PART I

NET-ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL THEORY

Massimo Di Felice

*Net-Activism and Ecological Dimensions of Action on
Digital Networks: 20 Theses in Search of a Language*

Beyond the social action

As part of the sociological theory of action tradition, it is customary to divide the various theoretical orientations traditionally in two imaginary lines. The first one, based on the work of E. Durkheim (2007) comes to the American structural functionalism of T. Parsons (2010) interprets the social action as restricted under rules and binding institutional relations able to limit and guide their impacts and their geometries. The second line of interpretation, in contrast, describes the social action as teleological, the result of rational subject-actor option that selects and chooses obeying its own values and ideals.

The latter is related to the work of M. Weber (1961) and would influence much of the social theory of action, reaching condition the economic thought (consumer theory) and political thought, and its effect on the thinking of the theory of acting of J. Habermas (2012) and many other authors. In lines contrary to these two large matrices, we find the minority tradition proposal by V. Pareto (1984), which describes the social action as the result of an irrational act, neither ideological-political or rational and economic.

In more recent times, M. Callon Law (1992) and B. Latour (2012) develop an original and more complex representation of social action, resulting from emerging associations between actants of various kinds, able to aggregate and disaggregate around controversy. Following the theory of actor-network, it would be the responsibility of the cartographer observe, track and map the associations, revealing the complexity of the dynamics of the various aggregations and disaggregations that articulate this particular type of social.

The whole wide and diverse tradition, whose complexity can not be clearly summarized in a few lines of social action theory in the social sciences, including this one's theory of actor-network (TAR) is based on a common assumption that describes the act as the activity that takes place in a time and in a material, architectural spatialities and although opinionative, as in the case of TAR, in a material and aggregative geography. In other words, the social tradition of the studies, whether sociological or that of the actor-network theory, is presented as material and inserted into the ecology of actors that interact or aggregate as materials and various entities that interact with each other in a concrete spatiotemporal context and supposedly as such, real and composed of related entities.

The digitalization process, especially in its most recent dimensions, the social network, Internet of things and big data, seems to express a computerized dimension of action, not just only more material neither only relational or associative. The computerization of the things, of the people, of the environment and territory turns into bits and information the various entities, creating a change in the nature of the various substances and making them connectives, i.e., carriers of a relationship no aggregative or articulated by an act, but 'transubstantiative'.

The contemporary ecological cultures, the sustainability practices, the digital activism movements that marked the Arab Spring and the ongoing protests at all latitudes, through forms of conflict carried out by interactions with social networks, are the expressions of a new type of social action, no longer directed at external or only resulting practices caused by an informative or technical conditioning. We call such diverse and complex interactions with the term 'Net-Activism' which expresses not only the set of collaborative interactions that result from synergy between actors of various natures, but the common digital condition that precedes and fashion people, information circuits, devices, digital social networks and informative territoriality, presenting, according to this view, as the establishment of a new type of ecology (*eko-logos*) no more oppositional and separatist, but expanded and carrying a common substance that makes reticular and connective.

The characteristic element of this type of interaction is that this happens in a computerized ecological context, i.e. digitalized and connective, a complex and unprecedented ecological process, not just social and architectural, but expanded in bits and networks, configured as not only associative but also as a connective reticular interaction. Faced with this major change, it is necessary to rethink the idea of action beyond

its anthropomorphic and subjective dimensions and its sociological and aggregative explanations that would limit the action to the scope of the political and associative acting.

In search of a language

It is fundamental, therefore, seek a reputable language to describe the complexity of such interactions, which express a reticular connective dimension and an unprecedented dwelling condition, difficult to be expressed. I chose the synthetic form of small theses to begin to formulate a language that can approach the Atopic entanglement of net-activists interactions:

1. The forms of conflict spread in recent years in every region of the world are not only the expression of a new type of social conflict, but the result of a profound change in the dwelling condition characterized by the aggregation, by means of the various types of connectivity of individuals, connection devices, information flows, databases and territoriality.

2. This unique interaction is the result of widespread diffusion on the one hand, the mobile connection devices (tablets, smartphones, laptops, etc.) and forms of wi-fi connection (broadband, satellite, RFID2, etc.); the other, the proliferation of networks social and the Internet of things, which gave rise to a particular ecological connective way, not only social, able to connect in real time, people, devices, information, territories, data and all kinds of surface. Finally, the materialities produced by 3D printers that develop experimental forms of ecologies neither only digital or only material.

3. Such interactivity is the advent of connective and ecosystemic forms of dwelling that express a particular type of interaction, which links people, devices, information flows, databases and territoriality in a new type of reticular interaction, neither more expressible from the theoretical language of social developed by European positivists disciplines, nor distinguishable by the traditional anthropomorphic dimension of social and political relations.

4. The characteristics of such interactivities are determined by a new type of network action, no more expression of the activity

of a single subject-actor, not the result of a kind of movement of an actor toward the outside and the territory.

5. The various members that intervene and contribute to the achievement of an action on digital networks are therefore not only human subjects, but also all sets of devices, technologies, circuits, databases and all kinds of entity-actor that 'leaves trail' (Latour, 2012).

6. It is necessary to rethink, because the quality of the action expressed by the forms of activism in the network, given that it does not express only the act of a subject (is that an individual, group or movement), but the unpredictable outcome of the connection the various actants and human and non-human actors-network (Latour, 2012).

7. The network medium requires us to reconsider the characteristics of quality of interactions spread inside and to develop non-linear geometries, i.e., frontal or – directed towards the outside (A to B) – or reversed, i.e. from the outside to the inside (from B to A). The eco-systemic condition of dwelling in a network leads us to also dismiss the dialogical perspective (from A to B and B to A) while simplifying of the group and of the complex simultaneity of the 'a-directional' interactions in a network.

8. At the same time, we can not describe digital interactions just as the simple result of the aggregative dynamics and associations around controversy, that is, as an act of connection to other 'actants' (Latour, 2012). The complexity of interactions in connected networks is presented, therefore, as a greater complexity, marked by an informative dimension prior the interactions and establishing a particular connective dimension changing the same substance of the members.

9. The distinction between action and act (in the sense of the Greek αἰον, which emphasizes its spontaneous, impermanent size and its non-reproducibility) specifies the quality of network actions such as the emergence of a connective act (Di Felice, 2013) which represents the acting no more of the subject actor point of view, not the subject teleological – a result of a human rational strategy – but from the ecosystemic and connective characteristics of the reticular connective contexts.

10. The connective act sets up, then, as the expression of a communicative form of dwelling (Di Felice, 2009) unstable

and emerging, that reintroduces continuously through the intermittency of connective practices of interactions between various substances, the characteristics and dimensions of the dwelling condition.

11. More than part from the public sphere and from the opinionated and political dimension, the Net-Activism practices are the most evident expression of the emergence of a new ecological culture, no more subject-centric or technocentric but carrying a relational ontology (Heidegger, 1967) and a specific connective dimension that changes continuously form and meanings of the diverse realities connected informatively.

12. This connective act spreads, thus, out of social, i.e., out of the urban anthropomorphic dimension and out the Western politics itself as the bearer of a diverse interactive ecology which cannot be explained only through its communicative dimension, if for communication only understand the media-informative dimension of information exchange.

13. Surfaces thus an interactive ecology composed of a set of interactive and open ecosystems which can no longer be thought of as a holistic system or a coherent whole, but as intermittent succession of various connection levels.

14. The reticular ecosystems (Di Felice, 2011-2012), through the generation of unstable and non-durable regroupings, produce the constant resetting of each 'actant' (human and non-human) and of each substance of their ecological-interactive condition through the detachment from its originating equilibrium level caused by the assemblage of all the connective interactions.

15. The complexity of such interaction is visible in the ecology of the interactions of net-activist movements. In fact, the vast majority of those were born in the networks and from social networks, and even gaining visible forms in the streets, preserves its connective dimension, continually changing their strategies and structures, reconfiguring the goals themselves, finding new purposes and aggregative forms during dissemination of their actions. Earning, still, form from the dynamics of the information flows and from the heteronomical power of the connections, and not from a previous and strategic identity-ideological position.

16. Unlike the communicative action (Habermas, 2012), or the conceptual tradition of political action (which runs from Aristotle

to Hannah Arendt), the connective act expresses an ecological act, neither subject-centric or rational, but experimental, produced by the ecosystem interactions of a group of actors-network, which, when entering in a connectivity relationship, give life to a dwelling and a communicative-connective ecology.

17. As a result of connective interactions between individuals, devices, information flows, databases and territoriality, Net-Activism expresses a form of post-politics conflict (Di Felice and Lemos, 2014), which dwells not more the urban or identity spaces of the national public spheres of anthropomorphic identity, but the connective atopy, next to dimensions of an interactive cosmopolitics (Stengers, 2007).

18. Today we are witnessing the passage of anthropocentric political dimensions – organized through the saturated electoral forms of representation and based on the power management in its public-human mono-dimension – toward atopic interaction practices (Di Felice, 2009) expressing the formation of reticular and emerging dwelling conditions. Which, through connectivity dimensions, are moving, our dwelling conditions, from national and political States, towards the direction of the biosphere and meta-territorialities (Abruzzese, 2006) neither internal nor external to Gaia (Lovelock, 1979).

19. The impermanent and temporary character (Bey, 2001) of the connective act leads us to define the Net-Activism as the size of an act 'a- institutional' that takes shape developing aggregations and networks and that tends, after desegregation, to its own disappearance, thus replacing the political dimension of power by the ecosystem and interactive dimension proper of the living organisms and of the emerging forms of adaptation to the open contexts (Morin, 2011) and interactive contexts.

20. Networks and connective interactions mark the passage of an anthropomorphic, urban, public and political eco-dwelled dimension for a bio-interactive sphere, which expresses the change in the contemporary habitat of national states to Gaia, from the parliaments to the biosphere, from the subject to the networks.

Beyond the Observation

The perspective of those who study and research the digital dimensions and connective relations in networks is delimited not only by the assumption of a technical and methodological issues concerning how to observe and how to track the emerging interactive dynamics that characterize the action of the various actants in networks. To research the digital networks is only possible from a dwelling change, which makes us from external observers to connected members. The digital networks are not external surfaces or public architectures, contenders of an act between various entities, but interactive ecologies and, therefore, coordinating a trans-specific dwelling condition, that, altering the substances in a common informative dimension that not only obliges us to an interaction, but to the alteration of our condition and of our original substance.

This dwelling precondition develops a particular type of interaction not only aggregative and associative, but carrying a profound change that makes possible the occurrence intransitive of the connective interactions. Digital networks, more than expressions of social or associative dynamics, become, in this perspective, the expressions of a substantial dynamism that interest the very ecology of interactions, the substances of the various interacting members and the quality of the dynamics of their interactions. It is therefore appropriate to question, in the range of the ecologies in connective networks, not only the principle of uniformity of interaction dynamics (TAR), but the very not uniform nature of each connected substance.

The connective dimension of interactions in networks questions the opportunity to base the knowledge of its dynamics only through the practice of observing its changes and its visible becoming, as this option prevents the recognition of ecological and dwelling specifics that are established in the digital contexts. The Net-Activism of research should therefore not be limited to the study of the dynamics of interactions between entities or actants, but should aim for the narration of connective ecologies, whose conformation precedes its internal dynamics, but is not limited to these. The study of Net-Activism cannot be limited to the study of mapping networks or to practices the tracking of actants-actors.

As in front of a forest or an ocean, whose totality is unattainable and its diversities extend beyond the reach of the observation, the various

Net-Activism declinations cannot be understood, in their qualities, just by describing their specific and emerging practices of interaction, since they fail to achieve the complexity and qualitative features such intransitive action.

In the same way the study of maps, trajectories and mapping of the fleets that cross the waters of the oceans tell us nothing about the scale of to sail and to sink, reducing the ocean and seas to flat surface of navigation, which prevents us to achieve what acting is not: fear of waves up from storms, the tears of goodbye watering each port and the mysterious emergence of a whale that turns every sailor on a captain Ahab.

REFERENCES

ABRUZZESE, A. (2006). *Immaginari postdemocratici. Nuovi media, cyber-cultura e forme di potere*. Roma: Franco Angeli.

BEY, H. (2001). *TAZ: Zona Autônoma Temporária, anarquismo ontológico e terrorismo poético*. São Paulo: Editora Conrad.

DI FELICE, M. (2009). *Paisagens pós-urbanas: o fim da experiência urbana e as formas comunicativas do habitar*. São Paulo: Annablume.

DI FELICE, M. (2011-2012). Redes Sociais Digitais: Epistemologias reticulares e a crise do antropomorfismo social. *Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens – Analítica dos Novos Media*, 43-44.

DI FELICE, M. (2013). Ser redes: o formismo digital dos movimentos net-ativistas. *Revista MATRIZes*, 7(2).

DI FELICE, M. and LEMOS, R. (2014). *A vida em rede*. Campinas: Papirus 7 Mares.

DURKHEIM, É. (2007). *As Regras do Método Sociológico*, (3ª edição). São Paulo: Martins Fontes (orig. ed. 1895. *Les règles de la méthode sociologique.* Paris: Payot).

HABERMAS, J. (2012). *Teoria do agir comunicativo*. São Paulo: Martins fontes.

HEIDEGGER, M. (1967). *Sobre o humanismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro.

LATOUR, B. (1994). *Jamais fomos modernos*, (1ª ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Editora 34.

LATOUR, B. (2012). *Reagregando o social: uma introdução à teoria do Ator-Rede*. Salvador: Edufba.

LAW, J. (1992). Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity. *Systems Practice*, 5(4).

LOVELOCK, J. (1979). *Gaia: A New look at Life on Earth*. New York: Oxford University Press.

MORIN, E. (2011). *Introdução ao Pensamento Complexo*. Porto Alegre: Sulinas.

PARETO, V. (1984). *Manual de Economia Política. Col. Os Economistas,* 2 Volumes. São Paulo: Abril Cultural.

PARSONS, T. (2010). *A estrutura da ação social: um estudo de Teoria Social com especial referência a um grupo de autores europeus recentes,* vol I. São Paulo: Editora Vozes (orig. ed. 1937. *The structure of social action.* New York: MacGraw Hill).

STRENGERS, I. (2007). *Cosmopolitiche*. Roma: Sossella.

WEBER, M. (1961). *Economia e società*. Milano: Edizioni di Comunità.