

# The changes in embarrassment revealed by new media practices

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# Research

- Mobile telephony
  - Cross-national study, Vodafone Surrey Scholar.
  - Couple communication, personalisation and conflicts
- Convergence digital photography and social media
  - Self-portraits
  - Negotiating public and private divide
- Flash Mobs-Hybrid Crowds

# Affective Technologies

- Nowadays ICTs operate and mediate the ways we are affected, moved, acted upon, attached.
- Shape, display, express, manage, control, elicit, experience, share positive and negative emotions.
- Shared agency between people and technologies



# Premise

- The self-disclosure and sharing of personal information, feelings and body images in digital media practices reveal changes concerning embarrassment. These changes are related to the contents of what is shared, the people and audiences who share it, and the situations and spaces where the self-disclosure take place.

# Materialisation of affects through Inscriptions

- Materiality of affects through their inscription in our mobile phones and Internet applications,
- ICTs not only mediators of verbal, written, aural and visual communications but artefacts that make and keep inscriptions as numbers, sounds, images and texts.
- Reflexivity, visibility, surveillance and control
- Dionysian Materialism (Sloterdijk)

# **Readers and listeners of affective inscriptions**

- **People involved in different interpersonal relationships and exchanges**
- **Designers and engineers thinking in terms of affective bandwidth or emotional usability**
- **Commercial agents leading marketing strategies**
- **Public authorities trying to gather information about their citizens, as well as trying to control who makes these affective inscriptions and how are they made.**

# Subjectivation Process

- The way a human being turns him or herself into a subject
  - Shaping of the self
  - Modes of subjection
- A process of self-formation in which people are active and come into being through a variety of “operations on own bodies, on their own souls, on their thoughts, on their own conducts” (Foucault)
- Subjects as effects generated by a network of heterogeneous materials in interaction.
- ICT are part of this network, making more evident the existence of these mediations and the work of producing subjects and subjectivities
- De-subjectivation

# Embarrassment

- **Self-feeling, self-recognition:**
  - One is the subject and the object of the feeling at the same time
- **Appearance, exposure**
  - Visible and not ready to be visible (Erickson)
- **Failure to fit with other's expectative**
- **Power unbalance**
- **Undesired intimate situations**
- **Affective cost of not following the scripts of normative experience.**
- **Both a feeling of domestication and a domestication of feeling (Ahmed).**
- **Changing threshold and disposition, culturally, historically (Elias)**

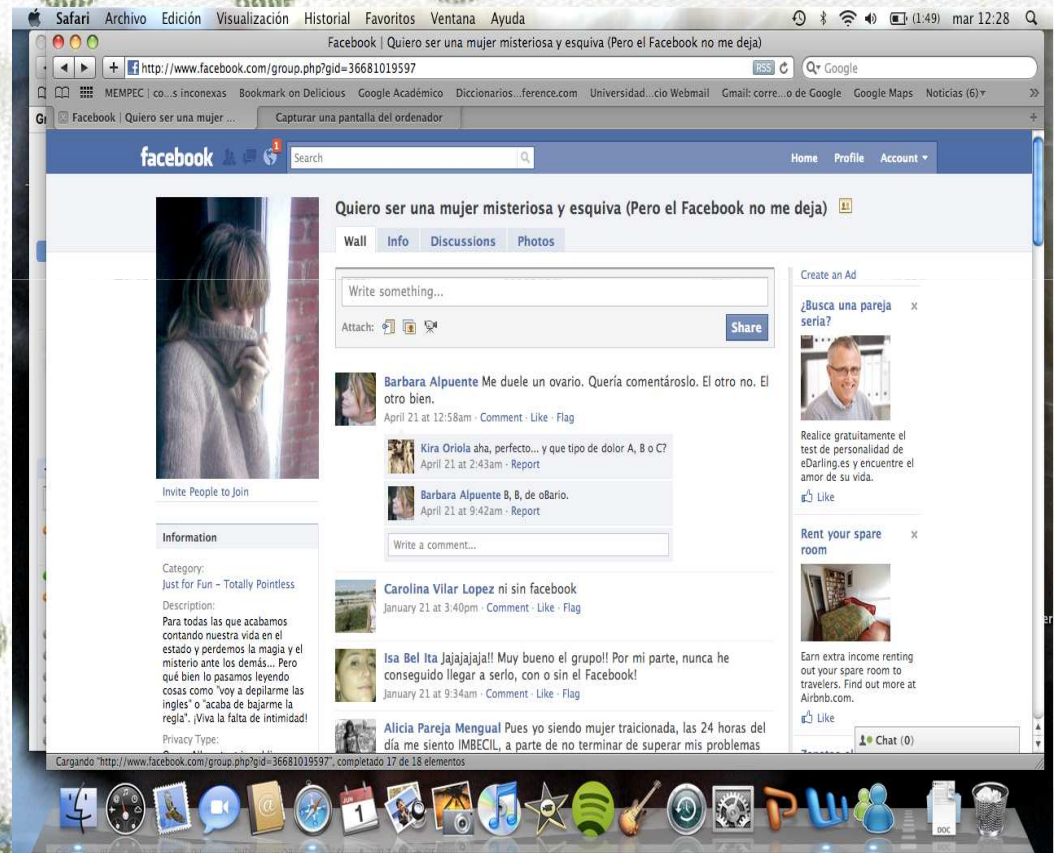
# Embarrassment Shifts

- Mobile phone talk in public places from embarrassing to taken for granted in a short time
  - widespread use, habit, social obligation of accepting the call and the conversation
  - change of social expectations about public behaviour.
- Example of de-subjectivation, oblivion of that embarrassment.



# Embarrassment shifts and shared intimacy

- **Self-disclosure of personal information in blogs, posts, tweets, pictures, videos.**
- **Sexuality**
- **Bodily functions**
- **Loss of self-control**
  - E.g. drunken and vomiting videos
- **Fun: Humour, irony, self-deprecation,**
- **“Empowering exhibitionism” (Koskela, Thenft): liberation, sociability, trust.**
- **Microaudiences, chosen publics**



# Shared intimacy through self-portraits

- Increasing number of self-portraits
- Blogs, msn, SNS, dating sites
- Nudity: pictures often taken inside private places (bathrooms or bedrooms)
- Microaudiences
- Part of contemporary embodiment processes
- Complex gaze game



# Dealing with the ambivalent aspects of the lowering of the embarrassment threshold

- Distance facilitated by technological mediation
- Anonymity:
  - e.g. faceless bodies
- “If you do it alone you are mad, but if you do it with others...” looking for and being with the collectives whose expectative you fit.
- Reciprocity
- Modulation of the digital presence: intermittency,
- Control of the content and the public:
  - limitations, not helped by technical and privacy features of most web sites (e.g. facebook, badoo)

# Communication Strategies Based on Embarrassment

- Institutional campaigns using shame and embarrassment
- Warning of risks of self-disclosure
  - Embarrassing young girls
  - “Slut shame”
  - Shamed are those who post not those who abuse or break the rules of trust.

# Modulation of Intimacy

- Family, friends, acquaintances, intimate strangers
- Strangers embody the possibility of a good encounter but also of a threat (Simmel, Benjamin, Goffman)
- Recognition
- Sharing
  - a performance and not necessarily a confessional disclosure of one's personality
- Exploring one's own strangeness
  - Uncanny-Ambivalence-Reconciliation

# Threads to follow

- **Intimacy not necessarily linked to privacy**
  - Intimate strangers
- **Loss or transformations of embarrassment as a way to trace forms of desubjectivation/subjectivation**
- **New disciplines and obligations**
- **Embarrassment, self-disclosure, self-portraits: reflexivity**
  - I am at the same time the subject and the object
  - Complex game of gaze/ complex relay of looks