

SOCIAL MEDIAS AND SOCIABILITY IN THE LATE MODERNITY

REDES E SOCIABILIDADES NA MODERNIDADE TARDIA

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Abstract

This brief essay aims to rescue part of the very diverse research agendas, oriented from the thematic trajectories “social medias” and “sociability”. These trajectories illustrate quite clearly the importance of this theoretical-methodological framework for the investigation of a wide range of issues in the contemporary social sciences. We are particularly interested in the construction of sociabilities mediated by the internet, from online communication platforms, in which it’s possible to establish social interactions with multiple actors, recovering conversation rooms, spaces of conviviality previously experienced in face-to-face interactions. They are, as we see in the approaches that stand out for their timeliness and because they are built from the Sociology of social medias, original. It’s an important example of the development of this increasingly relevant research agenda: the approach of human behaviors from the constitution of its reticular structure, but anchored from the mediation of the technology of virtual space.

Keywords: Social Networks. Modernity. Sociability.

Resumo

Este breve ensaio tem por objetivo resgatar parte das agendas de pesquisa bastante diversas, orientadas a partir das trajetórias temáticas “redes sociais” e “sociabilidade”. Essas trajetórias ilustram de forma bastante clara a importância deste recorte teórico-metodológico para a investigação de uma ampla gama de questões das ciências sociais contemporâneas. Interessanos, particularmente, a construção das sociabilidades mediadas pela internet, a partir de plataformas de comunicação on-line, nas quais é possível o estabelecimento de interações sociais com múltiplos atores, recuperando salas de conversa, espaços de convivialidade, antes experimentados nas interações face a face. São, como vemos nas abordagens que se destacam

por sua atualidade e porquanto construídas a partir da Sociologia das redes sociais, originais. É um exemplo importante do desenvolvimento dessa, cada vez mais relevante, agenda de pesquisa: a abordagem dos comportamentos humanos a partir da constituição da sua estrutura reticular, mas ancorada a partir da mediação da tecnologia do espaço virtual.

Palavras-chave: Redes Sociais. Modernidade. Sociabilidade.

INTRODUCTION

The proposal of this essay is oriented to, from a relatively broad thematic field, present the research agenda on social medias, which has been attracting the interest of various disciplinary spaces, with diverse theoretical-empirical cuts. The novelty of the analysis of social networks is, on the one hand, the updating of a central debate in the social sciences, which is the agency/structure dichotomy in the explanation of social phenomena, on the one hand, and the challenge of presenting a phenomenon whose central characteristics indicate a complexity and a plastic dimension, in motion, singular. An important fact to note, from the 1970s, with the introduction of various techniques for measuring social phenomena from reticular fields, the so-called “Analysis of Social Networks” gains a new impetus. Similarly, micro/meso/macro interdependencies are valued - including with complex measurement and visualization instruments.

It's presented as a rejection of sociological essentialism, in which the social phenomenon would have characteristics similar to those described by traditional science, with its canons inaugurated by Kant: that reality is organized, predictable; that phenomena have unique characteristics, distinct from all others, and therefore present themselves in the same way, regardless of their location or temporality. Now, those who dwell on the idea of network move from the field of analysis of society as organized by individuals and their study structured from the behaviors derived from their attributes, regardless of whether their determination would be from the individual, the structure, or both. What matters are the reticular fields, or, in Simmel's allegorical saying (1999) the “phenomenon of association” (*Vergesellschafteten*), arranged from multiple configurations derived from the sociabilities experienced by individuals in their daily interactions, although, still according to Simmel, capable of being organized, beyond the singular fact,

into broader analytical categories. Yes, therefore, it's possible to construct a scientific discourse that escapes solipsism. The being, the subject, is the result of the reticular fields that are established in his biography; it has its determination from life, from launching oneself into life, in moments of uncertainty, plasticity, but it's also anchored in more or less rigid structural determinations (social class, gender, race/color, among others).

Added to this point is another of equal importance: the innovative vision of the processes of social change, the incessant flow of events that structure the reticular processes, forcing analysts to reconsider any and all logic of analysis that is anchored in the predictable, in an order. Yes, it's true, there is expectation of normality, the interactive fields suggest more or less expected scripts of action, and broader fields of stability, such as trust in the other, these are not inventions. But it's not possible, for those who think of society as reticular processes, not to consider anything that is not inscribed in the idea of complex, multidetermined phenomena and, therefore, with sufficient plasticity and unpredictability for the avoidance of ordinary logic. It seems to us that there is an important epistemological shift in the academic community of this new century, dethroning or redefining old ways of thinking.

We intend in this brief essay to rescue parts of very diverse research agendas, oriented from the academic trajectories and research interest of their authors, which illustrate quite clearly the importance of this theoretical-methodological framework for the investigation of a wide range of issues of contemporary Social Sciences: media and cultural contexts, technological innovations, agriculture and globalization, migrations and sociability, organizations, health and sociology of science – this working the social processes underlying the construction of the disciplinary field of social networks. We are particularly interested in the construction of sociabilities mediated by the internet, from online communication platforms, in which it's possible to establish social interactions with multiple actors, recovering conversation rooms and spaces of conviviality, which were previously experienced in face-to-face interactions.

They are, as we see in the approaches that stand out for their timeliness and, also, because they are built from the Sociology of social networks, original. It's an important example of the development of this increasingly relevant research agenda:

the approach of human behaviors from the constitution of their reticular structure, but anchored from the mediation of the technology of virtual space.

***HOMO SOCIOLOGICUS*¹: BEING TOGETHER, TALKING, INTERACTING IN MODERN TIMES**

There has been a lot of discussion about what it means to be human. Humanity, since the beginning, has sought to construct representations about the meaning of existence, about the meaning of being together with the other. In this direction, everyone agrees that to be together means, in some way, to establish some kind of constituent bond, defining existence. And some also agree that the power of communication existing in various cultures establishes dialogical fields in which it's possible, from the verb, to establish an agreement on how to exist together and, eventually, to resolve any conflicts. Thus, what sociologists of some contemporary traditions often define as "sociability" indicates, in its essence, the attempt to understand the nature of the social. The social, in the context we are employing here, refers to what Simmel understands by its most essential nature, the content and form of social interactions, of sociabilities. In this way, still according to Simmel²:

I understand that the task of Sociology is the description and determination of the historical-psychological origins of those forms in which interactions take place between human beings. The totality of these interactions, originating from diverse impulses, directed to the most objective and the most diverse ends, constitutes society. We must also distinguish two senses for the expression "society". First, in a broader sense, it includes the sum of all the individuals involved in a reciprocal relationship, along with the interests that unite these interacting people; second, in a narrower sense, the expression society designates association as such, that is, the interaction, itself, which constitutes that between people, abstracting the material content; that is, the object of Sociology as a doctrine of society *strictu sensu* (Simmel, 1896, p. 167).

The conversational ingredient, in this case, is pretty clear. Naturally, communicative structures, although in their essence universal, present unique characteristics consonant with historical-civilizational and cultural moments. What happens, for example, in prehistoric societies is quite different from what happens in societies of late modernity; but they are, in their form, the same thing: ingredients

¹This is the title of an interesting essay by Ralph Dahrendorf (1973), *Homo Sociologicus*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul. Dahrendorf focuses his essay on the various social roles assumed, a position here put differently.

²We work on Simmel's Sociology on another occasion. See about it: Fontes (2015).

that nourish communication between people, language, which allows them to establish the social bond, insofar as they can build and share *Weltanschauungen* and, in this way, constitute themselves in unity (still in the German tradition, building a *Geist* characteristic of a people, of a civilization).

This article does not include the reconstitution or even comparative examples of modes of interaction between different civilizations; which, incidentally, although being the object of the Social Sciences (the attempt to construct universal, applicable explanatory models *ad aeternum*), so far incompletely achievable. Even the category *par excellence* that refers to the processes of change in general, time, an instrument that, if operationalized, could inscribe important marks for the understanding of social phenomena and their processes, is used precariously. In this direction, we cut our field of analysis for the processes of sociability experienced in modernity, with late modernity as a highlight. Modernity and time indicate characteristic processes, almost a key to understanding the forms of sociability existing for this period. Thus, according to Rosa (2019, p. 08) “modernization is not only a multifaceted process in time, but also, first and foremost, an extremely important structural and cultural transformation of the structures themselves and time horizons”; and the author also adds: “horizons and temporal structures are constitutive for orientations of action and for relations with oneself” (p. 10).

Indicative, for the case of the study of the processes of sociability experienced in modernity, is the effort of Habermas in the construction of a theory of speech, indicating that the foundations for the understanding of social phenomena should be sought in the way people communicate. What he did, with his linguistic turn, in an attempt to construct a theory of communicative action?³.

The project of modernity, according to Habermas, is not finished, only threatened. His most incisive diagnosis spreads throughout his work, since the classic Problems of legitimation in late capitalism⁴ until, later, in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity⁵. The promise, according to Habermas, begins in the eighteenth century, with the Enlightenment, with the idea that the human being,

³Consult about it, Habermas (1985).

⁴Habermas (1973).

⁵Habermas (1985a).

from reason, know nature and society to, from technique, provide the good life. Progress, as an ideal, is no longer a chimera; it's something possible and visible soon. Habermas further argues that even with the barbarism of the twentieth century, which, with its countless wars, annihilates some 100 million people⁶, one must not give up the promise of a future in which human potency is fully achievable.

But this modernity also brings numerous pitfalls, some already denounced much earlier, at the end of the nineteenth century, by European thinkers who lived the incredible experience of profound changes brought about by the expansion of industrial capitalism; among them Weber, who prophesied the dominion of reason over human wills and passions, transforming those who control people's lives, the members of the modern state, into “spiritless specialists”: the countless manipulation and increasingly invasive control, characteristics of modern times studied by various specialists, of various theoretical-methodological tendencies⁷. Habermas inscribed this threat in a concrete fact, in which instrumental reason colonized the world of life, subsuming it to the imperatives of money and power⁸.

The *zeitgeist* of modernity, a set of behaviors and practices of sociability constructed and experienced by Europeans (mainly in Germany, France and England) of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was widely discussed, thought and analyzed by philosophers, social scientists and literati. Modernity is completed at this time, consolidating social changes that have been sketched since the sixteenth century. Thus, the period of lights indicated not only the promise of progress, the consequent mastery of nature and the use of useful techniques for the good life, but also uncertainties: urbanization, industrialization, decline of traditional ways of life and challenges that were posed to people, with mentalities still inscribed in the rural, bucolic and relatively stable way of life.

⁶“*Les miroirs de l'actualité' et de l'histoire récente renvoient à l'homme de la fin du XXe siècle une image double et inquiétante: a la satisfaction de se voir maître de la nature à un degré jamais atteint jusqu'ici répond l'horreur de se savoir désormais aussi capable de la plus absolue inhumanité*” Habermas (1985:1).

⁷Here it's worth highlighting Marx's idea of alienation, and Foucault's idea of disciplinary society, among others.

⁸Here it's worth reading Simmel, in his work *Philosophy of Money*, indicating that the behaviors of distance, indifference and depersonalization of social relations were strongly influenced by the presence of the monetary economy. See: Simmel (2011).

In these discursive spaces, the one that associates the mental disorder with the social order is clearly identified. In contemporary social literature, for example, we can highlight a series of studies linked to the Chicago School, which seek to impute to the disorganization of the metropolises imbalances and neuroses of those who live there. Simmel's classic studies, such as "The Metropolis and the Mental Life"⁹, provoke the reflection of the researchers of the Chicago school. We thus have Wirth's (1938)¹⁰ equally classic text, which points out the implications of urban growth on people's behavior. Other studies follow, such as Mower's on urban ecology and mental disorders, Faris's on mental disorders in urban areas, Queen's on mental disorders and urban ecology, all published in Pierson's collection on human ecology.¹¹ In this same line of thought, Ehrenberg (1998) suggests a "*réajustement du Moi*", conforming it to urban modernity, of hectic life and intoxicating sensations.

More recently, researchers suggest that contemporary mental disorders may also be due to civilizational characteristics of this new century, distinct from those experienced by Freud and that gave rise to neuroses. Ehrenberg (1998) suggests a genealogy of suffering, in which neurosis arises cutting out the purely psychic injury, which originates in a traumatic event. These events, according to Ehrenberg, are typical of the "Evil of the Century", lived in sociabilities characteristic of Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. and the depression of late modernity.

Depression and melancholy, concepts already used in the early twentieth century, are resignified in this new century. Anchors such as guilt, disciplinarization and obedience, which make it impossible for subjects desiring full fulfillment, are now

⁹Simmel, Georg Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben". In: SIMMEL, Georg. Gesamtausgabe. Frankfurt: M. Suhrkamp. 1995. vol. 7. pp. 116-131 (there is a translation into Portuguese by Leopoldo Waisbort published in the magazine Mana - MANA 11(2):577-591, 2005, with free access from the electronic address <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/mana/v11n2/27459.pdf>. This study was originally published in 1903.

¹⁰Wirth, Louis. The urbanism as way of life. American Sociological Review, vol. 44, No 1, (Jul., 1938), pp. 1-24. Available in: http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~sozio/mitarbeiter/m19/content/dokumente/614/Wirth_1938.pdf. Acesso em: 17 mar. 2023.

¹¹Donald Pierson, American anthropologist, was a visiting professor at the University of São Paulo (*Universidade de São Paulo* - USP) and introduced community studies in Brazil. In 1945 he published an important collection on studies of human ecology. The edition we consulted (Pierson, Donald. Human Ecology Studies. São Paulo, Martins Fontes, 1970), contains the studies we cite on cities and mental health: Mowrer, Ernest. Faris and Dunham's ecological study of mental disorders (pp. 396-405); Robert Faris; Dunham, Warren. Mental disorders in urban areas (pp. 406-435); Queen, Stuart. Ecological study of mental disorders (pp. 436-450).

shifted to the demands of the performance of this new era: demands of performance at work, in sexual life, in friendship relationships, in short, performance as *Deus ex machina* of this new civilization. Thus, according to Ehrenberg (2012):

La dépression a joué un rôle d'entité clinique relais entre l'ancien monde de la psychiatrie et de la folie et le nouveau monde de la santé mentale et de la souffrance psychique. Elle a accompagné, au cours de la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle, le déplacement de la discipline à l'autonomie en prenant progressivement la place de la névrose freudienne, cette pathologie de la culpabilité, pour devenir l'ombre de l'individu normé par l'autonomie. Dans un style d'existence organisé par la discipline traditionnelle, la question qui se posait à chacun était de type « névrotique » : que m'est-il permis de faire ? quand la référence à l'autonomie domine les esprits, quand l'idée que chacun peut devenir quelqu'un par lui-même en progressant de sa propre initiative devient un idéal inséré dans nos usages quotidiens, la question est de type « dépressive » : suis-je capable de le faire? la culpabilité névrotique n'a évidemment disparu, elle a pris la forme de l'insuffisance dépressive (p. 12).

Tiredness society¹², or self-fatigue, are expressions now constructed to describe this society of performance, of the neurotic pursuit of narcissistic pleasure, in which anything goes to ensure well-being, including the use of psychic aspirin¹³.

All these issues were discussed before the great technological turn provoked by the internet, which emerged at the end of the twentieth century, and deepened its effects on people's sociabilities, from the first decade of the 21st century. Questions that are impossible to think about are now posed as a result of the impact of this new technology on people's sociabilities. But are they really new? Or simply something already existing, with a new look?

INTERNET-MEDIATED SOCIABILITY PRACTICES: WHAT'S NEW?

¹²This is the interesting title of the book of Byung-Chul Han (*Müdigkeitgesellschaft*, Berlin, Matthes & Seitz, 2013), which presents the thought-provoking thesis about modern times: "die psychischen Erkrankungen der Leistungsgesellschaft sind gerade die pathologischen Manifestationen dieser paradoxen Freiheit" (p. 25).

¹³Expression of Ehrenberg (1998) which comments on a trend of the medicalization of life, the construction of the society of well-being. Thus, according to the author, "on passe des médicaments pour malades aux médicaments pour gens normaux en difficulté, puis aux médicaments pour faciliter la vie chez les gens en état normal... le rôle des drogues psychotropes est de rendre à ces patients la joie de vivre, à laquelle justement la vie moderne et les progrès de la technicité ne cessent de s'attaquer" (p. 109). Thus, a second revolution - the first with the discovery of chemical straitjackets, neuroleptics, enabling the stabilization of psychosis - with the discovery of fluoxetine, in the 1980s, a drug of the class of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, begins a new era, that of the adaptation of the psyche to the demands of the performance and happiness of the world in late modernity.

The changes brought about by the advent of the internet are not yet clearly explained by social scientists. There are controversies about its effects (negative and positive) on sociability practices, mainly, but also about the changes resulting from what has been commonly called globalization¹⁴. There is, in fact, the recent incorporation of this new technology - practically from the 80s of the last century - which means that it's a phenomenon still in consolidation; on the other hand, it must also be considered that the social processes resulting from this new technology are frequently updated, due to the fact that computer technologies are constantly changing. The pace and speed of social change has increased considerably since the introduction of internet-mediated communication technologies. Its effects, as we know, extend to the entire sphere of sociability practices: economic, cultural, ways of life; the extent of the phenomenon increasingly broadens the spectrum of reach: we can even say that the impact of this new technology affects practically the entire planet, with the exception of a few isolated peoples or regions where the level of development is very low¹⁵. With this, we do not want to say that the digital divide is not important - and that it does exist, even in areas where access to the internet is wide - but that the world is globalized: the importance of the influences of the WWW on people's daily lives, even among those who do not have full access to the network, is undeniable: the importance of the influences of the WWW on people's daily lives, even among those who do not have full access to the network, is undeniable¹⁶.

The changes are significant, but we do not agree that we are in a new phase of civilization. Contrary to those who think of a phase after modernity, we endorse the thesis of Habermas (1985) when he affirms that modernity and its promises are still the reference for the world of the twenty-first century. Habermas, when he wrote this important book, in dialogue with the philosophers of postmodernity, perhaps did not imagine the profound changes that societies - especially Europe and the United States of America - would go through. But even so, considering that reason and its pathologies perhaps show us a different picture from that "optimistically" defended

¹⁴Some authors, especially those of French influence, have called this phenomenon globalization. Although they point out differences between the two expressions, I believe that they refer to the same phenomenon.

¹⁵We are talking here about the Amazon, regions of Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

¹⁶The literature on the subject is vast. Consult, for example: Han (2019).

by the philosophers of lights, the changes do not indicate completely different directions from those initiated with the *Renaissance* and modernity.

Similarly, and now considering the effects of the internet revolution on sociabilities, interaction practices, and the reticular constructions of individual biographies, I believe that, at its core, the phenomenon is of the same nature. From direct conversation, via face-to-face interactions, to those mediated by the internet, through its applications, the nature of the networks, observed from their morphology, their dynamics, and also from their structural cut, seems to show the same characteristics; which allows us to affirm that those conditions of position of the actor in the network indicate particular characteristics of access to resources: communication, support, material or symbolic goods, et cetera; that, consequently, we can consider that the considerations about the nature of the network extracted from studies of egocentric networks, in face-to-face interaction, for the study of networks mediated by the internet, are valid. Of course, some ingredients can be added, which are particular to internet-mediated networks.

To consider that the phenomenon is the same does not mean to admit that its manifestations are identical. There are, in fact, some ingredients that are particular to those in which the mediation of the applications is present. With this, I believe, we try to show that, for the analysis of networks, some ingredients are present in every reticular structure and others are particular according to the practice of dominant interaction according to the civilizing periods.

1. Self-centered networks in face-to-face interactions

The most frequent and universal way of constructing reticular structures is based on egocentered networks constructed from face-to-face interaction. They are structured with origin in the trajectories of everyday experiences, inscribed in the interactive fields of the social circles of the actors. These fields of sociability and the practices of interaction, however, are not uniform, both in their content and, equally, in their form. Self-centered social networks can be classified, initially, into networks of strong ties and networks of weak ties. The distribution of these networks is a function of the complexity of the social, which segments and distributes them in

specialized social spaces. Thus, individuals build their social circles, in their increasingly specialized reticular trajectories, as the division of labor increases and the transition from person to individual is completed. Now, in modernity, it's no longer the person, with integrated and fully recognized constructions of roles; they are individuals, with fragmented social interactions and inscribed in various fields of sociability, most often not communicating with each other. Individuals have, of course, greater possibilities of constructing the "I" and locate the practices of sociability in defined, segmented social circles. Thus, according to Simmel:

The individual sees himself first in an environment that, in relation to his individuality, chains his destiny and imposes on him the life closely linked to those who at the time of his birth are together... But as evolution happens, each individual weaves the bonds with people situated outside the first circle of association, who this time have a relationship anchored objectively on dispositions, inclinations, activities, et cetera. Association as a function of an external coexistence is replaced more and more by an association founded on relations of content... Geographical and physiological belonging, determined by the terminus a quo, is replaced here in a more radical way by the synthesis from the point of view of purpose, internal and objective interests, by individual interest. (Simmel, 1999: p. 408).

These networks also present other particular characteristics according to the historical moment considered. Thus, for example, in modernity, there is the tendency, as we saw above, of the formation of the individual, with more singularized reticular trajectories, characteristics of the passage from the person to the individual¹⁷; which implies more specific reticular constructions, with the predominance of weak ties and more singular contacts, resulting from choices of biographical trajectories. Thus, positions in the social structure, network design and reticular patterns increasingly resulting from choices are the characteristics of modernity, typical of the formation of the individual. As a result, there are a number of important consequences: patterns of resource mobilization, predominance of nodes subsumed to specific and specific interests, with the consequent absence of more lasting social bonds¹⁸.

¹⁷Some authors as Klinger (2021), they add another classification, with the introduction of the idea of the passage of the *individuum* for the *singulum* (*vom Subjekt über das Individuum zum Singulum*), with the emergence of post-modernity or late modernity.

¹⁸Some believe that the consequences of these sociabilities have very strong impacts on people's emotional well-being: social isolation, absence of consistent normative and moral references and fraying of the bonds of solidarity. Others, in turn, believe that the substratum of freedom of choice, the breaking of oppressive social bonds and the possibility of constructing biographical trajectories free from constraints of social control are important achievements that should not be neglected.

These questions were discussed in profusion by the literature of the Social Sciences, and explored by the novelists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Let us now focus on the phenomenon of social networks mediated by the internet, briefly exploring some points and aiming to demonstrate our central thesis: that, fundamentally, people's sociabilities do not change substantially with the emergence of this new communication technology; that, equally, numerous unique features are added, which we shall also try to highlight, although still quite provisionally.

2. Primary sociabilities and secondary sociabilities in internet mediated social medias.

In 1996 Manuel Castells launched a work with an ambitious pretension: to unveil the mechanisms of a new world order, triggered by the computer revolution. Under the broad title *The Informational Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, the three volumes of this important publication had as their central hypothesis, already launched in its introduction, the idea that “our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the Self” (Castells, 1996a, p. 03). Later, he introduces another fundamental ingredient: that the structuring processes of space/time of this new era are fundamentally modified, transforming them from originally fixed and relatively stable, to something loose, unstable and in constant motion. Thus, according to Castells, in this new form of social organization, “space organizes time in the society of networks” (p. 377), thus structuring a space of flows:

Flow space is the material organization of social time-sharing practices that work through flows. By flows, I mean purposeful, repetitive and programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions maintained by social actors in the economic, political and symbolic structures of society. Dominant social practices are those that are embedded in dominant social structures. By dominant structures, I mean the arrangements of organizations and institutions, whose internal logic plays a strangled role in the formation of social practices and social consciousness for society at large (p. 412).

Also according to Castells, the material supports for the construction of this society of flows are given from three points: (a) circuits of electronic impulses; (b) nodes and hubs; (c) spatial organization of the ruling elites and the articulation of economic practices in globally integrated spaces. They are the foundations for the

new society, global and local¹⁹, thus constituting an unprecedented revolution in increasingly integrated capitalism, disorganizing the borders of nation-states and deconstructing the previously traditional identity structures, whose most prominent examples are the categories of class and nation.

The nineties of the last century was the beginning of a process that has accelerated greatly since then. Castells's ideas, quite thought-provoking, did not say much, however, about the sociabilities of everyday life, about the ordinary life of people. Even in the second volume of his trilogy, which deals with issues related more to the subject and people, the angle is directed to the great identity questions that, while important, said little about how the internet and the computer revolution would later significantly influence the world of egocentric networks. Restricted fields of sociability, organized from the biographical trajectories, in which until then the existence of contacts mediated by technology²⁰, though it existed, it did not reach the enormous dimension of what was to follow.

The internet would emerge as a revolutionary tool of communicative processes only from the end of the twentieth century. Barry Wellman and his research group at the University of Toronto sought the answer to the following question: “Can people find community online in the internet? Can relationships between people who never see, smell or hear each other be supportive and intimate?”²¹

This is a question that researchers asked on a recurring basis, about the threats of this new technology in the construction of people's sociability trajectories. Is it possible that the use of the internet as a media of social interactions - given its potency and extent - interferes with territorially anchored sociabilities, from face-to-face interactions? What are the effects of this new technology on the (socio-affective) balance of individuals?

¹⁹The term globalization has been adopted almost widely among social scientists.

²⁰The post office, the telephone, the fax, very important for each era of modern times, would be seconded with the appearance of the internet.

²¹WELLMAN, Barry. GULIA, Milena. *Net wurfers don't ride alone: Virtual communities as communities*. In: Kollok, Peter (et alli). *Communities and CyberSpace*. New York, Routledge, 1999.

In the 1990s, there was an important debate in the United States of America about the decline of community, the main source of grassroots democracy that has been since the days of Tocqueville²², it was the hallmark of American democracy.

It should be noted, at this moment, that this phenomenon, being relatively new, presented among the analysts divided scenarios: either very optimistic, or catastrophically negative. Without intending to be extensive in this bibliographic review, it suffices, for example, to note two interesting examples about the effects of the internet on everyday sociabilities, in the construction of community bonds, or the effects on the construction of the public sphere. For an important current of American political scientists, the community bond, the belonging to territorial ties, was the “glue” that united individuals, that led them to the public sphere to deliberate and, together, build a society, whose common interests were the dominant keynote. This phenomenon, celebrated and stimulated by politicians and social scientists, is suddenly threatened by the recent transformations of American society, which caused the loss of community ties essential to maintaining the political health of the American people. Robert Putnam published, in the late 1990s, an important book, whose suggestive title is *Bowling Alone*, and indicated that community associative practices were in decline and that, therefore, the vigor of the public sphere was threatened. The disintegration of community ties is the result of a number of factors, but Putnam points to indices that indicate deterritorialization, dominant construction of secondary ties, and internet-mediated interactions in increasing importance. It’s, according to him, a phenomenon that erodes institutions in an important way²³.

The debate is not unanimous. There are other authors, for example, who indicate the possibility of constructing a “digital agora”. Pierre Lévy, for example, constructs the concept of collective intelligence, in which, from the free flow of communication, people express their opinions outside in an egalitarian way, thus avoiding the predominance of one over the other. With this, the power of democracy is effectively

²²Tocqueville, Alexis. *A democracia na América*. São Paulo, Edipro, 2019.

²³Communitarianism, or the strength of communities as a social cement, is a well-worked theme in American literature. On the subject, see: Wuthnow (1998).

increased, allowing the flow of debates and the circulation of ideas without precedent. This idea, of cyberculture, provides a very optimistic vision of the future²⁴.

Recently, with the social movements of 2013 - and the intense use of social networks mediated by the internet - the utopia of a symmetrical and horizontal network (basically, Lévy's idea) was revived, with the participants of the Madrid Assemblies, in which political agendas were launched for debate and voting from the Twitter platform. The construction of the digital agora was tried, in a future still full of uncertainties²⁵.

Another field of inquiry that was vigorously constructed in the late twentieth century refers to the attempt to understand the nature of social interactions mediated by the internet. The first studies were not yet aware of the impact of the Internet 2.0²⁶ and the emergence of social networks mediated by the internet. At first, it was still about the possibility of communication between two people, from electronic mail or virtual calls. In essence, the replacement of telephone media by digital media. Or the information possibilities offered by search engines (Google, Yahoo, among others). Basically, the idea was that the territorial anchor was not exclusive to social interaction oriented to strong ties, but that it was possible, from digital media, to build and nurture these bonds. Wellman and his research lab at the University of Toronto have produced numerous studies on so-called virtual communities and the power of the internet to bring people together. And his central hypothesis was recently revived in a 2014 publication: “technology does not determine human behavior; humans determine how technologies are used” (Wellman, 2014, p. IX).

Thus, according to Wellman's analysis, the orientations and format of social interactions in networks are basically those existing in virtual interactions: there is the presence of strong ties, weak ties, occasional and other permanent interactions. It's not possible to affirm the existence of a space of sociability parallel to the real

²⁴See: Levy (1997, 1994, 2002).

²⁵There is extensive literature on the subject. For the Brazilian case, see: Ferreira; Fontes (2013).

²⁶Internet 2.0 refers to a second moment, initiated from the first decade of the 21th century, when there was the introduction of platforms that enabled group interaction, the social medias: Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, among others.

world, as some writings of scientific dissemination or even the fiction of Hollywood films would have us believe.

It should be added, however, that overly optimistic utopias do not seem to be confirmed. Topics such as unrestricted access to information, the possibility of horizontality among network members and, consequently, the existence of democratic mechanisms for opinion formation, seem to be contradicted by recent studies.

But the most scathing criticism that can be made of new technologies concerns the control of information by private groups, with almost absolute absence of the authority of the State and, in this way, the dismissal of civil society and the political sphere over the domain of public actions. At the beginning of the computer revolution, with globalization, there were a number of studies showing the decadence of national states in the control of territories and, in this way, their weakening as an important actor in the regulation of the economic sphere²⁷. Now, with the development of the internet and its communication tools, something apparently more serious emerges: the fact that large companies that operate in communicative processes control impressive volumes of information about people, governments and companies. And this phenomenon is quite recent²⁸, drawing researchers' attention to a new phenomenon: surveillance capitalism, which is thus defined by Zuboff (2020, s/p):

1. A new economic order that claims human experience as a free raw material for covert business practices of extraction, forecasting, and sales;
2. An economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavior modification;
3. A disastrous mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge and power unprecedented in the history of mankind;
4. Structure that serves as the basis for the surveillance economy;
5. A threat as significant to human nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;
6. The origin of a new instrumental power that claims dominance over society and presents surprising challenges for market democracy;
7. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty;
8. An expropriation of critical human rights that can best be understood as a coup from above: a dismissal of the sovereignty of individuals (emphasis added).

²⁷The fact, for example, that the regulation on the circulation of capital is quite fragile, which makes it possible for currencies and exchanges to speculatively attack.

²⁸Research indicates that this phenomenon becomes more relevant only from the beginning of the second decade of this century.

Zuboff's book has something catastrophic and certainly many of the things he claims still need further study. But the fact is that there have constantly been indications that the internet revolution has quite nefarious effects on a number of facets of this new world order, in which certainly the ideals of liberalism - of the sovereignty of the individual, of the existence of states that act on the social order for the defense of public interests and, mainly, from a logic of protection of rights - they are a dead letter; that, even more, the ideals of a more just social logic, the banner of socialists of all shades, are confronted by an increasingly unequal and exclusionary world, in which, certainly, the background of these new technologies is the essential support.

And what draws our attention, in another aspect of studies, is that this immeasurable volume of information extracted from individuals, which they deposit uninterruptedly in the databases of those who control the internet - Google, Apple, Twitter, Meta²⁹ -, it's manipulated to organize the wills of the companies that use this information to sell, and also to form opinions. Seaver, in a thought-provoking article³⁰, brings important questions to the understanding of what he calls "algorithmic recommendation systems", a technique of manipulating data with information obtained by users of the various internet platforms that we access every day. Thus, when we search for something on Google, when we have fun on Facebook or when we browse Twitter, we leave there traces (about what we search, about the people we interact, about the news or the subjects we read, about what we buy...) that are then retrieved by data mining software; this data, after being processed and organized by algorithms, is returned to those who use the web to direct them to other sites of interest, thus recommending, for example, movies on Netflix or music on Spotify, winning the loyalty of customers who subscribe to the services of these streaming platforms. Or, in another direction, they direct web users to companies that sell things, in a subtle, calculated

²⁹Meta is a business conglomerate that brings together companies, such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Twitter was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Noah Glass and acquired, in April of 2022, by the billionaire Elon Musk.

³⁰Seaver, Nick. *Algoritmos cativantes: sistemas de recomendação como armadilhas*. Disponível em: <https://blogdolabemus.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Algoritmos-cativantes-Sistemas-recomendados-como-armadilhas.pdf>. Acesso em: 19 abr. 2022.

and planned marketing according to principles extracted from studies on human behavior, directed by psychologists and other experts³¹.

In another direction, equally complex and not yet fully understood, is the use of this big data, manipulated from algorithms, for the formation of political opinion, directing selected information and facts - sometimes manipulated, which later came to be known as fake news. Researchers indicate that recent occurrences, such as the Brexit referendum³² and the United States presidential campaigns³³ and from Brasil³⁴, were supported by the intense use of social media platforms mediated by the internet and the manipulation of information from the use of algorithms built, especially for this purpose.

The scenario, as we have noticed, is still full of unresolved issues, but there is an important research agenda, and the search for new tools for data extraction is necessary. It's no longer possible, for example, to think about the idea of the public sphere from the traditional practices of debate in print and the free discussion of people in face-to-face forums. From the cafes of the early Modern Age to debates and rallies, sociability practices remain the same, but now profoundly shaped by new techniques and means of communication. Similarly, the recommendation about a movie, a book or even a food is no longer given from the people in our social circle. The algorithms and the traps of the network imprison us in a universe of consumption, of formation of tastes and opinions. There is still no certainty about the real power of these new techniques, but they are certainly present and pose new challenges.

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³¹The author, who is an anthropologist, offers us an interesting analogy between these techniques and those developed by hunters in the construction of traps. They are systems that serve to "hook", in this case, people: "a tendency among the manufacturers of these systems to describe their purpose as 'hooking' people - enticing them for frequent or long-lasting use".

³²Consult on the subject: Del Vicario (2017), Mancosu (2019).

³³According to Howard (2018).

³⁴According to Salles (2019).

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