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Over the Rainbow.
The Affective Turn in Social
Sciences and its Political Effects

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Introduction. The Affective Turn in Social Sciences and its Political Effects

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By affective turn in the social sciences, the prevailing literature on the subject (Clough and Alley 2007; Seighworth and Gregg 2010) means the overcoming of the Cartesian dualism between res cogitans and res extensa, between mind and nature. In the essays that make up this volume, I address this issue in the wake of Bateson's (1984) research on mind and nature. The path I intend to follow interprets communication (see Habermas 1981) as a specific competence that brings together two main functions: exchange and contact. In the communicative function of exchange, affectivity is possible, dispensable. In the contact function, healthy communication is based on empathy (Ungaro 2017). By empathy (Stein 1985; Ardigò 1988; Maturo 2010) we mean participation in the emotional states of others with the awareness that they are the other's emotions not our own. This participation becomes possible because human emotions, as well specified by Shakespeare in The Merchant of Venice, by the Jungian theory of archetypes and by recent studies on mirror neurons, are shared and therefore can be mirrored and resonated. A proper distance, therefore (Rovatti 2007), allows to practice empathy and is the basis of healthy contact in communication. In the pragmatics of human communication (Watzlawick et alii 1967), the contact function of communication is further specified by the five famous axioms. According to the authors, in fact, it is impossible not to communicate. Therefore, every behavior forms a communicative act. Communication has a content aspect and a relationship aspect, where the latter influences the former in a decisive way. So how I communicate has prevalence over what I communicate. In communication punctuation, i.e., the points of view of the communicants, constitute an inevitable and sometimes vicious circularity.

Consequently, distance from one's own point of view is especially important in the communicative relationship, a distance that takes the form of the ability to meta-communicate, corresponding to the question, for example in an interpersonal relationship, "What is going on between us?" Human communication, moreover, can be expressed in both analog and digital form. This ability is typical of human beings, while machines can communicate in an exclusively digital way and animals in an analogue only way. Finally, human communication, to be effective, is based on complementarity. Therefore, on the necessary alternation between listening and expression. The fact that human communication at the pragmatic level performs a function of emotional contact also has important consequences at the political level. In the essays that make up this volume, this emotional part is treated on three levels. The first concerns the "affective politics" played out by the language of contemporary neo-populism as considered in two cases. That of the Brexit and that of the electoral claims of the 5 Stars Movement in Italy. In both cases, the political communication used targets people's instinctual and emotional spheres. Moreover, this ability to mobilize people's emotions is employed through a medium, the web, which paradoxically allows for a completely de-contextualized expression of one's feelings. It is therefore an amazingly effective emotional mobilization, but completely inauthentic. The second level of analysis is offered by a revisitation in a key of sociology of emotions of the famous treatment by Hanna Arendt (1964) of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. The banality of evil is re-interpreted as the Nazi hierarch's inability to feel his own emotions and to entrust himself, out of a misunderstood sense of protection, to the veneration of the strength of others. The third level of analysis concerns instead the issue of affective attachment. As proved by the study of three Italian cases of mass emergencies, resulting from seismic events, the political problem of reconstruction of devastated territories cannot disregard a work of elaboration of individual and social crises based on the ability to go beyond the affective attachment through the "letting go".

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