The independent psychological effects of participation in demonstrations

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Abstract

Street demonstrations have received the lion’s share of scholarly attention to collective action. This paper, starts by returning to this research in order to raise some methodological questions about how to collect data on demonstrations and the validity of the results gathered. Next and based on my own research on demonstrations, I suggest some questions that deserve to be analyzed. In particular, I argue that we should work more on the psychological effects of participation in demonstrations. One potential line of investigation would be to explore more systematically the socializing effects of political events. Indeed, vivid political events should be important catalysts because they can have traumatic effects. Events may have an impact at any age but depending on one’s position in the life-cycle, the socializing effects will differ, from strengthening and substantiation for older people to conversion and alternation for youngsters. I hypothesize, in line with the impressionable years model of socialization research (Karl Mannheim), that people should especially recall events as important if they happened in their adolescence or early adulthood.

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Street demonstrations today constitute a legitimate form of political action both for participants and those that are targeted, the recipients of their demands and public opinion. As a mode of political expression, they reflect an extensive array of practices, codified and systematized but subject to change, historically constituted and culturally defined but in constant evolution. Like any form of political action, their history is inseparable from the conjunctures that produced them and which have accompanied their progressive institutionalization.

Here, we define the street demonstration, as “any temporary occupation by a number of people of an open place, public or private, which directly or indirectly includes the expression of political opinions” (Fillieule, 1997). As such, street demonstrations include at least four elements. The first is the temporary occupation of open physical spaces, whether public (the street) or private (a shopping mall). This excludes numerous meeting places and assembly halls, and marches from workshop to workshop within a company on strike. Next is expressivity. Every demonstration’s primary dimension is expressivity, for its participants and the public, through a group’s visual affirmation, through updating its social demands. This second criterion allows us to exclude gatherings of heterogeneous crowds (what McPhail (1991:177) calls prosaic gatherings), lacking a unifying principle but also political actions requiring discretion, or indeed secrecy. The third is the number of participants. Given that there is no means of sociologically determining the minimum number of individuals likely to act collectively, it is useless to set an arbitrary threshold. This factor is only mentioned to draw attention to the necessary distinction at play amongst various modes of individual political action, while still recognizing the rather amorphous distinctions between them. Finally, there is the political nature of the demonstration. Many apparently nonpolitical events may be indicators of a
sociopolitical crisis or the occasion of its expression, as much research on the changing orientation of ceremonial rallies (e.g. “political burials”), hooliganism or “suburban riots” has shown. Also, let us briefly consider that the demonstration should translate into or open up the expression of demands of a political or social nature. From this viewpoint, the political nature of demonstrations might be unintentional, that is, not directly perceptible by the protagonists. Our definition does not limit demonstrations merely to a street procession. While the street march constitutes the core of the demonstration, more often it is only one element within a sequence of actions, notably including stationery gatherings, barricades, the closing of a street or area (complete blockage or partial), sit ins, die ins, kiss ins, etc (McPhail 1991; and Fillieule 1997). In addition, the types of action blur, one following the other, all in the same spirit. It is often difficult to distinguish a march from a rally. Marches often end in rallies and this is frequently the point when there is confusion and incidents occur.

Beyond these defining elements of what a demonstration is at its core, there is the interaction, both concrete and symbolic, between a number of types of actors, either directly present or involved at a distance.

In the physical space that brings them together, the first actors that come to mind are the demonstrators themselves. We will be careful not to consider them an indivisible entity. Demonstrations are usually presented as the expression of the desire of a well-defined group. This is misleading since each demonstration includes at least four aspects: the people in the street, the object (usually a symbol, an organism or a personality), the immediate spectators and the social base whose feelings demonstrators claim to express. More precisely, one may distinguish the
organizers of the demonstration, who may or may not be present on the ground, and those who steward them, from simple participants; the various groups, sometimes hostile to each other, outside of the cause which seems to unite them temporarily1; and the arrival of counter-demonstrators, themselves as heterogeneous as their adversaries. These demonstrators and counter-demonstrators, can find themselves in the physical presence of those they are challenging, bosses and heads of companies, politicians, bureaucrats, and groups they are confronting. Nonetheless, in most cases, although varying greatly with the particular circumstances, the interaction between demonstrators and their targets on the ground is orderly, regulated by the forces of law and order. These include city and traffic police, sometimes municipal police, park police in Washington near the White House, specialized public order forces (carabinieri in Italy, mobile gendarmes in France), and the civil guard or regular army, but also firemen, private militias and intelligence officers. These forces of law and order are generally under the direct command of political authorities.

Finally, a demonstration takes place in the presence of various publics that can be affected in two ways: they can become aware of the demonstrators and they can be convinced by them. These publics are both casual bystanders, spectators come to see the demonstration, and also, through the presence of journalists from press agencies, from the written press, from radio and TV, the clientele of these media. The latter deliver their description of the facts, which they bring together and reinterpret, especially through selective and partial coverage, of the positions and

1 i.e. the distinguishable delegations who have assembled under different banners, so-called "affinity groups," whose members are responsible to and for one another and, more generally individuals who most of the time assemble with one or more companions (family, friends, colleagues) in small groups with whom they remain throughout the gathering and with whom they subsequently disperse (McPhail, 1991; and Fillieule, 1997).
interpretations of various actors present, those generally authorized to pronounce an opinion: intellectuals, scientists, political or religious, national or international authorities, economic actors, pressure groups, and finally pollsters, who rely on the collection of “public opinion,” before or after the event, even during the event, in the case of inquiries conducted during the actual marches.

Demonstrations are characterized by the multiplicity of actors present and the complexity of the struggles for meaning playing out at various levels of the interaction itself and its interpretation. However, this should not allow us to lose sight of the fact that all this is only possible when a more or less general agreement is reached around the shared meaning of the situation. This shared meaning is the best indicator of the relative fixation of this form of political struggle, and therefore the explicit and implicit rules of the game (legal framework and usages), stemming particularly from a history of demonstrations and of protest cultures, with their expected gestures, predictable upheavals and always possible surprises and slips. Resorting to a demonstration, like other forms of political action such as strikes or boycotts, then, is all part of participation in an arena of social conflicts, that is “an organized system of institutions, of procedures and of actors whose nature is to function as a way to call for action, in the double sense of expressing a demand for a response to a problem and, in the legal sense, as recourse” (Neveu 2011: 17-18).

Bringing the demonstrators back in. Three forgotten research tracks

Literature on demonstrations has developed dramatically these last twenty years. However, research has mainly focused on the strategic use of this mode of action by protest movements, along with other pieces of the available repertoire, as well as on its institutional consequences. Hence, the neglect of its independent
psychological effects is certainly one of the major blind spots of contemporary research in the field.

As Pierre Favre rightly emphasized (2006: 193), “The act of demonstrating is also, if not first, self-centered; it is its own end and is largely indifferent to its echo in the public space.” In other words, one of the questions posed by the demonstration is that of its effects on the participants themselves. As Jesus Casquete states, “demonstrations are also an internal form of communication. In effect, to the extent that they provide participants with the sense of being engaged in a common cause with a large number of like-minded people who share similar feelings about an issue, mass gatherings also work as opportunities to cement a given social group” (2006: 48).

Indeed, a link is generally established a priori between, on one hand, the collective character of the action, which may be seen in a demonstration by the apparent coordination of gestures, simultaneous shouting, etc. and, on the other, the postulate according to which all gestures are an indication of belonging to a common cause, sharing a common enthusiasm. Finally, this unanimity would engender, at the same time, involvement (through reinforcing convictions), belief in the efficacy of the struggle (through an illusion generated by the numbers involved) and political socialization. So, it is not a question of denying a priori all these effects of participation in demonstrations but rather of not stinting in exploring them thoroughly before drawing definitive conclusions.

In what follows, I will emphasize the micro level of individual effects of participation in demonstrations, by exploring three long neglected research tracks: the circular reaction, and the convergence and emergence models. These models
suggest that demonstrations can have three kinds of effects on participants. First, demonstrations are occasions to build or reinforce group **solidarity** and **identity**. Secondly, demonstrations are moments of collective excitement, protest rituals contributing to enhancing **adhesion** and **unanimity**. Solidarity and adhesion are strongly related and we will not separate them in the following discussion. It is in the mutually inclusive chanting and gesturing that solidarity and collective identity are created. The sights and sounds of others nearby behaving as one is behaving yields the sense that “we” are together in word and deed. To return to Durkheim’s much discussed formula, it is the rite that creates belief. Thirdly, there is a **socializing effect** of the act of demonstrating, in the same way that the vote contributed and still contributes to learning to be a citizen. More generally, this latter hypothesis comes back to the idea that political experiences provide opportunities for socialization, through plunging individuals into a collective dynamic, which translates both into an intensification of interpersonal contacts and a greater attention to the flow of media information.

In the following, after a brief review of contemporary research on demonstrations that will help situating our discussion, we will explore these two hypotheses on identity/belonging and socialization. First, we will see how the literature on collective behavior posed the two first hypotheses but failed in its attempts to assess them and will draw several lessons from this. We will then discuss how we may advance a certain number of valid elements with respect to individual effects of participation in marches.

**Street demonstration. A complex social phenomenon under study**
Because a street demonstration is a complex and multiform social occurrence, studying it requires a variety of viewpoints and the adoption of a certain methodological pluralism. Research in the field, especially since the end of the 1980s, has developed considerably; fortunately, in a cumulative fashion, offering researchers a vast and diversified array of data.

On one hand, the long view of the historian allows for a consideration of demonstrations in terms of political culture, and raises questions about its capacity to spread and relay history in the living memory of participants, and in the historical memory of organizations. It does not allow for the construction of a statistical series on a time scale since the sources are extremely disparate and the construction of quantitative indices by public authorities is a relatively recent phenomenon (post 1968, for most European countries). However, in the contemporary period, protest event analysis, that is, the establishment, by both sociologists and historians, of a more or less homogeneous and continuous series on demonstrations in a number of countries in Europe and the USA, has allowed for a comparative analysis in which this form of action emerges and progressively becomes established, its scale and the forms it can assume in various locales, and its supposed effects in specific institutional contexts and particular conjunctures. In addition, it has highlighted the nationalization and internationalization of various repertories. (see Fillieule, 2007 for a critical review).

Other authors have focused more on the place of demonstrations in the repertoire of action and the strategies of professional or social groups or the views of public authorities. Still others have been interested in closer examination of the way in which states and police forces have historically developed the doctrines, practical
rules and operating procedures that have contributed to the co-construction of this type of action. (see Della Porta and Fillieule 2004, and Fillieule and Della Porta, 2006 for reviews).

As for the case studies, they raise other questions and offer very different answers. Such case studies as the ones on October 17, 1961 (House and Macmaster 2006) or February 8, 1962 (Dewerpe 2006) contribute to a history of the state and political groups. They are also the only ones that allow for an anthropological approach to demonstrations, an approach otherwise neglected except for a few rare attempts at ethnographic analysis of symbols and sets.

In another research tradition, street demonstrations are first and foremost performances in which a multiplicity of actors are involved in sequences of interaction, usually structurally regulated, but whose logic is also to be read and understood upon closer examination, through observation of the unfolding of events and what drives the participants. A vast field of research presents itself here. From an ecological perspective, inspired by Goffman’s *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), or *Symbolic Sit Ins* by John Lofland and Michael Fink (1982), one might study the very morphology of street demonstrations, their dramaturgical dimension. This type of approach allows us to start from the idea according to which individuals in crowds—here in politically oriented gatherings—are involved in social relations of a particular type, producing effects, both on the individuals and the groups, and the development of the situation, which require very detailed observation and examination.

Clark McPhail’s research is amongst the most remarkable in this broad field (1991). Since the 1970s, McPhail has systematically observed political demonstrations and gatherings in crowds, using note-taking, photography and film.
Systematic observation using a rigorous coding scheme (McPhail and Schweingruber, 1999; and McPhail, Schweingruber, and Berns, 1997) permits him to conclude that the dynamic variation and complexity of alternation between individual and collective actions require a model permitting us to take account of recursive processes of causality, in which actors pursue their goals and adjust their means in a dynamic environment (McPhail 2006).

The research mentioned here is significant for those hoping to understand the nature of a street demonstration. It cannot be reduced to a series of mechanical actions, and individuals in a crowd do not act like single human beings. While individuals behave in accordance with their predispositions and resources, they are also led to a given sequence of actions by the very logic of the interactions in which they are involved; an approach founded only on rational calculation, inattentive to the environmental dimension of the event, would fall short. However, this is still not sufficient, for at least two reasons. First, one must, as Goffman would suggest (1963:12), devote some attention to the manner in which behavior observable in demonstrations was historically initiated. Social norms that come into play continue to develop and evolve, in diverse and concurrent ways. In other words, social situations cannot be understood from a single observation of the joint occurrence of phenomena. Second, it is necessary to focus on the demonstrators themselves, their social identity and the meaning that they attribute to their action in the situation.

The recent development of sophisticated methods of gathering opinions during demonstrations have offered new insights into the sociography of demonstrating populations, their motivations and their connection to politics. Before the end of the 1990s, very few researchers tried to collect individual data during the course of a
protest event. One should mention, among a few others, John Seidler and his colleagues who studied static gatherings, on the basis of questioning still oriented towards exploring the mutual contagion of emotions (Seidler and al. 1977; and Meyer, Seidler 1978). Also, Anthony Ladd and his colleagues (Ladd et al. 1983), on the occasion of an anti-nuclear rally in Washington D.C., tried to correlate the issues defended by the organizations with the representations and beliefs of the demonstrators themselves, concluding, interestingly, that an ideological consensus is not a necessary precondition for participation in collective action. In doing so, they criticized Heberlé’s basic ideas, Smelser’s “generalized beliefs” and, in a modernized version but still similar at its core, “a dominant framework.”

One had to wait for more than a dozen years for individual surveys at rallies to be used once again explicitly to update a solid and replicable method. It was in 1994 that Favre and his colleagues conducted four surveys with the primary goal of producing a methodological reflection on sampling strategies, the issue here being to ensure that each participant had the same chance of being questioned during the event (Favre et al. 1997). Subsequently, the proposed method was replicated once in the context of a research project on the normalization of the demonstration in Belgium (Van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001). From this point on, recourse to such survey designs became commonplace, particularly with the emergence and development of protests and antiglobalization rallies. Because these events represented real epiphanies for the movement, because the public debate had much revolved around labeling participants “rioters” and “terrorists,” “the losers of globalization” or, on the contrary, “rooted cosmopolitans” and especially privileged members of society, and, finally, because one of the political, as well as academic, issues raised by this movement concerned the drawing of its boundaries, individual surveys at rallies
appeared to be a powerful and appropriate method.

To date, and apart from some data on demonstrators collected here and there, a team at the University of Florence was the first to launch an ambitious program to survey the so-called Global Justice Movement in Italy in different settings (Andretta et al., 2002). This was followed by two Franco-Swiss surveys during the anti-G8 protest of Evian in Geneva and Lausanne and at the St. Denis European Social Forum in France (Fillieule and Blanchard 2004, 2005). Then, a group coordinated by Stefaan Walgrave conducted the most ambitious survey project ever at the international 15 February, 2003 protest against an imminent war in Iraq. The survey was conducted simultaneously in some cities of the US, Great Britain, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium (Walgrave and Rucht 2009). Finally, a team led by Bert Klandermans, Jacquelyn van Stekelenburg and Stefaan Walgrave embarked on the most ambitious study of street demonstrations until to date in which approximately 80 demonstrations in 8 different countries will be surveyed (Klandermans et al. 2010).

While such a method necessarily raises some methodological issues (Fillieule and Blanchard, 2010), nonetheless, we now have access to a vast array of data on demonstrators, the way they participate and their motives. In short, the literature shows that the socio-demographic and political profile of participants differs from that of the rest of the population in terms of its relative youth, greater affiliation with organizations and higher level of education. Indeed, the vast majority of participants belong to interconnected networks and organizational structures. Finally, but varying, depending on the particular demonstration studied, participants are regularly involved in this sort of action. From this point of view, it is striking to observe that a good number of the participants in the anti-G8 protests in Europe are first timers, which
suggests the power of this type of events and the nature of this cause can attract young participants (Fillieule and Blanchard, 2004; and Jossin 2010), at the same time drawing our attention to the possible socializing effects of the demonstration, at least on the young.

**Identity and belonging.**

The question of individual effects of participation in crowd phenomena is surely one of the first to have been raised by those who, at the start of the twentieth century, began to reflect on collective behavior, in connection with the study of psychological processes underlying collective phenomena. From this perspective, Taine, Tarde and Le Bon successively sought to explain the formation of crowds. All three interpret this phenomenon as the effect of a mutual contagion of emotions amongst the participants, a contagion producing a “collective soul.” This research does not provide us adequate conceptual tools to study the mass phenomenon and is based on a reactionary vision which explicitly denounces the phenomenon and condemns it to disappear without giving rise to an organized school of thought. However, the questions raised in these early works remain partly unanswered.

We will not retrace here the complex way in which these issues were framed by theories of collective behavior. Yet, we must stress that Park was certainly the first, in *The Crowd and the Public* (1904), to present the principal postulate that in a crowd, the affects and instincts combine through the mechanisms of imitation to create a dynamic of collective excitement, a collective soul. Since the 1920s, Park’s research on crowds has been picked up on and developed by various sociologists of the so-called Chicago School. They successively advanced three major explanatory models of crowd behavior: the circular reaction, and the convergence and emergence
models.

The circular reaction model

Herbert Blumer forged the concept of circular reaction following the idea of hypnotic suggestion. He identified three routes by which individuals in a crowd develop an “esprit de corps,” which he describes, following Park, as “a form of group enthusiasm” (1946: 208). This esprit de corps may first originate in a dialectic of unanimity/exclusion that allows a group (we) to distinguish itself from others (they). There we find the generally accepted idea that the formation of collective identities always occurs through the delineation or reinforcement of specific boundaries to ensure collective solidarity. The esprit de corps may also stem from the informal friendship amongst members of the same movement (1946: 207) and contribute to creating forms of organic solidarity even more effective since they occur in small groups protected from any outside intrusion and functioning according to their own standards. Finally, group enthusiasm may be elicited through ceremonial and ritual behavior, such as demonstrations, meetings, parades, etc. Again, inspired by Park, Blumer insisted on the fact that rituals and the symbols that accompany them (slogans, chants, flags and banners, etc), are supposed to increase the feeling of community and of belonging to a group.

This description of the formation of an esprit de corps in a crowd is not far removed from what Durkheim, in Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse (1912), tried to describe as ”'collective effervescence.” Mariot summarized the content of this notion stressing that for Durkheim “in the life of a human group, there are moments, most often traceable to their regularity, to their defined nature and the emotions they elicit, in which are recalled, developed and questioned, according to a characteristic
formalization (in general through the intervention of symbols), standards, values, representations, and beliefs (the list is long) that define this group. These moments are called rites, or sometimes liturgies, or simply ceremonies” (2001:14). “Within an assembly that ignites a common passion,” writes Durkheim, “we become susceptible to feelings and acts of which we are incapable when we are reduced to merely our own strengths (...) It is for this reason that all parties, political, economic, or confessional, take pains to periodically hold meetings where their followers can renew their common faith by displaying it in common. To fortify emotions which, left to themselves, would fade away, it is enough to bring together and place in closer and more active relationships those who are experiencing them” (Durkheim 1912: 299-300). In other words, in these moments of collective excitement which can, therefore, be engineered, to use sociology’s description of mechanical solidarity to characterize primitive societies, “everything is held in common by everyone. The movements are stereotyped; everybody makes the same gestures in the same circumstances and this conformity of conduct merely reflects that of thought” (Durkheim 1912: 287).

In Blumer, as in Durkheim, we find our two first hypotheses of the effects of participation in demonstrations on the individual. These are occasions to build or reinforce group solidarity and identity, at the same time as they are ritual occasions with socializing effects. While these notions of circular reaction and collective excitement do not explain a great deal, they nonetheless draw attention to a series of basic phenomena which help us to understand what occurs in a crowd of demonstrators and, more generally, during collective protests.
More frequently, because demonstrations are often seen as a type of rite, they elicit analyses of such functions as initiation, integration and ceremonial renewal of groups, whether these are mass demonstrations of totalitarian regimes or more standard marches. Here, the display of the group’s orderly and unified strength and character are often seen as central. Thus, in 1908, for the May 1\textsuperscript{st} march in Vienna, there were platforms installed at different points along the route so that participants themselves could, if only for a brief instant, appreciate the immensity of the body of which they were part (Casquete 2006). This is also the reason why, in Bilbao, demonstrations for independence do not follow the usual routes with “stations” in front of each of the locations of power but instead follow a much longer itinerary with a very steep route, allowing the crowd, when returning, to glimpse its own power (ibidem).

\textit{The convergence model}

In another body of research, which takes its frame of reference from a different theoretical tradition, that of “social learning,” crowd behavior is due to \textit{convergence}. For the authors of this school, collective movements stem from common experience and the activation of existing and shared predispositions, whether of a social class, an ethnic heritage, a type or level of income, etc. The mobilization does not then revolve around “contagion,” but rather around “convergence,” in the words of Turner and Killian (1972: 19). To this, we may add the psychological postulate inherited from the works of Dollard and Berkowitz, according to which the aggressive conduct observable amongst individuals in crowds is a response to a state of frustration, which is deemed necessary to build the we-feeling needed for any collective action to occur (Gurr 1970).
In this model, it is not the crowd that produces a collective soul since it attracts people already predisposed to a certain type of behavior. All it takes is an encouraging dynamic which contributes to removing the prohibitions and favoring the movement to action. These hypotheses owe a great deal to the conservative and worried mood of the times. However, they deserve to be mentioned, if only for their continued use in the practical battles pitting authorities against the movements that oppose them, whether in the form of political-journalistic denunciations of “rioters,” or again, in the manner in which the professional culture of the police is influenced (Della Porta, and Fillieule 2004).

The emergence model

Since the end of the 1960s, the notion of the irrational and homogeneous character of the crowd has been largely abandoned by the social sciences in favor of a more rational vision. Studies, both of large gatherings without specific orientation (e.g. Lang and Lang 1953), and of political demonstrations, especially, of riots, have multiplied. These tend to show that crowds are never homogeneous and that individual behavior is the product of strategy and calculation (Berk 1974). It is in this context of rising criticism that Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian attempted to reverse the perspective of collective behavior, in stressing the diversity of motivations and individual behaviors in a crowd (1972). From this, the impression of unanimity which emerges from crowds or publics is, in their view, not due to the juxtaposition of identical individual behavior but rather to the existence of a social phenomenon, the appearance of a new standard that, as in all normal situations, acts on individual behavior (1972: 22). They conclude that “collective behavior differs from normal social behavior by the speed with which the new norms emerge and by the manner in
which social control operates, not by the absence or the presence of totally different forms of social control” (ibidem: 61).

The emergence of a “situational” standard is, therefore, the principal characteristic of collective behavior. It confers on it an unstable character, given the rapidity of its emergence. It also explains the importance of phenomena such as the rumor or the milling process, no longer as Blumer did, as a process permitting contagion, but rather as assuring “the development of a collective definition of the situation” through a “symbolic interaction” (Turner, Killian 1972: 41).

The contribution of these two authors to the understanding of individual effects of participation in street demonstrations is significant. They combine the hypothesis of the rationality of an actor sensitive to secondary rewards of participation with the initial intuition of collective behavior; i.e. the idea that in a crowd situation, individuals are also constrained by a whole series of rules, or even by normative definitions of the situation, which determine in part the manner in which they interact. Still, the notion of an “emerging norm,” even as revised in the 1987 re-edition of their book, proves to be relatively metaphorical and not so operational. There too, the questions raised are central, the explanatory hypotheses stimulating, but the responses less than satisfying, due in part to a lack of sufficient empirical grounding and suitable investigative measures.

The theoretical propositions of Turner and Killian are amongst the last attempts to confront the development of rationalist and structuralist approaches to the mobilization of resources, saving what could be the questioning of the multiplicity of attitudes and conduct during a demonstration and which produce it. As a result, the
question of individual effects of the demonstration, in terms of identity and solidarity, belonging and socializing effects, has remained largely unresolved.

In his research, Mariot has accurately posed this problem of interpreting behavior in crowds, starting from a discussion of the idea of “effervescence” in crowd situations. The formula comes back to the idea that, together, participants would be experiencing the same things, that from this community of sentiments and emotions would emerge a common consciousness, generating at the same time socializing effects. We will not go into detail on the author’s reasoning in testing this collection of propositions, starting from an applied historical and sociological inquiry of presidential trips in France at the end of the nineteen century (Mariot 2010). It is enough to mention that, beginning with the way that Marcel Mauss and then Maurice Halbwachs understand social reality, we see the socially defined character, that is, the previously instituted nature, of collective behavior. Individuals in a crowd conform to already existing operating procedures which are imposed on them, regardless of belief or membership. In other words “the gaiety in a social gathering is not related to its intrinsically collective aspect, but to the fact that it requires the cooperation of two partners, the man or the idea that could be the object and those that accomplish it. Thus, we understand that participants’ intimate investment may be highly variable, not necessarily consciously thought, without this raising doubts, and either weakening or strengthening the social meaning conferred on the event: this does not depend on the reflexivity or the degree of internalization of any of the participants in particular” (Mariot, 2006).

As a logical consequence of this position, the understanding of individual behavior in a crowd could only advance through careful attention to actors’ social identity, their
different degrees of involvement in the situation, and the reasons that they invoke to justify what they are doing. So, an ambitious research program opens up, bringing us in particular to the two directions previously mentioned: the observation of interactions taking place in demonstrations and the exploration of individuals’ characteristics and attitudes. It would then be a matter of bringing together in situ statistical data concerning the population of participants in order to evaluate the modalities of public participation, beyond merely sociodemographic characteristics. In this respect, individual surveys at rallies are certainly one of the most promising avenues for future research.

Socialization through protest event participation

This brings us to the question of the socializing effects of participation in demonstrations, bearing in mind that it is not enough to infer from signs of involvement in the situation any existence of lasting, thus socializing, effects on individuals. The study of the socializing effects of political events and communication about them is still largely underdeveloped (Tackett 2006). There are many reasons for this. As Sapiro (1989) states “social movements are populated by adults, and only recently have socialization scholars turned their attention in any serious way to adult

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2 In the literature on the biographical consequences of activism, there is no explicit distinction made between the socializing effects of being involved in a movement (what we can call organizational molding) and the effects of participation in protest events, with the exceptions of McAdam (1988), and Whalen and Flacks (1989), as well as research dealing with black student activism in the civil rights and black power movements, and with rioters (e.g. Gurin, and Epps 1975). The latter suggests that the riots themselves appeared to have generated a type of "riot ideology" that further resocialized not only the direct participants but also those who only vicariously experienced them, a result that has recently been confirmed by studies on not-so-committed participants (e.g. Sherkat and Blocker 1997). Yet the value of this research lies primarily in analyzing how movements teach young blacks to question the overall white system of domination through specific mechanisms and set-ups like mass meetings, workshops, and citizen and freedom schools. It does not directly address the questions we are here interested in.
socialization. Moreover (...) Socialization research has been aimed at understanding why individuals do or don’t participate in politics not at revealing the effects of political activity. We have rarely studied the socialization effects of explicitly political organizations."

On the part of social movement scholars, this is mainly due to a strong structuralist bias which is responsible for the imbalance between research on recruitment by movements and that studying the effect of participation on activists. Generally speaking, political behavior or participation in political organizations is conceived of as a dependent rather than independent variable. Socialization research has, in turn, been aimed at understanding why individuals do or do not participate in politics, not at revealing the effects of political activity. As compared with other forms of participation, such as participation in families or schools, the socialization effects of participation in demonstrations have rarely been studied, even if the so called lifelong openness model of socialization is now more and more in favor (Fillieule, 2012).

As a consequence, not only does participation in social movements depend on political socialization, but it also has to be considered as having potentially socializing effects, which means that protest events have to be studied as explicit and implicit socializing agents. Therefore, we need a fresh analysis of activist socialization, seeing it as a process of individual transformation stemming from involvement, and with immediate or deferred repercussions in all domains of social existence (subsequent commitment, of course, but also professional and affective life). Beyond exposure to political events, it is a matter of studying the ways in which political commitment affects all individual behavior and perceptions, in other words of considering that all participation, “however sustained or intense, has secondary socializing effects” (Fillieule, 2005: 39). This is certainly all the more true for people
in their late adolescence and early adulthood, as stated in the *impressionable years model*. Three propositions are behind this model. First, youth experience political life as a “fresh encounter,” in Mannheim’s words, that can seldom be replicated later. Second, dispositions and attitudes that are subjected to strong information flows and, regularly practiced, should become stronger with age. Third, the young may be especially open to influence because they are becoming more aware of the social and political world around them just at the life stage when they are seeking a sense of self and identity.3

Finally, it is clear that much work is needed in order to build a comprehensive and solid theoretical model for the study of the multiple socializing effects of protest participation. Demonstrating, in fact, is endorsing a role, distinguished by socialization, as it might be correctly called, in that it is not merely structurally determined (*role taking*). In fact, individuals are always negotiating the meanings of interaction with the other (*role making process*). From this, involvement in demonstrations is a moment when a repertoire of institutional activist conduct is learned and comes into play, defined by gestures and techniques, as well as representations and sentiments, all especially activated in the more or less ritualized confrontation with the forces of order or eventual counter-demonstrators (see Tilly 2008 for a similar remark). One might hypothesize from this that the experimentation with demonstrations also functions as a mode of political socialization, observable to varying degrees, depending on the individuals and their previous socialization (the desire for the drama of the demonstration is not socially neutral), the logic of the situation (noticeably tied to the occurrence of violence) and, more generally, the

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3 Some important surveys support the formative years hypothesis, for example Jennings’ (2002) about the durability of protesters as a generation unit, not to mention all the works that allow us to determine that the American cohorts coming of age in the 1960s constitute a distinctive political generation.
socio-political contexts that determine as a last resort the social desirability of activist roles. Anne Muxel offers an illustration of these socializing effects of participation in a demonstration in her repeated investigations of a group of adolescents, some of whom had participated in student movement demonstrations in 1986 (Muxel, 1990). She shows that these demonstrations marked the political choices of the young people who participated, leading us to speak of the generational effect.

With his greater attention to the very effect of demonstration performances on individuals and closer scrutiny of the ethnographic analysis of public actions of the association Act Up, Christophe Broqua (2005) showed how these are powerful generators of a lasting feeling of collective belonging and emotional mobilization for those who participate. In addition and more precise Broqua and Fillieule (2009) attempted to understand the complex dramaturgical mechanisms by which the organizers of public action achieve a pervasive emotional register, both internally (activist socialization and identity creation) and externally (strategic identities, pressure on targets and demonstration of the justice of the cause). They also show how the implementation such an emotional register contributes to creating effects on participants, both immediately and in the long term. This is what stories told after the event indicated, and they showed which moments of public action played a central role. Two elements are crucial here for the two authors. On one hand, the range of these effects is extremely varied, from a simple feeling of belonging to a collective entity to a powerful experience related to an “awakening consciousness” (for example with respect to a situation of injustice, or oppression). On the other hand, these

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4 As a matter of fact, ACT-UP was the most creative social movement organization of the last two decades of the 20th century. It both found dramatic ways of stating grievances and claims and, on occasion, managed to be ingenious in developing civil disobedience tactics that disrupted its adversaries’ business as usual. (Please see Broqua, 2005; Crimp and Ralston, 1990; and Gould, 2009)
effects are neither simply nor directly the product of strategies determined in advance by the advocates of a cause. They also emerge, in the course of public performances, and face to face interactions amongst actors, bringing us precisely to the heart of individual effects of participation in demonstrations.

**Conclusion. Avenues for future research**

Literature on demonstrations and protest events has developed dramatically the last twenty years, mainly due to the extended use of protest event analysis and individual surveys at demonstrations. However, the almost exclusive analytic concern with the institutional consequences of protest, and subsequent neglect of its independent psychological effects, is certainly one of the major blind spots of contemporary research in the field. As a matter of fact, more work needs to be done to build stronger theorizations and determine fundamental mechanisms. Two obstacles must be overcome to achieve this.

First and foremost, the individual actors must resume their rightful place in the study of protest. Social movement understanding has been dominated for a long time by a legitimist bias that conceived of demonstrators and protest actions as the product of deprivation and abnormal conduct. With the emergence of resource mobilization theory, these interpretations have been radically replaced by models that emphasize the costs and benefits of participation in collective action, as well as the importance of social movement organizations in mobilizing resources and distributing positive or negative incentives. Resource mobilization theory was further refined with the growing importance in explanatory models of the so-called “political opportunity structure,” which helped to stress contextual factors in collective action. Structural factors, political contexts, and organizations, and not the actors themselves, have
been at the centre of social movement research for more than thirty years. That
direction has been further reinforced by the quasi-exclusive recourse to methods
such as organizational surveys or protest event analysis. As a result, scholars have
certainly gone too far in neglecting the actors themselves, those who engage in
collective action, their social and biological characteristics, their very motivations and
their irreducible heterogeneity. Even the more recent developments in social
movement theory, by taking into account cultural factors and drawing upon both US
and European research, have left unexplored the individual who actually participates
in demonstrations, protest activities and, broadly speaking, social movements.

Another major flaw in research on protests stems from the fact that it does not
put enough emphasis on the performances themselves and their study by means of
field methodologies. This limitation is not unique to social movement research.
Observational studies are rare in political sociology and, for the most part, we study
the product and assume it is the result of the process. However, to study process, the
process needs to be observed, not merely inferred. This is particularly the case in
research on demonstrations. To study what happens in a demonstration, we need to
think of different methods of inquiry and observation and undoubtedly will have to
take a more ethnographic approach. We may have to resort to a variety of
methodologies, among them field methodology, such as participant observation and
ethnographic study, the collection of life histories, and visual methods For example,
Axel Philipps (2012) shows how, through the microsociological analysis of visual
protest material (banners, posters, flags, shirts, etc.), we can enrich our
understanding of who joined the demonstrations and what the protesters’ motives
and interests were, and obtain hints of possible frictions and the limits of mobilization.
If extended to the filming, coding and analyzing of individual behaviors and
movements, as suggested by McPhail’s research, visual methods could improve results and provide further information for the interpretations of protest events since they can include objects and aspects that are not on hand with interviews, written documents, or statistical outcomes. Yet another example are the protest surveys conducted by Klandermans and his team. The contributions to this special issue are the first results from this project.

Beyond that radical change in methodologies, research could explore several avenues that have been neglected until now. We conclude by briefly mentioning two possible directions.

One of the most promising tracks for future research in this respect would be to evaluate the degree to which actual participation in demonstrations transforms individual patterns of political thinking and behavior, and outline the ways in which it does so. Developing further research in this direction is all the more important in the subfield of social movements since we know young people usually favor unconventional modes of action such as demonstrations, blockades, etc, which then often constitute their first significant involvement with the political system, therefore having strong cognitive effects (Fillieule and Tartakowsky, 2008). The dramatic growth of the so called “no global movement” all over the world, with its strong appeal to the younger generation, is no doubt a rich field of observation for studying such processes and their possible effects on subsequent movements (Jossin 2010). Recent emergence of the “Indignados” and “Occupy” movements in Europe and America will certainly constitute another fertile empirical field of research.

Another direction refers to the study of the impact of political events on “engaged observers” and even “bystander publics” in the vein of Stewart, Settles and Winter (1998), who suggest that those who were attentive to the movements in the
sixties but not very active in them, showed lasting political effects years later. Such inquiries could also help to develop, at a microsociological level, some interesting questions on how ground-breaking movements can play an important role in resocializing other groups in the politics of protest, as for example the American civil rights movement did with many subsequent movements.
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