

The *Hypercomplex Society* and the Development of a New Global Public Sphere: Elements for a Critical Analysis

**La sociedad hipercompleja y el desarrollo de una
nueva esfera pública global: elementos para un análisis
crítico**

**A sociedade hipercomplexa e o desenvolvimento de
uma nova esfera pública global elementos para uma
análise crítica**

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Abstract

In the Hyperconnected and Hypercomplex Society, communication has attained a definitive strategic relevance for organisations, social systems and nation-states. It is a complex and articulate social process founded on the sharing of knowledge, knowledge that is capable of creating new social conditions but that also carries the risk of new social asymmetries. This paper focuses on the scientific debate from a sociological and philosophical point of view, addressing, among other points, the essential issue of the “public sphere” constantly tied to the intimate correlation between communication, knowledge and power, and more precisely to the correlation between access to knowledge (or information) and democracy, and between access to information and citizenship rights. This implies a problem of transparency and of ethical and responsible communication, as well as the necessity for a new communication culture based on the sharing of knowledge, which addresses the complexity of social relationships, here taken

also to mean power relationships. Between the forces of interdependence and fragmentation. Between inclusion and exclusion, within asymmetries running along discontinuous trajectories. Between new utopia and dystopia.

Keywords: (social) complexity, communication (as social process), new global ecosystem, asymmetries, citizenship, public sphere, social bond.

Resumen

En la sociedad hiperconectada e hipercompleja, la comunicación ha alcanzado una importancia estratégica definitiva para las organizaciones, los sistemas sociales y los estados nacionales. Se trata de un proceso social complejo y articulado, basado el intercambio de conocimientos, que puede crear nuevas condiciones sociales, pero que también conlleva el riesgo de nuevas asimetrías sociales. Este artículo se enfoca en el debate científico desde un punto de vista sociológico y filosófico, abordando, entre otros temas, la cuestión esencial de la "esfera pública" constantemente vinculada a la íntima correlación entre comunicación, conocimiento y poder, y más precisamente a la correlación entre el acceso al conocimiento (o información) y la democracia, y entre el acceso a la información y los derechos de ciudadanía. Esto implica un problema de transparencia y de comunicación ética y responsable, así como la necesidad de una nueva cultura de comunicación basada en el intercambio de conocimientos, que se refiere a la complejidad de las relaciones sociales, entendida aquí también como relaciones de poder. Entre las fuerzas de la interdependencia y la fragmentación. Entre inclusión y exclusión, a través las asimetrías que discurren a lo largo de trayectorias discontinuas. Entre la nueva utopía y la distopía.

Palabras-clave: Complejidad (social). Comunicación (como proceso social), nuevo ecosistema global, asimetrías, ciudadanía, esfera pública, vínculo social.

Resumo

Na hipersociedade hipercomplexa, a comunicação atingiu uma importância estratégica definitiva para as organizações, sistemas sociais e estados nacionais. Esta é uma partilha de conhecimentos complexo e articulado processo social baseado, o que pode criar novas condições sociais, mas também traz o risco de novas assimetrias sociais. Este artigo centra-se no debate científico a partir de uma sociológica e filosófica, abordando, entre outros assuntos, a questão-chave da "esfera pública" constantemente ligada à estreita correlação entre a comunicação, conhecimento e poder, e mais precisamente ao correlação entre o acesso ao conhecimento (ou informação) e democracia, e entre o acesso à informação e os direitos de cidadania. Trata-se de um problema de transparência e comunicação ética e responsável e para a necessidade de uma nova cultura de comunicação baseada na partilha de conhecimentos, que se refere à complexidade das relações sociais, entendida aqui, bem como as relações de poder. Entre as forças de

interdependência e fragmentação. Entre inclusão e exclusão através de assimetrias que se estendem ao longo de caminhos pontilhadas. Entre a nova utopia e distopia.

Palavras-chave: complexidade (social). Comunicação (como processo social), novo ecossistema global, assimetrias, cidadania, esfera pública, ligação social.

Introduction

The advent of the *Hypercomplex Society* (Dominici 2005; 2011) has triggered many dynamics, including a process of hypertrophic growth of the bureaucratic systems resulting from the strengthening/reinforcement of the old nation-states. This, in turn, has led to the gradual disintegration of public space, defined by the state of law as the “place” in which all social demands, methods of political representation, and, above all, protection of rights, should find legitimacy and communal recognition.

We find ourselves *within* the interconnected/hyperconnected society that “is a hypercomplex society”, in which the management and processing of information and knowledge have by now become our main resources, a kind of society where the exponential growth of opportunities for connection and information transmission - the fundamental factors of economic and social development - do not yet correspond to an analogous increase in the opportunity for communication, which we define as the social process of knowledge-sharing that entails equality and reciprocity (inclusion). Technology, the social networks and, more in general, the digital revolution, despite having determined a paradigm shift in the setting up of the structural conditions, allowing the interdependency (and the efficiency) of systems and organizations, and having intensified the intangible flow between social actors, have not yet been able to guarantee that the interactive networks that have been created will generate genuine communicative relationships, based on, that is, truly shared, symmetrical rapports. In other words, the network has constructed a new ecosystem of communication (1996) but, although it has designated a knowledge zone, it cannot by itself assure horizontality or symmetrical relationships. Again, the difference comes down to who and how: the people and the uses that they make of technology, beyond the potential interests at stake. For the same reasons, we will henceforth be using the term “connection technology” instead of “communication technology”¹ (Dominici 1998, 2014).

The development process of newborn democracies, which are often culturally based on the concept of “popular sovereignty”² and on the lack of a definition of the relationship between the core values of freedom and equality (Rawls 1971, Dworkin 1978; Maffettone 1991, Sen 1992; Bobbio 1995), has caused a radical *politicization of the public sphere*. This sphere, which expresses itself through political institutions and

new social issues seeking public recognition and translation into laws, has continued - with its globalist character - to take shape as an *autopoietic system*.

The operating spaces /functional areas of the public sphere have thus been drastically reduced to the single issue of "representation". Arguably, politics enters into crisis as the public sphere increasingly takes on the form of handmaiden to the power system. That given, to echo Habermas (1981), the level of *mediation* between the system and the life-world has disappeared - this mediation being based on *communicative action* capable of critically addressing social issues and opinions produced in the *life-world* and civil society, and of fully legitimising them and rendering them publically relevant.

The digital revolution and the subsequent emergence of the Network Society (Castells, 1996, 2009), together with technological advancement and the cultural global changes currently taking place, have caused a *complexification* of the *praxis* and, more particularly, of the unprecedented social interactions in the evolution of social systems. The deconstruction process of all scientific paradigms, systems of knowledge, and moral guidance (politics) - initiated and carried forward by twentieth-century thought - is progressing at such a quickening pace that it has become extremely complicated to define and formulate interpretative models of reality.

Argumentation

The inevitable *expansion* of the (not only political) *praxis* is therefore forcing the scientific community into rethinking, if not actually reformulating, those conceptual categories - including the once absolutely central *public sphere*³ (Privitera, 2001) – which for a long time enabled us to decipher socio-cultural changes. And it is precisely this expansion that is spurring scholars and intellectuals to make a significant effort to develop a more flexible *paradigm* of the concepts of the public sphere - with special attention to models and forms of communication (Mazzoleni, 2004) - and of public opinion (Habermas 1962; Price, 1992). This need - as has been said - is proving to be strategic for the advancement of democratic systems, perhaps even for their survival. What is at stake are not only the rights of citizenship (La Torre, 2004; Balibar 2012), namely the access to information and knowledge, but also, and above all, the possibility of their being used more consciously and productively in order to affect policy decisions and democratic dialectics.

This is a crucial issue that must be addressed at an international level⁴ because new information technologies are contributing significantly to the construction process of a new *metanational public sphere*,⁵ characterised by *innovative social interaction modes* capable of shaking up the traditional logic of *democratic dialectics* and *representation*, as well as the more general political *arena*⁶ (now the *global political*

arena) (Canfora, 2004; Crouch 2000; Dahl, 1998; Dunn 2005; Sartori, 1992; Schiavone, 2001).

The *E era* (Beck, 1993), dominated by *ambivalence* and *entropy*, is increasingly becoming the communication society, a society founded on information and knowledge⁷ sharing. However, in this phase we are seeing an increasingly worrying welfare crisis which, caused by a complex process of change in the labor market, is reshaping social stratification at local and global levels.

The current world-system, characterised by the radical uncertainty (Bauman, 2006) of its constituent subsystems, is introducing further variables that are instrumental in the production of new inequalities, inequalities which remain related to the ability to access, manage and produce the necessary knowledge for exercising the rights of citizenship. In fact, the so-called global risk (Beck, 1999b; 2007) is calling on the old nation-states to devise and put into place more targeted strategies that need to seek the support of public opinion(s).

Communication is proving itself to be not only value-added by the so-called *reflexive* modernization - or post-modernization (Inglehart, 1996) - but also the real 'essence of contemporary man'. In this sense, various calls for in-depth analysis have been expressed. In particular, the most important starting point could be thus summarised: the new communication technologies and social networks, as well as gradually *destroying* (*disintermediating*) all of the *mechanisms of political and/or social mediation*, have the potentially limitless *power* to extend the possibilities and opportunities of communication, facilitating the access to and exchange of information and knowledge between individuals (knowledge society). To put it another way, the *Great Network* (Internet) is exponentially increasing the conditions for a capillary distribution of the capacity to communicate, calculate and store information. And this should not be underestimated – although there may be some criticism and much critical analysis (Lovink, 2011; Morozov, 2011) - as it is the main indicator of the extraordinary (global) transformation of the dynamics and processes of economics, politics and social systems.

It should also be noted that this *reticular world system* is compelling the *Subject* 'to face an uncertain world' and is therefore demanding an increasingly high level of knowledge on his part to be a true *citizen*. At this point, more critical and pessimistic observers note that the individual will be "alone" in meeting the world, which appears to him as virtual reality of a perhaps unsustainable weight. He will be "alone" with his choices, which are illusory or preconditioned by whoever holds power or by a social group which has been reinvented or reshaped by the same global communication system itself. More dispassionate and optimistic observers, however, see the multitude of communicative opportunities and the extension of the reachable spheres as offering the same number of *chances* for the individual to choose and make free choices of every kind

- pragmatic and operational/functional, technical or cognitive, psychologically autonomous, as well as choices that are morally evaluated from time to time - all choices, however, that are mediated through the values of the *social reference group*.

The particular focus of our analysis is on the quality of the existing communicative interactions which characterise the *new public sphere*, reflecting on communication as a *social process of knowledge sharing* and on the *power relationships* that characterise it. The ambivalence of the process of *glocalization* (Robertson, 1995) cannot avoid having repercussions on individual social actors, on social bonds, and on the networks of social interaction (and, of course, on systems and organizations) in which self-awareness, rationality, cultural identities and, above all, the shared meanings that make society possible, are all structured – as Mead (1934) has adequately demonstrated.

Access, transparency, participation and citizenship: for a *new social contract*

Communication – it's well worth repeating – *built* on rational principles acquired in an intersubjective manner and aimed at sharing knowledge, can play a very important role in many critical aspects: in the rebirth of a *Humanism* guaranteeing the fundamental rights of global citizenship; in the formation of a transnational civil society (Beck, 1997); in the effective realisation of a *global domestic policy* which the old nation-states are beginning to pursue, albeit in ways that can be criticized; in the decisive global promotion of strategies aiming to achieve a society of widespread knowledge which, in the long term, could be - in an age in which information, knowledge and access (Rifkin, 2000) are the most important sources of wealth and power - an inexhaustible resource for the reduction of global inequalities⁸ and the crucial issue of human rights and citizenship (Nussbaum 2010; 2011). At a no less important micro-level, the conditions of social and ethical communication and of the model for sharing knowledge could finally lead to an unprecedented leap in quality of the (internal and external) organizational practices in nation-states, public administrations, enterprises, and, above all, in a production system that is increasingly becoming a *service society*.

In carrying out this “project”, linked to a *Diskursethik* which strives for the *equality, transparency* and *responsibility* of the actors involved in communication, we must tackle the paths of twentieth-century thought (not only ethical), which conveyed the principle of relativism (Nagel, 1997)⁹ and the substantial and universal - or as Wittgenstein put it - the *heterogeneity of language games and forms of life*.

The linguistic act allows for the creation of an *intersubjective relationship* in which its producers simultaneously create a relationship which constantly refers to a system of rules - in this sense, communication is at the base of the social contract and the

social bond. The concept of “inter-subjectivity” constitutes the founding element of individual identity and ethical principles, even when selected *autonomously*, arising within discursive and communicative dynamics which are rationally based and geared towards an *understanding* (agreement) that cannot be *enforced*¹⁰.

The *subject* finds himself directly *involved* in a *dense network of social relationships* which pre-dates the affirmation of his personality, conditioning him. “The process that involves interaction of individuals in the group implies the pre-existence of the group.” (Mead, 1934, p.164).

Despite the diversity of perspectives, underlying the work of the scholars who provide the theoretical “glue” for our analysis, there is the profound conviction that sociality is not an accident or a contingency; it is the very definition of the human condition (Todorov, 1995, p.29): all individuals are 'marked by an original incompleteness' which is only *corrected* in the course of *social existence*¹¹. Therefore, it is only during the process of socialisation, and within the (communicative) networks of social interaction, that the social actor, in addition to *structuring* his *self-awareness* and *identity*, can begin to weave, and subsequently nurture the “fabric” of the system of ethical values and knowledge which forms the basis for consensus (Habermas 1981a, p.199). Within this process¹², the medium of language plays a fundamental, not to say vital, role for the system itself, directing it towards an understanding and mutual recognition by all parties. This central activity, which requires awareness of - and the ability to control – the *complex nature of communication skills*, is demonstrated in the production of culture and, in particular, in the process of social construction (Berger P.L. and Luckmann T., 1966) of local and global shared meanings. We should also note, as well as the strengthening of the means, the proliferation process of the channels of communication and communicative modes.

In the age of *glocalization*, the thinking of the German philosopher and sociologist is particularly relevant, especially regarding the search for the universal critical prerequisites for reaching agreement with the *Other*. This understanding is realised, even for Apel, (who speaks of acts of linguistic communication), on the basis of a *communicative rationality* and not on the rationality of means and purposes formulated by Max Weber. It is an understanding that could be translated in operational terms as the exchange of knowledge resources, the reduction of global uncertainty, the recognition of global citizenship rights, the sharing of (some) normative and ethical principles and policies¹³, transnational development, the forming of a *transnational civil society*, and educational policies for a multicultural society and for educating the citizens.

It is in this sense that the attempt to merge a theory of action with a theory of systems and the realisation of a need for communicative rationality, leads to a dialectic relationship between *instrumental action* and *communicative action*, between “systems”

and “world of life” emerging in the communicative action theory. In particular, the concept of a *world of life* (*Lebenswelt*) is the essential mechanism for ensuring the *reproduction* of social systems:

“Under the functional aspect of mutual understanding, communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge; under the aspect of coordinating action, it serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity; finally, under the aspect of socialization, communicative action serves the formation of personal identity. The symbolic structures of the lifeworld are reproduced by way of the continuation of valid knowledge, stabilization of group solidarity and socialization of responsible actors. The process of reproduction connects up new situations with the existing conditions of the lifeworld; it does this in the semantic dimension of meanings or contents (of the cultural tradition) as well as in the dimension of social space (of socially integrated groups), and historical time (of successive generations). Corresponding to these processes of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization are the structural components of the lifeworld: culture, society, person (...)The dimensions in which communicative action extends comprise the semantic field of symbolic contents, social space, and historical time. The interactions woven into the fabric of everyday communicative practice constitute the medium through which culture, society, and person get reproduced” (Habermas, 1981b, pp.730-731).

Habermas also points out that these complex reproductive processes concern, in a particular way, the symbolic structures of the vital world, in which it is crucial to distinguish the *substrate material of the world* and the vital resources that make its “maintenance”¹⁴ possible. Language, aimed at an understanding with the Other and based on universal communicative assumptions that recall the concept of *intersubjectivity*, allows us to transcend each individual's intimate and private sphere and enables him/her to empathetically participate in the discussion.

In the so-called risk society, the extraordinary growth in communication and the radical diversification of education channels have led to a *greater capacity for self-determination* (autonomy) on the part of social actors when it comes to choices, values, behavioural patterns, cognitive patterns. But what has been upset in its entirety is the 'shared symbolic system'. The concept of '*intersubjectivity without compulsion*' is, in this sense, quite productive in terms of positive effects on our discussion. This means the development of models and strategies aimed at consolidating the important networks of social relationships (which are now also “virtual”), within which the social actor orients himself and the public sphere is constituted. The world-system and the new informational, global and interconnected economy (Castells), require a new sensitivity to issues relating to the Subject, social relations and the *space of knowledge*. Once again, Habermas helps us to formulate the concepts of interaction and intersubjectivity, which are also interesting, especially in view of the strengthening of the *transnational political public*

sphere. Every aspect of individual and collective practice, from politics to economics, ethics to aesthetics, has been invested by this important social change. In other words, in this new type of social system, characterised by the involvement of the masses in the mechanisms of production and consumption of goods and services, we can see a change in the Subject's (social actor's) relationship - and of his reference group's - to power (Honneth, 1986, 1992), knowledge, work (Beck, 1999; Rifkin, 1995), actual consumption¹⁵ and aesthetic enjoyment.

The process of *convergence* between communication technologies leads to risk, but also to great possibilities for civilization, *on the condition that nation-states and politics recover their essential role*. According to Lévy, it is fundamental, when faced with changes of this importance, to reflect deeply, both on the impact and on possible projects, since «The technical decisions, the adoption of standards and regulations, the pricing policies, will contribute, whether we like it or not, to the shaping of a collective sensibility, intelligence and coordination which will tomorrow be the infrastructure of a civilization on a global scale» (Lévy, 1994, p.15). Thus a new perspective on *nomadism* takes shape for modern man – whom we might define as a *multimedia individual*¹⁶ – in which movement is no longer at a physical level (moving from one point to another in space), but a visual navigation through countless *worlds of life* – often virtual, but no less exciting, full of symbolic value – and infinite provinces/realms/zones/areas of meaning. Intelligence, with the help of computer technology, will be distributed everywhere and constantly enhanced, thus creating a *new communication civilisation*. It is no coincidence that major scholars and theorists of radical modernity and globalization warn that the need for a repositioning, or even reinvention¹⁷, of the political system is a priority.

Such a re-positioning of politics and the power systems is necessary not only in relation to the *public sphere*, but also to individual social actors, who are even capable of producing their own culture and establishing their own *agenda* of priorities that the power system will be forced to address. We are speaking here of individuals - and we need to reiterate this strongly - who are increasingly autonomous and aware of their choices. This is highlighted by a certain amount of statistically recorded phenomena, including the radical diversity of consumption (not merely cultural consumption) and the proliferation of the so-called “multimedia diets”.

Complexity approach, Systems thinking and knowledge sharing. **Interpreting and managing global social change**

Further confirmation of this urgency comes from the interesting processes of the growth of political movements (Castells, 2012) and pressure groups which, no longer identifying with the traditional hegemonic ideologies and political party systems, are taking on responsibility for confronting the *Sovereign* on social issues generated *bottom-up* within the networks of public discussion. This is a *sphere of discourse* that has been

excessively remodeled by the domination of the economy (which is itself also destined to regenerate from the bottom up), as well as by Weberian *mechanised petrification* and, above all, by technocracy¹⁸ and techno-science (Bucchi, 2006; Virilio, 2002) which have almost completely replaced the natural environment with an *artificial environment shaped and structured by technology* (Latouche, 1995; Marchesini, 2002; Popitz, 1995). This weakened sphere of discourse, on the contrary, should definitely make an attempt to regain its decisional spaces, taking into account the views, issues and movements that have “bloomed” in a *multireticular configuration*.

The key objective is to govern globalisation, a complex process that requires an *approach to complexity*, a systems thinking and transnational strategies; a complex process that is evolving autonomously, almost in a sort of *autopoiesis*¹⁹. Consequently, it is tending to emerge as a mega self-referential system capable of generating and reproducing the elements that structure it. Between the forces of *interdependence* and *fragmentation*. Between inclusion and exclusion, within asymmetries running along discontinuous trajectories (Dominici, 2005,2014, 2016).

The complexity inherent in the globalisation process and risk society forces us to recast the *categories* of political action - above all that of the *public sphere* - and to broaden our horizons of thought and action. That is to say, we need to “develop a political system that doesn't merely follow the rules, but changes them, a political system that's not just of politicians, but of society, that's not just of power, but of configuration, an art of politics” (Beck, 1993, p.25). Another reason for this is that the vast majority of those fundamental rules were created in a context of a strong nation-state, in which the dichotomous categories domestic policy / foreign policy were more than valid. This complex rethinking of theory and praxis, as they were conceived in industrial modernity, is part of the perspective of radical modernity (Kumar 1978,1995), in which the element of *reflexivity* - here taken to mean self-analysis, the recognition of an increased complexity, and the existence of *other* cultures²⁰ - has attained significant importance, from both a theoretical and conceptual point of view and from a practical-strategic perspective (Beck, Giddens, Lash, 1994, Ferrara, 1998).

To borrow from Beck, industrial modernity, with all its *institutions of control and protection*, has undergone a radical process of aging, one of whose implications has been the oft-remembered *Risikogesellschaft*, which inevitably leads it to self-criticism. To put it like Luhmann, in the age of globalization, what is within the sphere under technical control has become hypertrophic compared to what is in the sphere which is not technically controlled. And since technology and its new powers - the outcomes of which are, at least for now, difficult to evaluate - bring new risks and uncertainties at the global level, we can certainly claim that technological praxis, together with the advent of the global market, has made the *worlds of life* far less certain.

Communication constitutes a socio-cultural space within which the shared meanings, symbols and cultural practices geared to the processes of symbolic mediation and the reduction of complexity are promoted and shared. In other words, communication allows the values, knowledge and behavior patterns peculiar to a social system to become ruling castes creating balance and consensus. Contrarily, it can also allow for the establishment of new theoretical and practical paradigms, guidelines and beliefs. It is a process that represents a kind of multidimensional circuit which innervates the world-system in its entirety, as well as individual social systems and the social interaction networks that exist between the actors that make up the network. And it is precisely through communication (and language) that social actors (and, why not, people) have constantly shown themselves capable, not only of adapting to the environment, but also of transforming it, and of accepting cultural objectifications, as well as denying them or questioning them.

Reflexive modernization and the *global risk society*, having immeasurably extended the limits of social action and, in particular, the praxis, make the extension of an ethically-oriented praxis absolutely necessary. This should be based on a communicative ethics which must be nothing short of the result - a far from certain result - of a rational process of *intersubjective acquisition* and, of a simultaneous and profound awareness of the “new” responsibilities and the urgency of their universalization.

Therefore, social experience is based, on the one hand, on the continuous mixing of *mutual relations* and the complex dynamics between the *self* and the *values* which coincide with social purposes, and, on the other hand, on a constant mediation between the conflicts that inevitably arise out of the multiplicity of interests involved. These conflicts must be - and this is what ethical conduct and, even more so, “real” communication (ethics) consists of - resolved through rationality. Politics are born and grow, in a certain sense, precisely to fulfill a strategic role as a *system* for the mediation of conflict.

Taking an overview of the new *communication world*, it must be emphasised that the Network of Networks (Internet), the absolute hero of our times, has emerged as the only (meta) *message-medium* responsible for *global (complex) interconnection* (Blasi, 1999, Castells, 2001, Breton, 2001; Carlini, 2002; Rainie, Wellman, 2012; Dominici, 2014). This *metamedium* of ambiguous and ambivalent elements is capable of simultaneously causing the “end of the social bond” (or at least its weakening) and also strengthening the synapses that link the “hubs” of the network system in which knowledge, culture, and strategies of action and cooperation (*social capital*²¹) are developed.

Conclusion

The utopia of the Knowledge Society and new opportunities (or risks) for citizenship

The Knowledge Society is an extraordinary utopia founded on solid and unprecedented opportunities for access to knowledge, on its production and distribution, as well as on transparency. There are, however, numerous problematic aspects linked to the digital divide and to informative and cognitive asymmetries. The Internet's netlike structure -with the strategic role of *social media* - and the intensity of the flow that can simplify this allows the definition of a more direct relationship between the *public* and *private* spheres, between the power system and civil society, and between individual and collective responsibility. Consequently, systems and complex organizations will be increasingly forced to establish their own strategies based on the values of *transparency*, *access* and *simplification*. New *architectures* of the communicative processes and the emergence of new, more autonomous and responsible²² forms of *subjectivity* could - to some extent paradoxically - create the basic prerequisites for the development of a democracy that is truly “deliberative” and not merely “procedural”. In other words, the *proliferation* of opportunities and of the forms of the social production of knowledge is destined to bring with it a renewed awareness of the strategic value of the *new public sphere* and, therefore, of the urgent need for a comprehensive *reform* of (*complex*) thought and knowledge (Morin, 1999th; Morin 1999b; Morin, 2002; Morin, 1990; Morin, É.-R.Ciurana, Motta, 2003), which itself implies an *education for the citizenry*. From the specific point of view of scientific research, and given the complexity of the subject, we get an increasing sense of the the importance of a comparative approach in the study of the new social ecosystem, democracy, of social and political systems and in the analysis of communication systems (Hallin-Mancini, 2004).

We should not forget that underlying everything is a *complex process of anthropological and social transformation* (Dominici,1998), which regards Internet, the new global ecosystem and all of the new electronic media (Ferrarotti, 1997; Van Dijk, 1999; Sunstein, 2001; Rheingold, 2002; Tapscott,1996, 2009; Morozov 2011, Castells, 1996-1998, 2001, 2012; Rainie, Wellman, 2012; Zuckerman, 2013; Seife, 2015; Turkle, 2015) – and, in particular, the Web 2.0 – as undisputed “rulers”. This process directly concerns individual and collective action – power, (tele-)work, creativity (science and art), knowledge, production – revealing glimpses of possible scenarios linked to the triumph of a media democracy (*teledemocracy* or *e-democracy*) or an electronic republic (Grossman, 1995), perhaps based on new pressure groups and/or virtual communities which, acting as carriers of social and political issues that had formerly remained hidden, set the political agenda.

The global risk society calls for us – taking the concept to its extremes – to globalise the possible solutions to the risks and uncertainties of the world-system. The social actors of the new *transnational public sphere*, particularly those that were previously *excluded*, seem destined to play an increasingly strategic role in political dialectics within a new ‘geography’ of power relations and new processes of *disintermediation* and *re-intermediation*. And the sole reason for this is that they have become “producers” of a constant and extremely articulate flow of information and knowledge (culture), which breaks the monopoly of the traditional industrial model²³. The new forms of social production generated from the bottom up will also increasingly challenge the grip of the power systems which, paradoxically finding themselves obliged to manage different forms of conflict, might encounter different forms of structural configuration, allowing themselves to be “contaminated” by what was previously *outside of the system*²⁴.

On the other hand, with the advent of the global public sphere and greater opportunities for knowledge sharing, the new *ethical subjectivities*²⁵ seem destined to invade and overwhelmingly reconquer the *political space*. This means entering the system and, while helping to readjust the power relations, they will wield an increasingly solid influence on the delicate mechanisms used to set priorities and take political decisions. It is a strategic element that immediately brings about a *strengthening of the social structures of cooperation* capable of limiting the risks arising from individualistic, antisocial or deviant behavior. This is the information revolution, which is not only a *paradigm shift* (Dominici 1996, 2005; Floridi 2010).

Technological innovation has always been a strategic factor of change in social systems and organizations, but without a culture of communication, without a systemic view of complexity, and on the level of political deciders, without social policies capable of sparking and upholding cultural change, it merely becomes a “would-be” innovation. The knowledge society and the new global ecosystem are destined to become more and more exclusive and inaccessible, even in those areas where it is not yet possible to put up walls and barriers to manage (?) diversity, inequality and conflict. The opportunities for inclusion and mobility guaranteed by the “*Asymmetric Society*” (Dominici 1998, 2005, 2014), apparently so open and inclusive, are in reality, only theoretical and limited to a legal framework.

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Notes

¹ See: P. Dominici, *Dentro la Società Interconnessa. Prospettive etiche per un nuovo ecosistema della comunicazione* [Inside the Interconnected Society. Ethical Perspectives for a New Ecosystem of Communication], FrancoAngeli, Milan 2014, p.9. I would like to add that “such a far-reaching revolution, linked to multiple variables and concases, forming a unique occasion for social change and innovation, could reveal itself to be yet another opportunity for elites and exclusive social groups, owing to many factors: the digital divide, the cultural divide (which has too long been underestimated, as have the variables of functional analphabetism and educational poverty), asymmetries, lack of long-term system strategies. To meet this social hypercomplexity, apart from a renewed focus on rights and rules, what is needed is an analytic approach to complexity, avoiding reductive and deterministic explanations, as well as a new ethical sensitivity. Considering that today, as never before, technology has entered so deeply into the synthesis of new values and new criteria for judgment. The social actors are on the brink of a potential and irreversible quantum leap, but the issue is not only to notice and observe the scientific facts, but above all to become aware that communication is, overall, a behavior that generates other behaviors and produces value. In doing so, furthermore, it is essential not to confuse means and ends, instruments and content, communication and connection.” See also: P. Dominici, *Per un'etica dei New Media. Elementi per una discussione critica* [For a New Media Ethics. Elements for an Analytical Discussion], Firenze Libri Ed., Florence 1998, monograph in which, among other topics, I speak about anthropological transformation, the new ecosystem and the sharing economy and society.

² “Popular sovereignty” as hegemony or domination by the majority.

³ For a reference to the introductory theme see W. Privitera (2001), a work in which the author looks at the different models of public spheres and critically reflects on the crisis of “popular sovereignty” in the era of globalisation.

⁴ It is no coincidence that the most careful analysts and critics speak of *transnational civil society* and the *post national public sphere*.

⁵ On the strategic issue linked to the creation of a “European Public Sphere”, see the official document of the Commission of the European Communities, *White Paper on a European Communication policy*, Brussels, 1.2. 2006.

⁶ One thinks of the current, extremely articulate debate on the question of democracy and its possible “deviations” (the concept of “postdemocracy”), paradoxically linked to the greater opportunities (the concept of “polyarchy”) that democracy itself defines and determines. For a clear and comprehensive introduction to the concept, please refer to the relevant entries edited by Norberto Bobbio in the renowned Dictionary of Politics, UTET, Torino (ed.1983 and 1990), edited by N. Bobbio, N. Matteucci, G. Pasquino.

⁷ In this sense, we should be acutely aware that the so-called “knowledge economy” should necessarily be based on the sharing of this extraordinary intangible resource, a sharing that constitutes the fundamental pre-requisite without which the possibility of producing knowledge is denied.

⁸ Inequalities that are also *political* and *cultural*.

⁹ E. Tugendhat (1984) defines “relativism” as the “finding of a multiplicity of mutually contradictory moral beliefs (...) each advancing its own absolute claim” (p.69).

¹⁰ The theory of Jürgen Habermas is much influenced in this respect by George Herbert Mead who, in proposing an interesting concept of the "generalized other", arrives at the assertion that ""The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the entire community. (...) In the abstract period the individual assumes the behaviour of the generalized other towards himself (...) only like this does the thought - or the internalized conversation of gestures that makes up the thought - manifest itself "(Mead, 1934, p.154).

¹¹ "The source of every judgement is in reference to the other (...) and therefore both the ethical and the aesthetic have to be born into society. We can't judge without leaving ourselves and looking through the eyes of others. If you could raise a human being in isolation, they could not express any judgement, not even about themselves: they would lack a mirror to see themselves" (Todorov, 1995, p.34).

¹² This can happen when "The subjects able to speak and act are established as individuals simply because, as members of a particular language community, they grow up in an inter-subjectively divided world of life. The identity of the single and the collective are co-originally formed and conserved in the processes of communication formation "(Habermas, 1991, p.11).

¹³ A process that is already happening, not without difficulty, in the field of international law.

¹⁴ In this case, the Weberian categories come back into play, as "*Material reproduction* is accomplished through the medium of purposeful activity, activity with which socialized individuals participate in the world to achieve their goals " (Habermas, 1981b, p.731).

¹⁵ On this subject in particular, see the interesting concept of "visible consumption", defined as a symbol of social status and individual prestige in a competitive society, in the work of T. Veblen (1899) who, despite everything, retains his originality and the modernity of his analysis. Among critical voices, also see the brief but interesting collection of writings published in journals in France and Italy by J. Baudrillard (1987).

¹⁶ This topic was discussed, together with issues of digital divide and privacy, in P. Dominici (1998).

¹⁷ The original title of the work by Ulrich Beck (1993), *Die Erfindung des Politischen*, translated into Italian as *The Age of E*, actually means "The Reinvention of Politics."

¹⁸ In the complex, but at the same time well-articulated, discussion on technology and the so-called "technocracy" - power entrusted to the "experts" and based on technical and scientific knowledge - see, in particular, the introduction to the main theories by M. Nacci (2000). For a critical review of the technocratic ideology see C. Finzi (1977); for a broader perspective see also U. Galimberti (1999). Regarding the political praxis and the concept of "tecnopolitics", consult S. Rodotà (1997). See also the important analysis of J.Habermas (2014).

¹⁹ I use this term with the same meaning Niklas Luhmann gives it when he refers to the concept of "system", namely, the ability of the system to defend itself against environmental threats, not by better adapting to the environment, but by creating its own constituent elements and thus evolving in a totally autonomous way. I'd like here to recall that Luhmann defines the "system" starting with the distinction between system and environment, introducing the concept of "world". By "world", the German sociologist and philosopher means the *reality outside the system (the group of indeterminable possibilities)* characterised by a limitless complexity, while he defines the concept of "environment" as *the group of determinable possibilities*. The "system", however, distinguishes itself from the environment as a selected set of the determinable possibilities present in the actual environment. In this regard, and still referring to the "system", Luhmann introduces the concept of "self-reference" in order to explain the system's ability to describe and perceive itself as a unit. It is, therefore, the process of reducing the environment's complexity that structures the system, allowing it to regulate itself autonomously. Environmental "threats" and stimuli (complexity) become significant for the system in terms of the self-referential way that the system translates them. To examine the fascinating "theory of self" in depth see N. Luhmann (1984). See also N. Luhmann, *The Autopoiesis of Social Systems*, in Niklas Luhmann (1990). On the concept of "autopoiesis" and "self-referential systems" see the fundamental work - which has profoundly influenced contemporary thought and the whole "theory of systems" - by Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, two Chilean neurophysiologists who, in the 1970s, formulated the famous "theory of autopoietic systems". Moreover, Maturana and Varela's studies have had the great merit of analysing and comparing the complexity of all "living" biological and social systems. Therefore refer to H.R. Maturana, J. F. Varela (1980). For further details, see N. Addario (1998).

²⁰ We should also take note “of the contingency of certain elements belonging to certain cultures” (Luhmann, 1992, p. 59).

²¹ The systemic networks of social relationships define the rules for inter-individual (intersubjective) exchanges, encouraging, owing to the trust and cooperation that they demand, the achievement of objectives geared towards the realisation of the "public benefit" and / or the collective interest. This can imply - inasmuch as it cannot be taken for granted - a greater awareness of the importance of compliance with the rules and "civic sense". Altruism and cooperative behaviour tend to emerge, in this sense, as real "social engines" of development. See J.S. Coleman (1990), with particular reference to the second part of his work, which addresses the basic question of "social capital" and the following topics: social exchange systems, relationships and systems of authority, systems of trust, collective behaviour and effective rules (demand and creation). See also another “classic” of scientific literature: Robert D. Putnam (2000).

²² Which in fact arise as new stakeholders = carriers of interests.

²³ Consider, for example, movements fighting for the opening and diffusion of knowledge.

²⁴ R.A. Dahl (1971) speaks of “Polyarchy” - and the *indicators* that characterise it - precisely in terms of *inclusiveness* and participation in the democratic praxis by the highest possible number of individuals.

²⁵ Those that I have defined here as *new ethical subjectivities* are obviously subjective carriers of values, issues, and a *widespread relationality*, which manifests itself in the act of generation and, subsequently, in the elaboration of linguistic and / or communicative acts which, as they take form, can't help but refer to a *system of rules, codes and culturally mediated procedures* capable of defining new power relations.