

in,chiostro



Extreme Darkness

The right to shock:
Salò or the 120 days of Sodom

The leather belt

Inside the Korean Nth Rooms:
a case of digital slavery



The green light

Whether we read “The Great Gatsby” by Francis Scott Fitzgerald or whether we see the splendid film with Leonardo di Caprio, one of the images that remains in our minds - one of many, mind you - is that of the green light, which Gatsby observes nostalgically on the opposite side of the bay. The controversial figure of Gatsby embodies the essence and nuances of the concept of extreme: extreme is fascination, because it is what lies beyond our possibilities, beyond the imaginable. The extreme is sensual, because it does not require rationality and is the alternative to the low tide of everyday life - no one likes gray but in fact a black and white reality is a great illusion. “The Great Gatsby” is also extreme due to the context in which it appears and which it reproduces all too faithfully: a society - the American one - marked by prohibitionism with heavy moral repercussions which finds its outlet in a social moment far from the point of spatial and temporal view from everyday life. Exaggeration and amplification become vehicles of a vitalistic impulse that appears to be the only one capable of giving life the flavor of authenticity. But Fitzgerald does not forget to remind us how this feeling of attraction hides, behind it, a strong fear: when Gatsby grabs the green light - Daisy, in the metaphor - and Daisy lets herself go to whoever embodies the concept of extreme - Gatsby, also without metaphor - it is then that the mechanism jams and the rope, stretched to its maximum tension, ends up breaking.

Fear and sensuality: these are just two of the vibes you will find when leafing through an unusual and different issue from our colorful and always carefully packaged signature. But a theme like the extreme, with its due nuances and derivations, could only be conceived in an extreme way, distant, if not opposite, to our previous works. We produced a chiaroscuro number, in which sometimes dark colors took over. We wanted to represent a world, ours, in which the extreme is omnipresent, used and abused; in which the extreme is used as the bogeyman - especially for political purposes - of a fearful and thre-

atening “other”, often in a crude and relative way; of an extreme accepted as a non-vitalist resolution, but to life; of an extreme which, paradoxically, wears the features of normality.

I will summarize by telling you - even if you will have understood it by now - that the following is not the “cartaceo” you are expecting. It is not for many reasons: first, because - for those who missed it - it is not on paper. This is not the usual “cartaceo”, also because there are two issues, one of which is in English: a “strategic” choice - if we want to call it like that - to open ourselves up to the public of Erasmus students whose voice has been heard.

Enjoy the reading

Maria Bovolon
Editorial director



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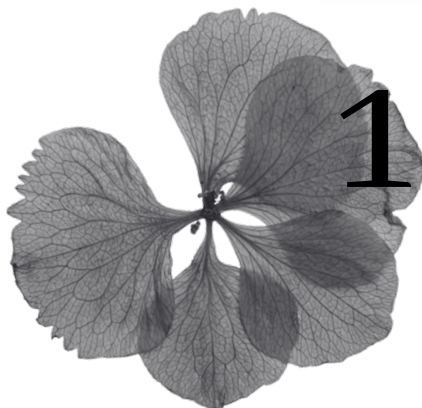
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A "Cloud in Trousers" on the soviet front

by Ilaria Fiorente

"Verse into hell with the vat of the Baltic / human blood, brains and drunken sailors' vomit" writes Boris Pasternak a few weeks after the October Revolution. It's 1917 and the Bolshevik party, led by Lenin, has managed to seize power: however, it would be extremely reductive to consider Bolshevism only within its political and social dimension; Bolshevism "claims to take everything from man, all his forces, wants to meet all his needs" - underlines the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev.

In a decade, some of the most fascinating poetic personalities of the twentieth century flourished in Russia: one of them, Vladimir Mayakovsky.

The figure of Mayakovsky, the "poet of the revolution", is essential to understanding the true essence of that event, which initially aroused strong hopes.

If it is true that great poets are born from the contradictions of their time, it can undoubtedly be said that Mayakovsky's poetry arises under the sign of anguish: in fact, he is in the Butyrka prison when he writes his first verses. Among the first noteworthy compositions is the poem "A Cloud in Trousers" (1915), immediately appreciated by the great poet Maxim Gorky.

Within a few years, Volodya (as his friends call him) becomes the megaphone of the revolution: lyrical poetry and theater are his preferred means of expression, as well as political manifestos, and his fiery words express a deep trust in the subversion of values that this event should have brought: "October. Join or not? The question does not arise for me [...]. It is my revolution."

The only maxim to follow for him is the equa-

tion "futurism = revolution": there could be no revolutionary content without an equally revolutionary literary form.

His verses are often a cry of secular pain, without expectation of any consolation; this pain becomes a challenge to humanity, in its impossibility of being tamed. Extremity, tragedy, and contradiction mingle in a voice that reaches the human soul.

*I used to blaspheme,
yelling, "God doesn't exist!",
but God from the depths of Hades uncovered
her whom even a mountain couldn't resist,
and commanded:
"Love her!"*

Mayakovsky, like other futurists, hoped that the events of October could sweep away the rhetorical old age and the crude academism that poisoned the cultural and literary landscape of the time.

*Beat the tramp of revolt in the square!
Up, row of proud heads!
We will wash every city in the world
With the surging waters
of a second Flood.*

The first conflict between Mayakovsky and the state organs, which granted little space to the futurists in the discussion of aesthetic issues, dates back to 1917. That's why Mayakovsky decided to abandon the battlefield and move from Petrograd to Moscow.

In 1919, he founded, along with other poets, the Komfut (Communist-Futurist Collective), immediately hindered by the Government. So he and his companions realized that the revolution of social and, above all, cultural customs was not only extremely distant, but also enslaved to the State's will.

In a short time, the publications of futurist poets were almost completely repressed; it was Lenin in person who imposed these limitations because he felt embarrassed by the fame and the excessively charming personality of Mayakovsky. Ironically, Mayakovsky, who was among the most stubborn supporters of the revolution, is silenced by it.

Many poets had wanted to see something positive in the storms of the revolution that swept through Russia in 1917, but their understanding of political events was weak, and they had mainly considered the revolution as a purifying storm. Later, they had to realize how things were

going, although the Government systematically hid its atrocities: for example, during the famine that struck the entire country in the summer of 1921, the press was prohibited from writing about the crop disaster and the official reaction was to pretend that nothing had happened, despite cases of cannibalism and the occupation of railway stations by millions of hungry peasants.

Nowadays Mayakovsky can be considered politically naive, in his desire to build a new and better society, and he was incapable of identifying the events that acted against such evolution.

Because of the increasing bureaucratization, an attitude that the poet had always sarcastically criticized, he dramatically had to realize that power is inscrutable and unattainable in its ultimate referents: indeed, Mayakovsky's requests clashed against the barrier raised by the Government.

When Stalin rose to power, the fervor animating Mayakovsky's revolutionary spirit faded more and more, and it became even clearer to him that the revolution he dreamt about would have frozen.

*Rummaging among
these days'
petrified crap,
exploring the twilight of our times,
you,
possibly,
will inquire about me too.*

By 1930, Mayakovsky had completely lost the favor of the Stalinist regime; to the system, he was a foreign body and he was marginalized by the Nomenklatura. Mayakovsky's last play, "The Bath" (1930), can be considered an attack both on his opposers and on bureaucracy, whose pressure was increasing more and more. Roman Jakobson, in the essay "On a generation that squandered its poets", got to the bottom of the "Mayakovsky case": it is a kind of obituary written in 1930, a month after the poet's suicide, and he bitterly concludes: "*when singers have been killed and their songs have been dragged into a museum and pinned to the wall of the past, the generation they represent is even more desolate, orphaned, and lost*".

Source: Lany-Jade Mondou



Association football fans: tales at the verge of football

by Mario Fiorio

Association football fans

«Twelve offenders out of almost a thousand Roma fans is an almost negligible percentage of offenders. Hey, among Lazio fans it's much higher!».

This is the declaration of Vittorio Gassman, in the role of Giuseppe Baiocchi (aka “Peppe the Panther”), in the movie “Audace colpo dei soliti ignoti” (1959). While inside the police station the Roman petty thief tries to demonstrate his strong alibi by reciting from memory the match's report played by Roma in Milan, the spectator is able to quickly imagine the atmosphere that, in those years, could be observed in the inside Italian stadiums. A sporting context in which each fan group certainly included characters of various kinds, but that at the same time appeared more homogeneous, community-based, a cross-section of the society of the time, gathered at the stadium to form a very varied neighborhood.

The situation changed radically between the 1960s and 1970s, when we moved from large groups of people who met to share the experience of the stadium to new groups of fans who gathered not only for football purposes but also for political and social motivations, often catalyzing processes formed outside the stadium and causing them to explode with episodes of violence and disorder.

While in Italy the most prevalent phenomenon the *Ultras'* one, we can see how in the United Kingdom, in some Northern European countries (the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium), in many Eastern European countries (Croatia, Serbia, Poland, Russia) and even in South America (Brazil) the real protagonists are the *Hooligans*.

What is the difference? Often the two terms are improperly used as synonymous, but there is something important to remember: if the

first ones operate in large hierarchical structures that cannot survive without a fair number of supporters who divide up tasks and duties of various kinds (from the creation of new choirs to the production of banners and choreographies), the last ones act instead in a much more autonomous manner, even with very few members (that's the reason why they are more difficult to control), gathered around a charismatic leader and enemies of all opposing fans, ready to conflict at any time.

Together for a common purpose: Ultras and politics

Over the years, particularly in Italy, the vehemence of the stadium's fans has allowed the formation of very active fringes in the promotion of political ideals, especially since the 1970s.

In 1971, the *Brigate Gialloblu* (*Gialloblu Brigades*) were born in Verona, ideologically linked to Benito Mussolini's *Brigate Nere* (*Black Brigades*) and to far-right political circles (is important to remember the clash, in 1973, between some far-left Bolognese ultras and a number of Veronese fans who were members of the ultra-nationalist groups *Fronte della Gioventù* and *Ordine Nuovo*).

Verona fans have distinguished themselves, over time, not only for their originality in creating new chants against their opponents, but also for ferocious acts of racism: on the 28th of April 1996, in the derby against Chievo, several fans rioted against the team's new signing, Maïckel Ferrier, a young Dutch defender of just 20 years old. The fact that he was originally from Suriname and his mulatto complexion played against him: a mannequin with a black painted face, supported by two hooded men impersonating members of the *Ku Klux Klan*, began to dangle down the die-hard fans stand, supported by two ropes around the neck to symbolize his hanging. Nearby, two banners: the first written in typical Venetian dialect, «*El negro i ve la regalà. Dasighe el stadio da netar!* (*They gave you the nigger, give him the stadium to clean!*)», the second noted down in English, «*Negro, go away*», maybe for the international public. Background choirs such as «*Il negher portalo in cantier* (*Take the nigger to the worksite*)» were present, of course.

The 1970s, however, were also fertile ground for groups formed by left-wing fans: just think about the historic Romanist fan group *Fedayn*, composed by left-wing militants from the *Quadraro* neighborhood, nicknamed in this way for a unique attachment to their team, compared to the sacrificing ability of the PLO movement's Palestinian fighters (there was a famous saying about them that went «*Hey, you are worse than the Fedayeen!*»).

Millwall's wrath: Hooligans and war

Exploring the Hooligan phenomenon in England from a political and social point of view is a rather complex task, but for football lovers there is only one truly representative name: *Millwall F.C.*, the undisputed protagonist of the East London Derby, the bloodiest derby in the history of English football, played against bitter rivals *West Ham United*.

«No one likes us, no one likes us, no one likes us – we don't care! we are Millwall, super Millwall, we are Millwall from the Den!»

If you ever stay near *Zampa Road* you might have the chance to hear this choir. The message is quite clear: no one likes Millwall fans, and that's what they want. They fully represent the mentality of the British *hooligan*: a man who decides not to leave his personal problems outside the stadium to spend ninety minutes of leisure, but to erupt all the things that went wrong during the week (at home or at work is the same): every match is a battle, every derby a war. This can also be understood from the name of the most important group, the *Millwall Bushwackers*, named in honor of the *Bushwhackers*, irregular military groups who supported the Southern cause during the American civil war: they invented the *Millwall Brick*, a weapon consisting of one or more newspapers rolled up, pressed and folded in two until they became very hard, like a stick.

The aggressiveness of the *Millwall* environment can certainly be attributed to the social context in which it is inserted: a part of the *East End* of London which includes some of the most deprived areas of the city, often gathered around football clubs which mostly served as cover in favor of clashes between rival gangs.

In recent years, however, there has been an episode that has shown the most hidden and, in some ways, incredible values of the English fans: in June 2017, during the terrorist attacks on London Bridge, three terrorists armed with knives tried, near of a restaurant, to make an attempt on the lives of those present by praising Allah. Roy Lerner, 47, decided to put his life at the service of others, attacking the terrorists with his bare hands and shouting: «Fuck you, I'm Millwall!». In total, eight very deep stab wounds between head, neck, chest and hands, a miraculous survival and dozens of clients saved thanks to his courage. And all without the *Millwall Brick*.

Conclusions

So how can we define this peculiar part of *fans' society*? A world dominated by violence and aggression that uses the stadium as an outlet? No, or rather not always. The world of organized fans is also passion, community and, why not, dedication to a greater cause. However, it is often not love for one's team that drives the fans, but other feelings, frequently fueled by difficult socio-political situations or more selfish intentions that go beyond the world of football.

The only certainty is that the world of football fans will never cease to amaze and, for better or worse, will continue to give emotions to all fans.

Source: Alberto Ling



Inside the Korean Nth Rooms: a case of digital slavery

by Sara Filippi

“The deeds were monstrous, but the doer was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous”
Hannah Arendt

25 years old Cho Joobin tries to take his own life in the public restroom of the police station where he has been interrogated for hours. Resorting to the extreme gesture may be a better solution than what waits for him: he is accused of being the “Doctor,” one of the main perpetrators of what will be considered one of the most heinous crimes in South Korean history.

The Nth Rooms:

Dubbed the Nth rooms, multiple chat groups on Telegram were reportedly places of torture, abuse and threats: they first emerged in 2018, with numerous other copycats rooms following soon after. However, the two main series of the chat rooms were led by the two most prominent masterminds, under the nicknames of “God God” and “Baksa” (Doctor in Korean). between 2018 and 2020. The two, although a heated rivalry, would act almost the same way: with the excuse of offering a part time job, they’d ask women to provide their personal information and increasingly explicit pictures that will later be used as blackmail material. At that point the victims were trapped in a vicious circle of digital “slavery” where they were forced to provide sexual content under the orders of the two chat moderators. Those who were not obedient would be threatened to be exposed with family members, co-workers or classmates (in the case of the 26 victims that turned out to be minors).

The victims were texted on a daily basis at all hours of the day and night, forced to film

sexual content, which was mostly violent and degrading, to film themselves while inflicting self-harm such as craving words and phrases like “Doctor’s slaves” on their bodies as well as sneaking into male’s public restroom and perform humiliating “missions”, to, in only one proven case so far, be sexually abused on live stream by one of the chat members.

The videos were indeed sent to the over 10.000 active users of these Telegram groups, supporting and suggesting each own violent thoughts in a place where inhibitions and fear of legal consequences didn’t exist. Behind the anonymity the moderators prompted the users to break all their limits and become the hangmen themselves, by paying more than 1.000€ cryptocurrencies to see their most depraved fantasies come to reality. The phone screen was a shield, the keyboard a weapon used to threaten freedom and respect: at the news of one of the victim’s suicide they would only complain on how they were not able to enjoy her body one last time, stripping her from the last form of respect even in front of death.

Thanks to two journalism students who were able to expose this Pandora’s box of blackmail and abuse, the horrors began to surface. It was out on the news, trending on social media, talked on documentaries, the audience was raged with worries and disgust. The whole media coverage though would not stop the chat members, on the contrary it would only feed their ego and superiority complex, challenging the journalist by blackmailing their own personal information and pictures. Baksa himself threatened them by forcing one of his “slaves” to film a video where she announced she would have taken her own life in front of the tv network responsible for one of the Nth rooms documentaries. Luckily the police were able to track the victim and nip the tragedy in the bud.

A tale of “anti-feminism”:

Nevertheless, with his popularity bursting at the seams, the Doctor remains an anonymous figure on the loose. His arrogance towards the law and human morality only makes him more popular, almost divine, among his followers. This is because the Doctor not only satisfies the

chat room users by validating their perversions, but also satisfies their need to unleash hatred and violence on women by proving that, until now, he has suffered no real consequences. It is no coincidence that the language used in the chats can easily be traced back to the incel community forums, where misogyny and targeted hate are on the daily order.

Talking about feminism in South Korea is quite complex. It is almost dangerous to be called a 'feminist'; it is a radical and unwelcomed concept that is struggling for acceptance and recognition. Many are openly against it, witch-hunting those who try to make their voices heard in a country where the gender pay gap is about 34.6% and the battle against 'molkas' - spy-cams placed in public places to film women without their consent - is loud and felt. Even the outgoing president, Yoon Sukyeol, won the support of the majority of the male population with a political campaign based on 'anti-feminism', denying the existence of structural discrimination and blaming the feminist movement for the drastic drop in the birth rate (one of the lowest in the world to date). In such a situation, where one's security is 'threatened' by an ideology that seeks to subvert the culturally dominant male role, having an instrument to reassert one's position, however violent and extreme, may seem tempting. And it's where the Nth Rooms come into the picture.

Is it really the life of a devil?

With the arrest of the Doctor and God-God, however, this system will be thrown into chaos. Many of the chat room participants, terrified of being exposed as their 'idols', will choose to end their own lives. Many others will be tracked down through virtual currency exchanges and later arrested.

Was justice really served?

"Thank you for putting an end to the life of a devil who could not be stopped," were the only words Cho Jubin (the Doctor) told the press after his arrest. There is not a hint of compassion, not a word of apology to the victims. Just a vain attempt to hide his crimes behind a demonic figure who, after all, does not exist.

Cho Jubin (the Doctor) and Moon Hyun Wook (God God) were sentenced to 40 and 34 years in prison.

Source: Cho Gi-Seok



The right to shock: Salò or the 120 days of Sodom

by Ilenia Sbalbi

President - "Luigino, say you can't eat rice with your fingers like that..."

Luigino - "I can't eat the rice."

President - "Then eat shit!"

Imagine being young and kidnapped without any apparent reason. Now you find yourself a prisoner in a dark place, where terror and despair are constant companions. Your captors are sadistic lords whose only purpose is to inflict suffering and humiliation. In an act of extreme perversion, they force you to commit acts of degradation and inhumanity. Every day is a struggle, a battle against your own dignity, shattered by the cruel hands of those who hold you prisoner. When someone asks whether they should watch "Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom," tell them this story. Ask them to listen to their own instincts, to consider whether they are ready to confront the cruelty portrayed. If even the idea makes their stomach churn with horror, it's probably best to avoid it.

"Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom" is undoubtedly one of the most controversial and discussed films in Italian cinema history. Its creation is surrounded by a series of circumstances that make it unique, starting with the controversial figure of director Pier Paolo Pasolini, ostracized and often misunderstood by Italian critics during his lifetime. However, despite its initial negative reception, the film has had a lasting impact on world cinema, influencing numerous subsequent directors and demonstrating that extreme and provocative cinema can find its audience.

To fully understand its significance and impact, it is essential to contextualize it. In the 1960s and 1970s, Italy was immersed in a period of fervent social, cultural, and political change. From here comes the first work of the

Trilogy of Death: "La ricotta," which stirred controversy for its sharp satire of Italian religion and society, putting Pasolini at the center of a heated debate on artistic and religious freedom. But it was the second film, "Uccellacci e uccellini," that marked a turning point in the reaction of society and critics. This work, with its surrealistic style and sharp social criticism, sparked intense discussions and put Pasolini at the center of the cultural debate of the time. Pasolini, with his bold and unconventional vision, encouraged reflection and questioning of the social and cultural norms of the time.

"Salò" is a descent into the abyss of human horror, where symbolism is acutely manifested to represent the border between oppressors and oppressed, between the old evil fascists and the young oppressed. Set during the fascist regime of the Italian Social Republic, the historical-political context is not just a backdrop but informs every aspect of the narrative. The four lords, representatives of oppressive power, embody the depravity and moral corruption of the ruling class. Their sadism and pursuit of pleasure through torture and humiliation symbolize the dark side of the fascist regime. On the other side of the symbolic border are the young prisoners, symbols of vulnerability and innocence sacrificed on the altar of power and perversion. Their condition of imprisonment and the brutal treatment inflicted on them represent the subordination and powerlessness of those subject to the tyrannical will of the powerful.

The border between oppressors and oppressed is further emphasized through the film's setting: the isolated and decadent villa, surrounded by a desolate landscape, reflects the isolation and impunity of the powerful, while the dark and claustrophobic interiors represent the imprisonment of the young. Pasolini also uses visual symbols and metaphors to emphasize the theme of the border. For example, the chains imprisoning the young represent their slavery and powerlessness, while the masks worn by the lords symbolize their false mask of civilization.

The key to viewing is the extreme of totalitarian power, showing an oppressive and bloodthirsty regime that exercises total control over the lives and dignity of its citizens. Pasolini uses a series of key scenes

and dialogues to represent authoritarianism and repression crudely and brutally within the context of his work. Beyond what is called “the dinner of feces,” there are other scenes that make the message clear: the wedding ceremony, where during one of the ceremonies organized by the lords, two young prisoners are forced to marry. This forced marriage not only symbolizes the distortion of moral and social values but also represents the total and arbitrary power exercised by the lords over the lives and dignity of the young. The torture of the young, numerous shots show the prisoners subjected to various forms of physical and emotional torture.

These extremely crude and violent moments symbolize the oppressive control exerted by the lords over the young and their total impunity in committing acts of extreme brutality. The gift game, in a particular scene where the lords organize a sadistic game in which the young prisoners must choose an object from a series of sealed boxes. Each box contains an increasingly dark and depraved object, symbolizing the progressive loss of their innocence and dignity.

The importance and impact of the “Trilogy of Death” in Italian and international cinema, as well as in the cultural and political landscape of the time, have been reflected. Pasolini, with his bold and provocative vision, challenged the social and cultural conventions of his time, offering a critical and provocative look at the nature of humanity and society. It remains a difficult film to watch but above all a monument to artistic courage and intellectual challenge, continuing to provoke reflection and discussion even today.

Frame from the movie “*Salò or the 120 days of Sodom*”



The leather belt

by Ines Fehri

“Ce n’est pas que le suicide soit toujours de la folie. Mais en général, ce n’est pas dans un accès de raison que l’on se tue”
Voltaire

Look at you, so convinced that the solution to your troubles lies at the bottom of a glass, in the smell of a cigarette, or in the arms of a dead-end relationship. Isn't that right? Let me let you in on a little secret now... there's no salvation in those vices, my dear friend, there never has been. You're right, it was me who told you that alcohol would soothe your pain, drugs would make you touch the sky with one finger and love would fill the void in your heart. I even sold you the illusion of an escape from the boredom and monotony of reality that grips you like a vice. What else... oh yeah, sure, - chuckles - now I remember. I promised you freedom.

Was I pulling your leg? Yeah, - mocks laughter - obviously. But hey, don't blame me, you made it so easy! Don't get me wrong, I do understand you. After all, you and I are children of the same void, both born of desire and desperation. [...] Oh, why did I do it? Because you're pathetic. And pitiful. And cowardly. The solution has always been right under your nose, so simple and liberating that it leaves you breathless - smirks - just imagine: a sweet sleep that knows no waking. Don't you think that's enticing too? I bet you do. I am you and you are me, don't forget that. I was there the other night, while you toyed with the idea of a sharp blade tickling your wrists or a leather belt embracing your neck, and well, I still wonder what's holding you back. The truth is, my friend, that everything is better where I am, and deep down, you know it too.

Come on! Come to me.

Perhaps it was a tedious voice like this one inhabiting Sergej Esenin, a genius, acclaimed and killed by his own genius. He was born on October 3, 1895, in Konstantinovo, Russia. Son of peasant parents, he grew up with his grandparents, starting to write poetry from childhood. Esenin arrived in St. Petersburg at

the age of twenty, firmly determined to become a famous poet. During those years, he did everything he could to earn the reputation of a “holigan,” indulging in behaviors that filled the salons of St. Petersburg with delighted scandal. His sexual freedom was exemplary, and as soon as he received the attention he desired from men, he moved on to women, using them in the exact same way. He embarked on several love affairs, one of them with Tolstoy's niece, and fell in love so frequently that he married five times.

Esenin was a lot of things, too many to be properly summed up. To give you an idea, we're talking about a passionate alcoholic, a frequent visitor to brothels, and a reckless spender of his finances. A romantic, attractive, idle, deferential, and a great opportunist man.

In 1917, he supported the October Revolution as the prevailing political sentiment of the time in Russia, convinced of the need to transform contemporary society. His poetic output during these years was still wild and full of exuberance. Although he was not a revolutionary, he believed that the winds of change would bring something positive, but the Bolsheviks had no intention whatsoever of restoring such a distant and ideal time; in fact, they were more devoted to steel than green pastures.

The last two years of his life were dark and full of anguish: completely at the mercy of alcohol, he became a victim of terrifying visual hallucinations that led him to converse with a “dark man” who seemed to inhabit his imagination. Paradoxically, this period was among the utmost creative ones. As a matter of fact, some of his most intense works such as “Desolate and pale moonlight” and “The black man” date back to those very restless days.

In 1925, he was treated in a psychiatric hospital from which he was discharged on Christmas. The next day, he decided to take his life: a clean cut to the wrists and a poem written in freshly spilled blood to his friend and poet Anatoly Marienhof. His first attempt, the only failed one.

*“Goodbye, my friend, goodbye
[...]*

In this life, dying is not a novelty, but certainly neither is living.”

Then, the second one. His suicide.



Source: Asaph Guedes

December 27, 1925, room number 5, St. Petersburg, Hotel Angleterre. It's where Sergej hanged himself with the leather belt of a suitcase on the central heating pipes. His body had scratches on the left arm, a deep cut on the right, and a bruise under his left eye - after his death, although he was one of the most famous poets in Russia, most of his writings were banned by the Kremlin during Stalin's dictatorship and only republished in 1966.

Many have shared his tragic fate, each carrying a baggage of talent and torment with them, in a tangle of genius and anguish. From Nirvana's leader Kurt Cobain, who died by suicide in 1994, to Van Gogh and the gunshot to his chest in 1980. From Hemingway, who killed himself in 1961, to Tenco and the bitter sadness that led him to shoot himself in his hotel room in 1967. And certainly, to figures as different as these one cannot associate a single interpretation of Baudelaire's spleen. That is to say that the desire to die does not only arise from mental illness, loneliness, or despair: often, what is lethal is something more personal, like the deep awareness of oneself and the surrounding world. The truth is that Sergej felt like a stranger wherever he went, and just like a Russian Dorian Gray, his body corrupted and devoted itself to vices to compensate

for his restlessness. The myth of country life, of Pascoli's "little child", was the only salvation Esenin saw in a life fallen into depravity. His suicide thus symbolises the inability to embrace a life where all sources of solace had been irreversibly tainted. Essentially, we're describing a sorrowful, repentant Stavrogin... albeit, too late.

Talking about suicide requires frankness, Pavese is well aware of this as he asserts that there is never a shortage of good reasons to kill oneself. The longing for death is an unwelcome and persistent presence, and it would be simplistic and foolish to reduce it all to the cliché that those who choose to end their lives are merely weak, cowards, or both. As Seneca argued, in judgment, we are often carried away more by the opinion regarding something than by the true substance of the thing itself.

Life can become unbearable, and denying it doesn't make it any less true. To those who are struggling with themselves, without demand, I ask for three favours. First, I urge you to raise your gaze. Life is a game of perspectives. Second, I ask you to abandon the presumptuous belief that you will live poorly forever and abandon yourself to doubt instead. I have seen the unexpected emerge from the cracks of certainty. Thirdly, I caution against placing blind faith in your intellect: it is the voice that wants to kill the listener, that must die.

At the Poles of Public Debate

What's left of Democracy and our Identity?

by Eleonora Faga

<< We have entered a new era of public debate characterized by a growing “disintermediation” of politics, a proliferation of communication opportunities and a distribution of power and visibility also supported by the spread of the internet. [...] It is in this scenario that we see phenomena such as incivility, disinformation and polarization emerge which seem to make the social and political climate more toxic. >>

This is how the back cover of “Voices of democracy - The future of public debate” begins, an essay by Sara Bentivegna and Giovanni Boccia Artieri, which attempts to reflect on a topic of perhaps ever greater importance and evidence within our current social – as well as civil – scenario: the polarization of public debate.

It is connected with a parallel change both of the political and media system; there is a “disintermediation” of the political debate such that official and authoritative voices, opposition voices, minority voices that require representation, voices of citizens - perhaps, discouraged and resigned by news events - are mixed.

We often witness a sort of infantilization of discussions, which are increasingly crude and biased, what we could define as a *propagation of uncivilized debate*. However, it would be necessary to adopt a less trivializing, more complex perspective, so that we do not end up in vacuous or rhetorical judgments. This is the invitation of the authors of the essay mentioned above, who point out these phenomena as <symptoms> of the transformation of the public debate, and not <causes> that lead to its deterioration. There would, in fact, be an underlying disease having much deeper roots,

inherent to transformations of democracy, of the media system itself, of the subjects involved and of the related power dynamics. So, now, let's focus on the role that social media play, for a long time considered a harbinger of democracy and freedom. Can the Internet really be considered the “21st-century public square”?

Is it not, rather, a *simulacrum of democracy*, in which opinions are taken to the extreme, in which, moreover, numerous biases take place and fake news spreads? There is a constant polarization of information, causing a polarization of opinions and, therefore, – of debate, the deterioration of which has been ‘engineered for profit’: social networks are in fact managed by private giants, constantly in search of financial gain. The design of digital squares is therefore structural in order to maximize engagement, to the detriment of civil discussion.

In recent years, the control of content on social media has been strengthened through the presence of teams of moderators and the launch of independent committees to combat misinformation (*fact-checkers*). Recently, however, there has been a gradual renunciation, by the companies that manage social media, of the role of controllers of online content. This is the so-called *policy of non-intervention*, promoted by Elon Musk, now head of ‘X’, whose explicit desire is to reduce content monitoring to a minimum. Numerous platforms have weakened the fight against misinformation, as well as harassment, online. This attitude of Facebook, X, Youtube and other social networks, however, risks colliding with the EU and its new regulation – the Digital Services Act (DSA): since last August the main social and e-commerce platforms must adhere to rules that oblige them to monitor the content. The European Union is the first jurisdiction in the world to issue such regulation. But is it right for private platforms or institutions to intervene by exercising control? What is, or what should be the rela-

tionship between social media and freedom of expression?

Meanwhile, democracy has become a concept that interests fewer and fewer citizens (so much that we can speak of *post-democracy* now: when the *demos* has almost no role anymore). We have witnessed the restructuring of Western societies in an oligarchic form, therefore the creation of a self-referential elitist structure. Derisive responses are given to people's real suffering, leading to an ever-increasing indifference and distrust towards politics. We are in a phase in which there is a prevalence of invective, or radical thought, in a 'political theatre' whereby contradictory elements are elaborated to generate meaning and achieve consensus.

There is, therefore, in Italy but also, for example, in the USA, a political dyad that doesn't work and denies the importance of differences, which have a fundamental function: to allow democracy, the representation of different instances. We could juxtapose the concept of polarization with that of *communicative substantiality*, of "a vital center", capable of composing the good present in both extremes, of generating life, building, in particular, otherwise non-existent identity foundations... We could consider the idea of the existence of a *humanistic rationality*, for which the cultural system has a fundamental value, is the key to opening new horizons of possibilities, which concern the 'World of Life', or that of daily interactions, of the inevitable conflicts that must be mediated. The public sphere is so complex, stratified and diversified that it requires comparison, discussion, exchange, moments of both convergence and divergence.

Are we really interested in a civil debate? Is a different structuring of (social) media possible to encourage dialogue and mutual listening? Starting from 'civil' writing, and therefore clear, honest, 'responsibly respectful' of words, ideas and recipients, a constructive dialectical culture could be regenerated. Overcoming the polarizing model through an Ethics of discourse, building a new aware citizenship, thus raising the level of democracy. And that a communication revolution can therefore pave the way for a political and social transformation...

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Source: Leslie Zhang



Russophobia and Russification: the prejudice and the dream of a nation hard to understand

by Giulia Palladini

“How to approach Russia? (...) Not even Russians have figured it out, they, who, with every generation, question what Russia is and tear their hearts apart to know if they are Europeans or Asians”

On March 6, 2024, at the Youth Festival in Sochi, Russia, the Italian street artist Jorit asked Russian President Vladimir Putin in person if he could take a photo together “to show the world that he is human like everybody else.” The president agreed, and within a few hours, the video of the Neapolitan artist went viral. The Italian and international press immediately published the news, also starting a journalistic investigation into the relationship between Jorit and the Kremlin. The artist, for his part, has always defined himself as being on the side of peace, but what arouses particular interest, more than the story itself is the effect it has been able to generate.

If the video of Jorit smiling while taking a photo with Russian President Putin went viral, there is a reason: Russia is unapproachable. Jorit’s outstretched hand to shake hands with the man symbolizing the Bear represents almost a distortion, a visual illusion worthy of AI-generated cardboard images; for the Western world, Russia is distant and elusive.

What has made it so hostile? Has it been rejected, or has it distanced itself?

Russophobia: the search for a culprit

The disturbing sentiment towards the photo of Jorit and Vladimir Putin has a name: Russophobia. In Guy Mettan’s book, published in Italian in 2016 by Sandro Teti Editore, “Russophobia: A Thousand Years of Distrust,” the author himself defines Russophobia as “an aversion, a fear, a hostile propensity towards Russian culture, their identity.”

The underlying thesis of this controversial French essay is that the West harbors a deeply rooted hostility towards Russia and therefore fuels a media bubble that is profoundly anti-Russian.

But how does Russophobia find its place in Western newspapers, talk shows, and all media channels?

“To justify their anti-Russian stance, Russophobes propose an apparently indisputable argument: ‘where there’s smoke, there’s fire,’ and resort to a well-tested technique: it’s Russia that started it,” says Guy Mettan, who dedicates an entire second chapter of the text to demonstrate that many of Russia’s actions in history, narrated by the West as intentional and spontaneous, are rather reactions to the West’s intervention and its a priori distrust.

He does this through some historical examples, including the Uberlingen plane crash in which 71 people died. The tragedy was caused by the collision of a Russian plane with a DHL plane, and on that occasion, European media refused for a long time to consider the possibility that the error was not caused by Russia.

Moreover, according to the author, by depicting Russia as a nation driven by blind expansionist ambitions, Europe and the United States find absolution for their own geopolitical choices. In this way, they perpetrate an imaginary in which their primary purpose is to defend Europe and “incessantly repeat the same antiphon: Putin is the bad guy, Russia wants to invade us.”

It doesn’t matter if this is true, reliable, potentially verifiable, and negotiable; “the contradictory narrative that Russia legitimately seeks its interests like any other nation is not considered.”

Mettan himself admits that Russia is certainly not an easy country to approach, and, in this regard, he adds, “If Russia is difficult to understand, it should not be caricatured and interpreted through the distorting mirror of clichés, prejudices, and propaganda, which is all the more insidious because, unlike Russian propaganda, it does not want to reveal its name.”

Russification: only one identity is possible.

However, the distortion mentioned above is generated by a further

element.

On Putin's shoulders, there is an international arrest warrant for war crimes, and it is demonstrated that his government is to be considered co-responsible for one of the bloodiest conflicts in recent years.

Furthermore, according to testimonies and evidence, in all occupied Ukrainian territories, Russia is uprooting the local cultural identity and progressively replacing it with its own. The only permitted language is Russian, only Russian textbooks are used in schools, everyone is provided with Russian passports, and Ukrainian writings, documents, language, authors, and any Ukrainian cultural products are permanently banned: this is called Russification.

In this regard, on March 11, 2024, during the ninety-sixth of the Oscars, one of the statues was awarded to the documentary "20 Days in Mariupol." It is footage by journalist Mstyslav Chernov, who recounted the first days of the Russian invasion of the city, definitively occupied on the 86th day and, as of today, under the full control of Russian authorities.

The documentary clearly outlines the bloody and violent traits of the Russian advance, which led to the death of 25,000 people: from the unjustified killing of civilians to the bombing of hospitals and residential complexes to

the capture of soldiers and supporters of the Ukrainian army.

But what about Mariupol today?

"Since the Russians arrived in Mariupol, everything has changed: the Russian language has been imposed, the use of Russian passports, and on all information channels, propaganda portrays the Russians as liberators of the city," says I., one of the guides at the National Museum of Kyiv, who has been offering guided tours of the capital to dozens of Mariupol refugees for two years now.

"I've heard many stories. Many families have been torn apart, and it's tough to get in touch with those who have stayed behind. The entire region is locked down, and what we know, we only know from those who have managed and still manage to escape."

The house

Donatella lived in Russia for 24 years and has been living in Ukraine for several years now. She speaks both languages correctly but has not lost a pronounced Tuscan accent in her Italian. "I knew the Russian soul, the people, the literature, the tradition, and as an Italian, I had to break down many preconceptions. That was my home, and now my home is here, and they want to tear it down and rebuild it their way," she says. "Hatred grows fast. Sometimes I don't feel like I belong to any of these three nations because I don't share what is happening.

The truth, however, is that when I think of all the people I've met, I belong to all of them."

Source: Vic Harkness



Down and Out: how manipulative language leaves the public feeling more divided

by Anonymous

There choices that may seem extreme compared to what's necessary or logical. But when it affects the public, they must be justified and presented in front of an audience, making language crucial for this purpose. What's more extreme than holding a conference on one of humanity's most pressing issue, the climate crisis, in an oil haven, with a sultan and president of the nation's oil company as president? The language that is being used in official statements will reflect this extreme paradox.

If we want to keep things as they are, we need everything to change.

A famous quote from the novel *Gattopardo* by Tomasi di Lampedusa, also echoed in the film before the closing credits, speaks to how people in power think and act in order to maintain their status quo. It's a sentence that, despite all the years that separate its conception from today, still rings true. For us readers of *Inchiostro* and the students at Unipv, what does change mean? As individuals with agency bestowed upon us by our age, we now find ourselves at the forefront of a debate. And the thing that is on our minds is not whether we can make a difference but how it can be made.

Showing aversion to change and openly manifesting it can be very unpopular for a leader. That is why, in order not to have to pay the price of unpopularity, leaders will come up with fake reasons. How do they do it? Rather than admitting to a conflict of interest or opposition to progress, they will argue that the conditions do not allow for change. Let's take fossil fuels: while many nations are pushing towards cutting down the use of them, their enthusiasm for more efficient use of resources

is met by comments from Sultan Al Jaber "It can only happen when the world has added a sufficient amount of renewable energy capacity."

What is striking is how through the use of linguistic tools and euphemistic expressions, political leaders will attempt not to utter a single word or phrase that might sound controversial. By analyzing language and breaking down statements by leaders from anywhere, we may unveil the intent to dissuade and confuse the general public on what the next move to make is. For example, what difference is there between *phasing out* the global usage of fossil fuels and *phasing down*, and why is so much attention paid to linguistic detail?

Change is at the forefront of debates among millennials, the new adults of Gen Z, and the young teenagers of Gen Alpha. For them, "change" is not just an unstoppable machine of technological progress affecting all strata of modern society. Leaders of nations, the heads of summits, company executives have all figured out that what young people are aspiring towards is something much deeper than that. Change must be of a large enough scale that it permeates into the world that surrounds us. Those very leaders are aware that they need to negotiate with these generations.

The biggest summit for addressing climate change is held once a year, and last December, at COP28, one of the most controversial to date, was held in Dubai. There is no city more renowned for its strong interests in the production of crude fossil fuels. Needless to say, to more than a few tree huggers, there was a glaring issue with holding an event on what needed to be done among oil miners whose main goal it was to keep everything as it always has been. Of course the Sultan Al Jaber could never openly admit to the fact that the United Arab Emirates want no part in cutting fossil fuels. The linguistic miracle was performed editing the final document stating that the quantity and access to it is insufficient, making it justifiable to continue using fossil fuels.

Is it even a coincidence that at a time of great urgency to find solutions towards climate change, we take one step forward then falter and take two steps back? After reading Dan and Chip Heath's book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Difficult*, it started to look like it was anything but coincidental. In their book, they outline very neatly why it's so hard to make lasting change in our lives and in those of others. The biggest factor is a conflict that is experienced in our own brains.

Our minds are governed by two different systems, one rational that plans ahead, and one emotional that is driven by willpower. When things do not get done it is because the two are competing for control. These two are referred to as “the rider”, which thinks long term and “the elephant”, which thinks short term and acts impulsively. In summary, obstacles can be emotional or even practical or intellectual, in which case we may either lose our resolve to do something despite having valid reasons, or we may end up never doing it despite having the motivation, or we may have no clue where to begin despite having the right idea and resources.

And the choice in language and what we tell ourselves can affect whether we wish to make change. The same thing applies to public media which reaches out to as many others as a collective. This will condition them to believe that nothing can be done, or that it’s not worth the effort. For example, ambiguity can make it so that we do not know what the correct course of action to take is, which makes the rider within us take more time conjecturing, rather than deciding and commanding the elephant. If the path is not clear, then the rider will be paralyzed.

Ambiguity can also be manipulated if it is in someone’s interest to keep people paralyzed. If the Emirati Sultan Al Jaber claim that we may not *phase out* (eliminate completely) of traditional energy but *phase down* or *transition away from* them, the listeners will have a vague image that changes are made. Therefore, none of the owners of the major oil companies nor can each nation leader be accused of not doing enough. It triggers a thought in the general public such as “If I can’t make heads or tails about the issue, how am I supposed to conduct myself and how can I hold others accountable?”

Another issue that hinders change is in difference. It takes a lot of reflection to visualize the devastating outcomes of pollution. Visualization is a dimension that speaks to the elephant, not the rider. The rider can plan, but he needs the cooperation of the elephant. And without a clear view, we lack conviction that the issue is urgent. At a certain point, the rider will give in to the elephant and postpone action. So when the Sultan says that “you can’t

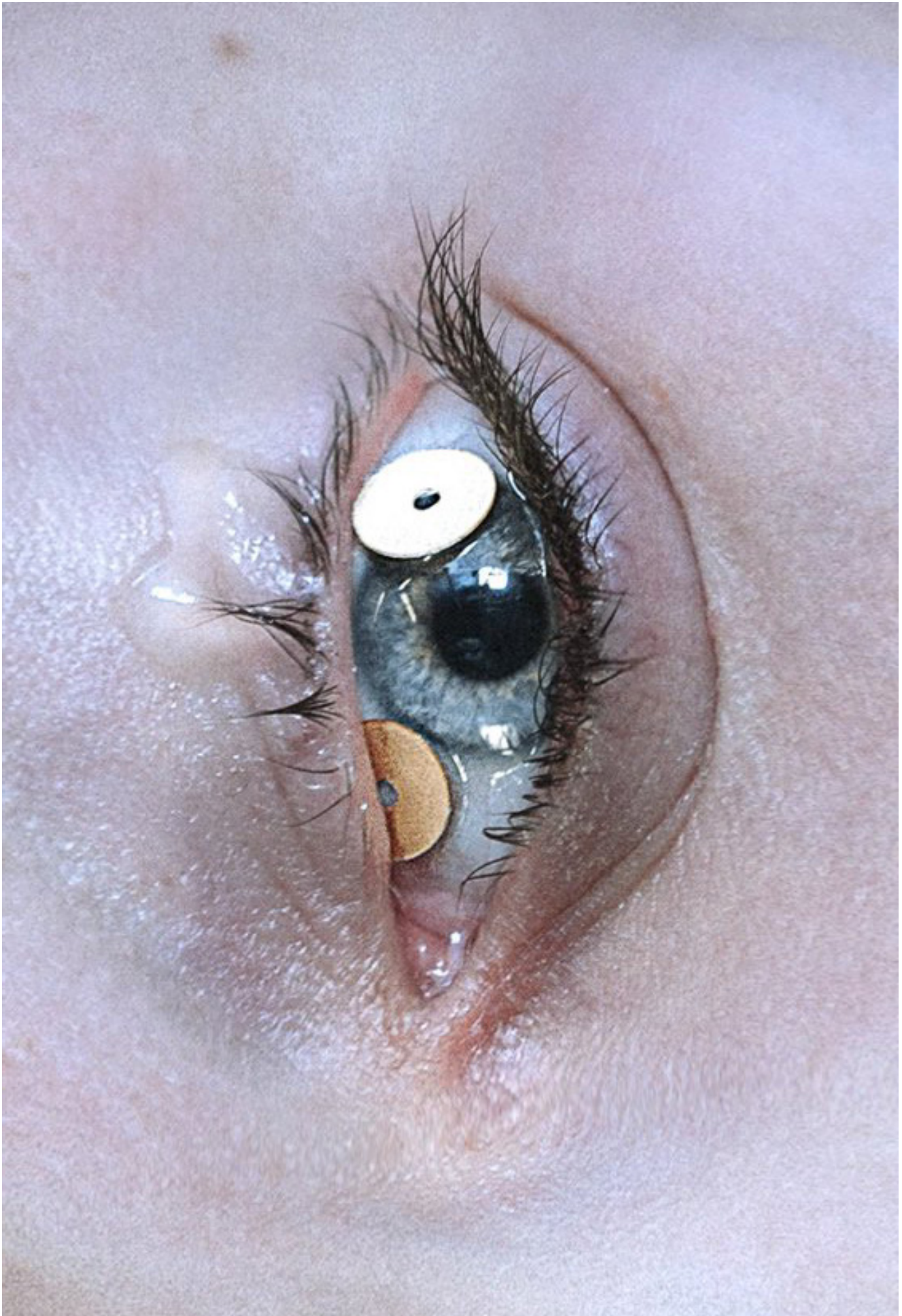
unplug the world from the current energy system before you build the new energy system”, he is trying to get the riders to submit our elephants.

It’s healthy to acknowledge that language and discourse are weapons. It is not indifferent for a leader to speak to millions of individuals. And being able to see through their words and hold their intents accountable will be the difference between a better tomorrow and an uninhabitable land.

Source: Dominic Dähne







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