

MACHIAVELLI, UTOPIA, AND QUEER POLITICS

Davorin Žagar



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9058-8164>

Facultad de Artes Liberales
Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez

E-mail: davorin.zagar@edu.uia.cl

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Abstract This paper reconsiders conflict between the great and the plebs in Machiavelli from a perspective of "queer utopia". The paper maintains that confrontation between the great and the plebs is best understood as a clash between two principles: repetition and inertia versus creativity and action. When the plebeian utopian impulse to be free from the oppression of the great is appropriately excited and expressed as an incessant yearning for the new, the queer political agency that is unleashed results in production of alternative possibilities of living and being in the world that make the society freer and stronger.

Keywords desire, innovation, Fabius Rullianus, Machiavelli, queer utopia, queer politics

Introduction¹

This paper redescribes the conflict between the great and the plebeians in Machiavelli in queer terms. Bringing in a queer perspective in relation to Machiavelli has a primarily symbolic value. There are clear differences between the context of contemporary queer theory, with its specific preoccupation for sexual and gender emancipation of the citizens since the early 1990s, from that of Machiavelli's 16th-century thinking about plebeians' (*popolo minuto's*) inclusion into formal political institutions. However, when a queer approach is understood in a broader sense as an attitude that questions "regimes of the normal" (Warner, 1993: xxvi), that is, the established, naturalized hierarchies, conventions, norms, institutions, subjectivities, and predominant ways of knowing and being, it resonates with Machiavelli's own rebellious project concerned with instituting flexible, versatile 'new modes and

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orders'. A queer approach to the ineradicable social divisions inscribed at the heart of Machiavelli's society helps to shift the perspective from the conflict between the great and the people understood as ossified *identity* categories to a productive confrontation between two principles – domination, hierarchy, inertia and repetition vs. freedom, creativity, movement, and *action*.

While various existing political-theoretical approaches emphasize freedom and the strength-enhancing *vitalism* of social order in Machiavelli, this paper specifically rereads Machiavelli's political texts as inviting plebeians oppressed by the great to detach themselves from customary modes of being and doing. Rather than referring to an identity, "plebian" then primarily designates queer political agency. The utopian strand of queer theory presented through Muñoz's (2009) conceptualization of queer utopia is thereby used as a tool to liberate the plebeian utopian energies and desire for the new contained in Machiavelli's political texts. Unleashing the radical potential for the new encapsulated in Machiavelli's conception of the plebs enacts queer agency and invigorates ossified social and political order by continuously imagining and producing new forms of life that extend the spectrum of being and living for the society as a whole.

Queer utopia

In contrast to the common representation of Machiavelli as a thoroughly anti-utopian, realist thinker,² this paper joins a minor strand of the existing secondary literature on Machiavelli that recognizes elements of idealism and utopianism in his thinking and hence successfully complicates the tendency to place him unambiguously in either the realist or idealist camp.³ The paper seeks to address those moments in Machiavelli's principle political texts where the longings of the plebs allow for moving beyond the here and now into a different, less oppressive time and space that promises a more fulfilling life.

While Machiavelli undoubtedly starts his analysis from the perspective of "what is," (P, 15: 61)⁴ that is, from the present moment and the requirements of the concrete conjuncture, at the same time, his intention is to critically confront existing reality. Rather than a mere defense of what is, Machiavelli seeks to change the *status quo* and intervene in reality on the side of those who are oppressed (Winter, 2018: 14-16). Machiavelli's texts pave the way to introducing alternative "modes and orders" (P, 6: 23; D, I. Preface: 5) that open a new horizon for a freer way of life for all citizens. These new modes and orders never take one predetermined, concrete, and definite form. In this regard, Holman (2018b) considers Machiavelli's work, specifically *Discourses*, as pertaining to the type of "critical utopias." Unlike totalizing utopian thinking that offers a positive model and prescribes some determinate design, Machiavelli's type of critical utopia is not prescriptive in any way (89). Rather than being an end in itself, utopia as it figures in Machiavelli's *Discourses* is a means by

² Examples of such readings include approaches emphasizing Machiavelli's idea of *raison d'état*, e.g., Meinecke (1957); elitist/conservative readings, e.g., Strauss (1958); interpretations approaching Machiavelli as a modern political scientist, e.g., Cassirer (1946: 116-128); and international relations studies. For an overview of the latter, see Cesa (2014: 1-31).

³ E.g., Holman (2018a: 37), Holman (2018b: 96), Winter (2018: 16), Baccelli (2017: 366), Benner (2017: 170-175), Lefort (2012: 171), Del Lucchese (2009: 33), Viroli (2007: 466), and Minogue (1972: 152).

⁴ Henceforth, I refer to Machiavelli's books using the capital letter, followed by the book number (where applicable), chapter number, and finally, after the colon, the page number.

which humans' inexhaustible creative capacity is unleashed in the form of political action that results in an open-ended and incalculable becoming of political form.⁵

Machiavelli's work is thereby characterized by a curious mixture of a specific type of "historical, popular and radical" realism (Winter, 2018: 14) and a particular type of "critical" or "persistent" utopia (Holman, 2018b: 89). That unusual mixture serves as the point of departure for this article's examination of Machiavelli's "queer utopia." Inspired by Muñoz, the concept of "queer utopia" is understood here as the capacity of those who are oppressed in a society to persistently and collectively, within the presumed fixity of the here and now, imagine, recognize and anticipate potential openings and rediscover the spaces of indeterminacy that enable alternative, "queer" types of doing, becoming and living, resulting in concrete transformations of the established modes and orders (Muñoz, 2009: 1-32, 185-189). As used by Muñoz (2009), "queer" refers to an attitude of the marginalized that is best captured in terms of an incessant, utopian desire for the new, the not-yet-here, and the different, an attitude that continuously transforms the status quo by persistently erecting new worlds. Rather than conflating queerness with the mere negation and refusal of the normative, Muñoz thereby emphasizes the generative, creative, and metamorphic dimensions of queer life and politics and its capacity to expand the spectrum of possibilities available to society as a whole.⁶

A queer form of utopia resonates with Machiavelli's teaching regarding the appropriate form that plebeian politics needs to assume to effectively question the "normalcy" and "definitiveness" of the dominant modes and orders symbolically represented by the figure of the great. Machiavelli's "new modes and orders" are, the paper argues, best understood in terms of a comprehensive critique of hegemonic rules, norms, practices, discourses, and ideologies, a critique arising from continuous plebeian production of alternative ways of knowing, being, living, and doing in the world. If plebeian imaginative potential is appropriately enacted, the plebeian desire to be free from the oppression of the great can express itself in a queer utopian form, as a craving towards the not-yet-here. Such a plebeian striving for the new and different has the potential to bring about outstanding innovations, revitalizing the society and making it both stronger and freer.

Through critical dialogue with contemporary democratic readings of his texts the next section relates Machiavelli's political teaching with the broader project of queer social critique. The remaining sections then deal, first, with the figure of the great and, then, with that of the plebs, reconsidering each through the optics of queer utopianism. Finally, in an effort to capture deeper layers of meaning behind queer utopia, the paper concludes by analyzing the figure of captain Fabius Rullianus, whose example helps to reveal the radical nature of political agency in Machiavelli.

⁵ Holman therefore claims that Machiavelli should be considered as no less than an "exemplary" and "quintessential theorist of utopia" (2018b: 88, 90). However, in my view, emphasizing the universal (human) capacity for creativity underestimates a specifically plebeian function in the social field: the plebs' capability for what I term a modality of "queer utopianism." While Holman claims that the elimination of the great as an organized *socioeconomic class* opens the way to an order based on conflict arising from *individual* human difference and multiplicity, I argue that such a reading is based on an overly narrow understanding of the nature of *political* struggle between classes, reducing that struggle to one read in overly economic terms. See Holman (2018a: 185-216).

⁶ Such a "reparative" understanding of queerness resonates with the work of authors such as Anzaldúa (1987); Berlant (1997); and Sedgwick (2003).

A queer perspective on the democratic face of Machiavelli's teaching

The rich and lively field of democratic scholarship on Machiavelli has emphasized the centrality and inevitability of conflict in Machiavelli's conception of politics and society. In this context, Lefort's (1972) groundbreaking democratic interpretation deserves special attention. According to Lefort, Machiavelli's originality consists in his insight that every City (ancient or modern, principality or republic) is perennially divided into two social groupings, which are equated with two irreconcilable desires that constantly try to prevail one over the other: while the great desire to command and oppress the people, the people (that is, the plebeians) desire not to be commanded and oppressed by the great (P, 9, D, I. 4-5, FH, II. 12 and FH, III. 1). The irresolvable struggle between fundamentally different desires that permanently co-determine each other through their mutual conflictual opposition implies an *originally* divided being of the society, a schism that cannot be healed, producing insuperable contingency (e.g. Lefort, 2012: 141). Lucchese's reading of *Florentine Histories* (2000: 85-86; 2009: 32) further underscores the radicality of Machiavelli's conflictualism, which rests on extreme and absolute internal division between the greats and the plebs, thereby precluding a consensualist understanding of politics and the common good.⁷ While Machiavelli argues that conflict is an inescapable fact of social life, he is well aware that tumult can produce both harmful consequences, as demonstrated by the history of the Florentine republic, and beneficial ones, as was the case with the early Roman republic where "the *disunion* of the plebs and the Roman senate made that republic *free and powerful*" (D, I. 4).⁸

From a Lefortian perspective, the outcome of social division depends on the type of political regulation. Conflict is productive of freedom and empowers a community when a principality or a republic recognizes the fundamental, qualitative *difference* between the desire of great (to have) and plebs desire (to be).⁹ "So great is the ambition of the great that it soon brings that city to its ruin if it is not beaten down in a city by various ways and various modes" (D, I. 37: 80), and therefore "every city ought to have its modes with which the people can vent its ambition" so as to avail itself of the people in the "important things," (D, I. 4: 17), namely liberty and strength. Both Machiavelli's new principality and a republic are of necessity tilted towards the people whose end "is more decent than that of the great" (P, 9: 39) and whose desires are "rarely pernicious to freedom because they arise (...) from being oppressed" (D, I. 4: 17). However, Machiavelli's disposition towards the people is not to be conflated with naïve romanticism. The plebs are not inherently good; they can easily be corrupted by the vices of the great.¹⁰ Still, as long as the people remain uncorrupted (D, I. 17) and their desire is given an appropriate and 'ordinary' outlet, the resulting (bloodless) popular tumults have good effects (e.g. D, I. 4, D, I. 7):

⁷ Pace Skinner (1978: 181) who argues in favor of a "tensely-balanced *equilibrium*" between great and the plebs in the framework of conventionally understood mixed regime (emphasis added). However, such insistence on harmony does not take into account the qualitative *difference* between the two types of desire.

⁸ Emphasis added. On the difference between destructive Florentine and productive Roman conflicts, see, e.g., Bock (1990).

⁹ On Machiavelli's novel theory of desire at the center of Lefort's interpretation, see Žagar (2017: 38-49; 2019: 205-206; 316-324).

¹⁰ E.g. "Their [the great's] incorrect and ambitious behavior inflames in the breasts of whoever does not possess the wish to possess so as to avenge themselves against them (...)" (D, I. 5).

by continuously contesting the great's domination, they broaden political freedom while also preventing more serious conflicts from emerging (e.g. D, I. 8).¹¹ When the (uncorrupted) people are placed as the "guard of freedom," the results are beneficial for the entire City, since those who have "a greater will to live free" are not able to "seize freedom" (D, I. 5: 18). At the same time, they persistently prevent the great from seizing it for themselves by neutralizing the principle of difference and reducing society to unity and sameness (D, I. 5: 18). The type of society that Machiavelli regards as most desirable renews its strength by drawing creative energy from the excess and liveliness of the desire of the plebs who neither "dominate proudly" nor "serve humbly" (D, I. 58: 116); their will to live freely maintains the order (D, I. 58: 118) by preserving the division within the heart of society, preventing its closure in terms of some final identity. (See Lefort, 2012).

From a contextualist perspective, Machiavelli's praise of conflict is primarily directed against the humanist ideology of concord and harmony that was formed in 1380s as part of an effort to reestablish the commanding position of the great in Florence and to maintain the *status quo* (e.g., Najemy, 2000: 75-104; Pedullà, 2018: 10-83). The humanistic insistence on the common good and unity and its anxiety about conflict resulted in resolute suppression of difference and excess in both political and private life. This suppression of difference is best exemplified in the "unprecedented criminalization of political opponents" (Pedullà, 2018: 67) and overall tendency to discipline society and mold it in accordance with the image of the "good citizen", a tendency especially discernable in the era's ever more exhaustive observation and regulation of sexual behavior and sexual deviance, particularly that of the lower classes (Najemy, 2016: 165-184; Zorzi, 1988: 56-63). To that end, a special new institution of criminal justice, the Office of the Night, was introduced in 1432 with the sole aim of surveilling, policing, and punishing sodomy. A widespread practice in Florence broadly known as a 'Florentine vice', sodomy was then enjoyed by the *majority* of Florentine men, including Machiavelli himself (see Rocke, 1996: 3-4; on Machiavelli specifically, e.g. Ruggiero, 2007: 109-162). Sodomy was arranged according to strict sexual rules and roles, and was more harshly punished – with sodomites sometimes even burned to death under Savonarola's theocracy – when these norms were broken (Rocke, 1996: 87-111; 195-226).

If we now turn from a contextualist to a theoretical plane, the desire of the great for having can be understood as having translated into a comprehensive project of social control ossifying the community. At a deeper level, desire to acquire and possess expresses itself as craving for domination over the Other.¹² The great's domination therefore must not be reduced exclusively, or even primarily, to its socio-economic dimension.¹³ Their aim is more extensive: to efficiently command, administer, discipline, and regulate the social body and fashion it in conformity with their own mode of being in the world, imposing it on the rest of society. From that

¹¹ For anti-aristocratic readings stressing the disruptive aspects of Machiavelli's plebeian politics, see especially Vatter (2000); Holman (2018a); and Winter (2018). For vigorous populist readings focusing mostly, albeit not exclusively, on the institutionalization of conflict in Machiavelli, see especially McCormick (e.g. 2011); Pedullà (2018).

¹² See also Lefort (1978: 215-237).

¹³ Without doubt, the economic dimension of the domination of the great is significant. See especially, D, I. 37; D, III. 24: 269; P, 17: 99-100; D, III. 19: 261. On the fatal amalgamation of the acquisitive, economic logic of the great and their monopolization of political authority as a means to further enhance their (material) interests, see Holman (2018a: 4-6, 45-46); McCormick (2019: 18-20); Del Lucchese (2009: 70); and Pedullà (2018: 75-76).

perspective, the great embody the principle of domination in the broadest sense. It is then possible to appreciate Machiavelli's appraisal of the conflicts derived from the plebeian desire to be free as destabilizing the fixed, petrified identity of Florence and opening up the possibility of reimagining the Florentine republic in a myriad of different, new ways. The Machiavellian project resonates with that of queer social critique, which likewise aims at delegitimizing the "natural" modes and orders through counter-political action of the (primarily sexually) marginalized. In both Machiavelli and queer critical theory, that resistance serves as a revitalizing force that allows for novel reconfigurations and reordering of the hegemonic order, resisting ossification by persistently elaborating new worlds.

From a contemporary point of view, the figure of the plebs in Machiavelli's texts can be approached as a broad, unfixed political category encompassing various groups of individuals marked as Others who are marginalized and despised because some significant aspect of their way of being in the world does not conform to the normative expectations established by the greats.¹⁴ Issues such as sexuality, gender, class, and their intersections should therefore all be taken into consideration when thinking about the domination of the great from a Machiavellian perspective.

Regarding gender, for example, recent feminist interpretations have argued in favor of a *mimetic* gendered relation between *virtù* (male force) and fortune (female force) in Machiavelli's political thought (e.g., Becker, 2020: 89-105). In order to efficiently respond to the "variation of things," that is, to the "winds of fortune" (P, 18: 70) famously represented as "a woman" (P, 25: 101), the Machiavellian "masculine" prince needs to acquire female traits as well. The new prince is required to imitate fortune's fickleness by constantly overcoming his own nature so as to adopt his conduct to the requirements of changing situations (P, 18: 70). The prince's androgynous nature underscores the fluidity of gender. That gender ambiguity is part and parcel of a more general questioning of clear-cut binaries, such as simply "good" or "bad" behavior (P, 15-17); the prince's multiplicity and versatility are required to efficiently deal with insuperable social division.¹⁵

By constantly performing a role on the (political) stage that requires putting on different masks (see Holman 2018: 114-115), the prince gradually makes it possible for the plebeians – the audience attuned to the symbolic dimension of politics associated with the ability to perceive and imagine (e.g. D, I. 56; P, 18) – to become aware that what makes them plebeians is not an identity, but a virtuous prince-like, and transgressive, queer type of doing, performing, being, and becoming that arises when their desire for the not-yet-here is properly inflamed. That inexhaustive (queer) desire for the new and different persistently exceeds the current limits of the real by unleashing creative agency that rejuvenates the established orders.

For Machiavelli, the more vital and dynamic society is, the greater, freer and stronger it becomes (P, 5: 21). The queer potential contained in plebeian desire to

¹⁴ Following Machiavelli's own method of wrenching old terms from their settled meaning and endowing them with new significations, I propose this broader understanding of "plebeians", in the spirit of Jacques Rancière, as a way of discovering new vital force in Machiavelli's text and intervening in the struggles of the oppressed in the here and now.

¹⁵ Moreover, the "queer" dimension in Machiavelli's understanding of gender can be extended to the sphere of sexuality even in his political works. For example, the sexual confrontation between *virtù* and fortune described in P, 25 depicts fortune as a woman held down by audacious young men willing to 'beat' and 'strike' her, but Machiavelli immediately shifts the implications behind the arguably sexual scene by adding that, as a result of such torment, fortune actually *befriends* the young (P, 25: 101).

be free from the oppression of the great activates and intensifies the difference inscribed in the very being of society, resulting in change of the *status quo*. Before analyzing the transformative possibilities related to queer plebeian politics, however, the next section first discusses the figure of the great, in relation to whom the figure of the plebeian is defined.

The great as guardians of the customary

The desire of the great to command and oppress people – their desire to have more – can be understood as a relentless craving for the reproduction of the same, an appetite for what already is. Confronted with the contingency and changeability of the world, the great desperately seek to secure and stabilize society, removing conflict. To do so, they attempt violently to reduce queerness and difference or make them invisible, rendering society inert, immobile, and static. Domesticated and petrified, society is reduced to coherence, oneness, unity, and sameness.

Given the principle of repetition and normative reproduction that follows from the desire of the great for having, the great can be understood as what Muñoz (2009) refers to as "agents of anti-utopianism" and advocates of "the politics of normal," as Warner (2000: 60) aptly calls it. As guardians of the established, customary order, under the veil of "true" and "universal" (and, as such, "good" and "proper"), the great enforce dominant modes, norms, protocols, and rules for the rest of the community. Gradually, over time, such norms come to appear as "natural" and "objective" standards of value. Well-behaved citizens formed in the image of the great are thereby eventually produced through habituation.¹⁶ In short, the figure of the great stands for the forces of social regulation and normalization.

Machiavelli's metaphor of the fortress, which figures in both *The Prince* and *Discourses*, is particularly useful for grasping the greats' way of being in the world (P, 20; D, II. 24). The great can be represented as living fortresses. The image of the castle expresses the desire, driven by fear, for a totalizing movement to adopt one definite identity, both for the oneself and for society (Honig, 1993: 68, 150).¹⁷ Fortresses are extremely harmful because those who enclose themselves in them are inclined to use violence to regularly crush those who do not fit within such "natural," rigid identities (D, II. 30: 200).

Readers can find a condensed discussion of the violent ways of the great and the dangers their violent tendencies cause in the third book of *Discourses*. There, Machiavelli speaks of the necessity frequently to return the republic to its beginning (*principio*) in order for it to last. The reader is first introduced to one particular mode of regularly bringing a republic "back to the mark" (D, III. 1: 209): repeated cycles of "excessive and notable" executions, which renew "fear" and "terror" in the breasts of men (D, III. 1: 210-211). Machiavelli adduces the Medici as a prime example of those who have used such cruel methods of renewal in order to maintain their ruling position in Florence. The evocation of the Medici is a clear sign, for the attentive reader, that Machiavelli is, in fact, saying something else between the lines since, while nominally a republic, Florence under the Medici was actually an oligarchy. Contrary to the manifest appraisal and recommendation of rule by terror and

¹⁶ On habituation, see, e.g., P, 2; P, 11: 45; and D, III. 43: 302.

¹⁷ Following Wolin (1960), Honig interprets the image of the fortress in Machiavelli symbolizing humans' inability to adapt to the world's contingency. The discussion here pursues her insight concerning the harmful effects of the excessive desire for consolidation, reconsidering it in the context of "class" difference.

fear, Machiavelli is covertly teaching about the dangers associated with the insatiable desire of the great for domination (cf. Lefort, 2012: 345-347), one best understood in terms of a generalized political anxiety concerning the new. If the great take control over the existing order firmly into their own hands, then "the return toward the beginning" (D, III. 1) takes the form of a simple repetition, a return to the same expressed as violent suppression and suffocation of any excess or transgression of the established and customary. The struggle of the great against the "universal ambition and insolence of men" (D, III. 1: 210), then appears as a mere façade for that effort to eliminate the new.

At the same time, the great's modes of extinguishing difference, cementing society, and securing the plebeians' obedience often take the more subtle, but no less violent, form of deception(s). The "politics of shame," as Warner (2000: 7) aptly terms it, represents a particularly telling form of the manipulative means used by the greats to seduce the plebeians: ensnaring them through the lure of the normal and making them "good," that is, obedient. An exemplary case of how shame serves the interests of the great figures in Machiavelli's discussion of the Terentilian law designed to allow the plebeians themselves to serve as consuls (D, I. 13, 39, 47, and 48).

Machiavelli approves the plebeian craving for the consulship primarily as the expression of a defensive impulse directed against the ambition of the nobles.¹⁸ The consuls were, after a long struggle, at last replaced by tribunes with consular power who could be elected from among those of either plebeian or noble origin. Ironically, however, the plebeians continued only electing nobles to the highest rank (D, I. 47). As the reader soon learns, the great were able to avoid plebeians' actually being elected by making the plebeians feel ashamed of themselves and unworthy of the highest rank (D, I. 47: 97; D, I. 48: 99). Confronted with candidates drawn from among the most reputed men in the city and their own men, the plebeians, out of embarrassment and a sense of inappropriateness, refused to elect fellow plebs.¹⁹ Shame has a decisive political dimension (Warner, 2000: 16) and is an important political resource the great have at their disposal. Seduced by the lure of the normal, in this case through a political strategy of instilling shame, plebeians' desire not to be dominated by the great is transformed into submissive self-domination. After all, the great have the grandeur, majesty, and regalia of the established morality and laws on their side. As a result, people are often frightened, mesmerized, or seduced by hegemonic modes and, consequently, become cowardly (D, III. 6: 228).

Generally, the way the great return society to its beginnings expresses an essentially anti-democratic logic based on imitation and emulation. In this case, whether through the threat of open violence or subtler means, the plebeian desire not to be oppressed expresses itself as a simple craving for security and reconciliation, a desire to return home, or a desire to be just like the great. Repetitive politics of this kind leads to assimilation and absorption of plebeians into the mainstream. But that tendency is detrimental for society as a whole since it reduces difference, thereby weakening society.

¹⁸ The plebeians (rightly) sense that, under the pretext of needing to curb neighbors' excessive ambition, the great, in fact, often used military expeditions to crush them outside Rome, where they did not enjoy the plebeian tribunes' protection. See D, I. 39: 84. Cf. D, I. 13: 40; D I. 47: 96-97.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that, for Machiavelli, virtue and shame are inversely proportional. In *Discourses*, Machiavelli writes that "with the more shame the less proof has been made of your virtue" (III. 10: 243).

The price to be paid for social stability and harmony is coercion and repression of those parts of the society that do not fit the established order. Machiavelli claims that a particular order can seem natural precisely because, over time, differences are repressed and the "*memories and the causes of innovations are eliminated*" (P, 2: 7).²⁰ As *Discourses* best demonstrates, new modes and orders are rooted in the continuous plebeian capacity to exceed the current limitations of the political. Society is kept free and powerful only through the plebeians' acts of ongoing (re)foundation.

Plebeians as both harbingers and creators of the world yet to come

Machiavelli's praise of plebeians as guardians of freedom is directly related to their capacity to freely and authentically vent their desire not to be commanded and oppressed by the great. In order to effectively guard the community's freedom, the plebs' desire needs to avoid two equally disastrous alternatives. On the one hand, it must resist assuming the form of a mere negativity manifested as a wholesale refusal, subversion, and disruption of the "normal" and the dominant. Yet, on the other hand, it also must not take the form of a simple, imitative reproduction of the politics of the great. Instead, the utopian, imaginative surplus contained in the plebs' desire to be free from the oppression of the great can and should be expressed as a yearning for the not-yet-here, an incessant appetite for the new. In other words, it needs to be transformed into a source of what today might be understood as queer politics.

From a contemporary standpoint, Machiavelli's political texts can be re-read as inviting plebeians to detach themselves from customary modes and from a rigid, "fortress-like" form of identity in order to participate audaciously in a queer form of desiring.²¹ Machiavelli's entire political project can be approached as a type of political pedagogy that aims to educate and excite plebs desire for the not yet-here that is anticipatory, open-ended, dynamic, relational, and imbued with infinite innovative potential.

Through his writings, Machiavelli seeks to recruit, instruct, train, and arm his own soldiers (cf. Strauss, 1958: 154, 171). Machiavelli explicitly says that "one's own arms are those which are composed of either subjects or citizens or your *creatures*" (P, 13: 57).²² The soldiers that subscribe to Machiavelli's project are his creatures. Under his guidance, they can collectively become of another mind and sort, and learn how to govern themselves in their own, queer mode. Machiavelli's pedagogical political project can therefore be conceived as one of training plebeians for their queer becoming.²³

²⁰ Emphasis added. See also P, 11: 45, where Machiavelli implies that social orders can, with time, become so old that they seem natural, as is the case with ecclesiastical principality. Such "naturally given" and "inevitable" orders are diametrically opposed to the new modes and orders of the new prince in the new state, Machiavelli's central focus in *The Prince* (6-7 and 9).

²¹ Machiavelli is writing not only for immediate readers, but also for future ones. See, D, I. Preface: 5-6; D, II. Preface: 125. Future readers cannot have one final identity (Lefort, 2012: 13). Queers fit such a description perfectly.

²² Emphasis added.

²³ Regarding the educational aspects of Machiavelli's teaching, a democratic strand of the secondary literature has highlighted his pedagogy of fear (Pedullà, 2018: 57, 84-117), pedagogy of violence (Winter, 2018: 24-25; 48-51, 197-199), or idea of popular self-education through political participation (Holman, 2018a: 212, 217-274). For a reading of *Discourses* as an attempt

Their position as outsiders in relation to the established order gives plebeians occasion to experience and know the world in a unique manner. Consequently, it enables them to think what is "normally" inaccessible or forbidden, thereby potentially giving rise to alternative modes and orders. However, plebeians initially lack knowledge and awareness of their own power. Machiavelli therefore seeks to open their eyes and ears (D, I. 47 and 54).

From a contemporary perspective, as the plebeians' captain or prince, Machiavelli inspires their spirits and bolsters their confidence to adopt a conspiratorial, queer course of action. In *Discourses*, Machiavelli warns that men are emboldened to try "new things" when they begin suspecting they were made to suffer evil, therefore becoming more audacious in the face of danger (D, I. 45: 94). Moreover, in contrast to his initial position, Machiavelli ultimately concludes that when the community's freedom is in question, "it is not shameful not to observe the promises that you have been made to promise by force" (cf. D, III. 40: 299; D, III. 42: 302). In other words, in order to resist the force of the dominant modes and orders, plebeians are encouraged to reject conformity to existing normative limitations and learn how, in Machiavelli's words, "to be able not to be good" (P, 15: 61; cf. D, III. 41).²⁴ The virtuous, creative potential of political action is fully liberated only by abandoning the confines of the dominant morality and conventional normative rules. Machiavelli encourages that because the ensuing innovations' desirable effects override the harm of breaking promises (cf. D, III. 42: 302).

The plebeians' choice between "the normal" and "the queer" can be understood as one between the future life or death of the republic. Queer politics saves the life and liberty of the state, whereas plebeian participation in the politics of the normal leads to a loss of freedom for all citizens. (See from this perspective D, III. 41 and D, I. 53). By engineering such an extreme necessity²⁵ in favor of the queer mode of political action, Machiavelli compels the soldiers whose minds he shapes to fight the hegemonic order. Indeed, he urges his reader always to be ready for war.²⁶ That imperative might be read as encouraging readers to recognize the need to be prepared to oppose the politics of the normal through queer politics, that is, through a type of doing and becoming that is anticipatory, related to the continuous production of something else, something different, and new that is absent in the here and now.

If the plebeians under the leadership of the new prince, that is, by means of Machiavelli's books, become aware of the opportunities that their ill fortune itself paradoxically provides, then instead of despairing or fleeing into the arms of the great, they may consider defending themselves (D, III. 31).²⁷ The oppressed can "show their face to fortune anew" if they decide to experiment with "their virtue and the

to re-educate desire of the greats, see McCormick (2018: 41-56).

²⁴ While this "pedagogical advice" is directed towards the prince, he at the same time serves as a model of subjectivity that the plebeians are invited to "imitate" (cf. Holman, 2018: 75-127). *Virtù* in Machiavelli's sense is no longer a conventional moral (classical) or Christian virtue, rather it is a *political* virtue that involves readiness to transgress customary modes and liberate agency so as to produce something new. It is worth underscoring that in P, 21: 91 Machiavelli states that prince should "give recognition to virtuous men and (...) honor those excellent in an art" and "prepare rewards" for such men who "expand" their City.

²⁵ On the virtuous work enabled by necessity, see especially D, III. 12, D, III. 16 and D, III. 32.

²⁶ E.g., D, II. 19: 173; D, III. 16: 255, D, III. 31: 283.

²⁷ This chapter is the beginning of the last part of Book III of the *Discourses*, which deals with the concrete form of internal political action required to confront the domination of the great in Florence.

power of fortune" and remake themselves (D, III. 31: 283-284). Armed with Machiavelli's teaching, plebeians are invited to denaturalize and politicize their identities. Maintaining that preservation of the freedom of the republic depends on it, Machiavelli incites them to conceive of their subjectivity in a novel, queer way, as a site of radical potentiality and creativity. By deviating from the accustomed modes, plebeians become aware of their outstanding capacity to innovate, thereby reenergizing and rejuvenating the republic by returning society to its beginning.²⁸

Indeed, in D, III. 1, Machiavelli eventually introduces readers to the second mode of return to the republic's beginnings by the "simple virtue of one man". Such a good man does not rely on "any execution." Rather, he returns the republic to its beginnings through a reputation gained by "rare and virtuous" examples (D, III. 1: 211). Machiavelli himself is such a man. Through his own example as an audacious discoverer of new modes and orders, Machiavelli encourages plebeians to follow the path opened by his subversive teaching and act upon their authentic, queer desires. From this perspective, the return to beginning for which Machiavelli calls might be understood as a calling for a return to an excess of desire to be otherwise, a desire for the new.

The plebeian capacity for trying new things rests on hope that redemption and change are possible in the here and now, through political action. (cf. D, II. 29: 199). Instead of a dreamy, vain hope that leads to passivity, Machiavelli's texts emphasize hope that pushes the plebeians beyond the limits of the here and now and makes them desire something else, something not yet here but worth trying to achieve. Hope is a particularly important resource because it activates plebeian collective imagination, making alternative ways of being and doing newly thinkable.

Political imagination is an essential part of plebeian political virtue, one which Machiavelli characterizes as "hidden" (D, I. 58: 118). In D, II. 2, the reader is told that a strong republic characterized by a free way of life is one where, through their virtue, the people as a class can become princes. Machiavelli immediately adds that this multiplies "riches," that is, innovations in society as a whole (132). Such innovations are directly linked to plebeians' imaginative capabilities. For example, towards the end of the first book of *Discourses*, Machiavelli discusses how men can predict accidents and adduces the Roman example of Marcus Cadius, a *plebeian* who was able to foretell and warn his compatriots about the coming of the French to Rome (D, I. 56). Later in the same chapter, we learn that men like Cadius (plebeians) are able to discern present "signs" of the future and predict "extraordinary and new things" that then materialize in reality (D, I. 56: 114; P, 26). Moreover, Machiavelli claims that plebeians resemble God in their marvelous ability to anticipate the future (D, I. 58:117-118). Plebeians are therefore simultaneously seen as both harbingers and creators of the world yet to come. Along with imagination, the ability to produce concrete innovations in the here and now forms the essential part of the plebeians' rare, excessive, and extreme, hidden virtue.

Indeed, in *The Prince* Machiavelli tells the reader that the plebeians are taken by both the "appearance *and* the outcome of a thing" (P, 18: 71).²⁹ In *Discourses*, the reader is told that, if the city wishes to use plebs in glorious affairs, then hope is

²⁸ See especially Pitkin (1999), who reads the return to beginning in terms of a "recovery," "renewed recognition of self," and "self-examination" "that result in "*dereification*" of society" (278-279, emphasis added). On renewal as introduction of innovation see, e.g., Arum (2020), especially 528-531.

²⁹ Emphasis added.

not enough; the hope needs to "come to the effect" (D, I. 60: 122). The awakening of plebeians' imagination therefore must lead to a liberation of creative action that is fully and ultimately realized and manifested within the context of queer types of doing, performing and acting.³⁰ When appropriately enacted, their capacity for political imagination eventually liberates plebeians from the structures of existing norms and reveals the possibility of both self-invention and renewal of the "natural" order of things through a queer politics directed towards the not-yet-here, the new, and resulting in concrete and surprising inventions.

In the third book of *Discourses*, Machiavelli claims that men can best rise and acquire public reputation through some "extraordinary and notable action," that is, by doing "notable and new things" (D, III. 34: 288-289).³¹ He adds that reputation acquired by doing new things can be increased and maintained only by renewing outstanding and "extraordinary works" that seek to promote the "common good" (D, III. 34: 288-289).³² By choosing a queer mode of life, plebeians will therefore be able to produce new spaces of freedom through continuous introduction of novelties³³ that extend the horizon of possibilities for the entire society. The "good effects," or added value, that Machiavelli recognizes beyond the "noises and shouts" derived from plebeian dissatisfaction with the existing modes and orders, refers to the resulting innovations that interrupt established customs and rules, renew the existing order, and keep society free and powerful by affording it a new beginning, time and time again (D, I. 4: 16). Queer politics can therefore be understood as a type of political service benefiting society as a whole thanks to the inventions it leaves at everyone's disposal.

By refusing to reduce themselves to one final identity, that is, by choosing becoming over being, queers always "return" differently, thereby continually renewing society itself. Despite their inability ever fully to arrive at the not-yet-here, they persist in producing new worlds. The plebs' desire for freedom can never be fully satisfied because domination is an indelible part of any reality, making disappointment part of the production of a queer utopia.³⁴ But, at the same time, it is persistent disappointment with "what is" that makes plebeians keep desiring otherwise and striving to renew what is. With the aim of recapitulating the essential elements of queer utopianism with emphasis on virtuous political agency, the next section deals with Fabius Rullianus.

³⁰ See, e.g., D, III. 43: 302 where Machiavelli says that the same desires produce different social results depending on "forms of education". (See also D, III. 46.) Machiavelli's project seeks to resist social inertia through constant production of alternative forms of doing and being in accordance with the flux of the nature.

³¹ As its title ("...Whether it [the People] Distributes Magistracies with Greater Prudence Than a Prince") suggests, this chapter is directly linked to D, I. 58, the central chapter of Machiavelli's appraisal of the people.

³² See in this context Borrelli (2014: 114), who differentiates between efficacious and dangerous types of innovations in Machiavelli and explicitly associates the latter to a desire for satisfaction of mere selfish interest.

³³ On the need for introducing novelties, see e.g. D, I. 39: 84. While Machiavelli insists overall on exercising a creative capacity resulting in the introduction of novelties that cannot be known in advance, in D, III. 14: 252 he does make an important distinction between pure fictions, which he represents as a harmful type of inventions, and mighty innovations containing "more true" than fictional elements.

³⁴ On disappointment as a necessary part of queer utopia see, Muñoz (2009: 155).

Fabius Rullianus as a symbol of "queer utopianism" and the Ciminian forest as a radically queer site

This section retraces captain Fabius Rullianus' actions in *Discourses* in order to underscore the radical nature of Machiavelli's call for political agency addressed to those who are oppressed. I am particularly interested in Chapter 32, which stages Fabius as its central actor, one who daringly leads his troops into a forbidden forest (D, II. 32). The Ciminian woods, on this reading, stand for radically queer and politically potent transformational sites that help reveal the not-yet-here.

As the last chapter of the second book of *Discourses*, Chapter 32 is a privileged site. The first two books present the theoretical part of Machiavelli's political project, whereas the third deals mainly with the required concrete form of political action needed to transform the here and now (Lefort, 2012: 328-425). Located at the juncture of books two and three, Chapter 32 both marks the transition between those two components of Machiavelli's project and unites them. The third book is the only one without a preface. Instead, it is Chapter 32 that lets the reader know how to approach the whole of that last book: as a call to plebeians to adopt a conspiratorial, transgressive, queer form of political action in order to confront the tyranny of the established, "natural" order.

This transitional section introduces the reader to the transgressive actions of Consul Fabius Rullianus. Following his initial success in the expedition against the Tuscans, the consul decided to pursue the enemy further without first consulting the Senate. Rullianus thereby resolved to wage war in "a new, doubtful and dangerous country" (D, II. 33: 206), the "impenetrable and frightful" Ciminian forest, which no foreigner had ever before dared to enter.³⁵

Unconcerned with comfort or safety, Fabius was willing to take risks. With his troops, he bravely confronts the terror and anxiety provoked by the new site. By the end of the chapter, the reader learns that, the tremendous hazards and perils involved notwithstanding, Fabius' adventure resulted in victory, securing concrete new acquisitions for Rome (D, II. 33: 207). His unauthorized, transgressive proceeding is beneficial for the *entire community*. Indeed, Machiavelli explicitly praises Fabius' transgressive proceeding as "very prudent" (D, II. 33: 207).³⁶ Moreover, Fabius gradually develops into Machiavelli's hero *par excellence*. In the very last line of *Discourses* Fabius is said to be "deservedly called Maximus" (D, III. 49: 310). By the end of the third book, the advantages of Fabius' conspiratorial type of politics over the politics of the normal thus becomes evident.³⁷

Machiavelli resembles Fabius in more ways than one. Both courageously take paths "as yet untrodden by anyone" (D, I. Preface: 5). Both break through the customary, crossing the established boundary of the forbidden and setting foot into the extraordinary. From the perspective of Machiavelli's theoretical teaching that aims to inspire intervention in the here and now, Fabius' practical proceeding is im-

³⁵ Livy (1982: 213). Fabius acts on his own on more than one occasion. See in this context D, I. 31, where Fabius is introduced for the first time. As a young Master of the Horse, he defied the orders of dictator Papirius and victoriously engaged in combat with the Samnites.

³⁶ For Machiavelli's praise of Fabius also see D, III. 33: 287; D, III. 45: 306; D, III. 47: 307; D, III. 49: 310.

³⁷ D, III. 6, the longest chapter of the book III, deals with conspiracies and eventually favors the conspirator's viewpoint over that of the established order, analyzing the failure and success of conspiracy through his eyes. See Lefort (2012: 358-359).

portant for demonstrating the real, concrete possibility of successfully carrying out "difficult and very dangerous," transgressive, conspiratorial action (D, III. 6: 218).

Fabius' decision to enter the Ciminian forest with his army can be understood as demonstrating the ability to leave the tyranny of the present and enter a forbidden future by interrupting the normal and customary order of things. Read from a queer standpoint, Fabius' success is significant in that it leaves the boundary between respectable and condemnable behavior unclear. Rullianus' disobedience brought about great victory, making insistence on mere discipline as an undisputed, supreme value untenable. As a matter of fact, the placing of one's own evaluation of reality ahead of pursuing the approval of those established as authorities is precisely where queerness begins (Muñoz, 2009: 72-73).

In that context, one could rightly doubt the sincerity of Machiavelli's discrediting of Fabius in D, III. 36. In this chapter's account of an earlier instance of Fabius' transgressive action (D, I. 31), one learns that Papirius wished to subject Fabius to capital punishment for having allegedly subverted and dishonored military discipline by defying his authority. As a dictator, Papirius represents the highest established authority, one who presumably expresses the perspective of the great. As his speech reveals, fearful for their own social status and position, the great are dedicated to maintaining the current order through discipline (D, III. 36: 293). However, in the pair of chapters immediately following D, III. 36, military discipline – supposedly the ultimate value and secret to Roman military success – is severely questioned. Manlius Torquatus, who best exemplifies the enormous need the great feel to make others bow unreservedly before their authority,³⁸ is irrevocably discredited. In contrast, Valerius Corvinus, who stands for managing soldiers more humanely, is redeemed.³⁹ Valerius, like Fabius, knows that one cannot rely on discipline alone (D, III. 38: 297). Instead, what is showed to be decisive is Valerius' ability to win the confidence of his soldiers, to "*advance ahead of the standards*," and "to be engaged in the midst and in the effort of fighting" (D, III. 38: 297).⁴⁰ Machiavelli himself is such a daring captain, one who advances ahead of the standards. As a plebeian prince, he presents his troops with a new, subversive teaching, seeking to win them over "with reasons, without using authority or force" (D, I. 58: 116), and to prepare them to assume their novel role as the guardians of freedom.

Fabius figures as Machiavelli's favorite captain when it comes to challenging discipline as the supreme value.⁴¹ However, at least in D, II. 32, Machiavelli remains

³⁸ Not surprisingly, Manlius was Papirius' favorite model. Livy (1982): 165.

³⁹ Cf. D, III. 37-38 with D, III. 22 and see Lefort, 2012: 388-393.

⁴⁰ Emphasis added. It is noteworthy that Fabius was pardoned by Papirius at the insistence of the Roman *people* together with the tribunes.

⁴¹ That said, note that in D, III.1: 210 Machiavelli surprisingly adduces Fabius Rullianus within the series of tyrannical figures who are *executed* due to their transgressive acts. However, Fabius is soon resurrected, becoming a key figure of the third book. Fabius is placed alongside ambitious figures (such as Maelius Spurius, Manlius Capitolinus, and others) whose transgressions require timely intervention in the context of discussion of the great's violent way of returning society to its beginning. In that context, Fabius' execution is included to illustrate the great's intention to "rush spiritedly" to prevent plebeian transgressions. The reader is thereby tacitly invited to distinguish between the great's own, *criminal* transgressions – including violent annihilation of plebeian authentic desire for the not-yet-here – which Machiavelli in fact opposes, and *commendable* transgressions – as exemplified by the actions of Fabius or the establishment of the tribunes of the plebs – which Machiavelli approves of and credits with freeing society from the clutches of the great.

surprisingly silent about how his favorite captain won the confidence of his troops and navigated the gloomy mazes and corridors of the Ciminian forest, thereby winning the battle against the Tuscans. Later in *Discourses*, he implies that Fabius won because he was able to activate "true virtue" in his soldiers. But what was that "true virtue"? We are told only that "true virtue" must not be reduced to the "way of religion" since the latter pertains to "things of little moment" (D, III. 33: 286). Similarly, the reader learns later in the same chapter that, before entering the Ciminian forest, Fabius tells his soldiers that there have been favorable signs that victory is certain, but that it would be "dangerous to make them manifest." Machiavelli deems that way of proceeding "wise" and worthy of imitation (D, III. 33: 287).

What is Machiavelli suggesting? First, it is clear that "true virtue" for him cannot be reduced to a mere rational analysis of a given field of forces and a resulting understanding of power relations (e.g., D, III. 22). After all, Fabius' soldiers were fairly outnumbered by the enemy but nonetheless prevailed (Livy, 1982: 215). Machiavelli's reluctance to use the figure of Fabius to communicate any definitive recipe for victory is a particularly queer gesture intended to inflame combatants' political *imagination*. At the very moment Machiavelli criticizes the "way of religion" (D, III. 33: 285) as such, Fabius' enigmatic address hints at the plebeian ability to see beyond empirical reality. He thereby mobilizes his troops to daringly confront the new enemy in the new country and eventually leads them to victory, turning the plebeians' transgressive action into a source of (political) redemption for their society as a whole.

When Machiavelli again discusses Fabius' actions later in book III, the reader continues learning about how to enact "true virtue" (D, III. 45). Following the suicide of Consul Decius, one reads there, Fabius is able to impress on his soldiers the necessity of fighting. He awakens their spirits by making them understand that they are fighting for their own honor (D, III. 45: 306), dignity, and freedom.

The ability to inflame the plebeian imagination depends on the prudence of their leader himself who must be able to conceal or make light of things that, at a distance, could appear as perils (D, III. 33: 285). Engineering necessity thus involves a sort of manipulation to revive the troops' spirits, educate their hope, and make them want to fight. Deception must not, however, be reduced to vain promises (D, III. 12: 248; D, III. 14: 252). Indeed, one always needs to keep in mind that under Fabius' leadership the combatants did win the battle.

Towards the end of *Discourses*, Machiavelli says that "all those who seek to be *held good citizens* ought to take example" from Fabius (D, III. 47: 307).⁴² Here we are told that Fabius was able to act in favor of the common good despite having previously suffered private injuries. "Good citizens" like Fabius are characterized by their capacity to transgress the limits of the established and customary and step into the extraordinary for the public's benefit.

The need for embracing the extraordinary presupposes the ability to recognize places or sites in the here and now that afford opportunities for staging and performing what this article has called queer politics. The very possibility of such a politics depends on plebeians' ability to identify potential openings or ruptures in the seemingly fixed structure of reality. In the context of Machiavelli's teaching, the Ciminian forest represents such a radically queer space, a liminal space or crack in the structure of reality that serves as – to borrow a dazzling phrase from Muñoz (2009: 127) – a potential "portal to a queer future." Read through a queer lens, the

⁴² Emphasis added.

Ciminian forest represents a site of the extraordinary that attracts and collectively transports queers to another time and space imbued with the potential for infinite new beginnings. While plebs are fearful and become obedient, cowardly, and weak when they are isolated from one another (D, I. 57; D, II. 17: 164), spaces like the Ciminian forest draw them together, making them ferocious and mighty.

Such "Ciminian forests" are both weird and magnificent. They abound in world-making potential. They are spaces of a queer, transformative, creative politics that resists the regulation and systematization characteristic of established orders. The relations that occur in such queer places are best characterized as complex, innovative, surprising, spontaneous and unpredictable. In such contexts, queers are able to collectively reshape and educate their desire and produce alternative constructions of themselves, elaborate new types of social relations, expanding the spectrum of possibilities for the entire society (Warner, 2000: 35-36, 70-71). The resulting innovations then become available to the great as potential objects of their desire for having, in turn enabling queers to acquire public reputation.

Machiavelli's texts teach us about the importance of recognizing, preserving, and multiplying such potent sites from which to rupture the ordinary. These sites can be thought of as points of access to queer worlds. As such, they are charged with futurity and serve as privileged sites for social renewal. In D, III. 39, entitled "That a Captain Ought to Be a Knower of Sites," the reader is told that knowledge of sites requires extensive training, preferably through hunting. The goal of hunting for a captain is for him to learn a given area well enough that he then "understands with ease all new countries" because of a "certain similarity" among sites (D, III. 39: 298; P, 14: 91). Hunting is therefore said to be the best possible training for war. By means of his books, Machiavelli trains his troops to recognize and anticipate potential openings in the apparent fixedness of the here and now, preparing them to fight the oppression of the established and "natural" order. In *Discourses*, Machiavelli claims that "the mountains are like the countryside and have not only customary and frequented ways but many others that, if they are not known to foreigners, are known to the peasants with whose aid you will always be led to any place whatever against the wish of whoever opposes you" (D, I. 23: 58). Therefore, though the great may attempt to guard all the passes and prevent change, their efforts in that regard can never ultimately suffice given the plebeians' inexhaustible imaginative capability and associated ability to discover and pursue unknown ways.

Later in Chapter 39, Machiavelli introduces the example of Publius Decius, a tribune of the soldiers. Unlike Captain Cornelius, Publius Decius was able to recognize the trap the Romans were rushing into during the expedition against the Samnites. To avoid entering the valley where they would be caught by the enemy, Decius spotted a hill that became a "citadel of . . . *hope and salvation*" (D, III. 39: 298).⁴³ Machiavelli tells us that Decius knew the nature of countries, enabling him to lead his army to that hill. And once besieged, he was able to find a way out and save his troops. The plebian imaginative capacity converts such unexplored places into citadels of light and hope, sites abounding with potentiality. Spaces of this sort testify to the ubiquity of unsuspected possibilities that appear on the horizon when plebeians became aware of the necessity to resist the lure of the dominant order.

⁴³ Emphasis added. The recognition of such windows of opportunity is possible only through a disciplined training of the imagination. See the memorable example of Philopoemen (P, 14: 59-60).

Finally, towards the end of D, II. 33, Machiavelli criticizes the Senate for trying to advise Fabius "about a thing that it could not understand" because it involved "infinite particulars" linked to a concrete site that the Senators could not possibly know (D, II. 33: 207). Machiavelli wishes to warn his readers here that places like the Ciminian forest are, by definition, sites of profound contingency. There is no definite map with which potential visitors to the Ciminian forest could be armed to make them secure. While the great vainly seek to cognitively master and control the infinite particularities linked to such places, Machiavelli invites plebeians instead to accept the challenge and confront the risk of uncertainty, plurality, multiplicity, and unknowability characteristic of these sites and to participate in an open-ended, dynamic, queer type of belonging and becoming.⁴⁴ In short, when approached from a perspective of "queer utopia," Fabius' example enables readers to better grasp the radical form of political agency required to effectively stretch the limits of the possible.

Conclusion

This paper proposes queer utopianism as an alternative optic through which to understand Machiavelli's perspective on coping with the conflicting relations he regards as indelibly inscribed in the social fabric. The figure of the great and their desire to oppress and command the people is, seen from this optic, related to the perspective of "what is," that is, to the politics of the normal and customary. The plebeians and their longing to be free from the oppression of the great is, conversely, associated with the perspective of what might and should be, one that reveals the possibilities for change immanent in the here and now. Machiavelli's political texts might be approached in terms of a project that seeks to educate plebeian desire not to be oppressed, to resist the lure of the normal and seemingly inevitable, and to express itself in the form of a desire for the not-yet-here that liberates the potential for plebeian queer action and politics. Such agency questions established hierarchical binaries and "naturalized" conventional norms by exercising the creative, virtuous capacity for action that results in novelties expanding the spectrum of being and living for the entire society. The meaning behind Machiavelli's insistent call for energetic action can be appreciated in all its radicality when the plebeian is comprehended not as a fixed social identity, but rather as a designation for creative agency. This agency can be grasped in terms of a utopian queer politics associated with the continuous production of unprecedented, alternative types of doing and being that serve as vehicles of change and a means to liberty for the community as a whole.

⁴⁴ In contrast, Skinner neutralizes the plebeians' desire not to be oppressed by reducing it to a mere passive desire "to live in security" (2002: 197). As Machiavelli warns through the mouth of the anonymous "ciompi" in the famous speech addressed to fellow plebeians: "one never escapes a danger without a danger" (FH, III. 13: 123); as that suggests, the great's domination can be opposed only by bold enterprises.

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Machiavelli, utopija i queer politika

Sažetak Ovaj članak razmatra sukob između velikaša i plebejaca u Machiavellija iz perspektive "queer utopije". U članku se tvrdi da je sukobljavanje velikaša i plebejaca moguće najbolje razumjeti kao sraz dvaju principa: ponavljanja i inercije protiv kreativnosti i djelovanja. Kada je utopijski poriv plebejaca za oslobađanjem od tlačenja velikaša potaknut i izražen na odgovarajući način, kao težnja za novim, tada se oslobađa queer političko djelovanje koje proizvodi alternativne načine življenja i bivstvovanja u svijetu koji čine društvo slobodnijim i snažnijim.

Ključne riječi težnja, inovacija, Fabije Rulijan, Machiavelli, queer utopija, queer politika

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