

Full Length Research Paper

Unmediated socialization: The experience of observing big brother aspiring participants

Gevisa La Rocca

Sociology of culture and communication, University of Enna "Kore" Italy. E-mail: gevisa.larocca@unikore.it.

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The article presents some reflections on the practices and forms of spontaneous and unmediated interaction implemented by competitors of the Italian Big Brother 10th edition, while waiting for the auditions. While waiting, the participants put in place various forms of sharing, negotiation and conflict about attitudes, lifestyles and opinions. The method adopted is that of auto-ethnography. The aim of the paper is to outline some research issues raised by observation.

Key words: Socialization, reality show, participant observation, auto-ethnography.

INTRODUCTION

Beside and far away (for a few short moments) "Can distance really separate us from our friends? If you wish to be next to somebody you love, are you not already beside them?"

The *incipit* of Richard Bach's *There's No Such Place As Far Away* (1976) provides a first consideration about the possibility of feeling close to somebody in a dimension of emotional harmony. Yet, as soon as we set our minds on the affinity between individuals that such affirmation requires, another assertion quickly comes to our mind. A consideration of Anna Andreevna Akhmatova (1989), the Russian poet, who in *C'è un confine nell'intesa* (1989), affirms that there is instead a limit to the knowing of others. This is a limit which cannot be overcome "by ardour or passion" and which "even friendship cannot cross over". It is a limit that even pushes her to affirm that if you accept it, you can explain the assertion: "Now you know why you cannot feel my heart/beat under your hand".

If it is so difficult to understand somebody with the strength of your will, how and where is it possible to meet somebody and immediately feel this person close to you? Is this not an oxymoron to be solved by using Heraclitean enantiodromy? Hence, moving along an affective dimension – as the *incipit* here presented, brings us to think – we could verify what Andrea De Carlo calls *Arcodamore* (1997), that is that every story, every relationship of this kind, lasts for a certain period of time, after which, as in the natural flow of things, it tires out

and ends.

Luckily, at least in this ambit, we do not wish to discuss this love at first sight kind of encounter, but a social one which focuses on the factors which determine the relationships between one or more individuals in places which can be "non-places" and which require a reflection on concepts such as socialization and peer group to be interpreted by the social sciences.

The occasion to talk about this are the observations made during the first research phase¹ about the aspiring participants to the 10th edition of the Italian Big Brother², in the months of June, July and August 2009, period in which the selections took place. The field research was divided in two phases: the first of observation and the second of interviews³ to the participants.

The immersion in the subject took place gradually and with the same slowness and desire to set every single moment of somebody who is entering the sea for the first time after the Winter. Only after getting used to the environment, we started to listen and look around. The observations have been divided according to the place in which they were made: open casting and casting location. The open casting took place in big cities, such as, for example: Milan and Rome. The places chosen as casting locations were small towns, such as "Marina" di

¹ Carried out by the writer of the present paper.

² From here onwards BB.

³ The interview information and interpretations are not presented in this paper. We inform that to analyze the reasons behind the decision to participate to the Big Brother, were interviewed 120 candidates, chosen from the North, the Center and the South of Italy.

Pizzo Calabro or the Infernetto, a district of Roma. It was therefore possible to work on the field using as discriminants the variables “urban” and “rural”, to then consider the distinctive factors which allow the formation of knots among the participants and the different content and level of the conversations made.

THE METHOD AND THE AIMS OF THE ARTICLE

The research and the narration of the events using the auto-ethnography approach

It's important to specify that in this work we use the auto-ethnography instead of ethnography. The reason is that while ethnography is a method of qualitative social science research that describes human social phenomena based on fieldwork, in auto-ethnography the researcher becomes the primary participant/subject of the research in the process of writing personal stories and narratives. In fact, in our work the researcher becomes the main actor and the narrator of his/her observations. Ellis and Bochner (2000) advocate auto-ethnography, a form of writing that “makes the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right (p. 733)” rather than seeming “as if they're written from nowhere by nobody (p. 734)”.

Auto-ethnography is “an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (p. 739)”; auto-ethnographers “ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become coparticipants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually (p. 745)”. In fact, as Ellis (2004) describes it, auto-ethnography uses the conventions of literary writing: “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. Auto-ethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. Thus, auto-ethnography claims the conventions of literary writing and expression. p.19

This method was used, with the purpose of outlining the issues that emerged during this period of observation. The aim is to emerge major research themes.

In this sense, we highlight two thematic blocks:

- The formation of social groups in different settings: rural⁴ and urban⁵.
- The socialization process immediately.

Below, the observations are made using the difference between “urban” and “rural”, not only and exclusively with

⁴ The term “rural” is referred to small town between 5,000 and 30,000 people that have hosted the selection of Big Brother.

⁵ The term “urban” is referred to urban cities, in particular to Rome and Milan, which hosted the selections of Big Brother.

reference to Tönnies (1887) and the opposition between community and society; where the first is considered as an association of people, where there is a perfect fusion of will, thought and action of the people who are members of it; while the second, the city, is a sum of individuals linked by a more contractual dimension. Here the reference is more to Weber (1922) and to the idea of an urban space which is opposed to the rural dimension, with all that this can mean from the socio-economic point of view, but also with the creation of a cosmopolitan outlook (Beck, 2006).

The observation of these “perimeters” is transformed in places of socialization for individuals who recognize themselves as belonging to a certain subculture, traces typically “Italian” dynamics: The sensation is that the participants are queuing up at the post offices or are sitting during a Sunday lunch in the countryside; the fighting against the prevarication of some young girls, to avoid being passed by the “soubrette” of the day; the bitter story of a young biologist about her job frustrations and at last the so desired panacea: the cathode ray tube.

Settings as non-places

M. Auge' tells us (1992, Italian translation 1993) that “non-places represent the age” (1993: 70) of modernity and they contrast places: *αγορά*, churches with bells or clocks; places, in other words, settled in our memory. A place can, in fact, be “defined as connected to your identity or relational; a space which cannot be defined as personal, relational nor historical, will be considered a *non-place*” (1993: 73). Non-places of the modern world are:

“airway, railway, motorway routes and means of transport (air-planes, trains, cars), airports, train and aerospace stations, big hotel chains, free-time structures, big shopping centers and, finally, the complex network of cables and wireless systems which fill up the extra-terrestrial space in order to make possible a particular kind of communication that often places the individual in contact with another image of him/herself” (1993: 74).

The impact

A hotel, a shopping center, a market, the studios, as soon as you arrive in these places the crowd of young people prevails; tidy, daring, full of great expectations. Some arrive during the night, some in the early morning, some with ease; all have the same objective: to take the number and to wait to enter. You enter in groups of 30-40 people and as soon as the calling of your number gets nearer, you crowd around the entrance.

I take a number too and I wait. I sit at the side of a pathway next to two boys and with many others I look at the entrance and wait. While we are waiting, we all chat.

What do they ask? How do you answer? What other screen-tests have you done or will you do? How did it end up for the participants of the previous editions? Have you prepared anything particular to show them?

There are many comments on each others' look. Everyone, for the simple fact of being there, has a specific look which brings closeness or distance.

While we wait, there is a continuous going and coming from the bar. Mates who have just met each other or who have set off together on this adventure pass the time walking or having a coffee, some fruit juice or a smoke.

"It could be a great occasion!" You hear from the background. But there is no agitation among the crowd, there is not the same nervousness you feel during your secondary school exams. These bodies seem to intrepidly show off their beauty. "I am here! If you like me, you will choose me. But in any case, I don't care because I will be chosen somewhere; I'm cool! I'm good looking!" Everyone, however, is waiting for the "good occasion".

"If you win, it is like you have won the lottery. Your life is changed and if you haven't done anything before, it is a good way of redeeming yourself". This is the comment of a man in his forties. A man with a megaphone interrupts the chatter and calls a group who must queue up for the selection.

The group leaves the crowd and queues up along the barriers.

(Milan, June 2009)

Big shopping centers, hotel chains, restaurant and pizzeria halls, seaside resorts were the locations where the casting took place and it was always possible to see the beginning of a relationship or some kind of communication exchange. It was, therefore, possible to see some forms of interaction which were not necessarily instrumental. There were spontaneous conversations on various topics. The interactions which took place in these environments regarded the BB, but also other topics, some of which were collectively relevant. These kinds of conversations resemble the birth of a spontaneous public sphere, exactly as J. Habermas had already observed in his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962) when he talked about the cafés which spread in European cities during the 17th and 18th centuries. It is obvious that since then many things have changed: not only the characteristics of the cafés, but also the places and the ways in which socialization occurs creating and intensifying new forms of social linkage.

Ex post, we can say that the activity of observation carried out during the research of aspiring participants to the BB requires a reflection on the appearance of this spontaneous socialization with "discussions" in places which in the opinion of Auge' are non-places.

The distinction made by Auge' between places and non-places is articulated through the differentiation made

by De Certau (1990) with reference to the concepts of space and place. According to De Certau (1990) space is a "frequented place"; in other words a "crossroad"; even if only for a short time, the people who stop in such areas and live there, make them places, or as Merleau-Ponty (1945, Italian translation. 1965) will say, they become "existential" spaces. Continuing to make references to the work of De Certau (1990), Auge' (1992, Italian translation. 1993) clarifies the relationship between the *in fieri* of the space-place and its *becoming* a place. Space is for place what words become when they are spoken, that is when they are captured in the ambiguity of effectuation, transformed into words deriving from various convictions, placed as the act of the present (or of time) and modified by transformations caused by further collusions" (De Certau, 1990: 173; quoted in Augè, 1992, Italian translation 1993: 75).

The *locations*, whether they are inserted in urban or rural contexts, *in that* and *for that* moment, become anthropological places, because paths are taken and speeches are made there; furthermore, if you look carefully, it is possible to perceive the language they are characterized by.

Immediate socialization

The transformation of space into places occurs through what Simmel (1908) defined as *sociability*, term with which he defined the possibility – *in fieri* – to establish relationships. Sociability is the "medium" through which the *in fieri* of the space-place is translated and becomes place.

According to Simmel, there are *a priori* conditions which allow the development of socialization; he identifies them in the possibility that the individual has to see other people not in their totality, but in their specific social collocations and also in the consideration that every individual who is part of a group, is not only part of a society, but also part of something else. At last, there is the possibility for the individual to belong to a society and to have inside it a position. The individual carries within his/her body the elements which allow his/her identification. This happens, without realizing it, in a filtered, but recognizable way.

"(...) the concept of reciprocal effect (*Wechselwirkung*, which is sometimes translated also with the expression "reciprocal action") is the essential concept of Simmel's thought (...). To consider the reciprocity of influences means giving up every attempt to identify a single causal series capable of exhaustively explaining any phenomenon: not only each phenomenon is connected to many others in an infinite net of causes, but each one *retroacts* on those which from a certain point of view, seem to be the cause. The notion of "cause" is therefore replaced by that of "correspondence", of reciprocal

influence among various orders of phenomena (Jedlowski, 1998:103).

When the waiting for the selection forces the candidates to stop, they make groups according to “acquired” characteristics, but which in that moment seems “attributed”; this allows them to form small groups of peers, with the same *in-group* and *out-group* function that occurs during adolescence; a phenomenon which has been widely studied by sociologists and social psychologists.

Ribolzi (1993) in *Sociologia e processi formativi* tells us that within *peer groups* relationships can be competitive but not of superiority-inferiority. This reference group is considered by young people a free choice made on the basis of an initial and generic research of similarity (in the adolescent this similarity is the opposition to adults). If you look at them from the outside, they can seem a unique subculture, that is a system of values, attitudes, behaviors and styles of life, but for those who are inside, the entire area is divided into further cultural subsystems and “touching” they recognize each other and start to talk, to debate.

According to the lesson of Cohen (1955), the subcultures have in common the fact that it acquired only by interaction with those who already share in thought and in actions the same cultural model. In fact, in order to form a subculture it is necessary that there is a system of interactions at the microsocial level, which is the expression of certain cultural patterns. The microsocial system to which these young people were exposed is represented by the media. Following the idea of Cohen, the subculture has aspects of cohesion and ties density that close itself at the idea of community. The distance between the community and subculture can be traced back to the interpretation given by Gelder and Thornton (1997), who argues that a subculture is a side close to the idea of community, but the other is far from it, because the idea of subculture belongs to a group less stable over time than that represented by the community.

As Meyrowitz (1985) affirms, the influence of mass-media is not so much in their diffused content, but in their ability to create social situations in which interactions take place modifying communicative models and favoring social change. This is true, also in the case in which they are only the excuse to aggregate. Programs such as Big Brother and other reality shows have changed the traditional places of socialization, contextualizing differently the functions which in everyday life usually take place at school, at home, in the square, in the family and attributing connotations that render them new spaces of meaning.

What is observed in these contexts is an *instantaneous* socialization, consequence of an immediate socialization. The participants carry the signs of their “flashy” consumption. The television programs become topic of communication: a common ground on which to talk and discuss. Micro social aggregates come to life while

waiting to be called.

In *Passaggio al future*, Morcellini (1992) explains well what is the difference between socialization with and without mediation (also called in this case self-socialization). In the first, prevails the role performed by the socialization agencies, such as the school and the family, where an adult transmits values, rules, languages and other things to a learner who is not placed at the same level. In the socialization without mediation “the stimulation and the influence of the capital “transmitted” are mixed, almost unrecognizably, with the weight of the most informal and interactive agencies of communication and social relationship. (...). What disappears is not so much the transmission as specific and ritual activity, but rather the authoritativeness of the transmission itself, and therefore its deepest meaning (1992: 25)”.

The “socialization journey” – as it is defined by Morcellini (1992) – makes constant reference to the traditional agencies, but also to the development of a constant dialogue with the news means of communication (1992: 163).

This recalls the role played by television as a medium. It is Silverstone (1994) who in *Television and Everyday Life* worries about connecting and making explicit the integration of television in our lives since childhood. We can stress this quoting Schutz (1973) “The experience we have of T.V. is similar to our experience of reality: We do not expect it to be, nor are we able to imagine it significantly different (p. 229; quoted in Silverstone, 1994: 16)”.

The influence of television has now been clarified both for what concerns childhood and adulthood, as known and studied about the consequences that it produces on individual and collective social action.

The urban setting

Reality shows are often included among the so-called “bad” programs for the audience, in the sense that or they are watched by people with a medium-low cultural level, or being exposed to their vision, you slip back to that level. Yet in the practice of daily life there has been a rapid assimilation between these T.V. programs and popular culture (McGuigan, 1992). And, in fact, the audience wants to become protagonist.

Ang (1991) says that television organizations are always *desperately seeking the audience*, but here it is audience that is desperately seeking television.

Why does this happen? What is the audience looking for in these programs?

“It is time that a black man entered the house!” And his eyes open wide and his eyebrow now only drawn, arches giving great visibility to the little diamond he has on his

molar tooth.

She met them there Drago and the others who come from Varese and who arrived there too late and were therefore left without number. "And now?" She asks. "Now", - they reply: "Or we wait for the two o' clock shift or we come back at six tomorrow morning and we get the numbers".

"Look at him. He is a trans! Yes, he has the face of a trans". For Drago they are all gays or trans. He is very young: Only nineteen, long hair with pig-tails, a blue and white long-sleeve shirt, jeans and white runners. Cool, he feels cool.

He? He does everything! Showing off, he says that he is a dancer, a model, a gigolò and also a student of fashion, though now he has dropped out. He is a natural leader and has brought with him other two who have come to participate to the selections with him. On the path where we are standing arrives a scooter, a Sr. with two guys, both with a white jacket. They park on the path, they get off the scooter and stop beside us. The driver immediately starts to talk. He comes from the municipality of Bari but now he works here for the public transport company and just to try, he has come to participate in the selections.

"But have you got a number?" They ask him. "Yes, I passed earlier and then went away". "And why don't you put it on?" The number has on its back a stick-on strip and everybody has stuck it on themselves. "If not it will get ruined before my turn comes". "We instead arrived too late and we are without one". "Here you are", and he hands it to Drago. "I have an extra one".

(Milan, June 2009)

A first answer to the question why these "young people" started queuing up is obvious. They are modern pioneers who have left looking for gold. Gold represented also by the possibility of expressing and realizing oneself in cognitive terms, before than in instrumental ones. If we think about the gold searchers, how they have been represented in westerns, the first reason of their journey is the desire to earn, but if we think carefully, it is equally true that they are adventurers. In the *Spaghetti western* plots how many characters made money and how many of them, instead, had a constructive experience for their life during the journey?

Elliot (2007) affirms that people come to find themselves more and more in the condition to define themselves with reference to "mega-events". "As directors of our existences, we use emotional frames of memory and desire, as well as more general cultural and social sources to give form to oneself (2007, Italian translation 2010: 8)". Eliot says also – proposing us a reflection of Taylor (1989) – that we are ourselves only as long as we are sensitive to certain issues. Drago is sensitive to the issue of sexual and racial orientation; the T.V. program is the tool to contextualize it and make it explicit.

The research of television participation and the feeling that you are carrier of a distinctive issue follows the functions of *ipséité* outlined by Ricoeur (1990). The participation to the BB would therefore be a way of building your own identity in its singularity or individuality. These young people know or believe to know something "particular". They have identified what could be their "star" – the element that distinguishes them from others – but to be able to make it shine or, better, to be able to switch it on, first it is necessary for the camera, for the "red light" to be turned onto them. Ricoeur (1990) calls this *ipséité* narrative identity, capable of discussing the relationship between two different kinds of self: on one side the character – which indicates a self existent in time and space -, on the other the word given, which describes a self existent in the time and space of a relationship. The narrative identity becomes a bridge between the *idem* and the *ipse*, between character and the maintenance of the self. "Character is therefore the "what of who", it is a ingrained sediment, that the telling of a story can however re-open (Besozzi, 2006: 153)" and also claim.

L'Itala spensierata perhaps is not so happy living; Piccolo (2007) in his book describes the "active" television audience of the programs of Italian networks, the behaviors of those who want to participate in *Domenica In* or in television quizzes. It is not, however, an Italy without socio-economic problems and for this reason free to enjoy itself; the way in which the author defines Italy as "happy living", considers the characteristics of a country that has lost its sense of direction, which does not evaluate the situation, which is buried in social problems and which has decided to express this way what it feels. Drago – protagonist of the previous paragraph – wants to talk about the racial issue and already in the back scene of that setting, he starts doing so. That public place offers the possibility to observe in a micro context the macro dynamics we are exposed to everyday.

Claiming a place

At a certain point the voice of a woman interrupts the regular flow of the candidates. And immediately after, there is a general applause.

People come closer to understand what is happening. The man with the megaphone and a dark suit is discussing with three women who are more animated than the others. One woman in particular, is angry. She is small, thin, with short hair, blue eyes, and neglected teeth. "That one has to stop teasing!" Angry, she shouts: "How can she be in the queue now, in this round, to enter for the screen test when she arrived after me?"

Before the man with the megaphone intervened in the discussion, a group of girls had noticed that this other girl had queued up even though she had arrived after them. The women had started to ask how she had got there

and where she had found the number since all the numbers had been distributed during the early morning. In addition, the girls who had seen her arrive after them, were wondering how she had a number which was lower than theirs. For this reason a very animated discussion had broken out, interrupted only by the intervention of the man with the megaphone.

The girl who had been accused pulled herself out of the situation easily, leaving the man to quieten down the angry women. Queuing up again with her friends, the girl started to talk about the envy of those insignificant women.

"But has she got the number or not?" "I saw her arriving after me. She can say it too", indicating a girl nearby.

"Please, if we continue like this, I will cancel the selections, I'll collect the numbers and we'll talk about it again tomorrow."

"But has she got the number or not?" "And who gave it to her if she arrived after?"

The man did not answer these questions. He only asked those girls to stop asking, because otherwise he would have stopped everything – this was the threat. Stop the possibility of entering the screen test room. The crowd around, that was listening and not talking to the man, summed up everything: "And how did it end?" "That she remained in the queue."

(Milan, June 2009)

Already Banfield (1958) had identified the moral foundation of a backward society and today what has changed, if out there it is still possible to see the continuation of the "golden rule" of amoral familism?

The excluded

"Are you here for the screen test too?" he asks me. "Yes and you?" "I have already done it." "And how did it go?" "Bad!" "Why?"

"Because I say things straight in the face." "But, what did you say?"

"We were all thirty there sit and there were not even writing. They were not taking notes about anybody. They already know who has to enter!"

"Sorry, but why then should they organize all this?" "Well, to protect themselves." "From what?" "Also from rumors. Well, good luck, maybe you will be more fortunate."

(Milan, June 2009)

The dialogue – here quoted and which took place with one of the aspiring candidates – transmits a sensation of strictness and sadness. It almost seems to suggest "abandon all hope, you who enter".

The rural setting

Although to enter the most famous and most spied house

in Italy is not easy, many want to try the same because the "house" represents a life chance.

"Life chances are attributes of the single individuals. In their social existence individuals have life chances: they can fulfill them or break them into pieces, but their life is an answer to these chances. Life chances are forms. They can be too big for somebody and stimulate him/her to expand and grow; they can be too limited and stimulate him/her therefore to oppose resistance. Life chances are possibilities of personal growth, of realization of capabilities and wishes and these possibilities are made available by one's social conditions. For every individual and, in a certain way, also for groups and social classes, there is a certain number of life chances (Dahrendorf, 1981: 40-41)".

This crowd, gathered in small town centers, has a clear idea about how useful it could be to enter the house. In their motivations we can trace an instrumental dimension connected to the everyday context in which their life takes place.

Family stories

The great-uncle from Northern Italy on holiday in Calabria drags his great-nephew and his great-nephew's wife to the selections.

Forty-six years old, with a dark blue tee-shirt, gray hair and eyes reddened by dinner and after dinner alcohol. "I have come here because I tried for many years to write letters to the Maurizio Costanzo Show, but they never answered. I have something to say. This screen-test is for me a way to get noticed. Do you know what a launching pad is?" he asks. "Then they will call me for other programs and I will go and speak."

"We have always done everything together. Consider that even though we are 29 and 27 we were engaged for 11 years and now we have been married for 4 years. We have never been apart", says the great-nephew's wife.

Somebody asks: "But do you think you two will enter together?"

They both reply no.

"Love (she says to him), I'm telling you beforehand that if they take me and not you, I'm going the same. I'll do it for the money. Even if you don't win, they then call you for evening events. I'll make some money and then I will open a small business in Rome. I'll leave here because here you cannot live."

"Anyway here (the reference is to the BB) to enter you don't need to know how to do anything. Look at Marcello (competitor of Big Brother 9). He passed the whole year making bread and they threw him out. If he had stayed put and done nothing, he would have lasted longer. It's enough to be friendly. And I arrived here alone (Nobody accompanied him to participate in the selections) and I already know everybody. Nobody beats me!"

"It is clear: We all do for the money." She continues. "I

have a degree, but what can you do with it? There is no work. This way you get some money without doing anything. Who would give you all this money to stay at home? If things continue like this, very soon they won't give you money even if you go to work. It is obvious that between going on T.V. and being seen by everybody and winning the lottery, I would prefer to win the lottery. But who wouldn't prefer it?"

(Marina di Pizzo Calabro, August 2009)

What emerges is the entrepreneurial spirit of the Italians chopped by the harshness of the banks and of our bureaucracy. Already Dahrendorf (1981) indicates how life chances are connected to "options", therefore to the possibility to choose and to "binding points", that is to constraints of different kind to which the individual is subject.

How does our audience think to overcome these constraints? It thinks that the solution is fame that can be reached thanks to television, nearly without merit, if not that of being lucky, like in the choice of a winning lottery ticket.

The participation to the BB is dressed with a double instrumental dimension: On one hand it is identified as the instrument through which it is possible to make money and on the other hand it is a mean to make a dream come true or to replace something missing. Certainly, it is a way of obtaining a better quality of life. Lived this way, the participation in the BB and the money which goes with it, allow to solve an economical problem which otherwise cannot be faced. They make it possible, in fact, to pay debts, to extinguish a mortgage, to buy a house, to open up a business, to guarantee a serene future to one's children. Big Brother is a way of tackling economic difficulties also caused by the unfavorable economic trend. It is therefore necessary to find a way to make this money, because not everybody, even if they were to enter the house, would be able to win the final prize. The way of making money is already clear to the participants of the selections. It is necessary to be guests in television programs or in events organized in discos, because also for this kind of activity one can be a "man without qualities".

REFLECTIONS ON THE OBSERVATIONS

The waiting space transforms the perimeter in a place, allowing who observes to develop two distinct considerations: the first refers to the transformation of the television audience and the second refers to the kind of conversation this audience makes in the space of a few hours.

The consequences for the audience

In 1998 Livingstone wrote the article *Crossroad in*

Cultural Studies, in which he stressed the cross-road audience research had reached. Livingstone's reflection is on the role and the perspectives of audience research, but also and in particular on the concept of audience. The cross-road audience research is supposed to be at, must be interpreted not simply as a convergence of different research traditions, but rather as a interdisciplinary meeting place inside which the divisions⁶ characterizing media and cultural studies should have been solved. A first knot to open is the terminological one, which sums up the problem of the borders between the various disciplines. In fact, in the canonical tale of the history and the progress of *audience research*, we usually talk about *audience research* and *Cultural Studies*, as if the first term could be classified within the second without difficulty. To be able to describe this debate, a specification about the concept of "audience" and about the ways to refer to it, is necessary. According to the interpretation given by Allor (1988) the *audience* can be defined as an abstract totality; Fiske (1992), taking up the debate between *audience research* and *Cultural Studies*, affirms that the latter should replace the noun *audience* with its verb *audiencing*, in order to stress the process of generation and circulation of meanings *Cultural Studies* are particularly interested in. Mosco (2009) recalls Ang's thesis (1990), according to which it is not an analytical category "like those of class, gender, race, but rather a product of the media industry (...) and research has not yet established that the conceptual value of the term, especially in its connections, is not that of a simple demographic grouping, but of lived experience (Mosco, 2009: 262)". Livingstone again with Lint (1996) calls attention to the semantic universes the noun audience refers to. This term, in fact, calls for a taxonomic conception through which a group of individuals, even if they will never be able to meet each other, have in common the fact of watching T.V. There is then a collective dimension, which refers to a collectivity, a group of individuals who interact with each other according to the means of communication they consume. To this second meaning refers Radway (1984), who considers the audience as a real community, exactly like Hobson (1982). There is therefore an intersection between a community which comes to life in the moment of consumption and the necessity to group these spectators/consumers using more or less suitable labels, such as "male audience", "soap fans" or those of reality shows.

The audience is starting to appear as a community that aggregates locally pushed by the influence coming from a medium and we can consider as global. This meeting of global and local reminds us of Appaduraj's mediascapes (1996).

In Livingstone's thesis (1998) the audience was

⁶ Livingstone recalls our attention among others on the debate between administrative tradition and critical tradition as well as between quantitative and qualitative methods.

becoming visible from a theoretical, empirical and political point of view. The consequences of this acquisition – according also to Silverstone (1990) – are that the audience becomes the cornerstone to understand the social and cultural processes of public communication. What is happening in Italy, if the audience is queuing up to enter the most famous house of the moment? What do these queues of aspiring VIP represent?

Considered with this meaning, the *audience* is no longer only visible or active, the *audience* becomes participatory. Like Alice in Wonderland this “people” continuously looking at a magic instrument, decide to go inside it. This opens up a new debate, because this audience is no longer only the one that sits in front of the T.V. and that the ethnographer can study looking at it interact with the medium, this *audience* moves around though remaining an “audience” the same. This *audience* like Alice jumps into a magic world or at least it tries to. It is no longer in front of the T.V. sitting in an arm-chair and playing with the remote control; this *audience* wants to be protagonist. This gives new ignition to the debate between audience theories and macro and micro levels of analysis. We should ask how to look at this audience/protagonist, that if it does not succeed in entering, it sits down in an arm-chair and watches the show, hoping to become protagonist the following year. There is a predominant integration of *audience research* with the rest of media and cultural theory, but also with socio-economic and political theories. If we accept that this crowd is an *audience* even if it has left the remote control at home, this brings us to have to find a sixth way to the ones presented by Alexander and Giesen (1987), because we are no longer in presence of an audience: 1) considered only as a market, 2) or as active and creative, 3) or as spectator-citizen, 4) or as hetero-directed mass, 5) or as resistant. This is an audience that wants to participate, that tries to and can enter the medium. Taking on these new connotations, thanks to the spreading of reality shows, it may be necessary – I say may – for *audience research* to abandon its period of reflection and start back working again.

Between stage and reality

What we observe among the aspiring participants of the BB is instantaneous socialization, caused by the implicit sharing of a subculture of belonging and the immediate recognition of this by the subjects themselves. It is a form of socialization that takes place during the waiting time, with all the implications that this contains. In their being there – the candidates – behave like Leibniz’s monads. They arrive in the pre-established place. They can arrive alone or in company and according to the “trajectory” they take, they can form small knots of shared interests with other people who have come there, like them, for the BB. Leibniz (1714) says that no monad is identical to another. It is, in fact, a closed universe: without windows,

from which may flow out any substance. Yet, they internally change without stopping, pushed by an internal impulse to reach perfection, the so-called appetite which provokes their continuous passage from one state to another. These states take the name of perceptions. This type of “information” and its “programs” establish the relationship between the single monad and all the other monads of the universe, like a point – the waiting space – where an infinite number of angles meet. These are the aspects which make up the individuals. For the fact that they without “windows”, though being connected to each other, Leibniz (1714) presupposes that every monad is a living mirror, capable of interior activity and to represent the universe from its point of view. And it is this point of view that all these people would like to bring on the stage, would like to see represented, wishes to see expressed.

The waiting space has all the characteristics of Goffman’s back stage, therefore of a closed place hidden to the spectators. Here the spectators can be considered in a double way: the recruiters – in front of whom they will appear shortly – and the television audience, who will see them in future. Although for Goffman (1959) the back stage is more a place where the actor can take off his mask and abandon his/her character, here the character is being built. The candidates reveal who they are talking with the other monads. They are preparing the mask they will bring on the stage (La Rocca)⁷.

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⁷ In the work: La Rocca G (2010). When the Public wants to be Protagonist: The Case of Reality Shows. Pasadeos Y (eds). Advances in Communication and Mass Media Research. Atiner, Athens 2010: 427-440, is possible to read that this kind of preparation takes place facing two different kinds of conversation which dress this experience with a cognitive dimension and an instrumental one. The cognitive dimension prevails mostly in the observations connected to urban contexts, where the young participants seem to be dreamers and oriented towards the achievement of their narrative identity thanks to the participation to the BB. For those who live in the so-called “rural” contexts, it is a life chance, the possibility to change one’s socio-economic condition, to socially redeem oneself.

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