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Deliberation and the Extraordinary: The mobilization of fear and hope in divination and conspiracy theories

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Abstract Divination and conspiracy theories are societal phenomena that share at least two features: they both seek out explanations for a peculiar state of the world and perplex most members of our modern occidental societies. In this paper, we will explore these phenomena through the glance of rhetorical deliberation, with a particular focus on the impact of fear and hope on the process. Doing so, we hope to achieve a better understanding of the deliberative genre, especially for what concerns the role of the emotions of fear and hope in persuasion.

Keywords: Deliberation, Fear, Hope, Rhetoric, Divination, Conspiracy

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0. Introduction

At first sight, ancient Greek divination and conspiracy theories have very few in common, and we would like to immediately clarify that our purpose in this paper will not be to deny the obviousness, nor to artificially try to bound these two societal phenomena. Still, in our opinion, they share at least two characteristics: they both seek out explanations for a peculiar state of the world[1], and perplex most members of our modern occidental societies.

We would like to explore them through the glance of rhetorical deliberation[2], and address the specific question of the impact of fear, of the representation of nearby evil, on the capacity to properly deliberate, and hence, to make a reasonable decision.

[1] According to various scholars working on conspiracy theories, such as P-A Taguieff for example, conspiracy theories are explanation for a state of the world, or a peculiar event that are usually more prominent in the public sphere in time of crisis. The presence of those discourses in these specific times is usually related to the component of suspicion and lack of trust toward the common authorities and channels of information (Taguieff 2013: 17).

[2] In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies three type of oratory discourses: the forensic discourse, the deliberative discourse, and the epideictic discourse. Each discourse relates to a specific argumentative function and expects a specific answer from the audience. The function of the deliberative genre is to

According to these premises, and through the study of two peculiar rhetorical contexts, we hope to be able to achieve a better understanding of the deliberative speech, especially for what concerns emotions.

1. Fear and hope in Aristotelian rhetoric

The impact of fear on the ability to decide has been recognised since the very first rhetorical theories[3]. It is well known that Aristotle established three technical proofs, on which the whole rhetorical system relies on: *ethos* (the self-image built by the orator through their speech), *logos* (the core of the argumentation, the selection and articulation of arguments), and *pathos* (the emotions). He provides, in the second book of the *Rhetoric*, a definition of each relevant emotion, including fear. As this will be the starting point of our discussion, we will begin by briefly summarising its content and the connection that Aristotle established with deliberation.

Fear has a particular status among emotions, as it is usually seen as a universal emotion, that can be recognised even in animals' behaviour[4]. Still, the kind of fear, *phobos*, described by Aristotle is less trivial, as it depends on the evaluation of a representation of a potential threat. He defines fear as:

> A painful or troubled feeling caused by the impression of an imminent evil that causes destruction or pain; for men do not fear all evils, for instance, becoming unjust or slow-witted, but only such as involve great pain or destruction, and only if they appear to be not far off but near at hand and threatening, for men do not fear things that are very remote; all know that they have to die, but as death is not near at hand, it is not a concern. If then this is fear, all those things must inspire fear that appear to have great power of destroying or inflicting injuries that tend to produce great pain. That is why even the signs of such misfortunes are fearful, for the fearful thing itself appears to be near at hand, and danger is the approach of anything fearful (*Rhetoric*, II, 5; trans. Freeze 2020).

Fear, in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, is mostly correlated to our relations with others: «Such signs are the enmity and anger of those able to injure us in any way; for it is evident that they have the desire, so that they are not far from doing so». Aristotle expresses in this passage a very pessimistic vision of men, who, he claims, «do wrong whenever they can» and most of them are «rather bad than good, and the slaves of gain and cowardly in time of danger» (*Rhetoric*, II, 2; trans. Freeze 2020).

Still, not all of us are likely to feel fear in the same way. Too confident people, who "think that they will suffer nothing" and become insolent don't fear; and those who "think that they have already suffered all possible ills" aren't afraid either. Indeed, and this is crucial for our discussion, according to Aristotle: «there must remain some hope of being saved, if they are to feel anguish. A sign of this is that fear makes men deliberate, whereas no one deliberates about things that are hopeless» (*Rhetoric*, II, 5; trans. Freeze 2020).

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support or dissuade, in term of usefulness/harmfulness, a decision to be taken, for example, "should we pass a new law on tax shift?". The speaker will argue against or for such question and try to persuade the audience to either back up or dismiss the proposition. The proposition always concerns a future decision, relates to human affairs and is usually taken in front of an assembly (*Rhet.* I, 3 1358 b 1-30).

[3] The impact of emotions on our ability to deliberate and their relevance in rhetorical processes have been well established, from different epistemological perspectives; see for instance Piazza 2021; Micheli 2010; Danblon 2002; Damasio 1994.

[4] For an overview on fear in Aristotle's theories, see for instance Konstan 2006: 129-135.

To sum up, fear, in the Aristotelian rhetoric, is directed toward a specific threat, usually embodied by a more powerful or stronger person. The mere representation (in Greek: *phantasia*)[5] of this threat causes fear. In this respect, it differs from angst, a more general feeling. Besides, fear may be a trigger to involve in a deliberation, in order to find the best way to avoid the danger, but as a condition, there must remain hope.
We would like to suggest that these reflections might be useful to better understand the mechanisms involved in at least some types of conspiracy theories and achieve a more subtle understanding of the judgement made by ancient authors on the use of divination.

2. When divination meets the deliberative sphere

The connection between ancient Greek divination and rhetoric, and more specifically deliberative rhetoric may, at first glance, appear to be antinomic. And one could indeed argue that, in a way, rhetoric replaced the ancestral, archaic model of the Masters of Truth, among which was the seer. The words of the seer, because of his specific nature and status in the society, were *per se* effective, and did not need to be convincing (Detienne 1967). Still, in the classical period, rhetoric did not completely overrule divination, but rather subsumed it. Divination had to adapt to the new frames of the society. The reading of the Greek historian Herodotus, whose work is the first historical text written in prose transmitted by the manuscript tradition, illustrates this point very well. Indeed oracles, seers, and divinatory sanctuaries such as the temple of Apollo at Delphi, where the Pythia uttered the god's answers, frequently appear in his work[6], and divine answers partially shape the course of history. But contrary to a widely spread idea, human politics and rhetorical deliberation are still the core of the decision-taking process, even when the gods are involved.
To show how it could have worked, we would like to focus on an extract from Herodotus' seventh book, that illustrates this connection, and will particularly highlight the impact of fear on the deliberative process.
The action takes place near Athens, in 480 BC, in the context of the second Persian War. Athens is in great difficulty: the Persian army gets dangerously close to the city and the Athenians decide to consult Apollo for advice. The god gives them a terrible answer: they must leave the city as fast as they can, because Athens will be harshly attacked, and destroyed[7].
Upon hearing this oracle, the Athenians were greatly afflicted. This answer leaves no space for hope: the city will be destroyed. Therefore, unsurprisingly, no political deliberation takes place. Instead, the delegation adopts a religious posture of supplication, imploring the god to change the course of events. It is worth noticing that the mere fact that the Athenians actually do something, instead of giving up, even if it is

[5] On mental representations, see Webb 2009: 110-113; 2007: 464; 1997; Dainville **&** Donckier de Donceel 2021.
[6] On these two oracles, see Blösel 2004: 91-101; Evans 2006; 1988; How & Wells, 1961: 181-182; Crahay 1956: 301-302.
[7] «Wretches, why tarry ye thus? Nay, flee from your houses and city, flee to the ends of the earth from the circle embattled of Athens! Body and head are alike, nor one is stable nor other, Hands and feet wax faint, and what so lieth between them Wasteth in darkness and gloom; for flame destroyed the city, Flame and the War-god fierce, swift driver of Syrian horses. Many a fortress too, not thine alone, shall he shatter; Many a shrine of the gods he'll give to the flame for devouring; Sweating for fear they stand, and quaking for dread of the foeman, running with gore are their roofs, foreseeing the stress of their sorrow; Wherefore I bid you begone! Have courage to lighten your evil» (Herodotus VII, 140; trans.: Godley 1921).

in a strictly religious context, is already praised by Herodotus, who says that the Athenians "stood firm" despite the shock caused by this threatening oracle[8].
And indeed, the Athenians will get a second answer, whose content doesn't differ much from the first one, but whose tone is significantly different:

> Vainly doth Pallas strive to appease great Zeus of Olympus; Words of entreaty are vain, and cunning counsels of wisdom. Nathless a rede I will give thee again, of strength adamantine. All shall be taken and lost that the sacred border of Cecrops Holds in keeping to-day, and the dales divine of Cithaeron; Yet shall a wood-built wall by Zeus all-seeing be granted Unto the Trito-born, a stronghold for thee and thy children. Bide not still in thy place for the host that cometh from landward, Cometh with horsemen and foot; but rather with draw at his coming, turning thy back to the foe; thou yet shalt meet him in battle. Salamis, isle divine! 'tis writ that children of women Thou shalt destroy one day, in the season of seedtime or harvest (Herodotus VII, 141; trans. Godley 1921).

Apollo admits that he is powerless: the city of Athens will be destroyed. But now, there is hope for the Athenian population, a "wooden wall" will be granted, as a "stronghold" for them and their children. Still, the Athenians now have to decide what to do. They must interpret the oracle, to decipher what does the "wooden wall" refer to, and, consequently, what action they will undertake. In order to do so, they gather in an assembly (Blösel 2004: 101; Vernant 1974: 9; Baker 2006: 21), and deliberate. Some argue that the wooden wall is simply the wall surrounding the city, other, especially Themistocles, argue that it refers to the Athenian fleet. This second option will prevail: as it is assumed that Apollo supports Athens, the fact that he refers to the bay of Salamis with the adjective "divine" is seen as a sign that the sea will benefit the Athenians. Besides, a recently built fleet is available. And indeed: the city itself will be destroyed by the Persian army, but the Athenians will win a decisive naval battle in Salamis, forcing the Persian troops to retreat.
As already stated, the oracle leaves the religious sphere to enter the political, rhetorical assembly. The decision is taken after a civic deliberation, and the responsibility of the action relies on the citizens, not on any religious authority. Besides, the Athenians listen to Themistocles and agree to lead the battle on the sea, because they judged his arguments more suitable, αἱρετώτερα, an adjective used no less than 21 times by Aristotle himself in his development on deliberation in his *Rhetoric*[9]. Herodotus also stresses the fact that Themistocles previously gave good advice to the city and was therefore seen as a wise man[10].
In this case, we clearly see, first, how deliberation and divination can be – and actually ought to be – correlated, and, secondly, how hope plays a crucial step in the very possibility to deliberate. The second divinatory case that we would like to approach shows, however, that the process is not always so smooth.

[8] See for instance Carrière 1988; Robertson 1987.
[9] *Rhetoric* I, 1362a, 22; 1362b, 9-11-19-27; 1363b, 14- ; 1364a, 1, 37- ; 1364b, 28-36- ; 1365b, 3- ; 1366a, ; 1366b, ; 1367a, ; 1369b, ; 1394a, ; 1397a, 27.
[10] The deliberative aspect of this extract was so salient that it became, a few centuries later, a topic for a rhetorical exercise: the rhetor Sopater (third-fourth century) uses the "Wooden wall oracle" to illustrate the development of the discussion of an ambiguous text (the stasis of amphibology), which largely overlap the treatment of deliberative speeches in the frame of the *staseis* theories (*Division of Questions*, 8, 377-382 Walz).

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3. When angst hinders the deliberative process

In 415 BC, the city of Athens decides to launch an expedition in Sicily. The official motivation is the rescue of their allies, the city of Egesta, but there is little doubt about the fact that they also wanted to extend their territory, and resource, especially in a context of rivalry with Sparta. This will lead to a fiasco, and, ultimately, to the Athenian defeat in the Peloponnesian war. The large majority of the Athenian citizens seems to have been in favour of this expedition, although Nicias, the statesman who is at the centre of this example, tried to dissuade them from undertaking such an enterprise. If at the beginning, the situation seems promising, the Athenian troops will soon be disenchanted. After several turnarounds, the only reasonable option for the Athenians is to try to escape from Sicily. Nicias, who now leads the troops with Demosthenes, is reluctant, because he fears the reaction of the city at their return, but finally resigns. In brief, at this point, Nicias is leading an expedition in which he doesn't believe, and is about to flee by sea, although hesitant (Rood 2017: 22-25; Niedzielzki 2017: 289-290; Westlake 1941: 61-62). Besides, he is severely sick, and had vainly asked the Athenian authorities to be replaced in his function.

In 413, the Athenians have the opportunity to escape from Sicily, are about to board, but their leader, Nicias, forbids sailing because a lunar eclipse occurred. The Greek historian Thucydides describes the scene as follows:

> All was at last ready, and they were on the point of sailing away, when an eclipse of the moon, which was then at the full, took place. Most of the Athenians, deeply impressed by this occurrence, now urged the generals to wait; and Nicias, who was somewhat over-addicted to divination and practices of that kind, refused from that moment even to take the question of departure into consideration, until they had waited the thrice nine days prescribed by the soothsayers. The besiegers were thus condemned to stay in the country […] (Thucydides VII, 50, 3-4; trans. Smith 1923)

This extract is sometimes put forward as a proof that Thucydides was profoundly opposed to the use of divination, and that he condemns Nicias' attitude: as a wise and educated man, he should have disregarded the opinion of the seer, and known that eclipses are nothing more than natural phenomena. But it is actually more complex than that. Thucydides does not explain how he judges Nicias' decision not to move, and his refusal to even deliberate the question at this point, but he clearly holds him in high esteem (Niedzielski 2017: 44-45; Rood 2017: 22-25; Liebeschuetz 1968: 298-299). Besides, back then seers usually accompanied armies. Thucydides himself held military positions before turning to the writing of history and seers were likely part of his troops (Oost 1975: 192).

We can also rely on other testimonies related to this episode in ancient historiography. Plutarch lived during the first and early second centuries, and, among many other works, wrote a collection of biographies of historical characters worthy of remembrance. Nicias is one of them. There are several eclipses in Plutarch's *Lives*, and fear is not an uncommon reaction among the narrative protagonists (Sapere 2016; Stockley 1998). The biographer often highlights the spectacular effect caused by these phenomena with visual descriptions of the sky, of the sudden darkness, changes of colours in the sky, so to explain the fear felt by the men witnessing them[11]. Still, when it comes to Nicias, his words are even more severe than those of Thucydides:

[11] For instance: *Life of Aemilius*, 17, 7: «Now, when night had come, and the soldiers, after supper, were betaking themselves to rest and sleep, on a sudden the moon, which was full and high in the heavens, grew dark, lost its light, took on all sorts of colours in succession, and finally disappeared» (trans.: Perrin 1918). See Flower 2008: 118-119.

> But just as everything was prepared for this and none of the enemy were on the watch, since they did not expect the move at all, there came an eclipse of the moon by night. This was a great terror to Nicias and all those who were ignorant or superstitious enough to quake at such a sight. […] 24. 1: Abandoning almost everything else, Nicias lay there sacrificing and divining until the enemy came up against him (*Life of Nicias*, 23, 1-24,1; trans. Perrin 1916).

Plutarch's account of this event is highly valuable because he does explain what Nicias did wrong. The first point that he made is that Nicias' interpretation of the eclipse as a sign sent by the gods is not at all surprising, especially since the mechanisms of lunar eclipses were not yet understood at this time. But his seer gave a wrong interpretation of the phenomenon: the eclipse actually showed the gods' support to the escape.
The problem here lies in the fact that Nicias was paralysed by fear. Plutarch establishes a strict distinction between, on the one hand, devotion and respect towards the gods (and this includes the taking into consideration of divine signs), and, on the other hand, superstition, to which he dedicated one of his works (*On superstition*). Being superstitious, to him, is worse than not believing in gods. Superstition relies on angst and prevents people from acting and thinking. One could add that it also hinders deliberation, and hence the active involvement in the civic life of the city. Nicias was so frightened that the gods may disapprove the decision to leave Sicily that he not only neglected deliberation but refused to deliberate. His only answer was a religious one. And even so, had he taken the time to evaluate the situation, he would have realised that even from a religious perspective, his attitude was extreme.
In these two examples, fear, and the strength to overcome it, plays a central part in the ability to deliberate and to make a decent decision. But obviously, other factors (such as the presence of hope) must be taken into consideration. This is what we would like to argue in the second part of our paper, taking as starting point conspiracy theories.

4. When there is no fear, and no hope

As for divination, the connection between conspiracy theories and rhetoric, and more specifically deliberative rhetoric, may, at first appear as antinomic. Indeed, even though they are usually discourses that oppose the general accepted explanation of a specific event or state of the world and thus present as counter-argumentation (Keeley 1999), the explanation they offer most of the time is usually marked by a determinist component, no place is left for chance and unpredictability (Nicolas 2014; Giry and Tika 2020): coincidences and indications of a potential conspiracy are presented as confirmed proofs of an alleged and secret conspiracy (Danblon and Nicolas 2010; Bronner 2013; Taguieff 2013).
But still, we believe that studying conspiracy discourses in regard to deliberative rhetoric could help us to better understand the importance of hope for deliberation to occur and more broadly, to better understand and delimit some of the salient traits of deliberation. Moreover, in this study, we choose to focus on a peculiar corpus: anti-vax and conspiracy discourses about the covid-19 pandemic mobilised to answer deliberative questions, such as: "should we wear a face mask in public?"; "should we comply with vaccination against covid-19?"; "should we respect sanitary measures?"; "should the schools reopen/close?"; etc. The speeches given to answer those questions, in our corpus, could be qualified as "covid scepticism" (which is not always the result of a conspiracy theory) and more specifically with a conspiracist view on the worldwide

pandemic[12]. More precisely, the speeches chosen[13] for analysis are pronounced and/or promoted by the Italian association *Commissione dubbio e precauzione*[14] and the antisystem association *100 giorni da Leoni*[15] which, on their internet pages and channels of communication either present the covid-19 as a recognised disease caused by a virus[16], or as the result of a virus circulating (and sometimes created and generated in laboratory) with the intention of vaccinating the whole world population : "they" should want the whole world population to be vaccinated because through vaccination, "they" could operate a sort of worldwide genocide and diminish the world population (as part of the so-called "Great Reset" conspiracist theory). This genocide would occur either through unpredicted and unexplained death or through diminishing women's fertility. In other speeches, the vaccine would be the mean for controlling the whole world population: through vaccine, microchip would be inserted in our bodies and, through the deployment of the 5G, "they" would be able to control the microchip, and thus "turn down" the people "they" do not want to see around, the people "knowing too much about what is really going on" being the main target of this operation (*i.e.* the people denouncing that alleged conspiracy, the [conspiracist] speakers themselves)[17].

Starting from what we said on the comparison between deliberations and divination, we will focus on the representation of fear and the presence of hope in the conspiracy corpus. As stated earlier, for deliberation to occur, fear may be mobilised by the orator to engage the deliberative assembly. In his treatise (*Rhet.*, II, 5, 1382a) Aristotle insists on the idea that fear is directed toward a specific threat, usually embodied in a more powerful or stronger person and that even though fear might be a trigger to involve in a deliberation, hope must remain for it to activate. In conspiracy discourses, our hypothesis is that the representation of the evil, the threat that embodies the fear is too strong and thus prevent the argumentative process from hope. In addition, the representation of the evil would be such that beside hope, the mere idea that the deliberation could occur is prevented too. Consequently, conspiracy speeches that are mobilised to answer deliberative questions paradoxically, forbid deliberation to take place.

[12] For more details on the covid-19 conspiracy theories see (Butter and Knight 2023).

[13] In this paper, we will look at parts of those speeches as they are relevant for studying the relationship between deliberation and conspiracy discourses and more broadly, the conditions for deliberation to take place.

[14] The Italian association Commissione dubbio e precauzione is part of the cooperative Generazioni future and was set up during the covid-19 pandemic. The commission present itself as an association of philosophers, scientists, lawyers, and legal experts whose aim is to reflect upon and criticise first the management of the covid-19 pandemic in Italy, and now, the international reaction and organization around the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The corpus we study here is composed of certain speeches delivered and promoted by the association during the covid-19 pandemic, speeches that we qualified as conspiracy discourses.
For more information: https://generazionifuture.org/dupre/ (consulted 20 April 2023).
For the Italian context, we do not enter the controversy surrounding whether Agamben (member of the Commissione dubbio e precausione) qualifies as a conspiracist. For more developments, we recommend (Cimatti 2022).

[15] The association 100 giorni da Leoni presents itself as fighting for 'Truth'. It is a project carried out on the Internet, by Riccardo Rocchesso. They publish videos, books, and other work thanks to the contribution of the project's supporters.
For more information: https://100giornidaleoni.it/ (accessed 20 April 2023).

[16] In some speeches, the covid-19 is not recognised as an existing disease but is depicted as a mere phantasy resulting from "State" manipulation.

[17] Note that the relationship between the explanations provided by conspiracy theories and by the epidemiology are at the centre of the recent paper written by (Alessi 2021).

Indeed, as it appears in the following text, in most conspiracy discourses about the covid-19 pandemic (but not only) the fear that these speeches induce is incarnated in *too* powerful characters. In these speeches, the threat is embodied by the representation of the evil as "omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent" people/group/forces, a sort of divinity against which one cannot fight and resist (Taguieff 2006: 39; Hougue 2020: 315–16). This idea is expressed, for instance, in the following text: during a French-Italian conference held by the *Dubbio e precausione* association, we notice that the "powers" they accuse of plotting against the population, are not precisely identified but referred to as "ultra billionaire", as "those people", with the impersonal pronoun "they", thus refer to undefined and very powerful people.

> Nous sommes dans un basculement de société, nous sommes littéralement entrés dans la troisième guerre mondiale, c'est-à-dire dans la guerre que mène une poignée d'ultramillardaires pour contrôler le monde et qui utilisent cette épidémie (…) Il faut bien comprendre que ces gens-là ne s'arrêteront pas (…) on ne va pas s'embêter avec quelques millions de morts pour qu'ils puissent se faire de l'argent (…)[18] (Olivier Soulier, 29/01/2022, French-Italian meeting of the «Commissione Dubbio e precauzione»: min. 01 :11"40 – 01 :19"22)

They, the alleged conspirators, are depicted as a sort of evil force infiltrating society, and we believe that this specific representation of the evil generates both too much fear and prevents deliberation: as "these" people are so powerful, trying to act against them would be pointless (Di Cesare 2021). There is both no more place for hope and no more purpose for deliberation; everything is already decided. As underlined before, for deliberation to take place, hope must be present (*Rhet.,* II, 5, 1383a, 1-10). And indeed, as exemplified in the following text, hoping for a better future, a positive answer towards deliberative questions on covid-19 sanitary measures can seem pointless if, as declared, "everyone is brainwashed and sensitive to mass propaganda":

> Purtroppo la maggior parte delle persone ha subito il lavaggio del cervello, indotto dal terrorismo mediatico e dalla propaganda nazi-sanitaria creata dai poteri forti, che ci vogliono obbligare a vaccinare i nostri innocenti giovani[19] (…).
> (Post di Mario Piemontesi, il 27 agosto 22 sul gruppo facebook «No Vax»).

Looking at Aristotle's treatise on *Rhetoric*, we note that the absence of hope could result from the depiction of a *too* powerful evil but also from the idea that someone who already suffered all the damages and sadness one could think of, will also be hopeless (*Rhet*., II, 5, 1383a 1-10). We find signs of these attitudes in the above text example.
Those two examples show how the absence of hope in those discourse prevent deliberation. Going one step further, we think that even though the question they wish to answer with this type of conspiracy discourses are from a deliberative type ("should we wear face masks in public transport?" for example) and thus should theoretically call for persuasion in terms of decision – according to Aristotle, we only deliberate on things that can be otherwise, and a decision is made in terms of useful/harmful[20] – we

[18] "We are facing a societal turn-over, we are literally entering the Third world war, it is to say, a war led by a handful of billionaires who control the word and use this pandemic (…). We must understand that those people won't stop (…) they won't bother a few millions of deaths if they can make money out of it (…)"
[19] "(…) Sadly, most of the people is brain-washed, because of mediatic terrorism and nazi-sanitarian propaganda, created by the strong powers, the ones who want to constrain to vaccine the youth (…)."
[20] For more precision on the type of questions and speeches that are considered to be deliberative, see, among various scholars Plantin and his idea of "argumentative situations" (Plantin 2011) and Di Piazza,

do see that deliberation is not possible. Deliberation is not possible in the case of conspiracy discourses about covid-19 pandemic for that there is no hope because, the ones "ruling the world" are *too* powerful and the general population has already suffered too much. There is no hope that thing would be different because everything has already been decided and is part of the "plan"; deliberating on issues that occur according to a predicted plan would then be pointless.

> Ho sempre detto che non credo che possa esistere una soluzione politica perché di nuovo, che senso ha cercare di andare a giocare all'interno di un sistema che nelle sue stesse regole è ammalato. Con l'idea di far cosa? Cambiarlo dall'interno? (…) La mia visione in assoluto è staccarsene[21] (…). (Matteo Gracis, 04/08/2021, video «Non mi candido», «100 giorni da Leoni», min. 16"30)

The idea that "entering the political scene" and try to make a difference is pointless is quite common for conspiracy discourses and we believe the corpus here analysed reflect a more general trait for deliberation in conspiracy discourses. Conspiracy theories are explanation of a specific event or state of the world that present a deterministic (but not assumed as such) narrative framework, capable of giving sense to facts and elements that appear *a priori* unrelated (Dominicy 2010). The various clues that a conspiracy theory identifies are almost automatically qualified as facts, all related, because they are the result of a unique cause, *i.e.* the plot. In this (alleged) conspiracy, participants would act in accordance with a secret plan: everything would already be written. Hence, we are confronted with a deterministic interpretation and representation of the events that leaves no (or little) room for deliberation as things can never be otherwise than as they were intended to be (Nicolas 2014: 1).

5. Conclusion

Deliberation is a persuasive progress crucial both in Antiquity and contemporary times. To better understand which are the criteria for deliberation and more precisely how the emotion of fear, as related to the representation of the evil and to the feeling of hope, is central in this argumentative process, we decided to examine two different corpuses that involve a deliberative decision. From this brief study on divination and conspiracy discourses, we might suggest that those are speeches that we tend to consider nowadays as irrational, partly because they lack capacity to properly deliberate. In our examples, divination is condemned because the deliberative process was neglected, while a reasonable divination should include a deliberation phase, and in our contemporary world, answering deliberative questions with a conspiracy theory that is deterministic and lacks hope, is too considered to be irrational. We argue that both this type of reasoning which seek to explain a peculiar state of the world, might be considered as unreasonable for they do not properly embrace the capacity to deliberate and hence, to make a reasonable decision.

Piazza and Serra about the relationship between rhetoric and deliberative democracy (Di Piazza, Piazza and Serra 2018).

[21] "I have always said that there is no political solution for this, because, once more, it would be non-sense to enter that world and try to play with a system that is intrinsically ill. And with what purpose? Change the system from within? (…) I am absolutely convinced that is better to take your distance with it (…)."

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