

PREFACE

Janus is the ancient Roman two-faced god—the god of the Origin who can also gaze at the End. According to Ovid, who put him on stage in the first book of the *Fasti*,¹ Janus symbolizes the doubleness of things, the passage between inside and outside, the transmutation and determination of the elements emerging from primordial chaos (and “chaos” was, in fact, Janus’s old name). It doesn’t seem out of place to suggest an analogy between the doubled gaze of the mythical god and the political gaze of Carl Schmitt. The German jurist had the same ambivalent capacity to see the two faces of the “political,” the same ability to grasp the passage from formlessness to form, from chaos to order, from war to peace, as well as their fatal reversibility, which is to say, the passage from form to crisis. Schmitt’s theory—a “vision” that was, in his case, also an “experience”—was designed to fit with the double face of the Modern itself. It can face the simultaneous disconnection and co-implication between Idea and contingency that generates and shoots through the Modern; moreover, it can face both the epochal compulsion for order and the impossibility of that order. The wisdom of this twofold gaze allowed Schmitt to see in modern politics both God and the absence of God; it allowed him to think politics as that energy which at once establishes boundaries and transgresses them, which generates not only revolutions but also constitutions, which produces not only decisions but also forms.

Schmitt shared with Janus not only a two-faced gaze but also a two-faced nature: Schmitt was himself double, both in his historical praxis and in his theoretical proposals, suspended between deconstruction and construction, between respect for tradition and boldness. In his continuous oscillation between predictability and unexpected blows,

between banality and sudden strokes of genius, between genealogy and ideology, between system and aphorism, between science and literature, Schmitt is an obligatory rite of passage for anyone who wants to think politics radically.

The bibliography on Schmitt is by now extensive and diverse, ranging from jurisprudence to political theory, from philosophy to the history of ideas. The numerous editions, translations, and collections of his works, the publication of his letters and the existence of specialized journals devoted to him, the many conferences, monographs, and essays that incessantly reinterpret his thought, the polemics that continually arise around his controversial intellectual and political activities, the formation, if not of “schools,” then certainly of hermeneutic currents—all of this demonstrates that Schmitt has today become a classic of political thought (perhaps one of the last). His thought has taken effect in very different modes of reflection on politics, inside of Europe as well as outside of it, leaving a confrontation with his thought inevitable. Albeit with understandable delay, powerful academic apparatuses are now at work on his thought, producing good results with regularity and effectiveness.

All of this increased attention, though, does not mean that there is consensus on the key that can unlock Schmitt’s intellectual work. Even in countries where the attention is more recent (such as the Anglo-Saxon academy, especially in the United States, and the Spanish-speaking world), Schmitt is seen both as a brilliant deconstructionist and as the disquieting father of all conservatives. His thought is valued for its critical edge, but it’s also seen as reactionary and propagandistic ideology. It’s possible to write about Schmitt in order to reject him as the inventor of “homicidal ideas” (not only during his Nazi phase, but also earlier), but also in order to delegitimize any nonliberal thought. Schmitt can also become the object of apologetic unquestioning belief, based on an appreciation of the perennial validity of his ideas. One certainly could place him in a sort of museum of ideas where, visited by specialists, he stays quiet while also remaining the disquieting specimen of a ferocious but now extinct age, in which danger predominated. On the other hand, one could treat him as a ladder that must be thrown away after use, or as a giant on whose shoulder one may climb to look further on.

Before specifying the mode of reading at work in this book—which follows the one I proposed in *Genealogia della politica*²—it’s important

to spell out another consideration. One doesn't do justice to Schmitt's thought by insisting that it be integrated peacefully within a general theory of politics (for example, as a contribution to the understanding of the role of violence and conflict in politics). With this, in fact, one misses its deepest significance, its disquieting and truly revolutionary side. To think politics, especially through Schmitt's categories, implies the awareness that what one is trying to measure touches, in reality, an incommensurable: the awareness, in other words, that the defined—the world of what is rationally knowable—lives alongside and coexists with the undefined and the undefinable (which does not, however, exempt one from seeking to distinguish each “according to its own principles”).³ The claim of this book is that the undefinability and incommensurability against which we struggle, but which at the same time also fascinates us, is the double-sided origin of modern politics. It is this origin, in other words, that accounts for the indetermination of Order, for the absence of God, for violence as the immanent destiny of the “political,” and at the same time, for the modern compulsion to order. The tragic awareness of this origin, and the intellectual stimulant that results, is Schmitt's true legacy. His profound nonhumanistic humanity consisted in his announcement of the radical contingency, and at the same time the epochal necessity, of politics and of its knowledge.

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There are two methodological devices that allow us to read Schmitt properly. The first is to distinguish his “doctrine” from his “thought.” Schmitt's ideological side—which often leads him to attribute to various real historical entities (Jews, liberals, Anglo-Americans, pacifists, and so on) the responsibility for dynamics that logically are part of modernity—should be set apart from his theoretical capacity to radically touch upon the deep structure of the Modern. This is not, of course, a distinction between a mythical veil and a scientific substance: Schmitt's work is born in, and is characterized by, a polemical impulse and an existential positioning that is targeted and militant. It is thanks to this impulse, and this positioning—and not despite it—that Schmitt is capable of a radical analysis of politics. To read Schmitt, one must therefore know how to pass through the perilous path of ideology (enduring, along the way, disturbances and shocks) and to understand that precisely this sometimes precipitates concepts that, far from remaining

stable or clear, are exposed to the structuring and destructuring power of the origin, of conflict, of chaos. Ideology is the “gate of hell” that leads Schmitt to knowledge of the “political,” and it is the dramatic and irritating condition thanks to which Schmitt is not only an ideologue but also an important thinker.

Even though Schmitt certainly can be classified as authoritarian and traditionalist Catholic, as fundamentalist and antimodern, as belonging to the German right wing even before his Nazi phase, and to conservatism after that phase, his thought nevertheless can't be reduced to these categories. He can be grouped under these rubrics both because of his explicit will, and because of the objective articulations of his arguments; he can't because his thought treated his positions (which, in the concrete, sustained his thought as he sought to transform it into “doctrine”) as a sort of propellant or occasion to do more—to arrive at the concepts, to grasp their contingent origin in conflict, to reach their constitutive epochality. It's in this gesture of radicality, which is sometimes only implicit, that we find the properly theoretical valence internal to Schmitt's performances. It's in this movement from ideology to concept and origin that we find the genealogical elements of the “system” that supports Schmitt's otherwise nonsystematic works. And it's for this reason that we, in turn, read him.

Given Schmitt's peculiarities and specificities, and given the true difficulty of deciphering this author beyond his apparent clarity, a second methodological device is necessary: Schmitt must be interpreted by difference, not by analogy or assonance. One should, in other words, underline what distinguishes him from other thinkers, rather than look for similarities. If one chases after the resemblances, one might end up (and this has in fact happened) assimilating Schmitt to the thinkers of the Frankfurt School because of his critique of parliamentarism, or assimilating him to Hayek because he distinguished between liberalism and democracy; one might also mistake him for a reactionary mystic of the Reich, or take him as one of the fathers of American political realism, or confound his decisionism with Benjamin's theological violence. Besides this risk, which is inherent to a strictly systematic exegesis of Schmitt's thought, there is also the risk of using Schmittian categories and methods for orienting thought and practice in the present.

The two essays that open this volume mainly deploy the first of these two devices, exposing the path that allows us to grasp the internal co-

herence of Schmitt's thought in its various phases and in its interweaving of thought and doctrine, of positions and concepts, of doctrine and genealogy. These chapters offer two comprehensive interpretations of Schmitt's thought on modern political form (the State) and its constitutive horizon (political theology as a particular reading of secularization). The third and fourth chapters deploy the second methodological device, distinguishing and differentiating Schmitt from those who are proximate to him and his beliefs. These chapters are dedicated to the complex relations between Schmitt and Machiavelli, and to the intricate interpretive bind that connects Schmitt to Spinoza and Strauss. The last chapter discusses the question of whether Schmitt's thought can help to decipher the global age—a crucial question, because deciding on it requires an evaluation of his thought as a whole.

The general thesis that governs this reading of Schmitt is that Schmitt's complexity is internal to the complexity of the modern epoch. Schmitt offers a political theory of the nexus—of the compulsion but also, at the same time, the impossibility—that links origin with form, energy with order (decisionism, the “political”). He also offers an anti-progressive epochal theory of modern history as secularization (political theology) and an antiuniversalist theory of political space as *nomos*. The result is a genealogy of the Modern—of modern European politics—that became possible during its early twentieth-century crisis. This is a genealogy that consists in grasping the other side of the Modern, in saying the unsaid (the origin) of its *logos* and narrations, in interpreting it not according to its customary motives (the conflict between subject, society, State, the ideological struggles) but according to the profound logic of its origin and its end. Schmitt's theory is, in this way, a double gaze on the double face of the Modern; but for this same reason, once his thought is taken outside of the horizon of European modernity, it risks losing its concreteness, losing contact with any genealogy, leaving only its doctrinaire side, exposing it to the risk of being reduced to obvious considerations on the necessity of the enemy and of order, on the bond between identity and hostility.

This is why, even though Schmitt's thought may appear suitable for the global age, dominated as it is by identitarian religious conflicts and by the compulsion to security, his ability to explain the dynamics of the present is actually poor and vague (aside from his enduring ability to demystify certain forms of universalism). Dragged to a space and time

other than that of the Modern, Schmitt's concreteness is lost. By making reference to his categories, the present would appear as a lack and as disorder deprived of morphogenetic capacity. The force of Schmittian thought resides in its capacity to reach into the interior of any crisis—into the void internal to order—and grasp there the possibility of a new order, the constituent power of conflict. In the global age, by contrast, Schmitt can tell us only that conflict has become nonsensical, and that order is now little more than a conservative and restorative call to achieve what “must be.” From the viewpoint of method, the movement that runs from ideology to concept, and from concept to genealogy, has vanished: we no longer can turn to the Janus gaze to frame the origin and the end of global phenomena and of the global subjects, which perhaps can no more be deciphered through modern “genealogized” concepts, and which wait instead to be grasped through a different sort of knowledge, with a different categorical approach—one that doesn't limit itself to the maintenance of chaotic, conflictual movements.

To conclude, if Schmitt's thought is the passage, seen from two sides, between order and conflict, and then again between form and crisis, then this passage shouldn't bring us back to its starting point. That would make it a labyrinth or maze, a place of loss and destruction, a tautological and pointless drift between Origin and End, between conflict and the exigency of order. Schmitt's thought is especially exposed to the risk of going nowhere when it's decontextualized with respect to the horizon of modernity. And this is why these essays aim not only to grasp the power of Schmitt's twofold gaze, but also to underline the necessity of surpassing him in order to move toward a new space—the necessity, in short, of posing the question of passing beyond the political theory of the passage.

Schmitt's distance from any political sensibility centered on the individual and its rights (and not just those of the private individual) rendered Schmitt's thought marginal relative to the liberal mainstream of modern politics. This was a fruitful marginality, since it enabled Schmitt to train a radically different gaze on the political logics of modernity. Today, however, the very different political logics of the global age consign this gaze to outdatedness [*inattualità*] and disorientation. Today, the question is not Schmitt's thought, but what exceeds that thought. After all, even a Janus gaze can't see beyond the end.