

Editorial

The fine line between public and private

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Applications, such as Facebook, Instagram, a personal blog, impact on our way of experiencing the space, especially on the way we communicate through space. From this point of view, when we talk about youth cultures (but adult cultures are not so different), what is more clear is the need of a radical redefinition of what is traditionally mentioned as a “public space”, in relation to what on the contrary we think when we talk about private space (Ito, 2009).

This concept, in political philosophy from Annah Arendt to Habermas, has to do with the adult use of reason. This is to be able to access to a space of discussion in which each one is considered able to share their reasons with everyone else. The implications for science and politics are clear: in the first case, to share our own convictions in public space means to refer to a control device that is functional to their certification; in the second case, the public space is a democratic space within which anyone should be guaranteed in expressing their point of view. In this perspective, public space is both a right and a privilege: a right, in the logic of access and representation; a privilege, since having access to the debate developing in it is a symptom of election and recognition.

The appearance and the social diffusion of the environments of mediated communication on the Internet are modifying in depth the concept and the perception of public space. On the one hand, the access to public space is spreading out indefinitely; this is good for those who are sure we are living a new age of participation, theorising digital citizenship as a form of citizenship better than the traditional states (de Kerkhove & Tursi, 2006). On the other hand, the space of appearing also expands the possibility for anyone to make an opinion, to “be someone” on the Web (Granieri, 2005).

Beyond the critical analysis of these phenomena (having greater access does not imply an increase in participation; to be popular in the Web does not mean that one’s ideas can claim an absolute value - Colombo, 2011) are the resonances they produce. These are particularly interesting. We are referring, in particular, to the youngsters and to what we can evaluate as to their escape from the private: in their pages in the social network, everything seems destined to be public and to constitute a set of opportunities for the construction of one’s own self (Caron, Caronia, 2006). Many today seem to replace the pages of their diary with the bulletin board of their profile, and they seem to move outward that set of facts, emotions and values, which we would instead think we kept in the space of our own background, shared at most with the most trusted friends. The private becomes public and vice versa, with some hypotheses of interpretation interesting from the educational point of view (Tapscott & Williams, 2006; Boyd, 2007).

First, to take care of a public space such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok can be a curious way in which above all the youngsters claim their own private space. As the other spaces are still controlled by adults, online environments as spaces open only to the youngsters and in which adults are not accepted can be interesting for the youngsters themselves. From this point of view, Facebook is “like a bedroom with the doors closed” (Tapscott & Williams, 2008; 50).

Secondly, the social affirmation of the social network can be understood as a response to the loss of traditional gathering places of previous generations. Insofar as urban spaces are less secure and, above all, the perception of this insecurity leads to don’t let their children live in them, the frequenting of friends tends to pass through the Internet: so they leave the school afterwards the morning and see each other in Messenger in the afternoon. You don’t have to move from home, it’s cheaper than the telephone and, unlike it, it allows you to communicate simultaneously with the entire peers’ group.

Finally, social networking spaces are real socialisation environments. We learn the rules of social life, we define the status of the individual within the group and we play all the dynamics that are typical of the associated life: the chatter, trust, alliances and respect. Boyd (2007; 10) wrote several years ago: “When I ask teenagers why they entered MySpace, the answer is simple: “My friends are there!” Their explanation of what they do in there is even more vague: “I don’t know... I take a ride”. However, this vague answer is a clear message: the popularity of MySpace is deeply rooted in how it supports socialising among the existing groups of friends. Teenagers enter to stay in touch with their friends. The problem is that in the social network there are not only friends, and it is really very difficult to share their content only with some and not with everyone. The boundary between public and private is really very thin.

References

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