

## Of Security and Liberty, of Control and Cooperation. Terrorism and the New Ecosystem of Communication

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*Of Security and Liberty, of Control and Cooperation.  
Terrorism and the New Ecosystem of Communication*

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**Abstract**

The Interconnected Society – a global ecosystem of limited rationality founded on the interdependence of systems and on the processing of information and knowledge (a new paradigm) (Dominici, 2014) – reveals itself, in fact, not only as the underlying structure of digital capitalism and of the sharing economy (Dominici, 1998), but above all, in relation to the issues considered in this essay, as the ideal communicative habitat for criminal and terrorist organizations. Here they can both plan and carry out propagandistic initiatives capable of deeply conditioning individual and collective perception, fears, uncertainty, risk awareness and the social acceptance of risk, and in general, public opinion and the collective imagination, exposed, as never before, to the emotional flare-ups of the global media system. Public opinion(s), which are more and more easily conditioned, are in turn capable of putting pressure on politics, which is expected, despite having itself become weaker and weaker with respect to financial and economic powers, to provide solutions and to make choices of transnational relevance. The network and the ecosystems of complex connectivity have been acting for some time as the main lever for bringing this conflict, which displays facets today which are completely different from those in the past, towards a strategic, not to say crucial praxis, both on a micro and a macro plane: a communication plan scattering in all directions, going viral in real time.

Keywords: hypercomplex society, new ecosystem, security vs. liberty, control vs. cooperation, communication, terrorism, surveillance, global Panopticon.

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## 1. Preface

What are the requirements of the ‘new’ *hypercomplexity* (cognitive, subjective, organizational, social and ethical) that characterizes the *Hypercomplex Society* (2003)? Aside from a systemic transnational perspective on strategies and politics, above all what is urgently called for is the definition and configuration of an interpretive theoretical model capable of, if not (fully) comprehending, at least recognizing and explaining the trajectories, which are themselves uncertain and confusing, as well as the numerous discontinuities in a global process of change that, in turn, has been casting radical doubts on paradigms, methodologies, analytic instruments and culture (organizational and non). The cognitive technological civilization has at last begun, after much delay, to realize the importance of a thinking style and a politics that can no longer afford to have a close-minded and particularistic outlook, especially in an era where signs of insecurity, uncertainty and vulnerability of every kind are on display, an era where dramatic conflicts are taking place that fuel the illusion, not only among the political classes and leaders of the nation states, of the prospect of finding simple and immediate solutions to complex problems, but also – and above all – that reinforce the rationales of exclusion and of perpetual emergency. All of this without considering, on the other hand, the new asymmetries and inequalities that are paradoxically becoming more and more blatant, right here in the era of maximum technological expansion and of extraordinary scientific discoveries.

A hypertechnological era, ever more subject to entropic and chaotic driving forces that, beyond the undeniable accelerations and advances in every field of human and social praxis, should have defined and determined ideal conditions in terms of control and predictability of behavior, processes and systems. A phase of radical global mutation which, as has already been underlined, forces us to reformulate our thoughts on categories, codes, languages, instruments, identity, subjectivity, cultural norms and models, (open) communities, relational and communicative areas, environment, and ecosystems. Never before has technological innovation, with all the risks/opportunities that it implies, brought the social actors and organizations to the brink of making a further, irreversible quantum leap.

This step-by-step attainment of evolutionary self-leverage casts radical doubts on traditional models and categories, obliging us to revise the very concept of ‘Person,’ rethinking humanity and its somehow ambiguous interactions with all that is technical and technological: an interaction that must give rise to a complex synthesis, whose perspectives, developments and implications cannot yet be evaluated. Caught between utopia and dystopia.

Between the forces of interdependence and fragmentation. Between inclusion and exclusion, within asymmetries running along discontinuous trajectories.

We find ourselves within the interconnected/hyperconnected society that is a *hypercomplex society* (Dominici, 2005), 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 (Dominici, 1996) in the setting up of the structural conditions, allowing the interdependency (and the efficiency) of the 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” (Dominici, 2014: 9; Rainie, Wellman, 2012; Turkle, 2015).

## **2. Between neo-positivism and techno-enlightenment**

Between neo-positivism and techno-enlightenment, we are living in the age of the triumph of technologies, in which the subject appears to have succeeded in dominating nature, controlling the ecosystem and organizing his surroundings according to his own laws and based on their utility. In reality, however, these objectives have not been fully reached and, above all, they have not been clarified, although said subject seems to be aware of having made a quantum leap, a leap that has passed the point of no return.

Scientific development, along with the new connective technologies, have deeply modified economic, social and political conditions, as well as the rapports among the former nation states, at this point overridden by the flows and dynamics of globalization: the protagonists of this great digital revolution that has transformed the world economy are the media in general and the Internet in particular, which, having nullified the space-time barrier and thus

the distances that separate us from the rest of the world, have created the structural conditions for the coming of the new ecosystem of communication based on the rationale of continual connection.

Never before has the image of the Global Village – prophesized by McLuhan (1964) – come back so clearly to haunt us, which – albeit in a context dominated by rationality and by the logics of control and surveillance – seem to feature an entropy that disequilibrates the balance of the so-called ‘infosphere.’ A ‘global village,’ increasingly interdependent – this is by no means the first time we make this point – that resembles more and more closely a hypertechnological and hyperconnected – but above all – a hypersurveilled mass society (Byung-Chul, 2012; Dominici, 2014; Ippolita, 2014).

Considering the complexity of such a metamorphosis and the new situations that it implicates, whose solution cannot be met simply through acquired experience, an in-depth analysis of the possible ramifications correlated to the coming of the technological network civilization is sorely needed. As discussed elsewhere (1996), we are talking about an *anthropological transformation*, evidently capable of changing our way of understanding reality and the world system, yet whose possible consequences are no less dangerous all the same.

The Subject (the *new subjectivity*) appears to be ready – once again – to steal fire from the gods. This potential for action, this capacity to shape reality through reason, science and technology, is perceived by the subject to be nearly unlimited. Nevertheless, the impression it makes is that there is a very low level of awareness regarding the intents behind the choices and the actions (Jonas, 1979).

Within the *Interconnected Society* (2014), the network and the digital media guide and accelerate the process of change, where communication and information have by now become ‘primary needs,’ capable of impacting social stratification on a local and global level. On top of that – as we anticipated quite some time ago – democratic regimes are basing their lives and praxes more and more often on ‘rules of engagement’ that are defined and constructed (other than carried out) not by the *Legislator*, but within the educational and professional institutions, places where information and knowledge are constructed and processed socially (see, in particular, the concept of the *Asymmetric Society* we have proposed). These are questions that must come to terms with the necessity of guaranteeing, or at least attempting to guarantee, *equality of starting conditions* (Nussbaum, 2002, 2010; Sen, 1992). The new forms of *inequality* clearly concern culture and knowledge.

The current social systems, laden with chaos and disorder, are going through a further critical phase of change marked by the coming of the

interconnected network economy, which raises new issues regarding citizenship, at the moment designated as ‘*digital citizenship*’ by academic authorities, for whom the access to knowledge, information and (nowadays) the Internet is a basic right (the term being used is ‘public assets’). ‘The starting point of this reflection is the right to Internet access, which we must understand, not only as the right to be technically connected to the network, but as the expression of a diverse manner of existing as a person in the world [P. D.: This takes us back to the concept of *anthropological transformation*], this as the outcome of a new manner of distributing social power. The simple reference to a “universal service,” which generally continues to accompany these discussions, hence, is inadequate, because we risk focusing almost exclusively on the technical equipment and its availability to the parties involved. It should be clear by now that the right to access is in fact a synthesis between a series of instruments and a potentially open series of powers that the person is free to use online’ (Rodotà, 2014: 13). There are, therefore, new opportunities of emancipation offered by the *technologies of connection*, and overall, by the expanding knowledge that feeds the protective and promotional social networks: the bonds of interdependence and interconnection are intensified, although some observers continue to hypothesize the demise of social ties. Well worth noting is the interesting growth of social movements and pressure groups that, feeling ever more distant and without representation from politics, have taken on the responsibility of making grassroots concerns and issues visible to the sultan as well as to public opinion.

The previous industrial model made up of consolidated structures, hierarchies and the logics of control and resistance to change is on the brink of being unhinged by the new ecosystem of knowledge which has (at last) begun to be recognized as a public asset and as a resource capable of (re)establishing less asymmetric social rapports. But it must be emphasized that the new forms of social knowledge production can only be decisive if the actors in the public arena know what to do with the knowledge, with the networks, with the civic and social media, and in general, with technology: and this once more underlines the urgency for a total reform of (complex) thinking and knowledge, all the more so at a stage where technology itself seems to take on the features of a *living organism* (Kelly, 2010) in constant evolution (as always, I would like to refer back to the concept of *autopoiesis*<sup>1</sup>),

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<sup>1</sup> About the concept of *autopoiesis*, see in particular: Maturana, H., Varela, F. (1972), *Autopoiesis and Cognition. The Realization of the Living*, Reidel, trad. it., *Autopoiesi e cognizione. La realizzazione del vivente*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1985; Luhmann, N., *The*

along trajectories that are only partially predictable. A long transitional phase that is characterized, other than by new conflicts and asymmetries, by extraordinary technological innovations that seem in many ways to be structured almost as though they were modern '*technologies of the self*', within constructive processes of the Self and of US, processes where distinction, identification and belonging function simultaneously; processes which, it must be clarified, duplicate dynamics that were pre-existent before the digital revolution, radicalizing them into new forms. It should be mentioned, as is widely known, that the concept of '*technologies of the self*' was defined and developed by Michel Foucault (1988). We have taken up this concept again in several of our works, both of early and of more recent date, linking it to functions that certain technologies and instruments – the social media itself (although content and usage count less and less) – perform within the so-called *interconnected society*. In this 'society', among many positive dynamics, the radicalization of certain social tendencies and mechanisms can be noted, for example, the search for continuous visibility, for a continual presence 'onstage' (ancient metaphor), to emerge from a (real or perceived) isolated or anonymous condition, the urgent need to belong to a group or to an exclusive social network (age-old issues, yet extraordinarily apropos) in the digital/network era. These are social and relational dimensions that must be seen in the general framework of the ever-expanding image culture and the culture of narcissism that in some cases can bring about processes of emulation (apparently) capable of actually improving (the perception) the well-being of the Person(s) and in general their existence and life experiences. Speaking of Michel Foucault and of the importance and present-day relevance of his written work, he identifies four types of technology, 'each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectifying of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform I themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1988: 13).

The *era* we are living in, on the other hand, is visibly becoming more and more characterized by the *shattering* of the *systems of belonging and belief* – where

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*Autopoiesis of social Systems*, in Luhmann, N., *Essays on Self-Reference*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990.

individual and collective identities are actually produced – and by the resulting advancement of individualism and utilitarian principles. It is no coincidence that the ‘*tyranny of the individual*’ (Todorov, 1995), an authentic centrifugal force capable of corroding the bonds of the social systems, is currently under debate in many parts of the world. An ongoing and weakening process which is further confirmed by the widespread deficit of social and political participation that in turn is fueled by the general atmosphere of mistrust towards all institutions (formal and informal), the only bodies that were in charge of transmitting and orientating the moral and cognitive value systems in the past. An extremely complex scenario, difficult to interpret, that in the wake of the loss of political and authoritative credibility has opened to the hypothesis of democracy ‘beyond’ political parties, insofar as these have proven to be less capable of gathering consent and of mediating the new forms of conflict than in the past. In the background, a crisis of the party-system which amplifies the other, much bigger crisis, regarding representation.

The dominating *individualism* in our social systems is the (somewhat inevitable) result of the *emancipation process/project* which has accompanied the advancement of Modernity. This process of transformation has first touched the *masses*, then the *Subject* has, on the one hand, augmented reality and has brought into the (at least theoretical) recognition of certain fundamental rights; on the other hand, it has contributed in weakening the bonds and limitations of belonging to a community. The triumph of the Subject, ‘free from ...,’ but also ‘free to ...,’ in an era where opportunities for emancipation and extraordinary communicative potential apparently abound, – although, in our opinion, *communication* is too often confused with *connection* – has paradoxically determined an unraveling of the social tissue, made up of people who are facing this complexity in conditions of greater autonomy but also greater isolation. The contemporary age is one in which the social mechanisms of trust and cooperation – foundations, as it were, along with the economy of power relations – have been under great duress from processes of increasing *insecurity* that have rendered *instability* an existential condition.

### **3. The urgency of an *approach to complexity***

The *Interconnected Society* – a global ecosystem of limited rationality founded on the interdependence of systems and on the processing of information and knowledge (*a new paradigm*) (Dominici, 2014) – reveals itself, in fact, not only as the underlying structure of digital capitalism and of the sharing economy (Dominici, 1998), but above all, in relation to the issues considered in this essay, as the ideal communicative habitat for criminal and terrorist organizations. Here they can both plan and carry out propagandistic

initiatives capable of deeply conditioning individual and collective perception, fears, uncertainty, risk awareness and the social acceptance of risk, and in general, public opinion and the collective imagination, exposed, as never before, to the emotional flare-ups of the global media system.<sup>2</sup> Public

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<sup>2</sup> The correlation between media, political agendas and emotional climate, opinion and reactivity is extremely close, and as is known, has been empirically explored and demonstrated by various studies in *Communication Research*. We see this conflict daily, and recently we have witnessed its validity during the latest dramatic events regarding migration flows and new forms of slavery. Pageants founded on the power of imagery and narration, which not only condition public opinion and imagination, but above all, the so-called decision-makers themselves. Within the bibliography on *Communication Research*, you can see: Benton M., Frazier P. (1976), The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media at Three Levels of "Information Holding", in *Communication Research*, vol. 3, n. 3: 261-274; McCombs M., Shaw D. L. (1972), "The agenda-setting function of the mass media", in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2): 176-187; McCombs M., Shaw D.L., Weaver D. (1997), *Communication and democracy: Exploring the intellectual frontiers in agenda-setting theory*, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum; McCombs M. (1997), "Building consensus: The news media's agenda-setting roles", in *Political Communication*, 14: 433-443; McCombs M., Shaw D. L. (1993), "The evolution of agenda setting research: Twenty-five years in the marketplace of ideas", in *Journal of Communication*, 43: 58-67; McCombs M., Reynolds A. (2002), *News influence on our pictures of the world*, in Bryant J., Zillmann D. (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 1-18; Protess D. L., McCombs M. E. (Eds.) (1991), *Agenda setting: Readings on media, public opinion, and policy making*, Hillsdale, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum; Shaw E. F. (1979), Agenda-Setting and Mass Communication Theory, in *Gazette*, n°2: 96; Yang J., Stone G. (2003), "The powerful role of interpersonal communication on agenda setting", in *Mass Communication and Society*, 6: 57-74; Shaw D., McCombs M. (Eds.) (1977), *The emergence of American political issues: The agenda-setting function of the press*, St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, pp. 89-105; Eder K., "Cognitive Sociology and the Theory of Communicative Action: The Role of Communication and Language in the Making of the Social Bond", in *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2007; 10(3): 389-408; Gerbner G., Gross L., Morgan M. et al. (Eds.) (1986), *Living with Television. The Dynamics of Cultivation Process*, in Bryant, Zillmann; Katz E., Lazarsfeld P. (1955), *Personal Influence: the Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*, trad. it., *L'influenza personale nelle comunicazioni di massa*, Eri, Torino, 1968; Katz E. (1957), "The Two-Step flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report on an Hypothesis", in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 21, n. 1: 61-78; Hovland C., Savis I., Kelley H. (1953), *Communication and Persuasion*, Yale university Press, New Haven; Lazarsfeld P., Berelson B., Gaudet H. (1944), *The People Choice. How the Voter Makes Up his Mind in a Presidential Campaign*, Columbia University Press, New York; Lazarsfeld P., Merton R. (1948), *Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action*, in L.Bryson (Ed.), *The Communication of Ideas*, Harper, New York, pp. 95-118; Yang J., Stone G. (2003), "The powerful role of interpersonal communication on agenda setting", in *Mass*

opinion(s), which are more and more easily conditioned, are in turn capable of putting pressure on politics, which is expected, despite having itself become weaker and weaker with respect to financial and economic powers, to provide solutions and to make choices of transnational relevance. The network and the ecosystems of complex connectivity have been acting for some time as the main lever for bringing this conflict, which displays facets today which are completely different from those in the past, towards a strategic, not to say crucial praxis, both on a micro and a macro plane: a communication plan scattering in all directions, going viral in real time. Meanwhile, the categories which I can, for simplicity's sake, term 'western democratic regimes', find themselves totally incapable of fending off the kind of media propaganda and psychological warfare that is also being carried out on a cultural basis. It is precisely in this manner that the error being made is to interpret such complex, ambivalent and ambiguous situations considering the role of the European Union and the so-called 'international community' – whose presence is increasingly imperceptible – through the reductionist lens of a 'clash of civilizations.' And that is exactly what terrorists and extremists have set as their main objective, apart from undermining trust in social relations and in systems experts, and from casting radical doubts on the concepts of liberty and privacy – which are already being violated online, it goes without saying, by multinational companies – and on the principles and the lifestyles that characterize the nation states who are attempting to resist this assault. In other words, global terrorism, aside from its main aim – obviously – to terrorize and to generate fear, has only to sit back and await the forthcoming 'Us against Them' reaction. Under these circumstances, the first and foremost action to be taken urgently is a serious social and cultural analysis of these phenomena and of the contexts in which they thrive. Yet the impression is

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*Communication and Society*, 6: 57-74; Noelle Neumann E. (1984), *The Spiral of Silence. Public Opinion-Our Social Skin*, trad. it., *La spirale del silenzio*, Meltemi, Roma 2002; Roberts M., McCombs M. (1994), "Agenda setting and political advertising: Origins of the news agenda", in *Political Communication*, 11: 249-262; Miller J. M. (2007), "Examining the mediators of agenda setting: A new experimental paradigm reveals the role of emotions", in *Political Psychology*, 28: 689-717; Matsaganis M.D., Gregory Payne J. (2005), "Agenda Setting in a Culture of Fear. The Lasting Effects of September 11 on American Politics and Journalism", in *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(3): 379-392. See also: McQuail D. (1983), *Mass Communication Theory. An introduction*, trad. it. *Le comunicazioni di massa*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1986; Bentivegna S. (a cura di) (1994), *Mediare la realtà*, FrancoAngeli, Milano; Wolf M. (1995), *Gli effetti sociali dei media*, Bompiani, Milano; Wolf M. (1985), *Teorie delle comunicazioni di massa*, Bompiani, Milano; De Fleur M. L., Ball-Rokeach S. J. (1989), *Theories of Mass Communication*, trad. it. *Teorie delle comunicazioni di massa*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1995.

that, at this point in the strategic process, we are simply playing things by ear. In particular, the total lack of any kind of communication strategy, either on a local or on a global level, is painfully clear. A strategy, that is, capable of weaving a counter-narrative to legitimize the political and diplomatic actions that must be carried out.

As always, repression is a necessary but incomplete instrument. Closing Facebook pages or deleting accounts involved in activities of propaganda or recruitment runs on a short-term rationale and does not suffice. Not only because we are dealing with cultural issues and processes – whose evolution is always non-linear – but also because the web of the new ecosystem consists of open structures in potentially infinite expansion (*autopoiesis*), linking multiple and potentially infinite nodes without limits. The problem, once again, is that of the driving logic behind the actions: open or closed systems, control or cooperation, liberty or security, and the manner in which the social networks and the digital media are utilized (obviously, with differing methods and purposes) by elites, power structures, lobbies, the masses, digital mega-corporations<sup>3</sup> (first off Google and Facebook), and nation states, as well as by criminal and terrorist organizations. Quite the contrary to the hegemonic narratives where the digital ecosystem is invariably described as a horizontal landscape of maximum liberty and disintermediation, the dominating drivers are those of *control*, of *absolute surveillance* (Lyon, 2001; Morozov, 2011), of the systematic closure intended as a solution or reaction to the critical phases of the evolution of social systems, which, having undergone sudden acceleration and extraordinary technological innovation<sup>4</sup>, are bringing about crises and turbulence that are not only economic. These crises have always concerned the management and monitoring of processes whose asymmetrical distribution of information and knowledge, along with the *cultural divide* (which

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<sup>3</sup> In describing these digital mega-corporations the term ‘digital cannibals’ has been used. In particular, see the article by S. Vergine, ‘The New Powers. Digital Cannibals’ in *L’Espresso*, 35, year LXI, 3 Sept. 2015. In all likelihood, the term ‘cannibals’ is meant to recall a phrase pronounced by Marshall McLuhan: ‘The new environment shaped by electric technology is a cannibalistic one that eats people. To survive one must study the habits of cannibals.’

<sup>4</sup> I would like, nevertheless, to clarify a rather common misinterpretation found among the comments and the narratives on innovation and the digital civilization: technology (and its products) is not something external to culture and to socio-cultural processes; on the contrary, it is inside culture; it is a fundamental component, other than a complex product. I mention this because, more and more often, I come across arguments such as: ‘culture is compelled to pursue technology.’ I hold that this is yet another example of a misleading dichotomy, which must be overcome so that a critical, global analysis of the ongoing dynamics of these processes can be carried out.

represents, as I have been contending for years, *the problem*), play a absolutely crucial role, representing the 'left-behind' zone of the new ecosystem: that part of the social web and network – extensions of areas which existed before the web came into being – which can be deemed 'inside' solely from the point of view of the connection. Following this line of reasoning, it becomes evident that the interconnected society (Barabási, 2002) has also delineated a new stratum of mass communications, contributing, in any case, to a reconfiguration of the pre-existing power structures.

The '*Hypercomplex Society*' (Dominici, 2005) and the age of informationalism, in our view, have marked the beginning of a complex process of civilization founded on the Internet and the social media, which introduces specific rules of inclusion and citizenship that thus require a re-conceptualization of the categories themselves and a redefinition of their related functions. The challenge regarding this type of complexity, as we have stated many times before, is not only a cognitive challenge, and cannot be embraced without abandoning outdated ivory towers and leaving behind equally outdated *paradigms of monocausal determinism*, moving towards a definitive, systemic perspective on and *within* complexity. In other words, it is our duty to finally allow awareness to ripen, realizing that reality, processes, and problems are always complex and require a multidisciplinary approach to complexity. If the problems are complex, the potential solutions cannot but be complex themselves. If, indeed, there are solutions to be found, they will be – in any case and in any moment – temporary, makeshift solutions; we must (therefore) radically reconsider the relationship between knowledge and skills, beginning with the early years of school. We can no longer afford to make the classic – other than strategic – mistake of considering and analyzing 'objects' and phenomena by isolating them and stripping them down to partial and reductionist explanations. Objects must be considered and analyzed as systems, taking great care not to confuse cause and effect, and maintaining awareness of their multiple dimensions and intervening variables. This crucial issue regarding approach and paradigm metamorphosis must absolutely be extended to include all sectors, including global terrorism and crime: the *hypercomplexity* we are facing is in constant evolution, and this evolution, through differentiation, is a complex and far from linear process.

#### **4. *Hypercomplexity* and the new risks: between openness and total surveillance**

The new connective technologies, besides having disrupted (disintermediated) all mechanisms of social/political intermediation – reintroducing, however, new filters and levels of action – have the power,

perhaps an unlimited power, to extend the possibilities and the opportunities of humanity (*digital divide*, and above all, *cultural divide* permitting). Other than the above-mentioned – and reiterated – inconsequentiality of politics (a question that is of underestimated relevance), the liberalization of the markets demonstrates, even more clearly, the lack of truly functional global institutions. This is a factor that weighs heavily, not only on the management of productive and cultural processes which are, by now, transnational, but even more on the management and monitoring of the dynamics linked to organized crime and terrorism. In this case as well – I repeat – many of the problems we are analyzing are tied to the fact that the international regulatory framework, as well as the judicial, and more specifically, repressive instruments of enforcement, were postulated, defined and carried out in a context whose global traits belonged to a strong ‘nation state.’ This political context, in which local and global levels were already very interdependent, where the national borders and territories, reservoirs of identity, were traceable back to specific, historically established judicial frameworks, played a well-defined and absolutely determining role. On top of this, the global economy is continually dealing with a process of radical reconstruction where physical capital is shrinking as the offer of services triumphs over the sale of goods and property exchange: access has become the new measuring stick of social rapports. In addition, the Internet and the social networks have further extended the frontiers of what we have defined as the *new ecosystem* (Dominici, 1998).

The implicit complexity of the globalization process (Bauman, 1998; Castells, 1996, 2001, 2009; Stiglitz, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999; Touraine, 2004;) obliges us to reformulate all categories of political activity and to extend our horizons of thought and action, developing a new politics that does not limit itself to following the rules, but tries to change them – also because the great majority of these very rules had been defined within the context of a strong nation state. A total overhaul of theory and praxis that should be examined from the perspective of a radical modernity in which even the reflective dimension (Donati, 2011; Ferrara, 1998), by which we mean self-analysis and awareness: awareness of increased complexity, of the existence of other cultures, of the contingency of belonging, (the belonging of certain elements to certain cultures) (Luhmann, 1992) – puts still more stress on the institutions of control and protection. The traditional logic of control, security and surveillance, typical of social systems and modern democracies, is still dominant, but its weaknesses and inefficiencies – not to say sterilities – are more and more visible as regards the management and prevention of complex processes and conflicts that have been overriding the nation states in recent and not only recent times. Global crime and international terrorism, aside

from having the know-how to successfully exploit the dynamics of public opinions (a point we will come back to) are also able to take particular advantage of the power vacuums and of the challenges in monitoring and enforcement found in democracies and/or technologically advanced countries. The complexity of these ongoing processes, besides their need for global institutions capable of defining transnational regulations and ensuring that they are respected, once again poses the question – which we have often brought up – of the paradigm shift, precisely in light of the evident inadequacy of earlier conceptual schemes. Moreover, in the era of total communication, not only do individual and collective theory and praxis undergo specific socio-historical conditioning on the part of each single context or reference group, but they are also strongly conditioned by the weight of representations – images of reality – on the part of the media (active metaphor) and from within the new ecosystem of communication in general. In this regard, terrorist organizations display an in-depth understanding of the potency of images and of symbols communicated locally and globally. What is more, they are perfectly aware of the strategic relevance of public opinion(s) within the nation states, even more so in the so-called interconnected society, where the systems of media, the Internet and social networks can instantaneously and continually create global fields of interdependent events, with deep-rooted repercussions concerning the complex processes of risk perception, which so often triggers social alarm that impacts both perception and actions.

In the age of the global market and the knowledge society, the social production of capital runs parallel to the social production of risks and dangers (of various genre and to varying degrees). It would be more accurate to say that the power balance between the two rationales are inverted owing to the reflective lens which prevents the productive sectors from concealing their latent side effects. The risk civilization, on the other hand, purporting to be an extraordinary opportunity for economic, political and social evolution, has, in reality, significantly enhanced the sense of insecurity and vulnerability within the social system, stoking a climate of fear (and/or of social alarm) on a local as well as global level and casting radical doubts on the *precautionary principle* itself (Sunstein, 2005), which in the meantime is becoming more and more detached from the social demand for protection. This individual and collective perception also casts radical doubts on the fundamental category of liberty, repeating in various forms and modalities the traditional dichotomy of liberty versus security, eternal dilemma that has always characterized the genesis and the evolution of human society. This dichotomy brings to mind the true nature of social ties and forms, regulated by mechanisms of trust and cooperation, along with public opinions, which can be considered, literally, exposed wires of the nervous system, under great strain and stress. Other

factors include the new risks, disasters and catastrophic events brought about by phenomena such as terrorism and criminality. Again, this dichotomy has re-emerged dramatically at the core of the public debate within the transnational political arenas, following the tragic events of 9-11<sup>5</sup> and a number of ensuing global terrorist attacks, and consequently, a global climate of fear which exacerbates even further the perception of insecurity and vulnerability within and without the systems, within and without the nation states. With one fundamental common denominator: visibility in the media and on the web, linked to an extraordinary capacity to create and constantly fuel a psychological 'war' that incessantly stokes our individual and collective fears, our subconscious, our collective imagination, already under fire from an economical/financial crisis (which is above all a cultural crisis of civilization) that has cast radical doubts on the welfare systems and the conquests of modern democracy, making insecurity and uncertainty into concrete conditions that are not only social, but existential as well. The global terroristic network, on the other hand, is a savvy inhabitant of the new ecosystem with a thorough knowledge of its potentially *open architecture(s)*, codes and languages; it well knows how to take advantage of the information flow and its characteristic social, political and cultural dynamics, whose structures are shaped by the asymmetry of information and knowledge. The world system and the new informationist economy, global and interconnected, require a new kind of sensitivity to the issues regarding the subject, the social relationships, and above all the 'spaces' for knowledge, in view of a consolidation of the *public and political transnational sphere*.

But the fundamental question lies in the fact that the knowledge society is, to all appearances, a risk society which has extended, beyond every border or limit, the dynamics of conflict, of risk, of emergencies (real or potential) and its systemic anomalies. This dimension intersects with the equally crucial one of trust, which remains a fundamental social mechanism capable of *reducing complexity* (Luhmann, 1968) and of rendering the social acceptance of risk and of every form of danger (terroristic, environmental, etc.) and conflict sustainable. This sphere of trust continues to be closely linked to the problems of knowing and of knowledge. Obviously, the aim of media and web propaganda on the part of terrorist organizations is to achieve the strategic target of undermining trust and every other kind of social mechanism which can guarantee social ties and cooperation. In the long run, however, the opposite effect could paradoxically result, as has been demonstrated by studies and research on social capital (Putnam, 2000) and on trust and cooperation networks during crisis periods (not only economic), and in the aftermath of

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<sup>5</sup> 11 September.

disasters and catastrophes. Although it cannot be ignored, at this point in time, how modern social systems, which are often the orphans of a solid cultural model, are characterized by instability and by a high degree of unpredictability in the actions and processes that accompany the nation states, whose role and (in)capacities show more and more weaknesses, not to mention the widely acknowledged absence of global institutions capable of dealing concretely with global problematics. Critical issues and problems of the *Hypercomplex Society* (Boccia Artieri, 2012; Dominici 2005, 2014; Lovink, 2016; Robins, Webster, 1999; Turkle, 2015; Zuckerman, 2013) that urgently require a strategic definition of political and organizational strategies for sharing data, information (Floridi, 2012), knowledge and skills. Dynamics and processes that, obviously, must be activated and developed in every field/sector of the social, political, technological and cultural process, from education to training, from training to research, from research to innovation. What is needed, apart from data and knowledge sharing (Giovannini, 2014), is above all an approach to complexity and systemic processes, in order to determine long-term structural and cultural changes, not exclusively for the purpose of contrasting terrorism and criminal organizations.

What is at stake, we emphasize, is the chance to redefine the relationships of social power structures within a public space that has no limits. The complex architecture(s) that support the network society confirm and reinforce the status of public asset associated with knowledge as a resource – the sole strategic resource derived from processes of intersubjective acquisition capable of replenishing the cells and tissues that form the neural network of the interconnected economy, creating, in this manner, the primary conditions for the evolution of a cognitive ecosystem based on open, dynamic processes, that will be more democratic than in the past. Along these lines there is an idea – or more accurately, an ambitious project, currently far from being merely a utopian dream, to design an open-source global web, not only for the purpose of knowledge sharing/production/processing, but in particular with the objective of controlling the flow of information, in an age which has never before reached such levels of total, invasive control. In any case, instruments and processes which could undoubtedly turn out to be essential for counterattacking the global web of terror.

The systemic crisis that we are going through forces us to ask ourselves, in the first place, what it means to be a person – to be a citizen – in this global society. What this crisis does is to cast radical doubts on the dimension of trust and on our security paradigm, which is constantly questioning us about our willingness to trade our liberties and our life-styles for a greater degree of security (or at least, for what is perceived to be greater security).

To deal with this complexity, which, we repeat, highlights the urgent necessity for a new paradigm (narratives are not enough), what is needed is a *New Humanism* (Dominici, 1998). This neo-humanism must be based on the concept of *placing the person at the center*, of sharing knowledge made truly accessible to all. Above all, it must be capable of including the weaker subjects and/or those who have been penalized by the world economy and by non-regulated growth founded on Weberian self-regulation. Our 'best bet' is to choose strategies designed for knowledge sharing that can play an absolutely determining role in the reduction of inequality (social asymmetry), in the reigning in of social egoism and consequently in the fruitful mediation and healing of local and global conflicts.

On the other hand, as far as global terrorism is concerned, the hope is that the Internet, the new ecosystem and the social media themselves will, in the long run, organize and coordinate all appropriate decisions and actions globally, becoming a sort of trap (here the 'web' metaphor comes back to mind, this time with a slightly different accentuation). The vast network and the social media, in fact, designed to come together as places and spaces of maximum liberty, sharing and radical openness, have instead turned out to be a physical as well as virtual space in which the weakened nation states (forced to surround themselves by walls) and certain unscrupulous companies and multinationals have been, for some time, carrying out a kind of surveillance and control that goes far beyond the mainstream narratives and the themes of the transnational public arenas, revealing themselves to be totally and absolutely invasive for the citizens themselves. The new mega-ecosystem: from open system to an actual *global Panopticon*' that is the lever to lift the world into a net, trapping it in its lattice.

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