

Francesco Antonelli

*Introductory notes*

In recent times, the digital architectures of interaction have become more than just new information architecture and a new ecology of dialogue and participation. In addition to these new forms of debate and interaction which are expressed far beyond the dynamics of modern public opinion, digital networks have opened spaces of experimentation for new decision-making collaborative practices. In several areas, the creation of platforms and architectures of debate and deliberation is putting new questions about the technological possibility of overcoming representative democracy. Along with these possibilities, the practices which express the dwelling dynamics of interaction between individuals, information, and territories, so far experienced in different contexts, demonstrate the need to rethink the concepts of participation and democracy. Much more than the expression of human parliamentary meetings and ideas, the digital architectures of participation express the ecological forms of a new type of social contractility capable of establishing relational ecosystems, connecting us to biodiversity, territoriality, gender devices and databases, extending thus the architecture of the anthropomorphic social beyond the polis and its political dimensions.

With this background in mind, the book is the result of the activities promoted by the Net-Activism International Research Network based on *Atopos Lab* in Universidade de São Paulo. At the Network join: Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Universidade Lusófona do Porto, Université de Lille 2, Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris. The first part is focused on the relationship between Net-Activism and social theory.

The first Chapter, by Massimo Di Felice, is focused on the analysis of social action theory. Di Felice argues that the rise of digital technologies

has been changing social theory perspective about the relationship between action, actor and social environment. On the basis of this point of view, he discusses twenty idea for re-thinking social theory in contemporary world.

The Paper by Antonio Tursi analyses the relationship between Net-Activism and contemporary democracy. Contemporary activism is notably marked by the use of digital communication networks. It therefore reflects the characteristics of these works, such as emotion and accelerated temporality. The redefinition of activism requires a new interpretive map developed between two axes: global/local and political reform/media reform. Net-Activism has an impact on the definition and practices of democracy, definitely marking an enlargement of the action repertoire available to individuals and to groups but also risks alienating the participation of citizens from the circles where decisions are made.

The purpose of the third chapter, by Francesco Antonelli, is to retrace the transformation of intellectuals in the passage from an industrial to a post-industrial society, up until the global network society, through a brief critical review of the main sociological themes that have dealt with this issue. The basic theory is that intellectuals are no longer a social and cultural elite defined by their relationship with political movements, but a mass and a variety of highly differentiated actors who find an environment full of risks and opportunities on the Internet, while taking part in the dynamics of power and counter-power, of criticism and economic production in a global society.

The following chapter, by Marco Binotto and Federica Ferrari, intends to analyse this identity practice, the link between the image of the networks as illustration and prefiguration of horizontal, de-centered, fragmented movements and the ideological contour of a society built around this metaphor. It also aims to define the connection that exists between communication technologies used to build organisational forms of contemporary social movements, and the configuration that shapes these collective actions.

The final paper in part one, by Elisabetta Ruspini and Sveva Magaraggia, is focused on the relationship between digital technologies and gender problems. They argue the rise of web 2.0 has been changing a gender perspective based on the classic dichotomy between masculine and feminine, opening the way to new gender interpretations and practices.

Part two presents a number of case studies on Net-Activism in the

contemporary global world.

A paper by Serena Fossati explores the communicative infrastructure of a youth organisation in China, that is actively engaged in environmental protection, and analyses what communication technologies are adopted and how they are used in combination. The findings are based on in-depth interviews with staff members and the content analysis of 1810 posts retrieved from the social media accounts of the association: Sina Weibo, RenRen and WeChat. Findings show that there are striking differences between the platforms, in terms of function, audience, content, and interaction. The study then considers the role of social media affordance in affecting and shaping the communicative infrastructure of the green group, in particular connectivity (the possibility of the organisation to establish a connection, strengthen the relationship with its audience and subsequent mobilisation) and visibility (the possibility to amplify its cause, reaching a broader audience).

Use of the Internet in collective action is one of the most salient features of mobilisation happening across the world in the first two decades of the new millennium. Worldwide, the web played a key role in the construction and deployment of huge demonstrations and provided unprecedented participatory tools. These opportunities are also exploited by radical movements and extreme right-wing organisations, whose use of the Internet is still not well understood. The seventh chapter, by Emanuele Toscano, proposed here aims to analyse the specific case of an extreme right-wing organisation in Italy, CasaPound, and is based on an empirical research carried out in recent years within this movement. Starting from a review of the literature about this issue, it will analyse in particular the use of the web by CasaPound, and its particular characteristics.

The eighth chapter also focuses on Italian right movements. This article, by Federico Tarquini, presents a mediological analysis of the relationship between media and social and political forms; examining the Italian far-right movement – ‘destra non conforme’ – in order to show how its aesthetic, social and cultural forms are informed by the imagery produced by the cultural industry and digital cultures. The aim of this paper is therefore to demonstrate the relationship of mutual influence between social and cultural forms typical of digital media, jointly with the change of political forms. This obviously raises the question about the category of extremism, or at least as it was understood in the twentieth century.

Chapters nine and ten both focus on the case of Expo 2015 in Milano. In recent years political participation and political consumerism have highlighted the ethical and responsible side of consumption practices. The Internet at large and social media have increased the likelihood of engaging in political consumerism. According to previous research, among social networking sites, Twitter is more focused on the sharing of opinions and information, thus it is more likely to be used as a means of debate about political consumerism. The paper by Ariella Mortara and Stefania Fragapane presents the results of a qualitative analysis conducted on Twitter posts, the aim of which was to analyse Italian consumer reaction to the news concerning McDonald's and Coca-Cola's official sponsorship of Expo 2015.

The paper by Stefania Parisi and Luca Massidda originates from a strong hypothesis: in the late nineties, social movements ascribed powerful political relevance to the media system: it was identified as a strategic field for the construction of a common space not expropriated, in its work and life, by Capital's logic. Today, it is precisely the relational and communicative dimension that appears subsumed from proprietary platforms of digital and social media, widely used by social movements. Therefore the construction of an antagonistic subjectivity seems no longer to pass through the imagination and design of an alternative media environment. This hypothesis is tested through the discussion of the findings collected in an ongoing field research on the practices of the 'Attitudine NoExpo' network.

The eleventh chapter, by Fabio Introini and Cristina Pasqualini, is focused on Social Streets. From 2013 onwards, in the main cities of Italy, the emerging phenomenon of Social Streets (from now on SoSts) has been gathering momentum. This process is trying to reconfigure urban forms of sociality with many implications at the level of collective action, participation and metropolitan transition. A SoSt can be defined as the attempt to use Facebook to reconnect and give new life to those social relations of proximity resting on a defined and delimited portion of urban space (the streets) which the SoSts, in turn, contribute to modifying and producing, with their online and offline action. Firstly aimed at rebuilding social ties, confidence and social capital, SoSts play a pivotal role at the pre-political level, reshaping in a participatory way the forms of dwelling. Being dwelling a meta-practice, this means that SoSts are also becoming collectors, catalysts and enhancers of innovative social practices inspired by a new philosophy of sustainability and a culture

of sharing, which have political meanings and consequences. Even if, in contemporary society, pre-political action is in and of itself political, the rise of SoSts is pushing its trajectory toward the intersection with institutional politics and the processes of city governance, with relevant consequences concerning SoSts identity and activism. In this paper, drawing on the evidence of quali-quantitative research on the city of Milan (which, with its 62 SoSts, is the Italian city in which this phenomenon has currently reached its largest expansion) attention is focused put on the way in which SoSts, acting in the wider and heterogeneous network of urban players (institutions, civil society, media) can affect the collective life of the polis.

Finally, the twelfth chapter, by Tatiana Mazali, presents the results of an ethnographic observation conducted within the project of active citizenship called *IRENCollabora*. Iren is an Italian multi-utility (electricity, energy, water and waste services), it operates for different territories and public administrations. Iren has recently taken measures to involve citizens in ‘improving the quality of their services’ through the provision of local committees. The committees are composed of stakeholders representative of the territory. In order to expand participation Iren has launched the online platform *IRENCollabora* for the widespread involvement of ‘common’ citizens. *IRENCollabora* is therefore a mixed format of territorial involvement. It consists of an online consultation, open to all citizens (based on the model of ‘disintermediated’ participatory online citizenship), flanked by a model of deliberation ‘mediated’ by a group of civil society representatives. The combination of these two ‘formats’ of civic participation is specific – and therefore precious in analytical terms – of the case study that the paper intends to present analytically. *IRENCollabora* is an example of ‘cross-genre’ activism, an example of ‘phygital’ participation architecture. The paper will discuss the issue of ‘hybrid’ community: In recent years the concept of ‘community of proximity’ has emerged, which now includes people belonging to the same territorial or social conditions, but all those who work for the global resolution of a problem thanks to the network and the 2.0 ecosystems. ‘Hybrid’ means the union/tension between online and offline identities and online and offline decision-making practices (mediated and ‘disintermediated’ at the same time).

