

## 8 How to Narrate and Represent Political Violence

This study has identified and critically analyzed language units, narrative models and rhetorical patterns used, within different media and over the course of four decades, to represent and give meaning to a specific event of political violence: the kidnapping, imprisonment and assassination of the Christian Democrat politician Aldo Moro. Starting from the hypothesis of a connection between procedures of legitimization of political authority and power structures and the martyr figure, this study has addressed different discursive, cultural, and memorialization practices, through which Moro's death was successfully and effectively represented as a form of martyrdom necessary for the salvation of the Italian State and society. The study has sought to show that through the allocation of the state martyr role, Moro's death acquired the meaning of a (voluntary) witness to the absolute and meta-historical truth of human and citizens' rights as well as the necessity of the sovereign state to be the guarantor and defender of these rights. It has also drawn attention to the intrinsic relationship between collective identification processes, state martyrology and state mythology. Moreover, this study has pointed out that the martyr figure can be and has been used both poetically and instrumentally, that is: both as an instrument of protest against and as the concealment of established relations, structures and micromechanisms of power.

This chapter recapitulates the main insights and theses of the investigation. The first section addresses the theory and methodology of discourse and cultural analysis, highlighting their heuristic value when it comes to analyzing representations of political violence. The second section identifies the main theses concerning the emergence, signatures, and performativity of the martyr figure. The third section specifically addresses the insights gained from focusing on the Moro case as a paradigmatic example to understand state mythology in the modern and contemporary world. The final part of the chapter addresses the problematic relationship between practices of mythicization and de-mythicization, that is: between hegemonic and subversive representations. It thereby topicalizes the open-ended question that concerns both realms of ethics and aesthetics: How can we narrate and represent political violence?

8.1 *Discourse and Cultural Analysis*

This investigation has made use of several tools of analysis and was inspired by different theories and authors. Its discourse analytical approach has made it possible to observe, describe and analyze both the historical emergence and changes of the martyr figuration, its diffusion, and its functionality within a particular pragmatic and hermeneutic context. Referring to the reshaping of discourse into cultural analysis as proposed by Stuart Hall, it has defined and analyzed discursive practices as cultural practices of representation capable of producing meaningfulness. In this way, the investigation was able to highlight and focus attention on the performative force and efficacy of different kinds of representations within different media. Following reflections exposed by both Foucault and Derrida, this study concentrated on the iterability, recognizability, materialization and manifestation of language units, narrative models and rhetorical patterns that refer to political violence, rather than on the intentionality of the acting subjects. It also referred to Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation to highlight the way in which discourse and cultural practices affect individuals, construct identity and subjectivity and shape their understanding of things and events. Furthermore, it has operationalized the distinction of instrumental and poetic uses of language, between hegemonic and subversive representations, in order to bring to light, compare and analyze different ways of iterating and recontextualizing the martyr figure. In this way, the discursive formation referring to the event of political violence, could be approached as a sort of battlefield in which hegemonic practices are challenged by other alternative and subversive practices, which try to expose and criticize the mechanism by which historical events are mythologized.

This approach has been very useful in allowing us to observe the emergence and use of the martyr figure from a specific perspective. In the first place, by focusing on the martyrological representation of political violence and not understanding violence primarily from the point of view of ritual theory, this study was able to analyze a concrete situation, in which the victim of violence clearly expressed his rejection of the allocation of the martyr role. Far from denying the relationship between rituality and performativity, this investigation has addressed the ritualization of the event of political violence—the construction and representation of the event as a ritual—as the product of discursive and cultural practices. Moreover, this perspective allowed for the observation and analysis of the production and function of discursive and cultural practices without postulating on the so-

cial actors' consciousness of the instrumental dimension of their actions as producers and consumers of representations. The conceptualization, according to which language is used instrumentally when it conceals the historicity and exteriority of language, does not necessarily imply that subjects using language in this way are aware of what they are doing. On the contrary, the efficacy of the instrumental use of language lies exactly in its ability to conceal its function from both recipients and producers of discursive practices.

This approach has also made it possible to analyze the emergence of martyrological and sacrificial representations in their specific historicity without referring to universal assumptions. Ritual theories of sacrifice and self-sacrifice tend to consider the use of violence to be a fundamental trait of mankind, resulting in anthropological, universalistic and not historical explanations of political conflicts. This is the case, in particular, with Girard's scapegoat theory, which, despite its declared intention to overcome the mechanism of sacrifice it analyzes, fundamentally legitimizes the exercise of violence and other practices of coercion by so-called sovereign authority by basically considering them necessary for containing the ever-present threat of violence that «comes from the bottom» and which can, potentially, always destroy society. From this point of view, universalistic ritual theories in general and the scapegoat theory in particular, quiescently and covertly sustain the conceptualization of the state as a *katechon*, a force necessary to avoid the «war of all against all»: since the predisposition to violence is deeply-rooted in human nature, it is better that a sovereign monopolizes violence. Within this narrative, self-sacrifice is the price that individuals have to be willing to pay for the safety of society. By considering the sacralization connected with events of political violence as the product of discursive practices, the study was able to observe and analyze political violence as a fundamentally historical and thus contingent phenomenon. Violence, to put it simply, *happens*; it does not have a meaning *per se*, but always assumes meaning within a particular historical context. There is no universal function or reason for violence, but only discursive and cultural practices that construct violence as something meaningful.

## 8.2 Performativity and Signatures of the Martyr Figure

This study has demonstrated that the performative efficacy of martyrological representations lies in their ability to appeal to people and to signify events of political violence as sacrifices for a certain cause. Through marty-

rological representation, violent death assumes the connotation of an act or event with which the dead person witnesses the absolute and meta-historical truthfulness of certain values, ideals and principles. Death then becomes a sort of truth-proof, which legitimizes the authority that the community experiences as sovereign. Furthermore, violent death assumes the connotation of an accusation of the political authority, which is responsible or is experienced as responsible for political violence. Moreover, this study has shown that the performative force of the martyr figure depends, on the one hand, on its stratifications of meaning, its residues of religious significance, its *secret index* and, on the other hand, on its spatial, temporal, multimedial diffusion and manifestation in the public space. With regard to this point, the study reconstructed the history of the martyr figure's signatures—the figure's transpositions from certain pragmatic and hermeneutic contexts to other contexts—at the end of which the state martyr figure emerged.

In its original context of appearance, the martyr figure was part of what has been defined as a narrative of rebellion, which is based on an eschatological understanding of history. Within this narrative, the martyr is the one who witnesses the truth of the soteriological power of Christ's death, resurrection and second coming at the end of time. The only authority that is experienced as sovereign is that of God, which operates in history through the Messiah, while the authority that subjugates the Christian community by the means of violence is experienced as illegitimate. In this context, martyrological representations appeal to people not as citizens within the borders of a certain territory, or as appertaining to a certain ethnic group, but fundamentally as part of a universal community of believers.

Through a long process of re-signification, the martyr figure has been incorporated into and «domesticated» by the modern narrative of sovereignty, which is functional to the construction of national identities and to the legitimization of political authority within national borders. The state martyr figure is thus intrinsically linked to the emergence of nation-states in modernity. The transcendental sovereignty of God is transformed into the immanent sovereignty of political authority, but maintains a sacral dimension. Within this narrative, this martyr is the one that witnesses the absolute necessity of the sovereign state to restrain the forces of evil that aim to destroy society and establish a situation of anarchic chaos, of war of all against all. Also, this narrative is based on an eschatological understanding of history, but inverts its original *telos*: the state itself assumes the connota-

tion of a *kathechon*, a power that restrains the forces of absolute evil from destroying society and political order.

Within the messianic and eschatological narrative of rebellion, each individual life is considered sacred since it participates in the sacrality of the Christian community, which in turn participates in the sacrality of God by virtue of the soteriological power of Christ's death and resurrection. Martyrdom, intended as a self-sacrifice witnessing truth, is the act-event that, «repeating» the self-sacrifice of Christ, re-actualizes the sacrality of the community. Precisely because life, independently from its political recognition, from its participation in the public life of the *polis*, is sacred, martyrdom as self-sacrifice highlights the iniquity and profanity of the exercise of violence by political authorities. Conversely, within Greco-Roman cosmology, the life that has been excluded from the political sphere and thus belongs to the gods is sacred. Because of its exclusion from the profane sphere of politics and its inclusion in the sacred sphere of the gods, this mere life is no longer subject to the laws of the *polis*. The religious-political authority that has the power to decide over mere life, that is, to exclude it from the political sphere, is equally sacred, inasmuch as its decision transcends legality and, paradoxically, establishes it. Within this cosmology, both the sovereign and *homo sacer* are thus extra-legal figures, the former because it *lives in* the state of exception and the latter because it *decides on* the state of exception. This is why political authority permanently needs spectacles of violence to visualize and expose its power over mere life, thus demonstrating its sacredness. The radical subversiveness of the messianic and eschatological narrative of rebellion lies precisely in its ability to overcome this conceptualization of the sacred, to detach sacredness from the exercise of violence, revealing violence's contingency and iniquity. From this point of view, the martyr can be considered the one that, from within the state of exception, undermines the mechanism of the acclamation and glorification of power.

The modern narrative of sovereignty brings and binds together elements of Christian martyrology and eschatology with Roman procedures of acclamation, glorification and representation of power. If, within the narrative of rebellion, the martyrological representation has the function of revealing the iniquity of the spectacularization of violence, with which political authority exposes its power, the martyr figure assumes the function of concealing the utility of events of political violence for the perpetuation of the status quo of power relations within the narrative of sovereignty. A *conditio sine qua non* of this domestication of the martyr figure is the discursive construction of a perennial threat, of a sort immortal enemy, which can

potentially destroy society and social order at any moment. This enemy is mankind itself, which, in the absence of a sovereign authority that monopolizes the exercise of violence, lives in a situation of permanent «war of all against all». It is for this reason that so-called sovereign states need myths in order to legitimize their power to decide on the state of exception. Within these myths, events of political violence appear as the unavoidable outcome of a cosmic and Manichean conflict between good and evil. This is why, ultimately, terrorism is the natural, accepted, anticipated, and often even promoted counterpart of bio- and thanatopolitics. In fact, the demonization of organized criminal groups, of gangsters of all stripes, is the most effective way of convincing people that they have to accept the political *status quo*. Whenever one or more members of these groups kill someone with firearms, bombs, airplanes, or anything else that can act as a weapon, there is a great opportunity to create a nation-state martyr, to represent events of political violence as unpleasant but necessary and expected outcomes of a cosmic struggle between good and evil.

Within the modern narrative of sovereignty, the Christian conception of the sacrality of individual life and the sacrality of both the *homo sacer* and the sovereign figure are bound together to the point of becoming indiscernible. This strange, yet historically very effective union became particularly blatant within this study when it came to analyzing the rhetoric of the «reason of state». The idea of the sacrality of individual life has survived, through and by the process of secularization, in the different declarations of human and citizens' rights. From this point of view, it does not seem hyperbolic to affirm that the idea of human rights and with it, modern constitutionalism, are the secular *pendant* of Christian personalism. From the French Revolution onwards, sovereign nation-states (the same goes for state leagues or multinational states) have been understood as the «natural» guarantors and defenders of human rights, and primarily of the right to life of every human being. In the course of the twentieth century, other bodies have emerged which, at least in theory, are supposed to guarantee human rights—primarily the European Union and United Nations. However, sovereign states remain the principal bodies that have the mandate to defend human rights and fight against their violation inside *and* outside their national borders. But because they are sovereign states, that is, geopolitical entities that have sovereignty over delimited geographic areas, they naturally tend to defend the rights and interests of their own citizens—though often not even those—and not of humanity as a whole.

The idea of the sovereign as the sacred authority that has the power to decide over mere life has been able to survive in modern political thought,

because of the funding paradox of modernity, which lies in the fact that sovereign states have *de jure* the mandate to guarantee and defend human rights, but *de facto* are in a perpetual conflict with each other for economic and political hegemony.<sup>1</sup> The performativity of contemporary state mythology lies in its ability to declare that every single human life is sacred and thus inviolable, but at the same time to declare that each human life is potentially expendable or, more precisely, can be excluded from the political sphere in order to guarantee the salvation, perpetuation and prosperity of society within the borders of nation-states. The rhetoric of the «reason of state» is based, ultimately, on a very simple mechanism: it makes people believe that the necessary price for guaranteeing the sacredness of individual life is the expendability of some «few» individuals. Or in other words: some humans have to be declared and treated as *homine sacri*, so that the sovereign state can guarantee the sacredness of individual life.

### 8.3 *The Moro Case*

My focus on the representation of the abduction, imprisonment and murder of Aldo Moro had the dual function of exemplifying and at the same time testing the heuristic value of these theses, their usefulness in analyzing and understanding discourses on political violence in contemporary world. In the first place, this study has demonstrated that the martyr figure played and still plays a central role in an enormous number of discursive, visual and memorializing practices that, since March 1978 onwards, have given meaning to the kidnapping, imprisonment and final assassination of Aldo Moro. It has thus highlighted that the allocation of the martyr role was and still is one of the main strategies of constructing meaning and signifying the event of political violence. Further, the study has shown that the martyr figure was used to justify the decision of not negotiating with the Red Brigades for the liberation of Aldo Moro or, more precisely, to make Aldo Moro appear as a martyr willing to die for the salvation of Italian society and its political system. Moreover, it has shown that martyrological representations, together with the rhetoric of the «reason of state», were intrinsically linked to a mythological narrative of the state, in which the Red Brigades were represented as absolute enemies who aimed only to

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1 From this point of view, Carl Schmitt is perfectly right when he argues that at the very root of the concept of state sovereignty and autonomy there is the distinction between friend and enemy. See Schmitt 2002.

destroy society and undermine political order and the state as absolutely necessary to restrain this manifestation of absolute evil.

By analyzing the representations of the event of political violence, rather than speculating about possible interferences, conspiracies and the direct responsibilities of intelligence services, foreign governments, representatives of political parties or secret organizations—that is, rather than focusing on what is obscure and unknown—the study has been able to focus on facts and events that are known, public, and accessible to everyone and has yet managed to maintain a critical approach. The actual knowledge about what happened in the spring of 1978 does not allow us to infer, with the necessary certainty and «beyond reasonable doubt», that there was a conspiracy by individuals or groups operating outside the organization of the Red Brigades seeking to eliminate Aldo Moro. Though it does not completely reject the possibility that there could have been different kinds of, still unknown, interference or false leads in the so-called «Moro affair». In fact, one of the main characteristics of the unknown, regardless of its probability or improbability, is that it cannot be falsified. This study demonstrates that it is not necessary to postulate on the existence of occult forces operating in history to highlight the instrumentalization of events of political violence. In fact, as we saw, even in the first days after the kidnapping, a discursive and rhetorical strategy was adopted, which *de facto* annihilated or at least minimized the possibility of saving Aldo Moro. The event of political violence was used to construct a state martyr figure, which was very useful for the maintenance of the political *status quo* and for the legitimization of established authority and power relations. In other words, this study has pointed out that martyrological representations of the event of political power became part of a strategy, which was functional to the preservation of power.

If Aldo Moro's letters had not become public, the process of his martyrologization, which began with his kidnapping, would have proceeded without problems. But Moro raised his voice and radically criticized and questioned the hegemonic representations produced by the government, major political parties and most of the established media. He rejected the allocation of the martyr role and even came to curse the government, the parties and the country for doing nothing for his salvation and, more importantly, for surreptitiously betraying the ethics of the sacredness of individual human life. In his letters, he subverted the rhetoric of the «reason of state» by clearly addressing the safeguarding of the dignity and rights of every single human being as the fundamental and, to some extent, unique true duty of the state. From this point of view, Aldo Moro did really act as



a martyr, but not in the sense of someone who witnesses by dying, but in the sense of someone who witnesses with words the truth of the sacrality and dignity of each singular human life by raising his voice.

For this reason, Moro had to be silenced and his personal dignity annihilated. Within this study, the *homo sacer* theory has been implemented specifically to highlight the mechanism by which Aldo Moro was silenced and excluded from the public sphere. The sixth chapter highlighted the different strategies used to deprive Moro of his public role, to represent Moro, no longer as Moro the politician, but as a drugged person at the mercy of his kidnappers or, simply, as a coward who selfishly tried «only» to save his own life. But despite this attempt at annihilating Moro's voice—without which the government, the major political parties and the established media would not have succeeded in declaring him as expendable, representing his death as the necessary cost of the salvation of society and the preservation of social order—, Moro's voice and words grafted like the roots of a tree in the wall of hegemonic discourse. Precisely because Moro succeeded, in spite of everything, in making his voice heard in the public space, the task of silencing him and symbolically taking possession of his body was not completely successful.

Over the years, Moro's voice and words have found more and more people willing to listen to them and use them to shape and give form to subversive and alternative cultural and discursive practices with respect to hegemonic discourse. As shown in the seventh chapter, despite attempts to establish a shared and undisputed memory, especially through the occupation of the public space with memorial signs and institutionalized rituals of annual commemoration, Aldo Moro and the events of spring 1978 were and still are the subject of dispute and conflicting interpretations and representations. In fact, his letters became the point of departure of different cultural practices in which the martyr figure is used subversively and poetically. In these practices, Aldo Moro is not represented as the martyr who belongs to the state, to the party, to the nation, or to the Church, but as the one who, making use of the last liberty that he had—the freedom of using language subversively—radically rejected any instrumental appropriation of his person. In some cultural productions especially, Aldo Moro seems to assume, at least partially, the role that the martyr figure had in its original context of appearance, since it becomes a sort of spokesman for a radical critique not only of the Red Brigades' ideology of violence, but also and above all of the rhetoric of the «reason of state». It thus seems that even if the modern, mythical narrative of sovereignty has domesticated the martyr figure, it is still possible to use it in a subversive way, that is, to reintroduce

it in what could be seen as a (post-)modern narrative of rebellion. The exemplarity of the Moro case lies precisely in this twofold usage of the martyr figure, in the fact that Aldo Moro was represented, remembered and constructed as a martyr who witnesses both for and against the necessity of sacrifice, who both conceals and reveals the mechanism by which power relations perpetuate themselves.

This last point is actually the main reason why this investigation focused on the cultural practices surrounding this particular and almost unique event of political violence in modern history. The case of the martyrological representation of Aldo Moro is, in some respects, what Agamben calls an example with a «paradigmatic character», that is, a case that cannot be explained by referring to the rule of a «generality preexisting the singular cases», but rather as a case that constitutes itself as a rule.<sup>2</sup> Agamben argues that «a paradigm entails a movement that goes from singularity to singularity and, without ever leaving singularity, transforms every singular case into an *exemplar* of a general rule that can never be stated a priori.»<sup>3</sup> The relationship between the rule and the example is not a logical one, where the movement from the rule to the case is called deduction and from the case to the rule induction. The heuristic value of a paradigm, of exemplarity, is not to exemplify a general rule but to expose its own singularity, which can then be used to make intelligible, and to analyze and interpret other cases by the mechanism of analogy: «its specific operation consists in suspending and deactivating its empirical givenness in order to exhibit only an intelligibility.»<sup>4</sup> In other words, the analysis of the martyrological and sacrificial representation of Aldo Moro does not validate any general rule—for example: the martyr figure always functions in that way and not in another—but is useful, as a paradigmatic case, for understanding and explaining other cases of analogous representations of political violence.

#### 8.4 *Towards an Aesthetics of Resistance*

If it is true that the martyr figure always returns, assuming new functions and engaging in new pragmatic and hermeneutic contexts, then a very important question arises, which concerns both the domain of ethics and aesthetics: What kind of representation of political violence might be able to

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2 Agamben 2009, 21; see also Ferrara 2008.

3 Agamben 2009, 22.

4 Agamben 2009, 25–26.

overcome both the deadly rhetoric of sacrifice and the mythology of the state? In other words, what kind of representation could be truly emancipatory, appealing to people to reject any kind of legitimization of violence? In a sense, it can be said that finding an answer to this question is the true *telos* that motivated and continues to motivate me in reflecting on the use and performativity of the martyr figure.

In the third chapter, I addressed the state martyr as a secularized figure, that is, as a figure that has been transposed from the pragmatic and hermeneutic context of Christianity and Christian theology in the late antiquity and medieval times to the context of modern political thought and society. In Agamben's words: «secularization acts within the conceptual system of modernity as a signature, which refers it back to theology.»<sup>5</sup> What is at stake here is the way in which a certain «sign signifies because it carries a signature that necessarily predetermines its interpretation and distributes its use and efficacy.»<sup>6</sup> The premise or axiom of the theory of signatures is that «pure and unmarked signs», which would signify and refer to something «neutrally», do not exist.<sup>7</sup> Signs are never neutral but always marked by their signatures, that is, they are able to signify something only because they are used within a certain context and refer back to precedent uses within precedent contexts. It is thus by being performed, by being used in a specific context and at the same time referring to precedent performances, that signs are able to exert effects and thus appeal to people, to produce and induce a certain subjectivity and worldview. In fact, this is why Agamben also defines secularization as a «specific performance of Christian faith that, for the first time, opens the world to man in its worldliness and historicity. The theological signature operates [...] as a sort of *tromp l'oeil* in which the very secularization of the world becomes the mark that identifies it as belonging to a divine *oikonomia*.»<sup>8</sup> From this point of view, the secularization of the martyr figure can be defined as a practice that transposes it into the domain of profane politics, which in turn assumes a sacral character.

Interestingly, in *The Signature of All Things* Agamben criticizes Hans Blumenberg, among others, for having not realized that secularization is not a concept but a signature.<sup>9</sup> This «liquidation» does not do justice to Blumen-

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5 Agamben 2009, 77.

6 Agamben 2009, 64.

7 Agamben 2009, 64.

8 Agamben 2011, 4.

9 See Agamben 2009, 76–77.

berg's reflections on secularization, since I believe that there are, in the writings of the German philosopher, interesting considerations which can help us to understand the role of secularized Christian language in the modern and contemporary world, as well as to relate the topic of secularization to that of mythicization. The proximity of the concept of signature with Blumenberg's concept of prefiguration, which served as a heuristic tool for the analysis of the martyr figure, was already highlighted in the third chapter. In fact, one can say that the relationship of signatures to signs is analogous to that of prefigurations to figures: in the same way that signatures transpose signs, prefigurations transpose figures from one context to another. Despite the two philosophers using two different concepts, because they are referring to two different traditions of thought, I believe that both are pointing out the same phenomenon. While Agamben refers to the tradition of structuralism and post-structuralism, in particular to thinkers such as Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, and Foucault, Blumenberg refers instead to the tradition of German hermeneutics. Despite this proximity, I referred to both concepts because they highlight different aspects of the common phenomenon of language transposition. The concept of signature was useful in highlighting and describing the long process of perennial re-contextualization of the terms martyr and martyrdom, at the end of which the state martyr figure emerged, and in pointing out that their historical stratification affects their efficacy in the various contexts in which they appear. On the other hand, the concept of prefiguration was instead useful for drawing attention to the mechanism by which social actors used and still use the martyr figure to signify and refer to an event of political violence, in order to reduce the experienced contingency of the event and thus create meaningfulness. In other words, the former has served to explain the way in which the martyr figure could be secularized and yet maintain its efficacy, while the latter helped us to understand the reason why social actors have recurred to this figure.

In the third chapter, I mentioned Girard's scapegoat theory, which is based on the anthropological assumption whereby human beings act violently, because they always desire what other human beings desire, which results in a conflict between desiring parties. On the basis of this assumption, Girard argues that sacrifice is a form of ritualized violence with which social actors control their aggressive impulses by directing them on to a victim that serves as scapegoat. Now, I reject and criticize this theory, not because I generally dislike anthropological explanations, but simply because it is based on misleading anthropological assumptions, inasmuch as it hypostatizes and universalizes the meaning and function of violence.

Moreover, this theory ultimately reproduces a mythological understanding of history, the same kind of mythological construction that this investigation has attempted to deconstruct. This is why I propose considering not violence *per se*, but rather the signification of violence as an anthropologically derivable and explainable phenomenon. It is therefore not in the phenomenon of violence that one has to search for and identify anthropological constants, but rather in the way in which human beings give meaning to violence, that is, in the relationship between human beings and the world, which is always mediated by a process of linguistic and symbolic construction. In other words, it is the need for the signification of violence, which is a historical and anthropological constant. From this point of view, the main question is not «why do human beings act violently?» but rather: why do humans need to make sense of what happens around them (especially when what happens occurs violently)? Hans Blumenberg's answer is relatively simple: because the human being is a «lacking being» (*Mangelwesen*) who compensates for this lack with action and, last but not least, with rhetoric action:

The fact that man is not biologically fixed to a particular environment can be understood as a fundamental lack of proper equipment towards the purpose of self-improvement *or* as an openness to the abundance of a world [...]. The human being is defined by what it lacks, *or* by the creative symbolism by which he resides in its own worlds. [...] Action is compensation for the «indeterminacy» [*Unbestimmtheit*, also «indecisiveness»] of the human being, and rhetoric is the strenuous production of the consistencies [*Übereinstimmungen*] which compensate for the [lack] of a «substantial» pool [*Fundus*] of regulations, so that action is possible. From this point of view, language is not an instrument for the communication of knowledge or truth, but primarily for the establishment of understanding, approval, or acquiescence, on which the agent [the acting human being] is dependent. [...] The human being's lack of a specific disposition to reactive behavior in the face of reality [...] is the starting point for the central anthropological question, how does this being exist despite its biological indisposition. The answer can be reduced to the formula: by not engaging directly with this real-

ity. Human reference to reality is indirect, laborious, decelerated, selective, and, above all, «metaphorical».<sup>10</sup>

On the basis of this sort of anthropological theory of rhetoric, it is possible to look at martyrological representations as rhetorical instruments that compensate for the radical indeterminacy and contingency experienced by humans when confronted with political violence and especially with violent death. The experience of death, especially of death inflicted by other human beings, reminds us of the incommensurability and unpredictability of what is happening in the world. The description of violence as what it is, that is, the simple and rather banal clash of living bodies in a certain space and time, resulting in the injury or annihilation of one or more of these bodies, is not able to produce that meaningfulness without which individuals are incapable of acting, thinking, choosing and deciding. The main and most powerful strategy of coping with contingency is the implementation of analogies and metaphors, whereby something seemingly inexplicable is explained by something else.

In the case of prefiguration, the analogical construction produces meaningfulness by referring to already known, historically stratified and conventionalized forms of representation, with which past events were represented and made intelligible. Moreover, the specificity of prefiguration is that it always refers to a past figure that, because of the meaning and even performative force attributed to it, serves as a representational model and as an «aid to decision-making» (*Entscheidungshilfe*): «What has already been done does not require [...] renewed consideration, confusion, perplexity, [because] it is pre-determined by the paradigm.»<sup>11</sup> From this point of view, prefiguration can be defined as an analogical construction or metaphor that always concerns actions. As this study has exposed, social actors have represented the kidnapping, imprisonment and assassination of Aldo Moro by referring to a figure that was already used in the past to represent other events of political violence. Martyrological representation prefigured Moro's destiny as predetermined and thus unavoidable. «The prefiguration»—Blumenberg argues—«gives legitimacy to a decision that may be characterized by the utmost contingency» and in the case of Aldo Moro,

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10 Blumenberg 2001, 406, 409, 415. Blumenberg refers to (and criticizes) Arnold Gehlen's famous work *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*, published in 1940.

11 Blumenberg 2014b, 9.

the prefiguration served to legitimize the decision of not negotiating, of doing nothing for his salvation.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, the use of the term «martyrdom» to signify the occurrence of a violent death was metaphorical from the beginning: in the context of the first Christian communities, the event of death was signified with a term that previously, in antiquity, had been used to signify the speech act through which a person bore witness to something. The term underwent a signature through which *events of death* by the hands of the ruling political authority could be signified as *acts of dying*. Through martyrological representation, death assumed the meaning of a community-saving act, the witnessing of absolute truth *and* an accusation of political authority. Represented as martyrdom, death is no longer a simple, meaningless event, but a meaningful act, a way of doing something meaningful by dying. The success of this metaphor depends on its ability to constitute itself as a paradigm through regular and repetitive spatial, temporal, multimedial diffusion and manifestation. As soon as the metaphor became so strongly conventionalized that its previous use—let us call it *pre-metaphorical*—has been forgotten, it basically ceased to be a metaphor. At the end of this process of re-contextualization, which goes hand-in-hand with demetaphorization, the martyr established itself as one of the fundamental, and to some extent, almost irreplaceable figures for the representation of political violence.

Analogies, metaphors, and prefigurations are indispensable elements in mythicization, the bricks with which myths are constructed. The phenomenon of prefiguration especially, Blumenberg argues, «presupposes that the mythical form of thought as a disposition to certain functions is still virulent», since here «mythicization approaches the limit of magic, or even exceeds it as soon as the explicit act of repetition of a prefigure [*Präfigurat*] is associated with the expectation of the production of the identical effect.»<sup>13</sup> This process of mythicization is basically omnipresent in modern and contemporary political discourses, especially when it comes to giving meaning to political violence. Within state mythology, violence always appears as the unavoidable outcome of the mythic struggle between good and evil forces. Now, if Blumenberg is right and the production of mythological narratives and the use of metaphors and prefigurations are anthropologically derivable phenomena, since human beings need strategies of complexity-reduction and meaning-construction in order to be able

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12 Blumenberg 2014b, 10.

13 Blumenberg 2014b, 9.

to act, to think and more generally to live in the world, then the question arises: is it possible to represent events of political violence without mythologizing them, without re-actualizing the myth that legitimizes the use of violence? If the human being cannot live and act without myths, is the mythicization of violence perhaps inevitable?

The «classic» approach in philosophy and cultural studies to counteract the appellative efficacy of myths is to deconstruct them and bring their function to light. Ultimately, philosophy was already a practice of demythicization since its inception. In twentieth century philosophy, the most paradigmatic attempt to deconstruct state mythology was perhaps made by Ernst Cassirer, who, at the end of *The Myth of the State*, published in 1946, argues that:

It is beyond the power of philosophy to destroy the political myths. A myth is in a sense invulnerable. It is impervious to rational arguments; it cannot be refuted by syllogisms. But philosophy can do us another important service. It can make us understand the adversary. In order to fight an enemy you must know him. That is one of the first principles of a sound strategy. To know him means not only to know his defects and weakness; it means to know his strength. All of us have been liable to underrate this strength. When we first heard of the political myths we found them so absurd and incongruous, so fantastic and ludicrous that we could hardly be prevailed upon to take them seriously. By now it has become clear to all of us that this was a great mistake. We should not commit the same error a second time. We should carefully study the origin, the structure, the methods, and the technique of the political myths. We should see the adversary face to face in order to know how to combat him.<sup>14</sup>

This study has taken Cassirer's warning seriously, trying to show that even after the Second World War, after the advent of the national myths of Fascism and Nazi-Fascism, political myths continue to determine how individuals and peoples represent and understand themselves, others and the world, particularly in situations of crisis and violence. In this sense, it can be said that this investigation was an attempt to deconstruct the myth of the self-sacrifice of the martyr-sovereign Aldo Moro by studying its origin, structure, methods and technique. As Cassirer argues, philosophy and critical cultural analysis cannot defeat political myths, but they can at least bring their function to light. However, I believe that only by means of ev-

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14 Cassirer 1946, 296.



eryday subversive practices, alternative representations of what is happening in the world as well as of *what could happen differently*, can dangerous myths be opposed efficaciously. This does not reduce the margin of action of philosophical thought and social and cultural studies, but, on the contrary, opens the horizons for a dual task: philosophical, cultural and social research must not only criticize and deconstruct practices of mythicization, but also reflect on the structure and function of what in the second chapter of this study was defined as the poetic use of language, namely of forms of representations using language units, rhetorical patterns and narrative models without hypostatizing the relationship between words and things, acts or events.

If it is true that human beings are not able to act, decide, and orient themselves in the world without using metaphors, prefigurations and, more generally, rhetoric, then we have to accept that myths cannot be defeated in a definitive way. The poetic use of language can subvert conventional and instrumental uses of certain language units, rhetorical patterns and narrative models, revealing and unmasking their exteriority, historicity and contingency, only within certain delimited pragmatic and hermeneutic contexts, and therefore cannot prevent the same being re-incorporated and domesticated by hegemonic discourses in other contexts. For this reason, the poetic use of language—as a «bipolar gesture, which each time renders external what it must unfailingly appropriate»—should be regarded as something that has to be done constantly in all possible pragmatic and hermeneutic contexts.<sup>15</sup>

The distinction between instrumental and poetic uses of language can be compared, to some extent, with Roland Barthes' distinction between encratic and acratic discourses:

Adopting an old Aristotelian notion, that of the *doxa* (public opinion, the general, the «probable», but not the «true», the «scientific»), we shall say that the *doxa* is the cultural (or discursive) mediation through which power (or non-power) speaks: encratic discourse is a discourse that conforms to the *doxa*, subject to codes which are themselves the structuring lines of ideology; and acratic discourse always speaks out, to various degrees, against the *doxa* (whatever it is, acratic discourse is *paradoxical*). This opposition does not exclude nuances within each type; but, structurally, its simplicity remains valid as long as power and non-power are in their place; it can be (provisionally) blurred only in

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15 Agamben 2015b, 86.

the rare cases where there is a mutation of power (of the sites of power); thus, in the case of the political language in a revolutionary period: revolutionary language issues from the preceding acratice language; in shifting over to power, it retains its acratice character, as long as there is an active struggle within revolution; but once this struggle dies down, once the state is in place, the former Revolutionary language becomes *doxa*, encratic discourse. [...] Encratic language, supported by the state, is everywhere: it is diffused, widespread, one might say osmotic discourse which *impregnates* exchanges, social rites, leisure, the socio-symbolic field (above all, of course, in societies of mass communication). [...] [A]cratic [...] are all the languages which are elaborated outside the *doxa* and are consequently rejected by it [...]. By analyzing encratic discourse, we know more or less in advance what we shall find (which is why, *today*, the analysis of mass culture is visibly marking time; but acratice discourse is by and large our own (that of the researcher, the intellectual, the writer); to analyze it is to analyze ourselves as we speak: always a risky operation and yet one that must be undertaken. [...] [T]here is an inverted relation between the two systems of discursivity: patent/hidden, overt/covert.<sup>16</sup>

The two oppositional pairs of concepts poetic/instrumental and acratice/encratic are not characterized by heuristic equivalency: the former serves to indicate two different discursive modes of relating and referring to non-discursive things, acts or events, while the latter illustrates the discursive practices' different positions and relation to each other within a certain field or context. Precisely because of their different heuristic value, both oppositional pairs are useful in making two final remarks on the possibility of subverting and opposing mythicization.

Firstly, subversive and alternative practices of representation always appear at the margin of hegemonic discourses or, as Barthes puts it, are always articulated outside of the *doxa*. This marginality or externality should not be considered an autonomous reality—this is why Barthes speaks of para-doxical and not anti-doxical discourse—but rather as a space, a field of action in which the same words, rhetoric and narratives used in hegemonic discourses are appropriate and to the same extent expropriated. Subversive and alternative practices, in other words, use language units, rhetorical patterns and narrative models to maintain their performativity—that is: their ability to appeal to people and to demand subjective positioning—

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16 Barthes 1989, 120–123.

without falling into the trap of mythicization. It is, ultimately, a use that exposes the historicity and exteriority of language without disempowering its performative force and efficacy. Secondly, any attempt to stop the spiral of history (to use Gianbattista Vico's beautiful metaphor) in order to consolidate and congeal a definitive and non-metaphorical language is illusory. Blumenberg calls this the Cartesian «ideal of full objectification», which corresponds to the ideal of «the perfection of a terminology designed to capture the presence and precision of the matter at hand in well-defined concepts.»<sup>17</sup> This ideal is illusory because mythicization and de-mythicization are two sides within an agonistic and dynamic struggle, where the *doxa* is always changing. What, in a certain pragmatic and hermeneutic context, is used in a subversive and para-doxical way—as the term martyrdom in the first and especially second century AD or, to some extent, in the context of the French Revolution—in other contexts can become part of hegemonic discourses. In this sense, we can say that the struggle against mythicization cannot be won once and for all, but is something that must be undertaken continuously. This study wanted to bring to light the role of the martyr figure in this permanent struggle for hegemony and emancipation, for the concealment and disclosure of the relationship between power and violence, a struggle that cannot finish but will continue in the future.

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17 Blumenberg 2010, 7.

