

ЦИФРОВЫЕ СФЕРЫ ВЛИЯНИЯ И БУДУЩЕЕ ИНТЕРНЕТА¹

DIGITAL SPHERES OF INFLUENCE AND THE FUTURE OF THE WEB²

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Аннотация. Всемирная паутина, как известно, родилась вместе с военным проектом Arpanet в целях гарантии точности и распространения военной информации во время холодной войны. По завершении этой исторической фазы данное изобретение было преобразовано для гражданских целей, подвергаясь влиянию создания информации «снизу». Тем не менее, несмотря на использование Сети «снизу вверх», Запад постепенно внедрял политику контроля и направления информационных потоков. Интернет также может стать вектором информационной конкуренции, и по этой причине все больше региональных или национальных институтов задумываются о развитии собственной инфраструктуры и собственной системы регулирования Сети. Цель данной статьи — рассказать о трансформации Сети с момента ее рождения до текущего состояния, дать обзор разделения Сети в наши дни.

Ключевые слова: всемирная сеть, мультиполяризация, социальные конфликты, коммуникационная политика, сплинтернет

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- **Abstract.** The World Wide Web was famously born with the Arpanet military project to guarantee the reticularity and dissemination of military information during the Cold War. With this historical phase concluded, this invention was transformed for civil purposes, influencing and being influenced by the creation of information from below. Yet, despite the “bottom-up” use of the network, the West has gradually implemented policies to control and channel information flows. The Internet can also become a vector of information competition, and for this reason more and more regional or national institutions are thinking about developing their own infrastructure and their own network regulation system. This article aims to present the transformation of the network from its birth to its current condition, to give an overview of the partitioning of the web nowadays.
- **Keywords:** world wide web, multipolarization, social conflicts, communication policies, splinternet

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1. Internet technology is covering the whole world with its complex infrastructure. Its presence is gradually becoming more pervasive, so that its aims and nature often merge with very different conceptions, visions and ideas. It has become, in a very short time, a tool for communication, information and data archiving, as well as a political, informative and also ideological battlefield. Its presence alone stimulates the debate on the extent of the right to free expression that it must allow, and this is further complicated by the difficulty of applying national regulations and legal codes to a reality that, by its nature, tends to cross borders and to presenting itself as transnational.

Often, indeed, the only apparently transnational image of the network does not allow those who use it to understand its true nature, confusing the network with the ideology or ideologies with which it marries and of which it becomes a vector. In some narratives, for example, the very concept of the internet (and the use of the internet) becomes synonymous with freedom of expression and, therefore, human rights, often confusing the means with the end or the way of use and, once again, with the regulations.

Within this conceptual chaos, it becomes important to understand the internet for what it actually is, that is a specific technology. As such, the approach that should be maintained should be to consider the instrumental scope, the uses, the organizational possibilities deriving from it and therefore the actors who benefit from it and the various contrasts between them (and through the network) are born.

It will thus become clear that the Internet is nothing more than a new information technology, much more powerful, faster and more precise than the previous ones, and that it has accelerated some often pre-existing phenomena exponentially. Furthermore, like any information technology, it strengthens and feeds phenomena of a political nature (and therefore *military* according to the famous Clausewitz's definition³), both from the top

to the bottom, from the bottom upwards, and between actors below and actors at the top. The Internet is, therefore, the place *par excellence* of asymmetry, where conflicting faults find their maximum expression, even if often not directly violent. Its versatility allows an extensive use and a multivectoriality that, with other parameters, were also typical of other forms of information in history.

One of the most striking examples of the political role of information, which in very distant historical times could only be more easily promoted from top to bottom, is that of the inscription of Bēhistūn, through which the rise to the throne of the king Darius of Persia in 522 BC. The historical event in question, as Alessandro Campi remembers⁴, presents itself with multiple versions: that of Aeschylus, that of Herodotus, not least that of Machiavelli in the *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio*. However, it is the description of the event that Dario himself gives that interests us most, as a demonstration of the political use that political power makes of information:

"[...] The inscription of Bēhistūn [...] represents [...] not only the oldest document, among those known, in which we talk about how Darius came to power, but also a sort of official and definitive version of events, used as a primary source by many of those who subsequently narrated them (starting with Herodotus). In this inscription, it is no coincidence, there is never talk of a conspiracy or a palace maneuver, but of an act of justice against an impostor, aimed at restoring the legitimate dynasty, carried out personally by Darius.

[...] Darius' only concern is to appear, in the eyes of his subjects and of history, a legitimate descendant of Cyrus and Cambyses and present himself as the one who, thanks to a solitary action, was able to avenge the

³ "We see, therefore, that War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means. All beyond this which is strictly peculiar to War relates merely to the peculiar nature of the means which it uses. That the tendencies and views of policy shall not be incompatible with these means, the Art of

War in general and the Commander in each particular case may demand, and this claim is truly not a trifling one. But however powerfully this may react on political views in particular cases, still it must always be regarded as only a modification of them; for the political view is the object, War is the means, and the means must always include the object in our conception". Carl von Clausewitz. On War // Start Publishing, Jersey City, 2021, p. 64.

⁴ Campi Alessandro. Una fonte machiavelliana in materia di cospirazioni e trame segrete: Erodoto e la congiura dei sette contro il falso Smerdi // Alessandro Campi e Leonardo Varasano (edited by). Congiure e complotti. Da Machiavelli a Beppe Grillo. Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli, 2016. P. 101 – 128.

deception perpetrated against the Persian people by a rebellious magus.

The “Darius’ version”, if we want to define it that way, is on the one hand an attempt to hide the violent and profane origin of his own power (and to remove the suspicion, advanced even today by various scholars, that he may actually having eliminated not an impostor, but the real Bardiya-Smerdi, therefore the legitimate heir of Cyrus, whose killing in the inscription is explicitly attributed to the responsibility of Cambyses), and on the other a propaganda expedient aimed at presenting his accession to the throne as, at the same time, the execution of a celestial design (which explains the hammering references to the will of Ahura Mazdā, the supreme deity of the Persian pantheon) and a legitimate restoration in the name of historical tradition⁵.

2. The information carrier from top to bottom, however, will be severely tested by historical events. Notoriously, one of the great technical revolutions was that of movable type printing, which made the production and distribution of texts faster and more effective, but the political purposes of letters were, as we have seen, already widely known. Although this system was devised in China by the inventor Bi Sheng, it is interesting to note what has produced its use in Western Europe, in a sociopolitical sphere notoriously subject to effective polyarchy. This invention has fueled the centrifugal forces with respect to already unstable centers of power, as in the case of the Protestant Reformation against the Church of Rome. The role of the press, notoriously, substantiated the Lutheran claim of distributing the Bible to the people, as well as the spread of the typically Renaissance tendency to use vulgar languages compared to ecclesiastical Latin. The fact that the first book to be produced and distributed by Gutenberg between 1454 and 1455 was precisely the Bible seems almost to be an anticipation of a “democratizing” trend in the religious and spiritual sphere, which however predicted events of catastrophic significance. As in the case of the splitting of the atom due to nuclear devices, the disintegration of a unitary conception of faith led, in Europe, to the bloody Wars of Religion, which still today constitute the hidden face of the civilization of the Old Continent, as well as the extreme dramatic possibility of historical events relating to the question of intercultural coexistence. In other words, cultural diffusion from below also means the possibility of an explosion of widespread conflict, hypothetically also of civil war.

This does not mean that the premises of that European civil war that were the Wars of Religion, or even before the Protestant Reformation, were not already there.

Indeed, within the jagged European political landscape, political divergences and different interests proliferated. However, the use of the freer circulation of ideas sharpened certain phenomena and speeded up other processes. Nonetheless, the Hobbesian problem of freedom of faith in the interior forum contiguous with respect for national religion in the public sphere responded to the needs created by the broader pluralization of thought⁶.

The ambivalence that arose in the modern state between free circulation of thought (however limited by religious institutions and cultural traditions) and common national thought for a long time stemmed the worst possibilities of the international conflict, until it exploded again with the political pamphlets generated by the logical outcomes of the democratism of the French Revolution⁷. This inevitably led to the demand for the right to freedom of the press throughout Europe, setting the fire of revolution everywhere.

The press, as the most widespread form of communication, has seen its political role increase in an ever greater way, fueling the growth of political movements and favoring the creation of new ones. It had great importance in 1848, in the formation of the socialist movement, in the birth of fascisms, in the creation of programmatic concepts of the European parties after the Second World War. Characters who have changed the contours of world politics have written for the press building, in one way or another, contemporary history.

To this is added the role, greatly understood by totalitarian regimes, that the newborn radio and cinema media were taking on. Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes about the key role that radio and cinema played in society at the beginning of the 20th century:

“The wireless was the acoustic equivalent of film, the first great dream factory and media intoxicant that gave audiences the illusion of being at the center of things. Audiences perceived the solitude of the darkened cinema and the cozy spot in front of the radio not as isolation but as involvement. Radio enveloped the audience in what was being communicated more closely, intimately, hermetically, and totally than ever before. The disembodied voice on the radio was comparable to the visual images of silent movies in that both swept the audience into a kind of psychological undertow. Audience members couldn’t help but use their imaginations to fill in the gaps that resulted from the absence of a sensual dimension — the sound in silent film and the visuals in radio. Receiving,

⁵ Ivi, p. 119-120 [translated from Italian].

⁶ Schmitt Cf. Carl. *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

⁷ Gough Cf. Hugh. *The newspaper Press in the French Revolution*. London: Routledge, 1988.

in effect, only half the reality, the audience would supply the other half according to their own wishes, fantasies, and convictions. The panic that broke out in the greater New York area in 1938 after Orson Welles's broadcast of "The War of the Worlds" is but one example of the power of the mass imagination when it is called upon to supplement a scenario it has experienced only acoustically"⁸.

3. In modernity, the communication relationships between power and the masses are very varied: from top-down communication, to bottom-up communication, as well as that born from the masses for the masses (as in the case of pamphlets and party political journalism). However, it will be precisely the context of the great international military confrontation that will forge a type of communication for the administrators of power that will completely change history.

Obviously, the reference is to the internet. The genesis of the internet is, as everyone knows, of a military nature. The first draft of what would later become the internet was ARPANET, a network developed by the United States Department of Defense to overcome the problem that would have arisen at the information level in the event of a nuclear war. The years in which Arpanet was born were in fact those of the Cold War, as well as the first steps of contemporary computational technology were instead taken in the Second World War, in the context of the espionage war between the Axis and the Allies. In the specific case of ARPANET, however, a technology born in 1969, the basic idea was to put a network of information centers in communication, so that a distributed architecture of the communication lines could allow the US to maintain contact between the reference points in case of annihilation of one of them by a nuclear device. This obviously brought with it a substantial renewal from the organizational point of view, of the communication infrastructures as well as of the knowledge itself. Its purpose, of a purely military nature, could be as definitive as that of the top-top communication to which we have referred. As mentioned, all this was born from a period of acute conflict, which stemmed first of all from the phase of "hot" confrontation with the European and Asian Axis powers, and then with the great Eastern Bloc and the Soviet power, as well as the rise of China as a new political player on the world stage.

It was only in the nineties that ARPANET changed to the internet, after a phase of use in the exchange of knowledge by universities, thus being marketed to the general public. The purpose of the network changed very

rapidly, with two effective phases of "democratization": in the first, it became a vector of knowledge between academics; in the second, every person who wanted to share his knowledge and information at his disposal with the rest of the world connected to the network would have had the opportunity thanks to the forums. The most logical evolution of all this would have been, shortly after, the social networks, which represent to all effects the channeling of every form of personal expressive capacity into the media chaos of the world wide web.

This process just described could be defined as the birth of a military technology then used for specific purposes, in a certain sense "demilitarized". Many of the inventions used for civilian purposes today have found their birth within the military, and war is notoriously a propeller of technical advancement. In addition, there is also the so-called *dual-use* technology, the purposes of which are simultaneously civil and military.

Yet, Julian Assange, in conversation with other hackers and network theorists, and referring to the phenomenon that will later be revealed to be mass surveillance, will express himself in these terms:

"I notice a certain militarization of cyberspace, in the sense of military occupation. When you communicate via the internet, when you communicate with mobile telephony, which is now intertwined with the internet, your communications are intercepted by the military intelligence services. It's like having a tank in the bedroom, a soldier between you and your wife while texting. We all live under martial law as far as our communications are concerned, we don't see the tanks but they are there. In this sense, the Internet, which was supposed to be a civilian space, has become a militarized space. But it is our space because we all use it to communicate with others and with our family members. The communications at the heart of our private life today pass on the Internet, so in practice our private life has entered a militarized zone. It's like having a soldier under your bed. It is a militarization of civil life"⁹.

The period in which this transformation highlighted by Assange would have taken place would have been that of the so-called "war on terror", which began with the attack on the World Trade Center and the subsequent deployment of American troops in Asia and the Middle East. During this period, all the spaces that America considered strategic were secured, including cyberspace.

In this sense we can realize how the geometries of power with respect to the internet have changed at a very rapid speed, typical of an era of maximum technical ac-

⁸ Schivelbusch Wolfgang. Three new Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933–1939. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006 [quoted from the digital version].

⁹ Assange Julian // Julian Assange. Internet è il nemico. Conversazioni con Jacob Appelbaum, Andy Müller-Maguhn e Jérémie Zimmermann. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2012 [translated from Italian].

celeration like ours. From the top-top communication function the internet has morphed into a bottom-bottom communication system and then into a top-down vector.

4. However, this is the history of the internet until yesterday, which coincides with a very specific phase of international politics. The United States, heirs of the tradition of global control of the seas of the British Empire, true winners of the Second World War together with the Soviet Union and subsequently of the Cold War against the latter, since the fall of the socialist stronghold have attempted the reorganization of the world according to a specific model, generically defined as “unipolar”. The passage from the unipolar to the multipolar moment, as well as the actual meaning of the terms “unipolarism” and “multipolarism” is debated, and this is not the case to get involved in the specificities of this discourse. What is interesting to note is the increase in the specific weight of an actor on the balance of international relations at the end of the global bipolar confrontation — the United States — and the progressive overcoming of this phase through the growth of relative magnitude of other actors. Whether multipolarity is an effective theory of international relations and law, a condition of geopolitical equilibrium or a situation of relative plurality of the main actors (already achieved or in the process of being achieved), the point of the situation here lies in the condition of non-hegemony of a single state-political subject.

The history of the internet has long and to some extent coincided with the history of the post-Cold War United States of America up to now. It is a fact that the internet, born in the US military, began its commercial adventure with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The extension of his field was in many ways also the opening of a great cognitive passage in the world towards Western culture, but it could have been both a vector for the promotion of American soft power and that of countercultural currents. In practice, it was both.

However, it is in this historical phase that the internet has become a synthesis vector of various clashing factors, and this precisely because of the complex historical-political phase in which we are immersed¹⁰. The West is experiencing a conflict of democratization versus verticalization, which in the world is a confrontation between center and periphery that is multiplying its essence. Finally, also in the Western sphere there is a multiplication of the spheres that compose it.

As for the clash that the internet is experiencing today, we must keep in mind the mechanics of economic centralization that we are experiencing in this specific

historical period¹¹. These mechanics have produced the giants of contemporary economics, many of whom are the so-called *big techs*. For these, Nicolas Petit coined the term “moligopoly”, explaining how they work both in competition with each other and as a trust, so as to ensure ever greater slices of power¹². He explains this economic form thus: “the coexistence of structural monopoly with cognitive oligopoly. It calls attention to the possibility of latent and complementary levels of competition in big tech that antitrust and regulatory decision-makers fail to observe. Put differently, while there is an undisputable trend toward industry concentration in the digital economy, there is also a competitive force behind it¹³”.

According to Petit, the conditions imposed by this condition require greater regulation of the power of big techs in matters of privacy, fake news and hate speech¹⁴. If in the first case, however, the growing effective power of these new economic powers is concretely limited, preventing the indiscriminate use of the Big Data that they collect according to the new models of information capitalism, the other two cases are not so simple. The limitation of the so-called fake news and the so-called hate speech can have more or less political purposes, and the demonstration of this is the controversial and dissonant use that of these concepts is made by the opposing parties in Western democracies. Obviously, the process of regulation according to Petit should be guided, in these cases, by supra-economic political authorities, who can guarantee the public interest against instrumental uses of this type of restrictions.

In addition to the possibilities of restricting the power of big techs by the public sphere, there is the bottom-up use of information technology by society. Damiano Palano describes the connection between contemporary populism and the internet in these terms:

“In recent times, the «telepopulism» of the nineties of the last century has also been accompanied by a sort of new «webpopulism», which has found in the Web the channel for communicating with citizens. The most relevant point, according to this interpretation, is that it is precisely the transformations that have taken place in communication that offer the possibility of going beyond the intermediation of parties and their organization and

¹⁰ On the current historical-political phase cf. Orazio Maria Gnerre & Gianfranco La Grassa. *Dialogo sul conflitto*. Neaples: Editoriale Scientifica, 2019.

¹¹ *Branaccio Cf. Emiliano, Giammetti Raffaele, Lopreite Milena e Puliga Michelangelo. Centralization of capital and financial crisis: A global network analysis of corporate control // Structural Change and Economic Dynamics. 2018. Vol. 45. P. 94–104.*

¹² *Petit Nicolas. Big Tech and the Digital Economy: The moligopoly scenario. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.*

¹³ *Petit Nicolas. Big Tech and the Digital Economy: The moligopoly scenario. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. P. 62.*

¹⁴ *Ivi, p. 238–254.*

to establish a direct connection between the leader and the public of potential supporters”¹⁵.

Whole parties of neo-populist brands were born thanks to the web, and the most striking case is certainly that of the *5 Star Movement* in Italy, which, by using the web as an instrument, also solidified a strong idea of freedom of communication, close to the ideas of the various European pirate parties, and an almost salvific conception of the use of new information technologies with respect to the possibility of a palingenesis of democratic processes. Obviously the ideas of the neo-populist parties and movements (I use this label here to be clearer to the reader, even if the discussion on how these contemporary phenomena should be considered should set a more complex discourse) are not anti-hegemonic only in an anti-institutional function, but very often (especially, but not limited to, in the cases of so-called left populism) they are anti-capitalist or in any case against large economic concentrations. Even the so-called “sovereignist” discourse often focuses on the extensive power that is being concentrated in the hands of large corporations, especially that of *platform capitalism*, even where this is considered a secondary problem compared, for example, to migration.

5. Secondly, as another fault line, we undoubtedly have what is a direct expression of multipolarization: internet today is experiencing an ever greater segmentation due to the fact that it has become the privileged channel of international confrontation. On it, cognitive struggles and *cyberwarfare* are fought simultaneously. The internet is, to all intents and purposes, an instrument of international competition.

“In its recently published mid-year Cyber Threat Report¹⁶, the cybersecurity firm SonicWall reveals that the total number of ransomware attacks in the first and second quarters of 2021 has reached 304.7 million, up 151% from a year prior and already surpassing 2020’s total of 304.6 million attacks. Citing high-profile attacks on Colonial Pipeline, JBS Foods, Kaseya and hospitals worldwide, SonicWall paints a picture of online criminals seizing the current moment of instability and global reliance on cyberinfrastructure to force a “new business normal” amid an “escalating cybercrime arms race”¹⁷.

This trend had already been highlighted in its early days by the “Chinese colonels”, Qiao Liang and Wang

Xiangsui. They conceived, as a characterizing element of the fourth generation war, the non-military war operations, and the role of the web was of fundamental importance in these¹⁸.

If states and institutions have to defend themselves, within an increasingly hostile environment, from threats also coming from the world of the internet, a progressive closure of the same becomes more and more understandable. In this context, the control over information flows also assumes a sense in relation to the screen that one may want to use against the narratives of other international actors who are considered as competitors. All this requires an ever greater segmentation, the only barrier to which remains the attempt to open communication channels towards the citizens of the other political and market spaces in the world. Moreover, this is complicated by the undeniable birth of a real world public sphere, which demonstrates its existence in partial autonomy from the geographical, cultural and political particularities that would like to be impressed on it. In his book *Splinternet* (which takes up a Clyde Wayne Crews’ term used for the first time in 2001¹⁹) Scott Malcolmson argues that “the World Wide Web is slowly returning to Earth and its entanglements: states, laws, cultures. Cyberspace, for a host of commercial and political reasons, is becoming many cyberspaces, some of which fit distressingly well onto the old political maps of nation-states”²⁰.

This is obviously all the more true when it is possible for a political entity to secure (or seek to do so) full digital sovereignty. To date, the European Union and the Russian Federation are still connected to the global internet, even though they are showing many reservations and studying new projects. Emmanuel Macron’s speech at the United Nations Internet Governance Forum in 2018 highlighted very clearly the French President’s point of view on all the limitations of the internet and its current formulation: from false neutrality, which does not marry with the principles of European universalism, to the pathologies to which it would expose citizenship²¹. Any

¹⁵ PalanoDamiano. *Populismo*, Editrice Bibliografica, Milan 2017 [quoted from the digital version, translated from Italian].

¹⁶ 2021 Mid-Year Update. Sonicwall cyber threat report: Cyber threat intelligence for navigating today’s business reality. — URL: <https://www.sonicwall.com/medialibrary/en/white-paper/mid-year-2021-cyber-threat-report.pdf> [quoted by Julian Fisher].

¹⁷ Fisher Julian. Digital Multipolarity and the Geopolitics of Cyberspace, on Russian International Affairs Council. — URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/en/blogs/julian-fisher/digital-multipolarity-and-the-geopolitics-of-cyberspace/?phrase_id=88466525

¹⁸ Liang Qiao e Wang Xiangsui. *Guerra senza limiti. L’arte della guerra asimmetrica fra terrorismo e globalizzazione*. Gorizia: LEG Edizioni, 2019.

¹⁹ In this case, however, the concept referred to the Author’s wish to divide the internet into many private properties, avoiding the monopolization of this “common”. Clyde Wayne Crews. On my mind, su Forbes. — URL: <https://www.forbes.com/forbes/2001/0402/036.html?sh=2a1bf5e65ea3>

²⁰ Malcolmson Scott. *Splinternet: How geopolitics and commerce are fragmenting the World Wide Web*. New York; London: OR Books, 2016 [quoted from the digital version].

²¹ IGF 2018 Speech by French President Emmanuel Macron, on Internet Governance Forum. — URL: <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-2018-speech-by-french-president-emmanuel-macron>

criticism made on this dimension is clearly a symptom of a weakness that is manifesting itself, and on the carcass of the internet every subjectivity would like to dine on: for this reason, Macron's appeals to make the web multinationals responsible are in the interest of the established authorities, which in that discourse clearly demand a multilateral relationship between institutions and corporations²². On the other hand, according to Macron and Merkel too, it is in Europe's interest to achieve effective digital sovereignty²³.

Russia and China, on the other hand, have "unique political traditions and culture, each has its own approach to managing dissent and opposition, dealing with internet and social media"²⁴. Their attention to defense and security policies has allowed them to develop a particular approach to informatic issues, clearly different for each of the two countries. Indeed, Russia would have developed a very specific discourse that can be defined as that of "digital multipolarity"²⁵. In this context, the defense of the specific interests of each country would coexist with concertation at the level of the United Nations in the regulation of the web.

The more the processes of multipolarization advance, not necessarily understood as an integrated international concertation but also as the disintegration of a single-centered international order, the more these processes of internet dismemberment will go on. The web could disintegrate its fungibility as France and Germany installed different railway rails to prevent their use by enemy trains in the event of an invasion.

6. The last factor to consider is what Damiano Palano defines "audience fragmentation"²⁶ in his discussion of "bubble democracy". Public opinion in the West has never been so fragmented internally as it is today. Of course, there are long-standing phenomena that have been widely documented and that refer to the fundamental cultural roots of contemporaneity. Bauman, for example, spoke of the division of collective identity into bubbles, bubbles in which individual identity is decomposed and recon-

figured according to needs and personal will²⁷. Of course, this type of cultural identity seems to us as distant from politics in its classical sense, yet the last few years have shown us how every sphere of mass culture can be polarized, and so it has been. The fault here is not necessarily of the internet, and perhaps it is also to be considered a factor of cognitive aggregation of the discomforts created by difficult economic times. In any case, it is in the digital sphere that these radical enmities are most easily reproduced. It is not possible for us to say with certainty whether the functioning of social media algorithms segments dissent or not, but that is what we often see in fact. Also in this case, there are mechanisms of disaggregation and aggregation of the masses. The latest US electoral campaigns, for example, have demonstrated the great capacity of the candidates in polarizing public opinion on issues with extreme divisive potential.

The destiny of the internet therefore seems to have to create real digital spheres of influence that perimeter its own dimension of autonomy. As far as the political dimension is concerned, this phenomenon is very clear and evident in its circumscription, as regards the social phenomenon it is not so easy to predict the results of this process, given that much will depend on the web regulation methodologies, and that these as we have seen could be national, regional, global, or none of these things. Obviously, every vision of the world and of politics presents more or less different solutions to the question of the autonomy of the network or the autonomy of big techs (to be considered also as potential enemies one with the other²⁸).

All this presents a completely synthetic and unsystematic sketch of the vectors of influence on the digital sphere, on their interests as well as on their relationships of encounter and confrontation. We have seen how communication flows as a power relationship between a "top" and a "bottom" depending on the situation, just as we have seen the variable geometries between different actors at the top and the bubbles of contemporary democracy at the bottom. Obviously, a more structured schematization of the ideas I have expressed here is urgently needed, and I hope to take charge of them in the near future. However, it must be considered that, changing scenarios and advancing technology, we are here in a field where the possibilities for forecasting are extremely limited and dangerous. The aforementioned scheme, only sketched here, could perhaps explain the mechanics of the relationship between powers and communication,

²² Ibid.

²³ Floridi Cf. Luciano. *The Fight for Digital Sovereignty: What it is, and Why it Matters, Especially for the EU* // *Philosophy & Technology*. 2020. Vol. 33. P. 369–378.

²⁴ Kortunov Andrey. *China-Russia Statement: A quest for diversity*, on *Global Times*. — URL: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1252068.shtml>

²⁵ Budnitsky Stanislav. *Russia's great power imaginary and pursuit of digital multipolarity* // *Internet Policy Review*. 2020. Vol. 9, No 3. — URL: <https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/russia-great-power-imaginary-and-pursuit-digital-multipolarity>

²⁶ Palano Damiano. *Bubble democracy. La fine del pubblico e la nuova polarizzazione*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2020. P. 138–155.

²⁷ Bauman Zygmunt. *Voglia di comunità*. Bari: Laterza, 2000.

²⁸ Assange Cfr. Julian. *Internet è il nemico*. Conversazioni con Jacob Appelbaum, Andy Müller-Maguhn e Jérémie Zimmermann. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2012.

but not necessarily their future organization. The future appealed to in the title is clearly the near future, a future that is already present. One of the aims of the social sciences should be to predict the immediate. For the long term it is necessary to highlight other trend lines.

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