

# DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND NEW BIOPOLITICS OF COMMON: “EVERYONE AND NO-ONE” VS “EVERYONE AND EACH ONE”

**Emiliano Bevilacqua**

**Daide Borrelli**<sup>1</sup>

University of Salento, Italy

## INTRODUCTION

We assume that some recent social and technological transformations favor the possibilities to realize a common space available, at the same time, for everyone and for each one. Michel Foucault's reflections on the control over life under the regime of governmentality allow us to identify the obstacles to this occurrence and, according to our perspective, lead us to focus on the potentials provided by the rise of a capitalist model based on information. (Castells, 1996). The reality of the *networked economy* could bridge the gap between vital mobilization controlled by biopower and the horizontal production of a common space that seems to be developing in recent years (Benkler, 2006), allowing us to imagine the possibility of a bio-politics affirming commons (Esposito, 2004). Hence, we believe that the current configuration of social life envisages a slow overcoming of the harshest tensions still fuelling the conflict between the individual and society, paving the way to new forms of political regulation and citizenship mediated by digital technologies.

## THE GOVERNMENT OF LIFE

In his lectures at the *College de France* held between 1978 and 1979, Michel Foucault provides very interesting hints on the genealogy of biopower (Foucault, 2004). He shows that the political regime of *governmentality* differs from the disciplinary power of *sovereignty* because of the construction of a common space that politicizes the private sphere, thus arousing and administering life forces. Actually, the power of the government operates as a device aimed to control its manifestations and to colonize the various forms by which it manifests itself. The bourgeois civil society reveals the nature of this common space, in which the parts and the whole find a point of intersection: it also expresses the ideology of the government, i.e., the self-narration made by governmentality.

Such a social space controls and, simultaneously, relies on the changeable and very complex scenario constituted by the living singularities. Therefore, if the

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1 The authorship of the present paper pertains to Emiliano Bevilacqua for the paragraphs “The government of life”, “Politics in the form of life”, and to Daide Borrelli for the paragraph “Digital communism”. The Introduction is to be intended as a joint contribution.

value of this common space in its self-narration is strongly linked to the possible expressions and realizations of individuals, in the substantiality of its history, it is characterized by a controversial, instrumental and directive relation with the life sphere. The civil society typical of the market is the place where the whole and the parts converge, in the light of an innovative solution of the problem of power and control.

The following passage shows the self-narration made by this regime when it originated:

“The homo juridicus tells the monarch: I have rights, I have entrusted some of them to you, and you must not touch other rights, or: I have entrusted my rights to you for this or that end. The homo œconomicus does not say this. Indeed, he also tells the monarch: you must not. But he tells him in this way: you must not, because you cannot. And you cannot because *you are impotent*. And why you are impotent, why you cannot? You cannot, because you don't know and you don't know because you cannot know” (p. 232)

This passage allows us to highlight the reasons for the crisis of sovereignty arisen, i.e., the ultimate difficulty to know and control a vital space fuelled by a variety of individuals, as well as by the notable capabilities of autonomy and movement manifested by bourgeoisie. Both processes mutually support and fuel themselves and concur to reveal a qualitative transformation in the balance of powers between actor and system, between private and public actors. A further analysis of this change is provided by a reflection on diversity distinguishing the legal subject from the homo œconomicus:

“If the legal subject integrates with all the other legal subjects by means of a dialectic of renunciation to one's rights, or because of the transfer of these rights to someone else, the homo œconomicus, on the contrary, integrates with the ensemble to which he belongs, i.e., to the economic ensemble, not because of a transfer, of an escape, of a dialectic of renunciation, but by means of a dialectic of a spontaneous multiplication” (pp. 237 – 238)

The dialectic of spontaneous multiplication shows the centrality of life mobilized in the new regime of power. Such a reflection highlights the limitations of the first assumptions of contractualism and stresses the emergence of a new logic in the relation between the individual and society. However, it must be recalled that the vitality showed by civil society in the self-government of social life is a construction confirming – and somehow focusing down on – the role of disciplinary manipulations in the relation between individuals and power institutions. This fact must be kept into consideration, because the Foucaultian citation is to be intended as a representation of the self-narration made by governmentality, regardless of the exact correspondence with a far more controversial reality.

In fact, one of the pathways undertaken by Foucault in order to further investigate the discussion of the main aspects of civil society follows the path traced by Adam Ferguson in the late XVIII century. This path is stimulating because of the critical perspicacity by which the Scottish moralist's writings

interpret the extremely significant historical changes. In this respect, Foucault writes as follows:

“Civil society assures the spontaneous synthesis of individuals [...] Actually, if civil society really operates a synthesis, it will simply be according to the result of individual satisfactions within the social bond as such.

[...] Each element of civil society can be evaluated only according to the good that it will produce or provoke for the whole [...] On the contrary, the value of the whole is not absolute, the value of the whole should not be referred to the whole and simply to the whole, rather, to each of the members of this whole: *Similarly, it is true that happiness of individuals is the great goal of civil society*” (pp. 245 – 246).

The synthesis between the parts and the whole, as well as the correlated and consequent goal of individual happiness, is the point where the play of powers in the particular configuration of the government is made clear. The stakes consist in the control of subjectivity, in the ability to extend – by means of specific techniques – the seizure of power over the life of individuals, whose manifold manifestations can no longer be excluded from the government practices. We know that the Foucaultian view tends to consider the history of liberalism as a confirmation of this new aptitude for control, thus deconstructing the claims for freedom that liberalism has reclaimed for itself and for the market, starting from the XVIII century.

The dramatic conflict characterizing the space of commons can be examined as follows: assuming that the centrality of life is affirmed as an important social dimension, so that it can be confused with the sphere of politics, life revealed at the political level is colonized and regimented by resorting to biopower devices.

A renewed attention to the possibilities of social realization of individuals, as well as to the expressive possibilities of life intended in a figurative way, are important aspects of the market society; similarly, the debate on the nature of the market is also – and particularly – a discussion on the obstacles to achieve the modern project of full manifestation of life in the name of freedom. After all, the nature of the concept itself of freedom is a source of unsolved controversies.

The obstacles accompanying the ambiguity of the individual and his vitality in the governmental regime are linked to the ownership of instruments and technologies necessary for the reproduction of life, and to the kind of control techniques and devices that have shaped - even though not completely - the nature of men over time. Biopower affects both these dimensions: in fact, assuming that men are what they do, we can affirm that what they do is affected by forms taken on by their political life. Governmentality expresses the ambiguity of a condition by which the individual is called to a vital mobilization, which can turn into its opposite due to the above mentioned obstacles.

The criticism to liberalism is fuelled by these considerations, essentially because of the gap between promises of freedom and realizations of biopower. In particular, the directive colonization of life by power seems to be an insurmountable obstacle to the realization of commons intended as a space of

everyone and each one, in which social life is not a field of experimentation for mobilization and control devices of living subjectivities.

We wish to underline that the diffusion of digital technologies promises to intervene in issues unsolved by the hold exerted by biopower on life: in particular, these technologies modify the access and usability of technical tools, useful for social life; they also allow to imagine the possibility that control techniques and devices progressively lose their power.

## **POLITICS IN THE FORM OF LIFE**

The affirmation of information and communication technologies is an important technical and social change, capable of showing a step forward in the pathway leading to limit contemporary biopower; the improvement of cognitive and expressive possibilities contained in digital technologies could pave the way to a substantial reversal of the relation between life and power, envisaging a social living in which the common space is – immediately and simultaneously – owned by everyone and each one, i.e., a commons in which both the overcoming of control devices and a consequent loosening of conflictual tensions between the individual and society can be imagined.

In particular, the *networked economy* can be considered as a field where living subjectivities contribute to produce relations capable of promoting a new kind of social organization. Some practices discussed by specialized literature constitute useful references in order to overcome the antinomies between politics and life that characterize the market. Yochai Benkler discusses the strategies of the production of culture, knowledge and information from this perspective. He shows the possibility to envisage a convergence between a economically profitable exchange of goods and services and a spontaneous and altruistic mobilization of living subjectivities (Benkler, 2006).

The discussion on social production implied by the diffusion of the *networked economy* at a global level allows us to identify typical elements of a common space differing from the logic of biopower. Benkler focuses on the relation between digital technologies and society:

The interaction between these technological-economic feasibility spaces, and the social responses to these changes – both in terms of institutional changes, like law and regulation, and in terms of changing social practices – define the qualities of a period (p. 31)

This view is characterized by an opening to historical time, considering the structural interaction between different dimensions that define life in society; rejecting particularly tightening causality connections, Benkler calls our attention on vital potentials implied by the affirmation of an unknown technological-economic feasibility space. In our opinion, such an approach allows us to provide hope with more substantiality; this hope has often accompanied the powerful growth of informational capitalism:

The promise of the networked information economy is to bring this rich diversity of social life smack into the middle of our economy and our productive lives (p. 53).

For all of us, there comes a time on any given day, week, and month, every year and in different degrees over our lifetimes, when we choose to act in some way that is oriented toward fulfilling our social and psychological needs, not our market-exchangeable needs. It is that part of our lives and our motivational structure that social productions taps, and on which it thrives (p. 98).

Transformations promoting the inception of informational capitalism seem to lead us to a different social regulation. Hence, we can observe some movements toward a spontaneous convergence between vital needs of individuals – with their different abilities and aspirations – and an important dimension of social living, i.e., the economic satisfaction of life through the production of collective goods and services. The dimension of social reproduction – on a different level compared to the one envisaged in the past by the needs to control nature and to face primary vital needs - is invested by a transformation in which the directive and instrumental intervention gives way to a common space based on individual natural expression. Therefore, a commons of everyone and each one, in which the conflictual relation between actor and system seems to be oriented toward the former, so that it almost represents the needs of new interpretative categories, extremely far from the binary logic still existing in the regime of controlled vitality of biopower.

It should be highlighted the kind of change capable of showing the new common space linked to typical practices of the *networked economy*:

The core technologically contingent fact that enables social relations to become a salient modality production in the networked information economy is that all the inputs necessary to effective productive activity are under the control of individual users (p. 99).

The focus is on the user friendly nature of digital technologies, i.e., on the collapse of barriers to entry related both to their availability and to their real use. The control on the inputs necessary to economic production in informational capitalism assures a different mode of generating social life, whereas the possibility to individually shape the responses to collective needs sets out individualities being more resistant to biopolitical manipulations. Nevertheless, digital technologies constitute the *enabling technologies* potentially capable to guarantee a technical-economic feasibility space in which richness of life can singularly express and offer itself as a common good.

Observing the role played by digital technologies as tools capable of serving life enables us to focus on the real process of transformation of daily work or leisure relations, grown up together with information and communication society; hence, we can outline a downward transfer of technological tools scarcely accessible before and, similarly, an interesting increase in knowledge inscribed in behaviors characterizing daily life. This situation seems to provide the infrastructure for a dynamics of generating social living by individuals who “decide to fulfill their social and psychological needs”: the possibility to rely on technical and cognitive tools necessary to autonomously produce goods and services provides living subjectivities with the prospect to overcome the governmental horizon. Such a prospect entails the possibility to rely on a social space within the framework of commons, i.e., the possibility to live a social life

in which the conflict between private and public spheres gives way to generate relations, goods and institutions that *are* of everyone because they are *immediately* of each one.

Digital platforms constitute an essential carrier for this type of possibility and some recent experiences can be interpreted in the light of this approach. The specialized literature examining phenomena of social production in informational capitalism provides important examples, discussed by Benkler himself. The possibility to resort to the disinterested support of a number of users in order to implement exceeding computing capabilities compared to the possibilities of only one data processor represents the core of many *horizontal* experiences aimed at processing information; when sharing a research project, each of the people involved can decide to network the computing power of their computers, downloading programs capable of activating their potentials when the owner is away from his computer because he is busy in other activities. In these cases, each computer shares its computing capabilities in the logic of collaboration: the networking of computers aimed at processing information related to the possible existence of extraterrestrial intelligences is frequently recalled (a supercomputer known as *SETI@home*), but such projects also operate within the field of scientific research. These examples draw our attention to the enabling capabilities of easily accessible technologies, whose potentials are further improved by social behaviors within the framework of sharing and altruism.

Experiences of digital collaboration in which intelligence and individual aptitudes interact with the technological infrastructure of informational communism prove to be even more interesting. Benkler maintains the significance of the NASA Clickworkers Project because it lends itself very well to a precise explanation of social experiences of great *public* importance, even if grounded in reasons and decisions by *private actors* determined to voice their inclinations: the NASA project has showed that the voluntary mobilization by thousands of non-professional clickworkers has allowed the American Spatial Agency to implement a routine scientific analysis, i.e., to mark craters on the surface of the planet Mars, with the same precision guaranteed by a professional team of geologists.

It is certainly true that, also in this case, such a result would not be achieved without the wide spread of digital technologies; however, the above mentioned experience highlights the unusual and immediate convergence between vital individual inclinations and social production of common goods, and especially a series of scientific knowledge that could imply interesting economic repercussions. Noteworthy and not even taken for granted is also the responsibility by which each individual has carried out his job as a non-professional: this phenomenon - that after all is typical of such known experiences like that of Wikipedia, induces to pay attention to contradictory outcomes of the crisis of control devices of biopower, thus fuelling a relative confidence in vital potentials of the individual. Therefore, these phenomena lead us to consider the assumption that “social production thrives when it manages to intercept a part of our lives and of our motivational structure”.

Hence, the *networked economy* might represent a dimension of social living in which the individual and society can interact differently from what happened in

the past. The direction to which this change will lead cannot be known, and the fact that the processes discussed maintain their centrality in the future is not certain. It can be affirmed, however, that overcoming biopower devices implies the need to cross a social space – a *public* social space according to the current meaning – that appears as a commons *of everyone* and, increasingly, *of no-one*, rather than approaching a commonality that is, simultaneously, *of everyone* and *of each one*.

## DIGITAL COMMUNISM

A new specter is haunting the world: it is the specter of communism of digitalized information goods, destined to become popular as we focus down on the contradiction between common production of knowledge and private appropriation of the value it generates, between participated culture and cultural industries. The conflict emerging from it does not concern tangible goods, but it is extended on immaterial dimensions of knowledge and the living as a whole.

The non-rival nature of consumption of digitalized contents (so that those who resort to them do not embezzle other's use) has induced scholars to deeply rethink the problem of the so-called tragedy of the commons so as to authorize a radical overturn of this perspective. Michael Heller, for instance, speaks about the tragedy of the anticommons in order to underline the need for digitalized knowledge to be usable under the condition of common access rather than as property goods managed according to the principles of market economy and subjected to the rules of copyright: "the more are the people who share useful information, the more advantages for all increase" (Hess – Ostrom, p. 6).

Digital technologies modify the creation process of commonality and profoundly redefine their sense. Commons is no longer an abstract entity, of everyone and no-one, but it becomes real heritage of everyone and of each one. There is a profound contradiction between the idea of the "commons" intended as what is shared and the concept of "commons" intended as what is ordinary and banal.

In contemporary democracies, these two meanings of "shared" and "banal" tend to increasingly disconnect between each other. The area of what is shared is being reduced and consequently concerns limited and circumscribed groups, whereas what is outside them is *abandoned, banished, banalized* (this is the semantic articulation of the term *banal*, of what is *banished* and relegated to the *banlieues*). This contradiction between what is "shared" ever more restricted and what is "banal" deserted from the self and abandoned at the mercy of someone, produces a paradoxical semantic reversal of the *commons* in the *immune* (Esposito, 2002), i.e., in a device that patrols and protects the borders of identity, excluding the otherness.

Media communication has historically carried out the public function to promote access and participation by citizens to a common space, to the framework of what concerns everyone's and each one's life. This media-traction process of nation-building is particularly evident in a country like Italy; in fact, someone has even observed that the real reunification of Italy has been truly realized only through television. At present, phenomena like the «end of the social» (Touraine, 2004) and the advent of a so-called second modernity (Beck,

Giddens, Lash, 1994) are profoundly changing the sense that subjects ascribe to their belonging and recognizing themselves in a collectivity. As it can be observed, the common good no longer coincides with an increasingly less identifiable general interest of society, but with what enables individuals to develop their liberty and creativity, regardless of the duties and affiliations conditioned by their social positions.

However, in complex societies that are pluralized and opened to global influences like the contemporary society, the survival of a common horizon «beyond individualism» (Morcellini, Mazza, 2008) seems to be seriously disputed. In fact, the commons tends to disaggregate itself under the pressure of particularistic pushes, apparently difficult to articulate according to a shared perspective. On the contrary, we are witnessing, as a reaction formation, to real escapes ahead, in pursuit of an essentialist model of common good, that is served up as a place of mythical reunification of collective identity and cause of rejection of any otherness. Indeed, the more is the deficit of commons, the more is the resort to the myth of lost and found community confident and surreptitious (an invented tradition like Padania is alimented by this lost and found community). «The very end of myths is to immobilize the world» (Barthes, 1957; p. 234), i.e., to conceal its character of historical and political option, in the name of its alleged natural need. The consequent general overview shows a strongly compromised fungibility of commonality, in unstable balance as it is between the risk of a corporatist disintegration and the temptation of an integralist mythologem.

In these kinds of tensions, what emerges is the profoundly aporetic character that the sense of the commons takes on in advanced democracies. To use Rousseau's language, the commons, as a «general will», is something transcending subjectivities that are supposed to be expressed, but in this way it comes to be perceived as a sort of *res nullius* (a space, de facto, of no-one), too distant, abstract and indecipherable to be perceived as significant by subjects called to recognize themselves in it. It is the melancholic condition that characterizes the rational public sphere described by Habermas (1962), that implies a dissociation between sensitivity and intelligibility of individuals, i.e., between what expresses their living singularities and what substantiates the publicly-oriented opinion.

On the other hand, if the commons is declined as «everyone's will», democracy becomes unruly and populist demoscropy, whereas collective identity is weakened so as to become a mere tactical aggregation of particular claims and renunciations to take charge of a common horizon transcending "short-sighted" policies (Padoa-Schioppa, 2009). These policies concern, for instance, space (this is the case of the relation with immigrants living within the community or with others that enter the global "mediapolis") or time (concerning issues like environmental sustainability and orientation towards future generations).

In these given conditions and in the current space of technological and institutional feasibility (traditional media, representative institutions) we cannot escape this aporia; the moment of generality and the moment of particularity do not combine; rather, where the former is affirmed, the latter tends to be negated. This is the reason why the alternative faced by contemporary social and political systems wavers between an idea of the commons spoiled by

abstract universalism and an asphyctic sum of privacies, preventing individuals from conferring an horizon of collective intelligibility to their actions and projects of life.

In both cases the space of the commons is increasingly doomed to disaffection and desertion, eroded, crumbled, essentially perceived as something stranger and unsafe. As refugees in a foreign land, in the space of the commons, individuals confine themselves to *stay there*, but without really managing to *become part of it*. It is not by pure chance that, in this framework of collapse of the social, we are witnessing a progressive dismantling of welfare structures and institutions and – to quote Zygmunt Bauman – the consequent transformation of the *Welfare State* in a «*personal safety State*», in which issues of social assistance and solidarity tend to be declined and solved mainly as problems of individual safety. When the problem of a collectivity is no longer that of partition of scarce resources but it becomes a problem of sharing a growing risk, it radically changes the structure and quality of commonality, since we shift from the “lack-induced commonality” to the “fear-induced commonality” (Beck, 1986) and, therefore, from the primacy of the theme of equality to the theme of safety.

The emphasis on safety has actually paved the way for the desertification of the common *world* and for the excessive production of growing shares of *non-world*, i.e., of areas, people and things that we cannot perceive as part of a shared universe and to absorb in our life space. We should consider, for example, the emergencies of garbage and illegal immigrants, that have recently shaped the agenda as the setting of the political debate in Italy: we approach both cases as if they were parts of the world to be compared to waste to expel, rather than resources to capitalize and «recycle», or to reintroduce in the cycle of our life system. Both of them are symbols of the crisis of traditional models of communication, of the public space and, more generally, of society with reference to global overviews of the present times.

If society means production of inclusion through the recognition of the other, the fact that today we deal with both garbage and illegal immigrants as problems included in the category of “waste” and of the “*non-world*”, i.e., as something to be disposed of or to expel from the *world*, shows that something has irreparably blocked and does not work anymore as it should in the mechanisms governing the social bond formation and reflect themselves in the spatial order (Petti, 2007). The garbage invading Naples and illegal immigration gathering in Northern Italy are signs of a transformation that is spreading over our world, thus threatening the certainties of our everyday life. These are two sides of the same «immunological» phenomenon (Esposito, 2002), two aspects of the same cultural and social crisis that is spreading over the common feeling. A crisis that strikes a death-blow to our ability to inhabit shared worlds of sense and firstly lays charges against our system of *communic-action*, of production of the commons.

A possible way out from this *impasse* can be found in the transition towards new regimes of communication and, therefore, towards new modes to construct the horizon of associated life. From TV to the Internet, for instance, the transition from a common world offered by media industries and professionals to a common world that we are able to produce ourselves, as non-professionals

of communication, has come into play. In this perspective, the etymological meaning of the word “non-professional”, because it really expresses the idea of taking pleasure from what we do as craftsmen of communication (Sennett, 2008) rather than a stigmatizable condition of inadequacy and non-professionalism (Keen, 2007). The Net allows the effervescence of social life to access the spotlight of the public sphere without any centralized mediation.

We can describe the different typologies of public sphere and sense of commonality produced by media mainstream and media grassroots in terms of *world made for us* and world made of us respectively. One of the recurring problems of modernity (starting from the Simmellian *blasé* grappling with the overload of stimuli of the metropolis) has always been oriented to rebalance the flow of information made available by the capability of individuals to manage and absorb them in a common heritage of sense. The communicative model that has historically operated best in order to obviate this difficulty has been the one of the *world made for us*, i.e., a supply of symbolic forms molded according to the public expected, and in which the public has been successfully called to identify. In this case, the public attends as *lector in fabula*, in the shape of a simulacrum conceived by the producers of the text. Today, this model of communication seems to have lost something of its propulsive function and of its capability to realize inclusive forms of *communic-action*. In the *world made for us* the public is nothing other than a discursive formation produced by media industries through the principles of a semiotics of the simulacrum.

Within the framework of the social networks and the so-called content user generated a new enunciative model is being experimented, the one of the *world made of us*, that no longer appeals to the simulacrum but to the imprint (Fontanille, 2004). An explicative example here can be provided by considering the systems of *folksonomy* and *social filtering* through *tags* attributed to users: the flows of information overload are not reduced by a centralized agent organizing and simplifying them for the users, but they are directly classified, filtered and re-mediated (Bolter, Grusin, 1999) by those who utilize them and that – when using them – leave their imprint, mark and identify them with their patina, i.e., with the memory of their previous uses and their reputational capital. The overused mannerist contrast between old and new media is not called into question, but the focus is on the arrangement of new communication strategies aimed at recovering the authentic sense of the commons, as what is of everyone and of each one. In fact, also television is equipping itself to meet the demand for a *world made of us* (Gavrila, 2006). It suffices here to quote two examples, particularly significant of this trend: the formation of organized fanships which integrate TV programs through participative conversational practices (Jenkins, 2006a e 2006b), and the experimentation of TV models based on the system of contents produced by users, as happens in the case of Current TV.

The participative practices fuelling the *world made of us* determine the conditions for the formation of a new sense of the commons, capable of projecting living subjectivities directly inside devices of collective deliberation. We have emphasized the fact that digital networks lend themselves to redefine the forms of biopolitics intended as a «politics of life itself ». We have also emphasized the fact that this breakthrough tends to transform politics from a

instrument of government and organization of life into an accessible platform, at the service of living entities. Hence, biopolitics is not necessarily assumption and taking charge of life but it can be declined as the «capture of speech» (de Certeau, 1994) directly by life.

Generally, these forms of capture of speech by life are condemned as an expression of emotive and populist politics. \* The antidote to hinder this type of drift is traditionally provided by institutions of representative democracy, which guarantee adequate filters and solutions of continuity – the system of hydraulic enclosure mentioned by Habermas (1992) – in the circuit connecting citizens and institutions, as well as in the path going from the calls of the life-world to their public representation. Nevertheless, in the current globalized and TV-mediated world we live in an unusual condition of immediacy (at the space and time levels), that constitutes the real “emergent cultural principle of contemporary societies” (Tomlinson, 2007; p. 10). In such a context, we believe that we should neither be afraid of politicization of life as such nor of the incursion of the private and personal spheres into the political sphere. It’s not this that empties and makes the commons banal and insignificant, but the instrumental, episodic and often only demoscopic nature by which, in traditional institutional and media frameworks, the access to public space is allowed to life. Hence, the danger to ward is not the invasion of the commons by too immediate interests, but, conversely, the discontinuity and partiality by which they are enabled to attend and confront themselves in the public sphere, their being reduced – so to speak – to occasional users of the commons, without having the opportunity to participate actively, continuously and generally in its formation, by organizing the agenda of priorities, i.e., by participating in the public debate and by effectively conditioning the decisional processes. Paul Ginsborg, for instance, has shown optimism on the possibilities to change this situation and has emphasized the novelty represented by popular mobilizations which have recently concerned the political debate in Italy, especially some online initiatives which have subsequently given life to an important protest, the so-called “NoBday”, addressed to the Cabinet of the Premier Silvio Berlusconi.

In the past, the political acting had to choose within a variety of possibilities ranging from direct democracy to representative democracy. Information and communication technologies have radically changed the scenario in which today the consensus can be organized, the political decision can be formed, and a new feature can be given to the citizenship functions. We can opt between intermittent democracy and «continuous» democracy (Rodotà, 1997), i.e., between forms of periodic consultation of the electorate and procedures of permanent mobilization of the citizens’ opinion, who are always enabled to intervene in the deliberative process. What is being established is the premise for the affirmation, beyond the logic of mass media, of a real deliberative society, in which the public sphere is not reduced to a place where the opinions of the political leaders are made public and applauded, but where we can actively concur to make opinions: «In public communication processes what counts is not only (nor mainly) the diffusion of messages and the taking of sides through the activity of mass media. Of course, only an extended circulation of comprehensible messages, and capable of catching the attention, can guarantee the participative inclusion of those involved. However, in structuring a

public opinion the rules of a common communicative practice are far more important. Only in so doing, the approval of themes and contributions can *develop* as the result of a quite exhaustive debate, in which – quite rationally – proposals, information and reasons could have been elaborated» (Habermas, 1992; pp. 429-430).

The public sphere cannot confine itself to enact a public event, but it must be capable of promoting, mediating and also – if necessary – transforming opinions processed at a private level. The added value of the model of continuous democracy consists in the fact that interests, preferences, and identity profiles of the subjects involved in political decisions are not given *ante rem* outside the public debate, but they form themselves in and thanks to public discourse. In this respect, processes of deliberative communication have, together with an inclusive function, an eminently cognitive value: as Habermas argues (2006), they develop a truth-tracking potential. «Compared with the ‘liberal’ perspective which considers interests as something already given and hexogen to the political process, thus disputing only the issue of their aggregation, the model of a deliberative democracy invites to call upon a discovery procedure and of possible *transformation* of particular interests» (Innerarity, 2006; p. 199).

Otherwise, there is the risk to run into the aporia of the commons, that we have already illustrated: subjective identities escape any possible mediation, and, after all, the collective horizon is banalized (hence, it is abandoned by citizens), since it appears in the form of an abstract synthesis that “comprises” them (i.e., “contains” them) without actually “comprehend” them (expressing and proving true their vital subjectivity).

In conclusion, a public sphere that is not sprinkled by issues deriving from living singularities of citizens appears as void and almost insignificant (expression of an abstract universalism), at least as a private that does not aspires to become public discourse remains asphyctic and incapable of embodying an authentically political and common vocation. The new forms of networked communication seem to be modifying this situation drawing up the conditions for a “commons made up of us”, i.e., for the development of a substantial universalism, in which the commons “grows together” – applies itself and develops together – with and through the living subjectivities that compose it.

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2 Please note: we are aware of the fact that citations from books, essays, articles, etc., in languages other than English and already translated and published should be based on standards. Nevertheless, due to the difficulties of finding the original sources, we have attempted to provide an accurate translation of the material in Italian consulted. However, because of the nature and difficulties of translation, as well as its uniqueness, slight differences with other official translations may exist.

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