

The escape into the virtual and the construction of the self.

By Giovanni Tagliaferro

We hear more and more often about adolescents as virtual castaways, of an incessant and always active virtually mediated sociality, characterised by an unprecedented dependence of connection.

In the scenery of techno liquidity, there is "the inescapable embrace between the liquid world, as announced by Zygmunt Bauman, and the digital revolution, as proposed by Steve Jobs" (Cantelmi, 5 (2013) 7). In this sense, the virtualisation of reality solicits and tickles man's own needs that have remained unsatisfied by the advent of the liquid, individualised and rootless society, excites them and provides them with resources, often improper, but in any case coveted as a solve responses , which com to shape the very identity of the internet user.

The spread of new media therefore changes the way in which the person can interact with reality and with the whole world. In the digital age, social categories seem to blur, since it seems to become possible to access any content, without

limitations of space and time. That's why, no longer a "face to face" mode, but a mediated mode. Communication is structured in a social vacuum in which the identity of the actors is gradually dying out. Young people are at the forefront absorbed and attracted, sometimes impulsively and other times compulsively, by virtual stimuli.

It is not uncommon for young people to develop a real "addiction" towards the network and its communication tools, as a "general condition in which it is the psychological dependence that pushes them to search for the object in which existence becomes free of meaning".

To give examples, the young person can develop a:

- cybersexual addiction;
- cyber-relationship addiction;
- information overload;
- online video games addiction.

Nowadays, adolescents use the virtual to experiment and extract meanings with which to build their own identity: Turkle (1995) had described the online space as an identity playground, in which people are free to

experiment different versions of themselves that, due to physical traits and personality characteristics, may have very little to do with their offline life. The Internet involves and seduces young people because it offers the opportunity to choose how to have fun, based on the user's mood.

If the virtual world has become the evolutionary forge of young 2.0, it comes natural to ask ourselves what nature are the relational ties that are created online, and how they differ from real ones and, in this case, how they can contribute to the identity formation of teenager. The psychology of the bonds created in cyberspace is anomalous itself, because many of the times it is an intimacy that is created between substantially unknown people. Young people look for in virtual communities, a socially shared space in which to identify themselves, receive emotional support, satisfy the need for a sense of belonging and to feel socially useful, developing meaningful relationships through more manageable channels than those of communication lived in concrete reality.

This makes us understand that it is not in itself the adolescent experimentation of alternative roles and identities in the virtual that constitutes a criticality, how much more problematic is the condition in which virtual reality ends up replacing reality, constituting the only place where the adolescent it defines itself and in which it recognises itself. The virtual world, in fact, can constitute for the young person a reality in which to escape and escape from the anxieties and uncertainties that naturally manifest themselves in his years of growth. In this sense, the internet can be assumed as a defensive dissociation mechanism, that is, as a ploy to withdraw in a transitory way into alternative mental shelters to those of ordinary consciousness.

The "escape into the virtual and the construction of the self" emphasises the new way in which symptoms of discomfort can be expressed over the development course.

The contribution leads to reflection on the phenomenological evolution of symptomatology that if until 2000 manifested itself in reality (for example phobias), in the body (for example psychosomatic and eating disorders) and in

thought (for example obsessional neurosis), now also invests the virtual. In fact, alongside the "traditional or analogical symptoms" such as fear, loss of interest in daily activities or outbursts of anger, studied and cataloged by classical nosography, we increasingly find the presence of "new digital symptoms".

We think of internet or mobile phone addictions, cyberbullying and the widespread practices among some guys of insulting each other while participating in video games online, sending sexy selfies to seduce themselves or self-celebrating on the web for having beaten a stranger with a single punch.

The "escape into the virtual" therefore represents the "new symptom" which is analysed with the aim of laying the foundations for the construction of a new "digital nosography" and therefore of a modern tool for cataloging discomfort to be placed side by side with the classical nosography. We also question the clinical significance of "digital symptoms", correctly framed as the manifestations of an individual and family problem of the adolescent that is born in reality and then reverberates on the web.

Moreover, if "language is the house of being" (Heidegger, 1947) then online behaviours and especially "digital symptoms" are the new language with which "being in the world" is manifested. For this reason, it is important to be interested in the virtual aspects of personality and therefore in the virtual identity of adolescents in order to provide useful psychological and pedagogical tools.