The article by Paola Rebughini proposes an in-depth analysis of some important aspects of the philosophical and sociological debate on the subject, subjectivity and subjectivation. I agree with the theoretical approach adopted by the author to retrace both the evolution of the debate and the formulation of the examined concepts and notions, crossing the boundaries between the two disciplines. I also share her final point, particularly the invitation for contributions to the analysis of the concept of the subject and related notions from a sociological perspective. This will encourage a renewed debate on such issues by investigating the transformations affecting the social reality of the 21st century.

I will address her overview by considering some particularly significant and highlighted points in the debates from the second half of the last century, as well as some possible analytical extensions to the transformations of contemporary reality. The first part of this article will mainly focus on the analysis of the singular or individual subject. The second will address the subject’s involvement in collective action and the subjectivation processes emerging from an individual’s participation in the 21st century’s collective movements.

According to Alain Touraine (2007), the subject asserts itself by appealing to its own dignity, creativity and rights as a human being against systemic powers – such as global finance – and predominant cultural views affecting its existence. The subject establishes itself through a performative (Butler, 1990) agency (Archer, 2000) in constant tension between the individual’s will to be free and a creator of originality, and the subordination to the constraints and powers of the diverse realities to which it belongs. The subject asserts its ethical call for the freedom and equality of human beings, facing ‘moral prescriptions’ that prevent the full expression of these principles (Butler, 2005). It pursues its own liberation as a categorical assertion of freedom and universal rights.

The subject is therefore the bearer of particularities and specificities of its own – such as sexual orientation, gender, age, ethnicity and culture – but also takes into account those of others, trying to deal with the rational and emotional tensions affecting its relationship with other subjects engaged in the development of their own singular liberation processes. The search for liberation of the subject’s emotional intimacy, creativity and rational faculties therefore involves both its own specificities and those of others, who are equally affected by cultural constraints and the pervasive impact of the 21st-century global power configurations. Such powers are grounded in the handling of scientific knowledge models and technological platforms shaping a whole set of rational and emotional aspects critical to the life of individuals and groups (Beck, 2006; Castells, 2009; Touraine, 2007). The subject therefore constructs both a rational and emotional performative agency in the face of systemic powers shaping the rational and non-rational aspects of the economic, social, cultural and political domains of its individual existence.

The individual attempts to build his/her own subjectivity by acting in mainly two directions. The first entails the adoption of a reflexive attitude with respect to his/her position in contemporary reality – that is, the awareness of the significant risks, to which he/she is exposed as a human being who has to face the uncertainties of a new phase of modernity. The spectrum of ecological risk is such an example. This is
characterized by a non-linear systemic rationalization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), whose changes and developments are due to the emergence of flows spreading out through technological platforms (Castells, 1997). In this context, there are no exclusive paradigms of modernization or liberation. The rational reflexivity, typical of the 21st century's modernity, is thus associated not only with the secularization, but also with a quest for freedom through the recognition of the equality of all human beings considered both in their individual uniqueness and specificity.

The second direction regards the individual's ability to relate his/her own subjectivization to that of others who face powers and constraints that affect their own existence. The individual reflects on his/her own self and develops his/her subjectivity in relation to the specificities of other subjects. In the dialogical relationship with others, the subject finds an equally valuable ability to feel and reflect; as his/her subjectivity is dialogically connected with that of others, he/she recognizes their specificities and shares the same goal – that is, to combine subjectivity with the liberation from powers and constraints that deny it. These subjects share a common action, but in this collective context each individual is independent of all others.

In her article, Paola Rebughini focuses on overcoming the dichotomy between subjectivization and objectivization analysed from different perspectives by the Frankfurt School and structural approaches influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The author points out the crucial relevance of Michel Foucault's theoretical framework, referring to the idea that the subject has drawn the attention of social sciences not because of its ontological essence, but as a part of the reality in which it is inserted while engaged in taking care of itself. In this perspective, however, there is no such thing as a total liberation of the subject – in the sense of a permanent emancipation from power – but only contingent forms of emancipation made possible in particular moments of partial freedom from it. However, subjectivization is difficult to conceive from a structuralist perspective, which relates it to the power of shaping individual lives and where the subject is acted upon by the system, with limited opportunities for self-liberation. Subjectivization is rather an intimate, personal process of assertion of an individual's uniqueness as a human being freed from a destiny of homologating and systemic control.

The subject and related concepts of subjectivity and subjectivization represent a starting point for a reflection on some contemporary phenomena. In particular, these concepts and ideas turn out to be useful when trying to better understand the transformation processes of 21st-century collective movements.

Some modalities of individual involvement in such movements can be regarded as subjective experiences. They are characterized by the act of contesting power and the assertion of personal independence. This process occurs through a form of existential resistance, wherein the affirmation of the subject is experienced in professional, economic, cultural and political domains of individual life. The subject's participation may occur through individual involvement in one or more collective movements. This is not a form of involvement that entails an exclusive process of emancipation. The subject can experience other situations, affecting the course of its action, both in its personal and professional or political sphere, without channeling its 'self-assertion demands' into collective actions structured around the aim to transform social life. The act of individual participation in collective movements does not cause the subjective uniqueness to dissolve into an all-embracing experience. Indeed this experience has multiple traits and forms.

In this sense, acting in multiple forms of collective participation and communicative negotiation with other subjects in the group, does not lead to the disappearance of the peculiarities and prerogatives of each individual. It is rather a process within the experiential appropriation of action itself, in which the individual tries to set himself/herself up as a unique controller of his/her life independent of the homologating forces of the system.

In the end, independent actors meet other subjects in participatory experiences that have both a personal and collective significance, in which each redesigns the horizons and segments of his/her own life story. Rebughini's contribution precisely and brilliantly retraces the diverse philosophical and sociological implications of the concept of the subject as well as processes of embodiment and interference underlying the relationship that an individual builds, is subjected to, or creates, with the world and the social reality to which he or she belongs.

**References**


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