

**The City of the Future:
Psychoanalysis and the Social Link**

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“To Be *and* Not to Be: Identity Today”

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Discourses and Practices of Identity between Transformative and Conservative Politics

I've been working on the concept of identity for about fifteen years. I've done empirical research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans - LGBT - movements that in the field of social movement theories have always been considered paradigmatic forms of identity movements, where identity is intended as the fact of sharing a collective identity.

In my research I've always had to deal with this concept of "identity," and mostly to contest it because in fact the concept, the theory, the thought of this concept has during my fieldwork always appeared seriously problematic and very contradictory with the way social actors, and especially LGBT activists, but I would also say LGBT people in general, use it.

While, on the one hand, theories of identity tend to formulate the interrogations that arouse the processes of identification (both individually and collectively) in terms of "who am I" or "who are we," imagining gay or lesbian identities as the result of a process of formation and appropriation of a definition that says, once and for all, precisely, what we are, to claim it or to protect it; on the other, in the political spaces of LGBT movements and organizations, within the community networks, identity has never been formulated in terms of a being of subjects, but in terms of a discourse that expresses in a given context a plural set of practices through which people enter into a dimension of their subjectivity which, in fact, exceeds their singularity. In the use that I have observed and studied, identity is a discourse and a practice; the affirmation of collective identities is what builds an "other" of the subject and not, as unfortunately it is often understood, a "same" of the subject. Discourses and practices of identity are therefore what in the local context, the local context of the city, I would add, become instruments for the construction of new, unexpected, political spaces or, in this specific case, spaces and subjectivities that have always been invisibilized. Discourses and practices of LGBT identities are instruments for the construction of community spaces that do not enclose people – another commonplace that is difficult to eradicate – but open to new possibilities in the city, new intersectional spaces, between people and between social groups.

In the history of LGBT movements, in France or in Italy, for instance, so-called identity politics, that is, the affirmation of the existence of particular and minority subjectivities with their history or culture, their spaces and their communities, has produced plural political discourses and practices, open and in continuous transformation. If we consider the innovations introduced in the field of the rights of formal couples in France, we see that the claims for the recognition of homosexual couples have transformed family law also for heterosexual couples, introducing a legal form, the

Pacs, which did not exist before, and removing the institutional monopoly of marriage. In the case of Italy and the case of civil unions reserved for homosexual couples, the identity politics here is not that of homosexual couples' claims, but that of the legislator who, in order to defend the institutional monopoly of marriage, actually draws up an "identity" law (and, I would add, a discriminatory one).

This comparison between the two levels on which the research work is based, the theoretical and the empirical, has led me to question this paradigm of LGBT movements as identity movements and, in the end, to question the paradigm of identity that has intensively occupied studies on social movements since the 1970s. LGBT movements and LGBT subjectivities have always been considered paradigmatic examples of the identity paradigm, insofar as they were, and still are, considered movements and subjectivities that place at the center of their existence the fact of defining themselves as particular or different, as a minority compared to an undefined reality (or that does not need to be defined) universal, evident, taken for granted, majoritarian, that is the "right" one, the "normal" one, the "straight" one. Yet this identity paradigm is not based on the empirical reality of minority discourses and practices, but rather on a majoritarian ideological assumption.

In this sense, we can distinguish between two paradigms or two identity models, the first one for which the affirmation of identity produces unprecedented discourses and practices, critique, dissidence, countercultural and anti-normative discourses and practices (which does not mean that they cannot create new norms), in other words, discourses and practices that work for the transformation of the social; and the second one, defined by the heterosexual paradigm, which (as we have seen in the case of civil unions in Italy) is driven by a logic of conservation of the tradition and, above all, of reproduction of the identical, not so much the reproduction of an identity, but of an identity model which is the model of gender binarism, of compulsory heterosexuality, of the so-called "natural" family and, today, I would add, of the defense of the racial (white) borders of the nation.

I am not arguing that transformation is a "natural" characteristic of LGBT people and that conservation is a "natural" characteristic of heterosexual people; the argument that I would like to defend is that there is not a unique meaning for the concept of identity, which is commonly understood as the production of "ghettos," the meaning that is generally attributed to minority groups. On the contrary, there are two identity paradigms, one introduced by minority discourses and practices that make identity an instrument of transformation (think about how the concept of queer and queer politics have elaborated critical theories that have allowed us to think about the logic of power of our societies), and the other informed by what Monique Wittig called the "straight mind," the one that perceives itself as universal, based on the heterosexual paradigm that promotes, on the contrary, conservative discourses and practices against those policies of transformation produced by minority LGBT subjectivities, but also feminist and anti-racist subjects.

This analysis allows us to better understand the historical context that we currently live in in Italy (but not only there), especially the political sequence begun with the elections of March 4, 2018 and with the Di Maio-Salvini government.

To give you a more precise idea of what I mean by political sequence, I would like to mention a statement by the Minister for the Family, Lorenzo Fontana:

"Dominant propaganda calls into question and weakens the natural family; they tell us that immigration serves to fill the gap in demographic decline. Then, on the one hand, there is the weakening of the family and the fight for gay marriage and the theory of gender in schools; on the other hand, there is the mass immigration that we endure and the simultaneous emigration of our young people abroad. These are all related and interdependent issues, because these factors aim to erase our community and our traditions. The risk is the cancellation of our folk."

What is "our community"? What are "our traditions"? And above all, what is "our folk"? What is this "us"? It is precisely that straight subject that identifies itself with the universal, with what we are, with what we were and with what we must still be, a universal white and heterosexual subject that affirms its identity at the moment when its universality is endangered by the transformations introduced by minority claims and by the presence of migrants, people perceived as strangers to the body of the nation.

To conclude, I would like to argue that identity is not something that lies within subjects, in their interiority, in their being; identity is and has always been a political discourse that has become a critical and creative instrument in the minority genealogy, whereas in the genealogy of the straight paradigm it has returned to being an instrument of reaction and conservation. The wave of nationalist, religious, and neo-fascist populism that is going through Europe is the result of an identity politics that at first allowed a strong and broad mobilization of the base of the fundamentalist Catholic movements, through the cause of the fight against the so-called "ideology of gender," and later led to the alliance of government so well summarized by Minister Fontana, that is, the defense of heterosexual white identity that has brought to light in Italy what I could call a form of Catholic-based neopopulist nationalism, a nationalism, a neopopulism and a Catholicism united precisely by a reactionary and conservative politics of straight identity, an identity that minority politics have today unveiled and have deprived of its universality, of its normality, revealing what in fact it is, that is, a social norm, and today, unfortunately, a political and government program.