Social movements and social systems: community, individualization and collective action

By

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Abstract

During the last three decades, in the sociology of social movements a 'normal science' asserted istself. McAdam (2005) defines it as paradigm of structural factors of mobilization. This 'normal science' forms through converging some theoretical orientations: the political process theories, the resource mobilization theory, the studies about the relationship between social networks and political mobilization. The paper advance a theoretical basis complementary to the main perspectives of the sociology of social movements, looking for analytical paradigms which could open new perspectives for defining the concept of social movement. Following the central thesis of the theory of systems, which states that the basis of a system is founded on the differentiation from its environment, social movements will be defined as systems that see the social system as their environment. On this basis, two main characteristics of social movements are individualized. First, the differentiation of a system-movement from the environment-society is based on the supremacy of communitas over immunitas, that is the reversal of hierarchies that characterizes civil order, political power and production system. The second characteristic of system-movements is the removal of ties between subjectivity and civil order. Two basic elements of the relationship between individuals and modern social systems – the negation of immediacy and the alienation from the organic connection with others and with itself – are reused by movements as a differentiation from social systems. That is, as a differentiation from that form of identity and that kind of connection with others and with itself that, following Luhmann and the theories of philosophical anthropology, characterize immunitarian systems in the modern society.

Introduction

In the history of sociology of social movements many definitions about the social movement concept have been developed. Diani and della Porta (2006) say that though there is no integrated theory to merge different paradigms, it is still possible to single out four aspects characteristic to movements referred to scholars from different theoretical and geographical backgrounds. In this perspective, it can be maintained that: *a) a movement is a network of informal relationships; b) a movement implies to shared beliefs about social reality and solidarity among the members; c) a movement implies an existing conflict; d) a movement implies the resort to protest.*

During the last three decades, in the sociology of social movements what could be called, with the words of Thomas Kuhn (1962), a 'normal science', asserted itself. The sociology of social movements is actually centered on a paradigm where certain determined theoretical perspectives converge. Like McAdam (2005), I would define it as *a paradigm of structural factors of mobilization*. This new "normal science" forms through converging certain theoretical orientations: the political process theories, the resource mobilization

theory, the studies about social networks and some elements from the rational action theory. The research has been focused on *the structure of political opportunities* perceived by the collective actor; *the resources* that certain protest *entrepreuners* have been able to mobilize, and on which kind of capital (political, cultural, social, symbolic) they were based on; on the social networks in which the participants were introduced to participants; on the individual *costs* and *benefits* of participation in the movement and on the role of movement organizations in distributing *selected incentives* that lower the costs of participation and raise the costs of non-participation, according to a conceptual apparatus, the latter, based on the work of Olson (1965).

This paradigm favors research about the causes of social movements. The objective of this paper is to advance a theoretical basis complementary to the above listed perspectives, looking outside from the sociology of social movements for analytical paradigms and input which could open new perspectives for defining the concept of social movements. The theoretical question which this paper tries to answer is: *What is a social movement?*

Social movements and social systems

A movement is a system that sees the social system as its environment. Like every other system, this is created through a process of *differentiation* with its actual environment. As the environment of movements is based on a specific institution or on a sum of various social institutions and cultural codes that dominate one or more ambients of social life, the most accurate definition of movements is that of counter-systems, that define themselves through differentiating from already existing social systems. As regards the nature of differentiation in the development of systems, the dimension of limits between internal and external relations, and thus the concept of *environment* as an external ambient to the system's internal unity, is central in theories that apply the systemic method to the social sciences. As Luhmann wrote: "the environment is a presupposition for the system's identity, because identity is possible only by difference" (1990: 305)**.** The difference from the environment is the founding principle of a system, that binds the internal elements through the exclusion of elements outside, while through a system of oppositions it defines its borders. Creating a system takes place through negation, not affirmation: "the system does not immunize itself against the 'no' but with the help of the 'no' […] to put this in terms of an older distinction, it protects through negation against annihilation" (1990: 576).

The negation, "no", the opposition to an environment and incorporation through exclusion are the constituent principles of systems and the same applies in the case of movement-systems. Negation and opposition are always the originating mechanisms of social movements. The workers' movement could not have been formed without the perception of a common adversary in the universe of extremely differentiated professionals. As the studies on the workers' movement history have demonstrated (Hobsbawn, 1984; Tilly C., Tilly L., Tilly R., 1975; Silver 2003), the "class consciousness" establishes itself in a contest characterized by strong divisions within the masses that socialists called proletariat, and in this establishment has a vital role the homogenization and concentration of proprietary classes, social and spatial isolation of workers from higher-middle classes, the recognition of an extra-political class created by an experience of life that is separated from and opposed to the world of riches and of state power.

The student movements emerge *opposing* to specific reforms that involve education system and include the negation of lifestyles and cultural codes attributed to certain institutions, authorities and agencies (Mathieu 2008, Rootes 2007). The local ecologist movements that oppose the construction of new infrastructures on their territory use the "no" as an originative engine in their aggregation and action processes; on this base they create a far larger system of codes and representations symmetrically opposed to the ideology of economical growth (della Porta and Piazza 2008, Vitale 2007).

Identity, praxis, the organizational forms and symbolic production of movements are founded on the opposition to the environment (corporations, political parties, mass-media, law, state apparatus, dominating symbolical codes). Therefore, a social movement is based on negation and differentiation from its environment, working as a "micro society" that creates its own criterions, symbolic codes and relations between individual and system that offer an alternative to current system, and replicates the processes of socialization: within a social movement individuals re-socialize. On the socialization level, a movement enters into a competition with the environment, its institutions, agents and devices, from which it has to differentiate and create its own system of negations. In order to emerge and consolidate, first it has to "deprive" the dominant socialization processes from some of their constituent elements. It has to succeed in representing itself as an instrument of social integration, that is, to become a place that allows the individuals to feel a social affiliation, to recreate the experience of participation outside from the mechanisms of institutions, mass-media, work or consumption. Secondly, a movement has to bring back to the "normal" socialization the connection between everyday life and public sphere, it has to root into the problems and expectations connected with the everyday life of participants, meanwhile rebinding them to public sphere, to a place that could represent them, bring forward the protests and decisions about these problems and these expectations. Thirdly, the re-socialization of movements has to intervene with ordinary relations between individual and public sphere, that is, with the lifestyles that are seen socially desirable, with the image that participants have about the individuality and social desirability. This topic will be further discussed in the paragraph about interactions between system-movement and environment-society. But now let's analyze the three essential characteristics of system-movement.

Movements, modern politics and community

We saw how differentiation could lead to immunization ("the system does not immunize itself against the 'no', but with the help of the no"). Let's try to apprehend the entire meaning of this concept, analyzing the implications according to three different social systems: juridical, political and economical.

In Luhmann's analysis, juridical system forms the immune system of society: "One can see the nexus of law and immune system more clearly if one considers that law is formed *in anticipation of possible conflicts*" (1990: 578-579). However, Luhmann's thesis is that since the 18th century the immune system has extended to all sectors of modern society, therefore the immune system is no longer a function of juridical system rather than juridical system has become a function of immune system. Which meaning could be given to the term "immunity"[1]? From the etymological point of view, the noun *immunitas* is a

privative term where the meaning derives from what it negates, in this case *munus*. *Munus* in turn means an obligation, a burden, "something that binds one in front of others". Thus *im-munitas* is something that liberates from the reciprocal obligation, a privilege that exempts from something that all others are obliged to. The real antonym of *immunitas* is *communitas*. Immunity being a case of peculiarity, "one's own" that allows to differentiate it from the "common", from something that belongs to everybody. "Personal" has a function of immunizing one from the risks of *communitas*, to become different from "public life". This is the first fundamental characteristic of immunity paradigms. The second paradigm can be reached via biomedical semantics. In order to function, the immune system is supposed to receive a controlled amount of what it has to fight with, it works as a reaction, a counter-force that prevents another force from establishing itself. Immunity means at the same time the protection and negation of life (of collective as well as individual life, that is, the creation of individuality), and this antinomy penetrates all modern idioms: the law, theology, anthropology, politics and biology.

These two mechanisms of immunity are employed for juridical systems. The law immunizes the community from the connective power of *munus*, from the inborn dangers of common relations which make such community, from the relationships of reciprocal necessity between individuals and from the confusion over the boundaries that divide what is private and what is common. But during the protecting process the law deprives the community from its most intense meaning, dissolves it in order to save it. The dialectics of protection and deprivation of community revolve around the opposition between private and common. The law disempowers the common and incorporates the society around the institution of private, around what is different. Juridical regime guarantees the community a reduced risk of conflict through the fundamental norm according to which things can be used and consumed only by those who can prove the legitimate possession, thus replacing the common obligation of communal binding with individual rights. The main objective of public law is to safeguard what is private and to be public is mainly to reclaim what is private.

Now to the relationship between immunization and politics. As stated by Carl Schmitt (2006), the political sovereignty has a religious foundation, originally transformed from the immunizing principle of *katéchon*, that restrains the course of life through series of specific procedures (accusation, confession, reward). Place where theology and political sovereignty metaphorically overlap is the analogy between the incarnation of Christ and the body of monarch. Just as Christ unites the entire Christianity within himself, thus the monarch reunites in his physical and institutional person the political body, "protecting" it from dissolving. Therefore the political immunization, just as the religious one, is a result of a twofold process: remodeling the community according to the image of a body (horizontal axis where "all subjects are equal"), and bringing political forces under the control of transcendent principle that protects it from self-destruction (vertical axis, the reciprocal incorporation between subjects and sovereign, the relation between the people and power).

The sovereign power immunizes the community from the risks that it carries within, from one side eliminating all social relationships that exceed the exchange of protection and obedience on which is based the Hobbesian social pact, and from other side eliminating the "cum" from community, replacing it with a political norm that puts every individual into a direct relationship with the sovereign power. Therefore, here we have two

axis of the sovereignty: the horizontal axis of subjects in front of the sovereign and the vertical axis of direct relationship between individuals and power. Political immunization brings forward the same effects of juridical immunization: it de-socializes, it neutralizes the communal relationships and establishes the private law as a civil order, in this case the private being the exchange of protection and obedience.

Let's see how the dialectics of *communitas/immunitas* appear within the economical system. Capitalist immunization appears in the form of commodity. According to Marx's analysis, transformation of products of labour into commodities constitutes of two processes: the transformation of use value into exchange value and of concrete labour into abstract labour. Both processes are based on qualitative in-differentiation – of products and labours – and on quantitative equivalence between them. These two processes are consubstantial and cause an unitary effect that Marx defines as *fetish character of commodity* (Marx K., 1973: 85-86). In order to become a value, capital has to immunize itself from the *communitas* that is founded on real social relations between different producers and between producers and aggregate labour**.** It has to be immunized from the social cooperation that is implicit in the productive process. As we know, the "liberated society" envisioned by Marx is founded *a contrario* on these processes (giving us another example of the importance of negation in political and theoretical construction of counter-systems). That is, basically, an association of free men who work with means of production in common property and use consciously their individual labour force as a social labour force.

Following the analogy with the forms of *immunitas*, we can associate them with capitalist production and exchange processes, where these processes incorporate the *communitas* of social cooperation, and in the same time immunize it breaking it up into separated work processes, perceived in this way also by the producers, and transforming the social relationship within. But that's not all. They function according to another immunizing device. The capital gains value only immunizing itself from the very labour force. As is well known, labour force does not mean labour. The labour force is a sum of physical and intellectual attitudes of individuals and it can be transformed into commodities that can be sold or bought only in certain historical circumstances. From one side, the capital has to reproduce such historical conditions, preventing, for example, any excessive socialization of means of production. From other side, it has to 'immunize' itself from labour forces, meant as the plurality of potential attitudes that are present in every human being. These potential or common attitudes have to transform into actually distributed labour, a performance separated from other performances and therefore private, deprived from everything that is communal. The target of immunization is the potential nature and common essence of labour force and its instruments are the same with what it exercises its "hobbesian" control over political authorities: continuity, regularity, control and discipline. Also in this case Marx creates an idea of a counter-system *a contrario*. For Marx the communism means also free individuality, potentiality and community of general attitudes liberated from external control of capital.

At this point we can try to trace our first conclusion, looking how the concept of social movement is affected by the dialectics of *immunitas* and *communitas*. A movement implies a process of de-immunization. The creation of a movement entails a separation of a sector of society from the immunitarian devices that govern social systems. The social

movement is a part of the society that defines itself as different from the society. The differentiation of system-movement from the environment-society is based on the supremacy of *communitas* over *immunitas:* that is the reversal of hierarchies that characterizes civil order, political power and production system. This supremacy is observable in all social movements, even though social movements do not concur with it entirely nor do they implement it at the same rate. According to Luisa Passerini (2008), the '68 was at first an alternative community to those that existed in the society already, an aggregation that responded to the need for new relations, proposing a clear alternative to the traditional family and associative forms imposed by the modernization. Even Italian movements from the '69-'77 cycle, which were marked by a progressive ideological hardening, demonstrate the centrality of communitarian dimension in places where they developed their own "defying codes" and experimented with alternative lifestyles (Grispigni 2007). For the local ecologist movements the contrast between *communitas* (the territory experienced as a connection between individual identity and collective identity from and as a social relationship) and *immunitas* (the political economical, juridical, technical and mediatic counterpart) is even more explicitly central.

The communitarian dimension does not mean communitarianism (returning to once existed origins), but supremacy of common over individual, of social relations over private ones, of reciprocal ties over the property. It is a voluntary tie and not an ascribed one, even if the forms of "objective belonging" - the common association with a territory (local ecologist movements), a gender (feminist movements), a generation (student movements), or with a position in productive processes (workers' movement) - do favour creating one.
We can observe these dynamics related to all three systems that were used to illustrate the essence of immunitary devices. The law, as Luhmann claims, is the immune system of the society, the system that immunizes from the connective power of reciprocal ties (*munus*), that institutes 'one's own' in order to immunize from the risks of common or from 'too close'. A movement, in the contrary, is a social form characterized by the supremacy of reciprocal ties, a form that immunizes from 'one's own', *from excesses of property and from excessive distance between the individuals*[2] in order to make the public space remerge again.

As Esposito wrote: **"**every time when "popular liberty" prevails – in republican Rome or in modern Europe - return certain elements of outlaw community with all its potentialities as well as risks" (Esposito, 2002: 52). We can observe this outlaw community in local struggles against unwanted development of public works and infrastructure, when the activists occupy terrains allotted for disputed works; during the occupations of schools and universities, during strikes and non-authorized rallies. "Let's take back the city" was the slogan of Italian university students during spontaneous marches in 2008. These actions imply a suspension of governing social laws and civil order, meanwhile and foremost the juridical division between private and common is denied: revoking the private or state property of places that are occupied or transformed into public territory, revoking the rightfulness of private owners (and companies) to implement decisions that are juridically all legitimate because these are founded on the rights of property. Then again, the tension between 'one's own' and 'public' can turn against the movements themselves. The growing bureaucratization that many movements tend to take on is a result of such tension, attempt to immunize itself once more from the contents of *communitas* on which it is based on.

Let's close this section with an analysis of the relationship between the movements and economical immunization. The basic features of movements such as de-immunization and the supremacy of *communitas* relate with the economical system in three forms. The first is the importance given to the use value instead of the exchange value, and to the actual labour oppositely to the abstract labour. In this sense the movements (not always, not all, and anyway we are speaking here about an idealtypical form of movement) are also a reactive form to the one of the most important characteristic of the capitalist valorization: the abstraction. The abstraction of labour, the abstraction of capital as an impersonal subject, tendentiously illimitable and universal, autonomous from individual and concrete subjects who from time to time develope its functions. That does not mean at all that every social movement is anti-capitalist. But every movement is in some form critical about the abstraction of production and exchange processes, critical about the indifferences between different products and labour, opposing the commodification meanwhile glorifying the "small", the concrete, the different, the self-created, the production for consumption and not for exchange. This explains also the pragmatistic character of contemporary movements.

The second phenomena concerns the identification with an ideal *communitas* of producers. The social movements tend to praise 'the producers' in contrast to 'who lives off from the labour of others' (politicians, entrepreneurs, state functionaries). Central, in this sense, is the category of resentment, that feeds from the juxtaposition of one's daily fatigue with the privileged position – real or imaginary – of those, who are denounced as parasites. This idea of resentment is characterized by the very contradiction that followed its introduction in the philosophical debate via works of Nietzsche. For Nietzsche (2004), the resentment is a reactive feeling, both the inertia of imaginary vendetta of the powerless against the upper classes or more powerful men, and the inducing principle of those moral values (that according to Nietzsche have a negative historical role) which are the base of uprising[3].Therefore resentment can be as much a conflictual action as a powerless fantasy of revenge, ready, actually or symbolically, to turn into a revenge against some boss. Rhetorics based on resentment against privileges is present, for example, in the local movements. In these cases it is seen as a conflict of 'low' (or small) against 'high' (or big) conflict. It is not an incident that the local movements feed of the David-against Goliath metaphor. But the resentment can be populistically stirred from above, by the same actors whom the movements confronts as enemies (companies, mass-media, political parties), with the intention to depoliticize social ruptures that are the actual source of conflict and change the dynamics to something more favorable for the ruling classes[4]. It goes back one more time to the ceaseless dialectics between 'civil order' and opposition – between *immunitas* and *communitas* – and to the fact that every system functions interjecting, often anticipating or creating, the conflict from the environment, recalling constantly its 'outside, or creating a controllable 'outside', to reinforce itself including new elements. Indeed, as Machiavelli thought, the good laws are born from commotion. Expanding the concept: good marketing strategies are born from what is yet not marketable, good advertising campaigns from what is unconventional, odd, anti-conformist, successful mass-media campaigns from the 'street', *vox populi*, from preemptively immunized dissent, as in the cases of anti-political and security campaigns. Tendencies to appeal for elements from environment increase with the decreasing legitimacy of systems. In this sense are exemplary the tendencies of political campaigners to "immunize" potential movements of producers through populistic agitation and their attempts to legitimize their own political existence through self-appointed advocacy of non-political entities.

The third phenomenon is the creation of non-commercial spaces of trade and introduction of radical, semi-communist ways of living. In territorial movements these characteristics are evident in permanent sit-ins: spaces of voluntary social cooperation, when not of real labour, where is still room for *free individuality*, for anyone whose tendencies differ from orthodox attitudes, for *common labour* as opposed to the *private labour*. In permanent sit-ins the *communitas* of movement reaches its highest manifestation.

In conclusion, the social movements are *communitas* that breaks away from political, legal and economical immunity devices. If we regard the movements as systems and the immunitary stratagems as their environment, then we can argue that the movements manifest themselves as a negation and exclusion from their environment, its organizational practices, its purpose and its symbolical order.

Movements as a form of individualization

Let's analyze the next essential characteristic of the system-movement: the movement as a space for the new individualization. To confront this topic, we should consider some important developments of philosophical anthropology of 20th century and dig into the relationship between the social movements and formation of subjectivity.
The fundamental conceptual layout of philosophical anthropology is that of *compensation.* The human nature is centered on deficiency, on absence of a predetermined relation between environment and instinctual specialization, on the fragility of inhibitory mechanisms. This lack makes the human existence frail, incapable to survive, if survival would be dependent on the nature, instincts and impulses alone. The life will not endure without projecting outside from itself, objectifying itself in forms that would separate it from its immediacy, and survival entails a certain reduction of strength, a restraint that hardens in objectifying structures. For Hobbes this is the place where the order opposes the natural chaos of life-force, where the function of discipline, normative and institutions is to create new, artificial environments allowing the life to be canalized in order to survive, while survival in natural environment is not possible.
The order, the *positive*, is created around the *negative* of absence, the instinctual weakness becomes a strength of learning and creating artificial order, identification is at the same time estrangement, the subjectivity has to alienate from the objectivity. Just as the survival of *communitas* implies its weakening through *immunitas*, the survival of individual life implies a reduction of its intensity and alienation from its most immediate dimensions. In the analysis of Scheler (1976), human being is such an animal that, in spite of all others, says 'no' to actual reality. Only in this 'no' to reality and life is human being capable of creating an identity, subjectivity, culture and therefore survival. In this view, freedom is an imperative to open up to the world for an animal that has no original or specific world, and thus, according to Anders (1936), it is a dominion of upmost eventuality, reversibility and of non-necessity of any environment or artificial order.

Or as Gehlen (1957) wrote, that the 'negative' of human being can be contained only through the selection and departure from the disorderly overflow of stimuli that floods individuals, thus only through the creation of spaces that separate needs and satisfactions. And according to Gehlen this is exactly the function of institutions. The subjectivity is combined at the same time of individualization and of separation from the individual itself

(from his impulsive side, from his immediate needs etc.).

Also for Plessner (1985) this is the role of institutions and processes of civilization. The blending outcome of the desire for community, the excess of reciprocal relationships between individuals, too close connection with the individual itself and with the most dangerous aspects of his nature, are all contained by a system of functional separations. So that the identity of individual could be safeguarded from two 'excessive relationships' (with others and with itself), it has to disconnect the interiority from exteriority, private from public, visible from the invisible. And the man-made system of institutions and social conventions, for Plessner, is supposed to guarantee such system of separations. Thus the alienation is the only way to save individual identity, removing the organic ties with others and with itself.

As Virno (2005) wrote, also referring to the theories of philosophical anthropology, the ambivalence of human experience lies in the imperative of opening to the world. This implies to three types of experience that support both the human ability to take on innovative actions, as well as the dangerous nature of *Homo sapiens*. The three types of experience are the negation, the modality of the possible and the regression to the infinite. Negation can mean both emancipation from a vital context and its order (a necessary precondition for the realization of innovative actions, like those in the midst of actions of the social movements), and the negation of alterity and the humanity of other; the modality of possible corresponds with innovative actions and with the negation of stability of symbolic order (as often happens, for example, within postmodern culture and ideologies); infinite regress could mean both interpretative competence as well as incapacity to make sense and to retain it. For these reasons, according to Virno, the conditions of 'evil' are the same that give life to the 'virtues': "what we are pointing to are both the premises of subjugation and torture, and also the prerequisites that permit the invention of factory councils or other democratic institutions based on that topically political passion which is friendship without familiarity" (2005: 13-14). Therefore, with the decline of the state and public institutions in the sense of center of socialization and reciprocal acknowledgement, grows the dangerous side of human ambivalence and intra-specific aggressiveness, but at the same grows also the space for creative and innovative action.

So, how do these theoretical guidelines concern the concept of social movements in general? First, in social movements returns the original sense of the 'no' that Scheler was speaking about. If the capacity to say 'no' to the actual reality is that on what the identity is based on, and if the law, the institutions and the economy constitute the reality that surrounds the individuals in the world of artificial order, then *the capacity of negation that is fundamental for the immunitarian apparatus is used, in case of movements, against this very apparatus*. The formation of identity, in this way connected to the alienation of the subject from the norms of civil society, differentiates from these norms and reenters through the movements as a construction, as contingency and non-necessity. Once more appears the constituent role of negation; thanks to this very correlation between negation and subjectivity could Albert Camus claim that "With rebellion, awareness is born" (2005: 19)[5]. Two basic elements of the relationship between individuals and social systems – the negation of immediacy and the alienation from the organic connection with others and itself – are reused by movements as a differentiation from social systems. That is, as a differentiation from that form of identity and that kind of connection with others and with

itself that characterizes immunitarian systems. As in the case of the '68 movement Luisa Passerini wrote**:** "in the course of these stages - breaking up with previous communities of families and friends, establishing new fusional communities - were shaped individuals that previously did not exist" (2008: 235). According to the interpretation of Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp (2003), at the centre of the performance and contestation praxis of the Glbtq movement is a cycle: identification (with traditional view about gender and sexuality) - counter-identification (taking a provocative position that ridicules and rejects the sexual and gender codes) - disidentification (seizing the dominant categories in order to transform them into a more flexible model of gender and sexuality). The dialectics between previous identity and acquired identity through the means of collective actions are quite evident.

The relationship between individual identity and the system thus "dislocates" from 'immunizing' systems towards system-movement. And starting with this dislocation new codes are created, new symbolical orders, new representations of social connections. As Touraine (1997) wrote, a movement implies a figure of Subject, an image of a dis-alienated identity that is recreated on the social relationship on which the system-movement is based. The topic of previous paragraph - the supremacy of *communitas* over the *immunitas* - acquires different cultural or ideological donning in different historical moments, but it is always culturally constructed as a way of equality. The dis-alienation of the identity, the topic of this paragraph, acquires as well different historical forms, but it is always retractable to the image of liberty. Different movements can prefer one of the two axis (the workers' movement the equality axis, the "New social movements" the liberty axis), but in any case they avow also for the opposite position. The position of defending the liberty is always connected with the subject, thus with the idea about subject that is liberated from those forms of alienation, necessary for creation of the civil order/society. In contrast with immunitarian devices, the image of a Subject emerges from the creation of collective identity. If we consider the analysis of Alessandro Pizzorno (1980), we can see the actual creation of collective identity in the moment when a movement advances from its expansive phase and defines itself as a specific system. Moreover, during this moment the supremacy of *communitas* (centrality of the assembly, denial of functionary posts, organization and central leadership, thinning down political and cultural differences) is connected to the figure of a dis-alienated subject. This synchronism confirms the existence of such connection between these two dimensions we are speaking about, of reciprocal necessity that connects one to the other. The 'suspension' of legitimacy of the immunitarian devices implies at the same time to the supremacy of the *communitas* and to the representation of a dis-alienated identity.

As a closing argument we can add that the second characteristic of system-movements is the removal – even if momentary and not completely – of ties between subjectivity and immunitarian devices. Just as the *communitas* makes visible the potentiality that is "enmeshed" with the normal functioning of social systems, does the movement bring forward an idea about the possibility to 'rejoin' an authentic self, aspects of individuality that were denied by the processes of modernization. Calling back to the 'organic link with itself' that according to Plessner and Gehlen every civilization has to deconstruct. In case of movements, especially during their ascending phase, it is the connection between individualization and alienation that is deconstructed, while to the surface emerge the needs, impulses, longing for a full adherence between external and interior, public and private, visible and invisible.

The social system as the environment of social movements

There's no irreconcilable otherness, impossibility of communication or impermeability between a movement and its environment. The relationship between the movement and its environment is traceable to three basic dynamics, to which we now turn our attention. These dynamics refer to the relationship between system-movement and its environment in different ambients: the social processes, ideology and organization.

Reaction. The first dynamic is that of the reaction, opposition, of the pure 'no' to social processes, ideologies and organizational practices of dominant social systems. Let's take territorial movements as an example. In social processes they represent a reactive form to different phenomena: to the social fragmentation, radical individualization induced by contemporary forms of consumption, to the utopia of autarchic Me, to the continuous changes of life environment provoked by constant technical and technological evolution, to the dynamics of de-socialization and its effects on identity and on relationship with social norms. Furthermore, they represent the reaction to the disorientation, provoked by experiencing their territory, their everyday spaces, as ungovernable commercial, productive and financial fluxes, shaped by governing logics elaborated in faraway and non-representative places, that yet change the social fabric, its relationships and life conditions. Strong forms of identification based on the joint affiliation to something "objective", like those that have place in these movements, are also a reactive form to emotional tensions provoked by the "project-based life" so typical to the contemporary living conditions, reaction to the flexibility, "liquidity" and mutability of identities, living conditions and environments.

On ideological and cultural level these movements are the opposition, negation and reaction against the entanglement of politics and business, the consumerist society, the myth of economical growth. More generally, they react to the absence of bigger, value-based political options which they could affiliate with and connect their own experience to, to the idea of futility and to the inactuality of whichever *project* meant to actively change living conditions and, along with it, some fundamental elements of given social order. If those options are not promoted by the official part of the social system, as they answer to a more general need for meaningfulness, discernment and self-determination, then they will be looked for through other actors just as social movements.

As much as regards the organizational questions, the movements create their own praxis and their own action methods that negate those attributed to political parties and economical institutions, evading at all costs the hierarchies, formalization, leadership, horizontality and outward openness.

At the first level, the relationship between movement and environment appears as negation and reactive formation, from which, as indicated above, originates the very constitution of a system-movement as differentiation.

Change of sign. In case of movements the relationship between the system and its environment is not only reactive and opposing, but also dialectical. The connection between *communitas* and *immunitas*, social systems and the oppositions, "control over life" and

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"life", has the nature of a continuous correlation between the opposites, of cross-reference. The system needs to continuously refer to the forms of *communitas* meanwhile the opposition (by the principle it has to define itself in negative) has to refer to the norms, means and codes created by the system. A system-movement defines itself in relation to the power and has a tendency to enter into a crisis on the moment it will seek to transform into a project on its own, gain autonomy from any reference to the power, "sail to the uncharted waters".

However, movements do take over certain aspects of socialization that belong to the dominant forms (it is enough to think to the "mimesis of the state" that is a common characteristic to the workers' movements), they're partially coherent with contemporary social processes and do make use of ideological elements and cultural schemes of hegemonic culture.
Let's take as an example the relation between the current consumerist model and territorial movements. As it's been proved since some years, the contemporary consumption model promotes desire as an expression of an individual "outside from the common", as a rupture, a discontinuity. Thus consumption is at odds with the very system of equivalent commodities and even though it tends to create forms of integration and "coercion to normality" it still promotes being different, the intensity of desire as a referent to legitimate social actions, the *necessity* for to create one's identity and to satisfy one's emotions, needs and pleasures. The way these processes diffuse in the culture and spread in collective representation can not be distant from the exaltation over the particular, the singularity and the contradistinction, as in the case of promotion of local products, that correspond in territorial movements to the opposition against general uniformity of commodities.

Besides, as Lipotevsky (2006) wrote, the contemporary consumption does not create only individualization. It also organizes into associations and affinity groups, communities, decentralizes into neo-clans, becomes fragmented and multi-centric, crisscrossed by tiny groups of shared identities that collocate in the space of market. It is, in every sense, an immunization of *communitas* through introjection. In this context the "fragmentary" parts of society tend to disintegrate it among them, claim an autonomous space for every one of them and then refute all public interests and political forms of representation and mediation. Contemporary movements, and territorial movements among the first, are partly a result of these processes, continuous and coherent with them, they're a rebuttal of public interests represented by the state, rebuttal of any political mediation. In a certain sense, they are "secessionist". And here we actually arrive to the meaning of "*change of sign*". Dialectics between a movement and society consist on one side of the fact that these movements are indeed coherent with dominant processes and social systems, on the other hand of the fact that they change the sign of these processes. Even though they secede from public interests and the state, refute any forms of mediation and representation, yet they are recreating a *polis*, reinventing public interests that *no longer is represented by the state*, but integrate the citizens and their homogenous and common needs, reweaving together symbolical universal horizons (through self-identification in *communitas* of citizens and producers, through the unitary thought of humankind). They're, therefore, at the same time both social disintegration and reintegration, the image of a fragmentation and principle of reconstruction.

Same kind of dialectics can be found in modes of production. Contemporary

productive processes use knowledge and space as central resources. While contemporary movements (territorial, student and precarious workers' movements) assume the same centrality, but at the same time change its sign: both space and knowledge are seen by these movements as goods that should be *re-appropriated* as common goods and located in re-constructed common space. Coming back to the previously encountered connection between *communitas* and economical immunization, would be useful to this purpose to reintroduce *the category of contradiction* between productive forces and social relations of production. Both the space – and all that it contains: social relations, networks, histories, identities – and the knowledge, being productive forces, clash with proprietary relations and imply to a common form. As Melucci wrote, the contradiction is "an incompatibility between elements or parts of a system. Incompatibility between elements within a certain specific system, incompatibility between different systems, is an activating trigger for the social movements and other forms of collective action" (1991: 39). In order to gain value, the capital must increasingly re-enter into the production-consumption cycle of common resources (territory, knowledge, social networks, collective identities, communities etc.), but that creates inside the economical system new incompatible forms that contribute to the activation of movements. These forms of incompatibility activate among the movements also others types of collective conducts. Regarding to some more advanced sectors of capitalist development is enough to consider things such as peer-to-peer system, free exchange of files, grassroots journalism of some blogs or independent TVs, open-source systems and Wikipedia. Such collective conducts indicate a certain incompatibility between productive forces and social relations of production that has become evident in the current, probably no longer reversible, crisis of music industry. These conducts create a *communitas,* which the corporations try constantly to immunize, commercialize, to fragment reducing it to private, meanwhile welcoming the "Hobbesian" contribution from the state apparatus (it's enough to recall the exemplary punishments doled out to people who download music files for free).

This dialectics between capitalism and movements naturally works in both ways. Paolo Virno (1997), for example, speaks about "counterrevolution" regarding to the reorganization of postfordian production in 70s, interpreted as an 'immunitarian' reaction to the workers' struggle of 1968-1972. Immunitarian devices, in turn, incorporate the elements born in the conflicts they had to face changing once more the sign. Thus we return to focal point: between movements and social systems, between the *communitas* and *immunitas*, the dialectics are constant and bidirectional. Furthermore, this binds together different cycles of mobilization: every cycle maintains as goals also the topics and problems found in the previous cycle and transformed by their introjection in immunitarian systems. Moreover, it remembers the failures of previous cycle and this causes the changes in movement's range and strategies from one cycle to another.

Assumption by generalization. The third characteristic of interactions between movements and society is the 'assumption by the generalization'. The movements do not only refute and negate the social devices of central government, not only they relate with these in dialectical way, but they also take over some partial aspects in order to generalize them within the social system. It regards mostly the broken promises of the society, what is propagated as an ideology of well-being, while reserving the real satisfaction to limited sectors and specific parties. In the case of "flexibility" topic, Zygmunt Bauman has frequently underlined that it is chosen and propagated by some smaller sector of the society meanwhile affecting a more

substantial part. The precarious workers' movements do not struggle for the return of centrality of long-term contracts, they do no look for stability and security in reactive form to the flexibility and uncertainty. They even object to political parties which respond to the problem of precariousness in this way. Their struggle against short-term contracts means an generalization and assumption of this kind of flexibility that privileged strata of society already enjoys, assumption and generalization of the flexibility as kind of liberty, autonomy, multifaceted experience and a game.

Conclusions

The social movements are at the same time negation, changing of sign and assumption by generalization of social processes, ideologies and modes of action that dominate a certain historical period. Their nature derives from all the three moments and from the reciprocal relations created between them. In order for a movement to emerge, consolidate and most of all, to have mass dimensions, it has to recline on all three of these dynamics of interaction with social system.

First of all, it has to originate from a strong conflict, from shared interests, common risk or social alarm, *more common as possible*, in order to sustain the creation of a *communitas*. For a system-movement to start the process of differentiation from social system it comes from, based on the mechanisms of reaction and negation, the interests or common risks have to face an adversary (one or more immunitarian systems) that appear as radical strangeness, that are not capable of directly protecting from the risks or provocations, or appear as pushing further the sustainable limits of alienation mechanisms, of identity as we analyzed above, increasing excessively the tensions between personal sphere and the structure of civil order. It's largely the adversary that limits from outside the possible space of *communitas*. The visibility and intrusiveness of adversary triggers the *potential* resources of mobilization. Potential, because they do not exist previously to the conflict, but are socially at disposal, potential centers for the *communitas*, material or symbolical structures on which a collective can be built upon. Potential resources thus means jet non-existent resources that can offer an anchorage to the objectivity. Without an adversary, without its visibility or intrusiveness, these resources remain as potential and do not become active.

The centrality is another fundamental mechanism to prompt the processes of negation and differentiation. Above all, during times of centrality of communication, in order to reach certain dimensions a conflict has to become "the main actuality" for the potentially mobilizable subjects, become a space where the time and social space converge as an emergency. Such reality, where remaining outside would be difficult without experiencing a sense of exclusion, a fear to lose an opportunity, a chance to be a part of current reality. An actuality that has to 'replace' the reality devised by the social apparatus of political government.

Second, the triggering and expanding a movement requires the capacity to change the sign of dominant social processes, cultural schemes and modes of action. In order 'to change the sign' a movement has to be rooted inside the processes that concern the immediacy and concreteness of everyday life and has to be partly coherent with it, without falling into absolute discontinuity regarding to common sense and hegemonic cultural schemes, adopting such modes of socialization inside that still link to the prevalent modes

of socialization. Potential activists unfamiliar with political militancy will participate only if they do not feel an excessive distance between themselves and the collective actors, between their normality and the nature of the movement. From the point of view of participants, it has to be the social system that slides from legitimacy to illegitimacy, from lawful to unlawfulness, not the contrary. On these conditions can the successive mechanism of differentiation of system-movement reach the highest levels of radicalism, most likely if the participants have formerly identified themselves as "common people" and "normal persons".

Finally, the movement has to intervene with the mechanisms of "broken promises", with social ideologies that did not realize, with processes where the system had contradicted itself and faced the problems of incompatibility.

The sum of these conditions forms the possible base that can trigger the processes of differentiation of a system-movement from its environment-society, with its two central characteristics: the advent of the *communitas* and an idea of Subject.

Notes

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[1]   I refer, as regards the concepts of *immunitas*, to the hypothesis formulated in Esposito R., *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, Einaudi, Torino, 1998 and in Esposito R., *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Einaudi, Torino, 2002.

[2]   See also, about this thesis, Canetti (1962).

[3]   Nietzsche writes, understanding and "prophetically" interpreting the spirit of our time, while showing all his distaste for "ascetic ideals": "The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of beings denied the true reaction, that of the deed, who recover their losses only through an imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant yes-saying to oneself, from the outset slave morality says "no" to an "outside", to a "not-self": and this "no" is its creative deed" (2004: 62).

[4]   How popular resentment against the èlite can be transformed into consensus with the strategies of conservative governments cf. Stuart Hall (1979), and Mastropaolo (2005). How the "de-politicization" process is a construction of neutral spheres freed from conflict, is analyzed in depth in Schmitt (1972).

[5]   Camus writes: "The very moment the slave refuses to obey the humiliating orders of his master, he simultaneously rejects the condition of slavery. The act of rebellion carries him far beyond the point he had reached by simply refusing. He exceeds the bounds that he fixed for his antagonist, and now demands to be treated as an equal. What was at first the man's obstinate resistance now becomes the whole man, who is identified with and summed up in this resistance. The part of himself that he wanted to be respected he proceeds to place above everything else and proclaims it preferable to everything, even to life itself. It becomes for him the supreme good. Having up to now been willing to compromise, the slave suddenly adopts ("because this is how it must be …") an attitude of All or Nothing. With rebellion, awareness is born."

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