

GLOCAL INTERFERENCES ON THE NET – ANY NOTES CONCERNING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION¹

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Abstract

Nowadays, jurists have been called upon to deal with a new and alarming form of pollution. This latter affects the virtual ecosystem, instead of affecting the real environment (nature and its balances). It is a pollution that has to do with the information (personal and otherwise) that circulates on the network and that, thanks to the casual and not very responsible continuous sharing, spreads on platforms and social networks.

Keywords

Digital Society. Social Network. Information. Communication. Information disorder.

Summary

1. New scenarios. Interactions and integrations. – 2. Information, communication and... relationship. – 3. About information disorder. – 4. Some conclusive suggestions.

¹ The present work aims to provide a further contribution to the path developed during the International Conference *#Interferenze_glocali. I diritti umani alla prova del XXI° Secolo* (held from 24 to 26 November 2021 and organized by the Global Network Humanities and Rights and the University of Rome "Tor Vergata"). The reflections developed here are in addition to those that appeared in CAMPAGNOLI 2021, pgs. 146-178.

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1. NEW SCENARIOS. INTERACTIONS AND INTEGRATIONS

Among the countless “glocal interferences”, which in recent decades have contributed to redesigning the geo-political structures inviting us to rethink social scenarios and legal institutions, special attention cannot but be reserved for the various issues related to the affirmation of the so-called *Digital Age*³ and, in particular, to the multiple repercussions that the emergence of ICT, the advent of the Internet and the development of the various social networks have entailed, both on the retrieval and dissemination of information, and on the approach to communication, of which – as we will try to emphasize here – there is the risk of losing the most important and authentic meaning.

Even before thinking about the peculiarities of digital information and reflecting on the changes in a communication conveyed by technological interfaces, however, it is useful to briefly emphasize three elements that – in addition to being decidedly important in the identification and description of the digital universe *tout court* – they prove to be functional to the articulation of subsequent reflections. In order, these are:

a) the substantial distinction that is given between technique and technology, which, although it tends to be little considered, in reality, represents the first and the essential starting point to fully grasp

³ An icastic expression with which we refer to a "new epoch in the history of man" marked by the changes brought about by the advent and diffusion of technology in every area and dimension of the living. See BENANTI 2020.

those fundamental aspects that distinguish the technological apparatus from the object *strictu sensu* understood;

b) the characteristics that identify the *cyberspace*⁴ and, with it, that singular environment made of fleeting contacts and incessant exchanges of data and information that is created within the Network and in all platforms and apps;

c) the particular relationship – marked not only by interaction, but also, and above all, by integration – that is created between man and the apparatus he uses.

The analysis of these three factors will allow us to grasp the scope of that revolution – which we have witnessed in recent years and in which we are still immersed – which has been marked: *i*) the appearance of the *World Wide Web* (conceived and designed essentially to activate and facilitate reticular contacts); *ii*) from the transition from *Web 1.0* (still substantially attributable to the macro-category of media *for the masses*: that is to say, the media *aimed at the masses* and in which there remained several limitations in the access, creation and dissemination of content by the *users/netsurfers*) to *Web 2.0* (*Participatory Web*, with which the era of the *mass media* has finally begun: vectors within reach of anyone who has access to the Net and thanks to which users / *netsurfers* can, depending on the cases and situations, spread any type of information, determining a shift and a continuous confusion of plans and roles, that of creator and user, that of writer and reader); *iii*) from the advent of *Internet of Things (IoT)*, the network of devices that interact with each other (often even without any need for human intervention) and in which

⁴ For an exhaustive description – oltreché originale e suggestiva – del Cyberspace, reference to the ever-current reconstructions of AMATO MANGIAMELI 2000.

the processing of information and data is now completely automated.

a) In the first place, it is necessary to dwell on the difference between technique and technology, which brings with it a radical change of *Weltanschauung*. With regard to technique – both, recalling what Plato already narrated in the *Protagora*⁵ (when he speaks of the birth of mortal races and, in particular, of the gifts that Prometheus gives to men, identified, precisely, by technique and fire), both, referring to the well-known definition given by Aristotle in the *Metafisica*⁶ – we can say that it is a form of practical knowledge, which implies the exploitation of objects already available in nature or manufactured as needed, whose purpose is essentially to extend and increase the scope and effectiveness of human action. Hence, the almost unanimous reading according to which technology, on the one hand, would arise from the need to respond to the shortcomings and limitations of man⁷ and, for the other, it would be nothing more than the result of the innate ability of the human to continuously adapt his behaviors and – thanks to ingenuity and imagination – to transform objects into tools for efficiency and strengthening of his actions.

It is essential to clarify immediately that, compared to technology, technology does not stand out so much in terms of quality and quantity of the support that is provided to man, but because, with it, an authentic change of perspective is realized and a new paradigm is imposed. In particular, with the advent of technology, we are

⁵ PLATONE 2001, 321a-322a

⁶ ARISTOTELE 2009, I, I, 981 a, 5-981 b 25.

⁷ And it is in this sense, for example, that he describes it GHELEN 2010.

witnessing the convergence of several techniques, which are connected and mutually coordinated with each other in order to form a completely new system, capable of guaranteeing a faster and more effective achievement of the initial objective. It should be noted: the leap from technology to technology does not simply achieve a sort of qualitative and quantitative *upgrade* (the result, precisely, of the combination of several forms of knowledge), but opens the way to the emancipation of technological apparatuses with respect to the need for *input* and control by the human⁸. A distinction – this between technique and technology – that pending a reflection on information and communication within the Net, is certainly functional to grasp the genesis of all those mysterious automatisms, which, today, mark the silent and elusive progress of algorithms⁹.

b) Secondly, it is necessary to look at those founding elements that characterize cyberspace and the world of the many platforms that we not only use to carry out most of our activities (work, personal, play, sports, etc.).¹⁰, but that entertain us by catalyzing a significant slice of our time. To identify the salient features of the digital *habitat* are:

⁸ And it is, clearly, within this different perspective that not only machine learning but also the new horizons of robotics are inscribed. Emerging themes and issues on which I refer to the extensive and acute reconstructions of AMATO MANGIAMELI 2015; 2020.

⁹ Emblematic, in this sense, is the action of *PageRank* (an algorithm that through a series of mathematical calculations selects the pages that must be shown first in the face of a Google search), to that of *Adwords* (algorithm that chooses the ads to be published based on the memory of the e-mails, the pages visited, the interests expressed and / or the most used services) and, last but not least, the *modus procedendi* of *News Feed* (algorithm that keeps track of stories by classifying shares).

¹⁰ Paradigmatic on the point, as observed by SPITZER (2017, p. 18): “Do you feel alone? – Why aren't you on Facebook? / Single? – Why don't you try online dating? / Problems

— The *de-territorialization*¹¹, i.e. the total absence of a territory, the lack of a physically determined place to refer to. That is why, online all spatial and temporal distances lose their meaning and are reset, supplanted by a virtual reality within which everything (*a fortiori information!*) is not only potentially simultaneous and ubiquitous, but is also extraordinarily permanent¹² and autonomously itinerant¹³;

— the *de-centralization*, i.e. what is often referred to as the *acephalia* of the Net¹⁴, due to the lack of a center of government-control and the substantial and indistinct leveling between the center and the periphery, that is, between what is internal and what is external, but also, between what is private and what is public. Paradigmatic of this continuous reversal of perspectives and roles, are the *Möbius ribbon* (geometric figure in which the inner side is not distinguishable from the external one) and the *hypertext* (made of continuous references and infinite references, thanks to which the reader and the writer not

at school? – You just need the right App to study! / Do you want to recover the line? – Don't have the Diet App yet? / Don't have time? – Put your agenda on the cloud! / Sick? – Watson helps you in diagnosis and therapy! / Hunger? – From fast food to gourmet recipes: all online! / No money? – Online credit is faster than any other bank! / Are you listless? – Try the right motivational App! / Do you spend too much time on your smartphone? – All you need is an App for automatic shutdown!”

¹¹ On the de-territorialization and its link with virtualization, the reference to the reconstructions of LÉVY (1997); and SERRES (1994), according to which we are projected into a completely peculiar dimension “out of”, as it lacks spatial collocation.

¹² With regard to the singular (and sometimes very uncomfortable) permanence that the Net and social platforms give to any information that is entered into them, I refer to what was observed by ZICCARDI 2007.

¹³ On the tendency that data and all digitized information (whether textual or visual) have to “migrate” from platform to platform I allow myself to refer to CAMPAGNOLI 2020.

¹⁴ Acephalia that we find in the rhizome on which – first – they placed the accent DELEUZE, GUATTARI 1975; 1977; 1987.

only alternate but cooperate incessantly in the writing/reading of a document that is always potentially different);

— the *date-vigil*, one of the most disturbing and problematic aspects of the Net, due to the development of an unprecedented form of control (continuous, automatic and, sometimes, even involuntary), based on the collection and analysis of the myriads of digital *breadcrumbs* that we completely unconsciously disperse at every access and / or activity carried out online. Crumbs, which – as he noted Bauman¹⁵ – they really say a lot about us, so much so as to allow the faithful mapping of our propensities, our orientations, our needs, and to offer valuable spies for the elaboration of social engineering strategies¹⁶. Traces that, moreover, once extrapolated examined, decomposed, combined and reaggreated, allow the formation of the so-called Big Data¹⁷.

c) Thirdly, specific attention must be paid to the implications and potential consequences due to the progressive shift from the

¹⁵ “every time I enter the Amazon site I am greeted by a series of titles 'selected especially for you, Zygmunt'. Given my previous book purchases, there's a very good chance that those tips are a temptation [...] and that's usually the case! Obviously, thanks to my inadvertent but obedient collaboration, Amazon's servers now know my preferences and hobbies better than I do. These suggestions no longer appear to me as advertising, but as a friendly help in moving in the jungle of the book market. Thank you, and every time I buy a book, I pay to update my preferences in the Amazon archives and thus infallibly orient my purchases [...]” (BAUMAN, LYON 2015, pp. 115-116).

¹⁶ It is within this framework that the so-called *nudge theory* has developed. The theory of the sting designed to improve the well-being of people through the underground manipulation of their decisions by means of what are defined as gentle (unconscious, underground) drives (solicitations). See THALER, SUSTEIN 2014. With regard to the Italian panorama, I refer to AMATO MANGIAMELI 2017a; 2017b; VIALE 2018.

¹⁷ See KUTZ 2013; VAN DIJCK 2014; DEUTSCH 2015; LYON 2018; BRUNTON, KUTZ 2019; A.C. AMATO MANGIAMELI 2022.

interaction between man and technology (where the parts are related but, in any case, distinct *man-technology*) in favor of a different relationship given by the integration of man with his own technological apparatuses.¹⁸ (where the related parts tend to become an indistinct whole *man+technology*)¹⁹. It must be said immediately that the integration between man and his apparatus (apparatuses) is the result of a fusion of planes (digital/real, online/offline), but, simultaneously, it is also the index of something deeper, as a spy of that increasingly symbiotic relationship that man develops with the apparatuses that accompany him in everyday life and that has been intensifying as the devices have evolved and have modified, both in functions and performance, as well as in structure and portability. Paradigmatic in this sense, is the transformation that over the years has affected the personal computer, which, from a tool designed to remain in a circumscribed place such as our desk (*desktop*) and that, also for this reason, remained outside the private and intimate aspects of existence, at first, it turned into an object suitable to be moved easily and to be placed on our lap (*laptop*) and, subsequently, it took on even more agile and functional features to accompany us constantly, so much so that it turned into a *wearable* device. And it is also to this different way of being and presenting the computer that we owe its growing proximity and its increasingly dense integration with our personal life. Obviously, this is an integration that does not

¹⁸ With regard to integration with our apparatuses, I refer to CAMPAGNOLI 2020a, particularly pp. 246-248.

¹⁹ It is obligatory to refer to the classic – but still significant and current – reflections of TURKLE 1995, 2011, 2015. Still on this point, please see: FLORIDI 2017, 2020; PACCAGNELLA 2020; CANTELMi, CARPINO 2021.

only concern the PC, but all the indispensable *devices* that, by now, accompany us in the execution of daily activities. An integration – this – that has not only practical implications, but that significantly conditions our behavior from various points of view. Not only – as is intuitive – in the mixing and compression of spaces and times (work and play, public and personal), but also with specific regard to the possible propensity to adopt dysfunctional behaviors, exactly as happens in the case of information pollution or communications disorders.

2. INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND... RELATIONSHIP

Against the background of the nodal aspects of the Web and the digital *habitat*, here quickly recalled, it is possible to reflect on information and, above all, on communication *on the Net*, taking care to underline the possible critical issues due to the migration from the analog dimension – in which *face-to-face* communication is the master – to the digital dimension – in which the interaction is mediated by the use of the *interface*.

As a preliminary point, it is useful to highlight a fundamental ambiguity, given by the fact that – probably also due to the wide use of the acronym ICT (*Information and Communication Technology*) – there is a tendency to put information and communication on the same level, proposing them as synonymic activities. It is no coincidence that in spoken language very often these terms are used in a completely undifferentiated way. It goes without saying that as long as this interchangeability remains confined to the linguistic level,

almost nothing happens. On the contrary, several questions can arise when – in adherence to a purely scientific-mathematical reading²⁰ – this interchangeability is also extended to the conceptual level, generating a possible debasement of the first (that is, of communication) in favor of the second (that is, of information). In this second case, clearly, what is at stake is not, neither the quantity of messages/data transmitted, nor less than ever the type of protocols/registers used, but the ontological value of communication, which – as Aristotle already warned – is intimately connected to the *logos* and that, for this reason, it embodies the activity most proper to the human being²¹. An activity that – contrary to what can be said with reference to information – cannot be entirely entrusted to artifacts and their many interfaces, unless we accept to incur a conceptual aporia and a progressive loss of value and meaning of communication itself.

If so, it is evident that it is not at all risky to argue that today – in the era in which natural and artificial plans and languages overlap and in which networks have become the main vectors of our interactions – communication needs more than ever to be restored to its original value and requires to a certain extent “saved” by the possible flattening with information. To move in this direction, however, it is essential to keep in mind that – beyond what may be the suitability to transmit any kind of message, a suitability that the act of communicating shares with that of informing and that can be

²⁰ I am thinking in particular of the studies of SHANNON e WEAVER (1983). Studies that, to some extent, refer to the much more illustrious contribution made to cybernetics by WIENER (1968; 1967).

²¹ ARISTOTELE 2016, I, 1253 a, 9-10.

replicated in a machine key – the authentic value of communication on which the Stagirite in *Metaphysics* emphasizes is inextricably connected to the anthropological dimension and, in particular, to that ontological relationality that characterizes man with respect to all other living beings.

In this perspective, it is very interesting to underline that the relational value of communication emerges clearly from a first etymological investigation. Suffice it to say that the word communication has its root in the Latin lemma *communicatio* which, literally, means “to set apart”, “to make someone else participate” in something that one owns (or that one knows). Endowed with the same root as the word community (*communitas*) and made by *com* (together) and *munia/munera* (gifts), communication alludes in itself to the possibility of pooling and sharing something. This meaning shines through well from the German formula *Mitteilung*, which immediately recalls the idea that communicating always means sharing something (a message, a content, a value). Hence, various hermeneutics: that of communication as *sharing of gifts*, that of the *gift of communication*, and, last but not least, that of communication as the creation of a context of sharing – the *communicative plexus* – within which each *speaker* is always an *interlocutor*. Partially different hermeneutics, but which in addition to not excluding themselves, are complementary, since – in fact – they all contribute to reaffirming the idea that communication in order to be able to effectively realize itself always requires the relationship and the continuous and reciprocal exchange with the other/others. Quite different from what, on the other hand, can be said about information, which can be drawn even in absolute solitude and without necessarily having to exchange between the sender and the recipient of the message.

Once the distinction between the action of informing (as a cold and non-participatory transmission of a content) and the action of communicating (as a relational participation of something with someone with whom one is called to interact) has been clarified and the essential link that binds the communicative dimension to the anthropological-relational one has been highlighted, it is necessary to reflect on the way in which an improper and/or not fully conscious use of ICT and new networks can negatively affect communication (demoted to information, or mere simulacrum of itself)²² and, consequently, also on interpersonal relationships²³.

It is important to reiterate immediately that, although they have been designed for the precise purpose of overcoming the limitations and difficulties typical of *face-to-face* interaction, social networks are (and remain) tools and, in particular, technological intermediation devices, which – just like any *medium* – stand between the speakers (and, more correctly, between the digitants)²⁴, risking not only to alter the anthropologically irreplaceable experience of the encounter with the other, but also to replace it with a substitute and counterfeit indirect perception. That is, with a perception that – as Byung-Chul Han

²² See IANNELLI 2011; MENDUINI, NENCIONI, PANOZZO 2011.

²³ On this point, in addition to the significant and best known reflection of TURKLE (2019), very interesting also the reconstructions of SPITZER (2017) e di LOVINK (2019).

²⁴ “Being digital [...] it means being what our fingers leak about us through the screen” (PRAVETTONI 2002, p. 46).

points out – in addition to not always being truthful, cannot be considered, neither dialogical nor relational²⁵.

In detail, online and on the various networks, the risk of losing the dialogicity and veracity of relationships is attributable to the mutual combination of some factors that we could define as structural.

1. First of all, it must be said that usually the various networks – instead of becoming a vehicle for that dialogue (in the sign and in respect of the *logos*) – tend more than anything else to encourage the use of disengaged and imaginative *role-play games*²⁶. Games and far-fetched masks, which however (and this is the problem!) have no connection with real roles²⁷. That is, with those fundamental roles of which Simmel was the first to be²⁸ and Mead²⁹ underlined the inevitable implications in the participation and development of social communication³⁰. As proof of the existence of a widespread incentive to camouflage, just remember the tenor of the welcome messages that welcome the user to his access to the platforms: from the friendly question that accompanies every entry on Facebook inviting to tell something about himself (*What are you thinking?*), to

²⁵ "The Internet does not manifest itself today as a space for shared and communicative action. Instead, it is reduced to a showcase of the self in which advertising is made above all to oneself [...]. Una *réclame* [che] non ascolta" (HAN 2017).

²⁶ TURKLE 1995.

²⁷ Roles that in the field of sociological studies – despite the variations and differences of the case – are usually divided into three broad categories: 1) the *primary or basic* roles (parent, child, brother / sister, grandfather / a, uncle / a); 2) *cultural* roles (Italian, European, Catholic, environmentalist, activist, affiliated to a certain party, etc.); 3) *social roles* (architect, professor, housewife, etc.).

²⁸ SIMMEL 1910, pp. 372-391.

²⁹ MEAD 1934.

³⁰ Still on the subject, the studies of MERTON (1949) e di LINTON (1936).

the exhortation that YouTube launches to its users to transmit a content that concerns them (*Broadcast yourself!*). Decidedly icastic incentives, which tend to translate into a winking *storytelling*³¹ and that contribute to feeding a casual and unbridled shopping between seductive profiles and increasingly functional to the image that from time to time (and access to access) you want to transmit. As Maldonado noted several years ago, online it is quite possible that: “an eighteen-year-old student [...] split for an old boxer at rest [...] a provincial lawyer [boasts] for a conductor [...] a married man [pass it off] as an inveterate bachelor [and even that] an Irish priest [let himself be believed] [...] a Brazilian prostitute”³². Hence, not only the origin of the very symptomatic and well-known formula according to which on the Net no one would ever know either who we really are or with whom we interact (*On the Net, nobody knows you are a dog!*), but also a widespread inclination not to perceive oneself as directly responsible for one’s words, actions and choices³³. For this reason, by failing (or in any case significantly reducing) those inhibitory brakes that normally distinguish offline behaviors, inappropriate attitudes and dysfunctional behaviors tend to be encouraged, which, in addition to assuming harmful tones and accents, can also become abusive and, in the most extreme cases, violent³⁴.

³¹ On this issue, see SALMON 2008.

³² MALDONADO 1997, p. 53.

³³ Based on the possible parallelism between the ring of Gige described by Platone in the *Repubblica* and the anonymity offered by the Net, referring to M.N. CAMPAGNOLI 2021, pp. 146-178.

³⁴ *Ex multis* vd.: G. ZICCARDI, *L’odio online. Violenza verbale e ossessioni in rete*, Milano, 2016; S. PASTA, *Razzismi 2.0. Analisi socioeducativa dell’odio online*, Brescia 2018; D.

2. Secondly, a very peculiar space is created online, defined as the space of *inter-reality*³⁵: a hybrid dimension, born from the interference between the real and the virtual, which contributes to favoring the replacement of traditional interpersonal relationships (absolutely concrete, well defined and circumscribed, tending to be complicated and potentially painful) with a plethora of fleeting and fluid contacts³⁶ (decidedly ephemeral interactions, usually not well defined or difficult to define, almost always disengaged, silly and playful, generally simplified and by nature complacent). It is no coincidence that it is customary to say that the Net and social networks increase the c.d. *bridging social capital*³⁷, identified by the set of weak ties: ephemeral contacts, made of few indications, easy to conquer and to increase at a numerical level, but from which very little can be expected in terms of effective proximity and relational proximity. Certainly, indicative is the considerable difference that is given between making and entertaining an offline friendship and the speed with which on the Web you win a friend or a follower with that same ease with which you grab a figurine. A figurine of which, however, very different from the real (F)riend, we know only some minimal and essential information, useful – as if that were not enough – not so much to understand something of the other/others with whom we interface, but more than anything else functional to understand if that profile with which the other presents itself can or

BUCKINGHAM, *Un manifesto per la media education*, trad. it., Milano 2020; S. PASTA, M. SANTERINI, *Nemmeno con un click. Ragazze e odio online*, Milano 2021.

³⁵ VAN KOKSWIJK 2003; RIVA 2009, pp. 3-7.

³⁶ Evident the reference to the famous theories of BAUMAN 2004; 2006.

³⁷ See PUTNAM 2004; WILLIAMS 2006, pp. 593-623; SOLZANO 2016.

may not be similar to ours (for declared localization, educational and/or professional career, gender, political preferences, inclinations, sporting interests, etc.)³⁸. It is enough to remember the genesis of Facebook – born to replace the old paper yearbook of Harvard University – so that these trends do not appear really strange and / or completely unexpected.

3. Another factor that contributes to decreasing the dialogicity and veracity of interactions is due to the fact that online the absence of physicality, and in particular the lack of all those meanings and those illocutory messages conveyed by the body³⁹, can easily undermine emotional literacy⁴⁰ and with this the *proximity to/from each other*⁴¹, i.e. *liability* (towards the other), the *commitment* (to the other), *attention* (to the other) and propensity to *listen (of the other)*. In short, all those elements that – according to Habermas – constitute the very lintel of *communicative action*⁴² and meaningful communication. This happens because *on The Net* what is lacking is precisely the authentically relational openness⁴³: openness that can only be realized if the

³⁸ PACCAGNELLA 2020, p. 174.

³⁹ These are messages and meanings that our mind perceives thanks to the so-called mirror neurons: bimodal neurons – both motor and perceptual – able to translate stimulations and visual information into as many internal representations that, in turn, can determine subsequent actions and/or reactions. See RIZZOLATTI, SENIGAGLIA 2006; IACOBINI 2008; CRAIGHERO 2017.

⁴⁰ Among the first and even more important studies on emotional intelligence, see SALOVEY, MAYER 1990, pp. 185-211; and GOLEMAN 1995. In addition, regarding the emotional illiteracy of digital natives, see GALIMBERTI 2007; PARSİ, CANTELIMI, ORLANDO Milano 2009.

⁴¹ With regard to proximity, BAUMAN 1993, pp. 91-98.

⁴² HABERMAS 2017.

⁴³ On dialogue – and in particular on the question – as the first form of openness to the other, the reference to the decisive reconstructions of GADAMER 1995.

subject lays down his own self-referential and solipsistic monadism and is willing to experience his own relationality and his own humanity, in the encounter *with the Other* and – to put it with Lévinas – thanks to the appearance of the *face of the Other*⁴⁴.

4. Last but not least, to reverberate negatively on the very meaning of communication, there is the fact that on the platforms – as Castells observed among the first⁴⁵ – tend to generate strong centripetal thrusts⁴⁶, that open the way to a new digital individualism, well represented by the formation of the so-called “bubbles”. The result of the alchemical combination of algorithms, which filter at will the reality (virtual and not) proposed ad hoc to the user, in detail, the bubbles build around each netsurfer (or netsurfers group) a context that reflects it very much: facilitating the preferential display of the contents that most interest him and, at the same time, obscuring the messages and unwanted information; proposing contacts with users with similar profiles and, simultaneously, allowing him to protect himself from interference and incursions of people not liked by him and/or unwanted, which can be promptly excluded, obscured, banned. Needless to say, within such “personalized” and “complacent” contexts they are more rewarding than – much more difficult to manage and sometimes even conflicting – real relationships. As for example above it is

⁴⁴ LÉVINAS 1980, pp. 92 ss.; 2002, p. 106.

⁴⁵ Impossible, not to remember what was said by CASTELLS (2002, pp. 130-131): “New technological developments seem to increase the chances of online individualism becoming the new dominant form of sociality”.

⁴⁶ On the advent and consequences related to the spread of virtual communities, the analysis and critical contributions of: GIDDENS 1990; RHEINGOLD 1993; BAUMAN 1993, p. 242; MALDONADO 1997.

almost intuitive that – precisely because of this greater ease of approach and management, as well as in consideration of the high degree of perceived satisfaction – network users tend to develop a whole series of possible dependencies⁴⁷ and/or pathological alterations of sociability⁴⁸, due to the fact that, sometimes, the return from online browsing to offline reality is perceived as too complex or even unacceptable, so as to induce to take refuge and hide in the Net⁴⁹ (clearly preferred and preferable to reality), exactly as it happens in the case of the well-known social isolation syndrome or *hikikomori*⁵⁰. A cardinal aspect of the virtual *habitat* and social media, the one just described, which, among other things, also highlights

⁴⁷ Among the main manifestations of the existence of a pathological addiction: a) cyberdependence (very similar to that created by the intake of alcohol or psychotropic substances) and the inability to control and limit the time spent online; b) multitasking, which, in the long run, increases the propensity to distraction and reduces the ability to store information; c) the phantom vibration syndrome that leads to obsessive and continuous control of the smartphone and / or tablet; d) digital insomnia, i.e. the alteration of circadian rhythms and the development of forms; e) digital depression, loss of interest in real life and any form of empathy towards others (SPITZER 2017 pp. 153-176 e pp. 279-290).

⁴⁸ See YOUNG 1999, pp. 19-31; BERNARDI, PALLANTI 2009, pp. 510-516; CANTELMINI 2014; MONTANO, VALZANIA 2018.

⁴⁹ To testify to the existence of a real “constant need for connection”, it is sufficient to remember that, often, the lack of access to the network can degenerate into the appearance of real disorders such as: a) the *nomofobia* (which stands for “no mobile phobia”) and indicates the fear of being left without a smartphone and without a mobile connection; b) the *fomo* (“fear of missing out”), that is, the fear of missing something, some news, some posts and – in short – of being “cut off” from what happens on the Net and on social media.

⁵⁰ Pathological situation that mainly involves adolescents, who come to reset all their social relationships, to lock themselves in the virtual reality of manga or some *community*. See, *inter alia*, RICCI 2017; CARESTA 2018.

the striking paradox of networks, which – contrary to what their own definition would have it, which, precisely, proposes them as "social" and therefore to some extent as linked and functional to socialization and sociality⁵¹ – tend to foster loneliness and produce new *screen hermits*⁵²: solipsistic monads that, now forgotten the relational communication, get lost in madly *chatting*⁵³, a chat⁵⁴ ephemeral and an end in itself.

3. ABOUT INFORMATION DISORDER

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness among scholars that *on The Net* not only can specific forms of digital pollution can be recorded – this is the case of *dis-informations* (of which fake news is the emblem), of *mis-informations* and of *mal-informations*⁵⁵ – but they

⁵¹ More than sociality, the new networks seem to favor that mere sociation, of which Simmel speaks: a form of sociability that is substantially playful and fluid, as the result of the free interdependence of individuals who interact with each other because they are moved solely by the desire to be together, without the need or to share further and precise purposes, nor to give life to associative bonds and constraints (SIMMEL 1997).

⁵² I recall here, and in part modify, the very effective expression (“mass hermits”) used by ANDERS (2008, p. 93).

⁵³ COLOMBO 2013, p. 138 ss.

⁵⁴ MALDONADO (1997, p. 53): “[...] gossip is considered as a futile, superficial and inconclusive way, and sometimes a little gossip, of dialoguing between people. This sense [...] is present in computer chatter. One can legitimately assume that its effects [...] may be devastating”.

⁵⁵ Dis-information are “information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country”; le mis-information represent “information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm”; than the mal-information are nothing else than “information that is based on reality, used to inflict

can easily develop even very dangerous alterations of the communicative eco-system that, in the most extreme and serious cases, result in specific criminal cases such as cyberbullying⁵⁶, the hate speech⁵⁷ or the revenge porn⁵⁸. As is evident, these are quite different phenomena, but which, from a certain point of view, have the same origin, since – *mutatis mutandis* – they all draw their start from the fact that the development of the Network has been marked by an increasing tendency to *dis-intermediation*. A process – that of dis-intermediation – which, on the one hand, has produced an appreciable expansion and a significant emancipation of freedom of expression, but, on the other hand, has favored a whole series of critical issues and issues caused precisely by the absence of a control and filter of messages and content placed online.

To acknowledge this passage is the same evolutionary process of the means of communication⁵⁹, marked, first, by the advent of

harm on a person, organization or country” (*Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making – Council of Europe Report DGI(2017)09*).

⁵⁶ For an in-depth analysis on the subject, see: GENTA, BRIGHI, GUARINI 2009; TONIONI 2014; COSLIN Milano 2012, pp. 129-32; SHARIFF Milano 2016; DANZI 2018; PENNETTA 2019.

⁵⁷ Please see, *ex multis*: PETRILLI 2019; CERQUOZZI 2018, pp. 42-53; SANTERINI 2019, pp. 51-67. Allow me, among others, to refer also to M.N. CAMPAGNOLI 2020c, pp. 1592-1618.

⁵⁸ For some comments on the new offence, I refer you to: CALETTI 2018, pp. 5-41; COTELLI 2019, pp. 1-17; MATTIA 2019, pp. 1-71; MEZZANOTTE 2020, pp. 1-11; SORGATO 2020, pp. 215-237.

⁵⁹ For an insight into the history and evolution of the media and the advent of social networks, see, *ex multis*: COLOMBO 2013; STELLA, RIVA, SCARCELLI, DRUSIAN 2014, pp. 6-7; BALBI, MAGAUDDA 2014; BENTIVEGNA 2014; RIVA 2016; VITTADINI 2017; POMETTI, TISSONI 2018; BISSACA, CERULO, SCARCELLI 2021.

traditional media, then, by that of the first digital media, subsequently, by the birth of the World Wide Web, and finally, by the development of social networks. A process, in which it cannot fail to be noticed that the element that, at first, has been reducing and that, then, over time, has almost completely disappeared is represented precisely by the intermediation operated by the so-called *gatekeepers*. Those controllers/guardians of information – typical especially of traditional media – who considerably limited the possibility of expression and access to news and different contents, but who also played an important role in guaranteeing and supervising information (verification of sources, control of correspondence between facts and narratives, guarantee of authoritativeness, protection of truthfulness).

In practice, with the dis-intermediation – whose peak has been reached precisely by the advent and growing diffusion of social media – we are witnessing a clear break between a “before” and an “after” in the history of information, given by the transition from vertical transmission (*one-to-many*) to horizontal circulation-sharing (*peer-to-peer*) of content among all users of the Network⁶⁰.

Obviously at first this change was greeted in a triumphalist and enthusiastic way, if only because it was perceived as a kind of return (or perhaps landing) to the most classic and noble participatory and democratic dynamics, typical of that ideal *polis* described in the *Funeral Oration* of Pericles⁶¹. A *polis* which was the very effigy of democracy and which identified an idyllic socio-political context,

⁶⁰ With regard to the scenarios opened up by the advent of new media, see the interesting reconstructions of SARACENI 2020, pp. 66-91; 2021, pp. 180-198.

⁶¹ TUCIDIDE 1985, I, p. 325.

characterized by the principles of *isonomy* (that is, by the equality of all before the law) and *isegoria* (i.e. freedom of opinion and expression exercised by anyone). It is precisely the extreme ease of access, the uncritical and unconditional openness, the apparently undifferentiated approach, the structural lack of boundaries and the total absence of hierarchies typical of the World Wide Web and social networks that have – at least initially – suggested the possibility of proceeding with such a parallelism between the new media and the model city of Pericles. A comparison – this – which, however, on closer analysis does not prove to be fully acceptable. If, in fact, on the one hand, it is actually possible to think that the new Networks – to a greater extent and with more ease than in other contexts – can finally realize that *marketplace of ideas* theorized by Milton⁶² and by Stuart Mill⁶³. That is, that free movement and that free exchange of opinions, which is the basis of the democratic processes proper to constitutional states, in which – as has also been

⁶² “[...] and now the time in special is, by privilege to write and speak what may help to the further discussing of matters in agitation. The temple of Janus, with his two controversial faces, might now not insignificantly be set open. And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing” (MILTON 1918, p. 58).

⁶³ “There is the greatest difference between presuming an opinion to be true, because, with every opportunity for contesting it, it has not been refuted, and assuming its truth for the purpose of not permitting its refutation. Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion, is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action; and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right”. “First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility” (MILL 1879, p. 36 ss.).

emphasized by Habermas – the truth can come forward only starting from public debate and only thanks to the free comparison of all the different positions⁶⁴. On the other hand, however, one cannot fail to notice the fact that these new media – despite being the result of the de-centralization and dis-intermediation of communication and information processes – still tend to generate a sort of re-coagulation and re-centralization of control in the hands of very few *Over The Top* (OTP): Google, as far as search engines are concerned; Facebook, with reference to social networks.

Hence, a whole series of possible risks related above all to the completeness and veracity of the information and content that circulate within the Network. The anachronism is given by the fact that that deluge of apparently free information – since in the abstract dis-intermediate – that reach us and that submerge us continuously is not always reliable, since in it the scientific and authoritative information alternates and merges with the fake, in an indistinct and indistinguishable way.

To give a minimum idea of the possible storm of disinformation that can be generated (and that is often generated) in the Network and in the eco-system of new media, it is sufficient to recall what happened during the Covid-19 pandemic and, in particular, in the early stages of the emergency. At that juncture, in fact, the medical epidemic was flanked by another epidemic – decidedly worrying and in any case dangerous – that of information and news, sometimes clearly false, sometimes simply altered, misunderstood, or hidden. Thus, we have

⁶⁴ HABERMAS 2009, p. 99 ss. and p. 105.

witnessed the spread of *infodemy*⁶⁵ that – despite not being in the least comparable in terms of dangerousness to the health one – has still proved to be very problematic, as with unreliable and/or completely mendacious news, it has contributed to feeding erroneous behavior and fomenting bizarre and conspiratorial hypotheses, as, moreover, happened in the case of the much talked about and then promptly banned as *Pandemic*⁶⁶.

Stated that the *habitat* of social and net – also because of the intrinsic complicity of anonymity favored by the screen⁶⁷ – it is almost never *sic et simpliciter* an agon of democracy but, often becomes a place of *digital parrhesia*⁶⁸, which can easily lend itself to information and communication distortions, it is useful to focus on one last aspect, given by the particular danger of which the information disorder is colored when it is not realized offline but on the Net. In fact, given that informational and communicative disorders can occur in any context, be it analog or digital, it is useful to highlight the reasons why, once they lurk in the folds of the Web and social networks,

⁶⁵ In truth, the notion of infodemy predates the Covid-19 pandemic, as it refers to the distortion of information (and the effect that such distortion can have) in emergency situations (MANFREDI 2015).

⁶⁶ Video, lasting twenty-six minutes, made by biochemist Judy Mikovits, which was published on social media on 04.05.2020 and which spread a whole series of falsehoods about COVID-19, including: the fact that wearing masks would be harmful, that in the water there are “healing microbes”, or, that the data on the number of infected and dead has been altered ad hoc to favor the control of the population (see SGHERZA 2020).

⁶⁷ Thus, “the perception of operating in a 'legal Wild West' [...] where ultimately everything would be allowed” (ZICCARDI 2017, p. 7; 2015).

⁶⁸ Given by the fact that anyone (even those who are not at all competent in the subject) considers themselves authorized to say anything and publish it on the Net. For this reason, there may be a situation in which the lie (of many) spreads and feeds itself with extreme ease (COLOMBO 2012, p. 209).

those same distortive behaviors take on a very particular harmfulness, becoming extremely difficult to stem and counteract. To make the eco-system of networks particularly fertile to the proliferation of these phenomena and, at the same time, to reduce the effectiveness of possible contrast strategies, are basically two factors. The first factor is that the relief of forgetfulness is lacking on the Web⁶⁹: any data tends to become ubiquitous⁷⁰ potentially eternal⁷¹, since it not only keeps active for an indefinite period of time but can re-emerge in a completely unexpected and uncontrolled way. The second factor, however, has to do with the fact that once they are entered into the Net the information and content acquire a volatility (or more properly an *itineracy*) of the very particular and that offline does not exist at all. In particular, online, messages, images, videos – and in general data – have the ability to migrate spontaneously and autonomously from platform to platform, moving to contexts that are also very different from those within which they are initially generated⁷². This is spontaneous migration – and *in nuce* very dangerous – which, as you can easily guess, tends to be fed and further favored by the autonomous action of algorithms⁷³.

⁶⁹ A.C. AMATO MANGIAMELI 2020, p. 119.

⁷⁰ On the fusion and confusion that is generated in the Net between past and present, the observations of VIRILIO 2000, in part. 118.

⁷¹ See ZICCARDI 2007.

⁷² GARDAGLIONE, GAL, ALVEZ, MARTINEZ 2015, p. 13 ss.

⁷³ Emblematic are the reflections of HARARI, an author who, first, spoke of datatism (as a new religion, form of power and / or technological dictatorship) and who, precisely with regard to the analysis of our data made by algorithms, observes that: “[...] today the Facebook algorithm is a judge of human personalities and inclinations even better than its own circle of friends, parents and spouses. [...] the algorithm [in fact, has] needs a set of

4. SOME CONCLUSIVE SUGGESTIONS

The intent of this contribution is certainly not to demonize the use of digital devices and access to platforms, which, very often, exactly as the recent pandemic emergency has shown us, is not only indisputably useful but can also prove indispensable and dutiful. The point (and the risk from which this contribution wants to warn) is another. As he forcefully pointed out Turkle⁷⁴, the problem is that – committed as we are to *askar*⁷⁵, *poke*⁷⁶ and *taggare*⁷⁷ continuously – we run the risk of distorting some actions and losing the meaning and value of some fundamental activities, first of all that of communicating.

only ten Likes to beat the predictions of work colleagues. [...] of seventy Likes to surpass the results provided by friends, [of] one hundred and fifty Likes to do better than family members and [of] three hundred Likes to defeat spouses!" (HARARI 2018, p. 415).

⁷⁴ TURKLE 2016.

⁷⁵ Neologism, this, which describes a widespread practice in adolescents enrolled in the social network Ask.fm namely to post a personal question – almost always anonymously – on the wall of one of the registered users. A mechanism, which can facilitate – and often facilitates – even the development of attitudes of an aggressive nature.

⁷⁶ Initially, on Facebook, the "poke" (literally a reminder) was used to ask a stranger for permission to access, temporarily, his profile to decide whether or not to insert it into his network of friends. Today, this practice has turned into the equivalent of a telephone ring made in speed and a friend to call his attention.

⁷⁷ That is, to attribute virtual labels, the "tags", precisely, to texts, audio, video, or images, to facilitate and extend their display.

Captivated by the white light of the technology effectively described by *Absorbed by light*⁷⁸ – installation that illustrates our relationship with digital tools and the growing disinterest in real relationships⁷⁹ – we risk being completely anesthetized and dehumanized by integration and symbiosis with our devices. Lulled by digital *cocooning* and the many interfaces, in practice, we risk losing the ability to manage the *vis-à-vis* relationship, losing the very sense of contact, communication and relationship with the other. A dimension that, as has been said, is indispensable as it is inextricably connected to our own humanity and that – precisely for this reason in the face of the continuous challenges and the many provocations of the *Digital Age* – must be recovered and defended.

A very suggestive indication in this sense comes to us from the Czech theologian and philosopher Tomáš Halík. Halík recounts that, one day, he received a letter from an agnostic, which explained to him his reasons in support of the non-existence of God. Among the many arguments, the agnostic adduced a personal, lapidary, absolute, unsettling one!

He argued that God could not exist because no God would ever let his beloved granddaughter die. Beyond the anecdote itself, to teach us something – especially in order to make correct use of

⁷⁸ Work that was presented at the Amsterdam Light Festival in 2018 (available online at the following link: <https://amsterdamlightfestival.com/en/artworks/absorbed-by-light>).

⁷⁹ The fulcrum of the depiction is a small group of people (*rectius* of statues), sitting on a bench, who, despite the contingent physical proximity, ignore each other, because they are enchanted – and in the proper sense “absorbed” – by the whitish light emanating from their devices. Certainly not accidental is also the possibility, offered to the passer-by / observer, to sit down and take part in the installation itself, experiencing firsthand that paradoxical simultaneity between presence and absence, participation and estrangement.

technological and social equipment and the restoration of a communication that even when it is digital must still remain relational – are the words of Halík:

“I never responded to that letter, and I don't know if it was out of cowardice, laziness, weakness, or hesitation of my own faith and theology, or I rightly thought that all the words in the world, at that stage, would only add wood to the fire, or sprinkle salt on wounds. If it weren't for the fact that I live so far away, maybe I would have gone to see him and shook his hand in mine. ‘Where was God when his granddaughter died? I don't know’ – I would have told him sincerely – ‘But now I would be happy if he could feel it in my hand, as he squeezes his’”⁸⁰.

The point is that – regardless of the medium and distance – proximity to the other must always be maintained and preserved. A proximity, which is not so much physical, but mainly emotional and to which Habermas refers when reflecting on the scope of communicative action⁸¹. Communication and relational contact with the other – as my interlocutor and person – are in fact essential values. For this reason, the use of technological equipment and their prodigious interactive channels must be seen as a support and an aid to overcoming distances, not already – as sometimes happens – as an alternative to the authentic relationship or, even worse, as a possible substitute. More specifically, communication – real and/or digital – must once again become an expression and vehicle of kindness.⁸² A kindness, which, mind you, has neither a merely formal character nor does it relate exclusively to courteous manners. The kindness to

⁸⁰ T. HALÍK 2020, pp. 109-110.

⁸¹ HABERMAS 2017.

⁸² COLOMBO 2020, in part. p. 107.

which one appeal and which must be preserved in all communications – regardless of the registers and methods that are used – is a substantial and ontological concept, which derives from the awareness of the common belonging to the *human gens*.

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