Master Thesis

The French May and the Shift of Paradigm of Collective Action

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The true literature about May 1968 is already less (and will soon cease to be) the literature that talks about it. After a first span of time, that of the chroniclers and of defensive or apologetic reactions, after a second span of time of analysis centred on the event, comes a third one of self-reflection for each human science and each institution… A surfeit of strategies, methodologies, and epistemologies picks up where the last episodes of the "May '68" soap opera left off. They are not longer attracted to the historical object but to the instruments of thought and of action that it brought forth.

Michel de Certeau (1997:62)

Abstract

With the intention of understanding today's options and possibilities of collective action, this thesis examines a historical moment of change. The New Social Movements theories allege that the French May was a turning point; it was a moment when traditional movements were replaced by new ones. Here I analyze the theoretical paradigm change in collective action in order to observe how its postulates can be seen during the events of *Mai '68*.

My historical approach - skeptic of empiricist positions - does not seek to make a universal history of the event, but just to concentrate in a particular aspect of it, namely, its incidence in the paradigm shift in collective action. The French May is important to me because of the role it plays in that particular conceptual constellation and not as a historical event *per se*. It is with this approach in mind that I elaborated this thesis.

In order to achieve my goal, in the first place, I develop a summary of the main theoretical propositions within the paradigm. I center my attention on three main dimensions which can be better understood by the following questions: who mobilized? What do they struggle for? How do they seek to organize the movements? After making clear the main postulates offered by the New Social Movement theories I, in the second place, analyze these same three dimensions in the events of May '68. With mentioned theoretical perspective as an interpretative background, I analyze primary and secondary sources in order to understand whether the French May fits in the New Social Movements paradigm or rejects that hypothesis. After concluding that this historical moment could be better understood as the last traditional movement than the first new one, I critically discuss its consequences. The left's interpretation of the event as a defeat led to the abandonment of the Marxist paradigm and the instauration of the New Social Movements one. In the last section I discuss the consequences that this view of the event had and has for our current potential of collective action.

Abstract

Um die aktuellen Optionen und Möglichkeiten des Kollektiven Handels besser zu verstehen, möchte ich mit dieser Master-Arbeit auf einen historischen Moment des Wandels eingehen. Die Theorie der „Neuen Sozialen Bewegung“ behauptet, dass der Pariser Mai ein Wendepunkt war; es war ein Moment, als traditionelle Bewegungen durch neue ersetzt wurden. In dieser Arbeit analysiere ich die theoretischen Paradigmenwechsel des Kollektiven Handels, um zu beobachten, wie seine Postulate während der Ereignisse des *Mai ’68* zu sehen sind.

Meine historische Ansicht- skeptisch gegenüber den empirischen Positionen- strebt keine universale Darstellung vom Ereignis an, sondern sich nur auf einen bestimmten Aspekt dessen zu konzentrieren, das heißt, das Auftreten des Paradigmenwechsels im Kollektiven Handeln. Der Pariser Mai ist meines Erachtens sehr wichtig, da er in dieser begrifflichen sowie spezifischen Konstellation eine große Rolle spielt und nicht ein historisches Ereignis an sich. Mit dieser Ansicht arbeite ich diese Arbeit sorgfältig aus.

Um mein Ziel zu erreichen, schaffe ich zuerst eine Zusammenfassung von den theoretischen Hauptaspekten innerhalb des Paradigmas. Meine Aufmerksamkeit richtet sich an drei Ausmaße, die mit folgenden Fragen besser zu verstehen sind: Wer wird aktiv? Wofür kämpfen sie? Wie wollen sie diese Bewegungen organisieren? Nachdem die wichtigsten Postulate, angeführt von der „Neuen Sozialen Bewegungen“, erläutert worden sind, analysiere ich an zweiter Stelle diese drei Ausmaße in Bezug auf die Ereignisse im Mai 1968. Mit der erwähnten theoretischen Perspektive als einen darstellenden Hintergrund, analysiere ich primäre und sekundäre Quellen mit dem Ziel zu verstehen, ob der Pariser Mai in das Modell der „Neuen Sozialen Bewegungen“ passt oder diese Hypothese ablehnt. Nachdem ich erklärt habe, dass dieser historische Moment besser als die letzte traditionelle Bewegung zu verstehen sein könnte wie die erste neue Bewegung, untersuche ich anschließend kritisch ihre Folgen. Die Interpretation vom Ereignis als eine von den Linken durchgeführte Niederlage, führte zum Abbruch des marxistischen Paradigmas und der Wiederherstellung der „Neuen Sozialen Bewegungen.“ Im letzten Absatz gehe ich auf die Konsequenzen ein, die diese Vision vom Ereignis hatte und für unser zeitgenössisches Potenzial des Arbeitskampfes hat.

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Introduction

The main purpose of this thesis is to analyze the relationship between the French May and the paradigm shift that occurred in the theories of collective action. In order to accomplish this objective I have organized my work in the following way. In this introduction I first justify why I am studying the connection between the French May and the New Social Movements theories and I secondly explain the particular historical approach that I have chosen for my research. In the following chapter I give an overview of the theoretical debate around the New Social Movement theories and the paradigm shift. More specifically, I choose there three main dimensions of analysis – agency, aims of struggle and organization – and show the different ideas that are proposed. After a chapter in which I offer a short chronology of the events, I use the three above mentioned theoretical dimensions to analyze the facts and event occurred during May 1968. This theoretically guided empirical analysis leads me to the conclusion that the French May cannot be understood as a consequence of the paradigm shift, but as a cause of it. In the conclusion I analyze which were and are the consequences for collective action of this historical phenomenon.

New Social Movements and the French May – Why?

In this thesis there are two main elements which take the central stage: those of collective action and the French May. More specifically, I am interested in the paradigm shift that gives birth to the New Social Movement theories and the way in which these theorizations interrelate with the particular expressions through which mobilization took place during *Mai '68*. Changes in reality lead to changes in concepts, but many times changes in concepts depict forced and over schematized images of reality. It is within this tension that I am trying to understand the kind of relationship that was established between the two dimensions. The choice of this set of theories and the historical events is not random or accidental, since the French May and its historical context have been of great influence in the work of most of the theorists involved. The main aim of this section is to show how these two elements are significant to each other.

Most of the contemporary debate around the concept of collective action and research dealing with social movements and political organizations assumes that there has been a paradigm shift. This is shared by many authors in different positions, from those who would include themselves in the main stream of New Social Movement theories, to those who are critics of these perspectives. Authors comprehending a variety of approaches such as Antonio Melucci (1980), Claus Offe (1985), Alain Touraine (1988), Manuel Castells (1977) or Klaus Eder (1993), just to mention the leading figures, have agreed on the fact that there has been a change in collective action, even if they do not coincide on what the new features are.

It is widely accepted that the key historical moment of change which is at the base of all New Social Movements theories can be found between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. It is within this time frame that collective action in the advanced capitalist countries – theorists argue – acquired new characteristics and, while demanding new conceptualizations, suggested the expiry date of the Marxist philosophy of history and its central categories. Since *Mai '68* was the paradigmatic case of

mobilization within this period, it results more than appropriate to make it the empirical case to contrast these theorizations with.

Going through the literature on history of concepts it is possible to find two major events which can be associated with the 1960s more in general and the French May more specifically: the incapability of orthodox Marxism to explain a changing reality and the emergence of New Social Movements theories. On the first point, there seems to be a general agreement on the fact that the movements during the end of the 1960s heralded the first challenges for the up to then dominant perspective (Flacks, 1967; Laraña, 1982; Katsiaficas, 1987). Michel Foucault (1980:67), for example, argues that a deep anti-Marxist mood was not only the outcome of 1968, but also what made it possible. Those who decided to mobilize and represented the spirit of the events were trying to look for an alternative to Marxism in the field of social change, they put under discussion the equation which up to the moment had always been a dogma: "Marxism = the revolutionary process" (Ibid). For Foucault 1968 was about making a revolution through different means and with different categories and it was this aim what created a reality which could not be understood from the Marxist perspective.

In this same line, Simon Choat marks the end of the three decades of Marxist preeminence in academic circles in France in 1968. He explains: "after the student-worker May revolts, Marx was overtaken by other thinkers, and through the 1970s he was turned upon with a vengeance" (Choat, 2010:10). Resnick and Wolff support this position by stating that Marxism became object of hard criticism by many of those who had been its devotees, because after 1968 this understanding of the world and social change seemed to lead nowhere. They categorically conclude by affirming that this paradigm "seems to have been superseded by events" (Resnick and Wolff, 2006:68). This rejection of Marxist categories and concepts by history would go hand in hand with innovations in the theoretical field, since it would prepare the soil for the seeds of the New Social Movements theories to germinate.

In the works on intellectual history, 1968 appears as a turning point in the transition from modernity to post-modernity. Terry Eagleton (1996) in his "The Illusions of Postmodernism," explains how this paradigm arises as a symptom of a defeated left. Even if he questions that this defeat has ever really happened, he describes how the disillusionment of a whole generation of leftist intellectuals and the frustration for the failure of the socialist project to triumph led to a conservative outcome. The reader can easily interpret 1968 as the main lost battle in this process of defeat. Peter Dews, in his critical account of post-structuralist thought highlights some of the very important influences of the French May in this twist:

> This revelation of the potentially explosive force of individual 'desire' was not the only way in which the May revolt represented a fundamental challenge to the view of the social as consisting in systems of communication or symbolic exchange (…) it also made clear that symbolic structures, far form unfolding in accordance with an immanent logic, were determined and served to mask relations of power (Dews, 2007:176).

This transition to post-modernism is not a minor fact to understand the emergence of the New Social Movements theories, since as Jonston et al affirm, this is the context where these new perspectives are being produced: "as analysts of new social movements in Europe sifted through the soil of postmodernism, they have located the first sprouts of new social movements among the relatively recent mobilizations of students and the New Left in the late 1960s" (Jonston et al, 1994:26). The mobilizations at the end of the 1960s are the empirical problem and the post-modern mood the intellectual context for the emergence of these new theories.

Tarrow (1994) has criticized the excessive emphasis on the idea of newness in these theories. In doing so, he explains that the authors have confused what was a particular cycle of protest (that taking place between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s) with a new historical stage of collective action. Even if Tarrow disagrees with the conclusions that most of the theorists have achieved, he is still confirming that it was the social unrest of that specific cycle of protest what provided the input for the shift in the paradigm. The same could be said about Buechler (1995), as he criticizes the fact that the excessive attention paid to cases of collective action which do no fit in the Marxist matrix had the unintended effect of denying any history in this field before the cycle of protests of the 1960s.

I quote Klaus Eder in other to summarize which could be the main position regarding the relationship between this particular period of time and the paradigm shift in collective action: "since the activist decades which began in the late sixties, the constructivist approach has dominated and found its most elaborate expression in the theory of new social movements" (1993:14). This quote could perfectly fit in almost any text by authors from the stream under analysis: the phenomena occurring since the end of the 1960s are the clay with which the new position is modeled. Maheu states that at the end of the 1960s intellectuals were facing "the first moments of what we have come to call, in the 1980s and 1990s, identity politics" (Maheu, 1995:4). But if talking about the sixties is still too general for the reader, I will quote Pichardo who puts place and time for the main affairs when he affirms that the defining events for this change of paradigm "were the wide-scale student protest that took place in France and Berlin in 1968 and Italy in 1969" (Pichardo,1997:412). Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, in her analysis of the French May from the perspective of collective action, puts it simple and clear: "I view the May events as an expression of a new social movement" (Gilcher-Holtey, 2003:254).

The end of the 1960s has been characterized by Turner as the moment of "birth of a new utopia" which meant the "start of a new sequence" (Turner, 1994:87, 90) of social mobilization. A new paradigm is inaugurated, contradicting the classical working class tradition. To continue with this kind of grandiloquent definitions, Richard Wolin (2010) says that the 1960s were a moment of *caesura* in the field of social mobilization and struggle from below; he highlights a change in the goals and scope of collective action. *Mai ´68*, he explains, inaugurates a new political phenomenon. Last, but not least, Katsiaficas defines 1968 as the "end of an epoch" (1987:82), as a global moment which inaugurates the dominance of a new subversive ideology, that of the New Left.

All in all, as I have showed through these pages, the overwhelming majority of authors working on the field of New Social Movements theories have identified the end of the 1960s in general and the French May in particular as the moments of radical change that have inaugurated a new period in the history of collective action. And it has been the conflict between reality and interpretation what has opened the way to the emergence of a new paradigm.

The link is clearly exposed, but needs to be examined. Was really the French May a moment of change which required innovation in theorization? Do the New Social Movements theories actually grasp and describe the elements that made May '68 a unique historical event? In the chapters to come, my main enterprise will be that of confronting the New Social Movements theories' categories with the main movements in the French May in order to establish which was actually the relationship established between the two phenomena.

Writing History – Which History?

The object of study of this thesis is a historical phenomenon; the field of my work is that of history. Stating that I am doing history might be useful as guidance but ambiguous as a clarification. My thesis does a historical analysis, but of which kind? Which are its suppositions and implications? The purpose of this section is to explain and justify the historical approach that I have chosen and is at the base of the construction of my research topic: the French May and its relationship with the paradigm shift in collective action.

Walter Benjamin rejected a particular vision of history, that one that he defined as "historicism." According to him, this line of historical research has as its goal the construction and description of the past in "the way it really was" (Benjamin, 2007:236). This is usually translated into an additive method which only focuses on the collection of an enormous amount of data and does not have the ability to differentiate between major and minor events. The result is a "universal history" without a "theoretical armature" (Ibid.:241). It is a history that describes the past in the most complete way possible but does not possess a theoretical orientation, a critical spirit, in order to produce a selection or elaborate a specific reading within the total event.

In order to avoid this empiricism Benjamin proposes a materialist approach to history. In this perspective the historian's mission should not be to describe what happened in the past but, much more importantly, to actualize the historical event according to the requirements of the present. More simply, the historical analysis has to look at the events in the past which are significant for the current state of affairs and read them from a perspective which proves important for the transformation of the present. The idea of a universal history is abandoned and replaced by a critical perspective that selects, distinguishes, ignores and analyzes historical events in connection with the contemporary reality.

As a consequence, a historical event is not any phenomenon in the past, but a moment that affects the social capacity for action and transformation, or in Benjamin's words, the *messianic power*: "there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. (…) Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply" (Ibid.:231-2). Our current potential and limits to act are in relation with the past. If we need to understand the current universe of the thinkable and the possible in the field of political struggle, we need to understand the historical events which are connected to our present. If we decide to study an event, to go back to the past, it is not merely to obtain a contemplative pleasure; we do it because in its special connection to the present the past recovers a new actuality (Lucero, 2010). The theoretically oriented analysis of the past actualizes and illuminates new questions, not only about what it was but also about what might be: we go to the past seeking the future (Ibid).

The link between past and present, Benjamin explains, is not established by causal relations or sequences of events one after the other. To show this connection the historian "grasps the *constellation* which his own era has formed with a defined earlier one" (Benjamin, 2007:240). Past and present are not linked by a causal relationship but are part of a same "constellation." This is some kind of conceptual structure which links them together but not because of chronology; the constellation shows the common ground they share for the understanding of the historical events. The constellation cannot be seen by those empiricists who disregard theoretical tools in their job. The only way to understand the connection is by looking at the events through some shared

“concept” which puts them in the same constellation, blasting in this way the historical event out of the “homogenous course of history” (Ibid.:237).

Since Benjamin doest not go much further on this idea, I intend to complement his proposal with Althusser’s notion of the “concept of historical time” (Althusser and Balibar, 2009). Even if the French philosopher is not thinking about Benjamin while he develops his idea, I have the conviction that both positions complement each other perfectly, offering historians in particular and social scientists in general an excellent choice for historical studies.

Althusser shares Benjamin’s rejection of empiricist history, which he accuses of being overwhelmingly dominant in every historical field. He affirms that historical time is not immediately legible, it is not visible and obvious to the observer. A sequence of events following other events is not more than a historical chronology and the mistake is to fall into the ideological pre-judgment of considering this sequence as the history itself. The only way in which the historian can escape from this empiricist and ideological position is by producing and constructing a concept of historical time. What does this mean? Althusser affirms that “there is no history in general, but only specific structures of historicity” (Ibid.:121), this, in consonance with Benjamin’s rejection of universal history means that the study of history cannot be based on the multiple dimensions and multitude of facts present during a certain period of time. The empiricist fantasy of such a history should be replaced by an approach that theoretically constructs the concept of what it wants to study. In this way, the empirical reality becomes divided, classified and organized in a hierarchy in a certain way that allows the historian to do her or his analysis. The concept gives a new meaning to the plurality of events; its construction produces a new reality which has nothing to do with the superficial sequences of events that the empiricist chronicler confuses with history. Since a history in general is impossible, the historian has to choose a particular historicity, a specific dimension, sphere or phenomenon which, through conceptualization, becomes the referent organizing the events. Only with the construction of a concept of historical time can the multitude of events acquire hierarchy and can the historian appreciate the “historical fact,” that one which causes transformations in the structural relations.

It is the concept, then, that allows the researcher to make the connection, as Benjamin suggested, between the past and the present. The historical fact is the event which transforms the structures of a concept which mutates with time. The concept is the structural dimension which relates past and present, not because of a causal relation, but in the fashion of Benjamin’s constellation. Past and present are put together because they are linked by a common concept of historical time and not because of causality. It is by our study of such a concept that the present is understood through the past and the past can show us the future, as the German philosopher proposed.

The goal of making a total history of a historical phenomenon implies the attempt to say everything that could be said about it. It is the pursuit of describing every part, every specificity, and every contradiction. The usual result is an empiricist history of facts and data of little intellectual and political value. As a consequence, I have the conviction that history can only be a worthy enterprise when the author has a narrative line in mind, a particular story within this history that she or he is committed to analyze.

With this approach in mind I have decided to study the French May, not as a historical event *per se*, but as a moment of change in the history of collective action. To write a thesis about the French May as a universal or general history would prove to have reduced value, as I have explained, since it would lead to an empiricist approach of the facts. In line with Benjamin and Althusser I have decided to construct my object of

study by placing the concept of collective action at the base of my interest in the study of *Mai '68*. I am interested in this historical moment from a perspective of political struggle, because this dimension is linked to my concept of historical time. I have chosen a theoretical concept in order to illuminate the facts and work with those which are relevant to it and avoid those which would be better connected with other concepts. Collective action is what makes certain characteristics of the French May important for me and what links the history with the present. The concept of collective action is the structure which forms Benjamin's constellation, the structure which puts together and in relationships a number of spots in the historical line.

According to my initial assumptions, it has been said by an important number of sociologists and political scientists that during May '68 a big transformation took place in the ways of collective action. As a consequence, the political world we live today, our possibilities for mobilization, contestation and organization have been modeled by a particular past. My goal now is not to go back to it in a nostalgic mood, to remember and to praise it, but to bring it to the present, to actualize it because of the relevance it has today. Collective action nowadays can only be understood because of its past, but also the past can get new meanings according to our present, this is the dialectical relationship that underlies Althusser's and Benjamin's writings. The importance of this concept is not minor, since it is strictly related to the possibilities of emancipation and transformation which define the importance of historical events for these authors, what makes the "messianic secession of times" for Benjamin: a moment in which the social forcers interrupt the homogenous stream of history to transform it and build a new future.

All in all, the purpose of this section should be clear by now. I am studying the French May only as a moment in the history of the concept of collective action. Many of its facts, features, actors and dates will not be taken into account, since my objective is not to make general history, but a historicity constructed around the mentioned concept. The justification for this is evident, since collective action is a fundamental dimension in the normative hopes of emancipation, the need to actualize this event in order to understand the present and bring new questions to the fore makes the historical enterprise an urgent one.

Defining New Social Movements

Introduction to a Paradigm

The main purpose of this theoretical framework is to fully describe what I understand as the main concepts of the New Social Movements paradigm. In this section, in the first place, I am going to give a general overview of the paradigm focusing on the discontinuity they want to express by their abandoning of the orthodox Marxist explanation of collective action, and on the most widespread and shared features which characterize this stream. In the second place, I will center on the main variables of analysis for the characterization of these new social movements. Basically, I will follow three very simple but important questions: *who* takes part in these movements? *What* do new social movements struggle for? And, lastly, *how* do they pursue their goals?

Some Precisions on the Concept: *New Theories*

I have always referred to New Social Movements *theories* in the plural and never mentioned them as a single theory. The main reason for this is the lack of a unified perspective or vision. We are not facing a theoretical orthodoxy, a one-voiced approach or a homogenous group of theoreticians, contrarily, the label of "New Social Movements" works as an umbrella that comprehends a variety of positions and views that, even if sharing some very important commonalities, oppose and challenge each other in many aspects. On this issue Steven Buechler states: "It would be more accurate to speak of 'new social movement theories' (…) various new social movement theorists give different emphases to these themes [newness, class base, way of organization and demands] and have diverse relations with alternative traditions, thereby warranting a language that speaks of the new social movement theories (in the plural)" (Buechler, 1995:442).

In line with this argument, the approach I am offering in this section is twofold. On the one hand, I will focus in the main aspects which are shared by the majority of authors who are working within this stream. Even if we state that we are facing a heterogeneous group of theories, we cannot forget that they can be grouped together because of some main commonalities. Consequently, I will first focus on these elements which give existence to the paradigm expressing a break with older traditions and filling it with authentic and distinctive content.

On the other hand, I have chosen three main elements of analysis which I plan to discuss in order to show the different positions on different aspects of the characterization of new social movements. In this part of my theoretical framework, after having discussed commonalities, diversity will take place and the reader will be able to appreciate those issues which generate debate and disagreement. The discussions about subjectivity, goals and organization will provide the ground for debate and, in a later part of my thesis, will be the variables used to analyze the chosen empirical cases.

It must be clear that we do not have a single theory, but, many *new* theories. The issue about the newness of the studied phenomenon has been widely discussed and analyzed (Melucci, 1994; Tucker, 1991; Cohen, 1985; Plotke, 1990) but not much has been concluded from it. From radical newness to conservative continuity a wide spectrum of opinions and positions has taken place and been defended. Confusion

seems to reign around a question whose futility becomes evident when we go through different answers which include different understandings about the new and the old, incompatible time spans and conflictive interpretative backgrounds. It is not my intention to take part in such a debate since the reward for the effort does not appear to be very tempting: is it important to know whether these movements are new, old or middle aged as long as the concepts that the paradigm provides are useful for understanding social reality?

When it comes to this debate, I tend to take Fredric Jameson's position about historical changes. According to him, radical breaks do not suppose the destruction of the old and the appearance, out of nowhere, of the new. Contrarily, he states that his change implies the restructuring of elements which were already given in the past, but now they obtain a new organization and hierarchy: "features that in an earlier system or period were subordinate now become dominant and features that had been dominant again become secondary" (Jameson, 2009:18). It is only in this case that the idea of newness can become interesting for the analysis. It is not about finding what is present now and absent before, since the radical change does not imply spontaneous generation, but the reorganization of elements in a distinctive way. My goal in the analysis of the paradigm shift, when it comes to the idea of newness, will be directed only under this perspective with the aim to highlight which elements are now dominant and which became subordinate.

Additionally, I think that the word "new" could still be of some use because of another reason.. Not as an essential part of this paradigm, but because it is telling us something about the genesis of the perspective; it is expressing a differentiation from what has already been said. There is an otherness in the construction of this theory, there is a reference which works as the "old" tradition which needs to be contested and discarded. A phantasmagorical presence, a being there through absence reminds us about what had to be rejected in order to found these new perspectives.

As the New Social Movements theories are embedded in the tradition of continental thought, it is not a surprise to find out who is the ghost that since the origin of this enterprise, more visibly or not, has been always present beyond the horizon. Accused of suffering theoretical weaknesses, rejected for being outdated and old-fashioned, the specters of Marx and Marxism have become the point of departure (and escape) for most of the authors involved.

Specters of Marx

> This trauma is endlessly denied by the very movement through which one tries to cushion it, to assimilate it, to interiorize and incorporate it. In this mourning work in process, in this interminable task, the ghost remains that which gives one the most to think about and to do. (Derrida, 1994:122)

Derrida proposes the idea of the ghost as an ambiguous figure. Is it actually dead a person –or an idea- that comes back over the time? Derrida's quote speaks about a trauma, and in this context I propose to understand it as the new reality that theorists from the left face: ways of collective action that do not fit anymore in the concepts which had been dominant for such a long time. These concepts belong to Marx and Marxism, the trauma, then, is related to their death: they are not useful anymore since they cannot explain reality, they tell us about a world which does not longer exist and processes which do not and will not occur again –*The King is dead.* The challenge, now, is to overcome the trauma. How? Through the elaboration of a new *repertoire* of

concepts and theories which would now actually explain reality –*Long live the king*! But even if the goal is to leave them behind, Marx and Marxism reappear constantly through this discussion. Not anymore as active actors, as living entities, but in the same way that specters do: they are there without really being there. Consequently, not only do these new kings erect their creation in conflict with the orthodox Marxist tradition, but they constantly actualize it and bring it to the fore in ghostly ways: they discuss and re-discuss their categories under new labels, borrow their jargon and refill it with new contents, keep some ingredients but use them in different recipes. The New Social Movement theories have many very important differences when confronted to the classist-materialist perspective, this is undeniable, but the latter has always been a ghost prowling through the halls of the former.

It is with this in mind is that I introduce the current section of my theoretical framework. Here I plan to briefly offer a quite simple, but illustrative, version of the orthodox Marxist approach to collective action and couple it with the criticism it has later received. In this way, when dealing with the main part of the chapter, the reader will be able to identify Marx's specters lurking around.

The class analysis of collective action, which had been dominant until the sixties, proposed a particular approach. For this perspective social actors should be understood collectively, as social groups that share certain material conditions. To explain a social movement, the first step was to analyze the social structure of a society. There, the sociologist would find different groups of people that establish different relations with the process of production: some own the means of production, some own only their own labour. As a consequence, these different groups of people would evidence different material conditions of life if we compare between them, but similar ones inside each of them. These groups are what we understand as a class, and class is the main actor in the Marxist understanding of collective action (Cotreel, 1984). More precisely, it is the working class, the proletariat, the collective actor which is expected to produce mobilization and, eventually, a revolution. Because of their position in the relations of production, workers are condemned to being systematically exploited by those who possess the capital. The only way in which they can subvert their situation is by employing political action and changing the system. It is under this perspective that the Marxist tradition has understood the worker's movement: it originates in the economic sphere and struggles for a change in the economic sphere. This was then a materialist-determinist approach: borrowing the terms from Marx, collective action (e.g. political demonstration) would be expressed in the *superstructure*, while its cause (position in the structure of relations of production) would be found in the *base:*

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness (Marx, 1979:12).

A social class, situated in a particular place within the social structure, has a common ideology shared by its members. This ideology works as the key frame for interpreting their position and, at the same time, defining their goals and aspirations. Consequently, the goals that motivate collective action are consequent with the material conditions of the class who is leading it: the causes for it are found in the place that the group shares in the structure. From there, particular objectives and demands are derived; the class position has a coherent translation into political struggle. The mobilization, in

this way, works as a reflection of the conditions in which a class lives and the aspirations it has. If we want to understand the content of the workers' political programme, we have to look at the structure which determines it and since the structure is shaped according to the material relations of production (this is, the economic realm of the society) there is no doubt about the economic nature of their claims: "the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (…) The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure" (Ibid). The idea of consciousness, understood as the awareness of a class of its own situation and the conditions that have positioned it there (Wright, 2005:21), works in Marx as a *classifier* (Andrew, 1984) of political action. This means, the working class is not *per se* a political actor, but becomes one when its members have developed such a class consciousness that they realize that they belong to a group which shares particular conditions of exploitation and decide to struggle with the aim of transforming their situation:

> Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends becomes class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle. (Marx and Engels, 2008:189).

The adoption of the class consciousness is what differentiates the class in itself (a group of people sharing the same position in the productive system) from the class for itself (this group of people, but mobilized together as a political actor). In this way, the social class can be understood no only objectively, but also subjectively, as the main politic actor mobilizing (Cohen, 1980:73-76). In orthodox Marxism there is a direct determination between the structure/objective position and the superstructure/subjective dimension as Wright has described:

> In the analysis of the working class it was usually assumed that there was a one-to-one relationship between the proletariat as structurally defines and the proletariat as a collective actor engaged in struggle. The transformation of the working class from a class-in-itself (a class determined structurally) into a class-for-itself (a class consciously engaged in collective struggle over its class interests) may not have been understood as a smooth and untroubled process, but it was seen as inevitable (Wright, 1998:123).

If the working class is the main and determining actor in this perspective, the main way of organizing their struggle will be, undoubtedly, under those institutions which bring them together. Under this idea we can find two main organizations which have been always the key places for mobilizing the proletariat: syndicates and (socialist) political parties. These are the places where their consciousness is awaken, their worries heard and the action organized. The working masses have to join them in order to coordinate efforts to change the material way of production and distribution.

All in all, it could be summed up in the following way: the capitalist economic structure determines that the working class is the motor of history, this is, the agent of political action; its goals are given by their material existence, this is, by the place they occupy in the relations of production and, finally, the main way to canalize these revolutionary energies is through the workers' institutions, this is, syndicates and political parties: Marxist collective action in a nutshell. These were the core ideas which

the Marxist tradition used as a base over which they would edify a whole tradition. This was a dominant approach since Marx's days of industrial revolution until its final crisis during the 1960s.

As I have demonstrated earlier in this work, it was at the end of the 1960s that this theoretical model started looking inefficient in its attempt to grasp reality. Collective action in favour of women, gender, ethnic groups, race or environmental causes, presented a challenge for the class-based analysis. A fundamental change was taking place in reality and its main consequence for the academic world was the outdating of the Marxist hardcore premises on collective action.[1] The first step in order to develop sophisticated enough tools to deal with this reality was the criticism of the, until then, dominant approach.

The criticism of the Marxist orthodox approach, nevertheless, did not emerge from nowhere. Already within the Marxist tradition had some of the main Marxian dogmas started to be discusses. Perhaps the most important example of this had been Antonio Gramsci. The Italian intellectual was among the first Marxist to criticize the materialist determinism (Gramsci, 1971). According to him, the relationship between base and superstructure was not unilateral, but dialectical. Both contributed to the reproduction of each other and, at the same time, this relationship made possible to produce social change in any of the both spheres. Political action, for Gramsci, was possible at the level of civil society institutions and not only through the transformation of the economic structures. The construction of class hegemony, namely, the imposition to the whole society of the view of the world and understanding of reality of a particular group, was the main political task for the revolutionary forces. This process of hegemony, unlike traditional Marxism, had less to do with the material dimension of the social class but much more with a cultural one, giving in this way importance to the before forgotten institutions of the superstructure. Within the Marxist tradition other authors - even if marginal until the 1970s - followed Gramsci's ideas in this respect, such as Richard Hoggart's "The Uses of Literacy" (1957), Raymond Williams' "Culture and Society" (1958) and Edward Palmer Thompson's "The Making of the English Working Class" (1963). A group of Marxist authors had already started focusing their attention on the cultural realm of society and their pioneering ideas would be at the base of the main criticism that the New Social Movements theorists would elaborate.

From their position, two main critiques could be identified; these are the accusations of economic and class reductionism (Buechler, 1995; Canel, 1997). The economic reductionism had to do specifically with Marx's model of society. According to this, it was possible to identify two different analytical levels in the social totality with a specific way of relationship. This is: the economic base, with a particular configuration given by the dominant mode of production and its consequent relations of production, determines the superstructure, comprising every other dimension of social life (religion, politics, law, education, culture). The most important element in order to understand political action was the economic structure. The class reductionism, strictly linked to the economic one, stated that the most important actors are defined by the particular class relationships in a society. In this way, if we want to find out the group which will take part in collective action, it should be identified by the social class it belongs to, this is the place it occupies in the economic base. Any other kind of ascriptions which could be used to define a group would be secondary to the class belonging.

[1] For a very good discussion about Marx's main concepts on politics and revolution, the reader may find interesting: Tucker, R. (1969) The Marxian Revolutionary Idea. WW Norton & Company, New York.

These two reductionisms are challenged by the appearance of new movements which do not fit in the conceptual framework. In the first place, because it becomes difficult to identify a homogenous class position among those taking part in them. In the second place, because their main ascription is not any longer related to class, but to some other defining features such as race, ethnicity or gender. In the third place, because the main content of their claim is not anymore perceived as coming from and heading towards the economic structure and the parameters of distribution. In the fourth place, because its patterns of organization have changed along with the rejection of bureaucratization and the classic working class political structures. All of these elements were fundamental to sustain and support the criticism against Marxism and, at the same time, to set the base for the elaboration of the approach I am describing in the next section.

New Social Movements Theories' Generalities

I have stated that the New Social Movements theories offer a varied landscape of interpretations and explanations, that they cannot all at once be summarized in the work of a particular author. This is a fact but, at the same time, it is a fact too that academic debates and discussions are many times based on simplifications, models and heuristic approximations. In this way, it is more common than not to find the label of New Social Movements as an encompassing container, as a concept which summarizes and uniforms the diversity of its inner debate into a homogenous and coherent ideal type. As a consequence, my presentation might be accused of being too generalist, of not respecting many perspectives or even of being over-simplistic, but the truth is that this general understanding is the key element for anyone interested in entering the debate. A basic comprehension of the main concepts and positions, of the main breaks and discontinuities, is the point of departure which will be of use in the following section of this chapter, where more detailed and specific analysis of certain dimensions will be elaborated.

As I explained in the last section, with the help of Derrida's quote, the trauma of the Marxist decline takes place when movements with a logic which is foreign to the materialist-classist approach become more visible and widespread. The social origin of the participants could not be directly ascribed to a particular social class, and the same happened with their aims and objectives. Non universalistic struggles, related to particular groups but not clearly to a particular social class: neither the origins, nor the outcomes of these ways of collective action could be certainly linked to the social structure. Most of these demands were impossible to be shared horizontally, this is, by the members of the same social class, but transversally by different sectors of different social classes. The emancipation of women in France or black people in the United States comprehended both: proletarian and capitalist women or black people. A new theoretical elaboration started to be formulated under the effects of this perplexity; it was about defining and understanding these new social movements.

In the first place, one of the main points of this new approach states that new social movements "do not bear a clear relation to structural roles of participants" (Johnston et al, 1994:6). According to this view, new social movements do not have a homogenous social base, they cannot be directly linked with a particular social class. The participants tend to transcend class divisions and people from different social backgrounds are usually found working together. The driving cleavages used to understand the group formation are usually different ones, such as age, sex, race, among

others. As a consequence, another difference appears: "the ideological characteristics of new social movements stand in sharp contrast to the working-class movement and to the Marxist conception of ideology" (Ibid: 6-7). Ideology, understood as the a vision of the world coherent with the material conditions attributed to a particular position in the social structure, is no longer useful as an analytic category, as there is not a common class in these movements. Contrarily, we find a plurality of perspectives, which tends to differentiate them from the proletarian mode of considering ideology.

The second important point that I would like to highlight is maybe the most significant one: "[new social movements] often involve the emergence of new or formerly weak dimensions of identity" (Ibid:7). Class position and situation is not longer a fundamental point of reference for the construction of the movement. These new social movements are characterized for the centrality that identitarian issues take in them. What does this imply? There is not anymore an objectivist reading of social movements as representing a particular position in the social structure, but, on the other hand, they are shaped and action is promoted based on a subjective element such as identity: a common belonging to group or community that the members accept as a shared ground. The material economic dimension is not central anymore and now the interpretation of the symbolic dimension of identity takes a leading place.

Thirdly, this new centrality of identity moves the emphasis away from the class struggle and transforms civil society and the cultural sphere in the new arena. Demands change their content and context. Many have described the transformation of the goals as a shift from struggling for redistribution to struggling for recognition (Cohen, 1985; Gimenez, 2006; Jonston et al. 1994). Most of these new collectives are not interested in altering the way in which goods, services and capital are allocated or at least do not think that this is the fundamental problem in a society. Their main concern has to do with the possibility of realizing themselves as individuals, with the possibility of being recognized as different and living their difference in the way they want. This is why the economic dimension becomes less and less important and the centrality moves to the cultural and symbolic dimensions of society. If the problem is not in the base (in Marx's terms) but in the superstructure, then the mobilization and organization of collective action has to be consequently displaced. It is not so much about expropriating the means of material production, but gaining control over those of symbolic production; we do not find a working class struggling against the bourgeoisie, but individuals fighting for the redefinition of social roles; the cold hearted imperatives of capitalist economy do not seem as terrible as the dominant discourses of homogenization.

Fourthly, there is a change in the way that collective action is organized. If we said that workers' parties and organizations were the main places where an orthodox Marxist would go to find the seeds of revolution, the post-, neo- and anti-Marxists would find there nothing but dregs of an old fashioned movement, whose goals and objectives are each day less important, urgent and shared. New social movements criticize the bureaucratization, the verticality and the hierarchies that traditional political institutions have established. They aspire to the construction of decentralized structures where the power is equally shared and same opportunities are given to every member. They do not want professional representatives or leaders, since they come from the delegitimized domain of the institutionalized political world. The field of the new social movements is the civil society and it is the preservation of a logic inherent to this sphere what motivates them in their organization and struggle.

All in all, I would like to quote Ali Hassan Zaidi in order to summarize this ideal type that I have just developed. I find it very useful, since in a single paragraph he focuses in the three main aspects (what, how and who) which I am planning to discuss

in the following section of this chapter: "NSMs [new social movements] focus on 'lifestyles, cultural politics, identities and politics of everyday life'. Other authors refer to the more informal and egalitarian forms of organization, while others refer to the lack of a shared class base among activists" (Zaidi, 1998:47). In the following section, this three dimensions – and the main authors working on them – will be under scrutiny.

Three Theoretical Dimensions

As I have described before, in this section I am planning to focus on three main topics of discussion within the New Social Movements paradigm. This selection, on the one hand, is justified because of the importance that the debates around this issue acquire among the new social movements theorists. What makes their object of study distinctive can be fully appreciated by looking at the dimensions I am proposing here. On the other hand, these dimensions do not only prove to be important to appreciate the theoretical innovation since they, at the same time, prove to be fundamental variables for the analysis of the empirical cases I have chosen. The questions about who integrate the new social movements, what do they struggle for and how do they organize in order to achieve it are of fundamental importance in highlighting the originality and discontinuity of the discussed theoretical stream and in the analysis of empirical movements.

Consequently, this section will be divided in three parts. In the first one, I will discuss the main positions describing who joins a new social movement by focusing specially on the debate around the role of social classes. In the second one, I will analyze which are the goals of these movements, what do they struggle for and in which social sphere does their struggle take place. Finally, in the third part, I will highlight one of the main weaknesses of the New Social Movements theories by analyzing the way in which collective action seeks to be organized and the relationship with traditional forms of institutionalization.

Classes in movements or removal of classes?

The main point of concern under this subtitle will be the issues around who mobilizes in the new social movements. Are they collective actors or rather the addition of individuals? Can this social formation be understood through a main explaining variable or is it just the result of contingency and strategy? Does any kind of structure restrict the participation to certain sectors or do the agents freely join a movement according to their interests, values or ideologies? These are some of the main questions which underlie the debate around the "who" in the new social movements.

All these questions (and even more) can be summarized under a notorious discussion which has become the point for dividing waters in the discussion about agency in new social movements, this is, the debate around the role of social classes. Most of the theoretical production and research around those who take part in collective action has ended up debating around one of Marx's main points: that of class as the main historical actor. The point of departure is the assumption that workers' movements are becoming less radical and predominant, what seems to expose the crisis of the proletarian class as the leading agency for social change. Most of the authors agree on this matter, but the problem appears when it comes to the definition of the new predominant agent, since consensus in defining the new reality is not always easy.

However, even if there is a multiplicity of positions, it is possible to sum up the explanations in two big groups. On the one hand, in an attitude of what I would describe

as *radical contestation* (of orthodox Marxism), we can find a group of theories which postulate the end of social class as a major explaining variable. For this group it is no longer possible to consider class seriously as the main driving force to explain mobilization and even less to consider it as the main actor in the foundation of a social movement. New grievances have replaced class by offering more and better explanatory variables. On the other hand, we find a group of authors – *nostalgic Marxists* I would call them - who, still sticking to a structural perspective, claim that the notion of social class has not lost its explanatory potential. They admit, nevertheless, that even if class is still analytically useful, the content given to this concept in the Marxist tradition has totally changed. The class is still alive, but under very different new conditions.

Radical Contestation

The group of the *radicals* happily announces the end of the classist-materialist approach. Class is neither ontologically, nor epistemologically useful: reality has changed in such a way that the class position does not explain the emergence of social movements, thus the concept of class cannot be central any longer in the debates on collective action. Many authors in this position have identified that "society class divisions are waning and the political relevance of class in general is declining" (Pakulski, 1995:77, but also see: Clark and Lipset, 1991 and Clark et al. 1993). This fact has led "many authors to argue for a specific paradigm of social movements uncoupled from their class context" since new social movements' "actions do not need to be linked to any social class whatsoever" (Maheu, 1995:9).

The radicals turn around the basic Marxist model: it is not the place in the relations of production (the base) what creates a common ideology and move this objective class towards the same political goal, but it is actually the identitarian or ideological variable (the superstructure) what puts people together in the movement. For Marx the base shapes a class and the class becomes a political actor, for his challengers it is in the cultural and political level that the group is formed independently from any kind of class affiliations. The superstructure, initially a residual category which grouped everything which was left out from the base and was reduced to reflecting what the economic structure determined, is now autonomous and independent from the base.

Even if there is consensus on this point, the alternatives offered can be divided in two variants: some authors replace class by another group of reference as the explaining variable, while others prefer to focus on the issues that the activists defend instead of the social background that they might share. In the first case, it is claimed that the identities which are at the base of collective action "have shifted from class to status, race, gender, ethnicity or nationality" (Buechler, 1995:453). The grouping factor is a shared identity, the "who" of the social movement is a community with certain distinctive characteristics in common which move them to make claims based on this commonalities. This position has been used to explain cases of collective action engaged with identity politics, since it acknowledges some kind of shared sociological category at the base of the movement. Class does not longer explain the agency of collective action, but there is still some kind of common base for action.

In this vein, Ralph Turner, when characterizing the movements from the 1960s on, stated that "the primary constituency for the new utopia was not an economic class but an age cohort, namely, youth." (Turner, 1994:87). As it can be understood, there is a displacement of the category of class, replacing it by a shared sociologic characteristic: age. A new variable is introduced, but this is still related to a category which expresses a structural position. Turner continues explaining that the rise of the youth as the main actor in the social movements had its main causes in the changes that societies were

undergoing in that period: "the major adjustments being made in social structure at that time had more to do with the relative privileges and obligations of age groups than of economic classes" (Ibid.). The governmental policies and the structural transformations were oriented towards an age and not a class division. Consequently, it was the age what was leading mobilizations and not a social class. Certain sectors of society are plausible to mobilize not because of their position in the economic structure, but during particular periods of time, in certain "generational junctures" (Pakulski, 1995:76) which generate a strong loyalty to certain values for particular age-groups.

In the second case, the idea of class is abandoned together with any other idea of a common social background. The reason for mobilization is the result of an ideological identification with certain problems or issues rather than a shared membership in a homogeneous social base (Dalton, Kuechler and Burklin, 1990; Pichardo, 1997:417). New social movements enjoy a "socially diffused base of popular support," (Buechler, 1995:453) and not a socially homogenous group of origin. The sociological background does not provide the reason for joining the social movement, it is an ideological conviction about the necessity of struggling for certain issues what moves people to work together. In this way value-based politics replace group-based politics. Examples of cases which can be understood under this perspective would be ecologist, pacifist or anti-nuclear movements.

The perfect representative for this approach is, undoubtedly, Ronald Inglehart. According to him, the central variable to explain the emergence of social movements are "values." With the time, different values appear and disappear in any society, some become dominant and some become dominated. It is this movement of values and ideologies what pushes the people to mobilize. A generation born in Western Europe after the Second World War has mainly enjoyed peace, stability and economic growth at least until the end of the 1960s. Given this conditions of relative prosperity, their main concerns and problems are not directly related to the material conditions of existence. Their basic needs are fulfilled and they do not suffer from deprivation, so there are no reasons to struggle for goods or services. The real struggle is for values. In these circumstances of physical and economic security a "post-materialist" ideology has emerged, concerned not so much about goods and services but about quality of life, moral standards and the social and natural environments (Inglehart, 1990: 373).

The main conclusion we can draw from this is the emphasis that Inglehart puts on values: it is this variable that links people who do not necessarily share any material or sociological pre-conditions for joining the movement. According to his empirical studies, there are no other classifying axes which would show regularities among the members of new social movements: "the evidence still indicates that the emergence of new values is the strongest predictor of activism" (Ibid.:389-390). The only consistent explanatory factor is that of identification with the ideology that the movement professes, any other ascription to social groups does not appear to be important.

The second example I would like to offer in order to illustrate the radical position is that of Melucci, since he is the best known author in this group and one of the most important ones in the New Social Movements paradigm. In Melucci's explanation, the starting point is a change in society during the end of the 1960s, we have moved from an industrial to an information society (Melucci, 1994, 1995). Conflict, he explain, occurs for the control of the "potential for action" and in information societies "this potential is no longer exclusively based on material resources or on forms of social organization; to an increasing extent, it is based on the ability to produce information" (Ibid.:102). In this way, social conflicts are less based on the distribution of goods and material resources, but now they depend on the main factor for

the production of social reality: information. That is why, on the one hand, the classic class conflicts are becoming less important: the material means of production and their ownership are not anymore at the heart of societies, now the struggle is around information. The idea of struggle or structural conflict as such is now much less important, to the point that Melucci highlights: "The problem is thus whether one can still talk of antagonistic conflicts, that is, conflicts that involve the social relationships that produce the constitutive resource of complex systems: information" (Ibid.:104). A new loose structured society blurs the antagonisms between groups, loosing trace of particular places within it where conflict might emerge.

This description given by the Italian sociologist draws a very democratic picture of social conflicts. If anyone is able to create meanings, the possibility of struggling for inclusion appears to be evenly distributed. It is just a matter of organization and imposing a particular perspective. While achieving the redistribution of means of production implied a clear cut between the contradictory classes which confronted each other, in the information societies the possibility of producing meaning is something that everybody has. It is because of this that Melucci speaks of "centerless" or "headless" societies (Ibid.: 115). Social movements are organized around contingent concepts. There is not an essential conflict which confronts particular groups. Individuals can choose their field of struggle, since a centerless society does not have a main way of exercising domination. In such a pluralistic system, additionally, a person can have multiple ascriptions to identify with. All this conduces to the main conclusion that classes do not matter; since there is not a single criterium for stratification, class looses its fundamental role. The plurality of grievances that this society offers makes it impossible to identify with only one. Furthermore, the multiplicity of ascriptions and the centerless character of the society do not provide ground for the development of social groups with shared characteristics. Agents are part of many groups, not fully identifying with any or changing their identification with time. There is not an essential concept of class or group. People join contingent struggles in the search of a personal identity and through this process create the group. Unity is not the starting point, a pre-condition for action, but the result of a procedural creation.

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) agree with this last point, since according to their view neither identity nor interests have a pre-discursive existence or derive from a single economic logic. According to them, social agents are "essentially decentred," they are not carriers of a self-defined essence which gives them full identity. Instead, they consider them as places of intersection for multiple personalities which vary according to the different relationships they are inserted in and the multiple discourses which take part in the constitution of these relationships (Ibid.: 95). Given that the identity of subjects is not anchored to the social structure or essentially given but depends on contingent discursive contexts where the individuals get involved, it can be understood as nothing but an "unstable articulation of constantly changing personalities" (Ibid.: 25).

All in all, we can conclude that this group that I call *radicals*, with some internal differences, sees a main goal in the elimination of social class as the explaining variable. Reality has been transformed in a way that is urging us to change concepts: "contemporary Western social movements are seldom numerically strong, but they seem to be particularly diverse and more separated from socioeconomic divisions than their early-industrial predecessors. This diversity and autonomy limits the heuristic value and theoretical utility of the Marxist paradigm. The class paradigm must either be supplemented or altogether discarded" (Pakulski, 1994:77).

Marxist Nostalgia

The theoretical position I am introducing now shares the rejection of the Marxists' main actor: the working class. According to them, new social movements are not spaces for the organization of the proletarian revolutionary forces, but the expression of social sectors that the traditional approach would have never expected to be mobilized. The working class is not the main agent involved in these groups anymore, but unlike the radicals, these authors have the conviction that the concept of class has explanatory value. That is why I have called them nostalgic Marxists, since in the rejection of the tradition they do not totally abandon the perspective. They maintain the centrality of the concept of class, offering in this way a new perspective of some kind of structural determination in the appearance and formation of the new social movements.

This approach recognizes the phenomenon which the radicals observe: the rise of identity based social movements entering the field of cultural politics to struggle for recognition. What they do not share is the explanation they offer when it comes to the definition of the new actors taking place: while the radicals center they attention on other kinds of social segmentations or directly reject any kind of structural pre-condition, the nostalgics seem to affirm that: "these movements are not at all free from the economic interests of the social classes. Identity politics symbolizes the rise of new social classes rather than marks the end of social classes as larger and stable identities" (Kaya, 2007: 77).

Even if it decides to keep the "old" concept of class, this approach generously radiates newness in its formulations. The class is still the main variable, but the empirical-historical classes mobilizing are new, because the society is structured and organized on a different basis. Class struggle depicts the main confrontation in contemporary societies, it is the main axis defining conflict, but since the class structure has changed, the conflict is not anymore based on the property of the means of production but on the control of the main organizational principles of the new societies.

The dominant conclusion within this group seems to be that the base of support for the new social movements is located among the (new) middle classes (Buechler, 1995:453-456; Pichardo, 1997:417-418; Brint, 1994). One of the authors who has worked deeply on this topic is undoubtedly Klaus Eder (1985, 1993). His approach begins by defining a constitutive change in the mode of production, what led to a change in the class structure. This transition to a postindustrial society has affected the way in which classes are structured and how they relate to politics. Nevertheless, this does not mean that classes have lost their analytical value, it is just a matter of actualization:

> The idea of class has to be stripped from its traditionalist connotations, from its contingent historical forms of manifestations including its connection with the idea of the proletarian and capitalist classes. Class is a structure that translates inequality and power into different life chances for categories of individuals. It is therefore a structural determination of life chances, a structure which distributes chances to act, and de-limits action spaces (…). This structural boundedness of action is what a class theory is supposed to explain. (Eder, 1993:12).

The analytical tool of class should be preserved, but the particular historical formation of a postindustrial society makes it impossible to continue working with the old schemas. Class is the key for understandings collective action, but it is a new class what we are talking about. According to Eder, new social movements are one more stage in the history of the petit bourgeois protests (Ibid.:145). They are carriers of a petit bourgeois consciousness which directly corresponds to its objective position (Ibid.:147). Although he recognizes the residual character that the notion of middle class has

historically received (a blurry group, located somewhere between the working class and the capitalists, but with no clear borders to differentiate from them), he highlights the important role that it may acquire, especially through the idea of "contradictory location" discussed by Erik O. Wright. Middle classes are exploited by the capitalists, who make profit out of their work, but at the same time control and dominate workers (Wright, 1998:19-63). This fact positions them as a social group opposed to both poles of the social structure. The structurally contradictory location has led this group to the embracement of a certain group of values which would confront with and differentiate them from the other two groups. He defines them as postmaterialist values and they have a twofold message: to reject materialism (thus, expressing a distance from the demands for redistribution made by the working class) and at the same time "to compete with the norms and values of the bourgeois high culture" (Eder, 1993:147).

All in all, Eder sees new social movements as a particular reaction to the conditions of existence of the middle class: a situation of upward mobility, preeminence of cultural capital and the lack of a clear group identity (Eder, 1985). Consequently, they seek the realization of a middle class identity (which up to the moment cannot be achieved because of their contradictory location) through the mobilization in the new social movements. With this goal in mind, they defend postmaterialist values in order to show their peculiarity and specificity as a distinctive social group. The mobilization, then, seeks to express particular demands which would differentiate the middle classes as a group through the pursuit of a specific normative vision of a desirable life.

Claus Offe (1972) contextualizes the appearance of new social movements within the frame of the advanced capitalist society. Unlike the industrial capitalist society, now the negative effects of the system go beyond a single class and spread to a variety of them. There are still structural positions of privilege and exploitation, but the latter is not any longer limited to the working class.

Furthermore, advanced capitalist societies under the regime of the welfare state are based on the attempt to combine the contradictory logics of economy and politics, with the state being the mediator between both. This institution has established particular methods of regulation which are mostly based on corporative representation of capital and labour and the negotiation between both positions. One of the consequences of this system it that it leaves out of the regulation processes certain not organized groups (Offe, 1984 – specially chapter 6). In this way, the working class and the capitalists are represented and included in the institutional framework of the welfare state, but some other sectors with specific and different interests but no organized representation are marginalized.

All these circumstances lead to an alliance of social actors who have nothing in common but a shared distance from the poles of labour and capital. The social base of new social movements, then, is constituted by three major groups: the new middle-class, elements of the old middle-classes and decommodified groups outside the labour market (Offe, 1985). What is curious about the new social movements in contrast to the old ones, is that their social base "is derived predominantly not from peripheral or underprivileged strata, but from groups who themselves play a rather central role in (…) 'post-industrial' society" (Offe, 1984:293). This describes the paradoxical role of the new middle classes who are relatively central role in the production of information but have been excluded from the decision making processes.

The final characteristics of this inter-class alliance can have different outcomes according to which sector becomes dominant in every particular case; since these groups do not share much more than their exclusion from the main regulatory mechanisms of the welfare state, the contingent constellation that the combination may

elaborate depends much on the specific context. But what can be concluded is the fact that 1) social class still matters as a variable which identifies the structural origins of the groups taking part in the new social movements, but 2) this, unlike old times, does not mean that they will follow politics "on behalf of a class" (Offe, 1985). What does this mean? Social classes are still the main criteria for identifying actors, but this does not imply that new social movements will follow class politics but "the politics of identity, and as such is not, strictly speaking, subsumable under the universal terms of a pre-given social category" (Vehabzadeh, 2003:25).

As it has been showed in this section – referring to the problem of agency -, the New Social Movements theories coincide in rejecting the working class as the main mobilizing actor. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on how to continue after that point. On the one hand, the radicals are divided between those who look for a new category which would transcend that of class in the representation of some common social base (generation, gender, nationality, etc.), and those others who reject any kind of structural influence in the mobilization of actors and explain the formation of groups only after isolated individuals have decided to defend certain values or issues. On the other hand, the nostalgics are not convinced about abandoning the totality of Marxist tools and would prefer to keep the category of social class for their analysis. Anyways, they free it from the classical Marxists content and use it to interpret a new class structure where the middle class seems to be the main actor involved in the constitution of the new social movements.

Cultural Movements

At this point we already know who the main actors are or which elements might structure them; the main question now is concerned what they struggle for. After the rejection of the working class as a paradigmatic actor and the economic determinism associated with that tradition, it seems quite clear that not many authors will dare to look for goals and reasons for struggle in the economic field. Basically, the project of the new social movements must be located in some other sphere and related to certain social dimensions which were not the focus of attention before.

This section will deal with the "content" of new social movements' demands, with the main goals that they pursue, and the problems they denounce; but not only. The analysis of their aims and objectives becomes inseparable from a debate which has been taking place for a long time: how to categorize these claims? With the economic realm abandoned, it has become a challenge for theorists to find the right sphere where to locate the new social movements. The majority of authors has supported the idea of the cultural character of their concerns, but this has not been enough since new questions have arisen: where in society does the cultural struggle takes place? Does this mean that new social movements have abandoned any political aspirations or, on the other hand, are they politicizing culture? The object of discussion of this section goes beyond the mere description of claims and gets involved in the debate about their location and significance within society.

Substantia et locus

Many authors have identified the emergence of new social movements with the displacement of class politics by a new set of cultural or identity politics. The main idea behind this is to show that the realm of their demands cannot any longer be associated with the material interests of social classes, but with new matters which have gained independency from the social structure. The new claims are associated with the recognition of particular identities and the possibility of living these identities with the

biggest possible amount of freedom. They are very much related to the individual and personal dimension of autonomy and freedom and in connection with the search for the development of formerly repressed lifestyles, which in many cases go against the dominant cultural and moral standards. If we move from the micro- to the macro-level, new social movements are supporters of a group of values committed to normative ways of organizing relationships between people and with their environment.

Generally speaking, we can see that the field of struggle can be widely identified with that of culture. It is not about transforming the economic structures, for sure, but it is neither about gaining political power nor assuming control of the state. The role of formal politics is simply subsidiary; new social movements do not want to be the new ruling elite, the most they might aspire to in this field is the exercise of pressure on institutions to get the resolutions they need to freely express their novelty. From this perspective, it is clear that the main domain of social movements' concerns is that of culture.

This domain, however, cannot be understood only abstractly. Even if in many situations the different dimensions of social reality are interacting with each other in such a degree that it would seem impossible to talk about them separately, we still can propose the analytical use of what I would call a *topography*. By this I mean the very simple idea that these abstract concepts of the economical, the political and the cultural can be located in certain particular places within the social structure. Namely, the state is the place for the political, the market the place for the economical and the civil society the place for the cultural. Why is it important to make this distinction? Using this analytical classification makes clearer that is the realm of new social movements and helps us to know where we need to focus our attention on. At the same time, it helps us understand how the conceptual categories are translated into practical actions, organizations and strategies in the material dimension of these movements. If we say that their main concerns are associated with culture, it would have no sense to expect them having relevant roles within state institutions or market interactions. The concern for and the defense of culture has to be found in a specific place, there is a territory where this issues are more visible and the competition for their domination and transformation takes place. Civil society is the sphere where to find the new social movements struggling and seeking to transform reality.

In order to illustrate this shift in the *substantia* of the new social movements' demands and the particular *locus* they occupy in society, I have decided to present the perspective of two of the main authors within the paradigm: Jürgen Habermas and Alain Touraine.

The necessary point of departure to understand Habermas' position is a brief review of his ontology. In his seminal "The Theory of Communicative Action" (Habermas, 1986) he describes the existence of different specific rationalities governing different spheres. On the one hand, we have the instrumental rationality, a concept that Habermas inherits from Max Weber[2] and the Critical Theory School he comes from[3]. This concept expresses a particular kind of rationality which is concerned with the most efficient possible combination of resources in order to achieve a goal. This rationality, then, has at its core the search for the best cost-effective means, while it does not seek to justify the ends of that action or to establish a discussion about their value. On the other hand, Habermas proposes communicative rationality. The goal of this rationality is the achievement of interpersonal understanding through the use of argumentation. Here, social goals are discussed under certain circumstances, namely, the absence of coercion

[2] See: Weber, 1978.
[3] See, for example: Horkheimer, 1974 and Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002

on any of the participants, a predisposition to mutually understand each other and the acceptance of power of the better argument. While instrumental rationality is described as goal oriented, communicative rationality shines because of the importance it gives to the conditions of the deliberative process though which it leads to interpersonal agreements.

At the same time, Habermas proposes a dual social structure which corresponds to these rationalities. Instrumental rationality has become dominant in the systemic domains of politics and economy, organizing every kind of relationship under the logics of money and power. Communicative rationality, instead, is the dominant logic of what he calls the "lifeworld." This is the civil society, the place where people interact under the logic of cultural exchanges and socialize concerns. Interpersonal relations are seen as goals *per se* and not as means to achieve objectives, for individuals relate to each other under the requisites of communicative rationality. The main conflict in society appears when the systemic logic of economy and politics seeks to impose its instrumental rationality on the lifeworld. According to Habermas, new social movements emerge as a reaction to this phenomenon; their goal is to stop the colonization of the lifeworld, to defend civil society in its communicative understanding against the logics of money and power.

The main conflict has changed: it is now about exercising a defense of the autonomous functioning of civil society against the colonization that the politic and economic systemic imperatives are realizing. The emancipatory potential is not seen anymore in the decomodification of the workers but in the maintenance and diffusion of a communicative rationality. The sphere of struggle has been displaced: the economic dimension has been lost, it is not anymore a place where to achieve transformation, but it is now a differentiated system from which to protect the civil society. We do not have classes conflicting because of the mode of production any longer, but a social and cultural block resisting the imposition of systemic requisites. That is why Habermas characterizes the conflicts which new social movements focus on as being less about material production and more about cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization (Buechler, 1995:446). The new politics that these movements propose have little to do with the class politics and the traditional processes of formal institutions, they do not want to relate to the state or the market but wish to freely develop in civil society by enhancing projects of self-realization, improvement of quality of life, broadening participation and the preservation of cultural identities. The main questions are about a "grammar of forms of life" (Habermas, 1986 Vol. II:392), which can only be resolved through communicative action.

The target "is not the political realm of the state, nor the economic realm of the market, but the social domain of civil society in which issues are raised about the democratization of everyday life and about the forms of communication and collective identity" (Cohen, 1985:667). The defense against colonization forces the activists to work within the limits of the lifeworld, founding in this way a kind of collective action which is much more cultural than political.

Touraine also elaborates on a displacement of sphere, since he affirms that the most significant conflicts have shifted from the field of social rights to that of cultural rights. The predominance, importance and visibility of cultural struggles have reached such a point that Touraine even suggests that those groups who organize actions in the defense of the lower classes (in the economic sense) should be able to translate their demands into a cultural code in order to have a chance of success (Touraine, 1999). But how has he reached this conclusion?

According to Touraine the post-industrial society can be characterized by its capacity of self-management. This is what he calls historicity, the ability of actors to construct a system of knowledge and the tools necessary to intervene in the society's way of working. It is "the set of cultural, cognitive, economic, and ethical models by means of which a collectivity sets up relations with its environment; in other words, produces (…) a culture" (Touraine, 1997:40). Culture, in this elaboration, seems to be the key to understand the main conflict "a stake, a set of resources and models that social actors seek to manage, to control, and which they appropriate or whose transformation into social organization they negotiate among themselves" (Ibid.:8). Historicity, the main way of producing and acting on the post-industrial society is mainly composed by cultural elements. The essential structuring dimension of contemporary societies is not anymore in the rigid and little changing economic structures, but in the dynamism of cultural creation and recreation.

The central conflict in society has moved from the material to the cultural production of society. Social classes (namely a dominant one, composed by technocrats and managers, and a popular one, integrated by clients and consumers) engage in conflict for the control and administration of historicity (Touraine, 1981). The dominated class adopts the form of new social movements in order to enter the combat: "If historicity is the set of cultural models (cognitive, ethical, economic), SMs [social movements] are the groups that 'contend in order to give these cultural orientations a social form,' to transform them into concrete forms of social organization (Touraine quoted in: Canel, 1997:6). Social movements, through the manipulation of historicity, of cultural models, try to transform social organization, they are, in Touraine's words, "the fabric of social life" (Touraine, 1981:94). The class struggle is for the control of the cultural production of society, or we could simply say, for the production of society, since culture is the dominant field where this process takes place.

Here we can also observe a de-politization of the struggle. On the one hand, the economic sphere is totally abandoned, since it does not determine the reproduction of post-industrial societies anymore. On the other hand, the classical political channels are ignored, since they are not the main conducts to operate in the cultural field. The social movements, then, engage in the conflict for historicity in the field of civil society, struggling for the cultural means of social production. Such is the importance that Touraine gives to the cultural sphere, that when he is asked about the different kinds of demands that collective action may support, he affirms that: "the formation of new actors, and consequently the re-birth of public life, depends often on the demands of a series of cultural rights, and it is this kind of movements, more than those which are directly opposed to a liberal logic, the ones who deserve the name of 'social movements'" (Touraine, 1999:56)[4]. The defining feature is not even about the difference between new and old; what actually constitutes the essence of social movements (without need for temporal adjectives) is their struggle for cultural rights.

How Political are Cultural Politics?

As we can see in the two described cases, Habermas and Touraine affirm that the principal domain in which new social movements operate is that of culture. The struggles for identity and recognition, for the preservation of the lifeworld's autonomy

[4] The source where the quote comes from is in Spanish, the translation was done by me. In the original: "la formación de nuevos actores, y por consiguiente el renacimiento de la vida pública, pasa a menudo por la reivindicación de una serie de derechos culturales, y que ese género de luchas, más que los movimientos directamente opuestos a la lógica liberal, es el que merece el nombre de 'movimientos sociales'"

or for the resources of historicity, all share an enormous distance to the classical economic demands and a not so clear relationship with politics. Why? Because the content of these demands appears to be foreign to the domain of politics and the political, issues related to the personal sphere or definitions of the self had always been marginal for the dominant theories of collective action. However, even if the content seems to be a-political, new social movements, in many cases, make politics out of it or try to give it a political use. Hence, we face the question about the relationship between culture and politics.

There are two positions in this respect. On the one hand, we find a group of theorists who accuse new social movements of depoliticizing and privatizing collective action because they do not engage in the transformation of the society as such or on debates about political economy, but just claim for small scale and particularistic reforms. They do not try to change the political and economic systems, but resist them. As we have seen in the work of Touraine and Habermas, new social movements escape from the logics of economy and politics and find refuge in civil society and the cultural domain. This way of collective action, consequently, has lost the politic potential that the revolutionary working class used to hold. Nevertheless, it is still fair to admit, as Evers (1985) does, that even if not political, these social movements carry a transformative potential which is based in the defense of civil society against the intervention of other systemic logics and the production of social organization through the manipulation of cultural resources. The preservation of this sphere implies working within its resources. Consequently, new social movements depend on cultural factors to organize and give coherence to their demands and activities.

On the other hand, we find the position of authors who, unlike the first ones, highlight the political dimension of new social movements' struggles. Kauffman (1990) affirms that the replacement of class politics by identity politics has led to the politicization of previously non-politicized areas of social life. The authors supporting this position do not say that new social movements abandon politics to enter the cultural sphere, but contrarily, that their intervention politicizes the cultural field.

This point can be very easily supported by those authors who do not see structural grievances as articulators of social conflicts. If there is not a main source of conflict defined by the way in which the groups are positioned in the social structure, there is not a main place for politics. Or put differently: politics can appear everywhere. Laclau and Mouffe (2001) affirm that the multiple points of conflict that society faces nowadays, given the anti-essentialist definition of subject and conflict that they support, open the possibilities for the political to appear in a variety of different fields. Since the political conflict is contingently structured around a discursive formation, there are no determinant pre-conditions for politics and in this way the new social movements are able to politicize every dimension of life. The new social movements contest the division between public and private and through their action they attempt to redefine these limits by transforming private issues into public ones.

Melucci (1994), another skeptic about the role of social classes and structural determinations in contemporary societies, defends the described position. In the information society uncertainty is common for individuals. It is a consequence of the ceaseless flows of information which are constantly bringing new inputs, the multiple ascriptions that the same individual may have, and the different groups of reference which may become important. In this context of uncertainty, individuals and groups try to escape from the constant change and give permanent meanings to their lives, and that is why the search for an identity becomes the main goal of contemporary social movements. As individuals realize that they can produce meaning, they organize

themselves collectively in order to shape their identities and impose their identity as a group and its recognition by the dominant discursive constellations.

Information is the basic resource of contemporary post-industrial societies. Its main attribute is being symbolic (Melucci 1994, 1995), it is a resource to create social reality, definitions of what is, what is not and what may be. In this way "the production and re-appropriation of meaning seems to lie at the core of contemporary conflicts" (Ibid: 110). Conflicts are about ways of defining reality, of giving meaning to concepts and are expressed through discursive battles. The explanation is coherent: post-industrial societies are not defined anymore by their material production, but by their symbolic production. In this way, the struggles are not concerned anymore with the way in which a society is structured according to its relations of (material) production, but by the way in which different groups try to manipulate the main resource (information) to give reality to their own meanings.

Melucci states that if new social movements would remain "political" in the traditional sense of the term, they would not be effective (Melucci, 1989). Since there is not a single power structure, a unique way of domination and a single hierarchy, it is evident that pursuing the same political goals as in the industrial times would lead nowhere but to defeat. The notion of politics and the political have changed with the change in society, and the new social movements have to organize consequently, redirecting their political potential through new activities and strategies. This is, they have to be aware, as Laclau and Mouffe (2001) propose, of the potential politicization of spheres which had always been considered as private.

Organizing the Movement

This third part of the chapter has the goal of examining the main discussions around the way in which new social movements pursue their objectives. Having already analyzed who the main actors are and what they seek to obtain, it is now the moment to focus on the questions around the way of acting: How do they organize, how do they take part in conflicts?

Even if most of the authors have something to say about this dimension, it is very important to highlight that this is, perhaps, the weakest point that the new social movements paradigm presents. Most important authors within this stream are strongly influenced by the continental philosophical and sociological tradition. I have showed this, for example, in the importance that Marx acquires in the work of the vast majority of the authors. Nevertheless, this emphasis on the European tradition has been responsible for the great silence around the other important contemporary school working on social movements, that one structured around the Resources Mobilization Theory and the Organization Theory[5]. These theoretical elaborations, unlike the ones I am working with, put their emphasis on studying the social movements as organization with specific structures, composed by rational individuals pursuing their own objectives and depending for their success on the mobilization of different kinds of resources. This perspective of analysis is not considered in the new social movements' stream, there is neither criticism nor support, it is ignored.

Basically, as we have seen in the last section of this chapter, new social movements decide to work in the sphere of civil society through the organization of activities and relations in a non-hierarchical way, respectful of every individual. Democracy and decentralization are two of the main values of these groups, so they are

[5] For the main concepts within this paradigm it is advisable to read: McAdam, D., McCarthy, J. and Zald, M. (1996), McCarthy, J. and Zald, M. (1977) and Zald, M. and McCarthy, J. (1990).

mainly organized in the fashion of direct democracy, with rotary leaderships, promoting the establishment of self help groups and a cooperative style (Pichardo, 1997:414; Tucker, 1991:78). They seek to construct structures more responsive to the needs of people, this is, under certain characteristics that avoid the depersonalization and escape from the systemic imperatives: open, decentralized and non hierarchical (Zimmerman, 1987). This goes hand in hand with a rejection of bureaucratic structures, which are accused of being dehumanizing:

> [New Social Movements] oppose the bureaucratization of society in economics and politics that allegedly suffocates the ability of individual citizens to participate in the definition of collective goods and identities. Instead they call for a culturally libertarian transformation of social institutions that gives more leeway to individual choice and collective self-organization outside the economic commodity cycle or bureaucratic political organization (Kitschelt, 1993:15)

Maybe because of the importance given to communicative rationality, activists believe in person-to-person contact and communication. This is reflected in the existence of decentralized consciousness raising groups, organization of discussions, communes and other kind of "free spaces" (Evans & Boyle, 1986, Freeman, 1983). One of the main means, then, is the establishment of small-scale organizations which are ruled according to communicative rationality and employ, in the everyday activities, the desired logic.

Richard Day (2008:70) explains that new social movements are a reaction to macro-structures and processes of power which are being expressed each time more at a micro-political and capillary level. Consequently, they seek to combat this ways of domination in an equivalent way, and that is why so many choose to involve in politics of everyday life. This is accompanied by the conviction that the means of social change must be consistent with its end, which means that new social movements have to organize themselves and their struggle according to the values and norms that they aspire to conquer. Melucci, when explaining the blurry borderline between private and public, says that this condition makes it possible for the individual isolated actions to produce a change "living differently and changing society are complimentary" (Melucci, 1989:206). In this way, the unclear division between private and public favors a strategy of adapting the means according to the goals: people should live and act in consonance with the goals they pursue because in doing so they are already taking part in the transformation of society.

Since representative democracy is accused of being unrepresentative, new social movements try to avoid any kind of institutionalization, which seems to lie at the base of bureaucratization and the consequent dehumanization of administration. People have to engage with their own activities instead of choosing some delegates to exercise a false representation. Following Habermas, who explains the need to stop the colonization by the economic and political system, and Offe, who explains that the social classes involved in the new social movements are those left out from the collective negotiations between capital and labour, we can understand why these movements seek to "implement these values outside the centralizing apparatus of political and economical representation" (Tucker, 1991:79). All the mentioned attempts to establish grass-roots organizations governed by democratic principles are to be placed in the domain of civil society (Cohen, 1985:670). The rejection of the economic and political logics are accompanied by a serious mistrust in any kind of organization which works within the spheres mentioned, that is why syndicates and political parties are not seen as vehicles for change.

Castells (1997) highlights the fact that the new social movements are interconnected through networking. This creates a decentralized structure which can be characterized by the absence of a mastermind controlling the activities or the existence of a unique and concerted strategy. To some extent, according to the Spanish sociologist, new social movements are influenced by anarchist values.

All in all, as I have said in the beginning of this section, most of the authors have developed very superficially this aspect of the new social movements. The main defining characteristics that should be highlighted are: they seek to create grass-roots organizations which are structured under democratic principles of direct engagement and discussion. Institutionalization is avoided and representative politics are accused of being a false vehicle for change. In the pursuit of their goals, new social movements already adapt their strategies and ways of acting according to the values they struggle for.

A Very Short Summary of Two Very Long Months

I have already explained somewhere else in this thesis which the main purpose of my analysis is. My goal, far from that of writing a chronology of events, seeks to avoid succumbing to the empiricist temptation. The inclusion of this chapter should not be seen as a contradiction, as a stab in the back of my historical approach, but should rather be understood as a necessary step in that direction. In order for me to offer an analysis of the paradigm shift in collective action during the French May and for the reader to fully understand it, it is necessary that both parts agree on a minimal background which will work as a context for the particular elements under analysis. This is what I try to do in this chapter, to offer a brief description of the main episodes during the period under analysis – a very short conventional history, we could say – for the reader to have as a reference when I quote and discuss particular incidents. In consonance with the already described spirit of my approach, I do not try to make "a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire" as in Jorge Luis Borges' famous metaphor (1998:325), but to offer a schematic summary of the most transcending events in order to contextualize my particular analysis of the chosen historical concept.

What it is usually called French May or *Mai '68* in French refers to the biggest series of mobilizations that France saw in her post-war history, a period of social unrest that the country underwent mainly during the months of May and June 1968. The most common name refers to the first of those two months because the main demonstrations took place during those days, but it is undeniable that they continued through the first part of June and they found the causes for beginning in the previous months.

Everything started in Nanterre, a newly constructed university whose main goal was that of providing a new institution in the surroundings of Paris in order to help the Sorbonne to host a growing number of students. Even if political meetings were forbidden in this campus, the first signs of discontent there were not related to political matters, but mainly to sexual issues. A conservative regulation had established separated dormitories for male and female students and the prohibitions of visits. This was source of complaint for most of the students, who during the last years before 1968 had already tried to challenge this disposition. Already in April 1967 a group of male students camped in front of the female dormitory as a protest and again that year, in November they demonstrated against the living conditions in campus (Duteuil, 1988). When in January 1968 the Minister for Sports and Youth visited the university to inaugurate a swimming pool, the problems in Nanterre acquired a national dimension. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who would become one of the main student leaders during this year, asked him in front of the press if the government was not interested in tackling the sexual problems of the students. The Minister mocked at him and Cohn-Bendit accused him of being a fascist. At the moment it seemed to be an isolated incident, but it was just the beginning (Ibid.).

Political activism in Nanterre continued spreading after that. If up to that moment it had been mainly related with libidinal issues and living conditions in campus, now the content of the concerns had diversified to include a critique of the class society. The opposition to the Vietnam War was one of the main mobilizing causes and had its major episode on the 22 of March, when an anti-war rally concluded with six students arrested by the police. In a context of growing politization this motivated a group of students to occupy the university's administrative building as a sign of protest. This event had not major consequences, since they left after some hours of occupation, but it

was the birth of one of May's main actors: the assembled students that night agreed on the creation of the *Mouvement du 22-Mars*, a new alternative to the bureaucratic and ossified student organizations which were target of their criticism (Wolin, 2010:83).

The following days continued witnessing growing mobilization and protests directed both against the international arena and the living conditions of the students. When on the 28th the authorities decided to close the university for four days, this was contested by massive teach-ins and assemblies organized in the following days. April continued with this tendency, with students interrupting lectures, challenging professors, organizing protests, engaging in fights with the police and other students. Political manifestos started circulating denouncing the "capitalist-technocratic university" and the organization of "Critical University Days" (inspired by the German students) became fashionable. So much effervescence, the increase in student involvement, the escalation of rhetoric and some clashes between leftist and rightist students made the Dean Grappin feel overwhelmed by the situation and he decided to indefinitely close the university on the 2nd of May (Seidman, 2004:84).

This measure meant nothing but the spatial change of the protests: the same spirit and convictions moved from Nanterre to the heart of the country, Paris. Already the following day found some hundred of students holding an assembly in the Sorbonne in support of their fellows from Nanterre. The minister of Interior Christian Fouchet decided that it was necessary to stop this before it grew bigger and sent the police to dissolve the meeting. The students were expelled from the building violently, what motivated other students who were not taking part in the demonstration to join them and fight against the police. After some hours of combat the forces of the order had arrested almost 600 hundred students, out of which 4 were sentenced to jail on the following day, when the authorities decided to close the university (Ibid.:96).

The violent repression, the enormous number of arrests and the jail sentences could not be tolerated by the students. The three main university leaders of May, namely, Alain Geismar (*Syndicat national de l'enseignement supérieur* - SNEsup), Jacques Sauvageot (*Union nationale des étudiants de France* - UNEF) and Cohn-Bendit (*Mouvement du 22-Mars*) led a demonstration on the 6th of May demanding the reopening of Sorbonne, the withdrawal of the police out of campus and the liberation of the students (Bourg, 2007:17). The first two demands were satisfied, but not the last one. This led to the continuation of protests and mobilizations on daily basis, all of them characterized by the growing political consciousness of the students (who little by little started directing their demands against the social system as a whole) and the lack of major violent incidents.

During these days the negotiations between students and the university did not prove to be very fruitful, but the reopening of the institution was achieved. At the same time negotiations between Cohn-Bendit and the acting Prime Minister Luis Joxe arrived at a dead end on the 10th of May. Students, who were already on the streets, feared the consequences of this outcome. The police was blocking the programmed itinerary of their demonstration pushing them to the interior of the *Quartier Latin*. Once they were there, news about imminent repression started to spread and this led to the tactic of building barricades in order to resist the police forces. All over the university neighborhood cars, trash, benches and a variety of objects were piled up together in the middle of the streets. The students divided themselves and waited for the forces of order. The confrontations began at midnight and continued until early in the morning; the *night of the barricades* finished with 367 wounded, 460 arrested and 188 cars overturned (Evans, 1968:125-129). The only victory for students that night was the occupation of the Sorbonne, which would last until the 16th of June.

The effects of that night were not only symbolic, police brutality and the unbalance between the contenders did not only give the students the favour of public opinion, but pushed the traditional leftist organizations (until the moment skeptical about the student movement) to the political scene. The *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT) and the *Parti communiste français* (PCF), joined later by the *Confédération française démocratique du travail* (CFDT), organized a general strike and accepted to demonstrate together with the students on the 13th of May. On that day a number of about 800,000 people (Shorter and Tilly, 1974) marched led by the students through the streets of Paris. The workers' involvement turned the student protest into a national crisis.

The days of massive mobilization and contestation had begun, every day the streets witnessed actions and the population observed the rising number of strikers: 2 million workers by the 19th of May and between 7 and 9 millions by the 22nd (Ibid). On the 25th of May occurred the most violent street fights, what pushed the government to negotiate with the labour unions. The Grenelle Accords stipulated a rise of a 35% in the minimum wage, a general 10% salary rise, the reduction of payments for social security and one less working hour per week (Howell, 1992:67-73). This was the first sign of decline in the conflict, since the main labour unions decided to accept it and called for a return to the factories though some organizations saw it still as insufficient.

It is in this context that De Gaulle suddenly disappeared on the 29th of May. In a secret trip to Baden-Baden, his absence seemed to be the culmination of the crisis: many started thinking that the general, who had barely spoken about this topic since it began, was overwhelmed by the size of the challenge and had no choice but to leave the government (Massu, 1991). The truth is that no one really knew what happened during that day in Germany, but when he came back to France on the following day he declared that there would be under no circumstance a resignation and that he had decided to dissolve the National Assembly and to call for new elections in June. He accused a communist complot of being behind the current chaos and called the citizenship to go back to their normal activities. That same night a massive degaullist demonstration took place in Paris. It was mainly driven by middle-class demonstrators who were tired of this permanent state of exception that the daily protests and mobilization had created (Feenberg and Freedman, 2001:61-63). The main political parties accepted the proposal. The Grenelle Accords and the elections seem to be the sign of defeat for the radical students. Mobilization started drastically reducing during the following days.

The outcome was a terrible defeat for the demonstrators: in the June elections De Gaulle obtained a devastating victory. His party capitalized more power and representation than it had before by winning 358 out of 485 seats while the leftist alliance lost more than 100 seats in the Parliament (Ibid.:65). The dreams of change, of alternative politics and revolution had spectacularly failed.

Mobilizing in the French May: Who? What? How?

The main purpose of this chapter is to analyze the mobilization during the French May according to the three dimensions proposed in the theoretical framework in order to conclude whether the empirical cases of collective actions can be identified as New Social Movements. In the first section I will focus on the subject of mobilization and will contrast two different hypotheses in order to explain it, one related to the New Social Movements theories and one with the traditional classist approach. In the second section I will first draw some conclusions about the "language" used by the activists in order to provide, second, a better understanding of the contents and reasons of their collective action. In the third place, I will analyze the ideal type of organization that the movements defended and how they tried to apply it.

The analysis in this chapter will be constantly in relation to the main concepts of the theoretical framework, since its main goal is to identify whether *Mai '68* can be labeled as one of the first examples of the paradigm shift in collective action.

Who Mobilized? A Generation or a Class?

The question around the "who" during the French May will be analyzed on different levels. In the first place, a short overview about the main organizations mobilizing during May and June 1968 will show that the collective actors and their position in the political structure can be much more easily associated with the "traditional" perspective than with that of the New Social Movements. In the second place, the main focus of my analysis will be on the discussion one of the main hypotheses trying to explain the social base of this phenomenon, that one which focuses on youth as the common denominator. In the third place, I will focus on the other main point of discussion when it comes to the social base, that of social classes.

Organizations

When it comes to the nature of the main actors and organizations which mobilized during the French May, it is undeniable that most of them would be classified as "traditional." If we just focus in the ideas and activities of those organizations which held more prominence during the events, even a fast look at them would be enough to say that the majority could not be identified as being part of the new social movements' stream. On the one hand, we face two very clearly and highly traditional organizations: the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF) and the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT). These two entities have traditionally been the two main organs for the gathering and representation of the French workers: the former, being the biggest and most prominent workers' party in the country and one of the main communist parties in Europe, the latter, recognized as the most important confederation of trade unions at the time. Closely associated, since the influence of the PCF on the CGT was very strong, they had held the monopoly of the workers' voice for decades in the post-war France. They had been the main political reference for leftists and the most effective mean for workers to get good results in the negotiations for redistribution. They were, all in all, the ideal type of what we have classified before as the traditional Marxists actors of collective action: class-based organizations which defended class-based interests. The analysis of these two organisms, then, does not have the purpose to find any kind of newness, but mainly to propose particular points of contrast with those that would be

the emerging social movements. Both PCF and CGT are the ideal type of collective actors for an orthodox Marxist.

When it comes to the main base-organizations, those much more representative of struggles-from-below, many difficulties to classify as New Social Movements arise. This hypothesis will be treated in detail in the different parts of this chapter, so I do not plan to go into details now. At this point, it will be enough with only describing the kind of organizations that I am taking into consideration. Once again, when we see that among the main mobilizing forces during *Mai 68* we find two traditional structures, two syndicates: on the one hand, the *Union Nationale des Étudiants de France* (UNEF) and, on the other hand, the *Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (SNESup), one of the main syndicates integrating the *Fédération de l'Éducation Nationale* (FEN). Once more, if we just focus our attention in the kind of organization I am dealing with, both of them still fit in the classic approach, since they are syndicates, associations representing the interest of particular professions. They maintain the idea of a common economic ground for common economic interests. It is only the *Mouvement du 22-Mars* the one which could be more closely associated to the concept of new social movements, tough not without many objections.

These examples, but also a multiplicity of other movements and organizations,[6] present a challenge for the theory: how is it possible to talk about the emergence of new social movements when so many actors clearly represent the kind of organization characteristic of the traditional perspective? Shall the New Social Movements theorists just concentrate in exceptional examples? These questions will be the main concerns through the different parts of this chapter.

It is still important to highlight, though, that most of the base-organizations – even if we could define them as traditional – had a shared rejection and mistrust towards the PCF and the CGT. Even if they could be identified in a same political spectrum and understood under the categories of a common paradigm of collective action, in 1968 it was clear that a division had occurred between the hegemonic organizations that were interested in politics of institutional reform and those others that had radicalized. Does this mean that the conditions for the emergence of new social movements were present? Or, contrarily, could this be understood as a radicalization of traditional forces?

The Generational Hypothesis

With the goal to characterize the social base which gave boldness and movement to the demonstrations, it is impossible to ignore the evident generational grievance. The characterization of the French May as a juvenile uprising, as the youth in movement or a generational challenge has been strongly present in the literature dealing with the subject of the mobilizations (Joussellin, 1968; Colton, 1992; Schildt and Siegfried, 2006; Ferrand, 1968; Winock, 1985; Gillis, 1974: 185-209). Even if the social origins or ideologies of the individual actors during this period might not prove to be homogenous and their influence could be widely debated, it is almost impossible to deny that youth was one of the main features which could be generalized to the majority of the participants. The French May had its beginning in universities and was initially articulated by students, this is, by an important proportion of a society which had

[6] Some other groups which were also important are: the *Syndicat Général de l'Education National* (SGEN), the *Féderation des Étudiantes Révolutionnaires* (FER), *the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire* (JCR) or the *Union des Étudiants Communistes Français* (UEFC). All of them, nevertheless, can be well identified with the dominant kind of structures of the worker movements' tradition, underlining the importance that this kind of organizations (syndicates, political parties and their respective student-based groups) had during the period.

reproduced enormously in the years which followed World War II. It is natural, then, that the generational grievance is present in many of the analysis, whether as a central variable or a contributing explanatory factor.

However, the fact that this dimension has not been ignored does not necessarily mean that is has proved effective in explaining the social base for mobilization. How can we analyze the emergence of a generational conflict? An answer to this would prove to be very important. In my search to find if 1968 could be considered the historical moment when new social movements were born, an explanation in which it is actually a generation – and not a class – what mobilizes social forces could be an important step towards the confirmation of the generational dominant hypothesis. The truth is, nonetheless, that not many historians have made good use of this argument. The main reason, I believe, lies in a deficient understanding and use of the concept of generation.

Bryan Turner (2002) highlights two ways in which the concept of generation can be interpreted. On the one hand, a generation could be understood as a group of people who were born at the same time, during the same historical period. Such a perspective refers to the "chronological location" of a generation, it groups individuals together in different time-frames according to the moment in which they were brought to life. According to Turner, however, this definition is too restrictive for the concept of generation and that is why he proposes "that we refer to this form of generational stratification as a 'cohort,' namely an age-group as defined by a specific point in time" (Ibid.:15). On the other hand, he proposes a more sociological approach to the concept of generation, one which would overcome the former's restrictions by focusing on generational cultures and consciousnesses, centering less on the dates of the cohort and more on the historical setting of the generation. The best way in which this term can be productively applied in social research is through a sociology of generations that "involves the study of the social formation of distinct generations in terms of the emergence of generational cultures and politics, and second, the study of the transmission of such cultures and consciousness" (Ibid).

With these two definitions in mind, my opinion on the matters coincides with the problem identified by Turner that "there is in much of the literature either a confusion about or tension between cohort and sociological analysis, that is between treating generations as naturally occurring phenomena (age-groups) and as socially occurring phenomena (social groups)" (Ibid). Most of the authors who have tried to understand the events of *Mai 68* as a conflict between generations have failed in recognizing the two dimensions of the concept and have stuck to the idea of cohort. This concept, even if important, cannot explain *per se* the conflictive situation lived during the 1960s. It is necessary to understand the cohort in its social dimension.

The majority of the literature has thought about youth as a demographic variable. They have only been able to offer a picture of a numerically growing age-group within particular material conditions and have used this to explain the conflictive realities that emerged at university. The age is important for them because the "baby boom" generation was extraordinarily numerous and this conflicted with educative institutions that had no capacity to adapt themselves in order to face this challenge.

Katsiaficas (1987:91-94), for example, describes how the strong industrialization which took place in France after World War II produced a very important migration from the rural to the urban areas of the country. This phenomenon, combined with the fact that during the same period families started reproducing at much higher rates, translated into overcrowded universities which evidenced a "structural and human crisis." The increase in the enrollment, moving from 123,000 in 1946 to 202,000 in 1961 to soar to 514,000 in 1968, was the main factor contributing towards

overcrowding (Boudon, 1969). Industrialization not only led to agglomeration in the cities but also required a growing number of qualified workers for managerial and directive positions. Consequently, the higher enrollment was necessary, it became an imperative for the reproduction of the system, but the educative structures failed to adapt to this changing reality.

Katsiaficas is not the only one to use the idea of generation in such a way. The concept "baby boom generation" is present also in the analysis done by Jeremi Suri (2005) and Richard Wolin (2010) of this historical period, who state that the university is trapped between a growing young population and the leaders' demands for more qualified workers. The explanatory value of the age-factor does not go further from a demographic approach: the current student-generation is much more numerous than years before but the educative system does not adapt on time. Seidman (2009) holds perhaps the extreme position within this group when he centers his attention on the demographic and biological strength of the generation under analysis: they were hormonally healthy, biologically strong and better fed than their parents. His Darwinist notion of generation seems to ignore any kind of social dimensions while he analyzes mainly a set of biologically-improved features: "greater numbers and higher quality promoted a putatively cross-class category of youth" (Ibid.:18).

All in all, the dominant use that the concept of generation has received in the literature has been to explain that the youth moved because they "were many." What does this explain? Not much, actually. If the main problem were overcrowding and dissatisfaction with the conditions of the educative system, why would age then be an explanatory variable? If parents and children would to be studying together under these same conditions, there would not be reasons to think – according to these perspectives – that mobilization would not happen. If we really want to see "youth" as the main actor mobilizing in 1968 we have to understand what made a generation an actor, and to do this it is fundamental to see this concept as something else than a group of people born during the same years. A generation is not only a mass of students entering university at the same time, a group of people who did not suffer war or famine. They are this, indeed, but much more. I propose to understand a generation as more than the addition of individual, as more than a cohort. Generation, as a category, means the sharing of a common social world and vision of reality. It implies a shared history but also a shared not-experienced world which they have heard and read about. One generation is contemporary of other generations, but their histories and futures are not a common ground. The students during the French May, as a generation, found themselves in a crossroad between the image of the world that they had received form their parents, the actual reality that they were living in and the future to come which they dreamed of.

The line of argumentation that would provide evidence to the New Social Movements theories position – which tries to find the defining cleavage for conflict in some other structural feature but class – should follow the generational approach proposed by Turner. In order to provide such an interpretation I will base my exposition on the argumentation that Paul Berman developed on this aspect. According to him, during the worldwide agitation of 1968 a common theme to all national cases could be found: "it was the split between the young and the old" (Berman, 1997:25). His idea of generation leaves behind that of cohort by focusing in the social dimension and historical context of this so called "youth."

Who were these young people in France 1968? According to Berman, the children of the Resistance, a generation born after World War II that did not experience those dramatic times but went through them thanks to their parents' experiences and memories. The occupied France was a place of oppression and defeat; it symbolized the

strength of fascism and its resolution to emerge as the ruling system and ideology after the war. But at the same time, the occupied France was a place of resistance, of bravery and revolutionary hopes of victory and transformation. After the end of the II World War those who took part in the Resistance were perceived as heroes and respected as such. Moreover, these heroes were, in many cases, associated with Marxist revolutionary ideas. The PCF was one of the leading underground organizations during this period and its clandestine struggle was recognized by an important part of the population in the first elections that took place after the war.

This imaginary of suffering and hopes, fear and bravery, weakness and strength, crowned by a final victory over an immoral enemy, was the credo transmitted in the many homes impregnated by what Berman calls a "militant" atmosphere (Ibid.:31). Yaïr Auron (1998) makes an analysis of 1968 as a phenomenon mobilized by a Jewish generation, showing that most of the main leaders of the student movement had origins in this community and, in most of the cases, had relatives who had lived the II World War. They had parents who had been victims of the concentration camps, fought against and suffered under Nazism, and transmitted their experiences to their children; as the subtitle of his book expresses, this was "Une génération révolutionnaire marquée par la Shoah" (Ibid). The kids of leftist heroes of the Resistance grew up admiring their parents' values and determination. Nevertheless, they had not lived that world, they were living in a very different one.

In his proposal of "causes and determinants" of a generation, Davis Wyatt highlights "The Privileged Interval" as one of the main elements. According to him "generations are forged not only by the events of a core decade but also by the conditions that bracket this privileged interval" (Wyatt, 1993:3). This way of framing time proves to be an excellent contribution to the understanding of the generation under analysis. Their privileged interval has to be understood by a dialectical view which connects a past of suffering, deprivation and scarcity that they did not experience with a present of unprecedented economic growth and comfort in which they lived (Yonnot, 1985). *Les Trentes Glorieuses*[7] is the name commonly given to the three decades after World War II during which France in particular, but the western central powers in general, experienced a continued economic growth characterized by dramatic changes in living standards and even many years of full employment (Goldfinger, 1998:39). However, the bracket which Wyatt talks about was not completed yet for them: they knew about the terrible past and their comfortable present, but the future was still to be founded.

They felt uncomfortable with their parents: how was it possible that those people who had been revolutionary heroes during the worst armed conflict in history had now become passive elements of the system? The new generation could not understand that their parents had nothing else to struggle for or that they simply did not want to struggle anymore. After all they had suffered, now they allowed the system to co-opt them and decided to start enjoying the comforts of a bourgeois life. Which kind of heroes were these? But maybe a much sharper and more incisive question was: which kind of heroes are we? When they compared their parents' times with their own present they could appreciate all the privileges they enjoyed. Their parents, even if now considered betrayers to their cause, had fought for what they had now. But their children did not: "And as children got older, the contrast between Marxist memories of the war and the comforts of the present was bound to cast a disagreeable light on their own young lives" (Berman, 1997:31). The accusation against their parents was mirrored towards them by

[7] This term was coined by Jean Fourastié in his book: "Les Trentes Glorieuses ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975" (1998)

an even harder accusation. The weight of a heroic past hung on their backs as a reminder of al those who had to fall for them to stand straight.

The students in 1968 doubted themselves and questioned their moral worth: "I am privileged, therefore I am nothing" (Ibid.:32) seemed to prowl around their thoughts. They suffered what Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman (1988) defined as a "complexe d'illegitimité:" they were not legitimate heirs of their parents, they did nothing to enjoy the privileges they had. But at the same time, it seemed that it was not too late, that they were still on time to be a generation up to the challenges of their history.

The way out of this crisis, the opportunity to finish with this complex, was to retake the revolutionary enthusiasm that their parents had abandoned and direct it against them and the structures they had created and now supported. Unlike what they parents thought, there were still man things to fight for, there was a pressing reality which invited them to take action: an unfair regime of cold war, colonialism and moral conservatism. A new battle against the bourgeois state, a new position much more radical than the ossified left seemed to be at the base of their motivation. Their goal was to escape from this situation of privilege and to struggle for social transformation. They wanted to found a new Resistance and destroy a way of life, even a system maybe.

The natural place of the youth to take their revolutionary concerns to was the leftist organizations. They were the heroes of the Resistance, so where else could they be better understood? But this was an unsuccessful attempt. The once revolutionary party had abandoned its radical claims and was now much more interested in reform through parliamentary means. The overall satisfactory levels of welfare achieved by the society as a whole were a quite comfortable position not worthy to be risked. The break is produced: young radicals dreaming of revolution versus old cautious leftists. This confrontation took place materially inside the PCF and the outcome was the expulsion of the student left wing from the party in two successive waves during the years 1965-66, while the French Socialist Party underwent a similar process (Berman, 1997:26). The youth, this new generation, realized that their radical positions would not find space in the old structure of the traditional leftist organizations. They needed new spaces for action and planning, they needed different allies and means of struggle. *Gauchistes* organizations would be the new place for their struggle. This is how a generational confrontation was about to start in 1968.

The Class Hypothesis

The generational reading of the events has proved to be widespread and assumed by most of the literature. Even if there might not be a definitive agreement on how explanatory it is, most of the authors seem to have considered it at least as an ingredient which contributed to the final result. The class hypothesis, on the contrary, seems to be much less clear as an explanatory variable.

Is it possible to understand 1968 as a class conflict? If we focus on the discourses by the actors – what I will do in the following section of this chapter – we would think undoubtedly that *Mai 68* was driven by class interests and the revolutionary hopes of a class-less society. But when it comes to the sociological analysis of the forces mobilizing the classist paradigm seems to loose much power. Why? Because the working class was not the collective actor behind the eruption of the French May and did not either gain a leading position in the events.

When we focus on the class analysis done in the literature we find that there is not much discussion about this topic. Most of the research assumes that the student movements were middle-class movements (e.g. Ross, 2002; Singer, 2000; Bacqué and

Vermeersch, 2007; Stéphane, 1969) but explanations rely more on the generational hypothesis than on any kind of explanation which would put class interests at the base of the mobilization. Middle-class is an attribute which characterizes the movements but does not work as the main variable explaining their emergence.

Now that I have stated that the middle-class hegemony was little discussed, I will move to a more conflictive dimension of the class hypothesis: where was the working class? Much of the activists' rhetoric and today's memories seem to portray a *grand-alliance* between the students (middle-class) and the workers. If this were the case, we would be able to partially refute the explanations offered by the New Social Movements theories. Many authors in this paradigm, as we have seen, have highlighted the leading role that the middle class acquires in these new forms of mobilization and many have also described the kind of constellations that their alliances could form by including sectors such as the new middle class, the old middle class, decommodified groups, etc.. Even if 1968 confirms their conclusion about the important role played by the middle-class, the role played by workers and their organizations could threaten their position. Were the workers still a revolutionary force during May '68 or were they just a conservative segment pushed to the scene for speculative purposes? The answer to this question will prove of fundamental importance in order to refute or accept the hypothesis by the New Social Movements theorists according to which the working class is not anymore the main agent in collective action.

The best way to face this question, I propose, is by analyzing one of the main concerns during 1968: the idea of *ouvrièrisme*. This concept (workerism in English) reflects one of the core convictions of what I have defined as the "traditional classist" perspective on collective action and represents its heart and soul when it comes to the "who" of mobilization. Being representative of the "old" tradition, workerism and its variants were considered to be obsolete by the New Social Movements theorists and new perspectives were theorized. Ironically, workerism was the dominant perspective during 1968 both in the traditional leftist institutions and among their challenging movements: "Yet both Communists and radical students believed in the historical mission of wage earners" (Seidman, 2009:18).

Ouvrièrisme was the widespread and dominant conviction among leftists that the working class was the only actor who could and should make the revolution. It is an orthodox reading of Marx: history progresses through class conflict and in the capitalist system it is the working class the one to bring revolution and defeat the established order. Only those situated in that particular place in the mode of production would experience the right material conditions to adopt a class consciousness and destroy the capitalist system. Other forces would not even try to do it or would not be revolutionary enough to succeed.

Both the old communist guard represented in the PCF and the radical *gauchistes*, accepted *ouvrièrisme* as a credo and adapted their argumentation and strategies in consequence. It was one of the main ideas behind the uprising of 1968: "the *groupuscules* that provoked 1968 protest – whether Anarchist, Trotskyite, pro-Situationist, or Maoist – were overwhelmingly ouvrièriste" (Ibid.:7-8). According to this perspective, workers would bring the change, but when *Mai 68* began the workers were in their homes. It was not the workers' struggle what was beginning, but a struggle for the workers: the *gauchistes* and the PCF (in close alliance with the CGT) would fight for the favour of the workers. The former tried to push them to the streets to finish what they had started in order to make together the revolution. The latter would use workerism as a source of legitimacy: middle-class students were *fils á papa*, the agents of revolution were represented by the only revolutionary organ, the PCF.

These two points can only be understood if we apply the class hypothesis. It is not only about the Marxist ideas about class, but the real material conditions of the agents involved. If the students were desperate to join the workers and the PCF used workerism to delegitimize them, it is because of the same reason: students/*enragés*/*groupuscules* were part of the middle-classes.

The main consequence was that students had to deal with this "contradictory position." They started the movement, they mobilized and they organized, but they still firmly believed in ouvrièrisme, and this concept that was constantly coming out of their mouths was saying that they themselves were not the subject of revolution. How to make revolution when you do not believe you are the one supposed to do it? At the same time they were marching through the streets, occupying the university or shouting revolutionary slogans, they were negating ouvrièrisme; at the same time they were predicating and sharing the workerist credo, they were negating their material struggle! It is only within this contradictory situation that it is possible to understand the obsession of students for joining forces with workers: "[m]any protagonists believed that were indeed launching a marxisant revolution, with students in the vanguard role providing an initial impetus and the working class being expected to take up the baton and, befitting the paradigm, validate the authenticity of a genuine revolution" (Bourg, 2007:27). The words by Bourg are the key to understand the students' situation: workerism was telling them that their revolution was not authentic. If they wanted to validate it, to make it a true revolution they needed the workers, and that was their goal. Their discourse was bursting with ouvrièrisme.

The Mouvement 22 Mars, at the beginning of May, expressed that their goal of transforming University was linked with the purpose of producing intellectuals that would join the workers: "NOUS VOULONS LA [L'Université] TRANSFORMER RADICALEMENT afin que, désormais, elle forme des intellectuels qui luttent aux cotés des travailleurs et non contre eux" (Perrot et al, 1968:48). The role of the university, of students and the professionals they will become is to fight together with the working class. During the first days of May the UNEF made clear what was needed for the emerging movement to be victorious: "c'est aux cotés des travailleurs et a leurs cotés seulement que les étudiants peuvent vaincre" (Ibid:49). The victory could only be possible if they joined forces with the working class. In this same vein, the newly created Comité d'action reminded the students on the 8th of May: "Mais n'oublions pas: gagner le soutien des travailleurs est au moins aussi important que tenir le pave contre la barbarie policière" (Ibid.:70).

In their discourse, nevertheless, it is also possible to find very clearly the students' concerns about their class position. Quite often in their messages they do not only call for the cooperation with workers, but try to reject the accusations they received of not being true revolutionaries. The bourgeoisie, they say, does not want to let students and workers struggle together because they know that they would be a truly revolutionary force. With that goal in mind, they depicture the student movement as something qualitatively different: "La presse réactionnaire vise a présenter le mouvement étudiant comme une révolte de jeunes privilégiés et cherche a nous couper de nos allies naturels [the workers]" (Ibid.:46) says UNEF, and the MAU adds: "II faut expliquer que si nous sommes des 'privilégiés' nous sommes soumis a la même autorité des lois, que nous refusons d'être les gardiens de l'ordre établi" (Ibid.:55). The Comité de Défense Contre la Répression shares the vision: "Ils doivent expliquer aux travailleurs les mensonges de la presse, montrer qu'ils ne son pas des groupuscules d'enragés ou de fils a papa, mais qu'ils veulent s'unir aux travailleurs" (Ibid. :66). To make the revolution, on the one hand, the students need to reject those characterizations

which depicture them as middle class or privileged strata of the society and, on the other, make the workers join them: “II faut expliquer partout à la population, aux travailleurs la vérité sur notre lutte. II faut expliquer que notre combat est inséparable de la lutte des travailleurs” (Ibid.).

The lack of support from the workers during the first half of May made the students anxious. They needed them to make the real change, but the workers did not seem to be willing to mobilize. The strategy, then, is not to stay only occupying the university, but to go out, to look for their workers in their places, explain them the struggle and bring them to the fore: “Les étudiants progressistes doivent quitter le Quartier Latin et s'organiser eux-mêmes en équipes de propagande vers les usines, les banlieues, les quartiers populaires” (Ibid.:66). Only when they gained the support of the main worker organizations, they finally seemed to be confident about the future of their struggle: “La mobilisation décisive de la grande force des travailleurs permettra seule la victoire finale de cette lutte contre l’université de classe et pour le renversement de la société qui l'a créée” (Ibid.:89).

Students, middle-class boys, had started the revolution but they did not believe to have the potential to take it to the right destination. They were “a middling social group (educated radicals) caught between power and powerlessness, and soaked in ambivalence toward both” (Gitlin, 1987:258). What they had started could only have a sense and possibilities of victory if the working class would come to their aid, join them and take the control of the situation. They were doing everything for the workers to make a revolution. For this purpose, they needed not only to invite them to take part, but to free them from the veil that the ossified and bureaucratized structures had put on them:

> “Les ouvriers prendront des mains fragiles des étudiants le drapeau de la lutte”: pour les militants d’extrême gauche ce slogan doit devenir réalité. Les raisons de l’échec de Mai 68 paraissent simples : le PCF et la CGT ont tout fait pour freiner le mouvement et l’empêcher de le mener à son terme. Ils sont responsables de l’ « embourgeoisement » de la classe ouvrière, font peser sur elle une chape de plomb que empêche sa révolte de s’exprimer pleinement. Il suffit de détruire cette chape et alors tout peut redevenir possible. Il faut donc partir à la conquête de cette classe ouvrière, l’arracher aux idées réformistes, se heurter au PCF et à la CGT qui en font leur propriété. (Le Goff, 2006: 205)

This was the struggle for the workers I mentioned before: the radicals and the conservative leftists confronting each other for the legitimate monopoly of the defense of the working class.

Students felt uncomfortable because of their contradictory situation and the PCF used this for its advantage. Among other things, the PCF used to characterize the students as “fils de grands bourgeois,” “anticommunistes” or as a group at the service of the “intérêts de la bourgeoisie et du grand capital” (Ibid.:84). Besides, their actions could not be considered revolutionary at all as the students were “too spontaneous, too libertarian and too self-indulgent” (Seidman, 2009:5). Since they felt threatened from the left for the first time, the “old” communists started criticizing the students because of the place they occupied in the social structure. They were using their same discourse of ouvrièrisme but against them.

The PCF was ready to remind this “fils à papa” that it was only workers who called to make radical changes in society, and it was only the PCF who could rightly represent them. This could be seen not only in the party’s official discourse, but also in the documents published by its student associations: “les communistes affirment que les véritables changements s'obtiennent par le rassemblement de toutes les forces progressistes et démocratiques et par la lutte quotidienne en liaison avec l'ensemble des

travailleurs. Tel est le sens de l'existence et de l'action du Parti communiste français" (Perrot et al, 1968:59); "Dans ces luttes, la place des intellectuels, des étudiants est aux cotés de la classe ouvrière, force sociale décisive de notre époque, avec son Parti, le Parti communiste français, qui combat pour la liquidation du capitalisme et la réalisation du socialisme" (Ibid.: 64-64).

Workerism in the PCF implied no contradiction for them: they were the main political organization representing the working class, they had an important degree of control over the CGT and, at least discursively, their goal of socialism was the same that the workers had. If ouvrièrisme was the dominant ideology, the PCF saw itself as the ideal type of the revolutionary organization. Even if, as the *gauchistes* had noticed, revolution was not in their plans.

While at the beginning of the events the traditional left had showed without hesitations their rejection and mistrust to the students, the use of violence by the state, the growing support from the population and the gradual higher profile of the protest pushed the PCF and the CGT into the scene. How was it possible that such a big agitation could be taking place without the participation of the revolutionary forces? The PCF was losing importance in the political arena because of a new force that was damaging their image from the left wing.

The students were highly skeptic about these organizations, but if they needed to include the working-class in their movement they had no choice but to negotiate with those who had influence on the biggest number. The 13th May demonstration was the day when workers and students demonstrated hand in hand against the regime. The students could not be happier: they had finally included the workers in their movement and, even if they had had to negotiate with the ossified leftists, they proved to be stronger by occupying the most visible positions leading the demonstration. Daniel Cohn-Bendit put it in these words: "What made me happy was to be at the head of a march where the Stalinist SOB were serving as the baggage handlers at the end of the queue" (1968:58).

At this point, it could be said that the New Social Movements theorists were wrong: masses of workers joined the students producing the biggest demonstrations that France had seen since the end of World War II. It was not only the middle-classes but the working class that were now mobilizing under the melody of the *ouvrièriste* symphony. If we analyze this static picture, it seems clear that the "old" social movements theories were still alive in *Mai '68*. But were the workers really revolutionary? Were they really committed to collective action and the transformation of a system? Was this alliance leading somewhere? The "no" used to answer all these three questions will be explained in the last pages of this section.

As I have said before, the living conditions of the working class in particular and France in general has evidenced big changes in the last three decades. Even if the exploitation and oppression denounced by the students still existed and was real, it was clear that the living standards under capitalism has also changed since Marx's times. It was the impossibility to see this transformations what made the students believe that the workers could still be revolutionary. The working class had conquered some modest achievements and was not willing to risk them: "malgré les grandes déclarations de principe, selon lesquelles la classe ouvrière n'aurait rien d'autre à perdre que ses chaînes, ceux qui la connaissent d'un peu plus près sont bien forcés à constater qu'il n'en va pas ainsi" (Le Goff, 2006 :207). Students preferred to blame the CGT and the PCF for the loss "de ce que le prolétariat avait de généreux, spontané, idéaliste, communautaire, violent, vitalisant" (Gavi, 1970:11) instead of accepting that this class had gone through a structural transformation. This new situation is what leads Le Goff to assume that

“[p]our ceux que sont sur le terrain, force est de constater que de nombreux ouvriers apprécient les avantages de cette société tant décriée » (Le Goff, 2006:205).

Under these new circumstances it is easy to understand the non-revolutionary spirit of the working class. They were already part of a system that of course was far from perfect, but worked well enough for them. Sporadic demonstrations were translated into material benefits or continued by negotiations about improvements in working conditions and remuneration. These were all moments of a cyclical process in which all the parts could count on the succession of these stages. The majority, non-radicalized, part of the working class understood this and when out in the streets during May they did not think about transforming society or producing a qualitative change, “thus, typically, labor’s focus had been economic or quantitative. Workers sought better remunerations, increased benefits, and improved working conditions” (Wolin, 2010:99).

They knew what they wanted and this was much better understood by the traditional left than the *enragés*. With their goal in mind they took part in the May demonstrations with the very specific purpose of achieving more satisfactory conditions within the capitalist system. They interpreted the moment as a sign of weakness in the government and decided to take part in order to take advantage of this situation. This position was interpreted by Wolin in the institutional level: “It was time [for the PCF] to act and thereby perhaps to steal some of the students’ insurrectionary thunder for their own political benefit” (2010:91) and by Seidman in the social one: “Wage earners were less interested in the destruction of property and more in its acquisition. Their desire to consume ultimately became a powerful force for social cohesion” (2009:161).

If the students would have understood better the working-class they were dealing with, they might have not proved so happily naïve during the mentioned 13th of May. Edgar Morin, writing during the times of the events prophesized the upcoming dangers:

> Mais on peut se demander si, même dans le cas d’occupation généralisée des usines, le mouvement ne serait pas récupéré finalement par la gauche officielle, que l’utiliserait contre le régime. Finalement, dans sa marche vers le pouvoir, l’avant-garde étudiant trouvera sur sa route les syndicats et les grands partis d’opposition qui absorberont le mouvement pour une relance du réformisme social, en expulseront les ferments révolutionnaires, ou laisseront les cohortes révolutionnaires aller à la boucherie pour mieux commémorer leurs mémoires dans l’avenir (Morin in Morin et al, 1968 :26).

The presence of the *groupuscules* and the tandem PCF/CGT in a same demonstration did not mean that they were part of a same movement. For those who thought that revolution was coming, it was all a misunderstanding: “Un puissant malentendu s’installe. Le divorce est en effet frappant entre l’utopie des ‘enragés’ et les principales forces syndicales et politiques en présence” (Le Goff, 2006:83). Morin’s fears became true and as soon as the syndicates had the chance to negotiate with the government they did so. The Granelle accord was the victory for the non-revolutionary left: they negotiated there the traditional “quantitative” dimension such as wages and minimum wages increases, a reduction in social security payments and not much more. They had entered the conflict for this kind of concessions, now, they could leave it. Of course, some workers resisted the results, but their minority position finished very soon, together with the students’ dreams. They were the really defeated ones.

All in all, when it comes to the “who” of social movements, 1968 proved to be the confirmation of working class conservatism. They did not start the movement and their main organs were seriously skeptical during most of the time. When they decided to take part it was only to achieve quantitative benefits, since they never shared the spirit of transformation that the *groupuscules* always defended. As soon as workers got

some benefits they moved out of the scene, leaving the students alone. They would have some more weeks of hope, but not many, since the elections at the end of June 1968 would be a victory for De Gaulle. With and without the workers, the revolution had dramatically failed.

The class hypothesis does not appear useful or suitable in this case. Students dreamed of a revolution which was more in their heads than in reality. Their reasons for mobilizing obeyed more to intellectual-ideological factors and a generational vision of the world than to their material conditions in the social structure. As we have seen, they could not even recognize themselves as a class in the struggle. Their identification has much more to do with their role of students and of a generation struggling against "old" institutions, norms and values. There was no an objective material ground for their emergence, but we assist to the elaboration of the generation as an identity which grouped masses of young people under the same fight.

Workers and their institutions just wanted to continue with the established system of collective bargaining. They were not satisfied with the overall conditions, but revolution appeared as a too risky and extreme choice. Additionally, workers' mobilization had much more to do with the corporative interests of their mains organizations and the pressures they suffered than with some kind of consciousness of their own. Their mobilization did not respond to structural pre-conditions, but was a reaction by the leader of the main bureaucratic institutions to the movement that the students had started.

It is my mind, consequently, that when explaining the "who" of the 1968 mobilization, the generational hypothesis imposes itself as the most adequate one and with it, the New Social Movements theorists.

What did they Struggle for? Marxist Vocabulary in the Political Field

When it comes to the objectives, aims and demands of the demonstrators of the French May, I have decided to divide the section in two main parts. In the first one, I will describe the language, the conceptual structure that was used in order to express and give shape to the mobilization. In the second one, I will analyze, in the light of the debate on cultural politics, the content of this language, the particular elements which were articulated and the overall character that this struggle assumed.

New Actors, Old Vocabulary

In his "global" analysis of 1968 Jeremi Suri coined the concept of "the language of dissent" to explain the ideological sources on which the generation of university students were basing their protests at different points in the world. The language of dissent, on his words, acted as the "superstructure" which could articulate the problems and demands of the 1968 generation: "The language of dissent, formulated during the early years of university expansion, provided the critical tools for men and women to challenge state power" (Suri, 2005:89).

This particular ideological discourse was based on "the words of prominent iconoclasts – writers as well as musicians and artists" (Ibid.:88). Suri's perspective shares the feeling of "newness" present among many of the new social movements authors, since this language which starts emerging in the 1960s allowed people to express a new situation which could not be denounced by articulating old discourses. Mobilization and protest could only be signified, articulated and organized thanks to the use of this language of dissent.

This discourse, in its novelty, was not only critical of social reality, but was also critical of traditional languages of protest. It was not only new because it could speak about a reality that had changed, buy was also new because it looked skeptically at former revolutionary discourses, especially Marxism. The leading figures of this movement, according to Suri, were Michael Harrington, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Wu Han and Herbert Marcuse. They were the intellectuals who "contributed to the language of dissent that empowered youth around the world to organize and agitate in diverse ways" (Ibid.:89).

This language of dissent is an important support for the New Social Movements theories, since the quoted authors go directly against or have very little in common with the traditional revolutionary Marxist ideas. As I have showed in the last chapter, the "what" of the new social movements is characterized for its distance from the workerist and classist demands and the introduction of politics to a new realm, that of culture. These authors criticized the orthodox Marxian understanding of social conflict and supported the free development of different lifestyles. The main aim of this language was to produce a cultural criticism of their societies which, in some cases, would progress to the field of politics. The economic system, however, did not appear as the sphere to be revolutionized, but reformed. This language of dissent made possible the emergence of new social movements since it liberated the student masses form the constrains of the Marxist discourse and gave them the concepts, ideas and words necessary to express their novelty.

Suri's analysis tries to grasp the generalities and commonalities of 1968 among a group of nations. The emergence and popularity of this language of dissent can be a good explanation for the cases of Germany, where the student leader Rudi Dutschke based his doubts about the revolutionary potential of the working class on his readings of Marcuse (Karl, 2003) and his experience as a citizen of the German Democratic Republic, or the United States, where the "revolutionary subjects were students, blacks and the poor" (Seidman, 2009:66). But if we just focus on the case of France, Suri's hypothesis proves to be terribly mistaken. As showed in the last section of this chapter, ouvrièrisme was a dominant idea among protesters (both radicals and not so radicals) who structured their image of the world and articulated their claims through the use of the classic-classist Marxist jargon. Morin et al say that even if the "youth" as a main actor was a fact of historical innovation, their mobilization could not have been channelized without the conceptual structure of Marxism:

> L'irruption de la jeunesse comme force politico-sociale, et de quelque chose de nouveau qu'apporte la jeunesse, (…) n'a pu s'accomplir qu'avec l'aide de concepts et forceps marxistes qui justifient et orientent l'agressivité, fécondent l'action, donnent une cohérence idéologique à un bouillonnement qui cherche encore sa forme et son nom. (Morin et al, 1968:27)

Marxist concepts were responsible for giving coherence to the plural and disorganized energies and enthusiasm of the students.

In this same vein, Bourg highlights the importance of "the revolutionary rhetoric and its economic-class vocabulary" (2007:22) in the French May's discourse. The main influences on the students who mobilized had very little to do with what Suri calls the language of dissent: Anarchism and Marxism in its different variants were at the base (Morin et al, 1968:20,78; Seidman, 2009:57). Cohn Bendit put it in this way: "None of us had read Marcuse. Some had read Marx, of course, and maybe Bakunin, and among contemporary thinkers, Althusser, Mao, Guevara, Lefebvre. But the political militants of the March 22 Movement had al read Sartre" (Cohn-Bendit et al., 1968:58). There are

not signs of the "new" revolutionary authors: mainly Marxists, an anarchist and the starring position of Sartre who, even if at this moment he was already a former Marxist, could undoubtedly be considered as an "old guard" intellectual.

There are no evidences of a new language taking place or being created during the French May. Students, political parties and workers' organization shared a same vocabulary, applied a same grammar and communicated with a same jargon. Alain Badiou puts it in the following way:

> In '68, that conception [that I have defined as orthodox Marxism] was broadly shared by all actors, and everyone spoke the same language. No matter whether they were actors in dominant institutions or protesters [contestataires], orthodox communists or gauchistes, Maoists or Trotskyists, everyone used the vocabulary of classes, class struggles, the proletarian leadership of struggles, mass organizations and the party (Badiou, 2010:54).

In this context, it is not a surprise that the students' demands were heavily imbued with an orthodox Marxist vocabulary. Going through sources it is possible to find these traces in almost every single *tract* in a variety of slogans and expressions: "Non à L'université de classe! A bas la société capitaliste!" (Perrot, et al, 1968:97), "A bas le capitalisme! Pour le socialisme: ouvrièrs et étudiants, combattons dans la rue" (Ibid.:99), "Pour un gouvernement des travailleurs!" just to quote some examples. The categories used to express the demands, goals and aims was clearly "old," "traditional" and not innovative. The assumptions by the New Social Movements theorists are categorically rejected in this field. Marxist categories were the *lingua franca* that activists used to describe the main social problems and formulate their goals and desires during May '68.

Now that I have established the language which was used to articulate the movement, I will in the following section pay attention to their specific content and discuss how cultural – in relation to what was explained in the theoretical framework – their politics were.

The Preservation of Political Politics

Concerning the nature of the French May a good part of the literature has been influenced by the New Social Movements theories position and has concluded that these events were part of a fundamental change. A paradigmatic interpretation within this group is elaborated by Wolin, who does not hesitate to affirm that "politics was redefined to incorporate cultural politics. Politics began to include acts of self-transformation and the search for personal authenticity." (2010:xi). After having explained that the structural transformation of work combined with the new conditions of the affluent society has made the class struggle an antiquated goal of the past, he describes *Mai '68* as the inauguration of the new social movements era:

> May was a watershed insofar as it signaled a transition to social struggles of a new type. The old type of struggle concerned demands for higher wages and improved working conditions. The new struggles revolved around two main themes: 1. the dismantling of authoritarian patterns of social control and the resultant democratization of society, and 2. the struggle for inclusion on the part a variety of groups – women, gays, immigrants, and prisoners – who had heretofore subsisted on the social margins (Ibid.:99).

The two main themes described by Wolin totally match those explained in the theoretical framework. According to him the French May is the first expression of a new social moment. He categorically concludes his historical chapter on the events by

saying that: "to conceptualize these developments in Marxist or neorepublican terms is to misconstrue their scope and import." (Ibid.:108).

In this same line we could quote the conclusions by Luc Ferry and Alain Renau (1987) who – in a critical account – explain that the stress on the logics of cultural revolt in May '68 and identity politics led to the main proposal of freedom in the election and exercise of a variety of lifestyle choices. Without the class element, individuals were free-floating entities that could choose among different cultural options. Régis Debray depicts the events as a bourgeois movement whose little anti-system inspiration was responsible for its final functionality to the dominant totality: "Capitalist development strategy required the cultural revolution of May" (1979:46). Gilles Lipotevsky has also defined *Mai '68* as a cultural revolution which "helped bring forth cultural liberalism" (Quoted in: Seidman, 2009:8)[8].

There is a whole line of interpretation which qualifies the French May a cultural phenomenon; this is, as a struggle taking part in the superstructural level of society, which focused more on the reform of civil society institutions than on the transformation of the economic and political structures. This reading of the events is compatible with the one that I have developed in my theoretical framework: the realm of politics is culturized and the main focus of attention leaves the economic sphere in direction of still not colonized ones.

The main objective of this section is to prove the inadequacies of this hypothesis by showing that the student movements (unlike the old left) were deeply concerned with class politics in a traditional sense and wanted a radical change in the structure of society, not only in the sphere of culture. To do this I am inspired by Bernard Lacroix's criticism of the above described stream, when he highlights that these conclusions which describe the events as a superstructural phenomenon can only be achieved by focusing on an intellectual history and neglecting the empirical social and political one: "They had no desire to rediscover what people thought or what they wished to do. They completely ignored the meaning the actors gave to their own actions" (Lacroix, 1986:119). A closer look to the historical material shows the strong political commitment of the students – in a classical sense.

It will be no surprise that in France the beginning the protests were related to the university system. Initially in Nanterre, protests were directed against dormitories restrictions first, and later against the system in general, coinciding with their move to Paris at the beginning of May 1968.

Hierarchies and rigidity were denounced together with poor infrastructure and overcrowding. The first national repercussions were associated with sex segregation in the dormitories, what gave the movement an image liked with the idea of libidinal politics. The hormonal claims combined with the budgetary and infrastructure related issues gave the image of a merely reformist movement which would cause no threat to the institutionalized order, since it proposed no systemic challenges. But this was only the beginning.

The students avoided, by all means, reducing their struggle to the domain of education, they wanted to transform society as such. The criticism of education was only a first step in order to make a critique of the society as a whole. How? They denounced university as a functional part of a totality, namely, the capitalist system. The university was at the orders of the dominant class and produced professionals according to the needs of the economic system. Students saw themselves trapped in an institution which was accomplice to a repressive and exploitative capitalist system. And

[8] A global interpretation of 1968 – not just restricted to France – that also characterizes the phenomena as a cultural revolution can be found in Marwick (1998).

they would also be accomplices eventually: their main concern was that university produced technocrats and managers that the economy needed to improve its efficiency, to rationalize even more the exploitation of workers and further the class divisions. On the 6th of May the UNEF stated this preoccupation clearly: "les étudiants refusent une Université qui tend à faire d'eux les cadres dociles d'un système fondé sur l'exploitation, parfois même les complices directs de cette exploitation" (Perrot et al, 1968:50). And in a document with the same date the JCR emphasizes this same dimension: "Contre la fonction capitaliste de l'Université qui répond a l'exploitation capitaliste des travailleurs européens" (Ibid.:51). The MAU rejected the role of the University which, according to them, is to produce "instruments dociles du regime" (Ibid.:53).

University was not understood as a separated domain, as an autonomous sphere, but as one more part of the system. Through Marxists eyes, university was read in classist terms. On the one hand, as I have said, it produced ruling classes that would become professional and scientific exploiters; on the other hand, this was a classist institution that systematically rejected the children of the working class. These groups, seriously underrepresented, had little chances of access and even if they achieved to enter university, they had the highest drop out rates. On the 4th of May a group of communist teachers denounced: "Université de classe, elle est l'image inversée de la nation: 8% d'enfants d'ouvriers! 40% des étudiants contraints de travailler pour payer leurs études! Les bourses insuffisantes et mal reparties!" (Ibid.:46). The university was a bourgeois institution at the service of the dominant class. It was necessary to transform it urgently.

But how? If the university was not understood as an autonomous institution but as one more part of a bigger structure, the answer was clear: it was impossible to transform university without transforming the society which produced it as a whole. The diagnostic of university problems done by the students led directly to the confrontation against totality. This is what Morin calls a *grande mutation*: "les leaders de la révolution étudiant se sentaient désormais les initiateurs d'un mouvement révolutionnaire destiné à abattre 'l'État bourgeois'" (Morin in Morin et al, 1968:45). This could not at all be understood as a cultural battle, students were challenging a whole system, their politics were so traditionally political that they had no need for adjectives (e.g. cultural / identitarian). "The challenge was not to repair a university that had lost its direction and fallen into disarray, but to mend the society that had endangered the university and its intractable array of problems" (Wolin, 2010:83). The contestation goes beyond the University, as the JCR expressed: "notre refus total de cette société de chômage et d'oppression, d'hypocrisie démocratique et de violence réactionnaire" (Perrot et al, 1968:100).

There was not way back for the *enragés* and the *groupuscules*, they had launched an assault to the state and the society as a whole; less than that would be conformism (a word that no one dared to speak out loud during those days). Since their struggle transcended the university, the cultural sphere and the superstructure, they could not fight alone, they needed the workers. I describe this issue in detail in the last section of this chapter, here I just add that it was not until it was too late that the students understood that the "what" that they were shouting was so loud that it did not allow them to listen the workers' one which was radically different. Cohn-Bendit put it in this way: "workers and students were never together (…) They were two autonomous movements. Workers wanted a radical reform of the factories, the wages, etc.. Students wanted a radical change of life" [9] (Cohn-Bendit quoted in Kurlansky, 2004:301). "A

[9] The source where the quote comes from is in Spanish, the translation was done by me. The original: "los obreros y los estudiantes nunca estuvieron juntos (…) Eran dos movimientos autónomos. Los

radical change in the structure of our society" was the goal during May, but they would not understand that the conditions for their victory were not given until their defeat (Cohn-Bendit et al, 1968:76).

The criticism was widespread and directed against the "economic, social and political systems" (Bourg, 2007:26) in a Marxist code. The first paragraph of the Sorbonne's occupation report of the 19th of May clearly illustrates this kind of reading on the evolutions of the events:

> L'occupation de la Sorbonne, a partir du lundi 13mai, a ouvert une nouvelle période de la crise de la société moderne. Les événements qui se produisent maintenant en France préfigurent le retour du mouvement révolutionnaire prolétarien dans tous les pays. Ce qui était déjà passe de la théorie a la lutte dans la rue est maintenant passe à la lutte pour le pouvoir sur les moyens de production. Le capitalisme évolue croyait en avoir fini avec la lutte des classes : c'est reparti! Le prolétariat n'existait plus: le revoilà! (Perrot, 1968:122).

It was a total critique of a totalitarian system: "Rien n'échappe à sa critique: les institutions, les autorités en place, les rapports sociaux " (Le Goff, 2006 :75). There was not a place, a sphere of contestation: the structure as a whole was the target.

What the "content" of the French May shows us is the inadequacy of the New Social Movements postulates to this case. The discourses, the concepts, were from the Marxist tradition. The analysis of reality and the diagnostic too. Consequently, the struggle was codified in terms of class struggle, of revolution, and was understood as a global enterprise which had to deal with the social structure in its totality.

Moreover, *Mai '68* was not a movements struggling for identities, was not limited to the cultural sphere. The ideal-type of new social movements did not take part during these events. Bourg makes it very clear in the case of gender:

> Gender concerns were not highlighted during the events of May 1968 in France. Although revisionist historians will no doubt continue to find evidence to the contrary, accounts of the French women's and gay liberation social movements generally contend that widespread leftist mobilization around and contestation of gender matters developed only later, around 1970 (Bourg, 2007:181).

According to Bourg, there would not be place for the put into question of sexuality among the leftists until "the French far left stopped expressing itself, as it still had in 1968, in the monolanguage of class" (Ibid.:182).

Seidman supports this position by categorically stating that feminist or ecologist demands were completely absent: "Their omission showed that the May event – often assumed to be the apex of the 1960s and its most representative expression – were indifferent to some of the central developments of postwar Western culture" (Seidman, 2006:144). The cultural characterization is also rejected by this author when he analyzes the artistic production of the movements. He concludes that "[m]ilitants were primarily interested in class, not ethnicity or religion" (Ibid.: 136).

All in all, I think I have been able to show that the dimension of the "what" of the French May had much more to do with traditional social movements. Until now, we have seen that the actor was new – in accordance with the New Social Movements theories – but the content and causes of the struggle were not. In the following section I will focus on the means of struggle, this is, the "how."

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trabajadores querían una reforma radical de las fábricas, los salarios, etc... Los estudiantes querían un cambio de vida radical."

How did they Organize? The Return to the Forgotten Tradition

In the opposition between traditional left and the radical movements the debate about organization is one of the main contrasting issues. The latter accused the former of being fossilized structures that have stolen the workers' creativity and effervescence under the excuse of exercising their representation. The CGT and the PCF are the linkage between the political sphere and the workers, since the proletarian is excluded from having an active role in that dimension. This alienation from the world of politics, the young radicals explain, is what had diminished the revolutionary potential of the working class. Only the direct involvement of citizens in communal issues can prove to be a good strategy for change (Meupeou-Abboud, 1974).

Groupuscules started with a criticism of the PCF, which was accused of being Stalinist and undemocratic in its internal organization. Furthermore, they repudiated its conservatism: it is not a revolutionary but a reformist party that has chosen the functional parliamentary system to develop its strategy. But the problem clearly transcended a particular organization, it was about a system that depoliticizes life and pretends to encourage popular involvement through the artifice of representative democracy:

> Il ne suffit pas de se rendre devant une urne et d'y déposer un papier qui a en effet plusieurs inconvénients : - il donne à chacun, à cause de sa représentativité national infime, l'impression de pouvoir très peu de chose sur la vie de la société, ce qui provoque une dépolitisation (…) – son caractère discontinue (tous les quatre ans en France) est totalement incompatible avec la vie politique d'un pays, phénomène mouvant par excellence (Comité d'Action Révolutionnaire Ouvriers-Étudiants, in : Centre de Regroupement des Informations Universitaires, 1968 :53-54).

The traditional bourgeois political system is not the place where the change will emerge, it is necessary to take the struggle to a different place, to use new means. The JCR represents this demand: "Ce n'est pas au Parlement mais dans la rue que l'unité des travailleurs et des étudiants s'est réalisée contre le gouvernement bourgeois" (Perrot et al, 1968:97).

The strong emphasis put on the rejection of liberal ways of political participation and organization, combined with a superficial understanding of the anarchist influence by some authors (equating anarchism with the absence of any kind of organization), has led in some cases to the assumption that the *enragés* rejected any kind of organization: "the movements' studied aversion to authority and hierarchy translated into a rejection of organization *tout court*" (Wolin, 2010:82). According to this reading of the events, this rejection to authority and organization would be strategically for starting with the movement but later on would make very difficult the operation of a free-working mass: "one of the student rebellion's major strengths – its strong distaste for ossified, traditional organizational structures – was also one of its major weaknesses" (Ibid.:191-2).

My purpose on this issue is to reject the simplistic reading of the events. As I will show, the repudiation of bureaucracy and hierarchy did not lead to a vacuum in organization but to the proposal of a different one. In what follows I will describe the particular way of organizing the political struggle that prevailed in *Mai '68* and then evaluate whether it fits or not in the New Social Movements schema.

Students felt a need for organization. They understood that the victory would be impossible without a certain degree of coordination and planning: "Mais pour que nos

manifestations réussissent, pour que notre action se renforce, il faut que nous soyons ORGANISES – a la base – sans a priori politique, sans attendre le va-et-vient des discussions officielles" (Les Comités d'Action, in: Perrot et al, 1968:77). The celebration of spontaneous demonstrations, of the unorganized feeling of the masses is followed by a cautious message which reminds that this tactic cannot prove effective for a long time: "II est difficile de faire une barricade, mais il est plus difficile encore d'organiser l'ensemble du combat avec ses multiples formes indissolublement liées: propagande, information, manifestations."; "EN MASSE, MAIS INORGANISES, NOUS POUVONS FAIRE DES INCIDENTS, UNE, DEUX JOURNEES D'EMEUTE. EN MASSE ET ORGANISES NOUS POUVONS FAIRE CEDER LE POUVOIR, SA POLICE ET SES COMPLICES " (Ibid.:69).

Philippe Labro describes Cohn-Bendit's concept of the political act: "quel était, lui, ce qu'il voyait comme l'acte politique par excellence? C'était de s'asseoir par terre et de discuter en dynamique de groupe ; de se parler dans ce monde de l'invective et du silence" (Labro, 1968:42). In 1968 the ideal type of organization and discussion was inspired by the idea of deliberative democracy, a concept which supposed a politicization from "below," where the bases of the movement would horizontally and without hierarchies express their views and take decisions. It was about establishing the best conditions for the heteronomic word to emerge. To speak in the public sphere, to denounce, are seen as a form of action: "L'action exemplaire surgit comme une parole interdite, elle est d'abord transgression. La prise de parole (…) franchissent la limite dans laquelle la contestation traditionnelle des syndicats et de organisations politiques s'était jusqu'alors maintenue." (Le Goff, 2006 :55). The word is action, so discussion and exchange have to be favoured in the structure of the movement. In its rejection of hierarchy and bureaucracy, the Mouvement 22 Mars was only composed by an Assembly where everybody could take part:

> [The March 22 Movement] has a number of 'leaders' in the sociological sense of the term, but no 'chiefs,' no executive, even less bureaucracy. Anyone can speak ´to the four winds´; the meeting does not vote, it sorts out a numbers of lines of force and any of the movement's militants can express them (Cohen-Bendit et al, 1968:54).

Morin et al highlight the organizational dimension as a key to success for this movement: "S'il a pu donner son impulsion à la révolte étudiante, et, par son effet, provoquer une grève générale, c'est parce que, dès l'origine, il est sans dirigeants, sans hiérarchie, sans discipline, qu'il conteste les professionnels de la contestation, viole les règles du jeu qui commandent la vie des oppositions" (Morin et al, 1968:47). The Mouvement 22-Mars was just an example of what would soon be a culture of assemblies and committees. The main idea was to generate many groups of discussion under the guiding concept of direct democracy. This was the kind of organization per excellence and one of the trademarks of the movement. The Action Committees propose this form of organization as the most effective one: "La seule forme d'organisation adéquate, c'est la constitution, A LA BASE, DANS L'UNITE, POUR L'ACTION, DE COMITES D'ACTION" (Perrot et al, 1968:71) and the JCR supports this idea: "En organisant le mouvement en COMITES ETUDIANTS regroupant TOUS LES MILITANTS engagés dans la lutte, comites qui définiront nos actions futures." (Ibid.:73).

The exercise of a real democracy, the possibility of assuming control of their lives, were the goals of an organizational structure that had as a final objective the realization of autonomy : "Pour être autonome, il ne suffit pas d'en parler, il faut faire l'effort fondamental qui es de se prendre en main soi-même sur tous les plans de sa vie,

sans plus jamais déléguer ses pouvoirs" (Comité d'Action Censier, in: Centre de Regroupement des Informations Universitaires, 1968:176), the leading idea is to exercise autonomy – their goal – in every dimension of life, including, of course, the organization of the movements – the instrument.

Having gone through the main aims of and tactics for organization, we could say that a mixture of "romantic communitarism, a generalized antiauthoritarism, and utopian experiments in direct democracy" (Bourg, 2007:27) could easily fit in the description of New Social Movements that I have done in the theoretical framework. The pursuit of autonomy, horizontality, radical democracy and the criticism of the traditional political system and its institutions are present both in the theories and the French May.

But is it something really new? My hypothesis is that the radicals of 1968 were not confronting the tradition with the proposal of new elements. They were actually accusing the current institutions of betraying the ways of organization that the leftist tradition has historically proposed. Stalin had betrayed the Russian revolution with the establishment of a bureaucratic machine on top of what initially was expected to be a multitude of soviets. The Stalinist PCF was just reproducing this phenomenon. But the criticism of the students of these forms of organization and their new proposals did not come from a post- or an anti-Marxist paradigm: they went exactly to the heart of the Marxist traditions to bring their demands for change. The revolutionary organization was not new, but old, loyal to a tradition that had been forgotten by the contemporary bureaucrats. Morin has been the author who has paid the most attention to this historical roots of their "novelty": "Le 22 Mars mime toutes les révolutions passées, la guerre civile d'Espagne, la révolution culturelle, Octobre 17, la commune de Paris, pour s'efforcer de vivre et faire vivre le socialisme des conseils" (Morin et al, 1968:78); "Le 22 Mars a réussi à faire de l'Université un territoire soviétique autogestionnaire, il veut étendre ce modèle à toute la société" (Ibid.:79); "L'irruption de ce communisme gestionnaire en France est bien la plus stupéfiante nouveauté de la conjoncture" (Ibid).

Socialisme des conseils, territoire soviétique autogestionnaire, communisme gestionnaire or *ordre soviétique* - were the historical models on which the radicals were inspiring themselves to propose their own views about how to organize the political struggle. The experiments which had taken place during the Spanish civil war, the beginning of the Russian revolution and its soviets, the anti-authoritarian concept of the Chinese cultural revolution, were all the Marxist-inspired sources which worked as an example for the students. They wanted workers councils, shared committees with the proletariat and a diversity of grassroots assemblies which would favor the deliberation and, in the process of organizing the radical change, they would have a taste of their final utopia.

Wolin said:

> But left-wing and republican critiques misconstrued May's political specificity. The May movement's uniqueness lay in the challenges it posed to traditional forms of political struggle, be they Marxist, liberal or republican. The May revolt corresponded to a new, multivalent political dynamic that transcended the Manichean oppositions of a class-based society (2010:106)

As we have seen, this assertion proves to be totally wrong. Radical students were, indeed, opposed to the form of organization of the left of those times, but they did it in such a way that they actually proposed a more radical left, a "real" Marxist organization. They looked at the main Marxist inspired attempts of organization from below and tried to reproduce them in *Mai '68*. The traditional structures and hierarchies of

representative democracy and the bureaucratic left were rejected, but their inspiration and goals were not related to a change of paradigm but to a revitalization of the most revolutionary elements of the tradition.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this thesis I stated my main goal: how can the New Social Movements theories' main features be related to the events of the French May? I started by specifying the kind of historical study I was intending to do. Far from an empiricist perspective, my goal required the historical analysis of a concept, that of collective action. With this in mind, the first step was to describe the main elements among the New Social Movements theories, paying special attention to three main elements: the agency behind this new kind of mobilization, the goals new social movements struggle for and the way of organization proposed. Once I had reviewed the main positions and authors within this paradigm, I moved to the empirical part of my analysis. After a brief historical summary of the main events during *Mai '68*, I focused my analysis on the particular form that collective action adopted during this historical event, following the three main areas that I had previously described in my theoretical chapter. I have already clarified the particular findings on each of these aspects, that is why now, in the conclusion, it seems to be the right time to finally answer my main question as a whole: how does the French May relate to the paradigm shift in collective action?

The Last Traditional Social Movement

When it comes to the *who*, the French May proved to reject the traditional Marxist categories of analysis. The main actor mobilizing, that who gave originality and specificity to the movement was a generation. This hypothesis, as I have showed, appeared to be more convincing than a class-based one, since the claims and demands could not be explained by the projection of interests from a class position. Even if there was a working-class involvement, it did not take place until the students pushed them to do it and their role was far form revolutionary. In this respect, we can say that the French May proved to be a moment of change in the paradigm of collective action. The working class – no longer revolutionary – looses its leading role in the new social movements, leaving the stage to other groups which cannot be understood in terms of class: in this case, a generation.

As I have described at the beginning of this thesis, this would seem to prove the dominant interpretation of the French May when it comes to collective action: this phenomenon was one of the main events in the paradigm shift, it exemplified one of the very first cases of a new social movement. But there seems to be very little evidence, besides that regarding the actors, which could prove this assertion.

Concerning the analysis of the *what*, it was clear that the vocabulary chosen by the demonstrators to formulate their demands, as well as their content, could only been understood within the traditional Marxist perspective. The social problems were seen as a product of the capitalist system, and its holistic transformation could be the only possible solution. Even if the working class proved not to have the leading position, the ideology of *ouvrièrisme* was dominant among all student organizations, showing in this manner the weight that traditional Marxism had in their vision. Identitarian claims, typical of the new social movements, could only be characterized for their absence – or marginality in the best of the cases.

The *how* of *Mai '68* continued with this trend. As it was explained, the rejection of traditional systems –parliamentary politics, representative democracy – and organizations – political parties, syndicates – were not boosted by a vision towards the future, by the creation of structures which were still-to-come, but by a look towards the

past. When it came to organization, demonstrators looked for the best examples in the tradition and proposed a mixture of Marxist and Anarchist experiences as the base from where to establish the foundations of their new political system.

All in all, I consider it very difficult to affirm that the French May could be seen as an example of the shift from traditional to new social movements. The change in agency does not appear to be important enough to make us declare that this particular historical event opens a new era in the history of collective action.

This assertion has been backed by the empirical analysis I have developed through my thesis, but it does not necessarily mean that the French May had no relevance in the history of the paradigm shift. I would not say that it was the first new social movement, but rather that it was the last traditional movement. And if it was the last traditional movement, it is not due to a coincidence, but because this historical event – in the sense of Althusser and Benjamin – would be of fundamental importance in the history to come after it. The French May had consequences empirically and theoretically in the concept of collective action, not because of the shape it took, by the historical incarnation it assumed, but because of its aftermath. In this sense, I would undoubtedly say that *Mai '68* should be placed as the last historical event within the traditional paradigm of social movements (in the context of advanced capitalist societies, as this theories assume – it is good to remember), but with very important consequences for what would be the origins of the New Social Movements paradigm – albeit not including itself as a case. In the following section I propose a particular reading of the event and its relation to the paradigm shift that is in consonance with these statements.

The French May as a Defeat

My conclusion is that the French May played a fundamental role in the paradigm shift of collective action, but not in the way commonly described. It was not so much that it opened an era, but closed one. It was not the beginning of a paradigm, but the end of one. What comes after – the growing importance of new social movements both empirically and theoretically – can be understood as a consequence, but not as a continuation or progression. The new social movements do not have their roots in May '68 and are not a causal consequence of it, but they are the direct outcome of the meaning that the events were given by its actors and the new understanding of politics that was generated.

I have showed that *Mai '68* was in many aspects much closer to a traditional expression of collective action. Consequently, my proposal is to do a reading of the event as a defeat: it was not a moment of novelty or creation, it did not found the new social movements' fashion, but it was the last big attempt in the advanced capitalist societies to produce a fundamental change of structures *à la Marx*.

This reading shares the perspective adopted by Terry Eagleton, when he explains the origins of postmodern thought. The explanation of the French May's consequences and the rise of Postmodernism go hand in hand, since the former was one of the defining political events during the period of genesis of the latter. Additionally, the new social movements, as I will explain, perfectly follow the patterns dictated by postmodern politics. It is because of this overlapping of concepts and their close interrelation that I will quote Eagleton's initial scenario in order to begin with my reading of the relationship between *Mai '68* and the shift of paradigm in collective action:

> Imagine a radical movement which had suffered an emphatic defeat. So emphatic, in fact, that it seemed unlikely to resurface for the length of a lifetime, if even then. The defeat I have in mind is not just the kind of rebuff with which the political left is depressingly familiar, but a repulse so definitive that it seemed to discredit the very paradigm with which such politics had traditionally worked (Eagleton, 1996:1).[10]

This is what the French May meant for many of its actors and supporters: it was a devastating defeat. This mobilization, which I have characterized as traditional and closely connected to Marxism, was immediately seen as the last massive attempt to challenge the totality, the capitalist system. If a period of permanent revolution, which has immobilized a country for almost two months, had not been able to produce major changes, what was left to be done?! The failure of the French May was understood as the failure of Marxism both politically and theoretically. If collective action was to be successful, it was urgently requiring a radical shift in its reading of reality, in its goals, ways of organizing and actors. The *enragés*, the *groupuscules*, the masses of students had been mistaken in their hopes of structural transformation and were seriously defeated. With them, a whole paradigm of collective action started sinking and the need to establish a new kind of subversive politics was the main goal in the French May's aftermath. For Eagleton, this is the context where Postmodernism germinated, for me, this is where its political logic started taking place through the increasing leading role that new social movements assumed.

After 1968 a serious reconsideration of the historical French appeal for revolution took place. In the years to come a twofold process would take place. On the one hand, a liquidation of Marxism, on the other, its replacement: "During the 1970s, there was considerable disappointment and frustration as the anticipated 'great evening' – le grand soir – of the revolution failed to materialize. France simply de-Marxified in new ways (…) The 1970s saw the dramatic eruption of 'new social movements'" (Bourg, 2007:9). The French May, then, was not at all the case of a new social movement, but laid the ground for their rise. It was the last political and historical failure of a tradition that had mobilized masses for over a century; its main inheritance was, in Bourg's words: "disappointment with revolution and a shift to postmarxism" (Ibid.:10).

This conclusion seems to lead to a paradox about the dominant interpretation of the events: why is *Mai '68* so commonly associated with the new social movements nowadays? Even if this is a very complex question, I would tend to think that this is the result of the interpretations that the frustrated, defeated activists and intellectuals constructed in their pursuit to establish a new paradigm: "the need to repudiate May fueled a retreat from politics into ethics, a retreat that distorted not only May's ideology but much of its memory as well" (Ross, 2002:12). The intentions of burying Marxism, of getting rid of its concepts, its grandiloquence, its hegemony, demanded not only the foundation of a new paradigm, but also a reinterpretation of the historical event of May. A new conceptual and political building was elaborated, one that looking at the past and interpreting it in a strategic way, would provide the ground for our contemporary possibilities of political struggle.

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[10] These words, it is worth highlighting, could have been perfectly used to describe the post 1989 scenario. Even if 1968's and Real Socialism's failures cannot be simply compared and superficially equated, it is undeniable that they share a common feature: they are main historical events in the constellation of the concept of collective action. These political and social phenomena affected the potentiality and possibilities of collective action in such a way, that some authors have had no doubts in comparing them as global moments of transformation (Jarausch, 2003; Jonsson, 2008; Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1992).

Consequences

The main outcome of May '68's defeat was a new kind of politics, the one of new social movements. Having already explained the content of the paradigm shift, the last part of my conclusion seeks to highlight which were the consequences and implications of this change for our contemporary possibilities of collective action.

One of the main features of the new social movements has been the neglect of the notion of totality. During the French May the system proved to be too strong, it was unbreachable. Activists found no choice other than surrender and the need of reformulating the target of their attacks. If the system as a whole was too solid to be destroyed, the best alternative would be to focus on its margins and crevices, on only certain parts of it. The assumption made by authors like Melucci, that societies are nowadays more complex and because of this it is not possible to recognize a center of the system, works as a validation of this position: if there is no center there is no single struggle to be fought, but a multiplicity of them in different spheres. If Marx and certain Marxisms had organized in a hierarchy the struggle for the structure over the struggle for the superstructure, now the new social movements and its intellectuals break the rule and give the same importance to both analytical parts. The capitalist mode of production is not the fundamental dimension of conflict, but one more among many others. This view of a centerless society which becomes so important after the defeat is what Eagleton has described as the rationalization of the lack of power (Eagleton, 1999:2): if the capitalist totality was too strong, if it was not possible to transform it, it is imperative to find a new field of struggle whose importance and strength are reduced to such a scale that the contenders would have more possibilities of success. From this perspective, it is possible to say that the new social movements' aims are marked by conformity to the possible, by a compromise with the plausible. The elimination of the idea of totality works as a consolation, this *holophobia* (Ibid.:9) is not more than a way of making necessity into virtue by giving ontological grounding to one's political limits.

This dismissal of the idea of totality offers to the new social movements previously forgotten fields of action. They will no longer struggle for transforming the relations of production (i.e. the system as a totality) buy will rather direct their attention to segmented, localized and particularistic issues. In this vein, their concern for identitarian issues is a clear indicator: gender, ethnicity or sexuality are some of a plurality of fields among which the notion of class is now only one more: "if the more abstract questions of state, class, mode of production, economic justice, had proved for the moment too hard to crack, one might always shift one's attention to something more intimate and immediate, more sensuous and particular" (Ibid.:17). The idea of totality banishes together with its familiar social categories. They are replaced by concepts and politics concerned with a new, smaller scale, where *the personal has become now the political* (Hanisch, 1969). Identities are at risk and their particularity has to be defended from homogenization. The body and sexuality are the historically repressed elements to be freed through the politics of *jouissance* (Stavrakakis, 2007). The contents of collective action have ceased to be political in a traditional way and are now highly culturized through the process that Ross describes as a flight from genuine politics to cultural questions and personal meaning (Ross, 2002:167). New social movements are a new form of collective action which has been adapted to a post-political world: "In our 'post-political' epoch of the culturalization of the political, the only way to formulate one's complaints is at the level of cultural and/or ethnic demands: exploited workers become immigrants whose 'otherness' is oppressed, and so forth" (Žižek, 2009:349).

Collective action has abandoned the heart of the system, the backbone of the capitalist totality and fights now only in the margins. May '68 had the same effects that

Alain Badiou finds in a phenomenon which was very contemporary at that time: the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The French author, an eyewitness of the ’68 events, also reads the Cultural Revolution as a defeat of the traditional hopes for change and revolution, defining it as the end of an epoch during which it was still possible to generate universal truth as a global revolutionary project (Badiou, 2005:53-54). The idea of a universal truth, which becomes the normative ground expressing the need for a revolution, died together with the notion of totality. The new political struggles do not feel confident enough – after their defeat – to formulate their claims in such a way and resign themselves to the defense of political truths only as local events. That was the aftermath of the defeat. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, it was a transition “from large to small (hi)stories” (Žižek, 2009:403), truth as local events can only lead to local political interventions in specific situations (Žižek, 2010:184). This process of fragmentation leads to the idea that the different spheres have become autonomous from each other and that it is possible to choose one where to struggle and be victorious there independently from the other ones. Jameson describes it in the following way:

> The idea will emerge that the struggles appropriate to each of these levels (purely political struggles, purely economic struggles, purely cultural struggles, purely “theoretical” struggles) may have no necessary relationship to one another (…) we are in the (still contemporary) world of microgroups and micropolitics – variously theorized as local or molecular politics, but clearly characterized, however different the various conceptions are, as a repudiation of the old-fashion class and party politics of a “totalizing” kind (Jameson, 1984:192).

Jameson clearly explains it: the critique of totality, of the traditional paradigm of collective action and the emergence of fragmented and segmented notions and strategies of political struggle go hand in hand in the process of foundation of the new social movements.

As I have showed before, not only have the contents and demands changed, but also the spheres of struggle. We can continue the parallel with Badiou’s analysis of the Cultural Revolution when he says that it was the last attempt of a paradigm that tried to confront and gain state-power: “the Cultural Revolution is the last significant political sequence that is still internal to the party-state (…) and fails as such” and puts it in a wider context by affirming that “without the saturation of the sixties and seventies, nothing would as yet be thinkable, outside the spectre of the party-state, or the parties-state” (Badiou, 2006:292). The state as a field of struggle, as an adversary, target and goal is abandoned by the new social movements who prefer to place their struggle in different social spheres:

> A fear is haunting (whatever remains of) the contemporary Left: the fear of directly confronting state power. Those who still insist on fighting state power, let alone directly taking it over, are immediately accused of being stuck *in* the ``old paradigm": the task today is to resist state power by withdrawing from its scope, subtracting oneself from it, creating new spaces outside its control. (Žižek, 2009:339).

The politics of subtraction pursued by the new social movements imply the withdrawal from the classical political field and the intervention in previously neglected ones. It is very similar to the defense of the lifeworld proposed by Habermas. It is a very coherent choice if we consider the new social movements’ proposal described up to here, but it suffers the same problem: subtraction does not face and confront the state power, the systemic imperatives, but rather tries to avoid them, to escape from them. The fight never takes place; the resistance is exercised as an exodus. As a consequence, the

structures of oppression and exploitation remain untouched, they continue working, while the activists place all their hopes in their escapist alternative.

There is a replacement of a certain type of politics for a new one, but this change obeys more to the surrender of the defeated contenders than to the transformation or solution of the previous situation: "If they have opened up vital new political questions, it is partly because they have beat an undignified retreat from older political issues – not because these have disappeared or been resolved, but because they are for the moment proving intractable" (Eagleton, 1992:24). The "old" problems appear to be intractable. The new social movements' reaction is not to tackle them in a new way, but to avoid them, to trade them in exchange for more friendly challenges.

The main consequence of this shift is the impossibility for contemporary mobilization to express their demands in anti-systemic terms. Transformation of structures is not anymore thinkable, it is not in offer in the market of contestation. The idea of revolution as creation of a new society is no longer possible: the only possible revolutions are small scale ones. With this micro-political (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980; Lyotard, 1979) or capillary (Foucault, 1980) perspective of politics, the capitalist system is naturalized. As it cannot be challenged as a whole, it becomes the invisible background where small scales reforms are discussed.

By forgetting about the notion of class, by avoiding and rejecting it, the new struggles are denying by its omission the reality of economic exploitation. The key for success of new social movements is that their claims can be easily articulated within a capitalist system. They propose superstructural reforms but leave the economic structure untouched. This proves to be the way in which those already once defeated can count with a second opportunity, with partial victories and ongoing struggles. In this respect Wendy Brown asks:

> In contrast with the Marxist critique of a social transformation as a whole and the Marxist vision of total transformation, to what extent do identity politics require a standard internal to existing society against which to pitch their claims, a standard that not only preserves capitalism from critique, but sustains the invisibility and inarticulateness of class – not incidentally, but endemically? Could we have stumbled upon one reason why class is invariably named but rarely theorized or developed in the multiculturalist mantra, 'race, class, gender, sexuality'? (Brown, 1995:61).

The French May was the last attempt to radically transform society. Its failure brought an aftermath of conformism, it gave rise to a series of particularistic struggles that, avoiding the notion of totality (and by it, abandoning the Marxist credo), have offered a number of possibilities of collective action that are easily compatible with the present system.

"But what if this defeat never really happened in the first place? What if it were less a matter of the left rising up and being forced back, than a steady disintegration, a gradual failure of nerve, a creeping paralysis? What if the confrontation never quite took place, but people behaved as though it did?" asked Eagleton (1992:19). But this question, even if articulated in the past tense, has much more to do with the future of collective action than its recent history.

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II.- Academic Degrees
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III.- Teaching Activity Performed
2009 – *Teaching Assistant.* Social Philosophy. School of Political Science and International Relations, Catholic University of Cordoba.
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IV. - Research Activity Performed
1. Research Positions Held
2009 – *Researcher.* University Social Responsibility Project: *Social rights, employability and intercultural relationships of the regional immigrants in the city of Córdoba.*
Vicerrectorado de Medio Universitario – Catholic University of Córdoba.
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2009 – *Researcher.* Research Project: Intercultural relationships, labour market and socio-spatial localization of Bolivian immigrants who live in urban and suburban areas of Cordoba city.
PID – Ministry of Science and Technology of the Province of Córdoba. School of Political Science and International Relations, Catholic University of Cordoba.
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2008-2009 – *Researcher.* Research Project: *Being Bolivian in Córdoba. Discrimination, illegality and labour conditions of Bolivian immigrants residing in the city of Córdoba*.
UNC-SECyT. School of Philosophy and Humanities, National University of Córdoba.
This Project was awarded a prize in the *Competition for Research Projects on Discrimination 2008*, organized by the National Institute Against Discriminations, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI, in Spanish)
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2007 – *Researcher-Student.* Research Project: *Observatory on Values in the International Society* (Commission: Europe). School of Political Science and International Relations, Catholic University of Cordoba.
Director: *Jean Monet Professor* Nelson-Gustavo Specchia.

2. Other Research Activities
2008 – Realization of in-depth interviews in the cities of Córdoba and Río Cuarto for the research project**:** *Formation of general skills for employability in the careers of Law and Political Science in the Province of Córdoba, Argentina.* School of Political Science and International Relations, Catholic University of Cordoba.

V.- Publications in Refereed Journals
2011 – "Del análisis ideológico a la crítica de la ideología: propuesta para una metodología de análisis de la televisión" ("From the ideological analysis to the critic of ideology: proposal for a methodology of television analysis").
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– (In press) Book review: "Richard Wolin, The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution and the Legacy of the 1960s."
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2010 – "Unpeaceful Peace?"
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2008 – "Ciudadanía, Estado de Bienestar y Clase Social" ("Citizenship, Welfare State and Social Class)".
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