

A Eulogy to Opinion

Alfredo M. Bonanno

1995

Opinion is the most widely circulated commodity. Everyone possesses it and everyone utilizes it. The manufacture of opinion involves a wide segment of total economic production, its consumption occupies a large part of each person's time. The principal quality of opinion is its clarity.

Let's say right away that there are no unclear opinions. One is either for yes, or one is for no. Subtleties and ambivalences, contradictions and painful confessions of uncertainty, are extraneous. From this comes the great power that opinion provides to those who use it, who consume it for their decisions, who impose it on the decisions of others.

In a world that is moving with increasing velocity toward the binary of positive/negative, red button and black button, the reduction to this simplified logic is an important factor in development, perhaps in civil coexistence itself. What would become of our future if we continued to hold on to the unresolved cruelties of vague ambivalences? How could we be utilized, how could we continue to produce?

When the real possibility of choice is reduced, this is precisely the moment when clarity comes out. Only he who has clear ideas knows what to do, but ideas are never clear, and here show up those who clarify them for us, those who provide easy and understandable tools: not discourses but quizzes, not elaboration but binary alternatives. Day or night, no dusk or dawn.

In this way they ask us to say we're for or against something. They don't make us see the aspects of the problem, but only a highly simplified construction. Saying yes or no is simple, but of the kind of simplicity that conceals and disappears complexity, not that understands and explains it. No complexity can in fact be explained except by referring back to other complexities. There are no solutions to problems, but occasions for reflection, for knowledge, for encounter. Joys of the intellect and the heart that the binary proposition deletes and substitutes with the utility of correct decision-making.

And since no one is stupid enough to believe that the world stands on two logical stilts, the positive and the negative, since there must be a specific place of elaborations, a place where ideas regain the upper hand and understanding regains lost ground, here arises the desire to delegate all elaboration to others, to those who by suggesting simple solutions seem to safeguard the consideration of complexity as an already given fact, and who thereby designate themselves as deponents and custodians of science.

So the circle is closed. The simplifiers present themselves as guarantors of the validity of the opinion requested, of its correct production in binary form. They seem to be conscious of the fact that opinion, once settled, destroys any capacity to comprehend the intriguing fabric beneath it, the complex unfolding of the problems of knowledge, the frenetic interaction of symbols and meanings, references and intuitions.

The manipulator of clarity destroys the fabric of differences, watering it down in the binary universe of the codex, where reality appears possible in only two solutions: the light on and the light off. The model summarizes reality, deletes its nuances and recommends it in statistical pre-packaged formulas, ready for consumption. There are no longer life projects but simple symbols that replace desires and duplicate dreams turning them into dreams twice over.

The quantitative growth of information available to us does not allow us to exit the sphere of opinion. In the same way that the greater quantity of commodities in a market, with all the possible and superfluous varieties of the same product, does not mean wealth or abundance, but only mercantile waste, so too does the increase in information not qualitatively develop opinion, not produce a true capacity to decide between the true and the false, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, but instead reduces these aspects to the representation of a dominant model.

In reality, there isn't good on one side and bad on the other, but a total nuance of conditions, cases, situations, theories and practices that only a capacity to comprehend can grasp, an ability to use the intellect with the proper corrective presence provided by sensitivity and intuition. Culture is not a mass of information but a living and often contradictory system by which we know the world and ourselves, at times painful, and almost never satisfying, by which we realize those relationships that constitute our life and also our capacity to live.

By erasing all these nuances, we end up with a statistical curve in our hands, an illusory trend produced by a mathematical model, not a reality that is divided and disturbing. Opinion then provides us with security, on the one side, but on the other it impoverishes us and deprives us of the capacity to struggle, eventually convincing us that the world is simpler than it is. This is all in the interest of those who dominate us. A mass of satisfied subjects convinced that they have science on their side — this is what they need to realize their future projects of domination.

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Retrieved on January 6, 2024 from mgouldhawke.wordpress.com
*Published in 'Canenero: Settimanale Anarchico', n. 16, 14 febbraio 1995, republished in, at least, a
later edition of 'Palestina, mon amour', by Edizioni Anarchismo, new translation by M.Gouldhawke*

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