

Towards more open information : digital media as moral, civic and multicultural environments

Abstract

In the new information society, living in a global space, ideas, technologies, people, products are intended to move from one place to another, but remaining interconnected within an ambient where cultures increasingly more dynamic contact.

What emerges now is the need to enhance the identity, the differences between individuals and this is only possible through the comparison and exchange with the other, as an opportunity for learning and of encounter.

The development pervasive media influences and approaches our daily experience to the global world, understood as a space mediated, new, defined by relationships themselves, where they build the frames of our civilization.

It is precisely starting from the social and moral responsibility to which the media are called in a multicultural democratic society which would constitute a responsible information and quality as a foundation of democracy and a common good.

Introduction

The quality of information is a foundation of every democracy and a common good.

The significant digital transformation has accelerated production processes and the sharing of information and the possibility of cooperation, dialogue and comparison/clash between individuals.

The telematic networks and new languages are changing the social, economic and cultural context, causing an adjustment and/or loss in respect of new forms of communication and exchange of knowledge.

The theorist of communication Marshall McLuhan (1976) had somehow foretold the birth of a “global village”, inside which ideas, technologies, people, products are intended to move from one place to another, but they remain interconnected within an ambient where different cultures come into contact and influence each other.

Thus emerges the need for modern societies to enhance the identity and the differences between individuals; this is only possible through the comparison and exchange with others: this is an opportunity for learning and meeting, in conditions that are easily accessible and manageable[1] .

The problem of the “different from me” has been addressed by many cultures, through models of exclusion or different integration between justified by different cultural motivations and contextualized particular historical periods (Zanetti, 2002).

Generally the awareness of a multicultural reality has unfortunately led to formulating ethnocentric models and strategies, safeguarding their own culture and their identity and activating a mechanism of the negation of the other based on the concept of “diversity” [2] .

The globalisation of markets has also favored the formation of a network of relationships which created

fewer points of reference and safety in our life (Guidetti, 2009), generating a strong sense of fear, insecurity and a "liquid society" (Bauman, 2006, Appadurai, 2005).

The action of the media, that we can call "the media-action", can be understood as an act of demarcation (Silverstone, 2009) which defines national and linguistic borders to construct identity and relations on the basis of common interests and styles of life shared.

The media therefore has a central role in the constitution of a civic, social and moral spaces. New conditions are occurring: "medial pluralism" and the birth of "polyphonic cultures" inside the Media-polis [3].

The intercultural meeting in the online and offline environment, in the absence of education and intercultural-medial competences, creates social conflicts between peoples, greater distances and the impossibility of dialogue (Giaccardi, 2012).

Nowadays the means of communication, are the mirror of the diversity inherent in the European social fabric: they are not limited to reproducing diversity, but actively contribute to its proliferation (Silverstone, 2009).

It's very important nowadays to consider the study and the narration of intercultural journalism, media and ethnic minority, providing us with an alternative approach to our idea of (inter)culture.

Roidi (2001) writes that "the unpreparedness, joined to the presumption, represents the largest of the problems of journalist, after that of independence".

The fragility of journalism and its professional culture translates into a waiver with respect to the pedagogical role, understood as cultural counterpart and interpretive media are all called to play in the story of modern and multicultural society (Barbano, 2003).

Acceleration, fragmentation and dilation characterize online information and all this confused situation puts the role of the mediator of a professional journalist to the test.

The result is a production discursive emotionally engaging narrative but it's distorted and it generates strong boundaries in the social imagination legitimizing the distinction between "them" and "us", which is not useful guidance to develop policies of integration and active citizenship [4].

Open information means a more civic and moral medial space?

Journalism and information spaces must therefore be able to sustain, communicate and to accommodate this attempt at openness to diversity, recounting responsibly for a plural society through tools such as study and training, awareness of stereotypes and prejudices, opening to the newness and knowledge of the mechanisms of interpersonal communication and mass (Corti, 2016).

The intercultural position is not uncritical acceptance of diversity: Portera (1999) highlights the need to begin a common path, not so much based on the acceptance and respect of universalistic mold, but on the possibility of identifying the real points of difference and conflict, learning to manage the latter non-violently.

Nowadays the arena of the global media is fragmented, despotic, unjust and challenged but nevertheless; it “is the place where any structure that can be made to support the culture of globalisation, must necessarily be formed ” (Stevenson, 1999).

Contemporary society is still characterised by boundaries that are generators of conflict and confused reality: the admission of diversity and the capacity to make distinctions are the constituent elements of a new, solid and global ethic of communication [5] .

The media itself is part and fragment of this reality,; the Media-polis reflects and, together, generates the multicultural space, the “voices” of these different cultures are articulated so in the means of communication by creating a “Polyphony” (Silverstone, 2009).

The process of migration has accompanied the history of the human race and has always been characterized by movements of individuals, groups and cultures, triggered by changes of a political-economic, religious-environment.

The difference between political refugees and economic migrants, security and the enhancement of the difference, are aspects which feature in the European public debate and not only.

The consequences of the phenomenon of immigration are, however, well beyond the political agenda, in that it affects the nature and character of a national culture, seriously in discussion boundaries and identity [6].

The policies of the response to the phenomenon of migration are usually accompanied by problems whose etiology varies and are dealt with in a different way often, as already demonstrated the tragic episodes of 2005 in the Parisian “banlieus” or the attack on the London underground in the same year [7].

The recent terrorist attacks in Europe have certainly not helped to decrease the dangerous rhetoric of fears and threats, understandable if you think about living in an era of global terror, but they are counterproductive because it reproduces the logic of the difference, instead of overcoming it.

With respect to the mainstream system it is fundamental to note how the internet has an interactive and public-transparent nature and it is distinguished for its “hospitality” (Silverstone, 2009).

According Derrida (2002): *The hospitality is the culture itself and is not an ethic among others. To the extent that touches the ethos, i.e. the tabernacle, the be at-of-self, the place, the way we relate to himself and to others as to their own or to strangers, ethics is hospitality, is from part to part coextensive with the experience of hospitality, in whatever way the opens or limits.*

From the words of Derrida and from the equation proposed by him (ethical-hospitality), hospitality presents itself as a duty more than a law, an ethical principle that informs the world.

The means of communication of the minorities are taking on an increasingly important role within the new digital media environment and what distinguishes them, with respect to the mainstream , is their ability and willingness to please the community of reference and, at the same time, the prevailing culture will be essential for the public culture of the future [8].

Recognizing cultural differences also in medial space, implies hospitality and therefore an opening toward

the stranger, the willingness to extend time and spaces on the platforms of the dominant culture.

The duty of hospitality is ,for Silverstone (2009), the requirement necessary for building the Mediapolis and is the precondition of “justice medial” toward the stranger in terms of representation in the medial of the world: this prevents failure of communication and the production of inadequate clearance between people, cultures and news[9].

Foreigners therefore, irrespective of their origin, need to be received in the medial spaces worldwide also without the presence of others (in our space) there would be an *audience* who presents on ear to the voice of the other, so you could not understand the differences and their presence in our reality (O’Neil, 1990).

Seeing (with the media and through the media) the other, means to see themselves and be seen as foreigners: this is because extraneousness, paradoxically, is the condition of our membership, our culture, what nourishes our memory [10] .

The process of social integration among strangers, as always, oscillates between inclusion and repulsion, friendship and hostility, approval and marginalization, acceptance and rejection.

Beyond stereotypes and prejudices, migrant workers sometimes appear as a necessary resource for economic and demographic development, sometimes as a threat to national security (Calvanese, 2011).

Then rethinking new modes of representation of the phenomenon of migration to new languages and narrative techniques, integrating in the general storytelling, equires the ability to accommodate the “different”.

At the same time according to Marci (2017), this means to re-considering this issue in the light of a more extensive process that concerns all of us, not only as a member of the host countries, but also as the next guests to a global world that sees us, paradoxically, ever closer in a mutual estrangement, more sharers in a singular otherness, increasingly connected because foreign and (increasingly) foreigners in a space that weaves and connects our individual lives .

Therefore the theme of foreignness, of what we socially we perceive as “stranger”, assumes a particular value starting from the way the media reports the news, in particular historical contexts and social dimensions.

The recognition of the other and of a chancing social scenario is possible only through a critical attitude with regard to the representation of the latter, conveyed by means of communication; this depends, not only on the willingness and ability to assume this attitude, but it is also a question of care and (medial) hospitality .

The many uncertainties associated with the digital media era may require us to think about the normative implications of life with the media.

Conclusion

According to Bauman (1996) “it seems we need a whole new type of ethics. A tailor-made ethic of the enormous spatio-temporal distance in which we can act and act, even if we do not know it nor do we want

it “.

According to the British sociologist Couldry (2015), as in the network society, any ethics of the media and communication, “must be linked to a more general ethics of human life”.

Reconsidering the ethical and human dimension of communication is a necessary step; more than understanding how to behave and manage our emotions in the new media ecosystem, it is fundamental to follow three principles / virtues, which the philosopher Bernard Williams (2002) suggests and that each individual should follow and transform into contemporary media practices:

- 1) Precision: the ability to deploy resources and make sure that what we are communicating is clear and precise in order to encourage feedback;
- 2) Sincerity: being willing to say what you actually think, creating confrontation, active participation and criticism in social media;
- 3) Take care: to know how to “cure” the consequences of my communication; any circulated content can annoy or affect and it is necessary to be able to foresee this double effect.

To the latter concept, we could link that of “hospitality” expressed by the sociologist Silverstone (2009), understood as the “virtue on which to found the Mediapolis.

For Ricoeur (2001) it is also appropriate to speak of linguistic hospitality, a fundamental ethical disposition that involves ensuring that, when we write and speak, we maintain that “right distance”; it is possible to apply linguistic hospitality whenever individuals meet and what their territorial relations are.

This means that anyone involved in the communication-relational process must take into account the consequences of their communication.

In the new media society (transparent and inter-connected space), it is essential to learn to listen and respect within the digital environment, to activate that mutual recognition also through the medium, not to be crushed by the information overload and to face with responsibility and awareness of the current “toxicity” of the web.

The concepts of information and communication no longer coincide with their “old” meanings of sharing, cooperation, or transmitting a message, but the current communication and information flows are complex processes that are linked to a new idea of citizenship and digital education.

There is a need to educate on responsibility and communication to create open, inclusive and sustainable social systems.

Footnotes

[1] Bennet J. M. (2015), *Principi della comunicazione interculturale*, Franco Angeli, Milano

[2] Zanetti F. (2002), *Telematica e Intercultura. Le differenze culturali nelle contraddizioni del villaggio*

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[6] Husband C. (2000), The Media and the public sphere in Multiethnic Societies , Cottle in S. (Ed.), Ethnic Minorities and the Media , Open University Press, Buckingham

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[8] Christians Clifford (2000), An intellectual history of Media Ethics , in Pattyn B. (Ed.), Media Ethics: Opening Social Dialog , Peeters, Leuven

[9] Chouliakari L. (2006), The Spectatorship of Suffering , Sage, London

[10] Marci T. (2017), La società degli altri. Ripensare l'ospitalità, LeLettere, Firenze

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