



Theoretical approaches to participation beyond the state and the market

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Abstract

The paper discusses the contributions of the young Karl Marx and Michel Foucault in order to draw the basic elements of public spaces far away from liberal individualism as well as abstract statism. This kind of social criticism tries to go beyond the categories of statehood and market. The young Marx advances the perspectives of men finally able to gain a subjectivity and a relation capacity escaped the meshes of alienation while Foucault's attention is directed to the forms of manifestation of life in a biopolitical context that can weaken the state and the market. These two institutions fall into crisis as devices of social organization, and they are undergoing the competition of horizontal and cooperative networks of individuals that express more effectively common needs and desires, offering a fresh and engaging perspective of participation. The new forms of participation are emerging more and more (i. e. crowdsourcing, open source software, fair trading, co-housing, etc.) because they express a cooperative and empathic society where the collective intelligence can auto-organize. The paper aims to show how the deep challenge to the public/private distinction has its roots in the radical theoretical reflection and to illustrate some empirical evidence relating to the progressive formation of a participated and auto-organized public spaces.

Keywords: participation; social theory; state; market; alienation

1. Introduction

I would argue two thesis about the new forms of participation in the public spaces. First, I think that there are some theoretical tools that are capable to offer some explanations of the new forms of participation: particularly, we can watch to the young Marx and to Foucault to enlighten these realities (Foucault, 1994, 2004a, 2004b; Marx, 1843-1844, 1844a, 1844b); secondly, I think that the interconnection among these theoretical tools and these realities of different types of participation is effectively and solid. Before deepening these two issues, it's important to underline that the subject of our discussion are the same as in the prevailing literature, which has a vision of new forms of participation as forms rooted in the everyday life, cooperative, auto-organized, affected by values as reflexive individualism and empathic cooperation and, at the same time, greatly influenced by communication and information technologies (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 1996; Innerarity, 2006; Rifkin, 2010; Sennett, 2006; Touraine, 2004). The new forms of participations can be of various kinds: convincing examples can be political, as in the case of popular revolutions knows as the "Arab spring", or even civil, as in the case of knowledge sharing experienced in recent years and symbolized from the birth of on line encyclopedia named Wikipedia. The aspects that are common to these different experiences are essentially the cooperative dimension, the use of digital technologies and then the public nature of their events. I will

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develop some remarks on the possibility of a positive analysis of these phenomena in the light of the criticism that

young Marx and Foucault formulated in relation to the constraints against mankind that capitalist society has exerted over time (Douzinas and Žižek, 2010; Hardt 2011; Hardt and Negri, 2010; Leonelli, 2010). My impression is that the emerging forms of participation provide a realistic support for alternative vision of society, beyond the state and the market, proposed in the past by these two scholars.

2. The thought of the young Karl Marx on the relationship between the alienation and the state/market binomial

The early writings by the German sociologist show his great attention to this issue. I think that the reflections of the young Marx are very interesting because both Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts as his critic of Hegel's philosophy of law paving the way for an inspiring vision of participation. Marx is interesting because his criticism of alienation is the base from which it's possible to question both the state both the market as these two institutions don't have the capacity to establish a world in which the manifestations of subjectivity can find the possibility to express, disregarding the complexity of social life. Marx thinks that the market is an institution in which people are valued on the base of their market value, that is as thing and not as human beings; an individualistic institution like the market expresses only a part of the life of mankind and this part is the fruit of a misrecognition of human needs and desires. The men, in his view, are not free to achieve their goals because private ownership of the means of production necessary to reproduce life imposes on the majority of them to engage their existences in repetitive work tasks imposed by the circumstances. The market society, therefore, frustrates social life by reducing it entirely in the limited area of the exchange animated, on the one end, by the desire of capital accumulation and, on the other, by the need to work to survive (Marx, 1844a).

Marx criticizes, at the same time, various forms of liberal government, from constitutional monarchy to republic, yet he focuses on the concept of popular sovereignty as epitomized and expressed by parliamentary democracy (Marx, 1844b, 1843-1844). He stigmatizes this model at two levels: at the social level, the economic vision by which the market allows individuals to enhance their potentialities is criticized on the grounds of the division between owners and non-owners that compels the latter to be dependent on the former in order to meet the basic needs of life; therefore a capitalist society proves to be a society of strong and insurmountable inequalities for the majority of people. At the political level, the democratic ideal of power exercised through the election of people representatives free to pursue the common good is criticized by emphasizing the very existence of a civil life where differences are so substantial and power is so badly distributed that a parliament free from any form of conditioning seems to be unrealistic. Therefore, Marx suggests, we cannot drastically separate society from the State, civil life from political life: if individuals are separated by unbalanced power relations, how can a democratic popular sovereignty – i.e., capable of giving voice to individuals starting from their abilities rather than from their economic position – be feasible? The foundations of the State rest on the individuals' difficulty to reconcile the concreteness of a painful and unequal social condition with the reality of an unjust and alluring power. The State then is a cause and a form of alienation while the manifestation of human needs and expectations is impossible for people living in a market society ruled by liberal political institutions (Marx, 1844a).

Marx puts expressly in relation the category of alienation and the realities of market and state (Aranowitz, 2003; Basso, 2012; Colletti, 1971). He seeks an alternative to this situation in which people are able to express both their own individual aims both their social and relational expectations, seeking a field in which people can realize their

cooperative efforts (Derrida, 1993; Hardt, 2010; Hardt and Negri, 2010). Marx insists on the contradiction between the concreteness of a society experiencing violent social imbalances and the theory of a political and economical life animated by a dialectic exchange between free and equal individuals; his attempt is to find a space in which there isn't contradiction among individual lives and social existence. I think that the marxian criticism of market and state as the basis of the modern alienation is very important to understand the current attempts of overcoming the market oriented behaviors and the statehood, imagining new forms of public space.

3. Foucault's reflection on the emergence of social life beyond state and market

Although there are many aspects that divide Marx from Foucault, the issue of the public space beyond state and market is a dimension on which it's possible to find some similarities (Hardt, 2010; Leonelli, 2010). The discussion of Foucault's biopolitics facilitates this task because, in addition to being the most important topic of this author, starts with the study of the forms of government of state and market (Foucault, 2004a). Some elements useful for understanding the current kind of participation are also present in Foucault's thinking on the biopolitical subject (Foucault, 1994; Esposito, 2004). It's important to underline the categories that forms the essence of the foucauldian biopolitics. The governmentality in which we live is a type of device that realizes a particular balance between life and power; in a short way, we can argue that biopolitical governmentality is a regime in which the life is necessarily evoked by the power because the existence and the productivity of the power is not possible without the mobilization and active participation of all citizens to social and economic activities (Foucault, 2004a, 2004b). We observe how the power has the capacity to control and govern the forces of the life and we know that power also has the capacity to shape human desires and subsequent behaviours, giving off, for example, new fashions, new practices of consumerism etc. The most important feature of this analysis, however, consists in a particular regime whose existence depends on a balance of life and power, or, more precisely, on an equilibrium in which the life is evoked to serve the power and in which the power doesn't exist without the life (Esposito, 2004, 2006).

The biopolitical governmentality is indeed the space in which is possible to observe, for us that live in it, the possibility that men strengthen their needs and desires till to question the power in itself. Although the topic is very complex, I believe that the most relevant aspect is in this contradiction between life and power.

The possibility to express our needs and desires till to question the power and the opportunity of a *social* concrete expression of our *individual* potentialities remain only a possibility but it is certain that this possibility cannot be thought within the political institutions of liberal organization of society, that is within the state. We can support this consideration with two reasons. The first reason lies in the fact that in the past the state was a pillar and a cornerstone of another kind of power, that is a disciplinary type of power that was theorized in the form of sovereignty mainly by contractualism. It's interesting that both the young Marx both Foucault consider this type of power as a political theology, especially in the marxian criticism of hegelian philosophy of law and in the foucauldian lessons named "The birth of biopolitics", held in the 1978-1979. The second reason for the lack of the state in realizing a context in which the men are able to realize themselves is the simple conviction that in our time the state is subdued to the market: we can look at the state as fundamental institution that makes possible the grasp of the market on our lives (Hardt and Negri, 2010).

It would be an error to think the state as an alternative to the market because the problem is to understand the role of the

market in the personality development and in the process of subjectification. We can argue in this sense that the market is a regime in which the life is acknowledged but, generally, in her individualistic features, that is only in a field in which all different aspects of people are mobilizing to obtain economic results with rational behaviours, subduing the means to the ends; but we know that the life has others dimensions, less sensitive to the rationality and more opened to all passions, to sympathy, to altruism, indeed more interested to establish emphatic relations with other human beings (Benkler, 2006; Hess and Ostrom, 2007; Rifkin, 2010; Sennett, 2008). The Foucault's theoretical approach allows us to carefully consider the possibilities that the activation and development of life in a market society leading to a change in social relations. If we look at the present new forms of public space and socio-political participation, we observe that the starting point of these social phenomena is the individual, that is a subject that tries to be himself starting from his own desires but not developing his egoistic and competitive forces: this subject starts from his own desires but he is happy to realize them through altruistic expressions of his personality in a context that is highly interconnected and cooperative, that is in a common dimension. The foucauldian thought on the relationship between biopolitical governmentality and market shows a central point, that is the growing social and political importance of life, initially under the sign of the egoistic competition but more and more oriented toward a collective action based on individual wishes and realized in a cooperative and common context. This reflection don't characterized only the foucauldian lessons of 1978-1979 but also other writings of the early '80s (Foucault, 1994). These foucauldian arguments also opens the possibility to analyze, with strong theoretical vision, the opportunities that are related to the new public spaces.

4. The current forms of public space and the new digital technologies

Which is the relationship among these theoretical features and the new forms of public space? Although the globalization has stimulated the market and its values, it's important to remember that there are a lot of social behaviors in which the individual profit and the individualism are less important than in the past; we can observe, at the same time, that the role of the State in the organization of these new social practices is less important than in the past too (Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1990; Innerarity, 2006; Rifkin, 2010; Sennett, 2006). We are in front of a significant change in the formation and in the manifestation of our social world, in particular as regards our representations of the self. The pursuit of happiness is frequently associated with altruistic values or at least with values rooted in the field of emotional fulfillment (Giddens, 1990).

This change began to emerge during the '70s of the last century and has been theorized in various ways in subsequent decades (Touraine, 1992; Harvey, 1990). The trends in the critique of market and state ideologies as well as the propensity for grater reflexivity has emerged in that period. Many scholars, however, argue that an important factor capable of accelerating change has been the rapid diffusion of information and communication technologies during the '90s (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 1996; Levy, 2002). These technologies have positively interacted with previous trends in the direction of the critique of individualism, consumerism and cultural massification. This process is influenced by new technologies because they are able, in every parts of the world, to allow the great part of mankind to express and realize a lot of new ideas and behaviors, in a very simple and not expensive manner (Benkler, 2006). It's important to underline that these ideas originate from every single individual but they became real in a social context that is opened, cooperative and networked: we can see then how these behaviors are at same time individual and social, singular and common. An explanation for this process is certainly the social use of digital technologies, whose characteristic we can define as enabling to discuss, to share information, to study together, to reflect on our destiny. The environment in

which our projects can be realized, in fact, is globally interconnected and technologically open.

Although the trends to concentration of capital in the network are quite significant, the life on line of millions of individuals is certainly animated by intentions of socialization and cooperation. Many cases can be recalled. We know everything about, for example, the importance of the network of social intelligence that has given life to the online encyclopedia named as “Wikipedia” rather than about the great turbulence in the international relations generated by the networking of many cable files by Wikileaks. We know the importance of social phenomena as fair trading, co-housing and crowdsourcing. Finally, we have observed the key role of social network in the popular uprising in the Middle East. All of these cases are certainly contradictory, and all of them can be interpreted differently: however, in each of them there are forms of participation that seem to go beyond the boundaries established in the past.

I will consider only two examples of the emergence of a new public space in which we can observe new forms of thought and action beyond the market and beyond the State. I cite two cases in which the individual passion for one field of research has given as the result a significant social goal. I take these examples by an highly reputable research (Nielsen, 2011). In the case of Galaxy Zoo we are faced with an episode of citizen science aimed at the classification of galaxies. The team of Galaxy Zoo has asked to the astronomy enthusiasts a help to classify the galaxies and the results have been positive, not too far from an output elaborated by formally skilled people. This interesting result recall the Wikipedia experience and it's more surprising as a result of a specialized field of research. The realization of this project, as often happens in similar cases (Nielsen, 2011), have shown that the conscientious efforts of thousands of people, made possible because of the digital technologies, have offered scientific results of great importance, thus combining the individual passion for the research and the social goal of scientific progress.

The case of GenBank, however, shows how the decision to share and to network the expert skills that deal with mapping the human genome has allowed to the scientific research on this object to get extraordinary results. In this case, we are in front of a political decision at the beginning of a process in which every results of scientific research has been put in common. The case of GenBank draws our attention to the possibilità that online institutional environments, capable of promoting interpersonal cooperation, foster in a decisive manner the growth of forms of sociality different by individualism and statism. The principle of intellectual property, for example, has been greatly reduced in the case mentioned.

5. Concluding remarks

It's important to underline the link among the criticism of state and market that characterized the radical thought and the emergence of new public spaces in globalization. The discussion about this link is important for two reasons. In the first place, it's important to emphasize that the possibility of understanding the deep challenge to the state/private distinction has its roots in the theoretical reflection that we have discussed: the ideas of the young Marx and Foucault help to analyze the processes that have changed the relationship between the public and the private, continuously invoking our attention to the active role played by individuals. In the second place, the emergence of new forms of public spaces could offering an alternative to the present crisis of our democracies. Representative democracies of the nation states is in trouble because of the emergence of centers of international power related to economics and finance: this situation fosters distrust and protests in public opinion that, at times, tend to occur in authoritarian forms (Crouch, 2010). The market regulation, moreover, have been called into question as a result of the drastic cuts in public spending policies

that followed the deep economic crisis that began in the years 2007-2008 in the United States (Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2013). The future of democracy and the new forms of participation are therefore influenced by a common destiny.

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