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***Public opinion as popular sovereignty:
Reactivating the represented people through Lippmann, Schmitt and Dewey***

ABSTRACT. The present paper suggests that contemporary democratic theory should reinvestigate and defend public opinion as an active, crucial expression of popular sovereignty in representative democracy. It does so by recovering and critically studying a missed piece in the mosaic of 20th century political thought history, i.e. the 'hidden' dialogue among Walter Lippmann (1922: *Public Opinion*), Carl Schmitt (1923 and 1926: *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*) and John Dewey (1927: *The Public and its Problems*). From different perspectives, all of them questioned the traditional understanding of the peoplehood/ public opinion/ popular sovereignty relation and provided a clash of liberal and anti-liberal perspectives with long lasting implications on the canon of XX century political thought. I argue that revisiting Schmitt's visceral anti-liberalism and his theory of the public from the standpoint of Lippmann and Dewey's debate sharpens the teeth of contemporary democratic theory against present-day plebiscitary and populist challenges. In particular, *via* Dewey I suggest that conceptualizing public opinion as one side (together with electoral will) of popular sovereignty helps countering both recent trends in populist ideology, monopolizing the appeal to 'the sovereign people' and depicting citizens as a monolithic entity (à la Schmitt), *and* the skeptical elitism à la Lippmann, conceiving the people as uninterested, depoliticized economic actors incapable of reflective sovereignty vis-à-vis technocratic government. Taking a step further than Dewey, I argue that when public opinion is understood as an everyday set of claims and counter-claims by the people, it becomes a 'negative' power subjecting to perpetual scrutiny institutional politics beyond the anti-liberal myth of a univocal 'we' and the neo-Schumpeterian image of electoral democracy. Rephrasing Canovan, Rosanvallon and Urbinati's claims, it proves to be *the* tool democratic citizens have at their disposal as "people in reserve" to reemerge as "people in action" in everyday political life.

The first three sections provide a comparative analysis of the way Lippmann, Schmitt and Dewey questioned the relation between public opinion, liberalism and democracy. In particular, section II explores the different understanding they had of how the conception of man is relevant for political theory: developing on Ellen Kennedy's work, I argue that, while the two American liberals based their ideal democracy on a specific conception of the democratic man and his mind (*anthropology*), the German anti-liberal developed his plebiscitary, homogeneous democracy moving from the questioning of the democratic people and their identity (*demology*). Hence, as suggested in section IV, the common thread in their works rather lies in the perception they all had, from different angles, of the inescapable symbolic dimension of mass democratic politics and of the challenges posed to liberal parliamentarism. Section III subjects the well-known Lippmann-Dewey debate to fresh examination in order to distill relevant hints for strengthening contemporary democratic theory and its understanding of public opinion. Finally, section V ties together the threads previously emerged: through Honneth and Posner, it argues that critically developing the emphasis Dewey reserves to the communicative and reflective dimension of citizenship would help contemporary democratic theory to disclose the exercise of popular sovereignty within inter-electoral politics through opinion and judgment rather than the will.

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