

Dear friends:

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Monographic theme map

Socio-political upheavals of a new generation: the strategic role of young people.

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The wave of social protests that has been shaking Latin America and the Caribbean since 2018 - 2019 and other regions in the world throughout the 21st century (France, Spain, China, the Middle East, North Africa, etc.) have been motivated by people fed up with corruption, the violation of their elementary human rights, environmental extraction and exploitation policies, economic reforms that make citizens' lives even precarious and the abuse of power (in Venezuela and Colombia there have been more than 250 deaths, in Nicaragua more than 300 deaths, in Haiti more than 120 deaths and in Honduras a total of 57 deaths) peaked in the second semester of 2019 with significant uprisings in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile and Colombia. There have also been strong movements focused on resistance to the authoritarian regime in Brazil, where the levels of violence have a very high impact on the daily life of the most populated urban centres. Most of those killed are young people, which is why we can speak of systematic and planned juvenicide, although in Colombia children have also been victims of different dehumanization strategies carried out by illegal armed groups and government security forces (in the name of security and the fight against terrorism).

A constant element in these manifestations of discontent, contained rage, disgust in the face of deception and induced panic and profound pain caused by the brutality of the so-called "forces of public order" has been the peaceful

participation of young people from all classes and backgrounds. An important factor has been their leadership of unprecedented forms of collective and connective action that, without a doubt, generate movements that we can describe in the case of Chile as an unprecedented "popular revolutionary uprising" that has the participation and support of the majority of citizens. In other countries, such as Colombia, social, environmental, cultural and feminist movements as well as students have been in the front line of the marches since November 21, 2019, when there was a national strike of gigantic proportions, against the national government led by Ivan Duque Marquez. These protests involve the awakening of entire populations who have been submissive or indolent for decades, motivated by unarmed insurgent groups who are bursting into the 21st century with new forms of social agreement and collective organization and expressions of political cultures that are devoid of certainties but capable of taking risks and grasping the ungraspable.

Some of the main features of these youth-led uprisings include:

- a) A lack of fear.
- b) Through other forms of strategic struggle.
- c) Without leadership or leaders.
- d) Transcending political parties and traditional polarizations.
- e) In defence of social and environmental justice, human rights and the freedom of diversities.
- f) An artistic, festive and creative tone.
- g) In search of radical and lasting changes.

In the 21st century, the social action that constitutes the contemporary youth condition is not just any kind of action; it is collective youth action in opposition to traditional power structures, action that draws on invention to create new forms of protest. It is agency understood as "the power to act differently" (Muñoz, 2011, p. 31); collective action that generates suspicion, seeks a different view of the world, invents new storylines. This action does not seek to maintain historically constituted privileges but instead promotes creation, resistance, social transformation and reformation. Collective action that is often mediated by discontent, disagreement and indignation as motors of a transformative desire to fuel the fight against oppression, unleash anomalies and to challenge what has been normalized. In short, it is collective action as a place of transgression that is strategic for thinking about the youth condition in today's world.

The contemporary youth condition requires an anti-essentialist ontology that recognizes the multiple, heterogeneous, historical, hybrid, dynamic, relational, changing, unfinished, nomadic, fragile, transitory and contradictory character of youth identities that are subject to processes of continuous construction and reconstruction. These emerging collective identities are not class-based but are covered by the name of *new social movements* -NMS- (feminist, ecological, indigenous, afro-descendant, peasant, youth, LGBTI, pacifist and others) and "in addition to broadening the scope of social struggles, they brought with them new conceptions of life and human dignity, new symbolic universes, new cosmogonies, gnoseologies and even ontologies" (Santos, 2010, p. 60).

The collective action of these NMS, understood as forms of agency and congregation around shared purposes or motivations that articulate politics, culture and daily life (Amador, 2011), is built on expressive relationships and emotional links, emphasize daily and local action, is more modest in terms of struggles and expected results than the traditional social workers' movement, is grouped under aesthetic and symbolic-cultural references, creates and propagates different forms of social relations and has a crucial mediating variable: *collective identity*. This means that it is action that is not based on unity, nor identity, nor totality, but on the latent power of multiplicity, of the weaving of singularities, of the enormous heterogeneity that is possible in "being together" and "being against".

Since the last decade of the 20th century there have been mass mobilizations such as those in Seattle (1999), Prague (2000) and many others that have involved protests against neoliberal globalization at the planetary level, including the holding of counter-summits and sabotaging the summits held by the WTO, the WB, the IMF and the G7/8, with the purpose of adding new points to the global agenda. Years later (2011) the "Arab Spring", the "Indignados" (outraged) in Spain and diverse forms of mobilization in Latin America and the world (#YoSoy132, #PasseLivre, #15M, #OccupyWallStreet, #BlackLivesMatter, #NuitDebout, #Diren GeziPark, #NosFaltan43, etc). The participation of a diverse and convergent youth conglomerate in these demonstrations, as well as the importance of new information technologies that facilitate connecting, articulating, convening and acting at a global level has led to renewed analytical horizons for collective action. In the first decade of the present century we began to speak of "a

new cycle of youth mobilization and radicalization" (Seoane & Taddei, 2002). Given the characteristics of certain mobilizations that have distributive, reticular, flexible, non-hierarchical, unpredictable and for some unstable, partial or circumstantial features, other names have emerged for contemporary collective action (mediated by new technologies) such as the "very new social movements" (Feixa et al. 2002), the political action of the multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2004) and the politics of the event developed by Maurizio Lazzarato (2006).

As Hardt and Negri (2004) argue, the resistance strategies that have proved most effective at certain historical moments have taken the same form as the dominant economic and social production models. The primary characteristic of the different forms of collective action in the world today is that they consist of networks, which like post-Fordist production, depend on creativity, information, communication and self-organized cooperation of plural singularities. In this framework, the hegemonic globalization promoted by dominant social groups is contrasted with a counterhegemonic globalization fostered by subordinate groups that generally make counterhegemonic use of discourses (such as human rights) or remote action technologies (such as ICTs) that are fundamental in the reproduction of the prevailing system (Santos, 2003).

As Lazzarato (2006) points out, the radical novelty of contemporary political behaviour manifested in anti-globalisation movements can be found in: 1) the implementation of a logic that affirms difference as a motor of cooperation; 2) the articulation of what is common that never merges into a peaceful whole; 3) political action based on the process of becoming and the event more than on long term political projects; 4) the implementation of coordinated actions that are always unpredictable, flexible, open, fluid, spontaneous, heterogeneous, contingent and tactical instead of strategic, in which individualities and collectives emerge and are never assumed as stable subjects or identities that have pre-established objectives, prepared responses, calculations and preconceived discourses.

In the current circumstances, anger and social discontent will continue to produce outbursts from youth. These young people are discontented and alienated citizens, convinced that the use of institutional pressure channels is ineffective; politicians are unable to understand the new context or unwilling to push the limits of what is possible to accommodate

growing and new demands by changing direction; more people exist outside the social contract... a kind of democratic fatigue accompanies our world in this first quarter of the 21st century.

The protests, which are heterogeneous, occur in dissimilar places but have three things in common: a) a context of economic deceleration that was recently announced at the Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund; b) the politicization of the fight against inequality (it is no longer just a social or economic problem, but directly political); and c) a pronounced drop in people's trust of political parties and central institutions such as governments or parliaments. In the case of Latin America, this was already announced by the Latinobarometer 2018 (Marta Lagos, its director, defined 2018 as an *annus horribilis* for democracy in the region). Latin Americans are more dissatisfied than ever with the health of their democracy and are increasingly inclined towards authoritarian models (illiberal democracies). Support for democracy, which had been at its highest level a decade ago (in 2010, 61% of citizens trusted the democratic model), fell to 48% last year, five percentage points less than in 2017. 28% of respondents in 18 countries in the region said they were indifferent to their governments. The benefits of democracy do not trickle down to most Latin Americans, even though they are better off today than they were 40 years ago. There are more demands from those who have enjoyed social mobility and from others who want to access social mobility. The stage is now open for experiments that do not always fully comply with the rules of democracy. Because the Latinobarometer was presented in November 2019, it didn't include the uprisings that occurred in the second half of last year in Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Colombia...

In this context, young people who have little to lose because they have been turned into precarious subjects without possible futures in strongly repressive penal states will continue to take the initiative to build "other possible worlds". They have even lost their fear.

Young people have not shown any interest in the traditional youth platforms and forms of organization operated in the style of political parties and/or social movements.

Today we find figures that inspire young people in areas such as the environment (Greta Thunberg), education (Malala Yousafzai), new technologies (Mark Zuckerberg), art

(Residente, lead singer of the Calle 13 music group), sport (Egan Bernal), etc.

Like them, countless youth collectives that are more or less anonymous and are "not asking permission" produce social changes (some aligned with capitalism) that shift existing forms of thought, values and aesthetics.

We have stated many times that these young people are looking for "recognition". We are currently facing the "end of linear biographies", that is, of life organized into a series of clear and sequential phases (childhood, youth, adulthood, old-age) supported by a defined and long-term life project. The contemporary youth condition is articulated around new temporalities that are not necessarily chronological (sequential, age, psychobiological) but socio-cultural and determined by living conditions, contexts and frameworks of differentiated possibilities. It is now a question of young people's concepts of the future, a particular event, life trajectories that are difficult to predict, itinerant and non-coherent, with diverse, changing and diffuse rhythms and directions. Young people today have obsolete pasts, an eternal present and uncertain and hazardous futures.

Despite increasingly precarious, fragmented, de-institutionalised and uncertain contexts, collective youth actions are emerging with varying degrees of informality/formality, circulate through plural channels and materialise in diverse political expressions. In accordance with Lazzarato (2006), it can be stated that contemporary youth singularities tend to disappear from the conventional political space and distance themselves from classic political representation (parties, unions) and reappear in other multiple spaces, demonstrating that the ideas of depoliticization, individualism and withdrawal into the private sphere by young people are nothing more than "a bunch of idiocies that we hear every day and are regularly denied by the emergence of struggles, forms of resistance and creation" (Lazzarato).

"At the same time, the social processes that lead to the possibility of thousands of young people being killed imply placing these deaths in broader social scenarios that include processes of economic and social precarisation, the stigmatisation and construction of discredited groups, sectors and youth identities, the trivialization of evil, the fracturing of axiological frameworks accompanied by the discrediting of institutions and emblematic figures of

probity, the construction of youth bodies-territories as privileged environments of death, the narco-world and the displays of corruption, impunity, violence and death that accompany it and the complicit condition of an adulterated or narco-state, a concept that alludes to the intertwined relationship between criminal forces that act within and outside institutions or, to put it more directly, as part of an intertwined collaborationism between institutional figures, businessmen and members of organized crime groups". (Valenzuela, 2015)

This condition leads to the production of *lives on the edge*, lives that express the abandonment and indolence of dominant powers that develop control strategies based on biopolitics (Foucault, 1977). These *lives on the edge* are found both in population policies, specifically in the set of processes and devices through which power and control are exercised over people's bodies and lives, as well as in necropolitics (Mbembe, 2012), differentiated policies of sovereign power inscribed in colonial and unequal systems that define disposable population groups and people who must die, as well as deciding who deserves to live. For this reason, it is important to note that:

Neoliberal capitalism generates conditions of social polarization where the few benefit while the great majorities are impoverished and precarious, a concept that includes economic and social conditions and systematic violation of human rights, creating broad sectors of the population that are surplus, superfluous or residual for the dominant powers. Zygmunt Bauman considers that permanence for this population is denied by the dominant powers and their ways of life are degraded by global neoliberalism (Bauman, 2005). The globalization model has been fertile in the production of excluded and abandoned social sectors, pariahs of modernity as Judith Butler calls them, who live in conditions of social prostration and whose lives are worth less than those of the privileged in the system. (Butler, 2010)

This condition is defined by Bourdieu using the concept of *precariousness*, a concept that alludes not just to conditions of inequality, but also to the structural dimensions that guarantee the reproduction of social conditions of inequality. Precarious populations are those with scarce social capital that have been degraded through their means of earning a living (Bourdieu, 1995). The economic and social precariousness of a population also

makes their access to justice precarious because their lives are outcast, dispensable, sacrificial and located in the margins of justice. These populations are subordinates without voices and with no chance of being listened to (Castells, 2000), they are the homo sacer of Agamben (2006), people who have a naked life and no rights, who are vulnerable, sacrificial, suppressible, eliminable, lives that can be killed without anyone being guilty of murder (Valenzuela, 2012).

These are the victims of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2011), people who are outlawed and sacrificed by those who have the power to decide that their lives are not worth living and therefore must die. Necropolitics create young people who can be sacrificed, who do not deserve to live, and who die as victims of juvenicide in Brazilian favelas, Central American neighbourhoods, cities in the Southern Cone, the Colombian countryside and cities, the zones inhabited by Latinos and Afro-Americans in the USA and almost the entire Mexican territory.

Understanding contemporary societies and, particularly the new forms of social agreement, new forms of protest and collective organization requires an understanding of the wave of insurrections that are occurring in the 21st century. Political cultures of young people have been profoundly affected by forms of expression in social networks, there are no certainties but they have managed to interrupt the monologue of the powers that be.

Communication is a strategic place from which to think, not just about the contemporary youth condition and how it relates to collective action, but to also contemplate society and culture as a whole. Communication constitutes a perspective of interpretation that crosses disciplinary boundaries and allows for the construction of a meta-level of understanding of the conflictive complexity and multi-dimensionality of processes that are articulated in a given reality (Vizer, 2006). The study of communication allows us to read the current social world, with its violence, power relations, conflicts and confrontations, its economic dynamics, profound changes and maladjustments, its systems of connections and social, political and symbolic mediations, its processes of knowledge construction and teaching-learning and its multi-country agendas that are configured not just by hegemonic power sectors but also by youth movements, agencies and resistances that create alternative country-specific and global storylines through renewed political and communication practices.

In order to carry out Youth Studies, it is necessary to overcome models that have generated knowledge using nomothetic approaches that compartmentalize access. Because these models are based on existing social paradigms, they result in theoretical constructs that are incapable of understanding very dynamic phenomena, such as those that exist in the field of contemporary communication. We believe that it is necessary to adopt a trans-disciplinary approach in which the culturological perspective acquires great importance. To do so requires: a review of the restructuring that the Social Sciences have experienced; engaging in the rethinking suggested by Cultural Studies, specifically in Latin America, of our historical context; and use what has been established in the field of Cultural Studies to think about communication from culture.

Communication, from this point of view, has an "extremely essential" character because it makes social life and human interaction possible and is based on a *necessary misunderstanding*: "the existence of a type of exchange in which subjects find a meeting space for their differences and a mode of negotiation that juxtaposes different ideas for diffusion with fundamentally antagonistic action strategies". The following are noteworthy examples of "connective action": a) streaming (images in real time), which allows power to be interrupted and stripped away; b) memes (the infinite map of the imagination), which includes the colours and tones of youth revolt; c) hashtags (mobilization and agreement), an articulator of political subjectivities.

In these new landscapes, classical ideological distances are reconfigured. Significant debates about the differences between social classes are an important part of the popular uprisings that are evolving.

Problem areas:

1. Glocal youth protests in the 21st century

Contributions from various countries of the world in their local languages (Spanish, Portuguese, English, French). Specifically, from those in which diverse forms of youth resistance to different powers have flourished.

2. Contemporary forms of collective action and connectivity

The constant evolution of social movements is a journey into the unknown, in which it has been possible to use intelligence

and creativity in the struggle against the latest generation of technological armed repression.

3. Utopias: "other forms of life are possible". Emerging aesthetic practices

In high-risk and non-future contexts, possibilities and horizons of hope emerge. Confronting death with music and other forms of art and poetry, with body experiences, solidarity organizations and daily creations of re-existence facilitates the construction of medium and long term meanings.

4. Precariousness and uncertainty: how to name the youth condition today?

A research area has been developed in recent years on necropolitics and juvenicide. Today we have more evidence and conceptual tools to recognize plural and radical violence where sex/gender, class, generation, race/ethnicity, context/territory and precariousness/social insecurity intersect. In a permanently evolving state of neoliberalism, in-depth research aims to read landscapes that are being seen with new eyes.

5. Communication in the worlds of youthful life

Youth studies cannot exist on the fringes of Communication Studies. The relationship of both of these areas with Cultural Studies is a dense epistemic framework that aims to be a significant strategic area for observing social life as a whole.

6. Reconfiguration of affective, working and educational life: meanings, experiences and youth practices

In different disciplines and interdisciplinary fields there is a commitment to understand the relational, micro-social and institutional spheres involving young people. One of these spheres has been the student movement (starting with the Chilean "penguin" protests in 2006). The demands and mobilizations of children and young people in schools has marked the beginning of socio-political eruptions in many countries.