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EDITORIAL

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The group of scholars that has decided to work on this *Euro-American Journal of Historical and Theoretical Studies of Politics*, linking together two continents by this project, aims at giving voice and making greater room for a debate about the urgency of explaining the radical changes that have taken place in political practices and in social government in the last ten years. It wishes to do so from a perspective that fully recognizes the theoretical burden of the anthropological and cultural revolution that those changes have brought about. To engage with this view does not necessarily mean to assume its positive content. Our scientific discourse can only be critical and reflexive, designed, as it is, to question the existent. Our project stems from the taking on charge of what exists, since it is by examining the aporias within society, the gap between its current representation and the dynamics that flow through it, that we can pave the way for different political, legal and economic practices, and, by so doing, start thinking and acting *otherwise*. Of course, taking charge of something is harder than just deploring, regretting, or condemning it. It is the basic assumption of those engaged in this project that politics is not only an acting of people concerning the world that keeps them together or sets them apart, as Arendt argues. Today it also, and above all else, needs to be the governing of processes of subjectivation, of the production of forms of life shaping the social space. We may not agree with such a fact; but this is the way it is.

From this second perspective which may be defined as the governmental fold of the present, co-habiting with the first one but often in conflict with it – it evidently follows that political actors are not only institutions and traditional political subjects: the state and individuals as citizens. In and by themselves, these magnificent categories cannot explain political power in contemporary age. The Neo-liberal turn, dating back to thirty years ago and that today appears willing to overcome the terrible, global, ongoing economic crisis by strengthening its junctions rather than significantly modifying them, has drastically increased the number of subjects of politics to include different forms

of social powers, without depriving the old ones of their authority. The main feature of this new kind of political rationality, that finds in the market its legitimacy criterion, is, in fact, as we all are well aware, a co-existence and co-presence of the old with the new and, therefore, an overlapping of languages and rationalities. The world of modern institutions, with its legal-political logics steering towards the coherence of the sovereign legal system, persists and co-exists with the new, pragmatic, and inclusive logics of governance and governmentality inspired by economics – though incessantly evaluating and selecting. Yet the latter seem to prevail and wholly transform the first. Different logics and languages that in the previous form of the welfare state were politically and ideologically synthesized, and that today co-habit within an incoherent co-existence, paradoxically fuelled by contradiction.

Already in this presentation of our project, the central role of economics becomes clear. We cannot just observe how the market, as it is often said, determines and shapes our lives. It is precisely because of the governmental and bio-political turn of power that the logic of economics has become the “way of thinking”, a method of approaching issues about life that had too long been considered unrelated to life itself and which would naturally seem to belong to the sphere of identity, feelings, and existence, well beyond the strictly economic domain. This way of thinking is strategic and modal. Its lexicon and interferences personify the medium that interconnects all aspects of life. Its competitive principle, aiming at the optimization of the cost/benefit relationship, does not only define the area of market exchanges; it also characterizes the problems of communication, information, security, and shapes everybody’s plans about life.

It should be by now clear why we wish to title *Soft Power* our journal. The expression that seems more appropriate to summarize this mysterious and ambivalent ontology of actuality indicates a diffused soft power capable of producing consensus and informing the subject’s forms of life. Soft power, therefore, might help us offer an explanation of the radical change in the study of the concept of power, a necessary premise to fully understand how it currently governs our lives. Only by considering power in its complexity, rationality, and productivity, we will be able to grasp the meaning of ongoing political transformations. It is no longer possible to adopt the traditional biased concept of power that reduces it to an institutional place whilst the others, those who are dominated, are simply left to put up with, delegate, or legitimize it. It is generally recognized that soft power is a syntagm that Joseph Nye adopted for the first time in the nineties to envisage, in the field of International Relations, some sort of soft power as opposed to the hard military interventionism of American geo-political influence. A power that

should have benefited from the cultural attractiveness of the American model, and that would have reacted by avoiding frontal conflicts, partaking to the shaping of collaborative, involved, and educated speakers willing to cooperate. If we go beyond this specific meaning, the most simple and captivating formulation of the syntagm relates to a new way of managing power relations: i.e. a typically neoliberal way of current times. Therefore, it refers to a form of rationality that is political in nature, although there is, underlying and operating, an economic strategic logic and a pluralistic pragmatism of forms of approach. It is a form of rationality that makes of the mechanism of interdependencies, of the co-existence of heterogeneous techniques and styles the vehicle for government processes that do not operate through the mechanism of coercion (although we will never grow tired of arguing that they co-exist with it), but rather aim to produce subjectivations appropriate for an unstable world, and power relations referred to individuals or free associations that remain active even when they find themselves in the weakest and subordinate position in an asymmetric power relationship. Soft power therefore has got a lot to do with that neoliberal form of governmentality of which Foucault has offered the initial definition and an outline of genealogy referring back to the pastoral and disciplinary model that becomes hybrid and is transformed when, through capitalism, individuals and social groups actively come into play in government relationships.

Governmental power is not a unilateral, totalitarian leadership over individuals, but a strategic relationship. It draws a scenario of different, intermittent, influenced, widespread powers – in the political socialization and in modern and late post-modern economics – in all forces operating within society, where they create multiple, varied and different relations of reciprocal influence from the bottom upwards. What we define power, here, is thus some form of integration, a coordination and finalization of relations among a wide range of forces. Besides the pyramidal structures of sovereignty, stand out *plurality* and *difference*.

Subjection is to be understood as a process of oriented subjectivation, though never completely saturated, that responds by bending its influence. The theme of soft power is the government theme, understood as a technology and the art of guiding behaviors, to act upon actions, to orientate men and populations that are at least partially free of choosing, while their regime of truth and the structure of their self are influenced. It is a bio-political practice not because it bases itself on the power of life or death, as Agamben argues, but because it overcomes the threshold of the *externum forum*, where modern power is exerted, and penetrates the secret scene of the subject, operating in his

processes of individualization and desires. Soft power, of course. Where violence is not direct, and if it is so – due to the synthesis of technologies – it is functional to security dispositifs, legitimized by the prevention of risks and by the safeguarding of one's own welfare. A power that operates over nations and men that are free is a power that cannot underestimate the importance of collective imagination, the self-representation of identity, the centrality of forms of persuasion, and therefore communication, that are necessary to any adequate subjectivation. Soft power might be used to underline that the political struggles at stake represent the complex government of souls, the ability of structuring the field of action of the other, of interfering in the sphere of its possible actions. In order to think about the exertion of power, we have to assume that all forces engaged in this relation, whether they are states, populations, or groups identified through homogeneous statistical features, are virtually free, as the people of democracies around the world declare they are today. Governmental power is a way of acting over subject-actors, free subjects, in so far as they are free, as Foucault argues. Power practices can in fact become fixed into institutionalized asymmetric relations (states of dominance) or in fluid, reversible, horizontal relations that escape the government asymmetry.

In-between these two poles lies the field of soft power government techniques, where the ethical-political conflict takes on its full meaning: to minimize domination, giving by itself the legal rules, techniques for managing relationships with others with oneself. There it becomes possible to increase freedom, the mobilization and reversibility of power games that are the conditions for resistance and creation. The organizational forms of this soft power are in fact loose, always adjusting, and show high reactivity to and adaptability with each other. The strength of weak ties spreads out, the unstable equilibrium adapts to change. Cooperation takes place through a constant transfer of experiences from the periphery to the centers, through the contamination of different languages: historical and anthropological studies in postcolonial areas show this hybridization.

Case and exception become compatible with the legal organization and we rediscover, within the impasse of universalizations, the singularity that generates new singularity. It is certainly a power that for legal philosophy is hard to account for, as it is beyond the pyramidal constructions of legal science and focuses its influence not on the general prohibitions of the law but on the differential processes, addressing and boosting the potential of each individual or group, or population, offering itself as an instrument of choice of the social powers in the form of contract, in the arbitration or voluntary

and cross negotiation, subordinate to fragmented or private objectives. Upon this social fragmentation and ontological uncertainty that is the tone of the whole, operate populist rhetorics offering empty signifiers that aggregate, by contagion and by imitation, fronts of antagonistic equivalence.

Populism is the other side of the neoliberal de-politicization and it is rooted in the same imaginary. Such a political rationality, though unstable and open, does not reduce the binding force to which the various actors are submitted, the inhibition and strong influence of many potentialities: the pressure upon self-made responsible and precarious lives increases. Yet at the same time, the power relation has generated a *plus* that is something more than a simple sum of utilized lives. The emergent qualities of those who cooperate are not logically deductible but only ascertainable in an empirical, historical and factual manner. It is therefore a power characterized by a very high degree of ambivalence that tends to empty politics, in so far as it weakens the identity antagonism on which politics traditionally hinges, as well as it declines the public representation of the law, to make room for self-managing and self-government forms, which in America have given rise to interesting developments. Ambivalent forms, non-traditional political subjectivations – which our journal will try to explain – but which risk, by weakening the political-juridical egalitarian defenses and by unleashing the agency of individuals, groups, or lobbies, to multiply the situations of inequality, and engender undesirable consequences of danger, insecurity, mistrust and existential uncertainty.

And the South of the world – of which both the Italian south and a Latin-American country as Colombia are part of, if in different ways – is aware of the mocking ambivalence of the emphasis on self-government, the explosion of social powers, and power softness.

The myriad of problems that receives a different light through this ambivalent and seductive concept of power evidently includes very different issues. The group engaged in launching this journal is constituted by philosophers and political scientists, historians of contemporary political thought, sociologists of communication, legal theorists; but we wish to make also room for contributions that are heterogeneous both in terms of disciplinary approaches and in terms of adopted standpoints, so as the journal might be a flexible and porous tool capable of growing beyond the initial project. In order to organize our work we have articulated two methodological poles: a historical one, that for us is essential in order to offer the genealogy of the factual and conceptual articulations that characterize the ongoing transformation and account for the concrete power effects that discourses of truth and practices of government *dispositifs* have generated.

The other pole is the theoretical one, assuming that the purpose of thought is the problematization of society and the effort to construct new conceptual tools suitable for it. More suitable than those we have at our disposal. As Deleuze argues: “Concepts originate from their conflict with things”. Therefore, they spring from the outside, from opacities and rigidities that force us to think everything all over again, to mistrust categories that prevent us from grasping the meaning. What cannot find a place in our journal is therefore those discourses of philosophy or of political history about themselves; that strictly academic self-referential activity. And yet, this is not because we consider it irrelevant, but simply because the challenge that drives us is another one. A challenge linked with an ontology of the present, of topical questions, that needs to decipher the facts and the genealogy that it reveals. The neoliberal turn to which this form of power refers to inevitably has been studied extensively. The crisis that imbues it and that is represented within its imaginary in a way that does not affect its coherence, is in turn an opportunity for studies of great interest. All this, according to us, must be thought and analyzed by penetrating the modes and logics that structure it, so that we might speak of a thought that meets the contemporary challenges. Starting now with a journal of historical and theoretical studies on politics that Foucault would call governmental, may be a chance to improve the tools of interpretation, to highlight the aporias and the faults that are not taken into consideration yet.