New forms of communitarianism in the scenario of total visibility: the affectionate community

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Abstract
The present article composes a course of inquiries about community, its social forms and its possibilities of communication. Our main concern is pondering new ways of making social contact when the present time seems haunted by mighty new and old insecurities, such as the ever growing depletion of natural resources and the collapse of media and communication patterns hitherto in force. In front of the process of exhausting human resources and at the highest pitch of technological development we can discern dialogical shaped molds in new emerging social forms and new patterns of message production within a global background wherein affectionate and sensitive bonds appear as the chief power of cohesion.
Keywords: communal communication, alternative communication, dialogism, citzenship

1. Context Presentation

Could community still be fate? The fact is, given the current environment of deep stress and anxiety from the daily routine in big cities and the uncertainty with the coming times, we notice that we find ourselves virtual and definitely connected and dependent on each other, as we never have been and perhaps never even wanted to be. In an effort to visualize and define this feeling/environment, before any concept, what came to mind was the shocking painting by Théodore Géricault (1791-1824), *Le Radeau de la Méduse*[2], about the famous shipwreck that happened in 1816, near Senegal. Nothing is radically new here: Géricault's work has stirred the attention of several thinkers, artists and even mass producers.

Just like a literary work can be constituted as a picture of its time (Balzac, for instance), a great painting is capable of making clear, in the metaphor of the happening, the visceral crisis of a society. It couldn't be any different with *Le Radeau de la Méduse*. In permanent exhibition in room 77 at the Louvre Museum in Paris, the theme of this painting with impressive dimensions (491×716 centimeters, or 193x281 inches) has caused an impact since the moment that Géricault, affected by the news of the

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[2] The Raft of the Medusa, an icon of French romanticism, references the improvised craft used by the crew of the Méduse, the French frigate that shipwrecked on its way to Senegal. Géricault's painting pictures the 12th day of the shipwreck, initially with 150 people and ending with 15 men that, in order to survive, resorted to cannibalism and the murder of the weaker.

shipwreck, decided to study the survivors. The accident and the work have produced several discussions and reflections on the subject, starting with the causes of the shipwreck: the lack of skill and experience of a captain with monarchic roots, and thus, connected to the *Ancien Régime*. However, information about the loss of all ethical and moral postulates and the presence of a rule based on survival, with the elimination of the weakest and reports of cannibalism weren't any less shocking. Finally, even concerns with the review of the work, especially its affiliation to *chiaro-scuro* and the study of anatomy revealed in the representation of nude bodies has inserted *Radeau* onto the podium of works discussed worldwide.

To elect, in an analytical text, an example of this order is like trying to follow Georg Simmel's form ideas, for those whose intuition and imagination have played central roles in sociological observation. Our purpose is to raise the hypothesis that, in this phase of financial capitalism, maybe we are living in the instant immediately before and after the shipwreck of the *Méduse*. Analogically, we are in this moment in which the current models don't count anymore and futures can be decided and planned. Lacking comprehension of the crisis, there is a perspective of being confronted with situations in which the choices are reduced.

Despite starting from the assumption that the implied question in the semiosis of *Radeau de la Méduse* – that is, the indexes of disappearance of ethics and morals – are known and part of the public domain for defining the horizon of current society, we elected with the function of postulate/maxim an excerpt written by the famous French authors Lipovetsky and Serroy, first published in 2008, with a subtitle that properly summarizes the proposal: response to a disoriented society. It states:

> Everywhere at the same time, a little can be seen a feeling of collective disorientation and impotency in controlling the course of the future. (...) Without a doubt some task of changing what is isn't the simplest, even more so given that the great 'solutions' of the modern era have lost credibility. Administrated economy has gone bankrupt, social-democracy started not working; and when it comes to neoliberalism, it doesn't stop demonstrating cruelly its limits and injustices all around the globe. It's because of that, more than ever, one should give space to imagination, to the multiplicty of Project and ideas (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011: 148).

In this scenario, in which the bankruptcy of the existing models is detected, has served as a guide for multiple productions in all areas of knowledge. For some years, the Portuguese theorist Boaventura Souza Santos (2007: 25) proposed a new sociology,

64

which he named *Sociology of the Absences* and *Sociology of Emergencies*, in a project to seriously define the problems that involve our current society, and consequently, establish goals and solutions. The strategies proposed are quite detailed, in a manner to enable them to be operational. The central idea, starting from the *Sociology of the Absences*, is to produce a "transgressive procedure, an insurgent sociology in an attempt to show that what doesn't exist is actively produced as non-existent, an alternative for the unbelievable, invisible to the hegemonic reality of the world" (Ibid.: 28).

This procedure allows, as far as communication is concerned, for concentrated research of critical reading and analysis of discourse, in its varied forms and schools, regarding media production. There are numerous examples that we could elect with these objectives, from key questions to banalities, as well as the space they occupy in media production. That is, investigate in Brazilian production, the place and treatment destined to ecological questions, such as the Belo Monte plant, all the way to entertainment, such as the 11° season of BBB[3]. In fact, investigating the agenda of media is, without a doubt, one of the greatest duties of the area and should be done in a systemic, permanent and untiring fashion.

Without intent of being a blind activist, this is the greatest task for all of those who study and research in this area, despite dealing with particular objects: to analyze the discourse and the silences. From this disposition, we draw a path for what Boaventura christened as *Sociology of Absences and Emergencies*. According to the author, it is exactly in the intersection of these two sociologies that the need to redefine what is understood as future emerges. His proposal is to let go of the idea of an infinite and distant future and concentrate in the concrete and contracted future. The focus on the immediate future, assumed as the present, will make us elect in front of the emergence of numerous experiences, which were so far invisible, those that present themselves *in the fashion of an emergency*.

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[3] Editor's Note - *Big Brother Brasil* 11 was the eleventh edition of the reality show that ran on Rede Globo, from January 11th thru March 29th 2011. Endemol own the right to the show. São Paulo natural Maria Helena Jurado Melillo won the competition, receiving R$1,5 million.

2.Designing possibilities: still traditional communities

For several sciences, and sociology in particular, the ideal of communitarian structure opposed to the concrete existence of the structure of society as a place or moment capable of producing an environment of greater confraternization among individuals. The more vigorous ideas regarding community structure have come from this confrontation between two orders. However, we currently diagnose the appearance of a proposal based mainly of the impossibility of the persistence of the capitalist model as applied so far. This new scenario has been proposed by authors of several areas, but surprisingly also among economists, like André Lara Resende in his interview on the *O Globo* newspaper (Thedim, 2012: 37), quoting another defender of the proposal, Australian environmentalist Paul Gilding, in his book *The Great Disruption*[4].

These are not new or even *revolutionary* authors. In fact, a deep question that our text intends to bring up can be summarized as follows: a great deal of the reinterpretation of the last century's communitarian thinking, that is the attempt to analyze structure within current scenarios, is not referenced by new prophets and defenders of the communitarian scope and all of its theme. The first big excuse says that the communitarian structure, as seen through the prism of sociology, is excessively connected to questions that could be calculated as dogmatic in current times, be it the spatiality, or the excessive connection between members, or even the cast of obligations that links have with the group's thinking.

Psychologically, another question emerges, since with a scenario of such uncertainty even as far as the survival of the human species, it seems vital that theories and thoughts never before imagined be sought. The hypothesis is that, by inserting current orders like the technological questions in given reflections, one could describe again the *status quo* and broaden the possibilities of solutions.

In this way, even though this article does not intend to retake the path of the concept of community, it is inevitable to mention the thinkers that took such a course, since its consolidation from the sociology with Tonnies and Durkheim. The present investigation intends to trace the path that offers the most consistency to the hypothesis that, on the

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[4] GILDING, Paul. *The great disruption – why the climate crisis*. NY: St. Martin´s Press, 2012.

horizon, counterpoised to the semiosis of the raft of the *Méduse*, designs a community established by the ties and signs of affection. It is supposed that the community structure moves in the direction of exits for the *ruse* present in current times.

Thus, it makes sense to reexamine some proposals defended by Canadian communitarian Charles Taylor in the early 1990s. A simple statement such as "We can't abolish the market, but nor can we organize ourselves exclusively through markets" (1994: 117) makes it clear that the worries of those discussed in the excessive concentration of what he christened *instrumental reason*, that is, distancing from the base questions for the life and survival of individuals, such as ecology. Taylor already predicted that the inefficiency of small groups during the last century's fight against the threats to species and natural reserves was due to the inexistence of a *collective consciousness*.

The question brought by Taylor and other neocommunists was at the core of existence itself, far beyond mere access to consumer goods and the latest technological advances. In a way, these reflections have put into current context a meaning of more public responsibility towards the question. It reality, it is a more engaged posture than that predicted by Christopher Lash in the 1980s, in which he named as a rhetoric of crisis, promoted by the media through movies, magazines, books, music and news that were able to cause the exact opposite of an actual concern and mobilizing action. The excessive concentration of themes, starting during the 1960s in the United States, "weakens the idea of crisis and makes us indifferent to pleas based on the assertion that some kind of emergency requires our attention" (Lash, 1987: 54). The solution, according to Lash, is that the subjects of energy, weapons and the environment should go beyond the scope of technical questions, by the managers of the crisis, and should be dealt with politically, cooperatively and democratically – that is, by the citizen.

This makes the concept of citizenship strategic. It's worth remembering that this concept, as we know it, appears in a historical context rife with transformation of the traditional power, that is, the changes in medieval society into the modern era, at the moment in which measures were installed that constituted the new social order destined to replace slave work with free work. To Habermas (1998: 144), urban bourgeois was

67

responsible for the transformation of royal subjects into citizens. This moment is important because all rights that constitute citizenship go through enormous changes, always focused on the insertion of the individual into the social structure. Marshall's conceptualization (1997) is rather direct because it understands citizenship as a universal status, enriched by rights and regulated by contracts. To him, "different status, associated to class, function and family was substituted by the unique status of citizenship, which offered a basis of equality over with the structure of inequality was built" (Ibid: 79-80).

The concept of the social contract is too costly for the implementation of modern citizenship. We can say this because it is known that man's rights are an artificial invention, born from the social and political relations that man establishes in society, since they are not born equal or free. Man's rights are a historical creation, a social and political construct realized from structural alterations in society and almost always the product of fights and social struggles contrary to the upholding of archaic orders.

However, the constitution of rights, as comprehensive as it may be, had a partial view of the social structure and does not guarantee the effective presence of citizens. It is important to emphasize – especially since the birthplace of the idea of citizenship is the bundling of rights – that certain authors such as Michael Walzer (1998) and Charles Taylor (1993), after investigating the rule of law in societies, contest the ethical neutrality of right, allowing themselves to consider that the rule of law should also be responsible for the promotion of *good life*.

This perspective is important, especially in societies like the Brazilian one, where an excessive concentration of wealth and major social imbalances exists. Within this context, social insertion is considered a basic starting point, falling short of the structure of social contracts and legal dictates of all jurisprudence of the collective rights. It is understood here that the core role of the State towards collectives in what is considered a duty is that of guaranteeing conditions of a dignified existence for all individuals.

This discussion is still open in view of the enormous zones of exclusion in third world countries such as Brazil. What constitutes citizenship can be clearly expressed in

68

an excerpt from the book by rapper Fiel. He develops the idea of *citizenship of exception*: "being a citizen is having the right to liberty, life, property, equality, political rights, summing up, civil rights. (…) Citizenship in Brazil is poppycock!" (Fiel, 2011: 69). Following this, Fiel describes a series of everyday situations of an inhabitant of a shantytown in Rio de Janeiro, demonstrating the presence/absence of the State and the challenges to access basic services like a sewage system or even mail delivery. The rapper ran a community radio, recently closed. It has now found a new lair on the Internet, which is free on the Morro Santa Maria, where he lives. The *élan* is not the same, seeing as many of the people, despite having computers at home, are unaware of its new medium.

This example shows how hard it is to work nowadays in Brazil with a theme that deals with citizenship, community and communication, since the legal issues, legislation, market flows and its idiosyncrasies, are all mixed into determining the individuals way of life, making them simultaneously live with orders that definitively should not belong to the current historical stage of civilization. While recognizing this ambiguous grounds of existence, the feeling of active citizenship however, is that of the need to advance towards other perspectives, beyond the drive of survival.

One cannot ignore what Aristotle predicted – a proposition developed by the communitarian Alasdair MacIntyre (1993) – regarding Greek citizenship, arguing that what was truly important was the access to a good life. The one in which men can deliberate about the merits of moral excellency, enjoy political participation, share common goods and decide about their uses. This is considered the stage after the supply of minimal necessities for survival.

Maybe it's exactly this characteristic, integral insertion in public life, which marks the concept of citizenship – the connection of communication and community. The conjugation of *citizenship*, *communication* and *community* imposes comprehension of the communicative process acting beyond its media format, rescuing the etymological conception of the search for common action, a trace that defines communitarian structure according to Robert Esposito when he aggregates duty to the next person. Together communication, citizenship and community go towards the

69

realization of their destiny: the search for the common good.

3. Present time and possible communitarian forms

Is his work *The Sociological Tradition*, Nisbet references Georg Simmel's qualification as *the Freud of Society*:

> In the same way that Freud dedicates to states and processes that, in the individual's unconscious, are underlying to the conscious thought and orient him, Simmel dedicates to the "unconscious" relations of social order, the dyads, triads and other eternal elements that are part of the social ties that, as the individual's unconscious, have a deep effect on the structure and evolution of more encompassing social associations (Nisbet, 1984: 128).

Simmle's analogy with Freud is possible due to the notion of community, which appears with great force in simmelian microsociology. Nisbet says:

> His study of groups like the dyad or triad, or yet social ties like friendship, obedience or loyalty should be faced as a research of the molecular constituting elements of society, that is, the smallest unities that the analysis of institutions and associations that can be brought to light (Ibid.: 127).

These are the same communitarian aspects seen as imperceptible processes that Muniz Sodré notices within a

> communicational approach of social discourse (in which "communication" is taken as meaning "ontologically ample", looking for linguistic regularities of production of meaning in subjective and affective characteristic aspects (apprehensible through reflective judgement, of appreciation and evalutation) which, in several cases, happen before the discourse and meaning. Aesthetics, centered in the Kantian idea of *common sense* (2006: 92),
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> uma abordagem comunicacional do discurso social (em que "comunicação" seja tomada num sentido "ontologicamente amplo", buscando as regularidades linguísticas da produção de sentido nos aspectos de caráter subjetivo e afetivo (apreensíveis por juízos reflexivos, de apreciação e avaliação) que, em inúmeros casos, antecedem ao discurso e ao sentido. A estesia ou estética, centrada na ideia kantiana do *senso comum* (2006: 92),

constitutes for him a starting point for the legitimization of not only acceptable knowledge, but good life and fair (ethics) in a community.

Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo's idea (2003) about communication assumes an affectionate community, kept by an agreement of tastes about the problem of collective voice and sensation division. Even more so, starting from Kant, he reveals himself fully heideggerian when he states that "affectivity is not an accident that should be put beside a purely theoretical vision of things" (Vattima, 1971: 39), for being a constitutive aspect of human openness to the world. He also says:

> If the affectionate situation is something that we find without being able to give it reason, the conclusion will be that it puts us in front of the fact that our original way of taking in and

70

comprehending the world is something whose foundations escape us, without being, on the other hand, a transcendental characteristic of a 'pure' reason, since affectivity is precisely the deepest thing each one of us has, the most individual and changing thing (Same).

We can assume, and this is the central object of reflection in which we associate ourselves to both authors, that the affectionate link seems to assume the vectorization of the relation between individuals based in greater part by this determiner than by the traditional ties of kindred, blood, territory and even law. With this new scenario in front of us, what does it mean to speak of community? And more: does its presence in current society means the effective concern with the common existence, beyond the merely legal and political agenda aspects?

On the other hand, the problem is still the one detected by Muniz Sodré, that is, the determination regarding the real sensitive nature in the processes of communication or information. There is almost no more doubt that communication is a new kind of productive force, as analytical knowledge that the strategies of discourse and sensibility that multiply themselves are a decisive part of production and that even ethical action can be defined as creative communication.

It is worth looking back at Sodré's reflection:

there has not yet happened an evaluation of the depth that the affectionate dimension has in what has been called the passage of "sensorial-motor" (characterized by the energetic intervention in the body of work) to the "sensorial-sign", which is understood as the displacement of active body awareness to the gestural of interpretation and sign control (especially in its indicial form) of technical devices. In other words, the passage from "metallurgy" (here, a metaphor for the production understood only as the realization of matter in substancialist means) to "semiurgy" (Sodré, 2006: 72).

Maybe we cannot think about community in terms of the traditional meaning any longer, especially in the way focused on relevance and locality, one of the forms predicted by Ferdinant Tönnies (1979) alongside community of kindred and community of spirit. We cannot leave out of our consideration, however, that currently in some places in the country, the word community replaces *favela*. It is usual in self-reference "I am from a community" by people who inhabit these popular spaces, more so in a meaning of belonging than a series of factors beyond the territorial. It is implied in this self-reference the meaning of belonging as a way of existence, a gang, a tribe, going towards that to which French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1987) refers.

It is possible that the idea of *community of spirit* could reveal with greater clarity

71

traces of what intends to be understood as the current community. A communitarian structure that has a dialogue with the scheme proposed by Esposito, in which duty and task for the next could be elements of connection. However, it should be strongly considered the possibility of linking in which affection, sympathy, equality of interests and sharing define the contacts. To understand that this format be uncommitted with the historical reality does constitute a basic premise. There is still much to be investigated in this sense, and this is configured as the prerogative from now on: to remove the curtains of characteristics and profile that which we are naming *community of affection*.

4. Drafts of a "community of affection"

"Community can be the place where individual particularities are defended and valued, where the conversion of all of us into 'social illiterate' is avoided" (Barcellona: 1992: 123). Pietro Barcellona's proposal is another of many that were present in the early 1990s, when it was already gleaned that, not only the apparatus of consumption, but also legal universalism and the artificiality of right, had postulated what we should be capable of seeking together: the concrete possibility of what he suggests and names as *common ground* and that with every day become the imperative of living together with respect to alterity.

In this sense, going back to the thought Roberto Esposito (1998) develops in the introduction to his book *Communitas* may help trace the road we intend to build. Esposito starts from the idea that, so far, we have been unable to think about community outside of an essentialist way. We have been thinking about the *being in common* as a body of identity; an identity given by the sharing of a property. In this perspective, what defines the group is what it has in common, property, be it a characteristic of individuals, be it territory or customs.

In the attempt to break free from this essentialist perspective, his proposal deals with a rupture from modern political language of philosophy itself. And the starting point that transposes it to a different notion of community he finds in the etymology of the word *community*, the Latin term *communitas*, formed by *cum* and *munus*. The word *cum* means *with*. He explains that *cum* is what puts some in front of others, some in relation to others – it's what propels us in the experience of being together. Therefore, *cum* is that which links, what connects the *munus*.

Munus, on the other hand, has three possible meanings, all related to the idea of duty, obligation, burden, function. They are *onus*, *officium* and *donum* (onus, service

72

and gift or donation). As such, *munus* expresses itself in the relation of men with each other established by *cum*, a reciprocal recognition, a common engagement, a kind of communion. Esposito considers that which the members of a community have in common is not something positive, such as a good or a property, not even a belonging or an essence. To him, what they have in common is a *duty*, a *job*, a *debt*. What unites people is a lack that obligates them to comply to certain tasks. That is, the debt all have to each other, and this obligation is born of lack, of emptiness, of the fear of each of us.

According to Esposito, still in the modern age, *immunitas* appears (title of another of his books) in opposition to the idea of *communitas*. To him, *immunis* is that which has no debt or obligation in relation to other men. He considers it the gratitude that makes a person to feel indebted and to pay with a donation. This is no longer a characteristic of modern man. Esposito argues that modern individuals are *immunis* and are devoid of the debt that unites them to each other, free of the contact that threatens their identity and individuality and of the possibilities that exposes them to a possible conflict with his neighbor.

The idea of gratitude as the link among individuals also developed by another Italian author, RAI journalist and political scientist, Marcello Veneziani, in his 1999 book reedited in 2010, *Comunitari o liberal: la prossima alternativa?*. After a path trying to define each of the two orders, he presents a chapter in which he deals with the ethics of honor and generosity.

Veneziani argues that, despite the meaning of honor being the core of communitary ethics, just like generosity is liberal ethics' good conscience, in truth one doesn't preclude the other: honor and generosity. He proposes a beautiful game from the present feelings in each of the two ethics. To him, honor evokes responsibility, merit. It is an aristocratic feeling and opposes humility, which is a Christian virtue. *Humilis* comes from *húmus* and evokes ground, horizontality. And *honor* indicates the vertical vocation, separating itself from the ground. Thus, the author summarizes: honor is a vertical feeling from the community horizon; generosity is a horizontal feeling of an existence based on subjectivity, with foundations in the subject.

The author deals with what communitarian ethics is – he works with the question

73

of *honor* with an interesting focus, seeing it as the appearance and form (Veneziani, 1999: 65-66). It draws a distinction in what he names *Ethics of honor*, that possesses a strict correlation between rights and duties; *Ethics of generosity*, in direct reference to human rights; *Communitarian ethics*, which for him transcends the rights of citizens and also composes their duties, and is based on the principle of responsibility; finally, *Liberal ethics*, as the one that goes beyond the rights of the citizen, conceiving them as those considered human.

Veneziani argues that the reference parameters for society according to communitaria ethics are the tradition and majority. He laments that currently this is a pale drawing over what composes honor, reminding us that the same is born with politics, being the first political feeling (Ibid.: 74), while generosity is, to him, an apolitical feeling, in that it abolishes limits and conflicts.[5] It states that generosity takes down limits and denies conflict, while politics evokes alterity, us and them, while generosity is born from the overcoming of these limits. Finally, after quoting Hannah Arendt (Ibid.: 74), to whom altruism cannot be a political virtue, he concludes by exposing how a new communitarian culture should be, in which both ethical proposals should be reinterpreted (honor and generosity).

In the effort to define the nature of what we will name as *community of affection*, it is necessary to reinforce that the current context of technological densification and the extremely high flow of information from new connection mechanisms compose it in a decisive manner. Multiple forms of message exchange offer a specific conformation to this new format of being together – what is certainly not the same as *Radeau de la Méduse*. This context should be considered as something defining and definitive for the current age, not only in what refers to connections among subjects, but also in its own way of putting itself in front of the collectivity. In the shipwreck of the old *social*, technology and consumption, by themselves, do not lead to the rescue of values and the indispensable affectionate dimension to human connection. In the raft of the Méduse, community should be an emergence, but instead resulted in absence. We finish this proposition with the same authors with which we began the text, taking their assertion

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[5] Veneziani reminds us that limits com from *limes*, the wall of *polis* and, *polemos,* the conflict.

as a guide for this:

> The hypermodern individual is not satisfied with the pleasures of consumption: he makes it a point of acting, expressing himself, giving his opinion, participating of public life, yet in a different way from antique militant politics, which demanded the sacrifice of private life and freedom of individual opinion. (...) What is search for on the Internet is a kind of democracy of expression. In which citizens can intervene directly, a democracy of vigilance of powers by civil society, no longer monopolized by journalists, media and political parties (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011: 146).

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