

Commentary on the Onlife Manifesto

Jean-Gabriel Ganascia

§ 1.1. A careful attention to some aspects of the present society shows that most of the concrete impacts of the computational era on the public space have been unexpected. This does not only mean that the computers and networks have proliferated faster than imagined before, but also that the type of social consequences of these developments—e.g. social networks, micro-blogging, wikis, high-frequency trading etc.—have very often been far away from the conceptions that many warned people had before. As a consequence, policymakers need not only to be open to the future developments of technologies and to their social effects, but also to prepare to be surprised by the future.

§ 1.2. Undoubtedly, modernity is rooted in the “Modern Age”, even if it is far more than a temporal era. As such, it begins at the end of the “Middle Ages” that corresponds either to 1453, with the conquest of Constantinople, or to 1492, with the first travel of Columbus to the Americas. Besides, modernity relates also to the Enlightenment philosophy, since the late sixteenth century, which put emphasis more on the results of experimental sciences than on the respect of traditional authorities. Lastly, modernity corresponds to these social and industrial development that originated in the eighteenth century in Western Europe, especially in Great Britain, and that was characterized by the rationalization of the production processes. From this respect, the end of modernity that we affirm in this manifesto corresponds simultaneously to the end of a period of history, which was centered on the Western Europe and Americas, and to the end of a type of philosophy to the end of a social and economical environment that was characterized by the illusion that knowledge itself could lead to a perfect and total control of the nature. Does it mean that we are entering in an epoch that some philosophers of the eighties and nineties, like Jean-François Lyotard (1979) and Jean Baudrillard, have qualified as “post-modernity”? That is an open question that certainly deserves a careful attention and some extensive discussions, which go far beyond the purpose of this manifesto.

J.-G. Ganascia (✉)

LIP6-CNRS, University Pierre et Marie Curie, Sorbonne Universités, Paris, France

e-mail: jean-gabriel.ganascia@lip6.fr

L. Floridi (ed.), *The Onlife Manifesto*,

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-04093-6_5, © The Author(s) 2015

§ 2.1. We say: *It is noteworthy that Cartesian doubt, and related suspicions about what is perceived through human senses, have led to an ever-increasing reliance on control in all its forms.* Obviously, it is not *to throw out the baby with the bath water.* The doubt, as introduced by Descartes, and all the suspicions about what is perceived, have contributed to build and to think the “conscious self”. For instance, the Husserlian phenomenology is rooted on such a doubt, which corresponds to a crucial moment in the reflection. This is not directly related with the “ever-increasing reliance on control”, which is a consequence of the rationalization of the processes of production in nineteenth century modernity. To address this point, we need to distinguish the reason from what Horkheimer calls, in the *Eclipse of Reason*, the “instrumental reason”, which is characterized as “means to an end” and which leads the reason to collapse into irrationality (1947).

§ 4.2 *We believe that it is time to affirm, in political terms, that our selves are both free and social.* That is obviously true, but, in itself, this idea is not new. For instance, during the French revolution, the opposition between the *Montagnards*, whose most prestigious representative were Marat, Danton and Robespierre, and the *Girondins* corresponded exactly to the tension between an aspiration to social on the one hand and an aspiration to freedom and economical development on the other hand. However, the way this tension between freedom and fraternity is resolved depends on the technological artifacts that mediate our interactions, which explains its particular twist in the present world.

Open Access This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License, which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.

References

- Horkheimer, M. 1947. *Eclipse of reason*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Reprint Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004).
- Lyotard, J.-F. 1979. *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Minuit.