Social Action

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by Davide Galesi

Introduction: an increasingly close connection between action and communication

Among the principles of sociology, the notion of action focuses on the specifically human bases of every social phenomenon. It represents, in fact, a particular type of behavior, characterized by the intentionality and the attribution of meaning of the subject. In other words, "behavior" is meant to refer to how one or more human beings are or move within their environment in response to external stimuli [Schütz 1967], and "action" describes the typical attitude of man, «be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence» [Weber, 1999: 4], which is founded on the individual processing of meanings, with different degrees of autonomy and awareness. When such action «takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course", it connotes more precisely a "social action» [ibidem].

In order to understand how this paradigm is intended to change in modern day society, which is increasingly influenced by digital technologies, this contribution will be organized in two steps. The first will outline the main phases of sociological thought, in order to highlight the principle conceptual dimensions, underlying how the advent of web 2.0 has enabled us to identify one of the typical features of contemporary society in the mutual connection between action and communication. The second will describe how such reconceptualization allows us to observe many phenomena in ambivalent terms, between reaffirming the meanings intended by the actor and the inevitable conditions of the systemic information flows.

1. In search of a significant link between the individual and society

In the history of sociological thought it is possible to distinguish two schools. The first refers to those authors who see society not as a phenomenon lying outside of social action, but rather as an interplay between the