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Born in Sesto San Giovanni on February 5, 1993, Antonio Sibilìa earned two Master's degrees and graduated with honors from the Department of Sociology and Social Research at the University of Milano-Bicocca. He was awarded the "Sofia Castelli" Graduation Prize by the University of Milano-Bicocca, the "Lorella Cedroni" Graduation Prize 2025, and a scholarship from the Municipality of Cinisello Balsamo in recognition of his academic excellence. His scholarly trajectory has been enriched by interdisciplinary experiences along the Silk Road in Venice, in the Balkans and Central Asia, with a focus on the philosophical, social, and environmental dimensions. After a six-month research period at the National Research Council, he is currently an early-stage researcher in the Sociology of the Environment and Territory at the University of Milano-Bicocca.

The Voice of the Gut: Ciacco and the Hollow Civic Body in the Desire-Driven Democracy

Abstract

Through a critical reading of Canto VI of Dante's *Inferno*, this essay explores the figure of Ciacco as a symbol of today's political crisis. Far from being just a representation of the sin of gluttony, Ciacco emerges as a hyper-political subject: someone emotionally exposed but politically powerless, caught in a fragmented public sphere without real forms of mediation. Drawing on Anton Jäger's theory of *hyperpolitics*, the article argues that Dante's character anticipates key features of postmodern democracy, such as the breakdown of civic unity, the rise of individualized forms of political engagement, and the weakening of public reason. The essay develops its argument in three sections – the hollowed body, desire without community, and the republic of emotions – in order to examine the connection between speech, emotions, and power in the decline of the political sphere. The swamp where Ciacco lies thus becomes a strong metaphor for the *democracy of desire*, where voices exist but fail to create either true listening or real change.

Keywords: Hyperpolitics, Anton Jäger, Democracy of Desire, Crisis of Logos, Post-democracy, *The Divine Comedy*, *Inferno* VI.

Introduction

In the Canto VI of the *Inferno*, Dante introduces the figure of Ciacco, a character known mainly through the novella dedicated to him by Boccaccio (*Decameron*, IX, 8). There, he is portrayed as a courtly man, a frequenter of Florence's aristocracy, inclined to the pleasures of the table but endowed with wit and rhetorical elegance. Dante places him among the gluttons, submerged in mud under a continuous, foul-smelling rain – a punishment that does not merely condemn excess in eating, but points to a broader degradation: physical, anthropological, and political. The infernal rain does not nourish – it contaminates; it does not bring life – it corrodes. It symbolizes a desire that has lost all measure, a boundless consumption that empties the body and dissolves the *civitas*.

Beneath the surface of individual sin, Ciacco's condition offers a collective diagnosis. His figure embodies the reduction of the political subject to a mere digestive apparatus, the transformation of

logos into indistinct lament, of speech into undirected outburst. This is not merely a moral fault – it is a symptom of the breakdown of civic bonds: the loss of the individual’s deliberative dignity coincides with the disintegration of the city’s communal fabric.

Ciacco is not a major political actor or a recognized thinker. He is a marginal, liminal voice, yet he plays a critical and prophetic role. As in many *Old Testament* texts, the denunciation of corruption rises from below. His speech, fragmented yet clear, identifies the root of Florence’s decline not in external causes, but in the internal degeneration of its citizens. Florence decays because the collective soul that animates it has decayed.

This perspective points to a well-defined ethical-political vision: the order of the city depends on the ethics of the individual. Without *dignitas* – understood as inner balance and moral awareness – no public justice is possible. In this framework, Dante’s placement of Ciacco among the incontinent assumes a specific meaning: the individual’s inability to govern themselves leads to a society ruled by greed and violence.

The Canto VI, therefore, does not merely condemn. It has a pedagogical and revelatory function: it shows what happens when measure is lost and speech no longer holds generative power. The figure of Ciacco becomes a mirror through which the reader may recognize their own condition and begin a path of regeneration – both personal and collective. Only by recovering *logos* can a new civilization begin.

On this basis, the present paper proposes a reinterpretation of Ciacco through the lens of Anton Jäger’s theory of *hyperpolitics*. According to Jäger, contemporary society is marked by increasing politicization without a corresponding rise in civic affiliation or social organization (Jäger 2024, 12). What we observe is a *K-shaped recovery* of politics: widespread but ineffective participation, emotional and intermittent, lacking duration and structure. *Hyperpolitics* manifests as a form of mobilization that is “low-cost, low-entry, low-duration, and all too often, low-value” (Jäger 2024, 13): instant protests, digital engagement, diffuse emotionality – but without transformative structures.

Ciacco embodies this paradigm. He is the hyper-politicized citizen without agency, stuck in a muddy present, unable to find direction or exert influence. His speech dissolves into noise: it does not propose, it does not build – it only laments. His is a voice of the belly, not of thought. It produces no deliberation, only spasms.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first analyzes Ciacco’s body as a metaphor for the emptied political subject, reduced to visceral desire. The second examines the logic of individualized, self-referential desire, which fuels fleeting and atomized forms of mobilization. The third addresses the crisis of political language and the dissolution of public deliberation in the *democracy of desire*, where political action becomes subjective narration.

Through these paths, Ciacco emerges as a paradigmatic figure of the disintegration of political agency in the age of the *democracy of desire*. For primary textual analysis, this paper refers to the Einaudi edition of the *Commedia* edited by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Alighieri 2012), whose commentary serves as the main exegetical guide.

1. Ciacco and the Emptied Body of Citizenship

In Canto VI of the *Inferno*, Dante places Ciacco among the gluttons, immersed in the mud under a constant rain. His degraded body becomes a symbol not only of physical decay but also of civic dissolution: the disorder of desire mirrors the breakdown of communal bonds. Ciacco is a fragment of a dismembered political body, reduced to matter without *logos*, surviving in a space where conflict does not generate politics, but only residual impulses.

In this light, Ciacco's body anticipates what Jäger describes as "a politics with only weak policy influence or institutional ties" (Jäger 2024: 13). His voice – monological and powerless – reflects a form of *hyperpolitics* devoid of transformative outcomes, expressing an affective activation that does not lead to action. Just as in our contemporary world, mobilization is marked by "convulsive instances of agitation and controversy" (*ibid.*), Ciacco also merely complains, without proposing or building anything.

When Dante asks him about Florence's future, Ciacco replies bitterly: the city is torn by "*superbia, invidia e avarizia sono / le tre faville c'hanno i cuori accesi*" (*Inferno* VI, 74-75) – sad passions that dissolve the community. These vices, also mentioned by Brunetto Latini and again in *Paradiso* (IX, 127-129), are not merely personal moral failures, but systemic dynamics of social disintegration. They are not a fire that purifies, but one that consumes and separates.

The reference to "*la tua città*" (*Inferno* VI, 49) implies emotional and political involvement: Florence is a microcosm of human disorder, and Dante himself is part of it. In this framework, gluttony becomes a metaphor for a hungry politics, ruled by unrestrained desire. The Eucharistic *fractio panis* turns into a *fractio civitatis* – the breaking of the civic bond.

Ciacco's comment on those "*ch'a ben far puoser li 'ngegni*" (*Inferno* VI, 81) – that they are "*tra l'anime più nere*" (*Inferno* VI, 85) – is emblematic. His laconic statement suggests that political action, without an ethical or spiritual foundation, becomes meaningless. Technical competence alone cannot save politics unless it is supported by an anthropology of *dignitas*.

This insight resonates with today's democratic crisis. After the fall of ideological narratives and utopian projects, the central question becomes the human quality of politics itself. As T.S. Eliot said, the problem is not the politicians, but the society that produces them – because society defines the boundaries of what politicians can or cannot do (Eliot 1983, 36-37). Pope Francis echoes this idea: "Politics, so often denigrated, is a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, because it seeks the common good" (Pope Francis 2013, no. 205).

Dante reinforces this diagnosis by evoking factional struggles within the city. Ciacco prophesies the expulsion of the *Guelfi Neri* (Donati) by the *Guelfi Bianchi* (Cerchi): "*la parte selvaggia / cacerà l'altra con molta offensione*" (*Inferno* VI, 65-66). The adjective "savage" alludes to the rural origins of the Cerchi family (Cardini 1970, 915), bearers of a mercantile *ethos* that challenged the traditional aristocracy. This marks a historical shift from nobility of spirit to financial ambition, causing a fracture in the *civitas*.

The mud in which Ciacco lies condenses the paradox of political participation reduced to pathology: a body and a voice exposed without any transformative capacity. As Jäger notes, "the solidarities of the online world remain an insufficient replacement for those of community and

workplace” (Jäger 2024: 11). Ciacco is an exposed body without a project; a voice without *logos* – a fragment of the public sphere dominated by fleeting emotions and ephemeral visibility.

His condition represents the paradigm of an *intestinal democracy*, where the citizen, emptied of agency, becomes a passive receptor of stimuli and impulses. A society in which politics no longer nourishes but consumes; no longer builds but digests. As Jäger writes, “what Americans are left with is a grin without a cat: a politics with only weak policy influence or institutional ties” (Jäger 2024: 13).

Ciacco, immersed in mud, without shape or direction, embodies the crisis of citizenship: the replacement of civic culture with the affirmation of an atomized individual incapable of becoming a people. His story – both in medieval Florence and in today’s democracies – tells of the dissolution of a form of citizenship that has lost its sense of measure, memory, and future. In this condition, it is not politics that disappears, but the form of citizenship that crumbles: no longer understood as participation for the common good, but as an isolated and emotional fragment.

2. Ciacco as a Hyperpolitical Subject: Individualized Social Mobilization

Jäger presents a thesis that is both original and unsettling: the crisis of politics does not lie in its disappearance, but in its uncontrolled proliferation. Politics, far from retreating, has spread everywhere – into consumption, technology, and identity. Yet this hyper-presence generates a saturation of discourse and emotion that leads not to the formation of community, but to political paralysis. This is what Jäger defines as *hyperpolitics*: a sharp rise in politicization, especially in recent years, that has not been accompanied by a corresponding growth in civic engagement or social organization (Jäger 2024: 13).

From this perspective, Ciacco can be seen as an *ante litteram* figure of the hyperpolitical subject: immersed in a dense atmosphere of emotions and tensions, but lacking structure, duration, and collective purpose. His voice denounces the crisis of the *pólis*, but it is monological, lacking constitutive power. It does not build bonds, it does not summon a *demos*: it is an affective soliloquy that testifies without transforming.

In the circle of the gluttonous, the body is continuously stimulated by external forces – mud, cold, rain – which evoke the condition of the contemporary individual: saturated with inputs, but incapable of orientation. Dante’s *Inferno* becomes a topography of hyperpolitics, where desire exhausts itself in impotent repetition. The contemporary public sphere is saturated with emotions and messages, yet it lacks the necessary structures to convert this expressive energy into real political change (*ibid.*).

This impotence becomes visible in the dialogue between Dante and Ciacco, where the moral ambiguity of the city is revealed. The line “*se ’l ciel li addolcia, o lo inferno li attosca*” (*Inferno* VI, 84) alludes to a confused sense of justice, incapable of distinguishing good from evil. And when Dante asks about “*che fuor s’è degni*” (*Inferno* VI, 79), Ciacco replies: “*Giù li grava al fondo*” (*Inferno* VI, 86), confirming that even civic engagement has been corrupted. The *pólis* is no longer built on shared virtues, but inhabited by public narcissisms disguised as concern for the common good.

When Dante pleads “*che mi 'nsegni*” (*Inferno* VI, 76), he seeks more than a report; he yearns for a form of revealing knowledge, in the tradition of Virgil’s *docere* (*Aen.* VI, 614: “*Ne quaere doceri*”).

He seeks a truth that may guide him through the chaos of the present. But even the great civic figures of the past – Farinata, Tegghiaio, Mosca, Rusticucci – are damned. The past, too, offers no salvation.

A key moment comes with the biblical-sounding question: “*S’alcun v’è giusto*” (*Inferno* VI, 62), reminiscent of *Jeremiah* 5:1 and *Genesis* 18:23-32, where salvation depends on the presence of even a few righteous men. Ciacco’s response is disillusioned: “*Giusti son due*” (*Inferno* VI, 73). A faint hope – one that Dante will continue to explore elsewhere (*Rime* XCI, 97-100; *Purgatorio* XVI, 121-126) – but which here remains unresolved.

Jäger notes that today political desire operates without institutional resistance, lacks representative mediation, and unfolds without continuity over time (Jäger 2024). Participation has been reduced to mere exposure: a post, a tweet, an isolated gesture. Ciacco’s voice, too, is fragmented and without resonance, unable to generate organization or envision a future. It is a genuine testimony – but ultimately a sterile one.

If modern politics was built on structures and forms of belonging – such as parties, unions, and assemblies – *hyperpolitics* can be described as a mode of action driven by constant motion, yet lacking stable positions: a flow without form, dissent without a coherent project (Jäger 2024: 14). Ciacco names the evils of the city, but he does not integrate them into a vision. His is a voice that registers collapse but does not imagine justice.

For this reason, Ciacco represents the saturation of the public sphere: an excess of discourse, emotion, and signs that do not produce connection. He is a precursor of the contemporary citizen: active yet powerless, engaged yet disconnected. His desire to participate has become a compulsion to expose, to show his wound. As Jäger reminds us, “what Americans are left with is a politics with only weak policy influence or institutional ties – a republic of emotion in search of a form” (Jäger 2024: 13).

Ciacco no longer seeks form: he floats in the mud, a silent witness to the dissolution of the *pólis*. His voice is that of hyperpolitics: it speaks, but does not dialogue; it denounces, but does not build; it demands justice, but no longer has a city to address. In this voice – separated from the community and emptied of any project – we can hear the deep crisis of political language: a crisis that strikes at the heart of *logos*, draining it of its generative force.

3. From *Logos* to Impulse: Ciacco and the Crisis of Political Language in the *Democracy of Desire*

At the heart of Jäger’s diagnosis of contemporary democracy lies the crisis of *logos*, understood not only as a rhetorical tool but as the foundation of citizenship. Political speech, once tied to rational deliberation and the construction of a shared horizon, now gives way to affective expression. As Jäger explains, contemporary politicization unfolds in the absence of symbolic mediation and

institutional processes (Jäger 2024, 13); politics has become more of an impulse than a structured discourse.

Read through this lens, Ciacco anticipates a subjectivity stripped of the generative power of language. His voice is sterile: it builds no alliances, preserves no memory, constructs no reality. He has not lost his ability to speak, but the capacity to be heard. He speaks – but his voice is swallowed by the mud, much like in today’s digital public sphere, where everything is exposed but nothing resonates.

Dante himself struggles to recognize him: “*l’angoscia che tu hai / forse ti tira fuor de la mia mente*” (*Inferno* VI, 44-45). The identity of the damned soul has been deformed to the point of being unrecognizable. It is the reflection of a vice that has become substance. In this mask lies Dante’s critique: behind the appearance of morality hides a disorder of desire that corrupts the city. “*La tua città*” (*Inferno* VI, 49) is not just Florence – it is every community that has lost the ethical and political foundation of *logos*.

Jäger notes that in the new digital public sphere, language is instantly made visible but fails to generate any shared resonance; communication becomes loud and fragmented, with messages shouted rather than thoughtfully discussed (Jäger 2024, 14). Ciacco, too, names the evils of Florence – “*ch’è piena / d’invidia sì che già trabocca il sacco*” (*Inferno* VI, 49-50) – but does so without a transformative language. His speech is an event, not a constitutive act. It does not found relationships or produce decisions. It is individual expression, not shared action.

This crisis of language is accompanied by the total personalization of political discourse. Words no longer create a *we*, but express a wounded *I*. Testimony replaces argument; trauma becomes the basis of legitimacy. Jäger describes a democracy shaped by desire, in which politics gives way to practices of emotional self-expression and mutual affective reflection (Jäger 2024, 15).

Ciacco embodies this victimized subjectivity: he speaks not to act, but to be recognized. He does not offer an ethical or civic analysis, but exposes his own failure. He is a witness, not a citizen. His voice is visceral, individualized, incompatible with any form of deliberation. He is emotionally involved, but not part of a collective.

As Jäger observes, in contemporary democracies citizens are increasingly vocal, yet their speech does not lead to construction; they engage in protest, but without forming lasting organizations; they express themselves emotionally, but without developing forms of representation (Jäger 2024, 15). *Logos* gives way to symptom; language becomes a private sign, a solitary echo. Without a collective “we,” democracy fragments into isolated individuals. And Ciacco, immersed in mud, represents this outcome: a subject without a world, because he lacks political language.

And yet, Dante does not give in to nihilism. Dialogue with Ciacco is only made possible after Virgil – the figure of reason – puts Cerberus to sleep with a soporific cake. As in *The Aeneid* (VI, 420-423), knowledge can only arise once the beastly element is subdued. Salvation, Dante suggests, is born of proper measure, from the control of impulse. It is not technique that saves the *civitas*, but an inner transformation: the *dignitas* of the individual, which is the foundation of justice.

In this view, the true political actor is not the technician of consensus, but the ethical subject capable of self-government. Justice is the expression of inner order, not external imposition. Only

those who have overcome their inner animality can generate law. Ciacco, lacking such measure, is the anti-statesman: a voice without *logos*, a body without form, an individual without a *civitas*.

In Canto VI, Dante foreshadows the breakdown of public speech: Ciacco is the first of many infernal voices that speak without effect. He is the first to speak, but his voice is already extinguished. As in Jäger's *hyperpolitics*, meaning is no longer constructed through communication. It is the voice of the belly, not of reason; the *democracy of desire*, not of discourse. It is the end of politics as form.

Conclusion

In the Canto VI of the *Inferno*, Ciacco's voice rises like a disturbing omen. It speaks from the mud, lacking any real power to propose or act – carrying a pain that never becomes action and a language that never becomes vision. In this Dantean figure, we find the essence of the democratic crisis described by Jäger: the transformation of the citizen into an isolated subject – emotionally active, but politically powerless – trapped in a public sphere full of expression but empty of real connection.

Ciacco is emblematic of a rupture that runs through today's neoliberal democracies: a separation between speech and *logos*, between desire and meaning, between mobilization and community. He reveals how the hyper-politicization of emotions, the individualization of discourse, and the disappearance of stable forms of organization produce a subject who speaks, protests, bears witness – but does not participate. A subject who, like Ciacco, is present but not represented, vocal but unheard.

The political landscape, increasingly shaped by emotions, intensity, personal identification, and outrage, is not just the result of digitalization or institutional crisis. It reflects a deeper anthropological shift: politics is no longer a collective experience but an individual form of expression. In this light, Dante's reflection becomes strikingly relevant. The swamp that surrounds Ciacco is not only a place of damnation – it is a symbolic image of a hollowed-out democracy, where desire burns out without direction and the voice loses its generative power.

To reread Ciacco today means to question the very possibility of politics: how can *logos* be reborn in the storm of digital noise? How can desire once again become a collective force and not just an individual impulse? The voice of the belly, to become the voice of the *pólis*, needs structures, connections, and duration. It needs, ultimately, a new grammar of the common good.

Dante's *Inferno*, from this perspective, is not just a theological fresco – it is a prophetic diagnosis of democratic disintegration. In Ciacco, the pathologies of post-democracy converge: the fragmentation of the civic body, the crisis of representation, the disappearance of political projects. But while in 1300 Dante could still rely on the hope of Purgatory and redemption, today our challenge is to imagine a political language that matches the emotional complexity of our time – a language capable of giving form to the desiring multitude and a voice to a people who, like Ciacco, risk sinking into the silence of the mud.

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