Introduction

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What is charisma? Ever since Max Weber's theory of the concept, it has stimulated controversy.[1] Is charisma a personal quality or capability, a "gift of grace," as the Greek word χάρισμα indicates?[2] Or is it psychological manipulation used by certain personalities to obtain the obedience and loyalty of others? Or is charisma merely a projection cast on the former by admirers and followers? Common usage borrows from all three approaches, identifying the charismatic figure as one who displays a personal attractiveness or forcefulness leading to popular devotion. But it leaves open what exactly is at play when charisma is attributed to a person. In politics the absence of "charismatic personalities" has often been deplored. But the rise of charismatic leaders has brought disastrous consequences, from Napoléon to Adolf Hitler. Today, charisma in politics is met with a mix of fascination and suspicion: while promising unmediated relations between the ruler and the ruled, it unleashes the dangerous dynamics of populism and the cult of personality.

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1. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischoff, Talcott Parsons, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 241–45. Hereafter cited as *ES*.

2. *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, ed. Committee on Bible Translation (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984). All biblical quotations come from this edition.

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As a form of political rule, charismatic leadership is founded entirely on the relation between the charismatic personality and his—rarely her—supporters. The charismatic leader is an individual who emerges "out of nowhere," rising to power through his own initiative and the acclamation of a group of followers. His power is self-acquired, not inherited, and is essentially bound to his person. Its basis therefore seems attributable less to rational insight or consensus than to an affective bond, a bond between persons, even if articulated by the charismatic leader's "mission." Charisma appears to exercise a form of power that has often been likened to seduction, hypnosis, or manipulation, drawing on the hopes, fears, dreams, and aspirations of a community of adherents. More than any other political form, charismatic leadership privileges affective and imaginary impulses. Charisma is more about the feelings, projections, expectations, and beliefs of a society or an audience than about its actual interests. It may be just this irrationality and affectivity of charismatic leadership that accounts for its enduring appeal as well as for the catastrophes that it brings forth.

Power's Empty Place

Notwithstanding the existence of charismatic personalities in antiquity such as Caesar, Brutus, and Alexander, charismatic leadership as a political form begins with the downfall of kings. The French Revolution and the beheading of Louis XVI ended a long tradition of sovereignty based on the king as the incarnation of the unity of a social body. The royal embodiment of social unity and political power was never merely a "head of State" but—as Ernst H. Kantorowicz shows in *The King's Two Bodies* (1957)—also a representation of Christ, the incarnation of a "body politic" both immortal and holy.[3] The king's person was therefore an object of permanent aesthetic glorification, a "glorious body," celebrated in literature, history, and art.[4] The trial and execution of Louis XVI aimed at the destitution of monarchy itself behind that of the king.[5] Monarchy has since lost its authority as the sole model of legitimate sovereign power, and its theological and aesthetic underpinnings seem equally lost to modernity. With popular sovereignty, the representation of power by one person becomes obsolete or at least highly problematic. The idea of the "people"

3. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

4. Louis Marin, "The Portrait of the King's Glorious Body," in *Food for Thought*, trans. Mette Hjort (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 189–242.

5. Friedrich Balke, "Wie man einen König tötet oder: Majesty in Misery," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* 75, no. 4 (2001): 657–79; Albrecht Koschorke, *Der fiktive Staat: Konstruktionen des politischen Körpers in der Geschichte Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2007), 219–40.

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as sovereign contradicts the consecration of one person as the embodiment of political and social unity. As Claude Lefort points out, the fall of the king created an "empty place of power" at the heart of the political: "The modern democratic revolution is best recognized in this abdication: no longer is power linked to a body. Power appears as an empty place and those who exercise it as mere mortals who occupy it only temporarily."[6] Modern political imagination revolves around this empty center and the "disembodiment" of power.

Substitutes for the "king's glorious body" (Louis Marin) as a representation of society have since been found in two strangely opposed and yet mutually indispensable images: the great man and the crowd. On the one hand, the nineteenth century is obsessed by the question of the great man, as shown by the cult it offered to political leaders (and also to philosophers, scientists, and artists). How can collective historical processes be "authored" by an individual? How can the individual influence and shape history? G. W. F. Hegel, in his *Philosophy of History* (1825–26), sees the "world-historical individual" as nothing but the "executor" of the "universal spirit" (Geschäftsführer des Weltgeists): "They do . . . know and will their own enterprise, because the time is ripe for it, and it is already inwardly present. Their business is to know this universal principle, which is the necessary and culminating stage in the development of their world, to make it their end, and to devote their energy to its realization."[7] Whereas for Hegel the great man is more instrument than agent in the course of collective historical processes, Thomas Carlyle's influential treatise *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) acclaims the exceptional nature of a lone heroic individual. For Carlyle, as well as for Jacob Burckhardt and Friedrich Nietzsche, the heroic personality acts independently of the cultural and historical situation surrounding him. Innovation and change are determined by the superior ideas of great men: "All things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world." The unity of society, Carlyle concludes, is thus essentially based on its recognition of the great man's achievements: "Society is founded on Hero-worship."[8] In the discourse on "historical greatness," the hero, the founding father, the great leader or thinker has become the monolithic and meritocratic replacement of the king as the "head" and

6. Claude Lefort, "The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism," in *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), 303.

7. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet, 5th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 85, 83.

8. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. H. D. Traill (London: Chapman and Hall, 1904), 61, 12.

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center of society. Consequently, the political community can maintain its coherence only by gathering around a great individual, its internal bonds served by a common worship or acclamation of their leader.

On the other hand, diametrically opposed to that of the great man, a counterimage appears: the specter of the raging modern crowd. In the essays of early sociological authors such as Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon, but also in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe, the urban crowd emerges as the unsettling symbol of the formlessness, irrationality, and dispersion of modern society. Modernity, as Le Bon declared, is the "era of crowds"; "the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase."[9] Crowds form and dissolve spontaneously; they are an ephemeral unity of the many, eliminating the individual's ability to reason and control:

> The sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes. A collective mind is formed, doubtless transitory, but presenting very clearly defined characteristics. The gathering has thus become what, in the absence of a better expression, I will call . . . a psychological crowd. It forms a single being, and is subjected to the *law of the mental unity of crowds*. (*PM*, 2)

The crowd forms a unity that is paradoxically a condensate of social dispersion and *dis-unity*, an instable, hysterical, aimless, and violent mass permanently threatened by disaggregation and decay.

At the convergence of these two central political phantasms of the nineteenth century—the crowd and the great man—a new figure arises to fill the empty place of power: the self-made leader, the man insoluble in the crowd yet able to steer it and to control its violent dynamics. Not a king issued from royal pedigree, and not the headless crowd itself—but an emanation of it. Ideally, the modern leader is a man (rarely a woman) "of the people," thus originating nowhere. By virtue of extraordinary talents, lucky coincidences, and personal ambition, he obtains social respectability and compliance from his followers. Long before Weber, crowd psychology from Cesare Sighele to Tarde and Le Bon pondered the social dynamics that determine this process of acclamation. What is the relation of the leader to the crowd? How does he develop from an indistinct subject to an agent able to manipulate the dynamics of modern masses? And what precisely are those dynamics? As Urs Stäheli shows in

9. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), xv. Hereafter cited as *PM*.

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his article, the figure of the leader can take very different forms. Whereas for Le Bon the crowd's leader is a randomly appointed helmsman of mass dynamics (*PM*, 118), for Tarde he is nothing but a spontaneous excrescence of the crowd's will, emerging from the swell only to disappear with it.[10] For psychiatrists such as Hippolyte Bernheim and Wladimir von Bechterew, hypnotic suggestion empowers the leader to mass manipulation.[11] Sigmund Freud eventually recognizes in him an oedipal father figure, repressive, violent, and always in danger of being toppled and killed by his sons in the primal horde.[12] The distinctive mark of the leader, however, is not necessarily an individual trait but an elusive quality attributed to him: "prestige," as Tarde and Le Bon call it—something perceived only by his followers that can be withdrawn by these at any given moment. Crowd psychology poses the enigma of the leader's gyroscopic role in the tumultuous momentum of modern crowds—without satisfyingly modeling either this role or its determinants.

Theology or Sociology: Weber's Theory of Charisma

Weber's highly influential theory of charisma is an answer to the questions about the origins and functions of leadership that were discussed at the end of the nineteenth century. But instead of drawing on such concepts as Tarde and Le Bon's prestige, terms in some respects quite close to what he will define as "charisma," Weber, surprisingly, resorts to a concept taken from theology. The term is first found in Philo Judaeus, denoting a "gift of God,"[13] and then taken up by Saint Paul, most prominently in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. Paul clearly uses the term to describe highly specific gifts granted by God to all members of the Christian community, gifts that both individualize them—each one has a different gift—and bind them to the community:

> Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. . . . There are different kinds of gifts [χαρισματων], but the same Spirit. . . . Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to

10. See Gabriel Tarde, *Penal Philosophy* (1890), trans. Rapelje Howell (Boston: Little, Brown, 1912); and Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation* (1890), trans. Elsie Clews Parsons (New York: Holt, 1903).

11. Hippolyte Bernheim, *Hypnotisme suggestion psychothérapie: Études nouvelles* (1891) (Paris: Fayard, 1995); Wladimir von Bechterew, *Die Bedeutung der Suggestion im sozialen Leben* (Wiesbaden: Bergmann, 1905).

12. Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth, 1981), 67–143.

13. David Norman Smith, "Faith, Reason, and Charisma: Rudolf Sohm, Max Weber, and the Theology of Grace," *Sociological Inquiry* 68, no. 1 (1998): 36.

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> another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Cor. 12:1–11)

What is striking in Paul's use of the term is that it signifies "gifts"—certain qualities and abilities—given by God "for the common good" of the Christian *ecclesia*. These donations are remarkable insofar as they integrate the gifted into the group and make them part of "one body":

> The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. . . . The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you." . . . There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Cor. 12:12–27)

For Paul, charisma is clearly a personal quality, but a quality that has both a spiritual and a social function: it binds the qualified individual both to God and to other Christians. By quoting the Roman allegory of the body as the image of political unity, the theological concept of charisma intertwines the political with the spiritual: the gift of grace is given to every individual, not to single out him or her as exceptional but to bind him or her to the community, the "body of Christ." Charisma is thus a concept originating in political theology, linking two forms of relation (or declaring them as *one*): the social relation of men to men and the relation of every man to God.

Weber openly admits that he borrows the concept from the Lutheran jurist Rudolf Sohm, whom he credits with having "worked out the sociological character" (*ES*, 1112) of charismatic rule in the early Christian church. But to make a sociological concept of charisma, Weber explicitly removes it from its politico-theological context. For Weber, charisma designates a political form, which he then analyzes at maximal distance from its spiritual origin, repeatedly emphasizing that he employs it neutrally, without passing judgment (*wertfrei*) (*ES*, 1111). Even though Weber strongly associates charisma with religious leaders and garnishes his explanation with biblical quotations, he does not sub-

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scribe to religion's imperative of faith or, therefore, to the claim to authority that the charismatic leader would impose. His approach is entirely descriptive and typological. Defining "charismatic domination" as one of three forms of "legitimate domination," Weber focuses on the differences between charisma and the other two forms, defined as "traditional-patriarchal" and "rational-bureaucratic" domination.

Whereas the other two types of domination are associated with economic and political stability, charisma is found in situations of social crisis and catastrophe. The rise of the charismatic leader is propelled by the crisis—be it war, civil war, religious dissent, or political anomy—as he can propose an issue beyond the reach of traditional structures. Thus charisma, Weber emphasizes, is "in this purely empirical and value-free sense . . . the specifically creative revolutionary force of history" (*ES*, 1117). The charismatic leader breaks away from old institutions and social bounds, the unconditional promoter of a self-given "mission," in the name of which he receives the acclamation of his followers: "Charisma is self-determined and sets its own limits. Its bearer seizes the task for which he is destined and demands that others obey and follow him by virtue of his mission. If those to whom he feels sent do not recognize him, his claim collapses" (*ES*, 1112–13). Weber, however, contends that this "mission," the leader's ideological or spiritual message, is not nearly enough to keep the followers' loyalty. Taking its origin and legitimacy from a crisis, charismatic rule is itself in permanent crisis: the leader's power is ephemeral and fragile, in need of repeated success. The leader depends as much on the acclamation of his group as it depends on him for direction. The only way the charismatic leader can prolong his power is to transform charismatic domination into one of the two other political forms. Charisma cannot maintain itself. The power derived from it, according to Weber, can be maintained only through its "routinization" (*Veralltäglichung*) into bureaucratic or patriarchal-monarchical political forms, either by establishing an apparatus of laws and officials or by elaborating monarchic rules of succession. Weber actually dedicates large parts of *Economy and Society* less to "pure charisma" than to this process of transformation, in which charisma is "routinized"—one may also say "profaned"—into more stable forms of power.

But there are a few difficulties and contradictions in Weber's theory. How does it derive the leader's charisma? Weber's definition oscillates between an individual gift and a projection constituted by the followers' gaze. His first definition describes charisma as a "certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered as extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers"

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(*ES*, 241). Charisma is a quality not merely proper to the person but capable of permitting him to be viewed as exceptional, conferring on him an exalted social role and status. It is thus a property both intrinsic and external to its bearer—betraying, I suggest, the theological roots of his concept. For this is the strange character of charisma in Paul: a gift conveyed to the person by God, a quality that gives the person his or her place in the Christian community. In other passages, however, Weber describes charisma as pure projection or social dynamic of recognition (*Anerkennung*): "It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This recognition is freely given and . . . consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero-worship or absolute trust in the leader" (*ES*, 242). Recognition, trust, and hero-worship (here Weber seems to take up Carlyle), however, are purely secular social bonds, far from the politico-theological connotations that charisma initially implied.

Weber's theory of charisma betrays a tension between a purely sociological theory of charisma as a *political form* and a concept fraught with irreducible *spiritual and theological* tenets. In many of his examples of charismatic authority, Weber describes charisma as a somewhat archaic form of domination, typical in sects, religious movements, theocracies, but also in warlords' factions or in bandit groups. In the historical examples Weber gives for charisma, there is almost always a religious element. And even if he aims at an "unbiased" analysis of these elements, he cannot dispense with them. His charisma seems inextricably rooted in a religious dimension. The theological implications initially intrinsic to monarchy and the politico-theological doctrine of "the king's two bodies" seem to persist in the form of charismatic domination—or to be condemned to eternal return as irrepressible taboos of political modernity.

Moreover, in Weber's examples, charisma appears indistinguishable from the primal scene of any political institution: a primitive form of power eventually replaced by more stable, elaborate, and rational types of authority, that is, monarchy and bureaucracy. (Freud's mass psychology offers a similar narrative about the primal horde cast around a father-leader as the origin of society.) Violence and war, madness and blind rage, are part and parcel of charisma. Weber associates with it such mythical figures as Achilles, the Nordic berserk, and the Irish warrior Cuchulain (*ES*, 1112). The bearer of charisma is thus not just blessed with a spiritual extraordinariness and a prophetic gift but also marked by an excess of violence and monomania, making—as Niels Werber demonstrates—of Herman Melville's Ahab a prime example of charismatic leadership. In a way, the madness and excess of charisma ape the uncontrollable dynamics of agitated crowds. The charismatic leader seemingly incarnates

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the excess and energy of crowd behavior as described—and demonized—by crowd psychology. Whereas crowd psychology, mesmerized by the uncontrollable dynamics of mass behavior, essentially tries to dispense with a theory of strong leadership, Weber's concept of charisma welds together the excesses of crowd dynamics and the idea of a strong command by the charismatic leader.

Weber's theory of charisma is a strange synthesis. It merges elements of premodern political theology with the observations of modern crowd theory; it hovers between a "neutral" or sociological analysis and the recognition that charisma cannot be understood without taking into account its spiritual and irrational elements; and it leaves us with some open questions: Is charismatic authority a primitive and archaic type of domination or is it a modern political form? Is charisma (according to its theological roots) a personal gift or is it the product of group projection, an attribution of the followers? Weber's originality vis-à-vis the discourses on leadership in crowd theory and the reflections on historical greatness, I argue, lies precisely in this conceptual tension traversing his observations on charisma. Crowd psychology can conceive of the irrational and uncontrollable momentum of mass behavior only in terms of pathology; discourses on historical greatness and heroism become mired either in the psychology of the great man or in the historical telos whose instrument he is. Neither of these two approaches can fill the conceptual void left by the king's downfall. Charisma fills the empty place by providing a political theory that accounts both for the dynamics of mass behavior—in analyzing the collective mechanisms of acclamation that the leader evokes—and for the spiritual aura of exaltation radiated by the charismatic person. Charisma would seem to be—paradoxically—the secular version of the "holiness" of the king in the political theology of monarchy. Just as the king, the charismatic leader is a figure of social integration and unity, but one who does not oppose the modern ideal of the people as sovereign. To the contrary: the leader is part of the people and thus a figuration of the people as ultimate political actor, but spotlighted by a halo of feelings and dreams.

This is precisely what makes him a figure of political modernity. Despite the historical and mythical examples of charismatic prophets and warriors, for Weber, charismatic leadership is also a genuinely *modern* phenomenon, an offspring of popular sovereignty. Especially in the first part of *Economy and Society*, he describes democracy as a political form particularly susceptible to the charms of charismatic leaders. For if charismatic authority "rests entirely on the recognition by the ruled" (*ES*, 266), popular sovereignty is in fact not opposed but open to forms of personalized leadership—as long as the leader is elected and supported by "the people." Modern party leaders, for example, are exactly such examples of "plebiscitary leadership" (*ES*, 267). "Plebiscitary

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democracy—the most important type of Führerdemokratie—" Weber writes, "is a variant of charismatic authority, which hides behind a legitimacy which is *formally* derived from the will of the governed" (*ES*, 268). What is particular to this form of charismatic leadership in modern democracies, however, is less the rationalizing process of legitimation through popular vote than, surprisingly, its irrational elements:

> It is characteristic to the Führerdemokratie that there should in general be a highly emotional type of devotion to and trust in the leader. This accounts for a tendency to favor the type of individual who is most spectacular, who promises the most, or who employs the most effective propaganda measures in the competition for leadership [*die Neigung, dem Außeralltäglichen, Meistversprechenden, am stärksten mit Reizmitteln Arbeitenden als Führer zu folgen*]. (*ES*, 269)[14]

For Weber, the link between the followers and the leader in modern democracy is not more rational than it is in the forms of archaic or religious leadership that serve as examples in the second part of *Economy and Society*. Even though Weber emphasizes that charismatic leadership tends to transform itself into more rational forms of domination, charisma *as such* (or what he calls "pure charisma") is a political form based on emotions and affects, on the ever-changing tides of trust, hope, fear, and promises. In a way, Weber's concept of charisma is the principle of irrationality and excess in politics—as much in the monomania of the charismatic leader as in the frenzy of his followers. Irrationality and affectivity in politics, however, do not necessarily lead to social chaos and anomie. The concept of charisma is able to explain how rigid and highly rational political structures can find their origin in the affective gathering of a heterogeneous population around one focal personality, and how the authority of this single personality can then crystallize a highly rational bureaucratic apparatus, as the examples of Napoléon and Hitler have shown. At this point, the concept of charisma becomes useful for analyzing specifically modern political forms, especially the *Führer* cult in National Socialism and the cult of personality in communism. Ever since, charisma and charismatic authority have been leading concepts for explaining the twentieth-century totalitarian regimes—political forms that Weber himself perhaps would not have dreamed of.

14. See Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss einer verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), 157.

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The Aesthetics of Charisma

What does it mean that charisma in democracy is based on a "highly emotional type of devotion"? In modernity affects seem to replace what in Saint Paul's political theology was the spiritual bond that linked each member both to the religious community and to God. These affects can be triggered and steered through "propaganda measures" or, in Weber's original words, through *Reizmittel*—methods of excitement, allure, enchantment. The charismatic bond is a bond of enchantment, formed by arousing hopes, expectations, adoration, faith, and awe. Charisma thus operates on a level that involves, first and foremost, the *imagination* of a community, its desires, fantasies, and fears. Despite its powerful material effects, charisma is an imaginary construction, be it adoration for a party leader, spiritual devotion to a prophet, blind obedience to a military leader, or intellectual subordination to a superior mind, as in the case of the circle around Stefan George.[15] This is, I think, the underlying reason for the strange ambivalence in Weber's definition, vacillating between a property properly held and one perceived or projected within from the outside. Charisma is an *imaginary quality*, or rather, a quality that lies in the ability to capture the imagination of a community and focus its hopes, affects, and dreams on the charismatic figure. This implies that the charismatic leader must adopt certain techniques of self-promotion and self-stylization to gain and maintain these feelings of devotion and loyalty. Like a theatrical role, charisma has to be "performed": it has to be displayed before an audience as a specific and remarkable way to speak, gesture, and communicate. Thus it intrinsically has an *aesthetic side*: charisma is born with the *representation* of an individual as extraordinary and "gifted"—representation both as self-representation or "performance" and as perception in the eyes of the supporters.

As an instable form of power, charisma is less a state than a process or a "path": the individual's rise from obscurity to general acceptance and popularity. While Weber pays much attention to routinization and normalization (*Veralltäglichung*), he rather neglects—as Armin Schäfer remarks in his article—the genesis of charisma as well as the micromechanisms of its maintenance. Here is where narration becomes crucial: only as a life narrated, as an extraordinary and memorable history, can charisma gain a concrete form. For charisma always has a story: it is made of the plots and intrigues woven

15. To the dismay of its members, Weber named the "George-Kreis" as a prime example of a contemporary charismatic group structure (*ES*, 245). Thomas Karlauf's biography of George sees him as the "inventor of charisma" (*Stefan George: Die Entdeckung des Charisma* [Munich: Blessing, 2007]).

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about the charismatic subject, creating his "image" or myth, recounting the stations of his rise, and memorializing the scenes of his success and downfall. Charisma must be narrated and staged—and literature abounds in such productions. Unlike sociology, literature is interested not in the normalization of charisma but, first and foremost, in its drama: its mystic thickening and quickening, its climactic success, and last but not least, its tragic denouement. Some types of texts trumpet the mission of a specific historical personality, openly advancing their subjects' spiritual leadership, such as hagiographic and some biographic genres, certain autobiographies, and the biographies, essays, and portraits of the George circle. The autobiographies of self-proclaimed intellectual or political leader figures such as Rudolf Steiner, Karl May, or—most notoriously—Hitler display a fixed set of narrative elements designed to construct a life story as the unfolding of a "mission," with early childhood obscurity, companionships faithful and fateful, a rising awareness of the individual's historical task, and pathbreaking threshold situations.[16] In this function, literature serves as a medium to make the rise of the charismatic personality plausible and comprehensible, and to provide myths and images to both nourish the devotion of the followers and swell their numbers. Literature is, of course, not the only medium to construct and transport charisma: painting and photography, films and parades, public speeches and celebrations are classical ways to transport the charismatic image to a greater public. Whereas Weber's examples of charismatic authority largely presuppose the leader's physical presence—the warrior leading his men into battle, the prophet preaching to his disciples—in modernity the physical confrontation of a leader with his followers is hardly ever possible. Modernity thus brings forth a type of political communication capable of bridging the physical gap. Political charisma in modernity thus depends on a mediation through images, texts, and films. To describe this crucial role of media as "propaganda" rather blurs the analysis of their political function. They transmit charismatic productions to a large and widely distributed audience, enabling this audience to find unity in the *representations* of its leader. In this way, medial representation of charisma functions just as Marin describes the cooperation of image, narrative, and the physical presence of the king, constructing "the king's glorious body" as the aesthetic symbol of social unity and power.[17] In modernity, media—from literature to images, films, and radio—provide the leader's "glorious body."

16. Rudolf Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang* (1925), ed. Marie Steiner (Dornach: Rudolf-Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1962); Karl May, *Mein Leben und Streben* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Fehsenfeld, 1910); Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 2 vols. (Munich: Efer, 1925).

17. Marin, "Portrait."

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The fact that literature is such a medium of charisma, however, does not mean that it subscribes blindly to the leader's mission and his desire for recognition and self-stylization. Most narratives, dramatic plays, and biographies are strongly ambivalent about the figure of the self-proclaimed leader. They aim more at a poetical analysis of leadership than its mere celebration. Narrating charisma means providing an anatomy of its gradual constitution, but without necessarily restricting the perspective to a single or partisan viewpoint. A multiplicity of perspectives, however, means looking behind the scenes of the charismatic arrangement and performance. Literary texts narrating the story of a charismatic rise—be it novels such as Herrmann Broch's famous parable on the powers of charismatic seduction, *Die Verzauberung* (*The Enchantment*), or Rudyard Kipling's ironic tale *The Man Who Would Be King*—may disclose the social techniques and the rhetoric employed by self-proclaimed leader figures, thereby unveiling the perceived charisma as a shared, and fragile, illusion. But they may equally try to reconstruct the commanding charm of a leader figure by deliberately reproducing the viewpoint of a person beholden to an extraordinary and demonic commander. This is how Niels Werber reads Melville's *Moby-Dick*. The narrator, Ishmael, sees in Ahab a form of irresistible personal authority, a personality that unites violence and monomania with the supernatural capabilities that Weber later extrapolates for his theory of charisma. Beneath Melville's figure of the potent and paranoid seafarer Ahab, Werber deciphers intertextual traces of the ancient Jewish king Ahab, a successful if dubious warlord—traces that he can follow beyond Melville: even into Weber. And while unwinding these intertextual entanglements, he not only uncovers the biblical and literary sources on which Weber drew while elaborating his theory of charisma but also fully measures the irreducible theological undercurrent in Weber's concept. In Weber the strange tension between modernity and archaism, genius and rage, gift and projection, betrays the literary origins of the discourse on charisma. Werber's reading also demonstrates literature's profoundly ambivalent interpretation of the fascination with the extraordinary man. Even in the bedazzled eyes of Ishmael, Ahab's larger-than-life nature oscillates between identifications as various as a genius, a heathen priest, a madman, a diabolic sorcerer. Ahab's charisma is contested by brilliance and insanity, good and evil.

The theater of sublime sovereignty incorporated by Melville's Ahab, nevertheless, is not the only form that charismatic leadership can take. Perhaps the spectacle of rage and monomania is but a trick to awe friends and enemies alike. The art of leadership has an unostentatious and technical side, tactical feints that can even consist in (temporary) self-effacement. Rereading

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the episode of Lucretia's rape by Sextus Tarquinius in Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (*History of Rome*), Friedrich Balke analyzes Brutus's steps to turn a private crime, the rape and suicide of Lucretia, into a rousing signal to the Roman citizens, instigating them to rebel against the Tarquinian kings and install the first Roman republic. Brutus is a master not only of self-effacement (gaining for himself the nickname "the dullard") but also of recasting a given situation as a public event and political symbol. In this republican hero Brutus—the founder of the Roman republic—charisma is devoid of any excess and ecstasy, reduced to bare leadership: an individual's skill at gathering a community around himself and winning them over to his political goals. As a narrator under Augustus, who saw himself as an heir to the founder of the Republic, Livy seems to make himself an accomplice of the charismatic Brutus, celebrating his steadfast sense of duty even when witnessing the execution of his sons. Yet his narrative also discloses the least ruse Brutus employs: literature betrays charisma's tricks of the trade. What becomes clear in Livy's account is charisma's revolutionary power: the self-proclaimed leader emerges in a situation of acute social crisis (symbolized by the "rape" of the people by its rulers) and manages to radically break from traditional practice. In a way, the situation Brutus inherits is "modern" in its expectation of an entirely new political form.

Narrating charisma means not only analyzing the social mechanisms at work in its origin. Literary narrative also allows for an inspection of the charismatic individual, one extending into the hearts and minds of his followers. Thus literature can attempt to elucidate the very genesis of the relation between leader and disciples, a question Weber does not touch on. The physician Alfred Döblin is obviously interested in the affective and physiological dynamics at play in this relation. In his first novel *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun* (1916), set in eighteenth-century China, he tells the story of the Chinese revolutionary and spiritual leader Wang Lun. Armin Schäfer shows how, for Döblin, charisma is generated not so much by an ideological program or the propagation of a mission but, first of all, in a physiological state of the charismatic individual, a state that then is passed on to the gathering of people around him. No words are needed, nothing is communicated beyond the irresistible transmission of an affect from one man to another. Charisma here is not a quality but the affective state through which an individual passes. Seen from Döblin's physiological angle, drawing on then contemporary research in psychopathology, the "supernatural" gifts of the charismatic subject are not much more than an energy reserve present in every man, forces that can be activated under specific circumstances.

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Literature's strength in analyzing charisma is precisely its fictional character. Far from taking Weber's allegedly neutral view, literary narrative can tentatively slip into the multiple perspectives at work in constituting the charismatic relationship: a story can be told from the vantage point of the converted as well as of the hesitant, a study of the charismatic subject—laying bare tactical considerations as well as emotions—or it can take the gaze of an outsider, the gaze of a witness. Literature can glorify the charismatic leader while noting undertones of uncanniness, madness, or even perfidy. Narrating the path of the individual's rise to power also involves a temporal standpoint: is everything unfolding in a narrative present ignorant of the future, or are we being told the whole story in hindsight, always already conscious of the glorious or catastrophic outcome? Whereas these may be entirely aesthetic decisions when made by an author of fiction, they assume political stature in narrating historical events. Obviously, Livy's way of presenting Brutus is deeply entangled in the politics of his time. Far from being a neutral, factual chronicle of events, historiography, not unlike literature, is condemned to making these narrative choices. Just as the novelist, the historian is forced to arrange his or her facts, to choose an "emplotment" with its consequent perspective on a life story.[18] Narrating the life of one of the most catastrophic political figures in the history of humanity makes the task all the more difficult. Reading the most influential biographies of Hitler—by Ian Kershaw and Joachim Fest—with the eyes of a literary scholar, I analyze in my own article each biographer's narrative strategy. While Kershaw, explicitly drawing on Weber, aims at rendering the complex group processes in constituting and maintaining Hitler's role as charismatic center of the National Socialist state, Fest wants to resuscitate Hitler in all his pretentiousness, hysteria, and cheap theatrical effects. Narrating Hitler's life, one cannot possibly be "neutral," and one cannot avoid being affected by the emotions he strove to trigger. Writing on charisma is always a work on the affectivity of charisma, and the choices the two biographers make in their narrative tones reflect their historical relations to the events: Fest, who was a young witness to the National Socialist period, must struggle with his visceral antipathy toward his subject while being bound to him by a lifelong fascination; Kershaw, on the contrary, born in 1943, maintains the cool distance wanted by a purely academic treatment, methodically dissecting his subject into the myriad perspectives suggested by historical evidence.

18. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

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Claudia Schmölders analyzes some of this historical material. Following up on her ample study of physiognomic discourses in *Hitler's Face*, Schmölders investigates the visual components of charisma in German leader figures from George, Paul von Hindenburg, and Hitler.[19] Physiognomy, the art of deducing an individual's character from facial features, is an old technique whose heyday was at the end of the eighteenth century with the writings of Johann Caspar Lavater. Schmölders shows how physiognomic semiotics persists in the visual culture of the Weimar Republic and informs how charisma in a person is perceived and described. In the documents of physiognomic analysis that Schmölders presents in her article, however, one thing is striking: the subject's extraordinariness is entirely confined to the eye of the beholder, enabled by physiognomic semiotics to see whatever he or she wants to see.

The fruitfulness of a literary approach to the phenomenon of charismatic leadership that the present articles showcase is completed by C. Stephen Jaeger's investigation of charisma as a concept in critical theory and cultural analysis. Jaeger's approach broadens the conceptual scope of charisma, extending it to works of art and counterbalancing it with a concept that is no less complex and elusive: aura. Whereas aura, according to Jaeger, is a quality evident only to the observer, charisma is a quality "inseparable from the physical presence of its possessor, person or work of art, measurable in its effects on an observing subject." Both concepts operate within the human imagination, both designate a genuinely aesthetic procedure, and both are intertwined: charisma can be perceived only if there is aura. In his readings of Homer's *Odyssey*, Jaeger drives home the distinction: Odysseus enters the Phaeacian court disguised as a beggar but is soon accepted as a remarkable and respectable man. His charisma emerges thanks to two factors: the physical beauty bestowed on him by the goddess Athene and the tales that he tells of his adventures. Even if charisma, as Jaeger suggests, is a personal quality and a gift, it is conditioned by the ability to tell stories sauced to impress a princess and by her court's perception of the physical beauty of the storyteller. And—last but not least—it lies in Homer's art of narrating such splendor.

19. Claudia Schmölders, *Hitler's Face: The Biography of an Image*, trans. Adrian Daub (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

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