

“Es el show de Maradona”. Between charisma and commodity*

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The TV series *Maradona in Mexico* seems to make explicit the conflicting coexistence of rationality and irrationality, disenchantment and enchantment in the celebrity status of contemporary sport. Sport has, in fact, its own ritualistic, emotional, effervescent dimension, capable of rooting solidarity, identity, and social belonging. At the same time, the factors of commercialization, commodification and spectacular entertainment, based on the principles of economic rationality and profit orientation, are equally constitutive today, if not more influential. Thus, a sports celebrity maintains that complex balance between being a brand within a market logic and an identifying point of reference for communities of fans, apparently by virtue of charismatic qualities and a predisposition for enchantment. Maradona's experience in Mexico – with his performance in the TV series – is no exception. The series tells the story of how Maradona, called upon to coach a low-ranking team in the Mexican second division, emerges as a charismatic leader, a centre of ritual attention, apparently gifted with mysterious and ineffable qualities. Despite his advanced age and very poor health, he still seems capable of arousing deep feelings, of instilling energy and of potentially leading a team – and with it the whole community – towards innovative and glorious footballing and moral achievements. However, his charisma does not escape the mesh of market rationality without being somehow contained and integrated. As a famous personality inserted in the commercial mechanisms of football, but also as a character in the television industry, he is experiencing that process of commodification of reputation that is typical of sports celebrities.

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Maradona in Mexico is a documentary TV series set during the two football seasons in which the former Argentine champion trained the Mexican team Dorados de Sinaloa – Apertura and Clausura championships 2018-19. The team from Culiacán, a city in the state of Sinaloa known until then on the international scene above all for the presence of one of the most impressive drug trafficking cartels in the world, was not in good shape. They were languishing in the second division of the Mexican league, and the first games of the season – prior to Maradona’s hiring – were studded with defeats.

To improve their sporting fortunes, the Mexican club hired Maradona as a coach, with the aim of shaking up the team, reaching the league playoffs and, with the greatest ambition, gaining promotion to the first division.

And so, an elderly, debilitated, exhausted Maradona, with clear difficulties in walking and speaking, who was very likely suffering from alcohol problems and was weakened by medication – let’s not forget that he would die shortly after, in 2020 – arrived in Culiacán and began his adventure as head coach of the team with significant ambitions, although not impossible to achieve considering the not particularly difficult level of the championship. All this despite not being able to boast an exciting curriculum and career as a coach. On the contrary, Maradona’s footballing excellence remained anchored to the years when he was playing. On the other hand, his quality as a character capable of attracting attention and focusing the gaze, conversations, and interest on his person remained alive and unchanged.

He could in fact count on his reputation as an excellent former footballer, for many the greatest in the history of world football, a worldwide fame that is still very much alive and kicking, as well as the credit of a very strong personality, an aura of charm that distinguished him, good interpersonal skills and quite a significant influence on other footballers.

In the two seasons, always starting the championship in a losing position, the Dorados led by Maradona always reached the final, but lost in both cases.

These are the events in a nutshell. The TV show, which will follow Maradona from the moment he arrives in Mexico, suggesting that the TV project was immediately linked to his signing, tells the story of the team, the matches, the social, cultural, and sporting context, briefly focusing on some of the club’s protagonists – players or managers – but always keeping the focus of the story, both in terms of content and emotional structure of the narration, on the *pibe de oro*. In fact, the whole series is conceived as a show focused entirely, almost obsessively, on him.

“Es el show de Maradona” – “It’s Maradona’s show” – is, not by chance, one of the phrases with which the TV series begins. Through the film technique of flash-forward, the phrase is uttered by a Mexican television commentator after Maradona’s expulsion and heated complaints against the referee on the day of the Apertura championship final. Thanks to his explosive anger, Maradona easily takes centre stage – as if he were in a peripheral position – putting on a show that is quite spectacular. These first few lines of the TV series anticipate the main plot of the TV programme, before returning to the beginning of the story. The show is in fact completely centred on the figure of the former Argentine footballer, who will always be in the spotlight, either directly in the frame or as the focus of conversation in most of the interviews with fans, managers, and Dorados players, but also as the target of

chants or comments from opposing fans, most of which are confrontational and hostile. In short, he is the absolute protagonist and symbolic centre of a substantial collective ritual, but also the explicit or implicit origin of the show, a captivating exhibition, celebrity capital to be invested in the football industry and in the collateral and support economy – such as the media.

After all, the sporting motivation for his recruitment as a coach is accompanied by a more or less indirect or hidden desire to market him extensively. Maradona's arrival will bring media attention, journalists eager for interviews, sponsors, and commercial exploitation to the Sinaloa club. This was something new that would lead to a new economic as well as sporting direction. The TV series also fits into this dimension where the ritualised moments of football – such as the match, training sessions, the dynamics within the locker room, etc. – or the spaces and opportunities for entertainment – such as the entire radio or television programme – are organised according to market logic.

Essentially, we are still talking about the commercialised level of the sport, where the mechanisms of celebrity are used to attract the attention of fans/spectators within the attention economy.

Maradona in Mexico thus seems to be an example of the unique interaction between the forms of (bureaucratic) rationalisation that are typical of football performance and the market – in our case, the entertainment, cultural and sports industries, as well as the celebrity industry – and irrational and enchanting elements. This is because the more or less implicit prevailing object of the story, and of the staged show, seems to all intents and purposes to be Maradona's charisma. He is in fact fully represented as a charismatic leader, who envelops the community with ineffable and enchanting qualities that make him the guide of an entire sporting community. However, in the market dimension in which he is employed, his charisma, precisely because it is spectacular and spectacularized, becomes a commodity, in line with the idea of the sports celebrity as a physical entity and as a star of competitive performances, capable of exploiting their capital of notoriety for profit (Bifulco, 2017; Cashmore, 2006; Driessens, 2013; Gunter, 2014; Rojek, 2001; Smart, 2005).

Basically, we seem to witness a rational project to exploit the representation of Maradona's charisma, the ideal spokesperson for a world of enchanted and portentous forces that influence the community of the Dorados, also achieved through a more or less partial or complete concealment or denial of rational or technical factors – from the technical-rational construction of the football performance to the methodical processes of media production.

Charisma and celebrity

“It is the fate of charisma to recede before the powers of tradition or of rational association after it has entered the permanent structures of social action. This waning of charisma generally indicates the diminishing importance of individual action.”

Weber, 1978, vol. II, p. 1148

Studies on the relationship between charisma and celebrity are not new in academic debate, especially in sociological research.

Delving into celebrity – either as a quality or as a person – is anything but uncommon among those who have focused their studies, or at least part of them, on the sociological or socio-historical analysis of charisma on a theoretical level or in its translation into relationships and concrete social behaviour. These authors often tend to emphasise the difference or at least a certain distance between these two realities, even when they can see some points of contact.

John Potts (2009), for example, is the author of a well-known book on the use of the term and category of charisma in Western history, from its original use in Greek culture and then in Christianity, to its creative and original rediscovery by Weber and its subsequent use to connote the extraordinary nature of stars in the twentieth century culture industry. Potts highlights how the rational and meticulous construction that characterises the star's media factory does not fully correspond to the paradigmatic conception of charisma as an immediate presence, genuine quality, sign of authenticity – at least in the representation that the community should find vital. It is no coincidence that Potts sees celebrity as a sort of “synthetic substitute” for charisma, a product of the economic rationality of capitalism, of the image and consumer society. This is despite recognising the undoubted relationship between fame and a certain degree of charm, attractiveness and magnetism that make up celebrity.

Even Randall Collins (2020), who tries to translate Weber's conception of charismatic leadership into the microsociology of everyday contexts and encounters, made up of emotional energy transfer and connections of ritual interactions, does not seem entirely willing to find a clear overlap with charisma, in a few scattered lines dedicated to celebrity. This is because the media construction around the star, resulting from a continuous rational work on images, news, and information, seems to go beyond the actual situational ability to motivate the followers/fans and guide their behaviour. Often the celebrity would appear to be trapped in the mechanisms of media consumption and audience share rather than having any real power.

On the other hand, several scholars of the processes and mechanisms of celebrity seem more indulgent and willing to find traces of charismatic qualities in celebrity itself. This obviously does not mean that they approach the matter with benevolence and avoid a critical approach.

Robert Van Krieken (2012), for instance, sees in celebrity the latest and most complete development of Weberian charisma. In the rational and bureaucratised definition of popularity concentration processes within the media system and the capitalist attention economy, Weberian charisma can effectively integrate with the other forms of authority, the rational-bureaucratic and the traditional ones. Attention becomes hence capital, a resource based on the public recognition of exceptional and prodigious qualities in an individual, basically on a charismatic force intrinsic to performances and representations visible in the media scenario.

P. David Marshall (1997), on the other hand, sees in celebrity the rationalised form, conceived according to the mechanisms of the contemporary culture industry, of the irrational and emotional identification processes that underpin the relationship between community and a charismatic individual. The elements of disenchantment, magic and mysticism are however replaced by bureaucratic, rational, and scientific mechanisms. Celebrity acquires the rationalised status of commodity and the relationship with the audience is equally methodical in a market economy, but this is based on the cultural legitimisation of the individuality that celebrity publicly expresses and defines.

Based on this, Charles E. Hurst (2015) suggests that there is a peculiar fusion of the rational and the irrational, enchantment and disenchantment in the Weberian sense, in celebrity. The underlying attraction of celebrity is irrational, emotional, part of the realm of enchantment, but its image – full of passionate shades – is managed rationally, through market logic and profit orientation, often with the help of various organisations and specialists. Basically, celebrity condenses the creation and effective sale of charismatic personalities through bureaucratic organisations – corporations, media organisations, advertising agencies, sports organisations, and all market-oriented institutions.

But what exactly does charisma mean and, above all, what kind of characteristics does a charismatic leader possess or at least – in a way that is more in line with Weber's theories – what does a community see in them that legitimises their influence and authority? To orient ourselves in the twists and turns of the concept, we will partly use its original meanings, while deepening its scope and referring to Weber's framework.

In its primary sense and within an irrational and basically magical-religious conception, charisma indicates a spiritual, free gift, guaranteed by divine grace and benevolence. It is expressed in an innate talent – therefore with a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the concept of merit – and unfolds in a striking ability to amaze, to attract, but also to inspire reverence and even awe.

We are therefore dealing with an “elusive something” (Potts, 2009) that is irrational, immeasurable, and unpredictable. A quality that belongs to an individual without a precise and rationally explainable reason, but which shows mysterious and inexplicable aspects of the human bond.

Yet, we are talking above all about a collective feeling that, as it is transferable, settles in a person.

Hence, the idea of possessing an inner, magical force is associated with authority. The extraordinary skills and features that the community recognises in the individual are the qualities that enable them to gain the obedience and following of their followers, who place their trust in their gift. Personal trust and devotion to the person – for their exceptionality, their character, their successes – express the irrationality of authority and of the committed relationship established, even though it often needs to be nourished by signs or tangible proof through prophetic modes of expression – in some cases a result of exceptional personal suffering.

The “gift”, the sense of extraordinariness, has a social dimension, in the belief of the community and in the bond that is thus created between leader and group (Spencer, 1973).

Validation is always social and internal to the community to which one belongs (Friedland, 1964). At the same time, by articulating the group's values and symbols, the leader becomes its emblem.

In its ideal-typical aspect, charisma is also a revolutionary force that makes history (Weber, 1978). The charismatic leader is an innovator who enters history, takes on a mission and a community fate, breaks with the pre-established order and becomes the spokesperson for a new order that is presumed more satisfying, especially from the point of view of values. By virtue of awe and reverence, the leader can potentially guide followers towards forms of collective joy.

To summarise, Martin E. Spencer argues:

We then turned to the question of 'What makes the charismatic leader charismatic?' and answered this in terms of 'mastery' and 'representation'. Through mastery of fate and the demonstration of world-ordering capacities the leader inspires reverence and awe. Through representation the leader expresses or incorporates the ideals of his followers, thereby generating enthusiasm (Spencer, 1973, p. 352).

In doing so, their force opposes tradition. At the same time – in their irrational mystery, in their display of superhuman qualities and in their inscrutable power to draw their followers passionately along – they contrast with the processes of bureaucratization and modern rationalization, which are composed of efficient methods, abstraction, predictability, depersonalization, routinization, and little attention to personal freedom. Hence a certain predisposition to the cult of the romantic genius.

In its pure form, charismatic force has opposing features to rational economic behaviour and the pursuit of interest. Charisma triggers an action devoid of monetary interests, far from the characteristics of economic enterprise, from which it would instead be threatened.

If, on the other hand, one wonders how charisma translates concretely, in real-life situations, into the ability to lead enthusiastic followers to action, the only attempt at analytical and theoretical composition, albeit a rough one, is that of Randall Collins (2020). According to the American sociologist, this attitude, or rather a real situational technique that can be incorporated into one's way of acting, is characterised by the general ability to assert oneself in face-to-face encounters and conversations, to broadly spread emotional energy, to be the focus of ritual attention and to become a centre of identification.

More specifically, from this point of view, charisma would take on different connotations and modalities depending on the context, the occasion, the processes and mechanisms involved.

A first way of being a charismatic leader is linked to a "frontstage charisma", which corresponds to the ability to arouse enthusiasm in large crowds and motivate them to act. It is characterised by the ability to give impressive performances in front of an audience, by linguistic and dramaturgical abilities, by the ability to transform every moment into a show, not for entertainment, but as an experience of transformation of emotions, motivations, and will. This type of charisma is characterised by: the ability to dominate public conversations – controlling the rhythm, the content, the emotional tone, having the last word, and leaving

the other person with few arguments; the ability to make decisions quickly and break with tradition, as well as the ability to understand who can be on your side; the proclivity to be unpredictable, to surprise and therefore instil energy and excitement, to elude usual expectations; the ability to understand and observe others in a micro-situation in order to orient their emotions and define the situation; the inclination to feed on the relationship with the crowd and on emotional sharing, managing to understand their dynamics and making them an echo of one's own self, even in moments of difficulty; the ability to stand as a moral revolution, a new force and emotional resource, a source of redemption from and in suffering.

Another form of charismatic leadership, according to Collins, is based on “backstage charisma”, which takes place in informal everyday situations. In this case, the ability to dominate meetings emotionally in a more personal environment comes into play, as well as the ability to persuade, make immediate and convincing decisions, and inspire loyalty and creativity. With their close followers the charismatic leaders tend to share their style and way of interacting, making themselves known as the boss, the centre of attention, dominating the time of action and defining emotions. This is how they motivate their closest collaborators, convince them, spread their energy, arouse and transform emotions, and make themselves heard.

In addition to these two highly situational forms of defining the charismatic relationship, there is also “success-magic charisma”, or rather an “aura of success” that surrounds the leader and that can clearly be associated with the previous charismatic modalities, especially the first. In this case, success seems to be reproduced in the imagination, the leader is perceived as unbeatable, prodigious, capable of producing lasting triumphs, despite obstacles and possible failures that have little impact on the recognised esteem – given that it is always the crowd that recognises the authority, with its fragility and possible inconsistency.

Finally, Collins identifies “reputational charisma”, as a result of the three previous charismatic forms. This is the ability of the charismatic person's reputation to reproduce itself and maintain the individual's appeal. Naturally, it is not enough to simply (have once) gain(ed) fame to be charismatic, since the inclination to incentivise the actions of followers is key to charisma. At the same time, this type of reputation can be artificially constructed, can be ephemeral and can even be created after death, as an ex-post narration.

The representation of Maradonian charisma

Maradona's arrival as messiah

The theoretical background just outlined provides us with a useful conceptual arsenal to return to *Maradona in Mexico*. One of the main contents of the TV series is based on the

staging of a sort of explicit show of messianism, not without a certain utopian significance (Paz, 2021).

The expectation of a messianic arrival is clear from the very beginning. “Maradona Llegó” (“Maradona arrived”) goes the refrain of the opening credits’ track, adding “para alegrar al fútbol” (“to bring joy to football”), and consequently to revive the fortunes and morale of the community that awaits him.

The opening credits reveal what will be a key meaning of the entire show, namely Maradona’s mission, a collective necessity that underpins the prophetic bond between the *pibe de oro* and the community. Maradona is expected to create an extraordinary situation with an equally exceptional and prodigious outcome: to lead the Dorados de Sinaloa team, but also the city of Culiacán and its fans, to a sporting and moral victory, but also an economic one, considering the club’s finances.

This is why his football history, made up of triumphs, falls, and comebacks, is recalled as a series of steps towards the culminating moment of the arrival of the eternal *diez* from the past as coach of the Mexican team, for a community that awaits him like a saviour.

The ageing legend, tried by life, by age, by health problems and addictions, by his posture and by his declining dialectic, is tasked with bringing joy to a decadent reality and leading it to sporting triumph, or rather the promotion to the first division. The gift of divine grace, or the benevolence offered by transcendence, certainly does not mean grace as bodily gracefulness. If Maradona’s body was a dispenser of athletic joys as a footballer (Alabarces, 2021; Archetti, 1997), now only another kind of strength can be released from his battered body.

The dominant representation of the story is that of a Maradona who manages, despite all obstacles (and up until the ill-fated final against Atlético de San Luis), to take the fate of the team upon his shoulders, to motivate his players to the point of revolutionising two seasons that already seemed to have been scripted for failure. He becomes the centre of attention for the fans, the team, the city, and the press, a catalyst for emotional energy and motivation to act.

Maradona is, in fact, described as the architect of a change in collective history, with a modest team, made up of second-tier players, which he managed to revive and take all the way to the final in both football seasons.

As mentioned, these two seasons always begin with the anticipation of Maradona’s return. In the first case, it was simply the anticipation of his first arrival as the club’s coach, while in the second season there was also the anticipation of his return to social life after a hospitalisation and the fear that he might die. Here the story further amplifies the dimension of suffering linked to messianism and the idea of a sacrifice for the community. The challenge of his alarming physical condition, his recovery from illness, the festive welcome and the ability to turn around the progress of a championship that had started very badly – also in this second season – will be the predominant subject of the story. And the matches will become joyful, as well as victorious.

Overall, in both sporting seasons, the story is told of how Maradona arrives in an apparent state of misery and neglect – the unfinished stadium with the pitch to be re-done, the

indolence of the workers, the neglected facilities, the team at the bottom of the league table, the disheartened fans, the city plagued by its social problems, and so on – and his touch changes the destiny of the community, in spite of its problematic conditions.

Undoubtedly, in the story, the Dorados also take on the task of helping Maradona, of making him happy. Deep down, in his mythologised form, *el pibe*, the boy, always coexists alongside the leader. It is no coincidence that he is a leader who inspires confidence, but remains a capricious character, to be pampered, insecure, potentially prone to despondency, perhaps unable to govern himself. Epiphenomena, evidently, of an active charisma, but part of the human contradictions that every myth elevates to a broader existential level.

Between history and myth (or archetype)

The myth, indeed. Throughout the TV series, the narration of Maradona's charisma is intertwined with a cyclical temporality closer to the time of the myth. In fact, there are several archetypal models that tend to be repeated: for instance, he returns to a suburban, desolate place characterised by poverty and crime – among other things, we are talking about one of the world's main drug production centres, famous for the presence of the notorious drug trafficker El Chapo Guzmán. From a certain point of view, it is a symbolic return – and narratively recalled in a more or less implicit way – to Villa Fiorito, to the poverty of Naples, or to a reality marked by the drugs that have left such a mark on his life.

Throughout the show, Maradona always maintains a popular dimension and style. He often proves ungovernable, easily irritated, rude, even aggressive with referees or opponents, especially with fans of other teams when they insult or mock him. At the same time, he shows affection and consideration for the friends, players and fans of his football club.

This style of his strengthens his bond with the audience, fans, and enthusiasts, but also with his players, with whom he shares his origins and class, thus marking the boundaries of his in-group.

The personal, but above all collective, redemption from individual and community misery at the same time make up the cyclical dimension of the archetype that inspires the narrative: Maradona has allegorically lifted Argentina out of misery, giving it joy and pride, he has done the same with Naples, and now he is preparing to do so with the region of Sinaloa.

After all, the same story of poverty and redemption that Maradona experienced first-hand, and with him the countries that welcomed and acclaimed him and that he redeemed, is repeated in his players. The story dwells on similar tales of poverty and football-based redemption, but also social and emotional ones, in the lives of several Dorados players. Maradona is therefore the tangible and symbolic role model, a centre of identification capable of motivating, instilling confidence, and guiding these players. The parallel is obvious, the affinity of their worlds inhabiting a timeless archetype.

The last place to go back in time is Mexico. Home to Maradona's greatest triumph, the 1986 World Cup, the country is now ready to welcome a new sporting success, new honours, new celebrations, new glory.

Within these cyclical time frames, the story unleashes the revolutionary power that creates history, the linear time of Maradona's landing in Sinaloa and the events that lead to two dramatic climaxes – the two finals of the two championships – although with a negative outcome.

With his arrival, a Maradonian revolution began, according to the *pibe de oro* himself: he went into minor football in search of challenges, to overturn the existing order and rewrite the history of the underdog, from the social outskirts of the world to an exciting result to boast about.

Maradona's story is thus transferred to the club's history. In the union between archetypal and historical time, personal suffering – cinematically evident in physical pain and infirmity – and collective suffering merge, in the name of possible revenge, of success despite difficulties, pain, and adversity.

Charisma vs technique and bureaucratic rationality

Maradona arrives in Mexico to carry out a profession in all respects, but in the TV series the job is carried out as if it were a gift, or at least this is the dominant tone of the story. On the other hand, the transferability of charisma to people and objects allows it to be potentially acquired personally or transferred to an occupation – that of a coach in Maradona's case.

Thus, the story describes how he is looked upon by all members of his community – footballers, managers, fans – with deference and devotion. He sparks enthusiasm, instils confidence, brings cohesion to the locker room, is loved and spreads love – almost like a father figure or a protector for his players. As a ritual and symbolic centre, he takes on the role of arousing and spreading emotional effervescence, of catalysing and translating with his decadent physicality joy, hope, expectation, but also disappointment and the ultimate pain.

At the same time, his influence produces excitement among the people of the city, who believe in him, participate in the celebration, in the rite of redemption and collective satisfaction.

The aim of his arrival is to symbolically climb back up through sporting success, to rekindle enthusiasm through football and victories, to protect the public prestige of the community – the team, the fans, and the city – and thus to achieve a moral victory and restore the collective honour – which remains unchanged despite the defeat in the two finals.

The confidence, joy, passion, and energy that he instils actually translate into results on the field and into a boost to the collective self-esteem and self-confidence. The team experiences a series of victories, turns its position in the league table around and then

comes within an inch of being unexpectedly promoted to the first division. This is how Maradona proves his strength to his followers.

This new destiny of success and positivity is represented in the TV series as connected to his charismatic presence, a presence that he sustains with his *maladroit corporeality* and he often insists on emphasising – not by chance, “I want to stay with you”, is what he repeats after the first final he lost and the unknowns about his health, a health that he does not worry about and that, in any case, seems less important than the embodiment of his mission.

Furthermore, his leadership is expressed in his constant defence of his players – they do not play if the pitch is in poor condition, so as not to compromise their physical condition – and of the community, or of himself against his opponents and their insults.

As we said, charisma is based on an irrational attraction – and Maradona’s one as it is represented in the TV series fully confirms the model – which contrasts with rational, methodical, technical-instrumental, bureaucratic, and organisational factors. All these latter elements are almost completely ignored in the episodes and in the main themes of the script. The material aspects of Maradona’s profession, such as his salary or the economic benefits of his celebrity status, are hidden or in the background, although there is mention of his ability to attract media interest, the attention of sponsors and funding for the club. However, these are minor issues that do not often appear in the narrative and symbolic structure of the TV show. After all, in the exemplary model of the charismatic leader, there is not much room for money and for any profit-oriented economic-rational behaviour.

At the same time, there is no real discussion of the strategies used to build a winning team, such as the transfer market. There is some mention of new players arriving in the second season, but in this as in other cases, the entrepreneurial ethics involved in managing a successful club is overshadowed by the magic of Maradona’s intervention.

Similarly, it is rare to see Maradona giving technical and tactical instructions, other than briefly on two occasions, once at the blackboard and another on the field for a few moments. Although the training sessions are often filmed, i.e. the moment when the athletic body is methodically kept in shape or the football skills are prepared, the explanations about the technique and tactics of the game are very rare, unlike the moments when Maradona motivates and encourages the team.

It is likely that, even in the day-to-day running of the club, this task was often entrusted to his collaborators – but we can only assume as much. However, the technical and tactical aspects of the team’s performance are either ignored or play a secondary role – as in the case of Luis Islas, the assistant coach, during the first season – or are even almost mocked and dialectically overcome by Maradona’s return in the second season.

In this case, in fact, the ineffectiveness of the technical-tactical instructions of his substitute, and then assistant, José Maria Martinez is cinematically emphasised before his arrival. Here technique and tactics are dominant in the story, punctuating and accompanying the team’s initial defeats. Maradona’s return will correspond to the disappearance of these aspects from the story, replaced by his charismatic influence and a new course of victories.

Images of players undergoing physiotherapy or medical treatment remain the only effective narrative concession to the scientific, rational, and technical components, or to the

role of experts and specialists within a hegemonic account of emotional and irrational factors.

The commercialised show and celebrity as a commodity

Maradona in Mexico is an emblematic product, in many respects, of the intricate dialectic between enchantment and disenchantment, irrationality and rationality that emerges when celebrity and charisma somehow meet.

In the contemporary sports industry, the commercial and spectacular dimension is prevalent (Andrews, 2006, 2019; Boykoff, 2014; Horne, 2006; Sewart, 1987; Walsh & Giulianotti, 2001). Of course, football and its underlying passion are characterised by strong emotions, but also by business with its rational and standardised procedures, as well as by the technical construction of winning performances that are also spectacular and therefore marketable.

As a sports celebrity, Maradona possesses a capital of notoriety, but also a charismatic capital that in this case are invested according to the logic of profit, in an instrumental and calculated use of the grammar of reputation within the attention economy.

The element of enchantment that characterises the *pibe de oro*, distinguished by his strong personality, feeds on an aura of mysterious and prodigious energy and fully inhabits the realm of the irrational and enchantment. But these meanings, and the underlying emotional connotations, are at the same time effectively sold as a form of commodity by rational and disenchanted organisations – media, advertising, sports.

Generally speaking, and even more so in the case of Maradona and his charismatic personality, there is no rational explanation for the attraction to celebrities, but their image, based on emotional components, is managed by specialists using rational production mechanisms, standardised procedures, and calculations of interest and economic advantage. It is no coincidence that the president of Dorados recalls with emphasis and great emotion the phrase “Sometimes fools spectacularly pave the way”, to explain the logic behind the investment in Maradona. Charisma is imbued with spectacle, and spectacle is magic, it is a ritual, but not infrequently it can also be instrumental performance and business.

Behind the promotion and protection of the charismatic bond with the public, there is a well-coordinated rational structure, planning, programming, and a meticulous organisation of time, space and tasks. Specialised people work according to distribution mechanisms and a hierarchy of tasks, specific skills and career mechanisms.

If the Maradonian scene is defined by the vehemence of his charisma, the background subtly recovers, in a way somewhat blurred by the power of the famous personage, the forces of technique, capitalism and bureaucracy.

Maradona was hired by the Dorados as a star, perhaps even before being hired as a coach. Of course, there were also sporting goals, but the hype surrounding his arrival

immediately boosted media interest, increased stadium attendance and fan travel to away games, helped to sell tickets, raise funds, and attract sponsors. Promotional videos, interviews, possible sponsorship contracts, fundraising dinners are all part of his presence. A city devoted to baseball is now waiting for economic development through football. The TV series itself, and the whole crew that immediately follows this adventure, is part of a large commercial organisation that exploits Maradona's popularity.

He is the centre of the ritual, through which he attracts the constant attention of anyone present – it is no coincidence that everyone wants to have their photo taken with him, both his fans and his opponents, attracted by his aura of celebrity – as well as the media, within a mechanism of constructing messages and images typical of a commercialised consumer culture.

At this point, everything becomes spectacle and everything can be spectacularized and sold: not only the charismatic personality on the screen and a story imbued with messianism and the expectation of redemption, but also the crime and misery of the cities of Maradona's past and present, the poverty of the people that reflects the original condition of the *pibe de oro*, the suffering, the old age, the illness. Even a hospital stay can be spectacular.

After all, the spectacular, and therefore economic, dimension of the Maradona phenomenon is one side of the coin that is inseparable from the Mexican project based on his persona.

This is how, with celebrity, the enchanting, the magical, and mystical elements can be absorbed by the rational, the disenchanted, the bureaucratic ones. In other words, celebrity can be overshadowed by everything that is calculable, deliberate, systematic, regulated, instrumental, exact, predictable, scrupulous, sober, effective, methodical, impersonal, quantitative, coherent (Hurst, 2015). Not exactly the image of Maradona.

All in all, even the cult of personality can appeal to market logic.

Conclusions

Speaking of military leaders, Weber considered the matter of the forms of bureaucratic rationalization of command and what could remain of the factors of attractiveness, emotional ardour, and the bond of trust with the leader. The process of instrumental calculation, even of irrational factors, seemed to him the dominant feature of modernity:

Discipline puts the drill for the sake of habitual routinized skill in place of heroic ecstasy, loyalty, spirited enthusiasm for a leader and personal devotion to him, the cult of honor, or the cultivation of personal fitness as an art. Insofar as discipline appeals to firm ethical motives, it presupposes a sense of duty and conscientiousness – 'men of conscience' versus 'men of honor' (...). All of this serves the rationally calculated optimum of the physical and psychic preparedness of the uniformly conditioned masses.

Enthusiasm and unreserved devotion may, of course, have a place in discipline; every modern conduct of war weighs, frequently above everything else, precisely the morale factor in troop effectiveness. (...) It seeks to influence combat by "inspiring" the soldiers and, even more, by developing their empathy for the leaders' will. The sociologically decisive points, however, are, first, that everything is rationally calculated,

especially those seemingly imponderable and irrational emotional factors – in principle, at least, calculable in the same manner as the yields of coal and iron deposits (Weber, 1978, vol. II, p. 1149-1150).

Based on Weber's considerations, when a popular personality, capable of arousing people's enthusiasm and influencing their moods and behaviour, is included in commercialization processes and market logic, it seems useful to reflect on the boundaries and power relations between the different areas.

Maradona remains a sports hero, a symbol, and identity reference, but also an inspiration for many fans and for cultural and class identities even beyond the simple football sphere (Alabarces, 2006, 2014, 2021; Alabarces & Rodríguez, 2000; Archetti, 1997, 2008; Bifulco, 2020; Bifulco & Dini, 2014; Brescia & Paz, 2023). However, as a star he lived, and still lives despite his earthly death, also within the commercial dimension, where one of the forms of routinization of his personality is expressed according to economic logic.

This is partly inevitable and not necessarily something to be viewed with dramatic alarmism. It is all about maintaining the transparency of these dynamics, not hiding the impetus of the market in the emotions of belonging and the joy of sport. This is to avoid the risk of absorbing into common sense and legitimising, without any critical sense, the rational evaluation of the human body, the consideration of the human being as a commodity, the use of its market value.

Biographical note

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