in the context of consumer society (Abruzzese, 1996)—the golden calf is a pagan artifice prefiguring modern and contemporary kitsch.

Indeed, as soon as one identifies mass culture as a monster to be slain (Eco, 1964) or an anomie to be corrected, the new holders of public morality act upon the public of the cultural industry as if it were an object to be molded for its redemption and integration into the system.

Concretely, each time a sign or a tasteless attitude is intercepted within daily life—particularly in consumerist and spectacular excesses—the entire discursive battery of cultural policies is deployed to restore the canons of the beautiful, the just, and the good. Thus, attempts are made to determine the categories of taste guiding lifestyles and social norms.

In the case of mass culture, however:

«Good and bad taste become very labile categories that may not serve at all to define the functionality of a message that probably fulfills many other functions in the context of a group or an entire society. Mass society is so rich in determinations and possibilities that a game of mediations and cross-references is established within it—between culture of discovery, culture of pure consumption, culture of popularization and mediation—hardly reducible to definitions of beauty and kitsch. In many of these stern condemnations of massified taste [...] no space is ever left for the average consumer (for each of us as an average consumer) who at the end of a day asks a book or a film for the stimulation of certain fundamental effects (the thrill, laughter, pathos) to restore the equilibrium of his physical and intellectual life» (Eco, 1964).

Each of us, as a consumer or spectator, finds ourselves at certain moments, more or less consciously, in this equilibrium evoked by Eco—a state reconciling head and belly in favor of the lower material body dear to Bakhtin (Bakhtine,1970). This is a pernicious condition for the order of politico-social systems, as it diverts said consumer from their citizen duties. It is consequently necessary to tame consumerist and spectacular impulses through critical discourse.

The cultural industry speculates on the discovery—or rather the revelation—of the public's accursed share to satisfy its impulses and translate them into commodities before integrating them into the system.

What follows is a scenario of total surveillance of the social body resembling those described in the novel 1984 (Orwell, 1950), the film THX (Lucas, 1971), or the television series Black Mirror (Black Mirror 2011-2023). It does not foresee punishments but rather rewards, as in the episode Fifteen Million Merits (Black Mirror 2011), imposes nothing but personally pursues each social actor by examining their communications, behavior, and consumption to anticipate their movements but also to respond to their expectations with seductive goods and services.

More than ever, the act of seduction must be understood in accordance with the etymology of this verb: to lead to oneself. The strategy, far from harmless, aims to bring back the fantasies and dreams teeming in the collective imaginary to the order of the commodity and the spectacle.

Thus, for example, even the most extreme icons of rebellion and malaise—from skulls to weapons and suicide—converge in narrative registers and storytellings that, by representing them in aesthetic form, soften their most corrosive effects for the established order.

By an effect of symbolic relaunch and unconscious response to these recoveries, the nihilistic tensions and desertions of all kinds simmering in the social body manifest a latent desire for generalized destruction of self and world.

Flagrant testimonies of this include adherence to new and old religious fanaticisms, tele-populisms, supremacist, xenophobic, incel, and neo-Nazi movements, as well as indulgence or indifference toward terrorism, which has only grown and flourished among fragile and rebellious social layers since the 1970s, from Italy to France and the United States.

Beyond their differences and nuances, all these situations share the pulsation of destructive instincts from the collective imaginary that cultural policies and their avatars have not metabolized. Upon closer inspection, the more the latter extend their domination in a totalizing manner, the more what resists them takes radical forms and tones.

The exacerbation of excesses, violence, and collective effervescence in various anti-social declensions—for example, during the recent pandemic, in the form of illegal parties, domestic violence, freedom convoys, and brawls in public places—signals the gradual conversion into barbarism of the mass once domesticated and confined to the role of a docile or inert public with only the possibility to consume and applaud at the appointed time.

In the case of the lockdown imposed nearly everywhere to curb the spread of the coronavirus, the entire population was fragmented, as in a worldwide happening, into distinct individuals governed by an active principle of remaining passive—»Stay home!»—which led to frustrations and traumas still affecting our societies in various forms: depression, suicides, divorces, sociopathy, hypochondria, and isolation (Marchetti, Romeo, 2020).

This case precisely shows how the institutions' determination to neutralize the agitated impulses of the population—as was the character of almost all social distancing measures between 2020 and 2022—results in the exact opposite in the medium and long term, irritating citizens to the point of making them cantankerous, even hostile and unbalanced in some cases.

5. Conclusions

The technomagical paradigm does not constitute merely an aesthetic, cultural, or media mutation: it also outlines the shifting contours of a major political transformation—in many respects, a transpolitical one.

Through the proliferation of affective communities, digital rituals, shared emotions, and imagistic narratives, contemporary technologies gradually dissolve the foundations of the modern social contract—the one inherited from the Enlightenment and based on reason, the individual, popular sovereignty, and institutional mediation.

In this new configuration, it is no longer the figure of the rational and autonomous citizen that prevails but that of the affective user, immersed in continuous communication flows, reactive to micro-emotional events, loyal to fluid and ephemeral belongings. Networks, platforms, and mass mediation devices no longer function as mere supports for public debate but as attractors of sensitive adhesion, capable of unifying masses around a shared imaginary, a hashtag, or a viral shock.

This shift gives rise to an unprecedented form of diffuse and reticular sovereignty: the communicracy. This is a liquid, non-territorial, non-institutionalized power emerging from the coalescence of collective emotions online. The communicracy is founded neither on suffrage, nor on law, nor on deliberation: it manifests in the instant, through the affective impact of an image, collective indignation at an event, fantasized identification with a cause—often at the border of the real and fiction.

Thus, a public emotion takes the place of public opinion. Where the latter claimed a form of shared rationality, public emotion erects affective intensity as a criterion of truth. The event is no longer what happens in the world but what resonates powerfully in connected subjectivities. The true is identified with the sensible—with what moves, scandalizes, dazzles, or touches.

This tipping point generates a new regime of reality we call technomagical realism. In this regime, reality no longer precedes its representations; it results from them. It is not a raw given to interpret but a performative construction arising from a collective imaginary fuelled by technologies. It is an enchanted reality, subject to effects of presence, spectrality, and incarnation proper to the magical domain: a reality that is made and unmade according to the symbolic intensities traversing it.

In this sense, technomagic does not oppose classical politics: it transcends and dissolves it into a transpolitical dimension where traditional concepts of power, people, representation, and legitimacy waver. Institutions are destabilized not by rational critique or social mobilization but by disaffection, indifference, sudden adhesion, or viral fury. They find themselves contested by deinstitutionalized, hyperconnected, erratic subjectivities that no longer seek to govern but to feel, vibrate, commune in moments of pure presence.

The task of contemporary thought is thus twofold: to decipher the invisible logics structuring this new emotional reality and to understand how, in the folds of technological enchantment, the age-old struggle between order and subversion, sovereignty and possession, institution and festival is replayed. In this theater of shadows and lights, technomagic operates as the absolute medium of our time, where the languages of belief, image, commodity, and power now merge.

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