

# The Order of Crisis or the Crisis of Order

by Isabella Indolfi

Speech about Crisis is an investigation into *crisis*, meant as the most recurrent word in public speeches and in the media during 2012. The use of this word became so widespread that it might be argued that without *crisis* politics and public affairs of all countries would be deprived of their own meaning and substance.

Overused and trite in its most negative meaning, the word *crisis* is exploited as a shield and a means of social control: this is part of a specific policy of fear, intertwined with what Foucault defines as “order of discourse”.

*“[...] in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers [...]”*<sup>3</sup>

The revolutionary power of the word *crisis* actually lies in its own etymology: it comes from Greek, and its original meaning referred to concrete reality (the threshing of wheat). The meaning of the word then underwent a gradual process of abstraction, and the connotation of “choice” and “selection” was replaced by a medical acceptance: for the human body, the “critical phase” of an illness represents its decisive moment, and therefore the moment of resolution. Halfway through the Nineties, the word took on a definitively negative meaning, which involved both the psychological sphere (crisis as *turmoil*) and, at a later stage, the economic sphere (crisis in its current meaning of *depression, stagnation*, which is applied to nearly all the areas of everyday life: we can talk about the economic and financial crisis, the climate and energy crisis, the social and demographic crisis). And then there are, of course, the repercussions, which can be material or psychological, individual or social: identity crises, depressive crises, crises of conscience, crises of faith, crises of values.

*“Crisis has come to mean that moment when doctors, diplomats,*

*bankers and assorted social engineers take over and liberties are suspended. Like patients, nations go on the critical list [...] "But crisis need not have this meaning. It need not imply a headlong rush for the escalation of management. Instead, it can mean the instant of choice, that marvellous moment when people suddenly become aware of their self-imposed cages, and the possibility of a different life. And this is the crisis that, as choice, confronts both the United States and the world today."*<sup>4</sup>

Now that we have started to become conscious of all this, we can consider crisis as a "mere word", and feel entitled to modify it and change its meaning once again. Therefore, the English word **crisis** becomes **crysis**, where "cry" is the etymological heart of crisis itself, highlighting the sense of pain and passive resignation that this word has recently taken on.

The (artistic) manipulation of our vocabulary and the use of poetic licences and puns can be one of the methods for mastering the rules of the production of discourse and redefining them: this will enable us to preserve that semantic substratum of crisis, which is the idea of the evolution of things, of a context which might spark a revolutionary change in the existing structure of an orderly system, shuffling the cards and paving the way for a new game with new rules. Irony and or/art, as a means of overcoming everything which is bound to get human beings down, are faced with the task of unmasking the mechanisms underlying the political exploitation of *crisis*.

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3. Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse", in Robert Young (Ed.), *Untying TheText: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Boston, Routledge &Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 48-78, p. 52.

4. Ivan Illich, *The Right to Useful Unemployment and its Professional Enemies*, London, Marion Boyars Publisher Ltd, 1978, pp. 19-20.