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*Pier Luca Marzo**, *Antonio Tramontana***

Author information

* Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Education and Cultural Studies (COSPECS), University of Messina (Italy). Email: marzop@unime.it

** Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Education and Cultural Studies (COSPECS), University of Messina (Italy). Email: tramontanaantonio@gmail.com

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Pier Luca Marzo*, Antonio Tramontana**

Abstract: Using a narrative approach, the paper focuses on the Apple Special Event, seen as a veritable video-theatrical performance enjoyed annually by a vast audience spread all over the world, as well as by an equally large number of communities of experts (journalists, bloggers, IT professionals). It is a performance whose particularity is the way it hinges on the narration of devices. Moving within this analytic framework, the article is divided into three parts. The first highlights how narrative has the power to extend the fictional world to the sphere of social action, determining real effects in the global market. In the second, the Apple Event will be analysed as a reactivation of the religious archetype of the narrative for the mass use and consumption by millions of users. In the third, the ritual phases of this techno-animistic narrative will be illustrated, and the way in which they combine to create the imaginary community of the Apple Park examined. Starting with the articulation of these three points, the general aim of the work is to consider the Apple Event as a case study through which to understand a process of mass re-education towards the religious phenomenon, reproduced by the marketing strategies of late capitalism.

Keywords: show, religion, ritual, goods, imaginary

* Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Education and Cultural Studies (COSPECS), University of Messina, Italy. Email: marzop@unime.it

** Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Education and Cultural Studies (COSPECS), University of Messina, Italy. Email: tramontanaantonio@gmail.com

Introduction

On 12 September 2018 at 10am, California time, the annual episode of a TV series awaited for months was streamed live. As it flowed into the digital networks, the media event attracted millions of viewers from all around the world¹. These also included an army of critics ready to comment on the episode as it unfolded². In the months leading up to the event, this community of experts could do no more than provide pseudo-spoilers of the new episode on blogs, online newsletters and social networks. This daily succession of rumours had the effect of further fuelling public expectations. However, this was a TV series unlike any other. The protagonists of this particular drama were in fact objects rather than characters. The role of the audience was limited to creating the human backdrop against which to admire the marvellous performances of these objects, the real stars of the show. These were digital devices, and the impact of their performance was such as to take them through the fourth wall, that invisible barrier that separates the stage and the audience, fiction and reality³. Moreover, the location of the TV series was a Californian theatre with a famous name. This is the other distinctive element of the series, but not the most important one. Once they have made their entrance on stage, in fact, the fate of these artificial actors is to emerge from the set to circulate in the digital and physical shop windows of the world market in the form of cult goods (Carmagnola & Ferraresi, 1999). It will then be the paying public who, at a high price, will free the devices from their glass cages and introduce them into everyday life. It is in this great theatre that the social actor will enter and exit from the many “stages” of life, exploiting the technical capabilities of these serial actors. Through this instrumental use, these devices will transform their users, organizing their time, increasing their fields of reality, stimulating them to be constantly connected with their social groups and work environment, checking their heartbeat, reconfiguring their relationship with space, leading them compulsively to photograph themselves and the world around them, to film the significant moments of their life, to express their inner states using a playful iconic lan-

¹ A number destined to grow with the views of the following weeks, with the event available for watching on the home page of the series producer.

² Unlike the public scattered over the infosphere (Floridi, 2014) – with respect to whom the continually relaunched event would try to attract the largest possible number of spectators – those physically present during the airing of the episode constituted a restricted, privileged group, who would have the task, through a strict rite to which they will submit, of amplifying the message of the broadcast.

³ It should also be noted that the event in question is a radical case of cross-media communication (Jenkins 2006). It in fact incorporates an audience and a stage (theatre), a screen in the hall (cinema), a series of digital devices in the hands of the viewers who use them to post live comments (web 2.0), and a portal through which the event itself can be followed (live streaming).

guage, and encouraging them to make value judgments on the most disparate topics. This creates a reciprocity so intimate that it creates a dependence of the social actor on the object, to the extent that the former is thrown into a state of disorientation in the event of the latter's absence.

The plot just described may sound like one of the episodes of *Black Mirror*, but instead is that of a (non) TV series produced by the first company in human history to achieve one trillion dollars in capitalization. We are talking about the *Apple Special Event* held at the *Steve Jobs Theater* in Cupertino. This is where the annual Keynote presentation of the computer company was held, where the new range of iWatch and iPhone devices were presented.

Figure 1 – 9 January 2007, Apple Event at Macworld in San Francisco (00:16:25)⁴



The first episode of the series, or at least the one that has taken hold in the collective imagination as such, took place in another theatre, that of Macworld in San Francisco. It was on this stage that, at 9:00am on 9 January 2007, Steve Jobs in the uniform of a refined nerd – jeans, black T-shirt and tennis shoes – created the golden frame that revealed to the world the phantasmagoria of the first iPhone. It was the first cell phone to become really smart⁵. Treading the boards with relaxed agility, the founder and guru of Ap-

⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hUIxyE2Ns8&t=985s>

⁵ During the presentation, Steve Jobs said to his engrossed audience: “The most advanced phones are called smart phones, so they say. And they typically combine a phone plus some e-mail capability, plus they say it’s the Internet. It’s sort of the baby Internet in one device, and they all have these little plastic keyboards on them. And the problem is that they’re not so smart and they’re not so easy to use, and so if you kind of make a Business School 101 graph of the smart axis and the easy-to-use axis, phones, regular cell phones are right there, they’re not so smart, and they’re not so easy to use. But smartphones are definitely a little smarter, but they actually are harder to use. They’re really complicated. Just for the basic stuff people have a hard time figuring out how to use them. Well, we don’t want to do either one of these things. What we want to do is make a leapfrog product that is way smarter than any mobile device has ever been and super-easy to use. This is what iPhone is.” (S:00:03:40 – F:00:04:25) Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hUIxyE2Ns8&t=985s>

ple presented the equally relaxed agility of a technological leap forward of several years. The plot constructed by Jobs enchanted the audience from the beginning, by asking them to reflect on how difficult the first generation of smartphones were to use. Having won over the audience, through the use of pauses and witty remarks, Jobs presented himself as the man of providence, who held in his hands the epitome of a problem solving device, enclosed in an object whose design was beautiful in its simplicity. With the ability of a magician, all he had to do was use the tip of his finger to scroll down the first multitasking touch screen in history to make the smartphones already produced by the competition fade into insignificance.

In just a few seconds, the iPhone became the first digital device capable of converting complexity into simplicity, function into tactile pleasure, the computer evolution into a form of avant-garde design, the future into the present. Moreover, all these qualities were emphasized by the fact that the iPhone was the first object to be characterized by its absence of specializations, and therefore able to contain them. Thanks to its flexibility, it became a point of convergence of a wide range of functions previously scattered across separate, distinct devices: those of the mobile phone, the iPod, an internet navigation device, a camera, a GPS navigator (Tramontana, 2015). The possibility of being able to modulate these functions at the touch of a hand, was certainly the key that in 2007 opened the door of desire for millions of consumers. Their desire continues unabated, given that in 2018 alone, 345 million consumers worldwide took a bite out of the Cupertino apple and bought a model of the iPhone. Apple continues to consolidate its position as a leader in the IT market, in terms of both innovation and sales, despite the sense of vacuum felt by the fans of the Apple community as a result of Steve Jobs' death in 2011 (Rega, 2015). Yet, as in charismatic and religious institutions, the death of the leader has led his figure to become spiritualized in the founding myth of the Apple company and community. Biographies, documentaries and films on his story have certainly contributed to perpetuating life after death for Steve Jobs. However, Apple is obviously the sole administrator of the spiritual legacy left by the creative and visionary CEO *par excellence* of the digital age. It is to this end that, in order not to disperse the symbolic charge exerted by its founder, the company has built a special place to celebrate its cult: the Steve Jobs Theater. This work of architecture is located near Apple Park, the mammoth circular IT temple costing \$5 billion, which has been the headquarters of the company since 2017. It is in the emptiness of this theatre that the spirit of Steve Jobs lives on and is energized every year, as it flees the stasis of the mausoleum. Necropolis and presentation venue, the Steve Jobs Theater thus becomes a place where we witness a rite that weaves a narrative linking past and future, industrial imaginary (Musso, 2014) and the devices that objectify it, the esoteric work of the priests of

the innovation of Apple Park and the revelation of part of this secret work, bringing together mass production and the community gathered around the cult of the product.

Rituality, the fetishism of consumer goods, theatrical performance, public expectations, secrecy and revelation, symbolic places, community, daily life, technological innovation, spirit and matter, life and death, present and future, production and consumption, fiction and reality, body and object: these are the elements that articulate the presentation of Apple's Keynote on the stage of the Steve Jobs Theater, which in this paper are given a unified meaning by means of analysing narrative approaches. By analysing the narrative nuclei that articulate this fiction of late capitalism, we will try to consider its educational aspect. In a strict sense, the educational dimension of Apple's Keynote is linked to the function of educating the public of consumers about the new performances their products are capable of. However, this instructive aspect is only the surface of a deeper narrative mechanism. This can be sensed if we go to the etymological root of the term *educate* [from Lat. *educare*, intens. of *educēre*] which indicates the action of "drawing out and raising". This will be our starting point for analysing the narrative imaginary of Apple as a "drawing out" of the consumer from ordinary life, transporting them to the temporary community created by the presentation. This imaginary narrative produced by the company, as we will try to highlight, has the power to create an archaic cult in the age of technology, which creates concrete effects in the world market. It expresses a dialectic between archaic and technique which had existed since the prehistory of the industrial revolution. We need merely think of the places identified by Walter Benjamin in nineteenth-century Paris: universal exhibitions and *passages* (Benjamin, 1999). Benjamin's physiognomic observations showed how capitalism as a religion was contained in the technical forms of these architectural structures (Benjamin, 1996). While universal exhibitions celebrated the myth of the machine, the *passages* celebrated the fetishism of goods. In an age in which the capital of the 21st century is the internet, machines and goods are brought together by Apple in the architectures of its pocket devices. It is in the dimension of theatrical narrative that its products are imbued with an archaic cult capable of educating millions of consumers in its image and likeness, but it is the ability to use modern forms of communication that allows it to express the phantasmagorical dimension of digital objects to a world audience.

To understand the terms of this techno-cult, this paper is divided into two parts: a first part in which the Apple Special Event⁶ will be seen as a narra-

⁶ The analysis will be carried out on the video in which the Apple Special Event of 12 September 2018 was shot at the Steve Jobs Theater (Cupertino, CA) and broadcast live on the website www.apple.com. It is currently available at <https://www.apple.com/lae/ap->

tive capable of reactivating a mass religious phenomenon, and a second part in which the ritual elements through which it is expressed will be discussed in greater detail.

The Apple Event and the religious archetype of the narrative

The Apple Event is not immediately identifiable as a narrative, but rather as a clever marketing strategy by the Californian company to launch its products. Nevertheless, behind the transparency of this media showcasing (Codeluppi, 2018), there is an equally sophisticated narrative machine which, as we shall see, extracts its seductive power from the deep layers of the collective consciousness, those of the religious phenomenon. The peculiarity of this phenomenon is to project the interiority of individuals onto a transcendent plane from which descends, as Durkheim realized, an institutional principle of the social order in which they are integrated into terms of solidarity (Durkheim, 1990). The circularity between the sacred and profane of life has always found its form of mediation in narrative. The cult of the ancestors, stories of fantastic creatures, foundation myths, the deeds of deities, parables and the lives of the saints were the traditional forms of this mediating function.

The symbolic density contained in these sacred stories found its articulation in ritual representation through the use of various expressive levels – that of orality, music, dance, and the plastic and pictorial arts. In the rite, the static nature of religious representations was translated into movement by interweaving the bodies of believers in well-choreographed moments of collective action. It was thus that the religious narrative found its plot in ritual action, conveying the community into an ecstatic condition which brought the invisibility of the sacred back into the visibility of the profane world. The result of this exchange between sensible and supra-sensible was that of re-establishing the bonds between the members of the community and, at the same time, renewing the legitimacy of the social order. The narrative, therefore, finds its archetypal source in the invisibility of the sacred and the manifestation of its institutional power in ritual re-enactment. The gears that drive the multimedia show staged at the Steve Jobs Theater simply reactivate this narrative archetype by reproducing a techno-spectacular rite in the context of late capitalism.

ple-events/september-2018/. The video lasts a total of 01:47:13 and the parts cited will be specified in terms of the time (hour, minutes and seconds) they start (“S”) and finish (“F”). We will focus exclusively on visual material, thus excluding the rich sound material, be it composed of the discursive part staged by the protagonists who alternate on the stage, and the sound that is interposed in different moments whose purpose is to change emotional tonality and prepare the specific context of the discursive dimension.

The objective of this part of the work is to outline a theoretical framework within which to examine the peculiar characteristics of this religious narrative. We must surely start with the first reflection produced by the Western tradition on narrative, that contained in Aristotle's *Poetics*; it is here that the Greek philosopher states that a story is "the composition of the things done" (Aristotle, 2005, p. 27). This composition must reconcile the causal coherence of the events that move the plot (*muthos*) and the effect of surprise (*metabolé*), without this narrative framework upsetting the general logic of the plot. For Aristotle, the achievement of this balance places those who listen to a story in an emotional field (*pathos*) in which they can identify with its protagonists. When this happens, the public receives pleasure even when it witnesses the protagonists commit terrible and criminal actions, as in the case of tragedies. This pleasure has the effect of purifying and relieving the spirit of the viewer from the need to perform the tragic actions presented on stage (*catharsis*). The emotional wave produced by catharsis, investing the public with pleasure, thus has a profound function of civic education. The Greek amphitheatre was the educational site *par excellence* of the *polis*, where the dark passions of the urban unconscious were brought out of their latency and onto the stage. Theatre in classical culture, therefore, also assigned to narrative representation the function of manifesting the invisible in the visible.

Despite this cathartic function, a narrative is the composition of the facts that take place in a simulated world, that of the represented work. Fiction is in fact the universe in which this artificial world orbits. The facts recounted in this fictional universe are only facts there, and are thus destined to dissolve in the light of the real world, when the listener reaches the end. However, if the planes of fiction and reality were really so dichotomous, why then, starting in childhood, would we love to listen to stories without feeling hoodwinked by them? And in our case, why does the emotional wave generated from the Steve Jobs Theater produce a real effect as recorded in Apple's share prices?

One answer could be related to the human desire to escape the gravitational pull of reality by means of a fictional surrogate. However, the question cannot be reduced to this state of alteration of the principle of reality in which the consciousness seeks refuge. Narration and reality, rather than a dichotomy, are to be understood as two poles of a more complex relationship that must be reconstructed here in order to identify the social shaping power deployed by the Apple Event.

An initial link is found in the language, since it is in the same linguistic frame that the narrated facts and experienced facts are knotted and intertwined in order to be moulded into a horizon of meaning. On the other hand, as Parini (2017) points out, the very etymology of fiction indicates the act

of forming, shaping, modelling the facts and the time in which the events in the plot take place⁷. The narrative thus, more than a linguistic structure, is a structural principle that provides man with a possibility to understand the chaos in the environment and his soul, moulding it into a stable order, that objectified by the poetic work. It is a structural principle that also acts in the collective work called society, by shaping the stable order of reality. These are the symbolic universes preserved in language, as Berger and Luckmann write, which preside over the processes that construct, legitimize and perpetuate social reality. It is in this linguistic universe shaped by common sense that, according to Schutz, literature moves, increasing its degrees of meaning, bringing imagination into the world (Jedlowsky, 2009). Analysing *Don Quixote* by Cervantes (Schutz, 1996), the sociologist highlights how the narrative deconstructs the reader's faith in the objective character of reality, opening experience to a multiplicity of possible realities. It is from this theoretical-analytical perspective illustrated by Schutz that narrative, not just in the literary sense, focuses the attention of sociologists interested in exploring the finite provinces of meaning of the social world (Longo, 2015).

Also the fiction staged at the Steve Jobs Theater actuates, for the pleasure of its audience, this enlargement of reality by using a variety of languages – oral, textual, iconic, sound, photographic and video. This is not an extemporaneous enlargement, since the devices offered by this multimedia show, once purchased, expand the consumer's reality and make their actions in the great theatre of everyday life more performative.

The relationship between reality and narration, therefore, finds its first connections in the fact of being under the sole jurisdiction of language and of the fictional order; a fiction that produces reality in society and which in the story, instead, reveals the illusory nature of reality by constructing a possible reality.

These are not the only links. There is a further relation between reality and narrative: that of *mimesis*, the human faculty of imitation that for Aristotle is the source of narrative.

Ricœur creates a circularity between reality and story, entering into the heart of the Aristotelian mimetic process (Ricœur, 1983). His thesis is that narrative is not something that can be relegated to literary criticism and its aesthetic judgments, but is instead the linguistic terrain in which the sense of human experience is configured. Ricœur distinguishes three phases of Ar-

⁷ “The word *fiction* is no exception. The Devoto-Oli etymological dictionary specifies a Latin derivation that has to do with *mixing clay, building walls*. Going further in the etymological definition, we arrive at ‘modelling, shaping, imagining, inventing, simulating’. [...] This excavation, though conducted in an approximate way, however allows us to shed new light on the sense of *fiction* that it is referred to as the constitutive feature of literature” (Parini, 2017, p. 49).

istotelian *mimesis* connected to each other in a spiral movement that opens narrative to reality and, vice versa, reality to narrative. Ricœur indicates the origin of this spiral as *mimesis* I, the imitative phase in which the narrator finds their compositional material in a pre-comprehension of the world of action. Unlike Plato, this initial phase of Aristotelian *mimesis* does not draw on metaphysical models, but directly on human conduct, being a *mimesis praxeos*. The narrator imitates the articulation of the action in this human conduct, its symbolic component that makes it readable in certain emotional tones and the features of its temporal connections. It is not therefore a copy of the real (which is more widely found in historical narrative), but a re-creation of the facts (*poiesis*), which are transferred to a mirror universe of associated life, that of fiction. Although not immediately real, this universe brings together the typical forms of action, symbolism and temporality.

In the case of the Apple Event, *mimesis* I imitates the ordinary life of its audience through the informal costumes and friendly attitude of the actors who alternate on stage during the Keynote representation and, above all, by using photographs and video clips projected on the giant screen. These images, presented in a carefully modulated rhythm, show people in pleasant everyday situations – holidays, birthdays, trips into the country, evenings spent in the company of friends (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Apple Special Event 12 September 2018 (00:07:21)



Naturally, it is the leading actor in the iPhone event that reproduced this increasingly high-definition visual scene in which reality acquires a hyper-realistic nature (Baudrillard, 1976). A protagonist that, once taken out of the Steve Jobs Theater, will shrink to fit the hands of its user, interpreting the character of a servant in the stages the user walks across in daily life. A servant able to offer the user a series of applications, as the presenters repeat on various occasions, to capture significant biographical fragments, check

the biometric data of their bodies, connect with their loved ones, play, make purchases more secure and immediate, etc. The iPhone Apps and iWatch presented at the Keynote thus become an iconic miniaturization of the global user's daily life. The viewers identify with this life, empathically entering the world represented by the Apple Event.

While a narrative starts with the imitation of *praxis*, for Ricœur, *mimesis* II is that phase of the mimetic spiral that metaphorically takes this concrete plane to the fictional domain of the *as if*. This world, different to reality, is governed by a dual temporality – chronological and non-chronological. The chronological dimension is that which Ricœur connects to the linear time woven by the plot of the story in which the narrated facts are arranged into a before and an after. The non-chronological dimension, instead, is a vertical temporality that collects the facts dispersed chronologically by the plot into a single story that gives them intensity of meaning.

The Apple Event also operates at the intersection of these two temporalities. The chronological axis is represented by the episode which went live on 12 September 2018. Here the plot unravelled by the Keynote staged for the pleasure of its audience the memory of the company of Cupertino, evoked in the theatre that bears the name of its founder, with the expectation of the new products presented; these are the narrative elements of surprise (*metabolé*) that generated dissonance in the interweaving of the facts without distorting its internal logic. This balance, to resume what was said above, created an emotional bubble of *pathos* that took the audience from the horizontal axis, unravelled by the intertwining of the episode, towards the vertical axis of the great story of Apple. The iPhone and the iWatch are the fetishistic objects of this mass collective transfer towards that phantasmagorical world in the circular temple of the Apple Park. In this Stonehenge 2.0 of Silicon Valley (Figure 3/4), it is the Promethean cult of technology that is celebrated, as it directs its adepts-consumers to the cosmological phases of the sunny future.

Figure 3 – Apple Park



Figure 4 – Stonehenge



The plot woven by the Keynote becomes so functional that it charges the Apple Park with a mysterious centripetal force, in which the attention of a global mass of spectators is concentrated through the use of media and projected onto a transcendent plane. It is within this magic circle, made of crystal and carbon fibre, that the avant-garde imagery of Apple clashes with the archaic imagery of the religious, in a dynamic dialectic. For Benjamin, the origin of these types of images is to be sought in the points of maximum tension between the opposing tendencies of an era. For him, the peculiarity of these types of images is that they emerge from the points of greatest tension between the opposites of an era, revealing its deep meaning (Benjamin, 1999). These fragments of time, even if they come out of chronological time, transcend it, fixing themselves like stars in that same sky on which humanity has always woven stories of eternity.

The video of the Afro-American woman running with a case with mysterious contents through the Apple Park simply brings together into a single constellation a set of dialectical images generated by the collision between the archaic and science fiction, between sunlight and the solar panels of the structure that capture its energy (Figure 5), between the nature contained in the park and the hi-tech walls that surround it (Figure 6), between the simplicity of the clothes of its inhabitants and the use of smart-objects to communicate with each other (Figure 7), between the community life of the Californian techno-polis and its spacecraft shape (Figure 8).

Figure 5 – Apple Special Event 12 September 2018 (00:01:35)

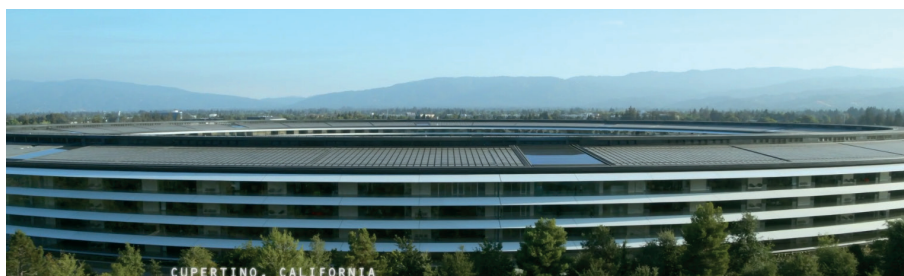


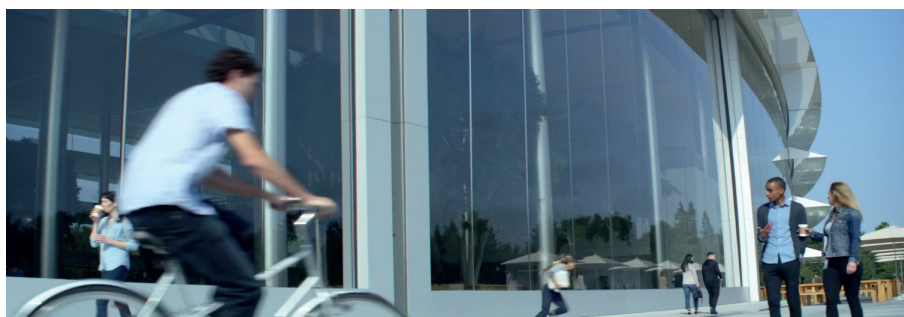
Figure 6 – Apple Special Event 12 September 2018 (00:02:25)



Figure 7 – Apple Special Event 12 September 2018 (00:02:46)



Figure 8 – Apple Special Event 12 September 2018 (00:02:52)



These dialectical images lead viewers to identify with the protagonist who will lead them, at the end of the video, into the basement of the Steve Jobs Theater in which the spirit of Steve Jobs, Apple's *deus ex machina*, lives on. It is in this place of representation, in which the primitive cave and the Greek amphitheatre become one, that her run ends as she hands over the briefcase to Tim Cook, the great priest of Apple's sacred city. Once opened, it is he who will pick up the clicker, the magic wand used to start the Keynote, the ritual ceremony of the Apple techno-tribe.

Mimesis III, for Ricœur, is the final phase of the mimetic process that brings fiction back into reality. It is the spectators who perform this third mimetic movement in which the *pathos* aroused in them by the narrative creates the educational catharsis of their souls through which they can reconstruct their concrete experience. The fictional circularity of the story (*mimesis* II) born from the imitation of *praxis* (*mimesis* I) becomes a broken circle, a spiral that extends into the inner world of its users (*mimesis* III) providing a charged metaphorical model on which they can draw to shape their own experience.

In the case of the Apple Event, this extension brings into the ordinary life of millions of spectators a metaphorical metanarrative model, to be imitated through the consumption of its technological goods. Postmodernity has too

hastily decreed the departure from the contemporary scene of metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984) without realizing, instead, that it is capitalism that recreates them, as in the case of Apple.

In fact, its devices do not only connect users in the elsewhere of the digital network but, at the same time, connects them in a techno-animistic dimension of mass religious life. This imaginary dimension of collective representation is the added value that makes Apple a leader in the global IT market (Rega, 2015).

The iPhone and the iWatch are desired so avidly precisely because they are transactional objects which project the consumer into the transcendental world of the Apple Park by taking them to one of the many Apple Stores around the world. These are the places of pilgrimage to the fetish of goods, through which the fiction of the Apple Event finds a way of entrance into reality.

The Rite of the Apple and the reactivation of mythical forces

As has been highlighted so far, the specificity of Apple's being in the world consists of preparing and nurturing a religion based on the worship of digital objects. While the narrative becomes the creation of an emotional field that turns everyday objects into real fetishes around which a collective cult is organized, the cult in question, however, needs a ritual able to arrange in the smallest details the emotionality through which a cluster of circuits "transcends sensuousness" (Marx, 1982, p. 163). What follows is an analysis of the formation of the ecstatic intensification of a social circle, retracing the path that leads to the creation of a real emotional community that is realized around a techno-animistic ritual and identifies itself in the cult of the products sold by Apple.

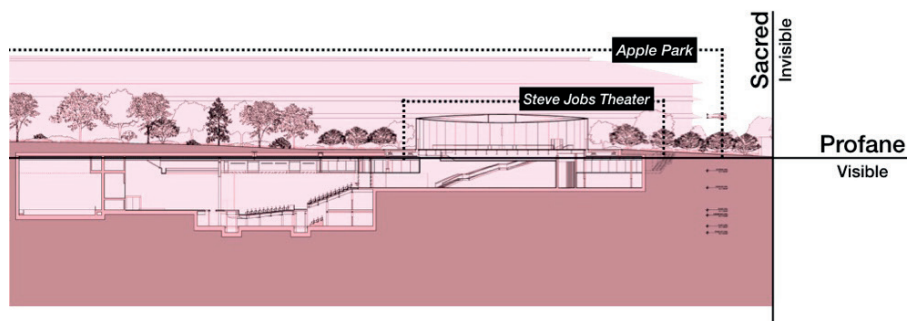
The starting point for this brief exploration of the rite is the place where it is performed. The place in question, in fact, becomes the topical moment in which two different (but complementary) orders are interpenetrated: the visible and the invisible. Through these two orders the complex fragmentation of elements staged during the event is configured as a religious gathering of the faithful, who for a moment give up part of their life to collectively meet and worship.

Starting with the way in which the visible is enriched by an extra-phenomenal component – or if we prefer, the way in which the invisible is found to express itself through material elements – we see an initial (and founding) distinction: that between the sacred and the profane. From the outset, the sacred and the profane, which are displaced from the order of the visible and invisible, are presented by means of a precise organization of space. The place where the event takes place, in fact, contains within it a series of

(invisible) symbolic features crystallized in the (visible) architectural forms that seem to be built in order to create a curvature in the space of daily life – if not, indeed, create a space that is qualitatively different from what surrounds us daily (Eliade, 1959) – thus fulfilling the function envisaged by *mimesis* I. To the extent to which the narrative stages its own representational material, imitating the plane of *praxis*, then the Apple Park is both the operational headquarters of the multinational and therefore the place where the objects are conceived and designed, and also the place where the mystery is guarded. As the headquarters in which the brand secrets are protected, it becomes the point from which the position of strength in the market is determined, ensuring dominance over the competitors. Here then is how the sacred appears in the Apple narrative: a mammoth construction with an unusual shape, whose secrets are to be defended by a series of restrictive measures, and which eludes everyday experience and reveals itself to the world in its exceptional nature compared to its surroundings. But, a part dedicated to the management of the mystery, to a venue to which access is limited to the chosen few, corresponds to its opposite, and what is hidden to the senses would not make sense if there were no element to oppose (and with which to relate). Alongside – and outside – the gigantic circular formation that represents the topical point in which to place the invisible, the Steve Jobs Theater has the function of cyclically drip-feeding to a world audience some of the secrets guarded in the great circular temple, and here the visible order is the element which can give a sense to the structure. It is thanks to the presentations organized in the auditorium, in fact, that the mystery unveiled through technological objects subsequently bursts into the lives of consumers.

Figure 9 - In the first image at the bottom we see the large circular structure of the Apple Park, while the entrance to the Auditorium is in the foreground. The second image, meanwhile, offers a cross section of the architectural elements with a map showing the relationship of the symbolic elements





It is clear that what is at play is a series of opposing elements that come into relationship with each other: the visible order corresponds to the ordinariness of the profane and the empire of everyday life. On the contrary, this regime is opposed by the invisible order, in which the sacred, determined by secrecy and by the complex rules of access, breaks into the routine of everyday life, involving a bump in the flat repetition of acts we perform regularly. The Apple Event aims to bring the two worlds into contact so as to create an (emotional) curvature of the flat space of everyday life and create a cone through which the lives of as many individuals as possible can be put into perspective. Thus the place becomes the point where the compositional rules set forth by Aristotle are realized. Thanks to this curvature of *pathos*, the spectators identify with the realistic world of the Apple Park, predisposing themselves with pleasure to the revelation of the new devices produced in this Promethean temple.

The place where the event takes place ultimately establishes two worlds: the sacred and the profane – which take shape through a precise dislocation of the visible and invisible order. The rite instead gives a precise configuration of these orders so as to create a constellation of Benjaminian dialectical images permitting the transition from one world to another (Van Gennep, 2004) and ensuring that, in this rite of passage, a cluster of circuits assembled to perform a series of pre-established functions become real objects of worship.

Adopting Benjamin's warning, whereby "Only a thoughtless observer can deny that correspondences come into play between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 461), it is a matter here of exploring the phases that characterise the rite so as to observe the forms through which capitalism causes "a reactivation of mythic forces" (*ibidem*, p. 391).

This rite is divided into three distinct phases: pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal⁸. Through these phases *mimesis* II is achieved, that is the metaphorical transportation of the daily life of *praxis* into the world of narrative fiction.

The pre-liminal phase is marked by the formation of a group of the faithful. In order for a community to be created, it must distinguish itself from what surrounds it. Thus, individuals who are different from each other, in order to feel part of a single entity, must be able to decide who is inside (and part of) the group, and who is outside. To actuate this process of distinction which gives life to the group, a series of symbolic elements are used during the ritual; these materialize, in the case examined here, in well-defined architectural structures. This is then a phase of aggregation of different characters who find in the community of the faithful a way to conform. This function is carried out by the Steve Jobs Theater. The architectural structure brings together what Neumann calls a “collective spiritual reality”. The visibility of the architectural structure incorporates the invisibility of the “transpersonal force” (Neumann, 1991, p. 11). This meeting constitutes, with respect to the functioning of the entire rite, the moment when a community is created, that is, a point when a difference between an inside and an outside is established.

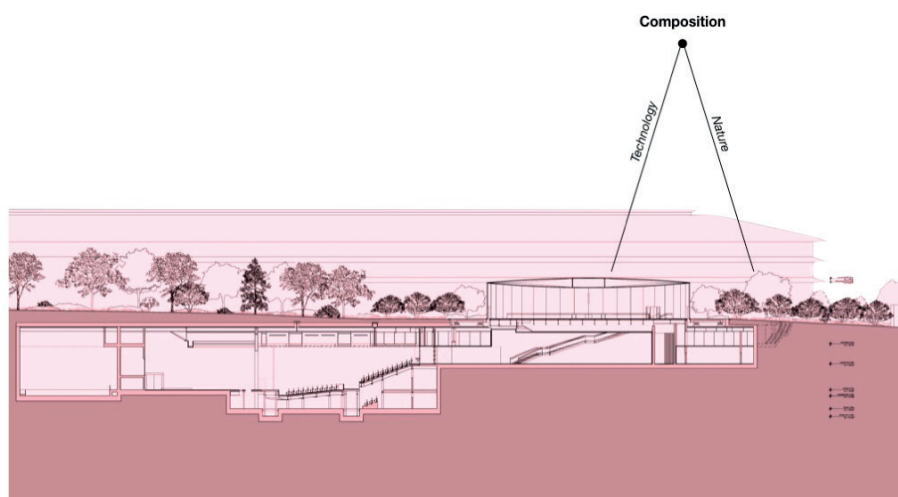
So, to be part of the community, one needs to go through a series of symbolic elements that can demarcate and separate the elements that define being within the group with respect to other elements that, instead, define its borders and the space outside the community. There is a dialectical image capable of enclosing these elements. It is a “dialectic of the composition” (of the group). This dialectical opposition has the aim of establishing a series of well organized acts through which each individual tends to abandon their exclusivity and become part of a whole, thus composing the body of the cult community. It is thanks to this image that every potential user of technological objects becomes a member of an emotional community.

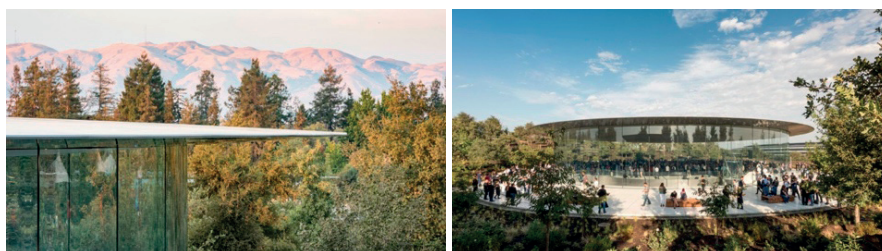
The dialectic of the composition (S:00:00:26, F:00:00:38) presents itself as a contrast between two antinomic elements: technology and nature. The former is the element that distinguishes the brand, on which the power of its existence is based. By virtue of the fact that technology is a founding

⁸ The three phases were distinguished adopting the categories used by Van Gennep. However, they needed to be slightly modified to take into account the specificity of the case examined. While each of them may in fact be assigned with a specific function – and the three phases, for the French anthropologist, correspond to the functions of the separation, transition and aggregation of subjects with respect to the social group –, we noticed that only the first phase corresponds to the conceptualization of Van Gennep. The other two, rather than determining the transition and aggregation of the collective body, instead have the purpose of creating – through emotional intensification and distribution of the cult – a process of re-enchantment of the world (liminal phase) and a process of evangelization of the daily order (post-liminal phase).

element of Apple's identity, it becomes an exasperated search for factors, combined with each other, which aim to define the image of a state-of-the-art technological company. More specifically, however, what defines Apple's public face is the opulence of the technology, because it is a search that cuts no corners in the choice of materials and its staging. It is a continuous search that is expressed not only in the production of objects intended for consumption by the members of the community, but also in the places of worship of the goods in question. The Steve Jobs Theater, therefore, is no exception. In itself, it resembles a transparent cylinder resting on a hill. This circular structure, whose glass walls provide a view of the many trees that surround it, is covered by an incredibly expensive carbon fibre roof. Thanks to the lightness of the covering, and therefore to the choice of material, it can be supported simply by glass walls without the need for additional supports, such as pillars. The absence of any supporting element placed at the centre of the hall makes the view of the outside (and of the element that is opposed to the technical composition) visible from every point. Thus the contrast appears as a clear element, visible to all: the many trees that surround the theatre, each with its own rhythm and inner dynamic, is opposed to the uniformity of the dominance of technology embedded in the architectural structure. And it is this contrast which defines the space of a community being formed: on one hand, the chaos of the outside; on the other, the action of the group that finds protection in the controlled manifestation of technology, finding shelter from the unexpected and the surprises reserved by the infinite manifestation of shapes and colours offered by the trees.

Figure 10 – Above, cross section in which the dialectic of the composition is shown. Below, two images of the exterior of the Steve Jobs Theater





It is therefore a demarcation of the elements on which the distinction between an inside and an outside is based. It plays on the logic of separation inherent in the geometry of the lines that contrast with the abundance of the configuration of nature, with no two leaves the same and a rich variety of colours.

The auditorium, in its dialectical opposition to nature, is constituted as a place to gather and the point on which to converge, and it is towards this point that each participant makes their way in order to meet at the place of worship. In this process, all differences are minimized, until we have a single aggregate community able to express itself in a uniform way – and performing an impressive action from a sociological point of view. This pre-liminal path is staged by means of a single sequence (S:00:00:26 – F:00:00:38). A circular movement, shot from inside the theatre, shows the outline of the trees surrounding the building – and in the background, in the very first frames, we can see the place where the mystery is kept: the Apple Park. In the meantime, people with no relation to each other approach the circular staircase that leads them to the room where, soon, all will assume the same posture (conditioned by the seats), applaud, and be amazed in a controlled manner as they hear the proverbial announcements from the stage.

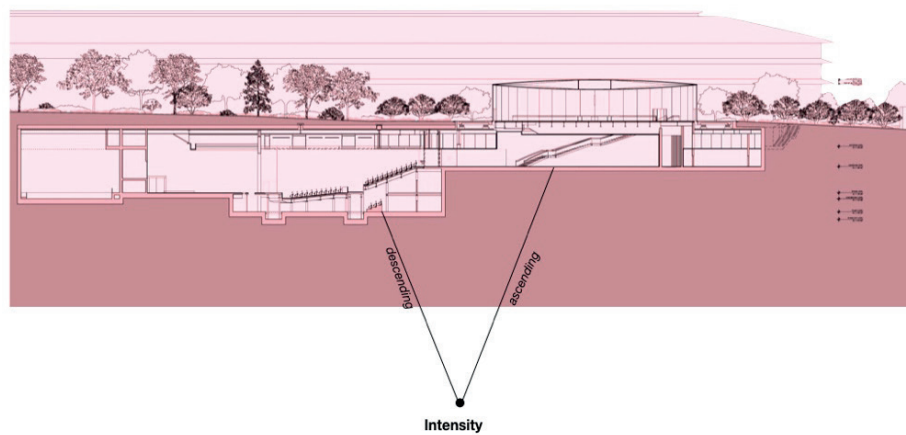
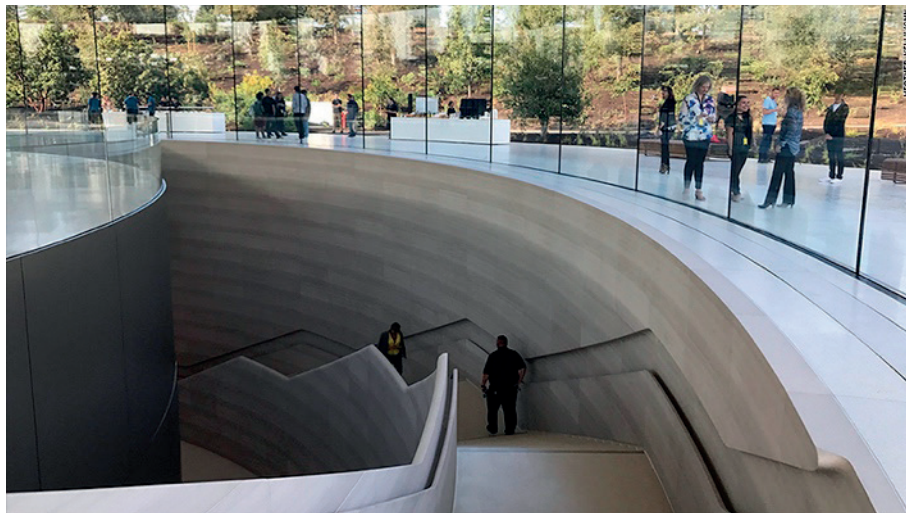
The last metres that separate this disjointed group of individuals are marked by a short path corresponding to a lowering of the roof with, on what appears to be marble, the following engraving: Steve Jobs Theater (S:00:00:48, F:00:01:04). This inscription represents the true genesis of a threshold, i.e. the point beyond which nothing is as before. We are now at the mercy of the collective movement that fills the seats and, at that point, every singularity is now outclassed by a group emotion, which at least in this phase is expressed as a great expectation for the disclosure of the secret.

From the symbolic point of view, when everyone is preparing to lose a part of themselves in order to conform to the collective substance, we find ourselves faced with new dialectical oppositions whose goal is to generate a series of emotional contents capable of nourishing this new-born collective body. Thus, the composition is followed by the “dialectic of [emotional] intensity” (S:00:01:05, F:00:01:29), which ushers in a new phase of the rite: the liminal phase. Once again, symbols use matter to express themselves, and

once again the invisible finds in the architectural structure of the auditorium a means to express itself. The point where the secrets are revealed is the heart of the hill. The cylinder with the glass roof is in fact only the entrance that provides access, down circular stairs, into the bowels of the earth.

What contrasts the pre-liminal with the liminal phase is a concrete downwards movement by all the individuals, now members of the community, and here a new symbolic framework is established and new dialectical images take shape.

Figure 11 – Above, an image of the circular stairs leading to the auditorium. Below, a cross section of the Steve Jobs Theater showing the circular shape, which forms the outside, the stairs descending and the auditorium located in the bowels of the hill.



In this way, the whole being formed is digested by the depths of the earth and the movement of swallowing reconfigures the variety of individuals, ingesting them in an orderly way by means of the regulated distribution of the seats. The emotion that will soon animate this body is as one with the visceralness of the earth: so emotion finds its counterpart in the intimacy that envelops the community. The ascension (of the pre-liminal phase) that stretches upwards and towards the light contrasts with the descent (of the liminal phase) that enters the dark heart of the hill. While before, through the image of composition, we could distinguish the inside from the outside, now, thanks to the image of intensity, an enveloping and centralizing force presses on the collective body to make it become, through the intensification of characters, a formation that can express itself through shared emotional manifestations. Therefore, while the pre-liminal phase actuated a component that was completely external to the individuals, organizing and assembling them by means of a series of architectural elements, now, in the liminal phase, what we see at work is a force that enters the depths of a newly formed collective body.

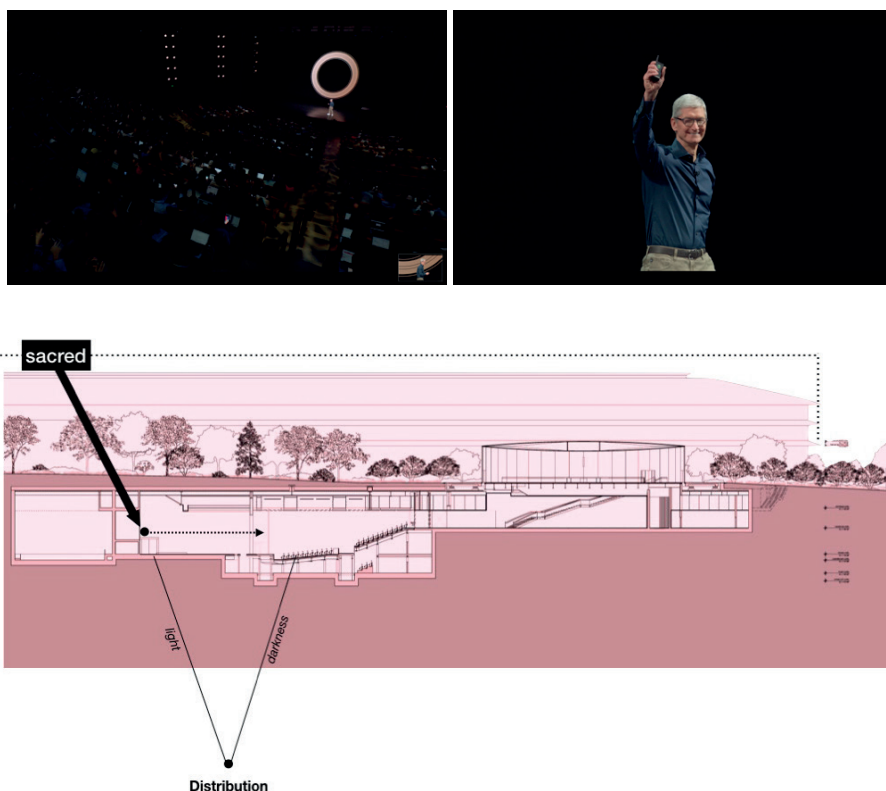
The liminal phase, unlike the previous one, is more articulated⁹ and, supporting the dialectic of intensity, there is another dialectic, which also acts on the collective body gathered in the bowels of the mountain. This is the “dialectic of distribution” (of the cult) (S:00:01:30, F:01:46:30), which plays on the contrast between light and darkness. The contrast between light and darkness acts on the group which has now been consolidated through the previous phases, and its aim is to create a hierarchy in the performance of worship. In fact, while on the one hand, darkness demarcates the community of the faithful, the light projected on the person on stage serves to indicate the administrators of the cult – who, soon, will have the task of modulating the emotional register experienced by the spectators.

It is only thanks to this hierarchy that worship can be administered, by keeping the collective body under control. Everything happens without there being risks of subversion of the order, and the priests can control the emotional modulation that inundates the public. To confirm this hierarchy, as soon as everyone takes a seat and everything is ready to start, it is a video that is projected before anything else happens (S:00:01:30, F:00:04:20). It is the same film

⁹ The richness of the liminal phase, compared to the previous phase, is dictated by the centrality that it assumes with respect to the performance of the entire rite. As Turner clarified, it is thanks to this phase that “new models, symbols, paradigms, etc., arise – as the seedbeds of cultural creativity in fact. These new symbols and constructions then feed back into the ‘central’ economic and political-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and *raison d’être*.” (Turner, 1982, p. 28) In the case examined here, it is thanks to the germinal power of this phase that a real re-enchantment of the world takes place, and it is thanks to this specific poietic function of mimesis II that the world can subsequently be lived according to the perspective dictated by the narrative, concluding the spiral of the mimetic process and returning to the order of reality subjected to the conditions envisaged by the narrative itself (mimesis III).

whose protagonist is the girl running – and resumed in the previous part. The content seems precious and the action of running expresses the need to deliver what is inside. She runs through the trees, runs across the Apple Park, until she reaches the Auditorium to enter backstage and finally deliver the much desired content to the Supreme Pontiff: only at this point does Tim Cook open the briefcase to reveal the element which can give him full control of worship: the clicker, that is, the handheld device he uses to change the slides projected on the screen and thus to guide the rhythms of emotion. The clicker, then, that will be passed from hand to hand to those who, from time to time, tread the boards to unveil small portions of the mystery, endows the ministers of worship with authority and gives them full control over the spectators' emotions.

Figure 12 – Above, Tim Cook; as soon as he goes on stage, his first action is to wield the clicker and show it to the public. Below cross section in which the dialectic of the distribution is shown. Below, the stage seen from the perspective of the spectators, where we can observe the dialectic between light and darkness.



With the authority conferred by the sceptre, first Tim Cook and then Jeff Williams, Phil Shiller, Kaiann Drace and Lisa Jackson, will go back and forth on stage, as if they want to reach every part of the wide spectrum of faithful

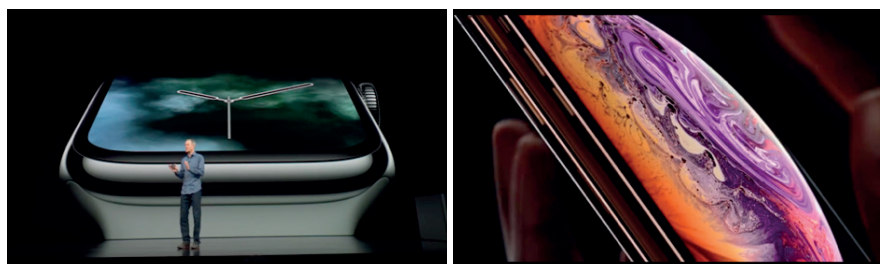
present in the hall. Their steps are slow and their lip movements seem very clear, so as to underline the solemnity of the words spoken.

As a support, behind them, is the great altar from which images of the objects of worship are projected. The word *altar*, which derives directly from the Latin *altar* and “can be related to *altus*”, in the sense of a real elevation, also, “in all likelihood, is related to the verb *adolere* (‘adore’, originally ‘to burn, to raise smoke or fragrance’), and took the meaning of a place where fire is burned, as in the case of sacrifice (Edsman, 1994, p. 11). Here, in fact, just like an altar, the maxi screen is the place where the sacred element that is being worshipped evaporates from the material substance of the objects of worship. The altar is therefore the point from which the objects are revealed through the surprise effect, creating, according to Aristotle, that narrative vertex (*metabolé*) in the plot (*muthos*).

This emanation of a phantasmagorical substance assumes various manifestations, and in all cases the aim is to address the different levels of which the collective body is composed: the cognitive, the emotional, the imaginative, etc. The different types of projected images make it possible to cover the variegated psychosomatic composition of the participants and achieve the almost total participation of the faithful.

A first type consists of “dream images”. These images are intended to dilate the order of the functional use of an object. By expanding the number of possibilities it has to engage in the actions typical of everyday life, this type of image could even be seen as creating a desire without any concrete manifestation, as an end in itself, to the point that people are led to want a practical, functional object without fully understanding its practicality and function. It is a type of representation that eludes the order of reality, and its phantasmic substance can (and must) embrace any possible imaginative collocation by the users. These images are therefore full of potential for straying outside the limits, but require further compensation so that it is always possible to establish borders that can be superimposed on users’ real life.

Figure 13 – A series of “dream images”



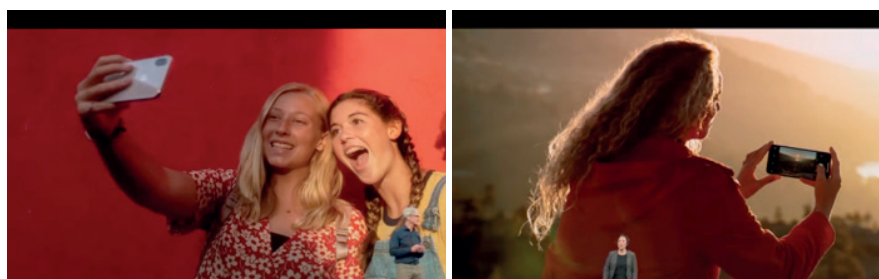
These images clearly show the phantasmagorical element that emanates from matter and speaks to the innermost part of the collective body, appeal-

ing to the emotional dimension. This activates the imagination, which is used to place in one's life an image that goes beyond the object's materiality and practicality. The second type of image, on the other hand, aims to throw back down to earth what has just been raised. We define this type here as "analytical images". They are meant to speak to the calculating part of the collective body. They present the object of worship as fragmented: the processor and its power, the camera lens and its video performance, the screen and its playback qualities, etc. The object appears in its crudest guise: an assemblage of parts whose mutual determination elevates it to the rank of object of desire, but starting with operational qualities, to then discover how it can be used in practical terms.

Figure 14 – A series of "analytical images"



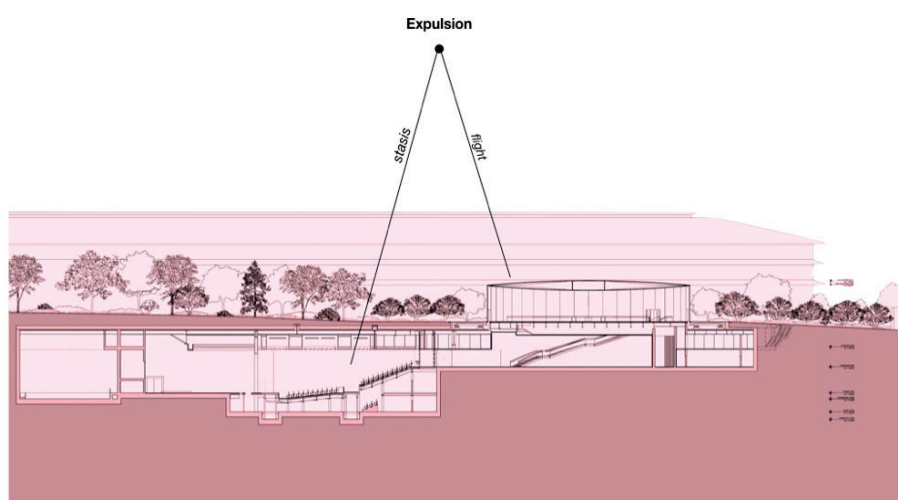
Figure 15 – A series of "placement images"



While the dream images and analytical images are intended to place the object in a sphere which goes beyond the order of reality but remains within specific operational qualities, there is a third type of image that can bring together the phantasmagorical and functional elements: these are "placement images". The function and purpose of these images is in fact to place the object (both in its emotional and functional version) in the lives of us all. In the totality of its existence, both the phantasmagorical and the practical elements invade scenes of daily life, but when being presented through the two previous types in "enhanced" versions, their placement in everyday life must be in turn strengthened. Whenever there are images of placement, we are in the presence

of smiling young people who use the object in extreme conditions. We have an excessive “staging of life”: whether it is shown in more natural moments, or in extreme conditions, which put the power of the object to the test (photographing a sunset, taking a selfie at night, or making a note of one’s physical activity while snowboarding or swimming in the pool).

Figure 16 – A cross-section showing the dialectic of the expulsion. Below, one of the last frames of the video, in which the spectators get up from their places and the room begins to empty



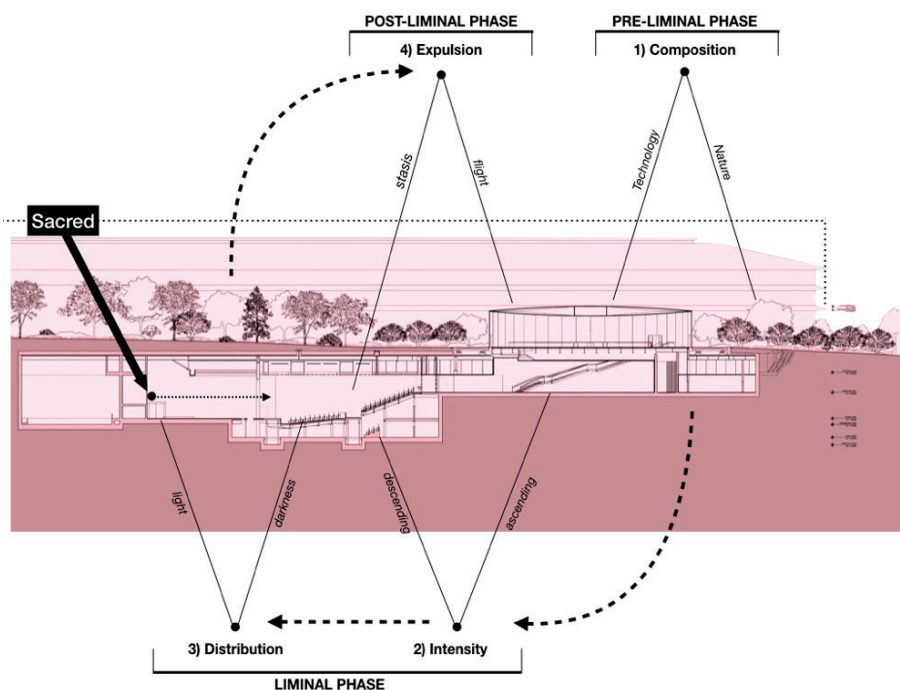
The mystery staged during the liminal phase in the auditorium offers all the spectators a portion of the sacred. It is a mystery, however, whose full function is seen in the last dialectical image. In the very last scene of the video being analysed we can see the collective body in the process of disintegration. The post-liminal phase comes to life, characterized by the “dialectic of expulsion” (of the collective body) (S:01:46:31, F:01:46:44) from the borders of the cult. This phase, like the others, is characterized by a juxtaposition of elements and is constituted through the antinomy of stasis and flight. After more than an hour contemplating the objects of worship (in the dark, enveloped in their seats and arranged in a semicircle), when they re-emerge to everyday life and trample the profane soil, it seems that everyone, almost in the grip of an interior impetus, cannot wait to return to the light, to retrace the rite backwards and return to the starting position. This escape whereby everyone leaves their position, however, does not take them back to their starting position. The experience of the sacred in fact constitutes, the cone of shadow through which they observe the profane world.



This last phase of the rite actuates *mimesis* III, that is the invasion of narrative fiction in the real world. The *pathos* experienced in the previous phases becomes an dynamic substance placed in the hearts of the faithful with which to combat the dreary succession of everyday events, enveloping it around the emotional content experienced during the event and embodied in the objects of worship. Thanks to *mimesis* III, therefore, a daily world now affected by the enchantment of a naked product enveloped in a phantasmagorical substance is fully legitimised; and it is also thanks to this camouflaging process that the regular succession of moments that every day we live is enveloped by the enchantment of possessing objects that transport us, albeit only for a moment, into another world.

It must be said however that all the ways and representations through which the object of worship is staged will always be merely a partial revelation of the numinous content within the great temple (Apple Park). This partiality makes the phantasmagorical power embodied in the objects short-lived, and the narrative machine thus finds itself cyclically renewing, through an operation of partial unveiling of the mysterious content, the adherence to a faith placed in a phantasmagorical technology. With two presentations a year, queues in front of Apple Stores, and the clamour that occurs every time Apple products are unveiled to the world, the mystery cult, which finds in digital technology a form in which to exist and be preserved, continues to be perpetuated.

Figure 17 – Diagram showing the entire cycle of the rite



Conclusion

By analysing the Special Event organized by Apple we have seen how narrative is not a closed circle in the world of fiction, but a spiral aimed at intensifying the meaning of the associated life by multiplying its planes of reality. The complex narrative in the case examined in fact makes the latest iPhone and Apple Watch a point where fiction has the ability to define the actions – even in the most microscopic aspects – of our lives, giving vent to our impulses, immersing us in new social phenomena or even achieving our innermost aspirations. But what is staged in Cupertino is not limited to performing the immediate aspects of an educational function, namely educating users with regard to the function of objects and presenting to a dreamy-eyed public the concrete reality of the functions of these objects. Going deeper, the event being considered here embodies the etymological sense of the term *educate* seen at the beginning, since it pushes its community beyond its ordinary placement and raises it to a new (sacred) dimension.

The possibility of fiction to reposition the reality of daily life on a transcendent plane is in fact to be found in its ability to reactivate the religious archetype. The rite, for its part, has the task of establishing individuals' de-

gree of involvement in this feeling, which is rooted in the depths of the collective consciousness. Both the rite and the narrative interpenetrate and determine a centripetal movement capable of attracting a group of individuals and turning them into a community to which to deliver a glorious destiny of technological and phantasmagorical goods with which we may live a sacralized daily life. It is here that the power of the sacred is realized, and it is this animistic cult of technological objects, which, despite finding its reason to exist and prosper in the complexity of matter, embodies our hopes that a mass of processors may be able to save us from everyday life and take us to a special dimension.

If we consider the form of worship we have analysed in California – that after a few hours would invade the world – as a narrative form through which daily life may be enchanted, then contemporary capitalism, from this perspective, may be seen as a contemporary form of religion to which the global masses adhere in order to give purpose and order to their existence.

Using these objects on a daily basis thus means holding a fragment of the sacred in your hands; the materiality of the technological object will merge and become one with the invisible spiritual energy that surrounds it and projects it to a level above the profane order. The fetish-object will ultimately be the means whereby the capitalism of our age, worthily represented by one of the greatest economic-financial empires, reactivates an archetypal sentiment; the Apple community, on the other hand, is one of the highest expressions of complexity through which not the economic powers, but humanity itself, feels the need to shout out to the world the richness of its composition.

Acknowledgment

The paper presented here by the authors was written together and is the result of their joint discussions and reflections. It has however been agreed that we may attribute sections I and II (introduction and “The Apple Event and the religious archetype of the narrative”) to Pier Luca Marzo and sections III and IV (“The Rite of the Apple and the reactivation of mythical forces” and “Conclusion”) to Antonio Tramontana.

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