

Introduction

What constitutes the common? While I was exploring the dark sides of digital commons and culture industry, the awakening of the *animal spirits* of the financial crisis during 2008 became in fact the horizon of the political debate. The idea of investigating the *animal spirits* of the commons was actually conceived a few years earlier, when the global mediascape following stock indexes were fed by the pornography of war terrorism. Yet the irrational fears and forces struggling behind media networks were never illuminated by critical thinkers and political activists or, more specifically, considered as a *productive* component of economic flows. John Maynard Keynes once defined ‘animal spirits’ as precisely those unpredictable human drives that influence stock markets and push economic cycles.¹ Similarly, in his recent work, Paolo Virno has underlined how all institutions (from the nation-state to contemporary digital networks) represent an extension of the aggressive instincts of humankind.² In this reading, language and culture form the basis of the common (*networking*), but also new fields of antagonism and chaos (*notworking*).³

While the playground of Free Culture is celebrated and defended today only on the basis of copyright legalese like Creative Commons, a vast bestiary of conflicts is propagating beneath the new factory of culture. In this book, while avoiding any reactionary position on such phenomena, I explore how *animal spirits* belong to the contemporary notion of multitude and also positively innervate the *production of the common*. Against the ‘creative destruction’ of value characteristic of stock markets that has become the political condition of current times, a redefinition of the commons is needed and urgent.⁴ Besides the familiar mantra of supply-and-demand, a purely imaginary fabrication of value is today a key component of the financial game.⁵ What might occur if the urban and network multitudes enter this valorization game and recover a common power over the fragile chain of value production?

The common is not an independent realm. It is a dynamic object that nevertheless falls into a field of forces surrounded and defined by the laws of value and production. The new parasitic forms of network economy and monopolies of communication (from IBM to MySpace) can easily exploit, for instance, the generous stock provided by Free Culture

without imposing any form of traumatic enclosure or strict regime of intellectual property. To debunk a fashionable and superficial political posturing, this book pursues a spectre, a *sub-religion of separation* that has come to dominate media culture, art critique, radical activism and academia over the last decade.⁶ The chapters of this book point to three different but contiguous domains that have been conceptualized and celebrated as autonomous spheres or virtuous economies: digital networks and the so-called Free Culture, the culture industry and the European 'creative cities', the mediascape of war terrorism and Internet pornography neutralized by intellectual puritanism.

The separation of these media domains is patrolled by a legion of postmodern thinkers, that are widely employed by cultural theory (especially in the field of art criticism). Authors such as Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek are taken here as a symptom of a typical Western *language fetishism* that locks any potential political gesture in the prison-house of Code. In this confinement, any act of resistance is inhibited as fatalistically reinforcing the dominant ideology. The Empire is suffering its own diseases, but postmodernism indulges its curious claustrophobia. An investment in this critique, however, does not mean a naïve return to good old materialism, but on the contrary, aims to illuminate the *frictions* and conflicts in the interstices between material and immaterial, biological and digital, desire and imaginary. Each sphere of separation cultivates its own inbred languages: *digitalism* and *freeculturalism* in the circuits of network economy, the hype of *creativity* for the culture industries and new city policies, the hysteric *left-wing puritanism* against 'warporn' and 'netporn'. Each sphere hides its peculiar kind of asymmetrical conflict. Undoubtedly, as Giorgio Agamben suggests, the profanation of these hidden separations is the political task of the coming political generations.⁷

Crucially, these three separated spheres are coextensive with three forms of commons, whose glorious autonomy is haunted and infested here by three conceptual beasts: the corporate parasite of the digital commons, the hydra of gentrification behind the 'creative cities', the bicephalous eagle of power and desire ruling the mediascape of war pornography. This bestiary is introduced to advance a non-dialectical model for media politics and radical aesthetics. In particular, such beasts represent new *biomorphic* concepts to replace the binary abstrac-

tions of postmodernism, such as *simulacra* and *symbolic code*. Moreover, they are not necessarily evil creatures: an alliance with them is the untold of radical thought. The parasite discloses, for instances, the tactical alliance of Free Software with media corporations; the hydra reveals the conflictual and competitive nature of labour in the culture industries; the bicephalous eagle incarnates the fetishism for power and desire that seduces any political imaginary. Together, they constitute a primary bestiary for the age of neo-archaic capitalism, and can hopefully inspire a generation of *new political animals*.

This book attempts a sort of linear Dantesque journey along a steep mediascape: descending from the gnostic plateaux of *digitalism* and pure peer cooperation to the reptilian unconscious of the metropolis beneath the benevolent totalitarianism of the Creative Industries, deep into the underworld of netporn and warporn, unveiling the shadows of an apparently immaculate digital colonization. As an old Dutch-Jewish saying puts it, 'the greater the spirit, the greater the beast'. All immaterial commons have a material basis, and in particular, a *biological* ground. Seeking a new political terrain for media theory through the concept of an *energetic unconscious*, I try to incorporate the *Zeitgeist* of the biosphere (energy crisis, climate change, global warming) into the belly of the mediascape. This energetic interpretation of technology directly contests the dominant paradigm of Media Studies that reduces and neutralizes the network to a dialectics of two internal coordinates: (*digital*) *code* and (*desiring*) *flows*. In contrast, I argue that any system should be defined by the external excess of energy that operates it. Similarly, the puritan activist imperative to 'consume less' will continue to remain ineffective until the capitalist core of production is questioned. Between code and flow, a dystopian vision of desire and economic *surplus* is introduced.

In fact, what is the *creative* gesture that produces the commons? A widespread belief considers creativity as naturally 'good' and immaculate, energy-free and friction-less, untouched by compromise or conflict. A famous slogan shared by the supporters of Free Culture and the *wealth of networks* alike reads: 'Information is non-rival.'⁸ In reality, beyond the computer screen, precarious workers and freelancers experience how Free Labour and competition are increasingly devouring their everyday life.⁹ Digital commons have become *pseudo-commons*, an ideal space detached from the material basis of production, where surplus-value

and exploitation are virtuously expunged. Indeed, the 'age of digital reproduction' has accelerated both immaterial commons and competition in a more general sense. Global financialization, for instance, and its volatile derivatives are also made possible by digitalization. The slogan 'information is non-rival', therefore, has its *doppelgänger*: accumulation of information on the one side feeds speculation and new communication monopolies on the other. The new commons are fragile if they are established only from a formal perspective like that of Creative Commons licences. This book strives for a stronger political definition of the commons and, in particular, investigates the wider material impact and ramifications of the cultural capital.

The ephemeral Creative Cities rising across the European skyline are the latest attempt to incorporate the collective factory of culture into corporate business and real-estate speculation. The *artistic mode of production* has innervated the economy of European cities, but more for the sake of gentrification than for cultural production itself.¹⁰ This critique, however, does not lament the malicious nature of the cultural economy. On the contrary, an invigorated cultural scene can only be established by reversing the chain of value generation. By legitimately expanding the notion of 'creativity' beyond *economic correctness*, this book explains how sabotage can equally be seen as *creative* and productive. Against the old political museum of Fordism, a dynamic and combative definition of the commons is advanced. Neoliberalism first taught everybody the sabotage of value. Sabotage is precisely what is considered impossible within the postmodern parlance (where each gesture supposedly reinforces the dominant regime), or conversely what Antonio Negri considered a form of *self-valorization* during the social struggles of the 1970s.¹¹ In a dynamic world system shaped by a lunatic and an irrational stock market, the power of *creative destruction* must likewise be understood as belonging also to the contemporary multitudes and the common.