Bodies, Images, Networks.
Digital space as public space

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Issue 1/2023 of *Lessico di Etica Pubblica* aims to investigate the transformations of public space and the subjects that inhabit it in light of its intertwining with the so-called "digital space". Even if we limit ourselves to a narrow notion of public space as a collective place of encounter, interaction, sharing, and mutual negotiation of identity among multiple embodied subjects, among living and mutually exposed bodies, we are already witnessing the emergence of new relevant issues related to the transformative role and function of digital technologies within it.

The Covid-19 pandemic has helped highlight numerous processes of hybridization, through digital technologies, between public and private dimensions. Such processes have challenged a fundamental distinction in our culture, that between private and public space. Digital interfaces are increasingly proposed as functional equivalents of physical spaces once explicitly dedicated to specific activities: the classroom, the office, and the conference room. In this perspective, the so-called "digital space" becomes one of the main fields of symbolic mediation in the collective sphere. The digital representations with which we act and interact in this kind of space seem to be, primarily, images. They function as carrier vehicles of such mediation. We can thus think of digital spaces as a network of images, graphic interfaces, and virtual objects that traverse and colonize a network of bodies. Conversely, it is possible to think of public spaces as a network of bodies intertwined with a network of images. Such interpenetration significantly restructures how subjects constitute themselves and interact within the new digitized environments, entailing new potentials and new risks. This situation calls for in-depth analyses of a theoretical, anthropological, ethical, and aesthetic order.

The first order of problems is implied in the assumed spatiality of the digital. If the digital is a space, its hyperbolic character and its tendency to hybridize with other kinds of places both jeopardize and open up new possibilities for the identity of the subjects who express themselves and operate through it. To what extent can we speak of digital "space"? Is it a metaphor or a description? How do we redescribe the eventual boundaries that should circumscribe this eventual digital space and constitute it as such? The actions of the digital subject potentially connect to an infinity of nodes in perpetual expansion. How, then, to think about the identity negotiation processes of individuals and social groups involved in the interactions that come to form in such a

space? How do the new digital "spaces" restructure the relationships between private and public, individual and collective?

The problem of the spatiality of the digital is closely related to the relationship that the digital environment has with physical bodies and, primarily, with living bodies. In general, we think of interaction with digital media as an essentially disembodied process. Can we still assume that this is the case in light of the increasingly pervasive intertwining of digital space, private space, and public space? Thinking of the digital subject as embodied and living implies other problems: if digital space is configured as a network that constitutively pluralizes its subjects through their images, how can we think of the unity of a living body that reverberates in a recursive multiplication of its representations?

From here new questions emerge concerning the interaction between multiple living bodies in a public space constituted through digital symbolic mediations. Digital images of the body, embedded in increasingly complex algorithmic processes, are subject both to impersonal use within deep-learning processes and to active and targeted tampering (e. g., deepfakes). This calls into play new ethical and political questions. How can we formulate decision criteria for the ethical use of digital representations? What are the attitudes we must take toward such representations in light of this new configuration between digital spaces, bodies, and images? What are the new ways in which we should doubt or trust these images?

All these problems presuppose a decision about the presence of the body in digitized public space, that is, about the spatialization of the digital. Thus, we return to the initial point, but with the understanding that the spatialization of the digital is, at the same time, a digitization of space. What happens then to digital images themselves, once they are translated into non-digital representations, and vice versa?

Starting with these questions, this issue of the journal welcomes (non-exclusively) contributions that explore the following themes:

- Digital spatiality and the digitization of public space.

- Identity, processes of subjectification, and community formation within digitized public space.

- Function and status of the physical and/or living and/or imagined body, in all its variations, within the digital realm of public space.

- Epistemic reliability of digital representations and ethical implications of their management in social and public perspective.

Essays should be received by **Apr. 15, 2023**, at the following email addresses: retidicorpi2022@gmail.com and redazione.eticapubblica@gmail.com

Accepted languages are: **Italian**, **English**, **French**.

Authors should submit the essay anonymously for double-blind peer review and a separate paper stating their first name, last name, affiliation, essay title and email contact.

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