

Chapter 25

The Aestheticization of Counterpower: The Iconography of New Social Movements in Network Society

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ABSTRACT

The impact of new communication technologies—especially social networks such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook—on democracy and mass movements has been a core subject in the area of social and political research ever since these technologies have started to play a crucial role in dissemination of ideas that go beyond the limits of mass media and foster symmetrical communication on an unprecedented scale. One of the important features of these technologies is the image sharing ability with network members. It is a propulsive force to turn a crowd into a mass with creating a collective subjectivity (the we) of mass through image, which turns into an iconography. This iconography is per se an aesthetic medium of ideology that is against the political totalizations in new digital public sphere. Thus, in this chapter, the authors focus on the formation of new social movements in network societies, then the aesthetic dimension of iconographic images in these movements.

INTRODUCTION

We all live in a society where people have a common territory, culture and social code system. As Emile Durkheim says:

Society is not a simple aggregate of individuals who, when they enter it, bring their own intrinsic morality with them; rather, man is a moral being only because he lives in society, since morality consists in being solidary with a group and varies with this solidarity (Reisman, 1990: p. 173).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4655-0.ch025

Like morality; ideas and behaviors of individuals emerge, gain meaning within society and get affected. Society is not a unified, homogeneous and stable structure. There are different groups, organizations and clusters that are built on political, religious, ethnic and cultural differences in it. These structures strive for the establishment of general rules and structures that are useful to them. Therefore, there is a dynamic and constant struggle to gain the necessary power elements to manage and direct society. This process can be clearly seen with the actions during social movements, political participation, adaptation of new technologies, policies and innovations. Across social science, there is a vast empirical evidence that shows that social interactions can alter choice. These evidences have stressed that there is an important coexistence of individual decision and social relation. Although social interactions can alter the choice on the individual level, it needs a collective action in order to reach a power level that can affect all society. The decision to join collective action is influenced by the action of other participants (Passy, 2003: p. 25).

These collective actions cause movements which can be gathered under three basic types: *social*, *historical* and *cultural*. *Social movements* can be defined as efforts to gain and control power on cultural patterns such as ethics and knowledges of society. *Historical movements* aim to control the process of changing from one societal type to another one. A *cultural movement*, on the contrary, is a type of social movement in which the transformation of cultural values plays a central role but in which social conflict appears within this process of transformation of values (Touraine, 1985: p. 776). Writers in the dominant political process approach view social movements as sustained and organized public collective action aimed at making claims involving political authorities (Pinard, 2011, p. 4). Revolutionary and reformist tendencies can be seen simultaneously in social movements. A social movement can aim to implement an institutional reform and abolish censorship, or fight against the power and privileges of a ruling class (Hannigan, 1985: p. 438).

The sine qua non of the study of social movements has traditionally been the question of why movements form (Jenkins, 1983: p. 530). The first approach for forming of social movements generally has focused on sudden increase of grievances which emerge due to rapid social change. Grievances are an essential and constant part of social movements and their emergence can be explained with changes in power relation and structural conflict to build social institutions, gain resources, control organizations. The second approach for forming of social movements has stressed on resource mobilization and in this approach, grievances are secondary factor for social movements. In this theory, social movements are considered as extensions of institutionalized actions and it has only focused on a movement if it attempts to change elements of social structure, wealth distribution system and group organization (Jenkins, 1983). The third approach has considered incentives as the center element of social movements and according this theory there are three kind of incentives: *Material*, *solidary*, and *purposive*. Material incentives are the tangible rewards often related with monetary such as salary, fringe benefits, and threats of physical or economic retaliation. Solidary incentives are mostly related with social interactions and they can be positive or negative such as friendship, respect, approval, and compliment or disrespect, humiliation, and banishment. Purposive incentives are intangible rewards that arise from internalized norms and values of organization to reach the organization's goals. Example can be including environmental and civil right activities. These concepts of solidary and purposive incentives have permitted theorists to incorporate the influences of social networks and culture and socialization (Oliver, 1993: p. 279).

Beside these incentives, social movements are constituted by aggregation through the sum of attributes and components, the interactional process through communication networks and symbols. For aggregation, individuals need to have a set of attributes (common political view, perception, mind set)

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