Presentation

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" Snow White's stepmother asked her magic mirror. This spell seems to have become resignified in the magic mirror of the computer screen, this lens that sees us and lets us see everything, better and farther than we could ever have imagined 20 years ago. The internet was created in 1969, but it only began to spread into the general population two decades ago. Since the mid-1990s, we live in a world where interpersonal relationships are increasingly digitally intermediated. Smartphones, tablets and laptops have become everyday equipment in the lives of people who use them to work, socialize, flirt, and to create loving and political relationships.

The spread of mediated relationships has created a new social and subjective reality, blurring the boundaries between the public and private, the personal and political. These now appear to be inextricably linked. This new networked society is aptly described by Manuel Castells (2011) as the intersection of three major changes: the consequences of the achievements of social movements of the 1960s (particularly feminism); the 1970s' revolution in information technology; and the economic restructuring of the 1980s, most especially the reduction of statism.

The internet connects the private and the public in such a way that its uses have become fundamental to gender and sexuality studies. If we take seriously the feminist assertion that "the personal is political" (popularized in 1960s), we find in contemporary digital media a new field of social research. Increasingly, "we are the world" through online social networking, but we are also "a work in process", in constant transformation, molded by the flows in which we are inserted and of which we are also a result. This situation is of clear relevance for feminist, gender and sexuality studies and – it is worth noting – for all of contemporary social theory in general.

One of theoretical and conceptual advances in this field of study has been the tendency towards overcoming the opposition between the "real" and the "virtual" that marked the first attempts to understand these new forms of sociability. Life in the age of digital media takes place in an on/offline continuum (Miller & Slater, 2003), blurring the boundaries between what is here, supposedly real, and what is there "in the cloud", supposedly virtual (Leitão & Gomes, 2011). As in a dance, bodies, clothing, gestures and musicality are interwoven to form this continuum. The new changes in perception may not have consolidated yet into a new conceptual vocabulary (Baym, 2010) – some of the articles in this dossier still use the term cyberspace, for example – but, at the very least, old vocabularies have been reframed by experience and empirical evidence which points to the fact that online relationships are not a separate space from face-to-face relationships. Neither are online relationships disembodied.

The research gathered in this dossier shows a scenario marked by corporeality. This is a marked difference from the centrality of the text that prevailed in the early research on the internet, a phenomenon analyzed by Eva Illouz (2007) as the "textualization of the self." Following the advent of scanners in the late 1990s (which enabled devices to digitalize photos) and of digital cameras in the following decade (which are today now fully integrated into cell phones) we have now come to selfie. This is the full portrait of an era in which we are encouraged to produce our own images and share them through different social media.

Different from what was thought twenty years ago, these technological advances have not released us from the body. Rather, they have highlighted it, prompting each of us to contemplate ourselves with renewed eyes. The lure of the body, the first thing that is communicated about us before we can even speak a word (Butler, 2006), is the center of online sociability, no matter how we "search" for it, in forms of individual recognition and of belonging to groups, both in and out of mainstream.

In contrast with the preceding era of mass media, dominated by radio and television broadcasting, digital media allow (since the

advent of internet 2.0 around the turn of the millennium) and even encourage audiences to take an active role not only in communication, but also in creating content (Athique, 2013). If in the electronic age of radio, TV and film – vertical mass media – there was a clear distinction between senders and receivers, in the digital era horizontal communication networks are the rule. Users are an active audience and this gives each one a sense of being the protagonist of her own life and his ideals.

The body-photo, the body-video and the body streaming in a video conference made us more aware of our own appearance. Not coincidentally, the poses of ordinary people in snapshots never approached those seen in advertisements. The increasing sharpness and power of the camera lens had to be softened by a multitude of filters and correction mechanisms. The "purification" of bodies in the context of some contemporary feminist political expressions can be read from different perspectives (Sibilia; Ferreira; this dossier): nudity is a form of political protest, but in the intertextuality of today's the media it can also be seen as a spectacle.

Communication technologies and body are intrinsically linked and reveal much more than an alliance based on marketing. Their intersection shows a significant gap between social representations and the desires of recognition. There is an articulated and historical continuity in the use of technology to manipulate moral boundaries and social constraints in the operationalization of agency and the search for greater freedom and opportunity, especially in the sphere of affection, love and sexuality. The relationship between technology, agency and secrecy revealed new facets with the emergence of the internet. Supposed anonymity created ideal conditions for the on-line revelation of socially proscribed desires, culminating in the rapid accumulation in masses of people looking for partners: people searching for same sex mates; heterosexual women seeking playful games of pleasure and freedom while on the look out for a partner who meets their criteria. Most notoriously, the new digital communications technologies have forced the recognition of the

porosity of marital relations between men and women, engendering relationships based on different kinds of secrets.

This dossier brings together investigations that seek to analyze the meanings of technological mediations in the lives of people in different contexts. In particular, they focus on how mediated relations are shot through with gender, sexual, ethnic-racial, generational and regional differences, creating visibility schemes whose grammars, while distinct, are connected together in the production of moral values. Several articles show out how the use of these technologies points to people's attempts to shake themselves free from the moral norms that restrict their desires (Miskolci, Pelúcio, Schaeffer, Beleli), as well as from the petrifying meanings of tradition and modernity (Sibilia, Ferreira), urban and rural, and the construction of youth itself (Adelman et al).

Different from what was predicted by the deterministic and dystopian visions about the impact of technology on social relations, the advent of digital media has not decreased sociability: it has expanded and deepened it, allowing one to know more people, communicate with them more often and increase one's personal ties. Even among subordinate social groups marked by gender, sexuality, ethnic/racial origins, or age internet-based networking has facilitated political discussions.

All of the articles published here and the associated investigations which gave them birth lead us to reflect on the contemporary demand for recognition and the new grammar of belonging. Whether online or offline, everyone wants to be accepted, admired, and recognized. This is what allows us to understand the practice of posting pictures and texts to be "liked" on Facebook, the creation of desirable profiles on sites and applications where people seek out love and sex, the attempts to collect followers of political discussion platforms, or the public marking out of lifestyles. As Zafra remarks in this dossier, social networks operate as boundary markers for forms of collective representation and identity and even, shape interpersonal relations. Going beyond those studies of social movements which partially incorporate the new media in their search for novelty (as

if today's new platforms couldn't engender anything more than a nostalgia for revolution), it may be fruitful for us to try to understand how social networks are used for the expression of those political and social conflicts that have remained silenced and/or invisible in everyday off-line relationships.

Many of the texts gathered here reflect upon the consequences of the sexual revolution which began in the late 1960s. The personal is political to the point that it is not expressed in terms of demands articulated by parties and/or traditional social movements. These new demands break with the verticality of earlier forms of media production and old politics, allowing connected subjects to become protagonists. Relating to an audience makes interactivity the magical mirror-screen in which we are seen and recognized by others.

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