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**Between Social "Forms" and "Figurational" Sociology: Simmel and Elias  
and the Role of Emotions**

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## **CAMBIO**

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## [Between social “forms” and “figurational” sociology] Simmel and Elias and the role of emotions

### *Introduction*

The importance attributed to the emotions is one of the more significant developments in the western contemporary culture. However, the re-evaluation of the sentimental and emotional dimension in human sciences begins around the mid of the 70ies: up to that moment it was professed a theory of social action based on the concept of an actor meant as a rational, reflexive and prescriptive subject; therefore his emotions and feelings were considered as residual and often troubling elements diverting the rational goal directed action (Turnaturi 1995). On the other hand, for a very long time the logical thought has been considered as an ordinary condition of the mind that, subsequently, would be disturbed by the passions, while it's necessary to think that our perceptions pass through the emotions too and that these last are not an external addition: cognitive processes are involved into the emotions, this means that emotions and cognitions are not incompatible and opposed<sup>1</sup> (Frjida 1993, Bodei 1997, Furedi 2004, Hochschild 2003).

An evident contribute to the re-evaluation of emotions comes from the philosophy of 700's and 800's if it's true that an author such as Adam Smith approached the emotions of sympathy and empathy in his book “Theory of moral feelings” (1759), considering them as what binds together the society. Darwin indicated the association between emotions, feelings and the relational configurations, which defines them as well: emotions are not only inside the individual but between the individuals as well. More than a century ago, the role of emotions was grasped as well as the fact that individual cannot be separated by his passions. However, it's more recently, in particular with the development of the phenomenological contribution, that a full philosophical citizenship has been granted to the theme of affectiveness (Vozza 2003).

After a long period of insufficient interest, the attention moved from the individual social life to his inner life, generating a new orientation of the intellectual life, more focused on oneself: since the self is defined by feelings and emotions, the emotional state has started to be considered a key element, which determines the individual and social behaviour. Even the processes of social fragmentation and increasing individualization lead the individual to inquire continually his own identity: the individual try to reflect onto himself and this brings him to consider feelings as the only unaffected source of authenticity (Furedi 2004).

With the development of sociology of emotions, the individual has gradually being considered as an emotional actor who is not the opposite of the rational and prescriptive actor but represents another side of this, his constituent and inerasable part: the individual cannot be seen as a spontaneous, free agent because he moves within culturally defined limits and boundaries too (Turnaturi 1995). From the point of view of terminology, the concept of emotion is used essentially in psychology while the notions of feeling, affection and passion tend to be related directly to the human and philosophical tradition (Cattarinussi 2006). Very opportunely Turnaturi distinguishes between ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’ explaining that the last has met an higher consensus than the first: feelings are in fact important factors for the communication, socialization, the maintenance of a social organization, while emotions introduce the possibility of conflicts in social relationships and their freedom of expression can be inter-

<sup>1</sup> Thus, during the growth of the individual the basis of affectiveness are shaped before the symbolic systems and the two integrated progressively themselves “forming a gyrosopic system which can orient him” (Bodei 2000: 81).

preted as a signal of social relations and communication disorder<sup>2</sup>.

Even if emotions have gained an extraordinary cultural status, the attitude toward them remains ambivalent. On the one hand, the public exhibition of emotions represents the evidence of the development of a more intelligent and sensitive society, on the other hand boundaries are set for the emotions which are cause of social unease. Therefore, only the emotions useful to the project of individual self-fulfilment are presented in a favourable light while those which create dependences are looked at with suspicion: thus emotions are objects of cultural reverence but also of psychological treatment.

In any case, emotions have always been represented as a constant characteristic of social life. From this point of view, if today the social debate reevaluates the emotions and the duplicity of human being it's because authors such as Georg Simmel and Norbert Elias have taught us that the individual should be analyzed and considered as a whole<sup>3</sup>.

### *Simmel and Elias: the essential role of emotions*

Beyond any doubt, it's Simmel who reflects on that sociological imaginary which represents the background for the interpersonal setting up of the individuals intimate life. The emotional reality is the basis of individual experience and social interactions (Turnaturi 1994). Individuals who relate to each other through emotions and social relationships generate other emotions which are linked to the interactions because they are, at the same time, their result and their source (Turnaturi 1995). Indeed, the notion of relationship represents a key which allows to consider the society as a reticular system, where psychic differed elements intersect, even if we choose to search aspects of human life related to intimacy, emotion and feeling (Toschi 2010). How is created a society? Following which rules? How individuals interact between each other? What is the role of different sensations? They're only the main questions which we can find, more or less declared in the simmelian texts. According to the German sociologist, the social structure is identified and developed in correlation to specific places – the Court, the Salons – but also to rituals and individuals (Papilloud 2010).

The role of sociology is to study the associations and their shaping (Simmel 1908). Society is only a name which define a group of people linked by their relationships: it's a multiplicity of interactions rather than a whole, a group of people characterised by urges, feelings and motivations (Watier 2010). In fact the relationship with the society is set up through the body and the sensations which represent the essential perceptive openness that shapes the experience (Picchio 2010a). Consequently the society net is made up of feelings: the emotional categories play a fundamental role in the socialization. If socialization is the ability to create associations, it's necessary to suppose that impulses, motivations, feelings rise in the individuals when they enter into social relationships (Watier 2010).

Simmel in his famous essay "How is society possible?" underlines that individuals really feel members of the society which is shaped by the mutual relationships with others. But it's in its "Essay on Sociology of sensation" that Simmel shows as generally everyone perceive the others through sensations: acting on ourselves, the sensitive impression of a person can release feelings of pleasure or displeasure, of excitement or calmness, because of the eyesight, the tone of voice or his simple presence in a same place (Simmel 1908).

In that regard, it's known that among the more important sensations, Simmel counted the glance (Turnaturi 1994): in the modern metropolis a predominance of eyesight, if compared with the other senses, occurs. This is due to the development of the means of transport which make possible for the individuals to be, for a long time, in a close range with persons that they don't know directly or to whom they speak rarely, but where the physical

<sup>2</sup> For a recent reconstruction of the concepts of emotions, feelings and passions, we refer to Cerulo 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Naturally, it has to be remembered Durkheim who considered the emotional factor as fundamental in order to create the collective effervescence that can be seen as the foundation of integration and social cohesion. Nevertheless, Durkheim underlines the destabilizing nature of emotions for which the only cure is their channelling into collective conscience. It seems indeed that in his analysis there is a lack of positive view as far as the emotional factor is concerned, in case it's not bound either to the collective conscience or to the religion: the emotional effervescence should be controlled and channelled into rigid social norms (Cerulo 2009).

contact and the visual interaction are unavoidable (Picchio 2010a). Therefore, the glance knowing connotes the relations among individuals and it's through the glance that that reflective intimacy, always wary in order to offer a meagre and sparing signal, is originated (Accarino 2008). This is a sense upon which also Elias focused is attention for a long time: in civil society the sight acquires a particular importance: as the ear and rather, more than this, it acquires the function of "joy mediator" because in the society the immediate satisfaction of desire is constantly limited by prohibitions and borders (Elias 1969b: 365).

Simmel realized that with the refinement of civilization, the acuity of the senses would have been reduced while the pleasure (and displeasure) sensation would have been increased: this could have created more suffering and repulsion than joy and amusement. As it's known, the modern individual considered by Simmel, lives constantly exposed to various impressions: through the development of urban life, we can assist to an increasing individualization process and the individual can interact with his many fellow men but he can't know them in depth as in the past. In this passage, it's almost possible to foresee some hints of the later eliasian reflexion:

In general, the effectiveness of the senses at a distance becomes weaker with the heightening of culture, their effectiveness stronger within close range, and we become not only near-sighted but altogether near-sensed; however, we become all the more sensitive at these shorter distances (Simmel 1908: 557-558).

It's clear that the simmelian thought revolves around the phenomenon of hypersensitivity. The feelings are psychological categories which have to be taken in account and to be investigated because they're fundamental for the social interaction. In effect, the emotional function could allow the establishment of social relationships and of a sense of belonging. During the interaction the emotions spring up and grow starting from the more private and 'tragic' relation as the dyadic one, based on intimate relationships. Thus the love feeling contains a tragedy in his essence because it's possible to observe a sort of contradiction: even in tight emotional relationships, notwithstanding we want to be with another person, at the same time, in order to protect our individuality we don't want to be totally with the other one or else to be with him but with some reservations: therefore in love affairs the individuals both offers and denies themselves because love is a 'relationship', not a fusion<sup>4</sup>.

The analysis of emotional and psychological elements is a constant in Simmel essays: it's essential not only for the study of eroticism but also for that of friendship, of authority and power, of relationships between individuals and groups. Feeling and affections are a brilliant example of social forms that not only adhere to the individual sphere but represent genuine forms of interaction as well (D'Arienzo 2010). Therefore they are elements of strong social relationship. Exemplary, in that direction, is the gratitude, a link among individual very thin but strong, so strong that if every reaction of gratitude for previous actions were to be eliminated, the society that we know, would break up (Simmel 1908: 505). Simmel pointed out that even in this case, only with a certain flexibility, the society can conciliate the link stability with a continuous fluctuation between defence and offence. Even some elements, which could look, at a first glance, far from the emotions, as secret, discretion, tact, are strongly characterised by an emotional burden<sup>5</sup> (D'Arienzo 2010).

There is the relevance of senses: they have the function of selecting emotions in relation to the different subjects with whom we get into contact in everyday life. It's thanks to the recognition of the other, through senses as eyesight and smell, that we are able to interact, even if in the transience of the encounter. In everyday life scene, every interaction acquires an emotional defined shade because individuals try to communicate and to

<sup>4</sup> As it has been recently mentioned, if we do not exist as autonomous individualities we could not meet another individual and to enter in relationship with him; we would not have anything to tell to the other if he were melted in a symbiotic way with us. As it has been acknowledged from the sociological and psychological point of view, in every love there's a form of belonging which arrests the individual growth and forces the identity to set up only within an enclosure that is the love which has never to be betrayed. Nevertheless in every love who not knows the betrayal and not supposes this possibility there is too many infancy and naivety, too many fear of living only with our forces, an inability to love as soon as it appear a shady area (Galimberti 2003): this seems to me an observation that, even if linked to the analysis of contemporary society, owes a lot to Simmel's consideration on the eros.

<sup>5</sup> Secret, for example, can cause negative emotions when it underlines an inequality because the personality of someone is emphasized at the expense of somebody else: the excessive proximity could be felt as both oppressive and intolerable, causing an increase of emotionality in every reaction.

understand each other (D'Arienzo 2010), in order to establish emotional groups. Therefore, if the increase of the psycho-social differences in the metropolitan scene causes remarkable life fragility, it's trust that can manage the establishment of social ties.

Not only it has been asserted that Simmel's sociology represents a real mine for every sociologist who try to understand the contemporary society (Cavalli 2010), but authors, which today we consider classics, such as Krauer, Adorno, Benjamin and obviously Elias, were abundantly inspired by the Simmel's sociology as well.

Elias, too, ask himself how is it possible for society to exist. Taking over Simmel's heredity, he transfers this on the plane of history, culture and interpretation of modern culture development: while Simmel pays attention to individuate abstractly the forms of socialization, for Elias it is crucial to point out the historical forms of socialization, putting the socialization in an historical-cultural context and thus this concept is replaced with the term of 'civilization' (Mongardini 1991). It's the theme of social interaction, the concept of a social dynamic development and the accent on a process dimension of social life that we can find, after many decades, in his reflexion. According to Elias the intertwining of mutual relations among individuals, their interdependence, therefore what links them all together, constitutes the society. This represents the core of "configuration", a concept by which the German sociologist indicates mutually referred and reciprocally dependents individuals; it expresses the processing and interrelated character of the social forms (Elias 1982, Calabrò 1997). There is no sense in conceiving the idea of men as singular entities: interrelated individuals, all together, set up configurations, groups and society. The individuality has to be considered as a personal elaboration of a common social habitus<sup>6</sup>, since the origin of human life individual and social dimension are always strongly linked. In effect, nobody is born isolated and conscious that is a single: he is born and grows up in a pre-existing intertwining of individuals and he enters into a net that is set up by himself too (Picchio 2010b).

The self-control of the urges and the expression of feelings is a component of the habitus too, which results from being born and having grown up in a particular phase of the civilizing process. The control of the emotional life becomes more complete, uniform and stable through a constant self-control: with the gradual transformation of the human habitus, we reach a (temporary) way of behaving civilly and feeling (Elias, 1969a). Elias carefully analyses in his works the transformations related to the habits, such as having either lunch or dinner, corporal necessities, emotional urges, the capacity of self control and other important elements referred to the individual everyday life. The increase of the complexity forces drives the individual to adopt behavioural strategies, which have to take into account the effects in time of the actions through the chain of the social interdependences: this necessity leads the individual to exert a more automatic and constraining self control (Calabrò 1997). The denser the web of interdependence

becomes in which the individual is enmeshed with the advancing division of functions, the larger the social spaces over which this network extends and which become integrated into functional or institutional units – the more threatened is the social existence of the individual who gives way to spontaneous impulses and emotions, the greater is the social advantage of those able to moderate their affects, and the more strongly is each individual constrained from an early age to take account of the effects of his or her own or other people's actions on a whole series of links in the social chain (Elias 1969a: 307).

To the increase of functions subdivision and individuals interdependence, corresponds, at psychic level, a gradual interiorization of the prohibitions, a self control of both desires and behaviour in respect to the social norms. It's the civilizing process, with the monopolization of central power. With this monopolization,

the physical threat to the individual is slowly depersonalized. It no longer depends quite so directly on momentary emotions; it is gradually subjected to increasingly strict rules and laws; and finally, within certain limits and in spite of certain fluctuations, the physical threat when laws are infringed becomes less severe (Elias 1969a: 308).

<sup>6</sup> For *habitus* we intend the social structure of the personality. The concept refers to everything which is acquired through the socialization process and which combines the majority of the individuals who live in a certain historical society: the *habitus* represents a common social mark, the humus where the personal characteristics develop and through which every individual can distinguish himself from another belonging to his society (Elias 1987).

Notwithstanding the monopoly on violence exerted by the State and the increasing functional interdependence among the different classes, the social tensions become a permanent condition which cannot be solved with the use of physical strength: on the contrary they are converted into a constant pressure on the individual that modifies his psychic structure irreversibly.

In advanced societies public and private spheres of life occupy different and defined spaces but the individual is bound to control his instincts and emotions in both of them. If the emotional expression tends toward an intermediate position, the emotional behaviour doesn't disappear but becomes more moderated. Nevertheless, the physical violence and his menace exerts some influences on the individual. A continuous, uniform pressure

is exerted on the individual life, a pressure totally familiar and hardly perceived by him, because his behaviour and emotional conformation have been adjusted from the earliest youth to this social structure (Elias 1969a: 311).

The individual emotional expressions are constrained through a constant self control of the emotional life and the behaviour in every living space. The forms of violence which have always existed and which for a long time have amalgamated with physical violence, are now more marginalised: they remain in some appropriate spaces but in a different way. Life becomes not only freer of dangers but emptier of feelings and pleasures as well and, at the same time and in some way, the conflict is interiorized. This means that tensions and passions, which were once openly 'released' in social life, have to be resolved by everyone inside himself.

The increasing self control of emotions brings to the development of an individualization process: when individuals control their feelings, they don't feel as a part of community but, on the contrary, as isolated subjects, each opposed to the others (Elias 1975). Nevertheless, Elias invites to consider dangerous both the habit to repress emotions, because it leads to anaesthetize the emotional life, and the transformation of individual energies in overwhelming exhibitions, such as attraction, repulsion and obsession: the emotional energies could be better expressed in activities which are satisfactory, from the individual point of view, and fruitful from the social one. In the reality, the result of the individual civilizing process is not always either totally negative or positive: usually 'civil' people place themselves in a space between the two extremes, in a median line (Elias 1969a). Thoughts and ideas seem to be the most important elements of the individual psychic self control, while both the unconscious impulses and the emotional structures are not considered; every type of research that analyses only the conscience of individuals, their 'reason' or their 'ideas' and does not take into account the structure of emotions and the orientation of human feelings and passions, is destined to be unsuccessful (Elias 1969a: 369).

From an historical point of view, it is already at the beginning of the modern times, during the Renaissance, that we can notice in a clear way the difference between our individual identity and the collective identity, while in simpler societies the capacity of the individual to take distance from oneself and to look at oneself from the outside is less widespread and developed (Picchio 2010b). With the civilizing process progressive advance, the habit of self controlling emotions, spontaneity and behaviour and, at the same time, of reflecting upon oneself and his own motivation propagates. Thus the increase of self control, the larger ties imposed by the rules of conduct, oriented to the good breeding in social relationships, lead the individual to interpose a greater distance between themselves, the others and the world.

Compared to those of earlier civilization stages, the people in the succeeding, rising formations are usually organised into larger associations with more numerous, diverse and unstable contacts. The ways in which they are directly and indirectly dependents on others are also numerous and diverse. The rising formations demand of their members a greater and more complex self-control, compared to the previous and now decaying formations, if they are to maintain a high social position (Elias 1975: 300)<sup>7</sup>.

It is even more in the court society that the civilizing process leads to a major self control and to more differentiated behavioural models and sensibilities. The individual, in order to acquire a social relevant position in this context, has to adapt his behaviour to the typical norms of this society. Even if in the previous stages of historical

<sup>7</sup> In effect, the chains of interdependence created by men at every previous stage of development, are shorter, less large, less permanent and particularly less strictly joined if compared with the later ones.

development, a fixed code of conduct was binding for the individuals, now the compulsions and the whole organizations of these previous stages are consolidated.

Elias underlines that it is the king's court itself, with an elevated level of complexity as far as human relations are concerned, which imposes a particular self control on his members. The court requires a constant discretion and accurately calculated social interaction strategies in the different social relationships, also because for many aristocratic people the sources of their wealth depend on the favour of the king or of his confidants. To lose favour with the king, or with a minister, can menace not only a courtier's sources of wealth and the living conditions of his family but also his prestige and his 'market value' in the society, his perspectives and his hopes for the future. Losing the king's favour poses a serious threat even to those courtiers with a great family wealth: the king's disadvantage means the end of one's own social life. For this reason the constraints that the individuals exert on each other, have a social character and impose on everyone an elevated degree of self control: these constraints are not limited to the reciprocal interdependences only but include those that one learns to exert on himself as well. Elias shows as initially, in the court life, the hints of the smile, the graduation in the good manners, the refinement of behaviour according to either the class or the status of one's own social interlocutor may be a conscious exercise of self camouflage. Nevertheless, the capacity of consciously controlling oneself is developed in those societies whose structure requires, in order to allow the social reproduction, an elevated capacity of "constantly and efficiently dissimulating one's own temporary emotional urges, until the dissimulation becomes an integral part of the personality" (Elias 1975: 328)<sup>8</sup>.

Here we hear the echo of a simmelian reflexion concerning the transformation of the urban life, that change which has to do with the intensification of the nervous life produced by the rapid and uninterrupted appearance of external and inner impressions. Simmel underlined the possibility of the spreading, among the metropolis disenchanted and bored inhabitants, of two attitudes: the 'cynic' and the 'blasé', two crucial onsets well representing the peak reached by the civilization of the money. The 'cynic' is one who proves the standardization of values and the deception upon which the differences among values are based, while the 'blasé' seems characterised by an attitude of indifference: he's someone who doesn't feel lively, someone who purchases goods with money but who, at the moment of buying, loses sight of the attractiveness which pre-existed before the choice<sup>9</sup> (Simmel 1984). Naturally, the two attitudes, which are possible outcomes of the modernity development, can mix together and characterise the identikit of the modern city-goer. Nevertheless, even if an inner barrier arises among the individuals, which is highlighted by the spread of cynic and blasé attitudes, this makes possible the modern form of social interaction and life: the influence of money on the relationships creates an invisible functional distance among the individuals that represents an inner defence and a compensation for every excessive proximity and friction in the civil life. The attitude with which metropolitan inhabitants relate to each other may be then defined as a form of discretion. In effect, if to the constant exterior contact with an endless number of people should correspond the same quantity of inner reactions that happens in a little community, where everyone personally knows each other, everybody would be in a psychic unbearable condition (Simmel 1921). For this reason in the metropolis 'discretion' and 'tact' represent two important tools regulating everyday life in the metropolis: it is also through these tools that social interaction is possible.

With their analyses, both Simmel and Elias seem to propose that in the advanced societies many social relations can only be satisfied if the people involved try to manage an uniform and stable control on the spontaneous and emotional urges. If, on the one hand, the individual self control becomes more necessary in the social life, on the other, the space for powerful feelings and the expression of too explicit behaviours is reduced. In our societies, which demand absolute discipline and emotional prudence, the unleash of openly expressed feelings is strictly

<sup>8</sup> For this reason, many nobles looked back on the vanishing world in which they possessed the freedom that was now lost; thus, the sword is put aside and the world of play created, a mimetic world in which people disguised as shepherds and shepherdesses can live out the unpolitical adventures of their hearts, above all the sorrows and joys of love, without coming into conflict with the constraints, the commands and prohibitions of a harsher, non-mimetic reality (Elias 1980).

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless if the "cynic" seems to develop a feeling of joy linked to the great purchase's opportunity, the "blasé" is anyone who seems less disposed to be subjected to a this process of constant self illusion: this is the reason why the second is more restless and anxious in the research of new attractions which in reality he perceives with growing difficulty in everyday experience (Bianchi 2010).

controlled (Elias, Dunning 1986). As also other authors have emphasized (among which Goffman with his theory of deviance), our society sanctions negatively anyone who express sudden urges or emotions that he is not able to control.

On their part both Simmel and Elias, even if positively valuing the reduced presence of close ties in urban life and the learning of urges self control shared by all the human kind, invited to consider seriously the emotions. According to Elias, in our time, compared to less differentiated societies, the social and personal organization of control, aimed at restraining the passionate excitement expression both in public and in private, is becoming stronger and more efficient. Thus situation which stimulate strong emotions are treated with suspect mainly by those who are responsible of public order maintenance.

Nevertheless, in the civil society also, in a more refined form compared with the past, the urges could find their legitimation in a defined space. It's a phenomenon which characterizes the transformation, in parallel with the 'civilization', in the emotional economy. Thus, for example, leisure activities<sup>10</sup>, firstly the sports, allow the mimetic expression of human primordial instincts, appealing directly to the individual feelings and rather trying to arouse them in a different way. Allowing those emotions, such as triumph, joy, hate, affection, love, fear and pain, to flow freely inside a symbolic context (a play, a concert, a game, a painting, etc.), these activities tend to mitigate the weight of constraints imposed on the no-leisure life of the individuals (Elias, Dunning 1986).

Even in the case of a football match it is possible to savour the excitement which rises or drops according to what happens in the playground, knowing that neither the players nor themselves will get hurt. As in the real life, they can feel sensations linked, on the one hand, to the hope of success and, on the other, to the fear of defeat: strong sensations, originated in an imaginary scenery, and their appearance while in company of many people can be more agreeable and liberating because the individual is usually more isolated in the society and he has less opportunities to express collectively high feelings (Elias, Dunning 1986). Therefore the pleasure of fighting and the aggressiveness can find a socially allowed expression in sportive competitions; thus, in contemporary society, many leisure activities represent a socially accepted and shared phenomenon or, according to the psychoanalytic term, a 'socially permitted regression' (Elias 1969b).

It's necessary to acknowledge that looking for excitement in leisure activities is complementary to the emotions control in the everyday life. The leisure activities are characterised by the fact that the action takes place exclusively on the strength of its own desires and emotional needs while in the no-leisure activities the emotional necessities are subjected to obligations, to the consideration of the others and to a certain degree of social constrain (Elias, Dunning 1986, Calabrò 1997). Elias realizes that a lack of balance between the leisure and no-leisure activities, with all the routines and controls requested by the society, can cause a weakening of the feelings. In spite of the fact that the routine plays a fundamental role as far as the security is concerned, if we don't expose ourselves to a certain degree of insecurity and to some emotionally characterised risk, we can't relax and therefore the leisure activities become useless. Thus the function of these activities is not only to discharge the inner tensions but to reinstate the right level of tension that represents an essential element for mental health as well. These are important functions which have to be analysed and searched thoroughly from the sociological point of view, above all for the comprehension and the interpretation of some relevant phenomena presents in our contemporary society.

### *The contemporary society: integration or disintegration of social tie?*

If the sense of belonging changes in connection with the transformation of the relationship between the individual and all his potential social groups, the contemporary society is characterised by a greater frequency of changeable social relationships among individuals. The increasing relationships insecurity forces the individual to

<sup>10</sup> According to Elias the leisure activities collect three activity sub-groups: the mere socialization activities, those defined mimetic and play activities (all those which allow to play with the norms within socially allowed activities). Finally there are those less organised and specialized activities to spend the time, the extraordinary events, the more intimate and unconventional moments in respect to the routine and to an utilitarian use of the time, such as staying in bed Sunday, making love, taking care of one's body...etc. (Calabrò 1997).



verify continually which relationships are still valid and significant, and which have either to be quitted or rebuilt in a sort of constant relational monitoring. These transformations lead to grater tensions: the human condition becomes more difficult and this brings to a conflict between the natural need of an emotional recognition of his own self by the others, of an affective reassurance that only the others can offer, and the opposition to this need that implies the answering to the emotional expectations of the other. Thus, often we desire emotional relationships but we are not able to satisfy these desires because this mechanism presumes an engagement and a deep exchange with the other that the individual is not capable of sustaining because he's too centred both on himself and on his self-achievement needs.

Even in Elias reflection, as before in Simmel sociology, we note a basic ambivalence (Calabrò 1997): the individual wants to bind himself to the others but, at the same time, fears the link because afoot of commitment, dependence, restriction of his freedom, requirements to satisfy and expectations to fulfil. Therefore the conflict between the 'I' without the 'We' happens because of the habit to perceive ourselves as isolated individuals and the need to be strategic in order to pursue our social relationships can't suppress that desire – which is a vital ambition and an unavoidable condition of the human being – to love and be loved, to give and to receive affectivity and cures in social interaction. The individual desires the affective recognition of another but he has lost the faculty, when he runs into it, of answering with the same spontaneity and warmth (Picchio 2010b). The example of the family role utilised by Elias is typical: if it is undoubted that family can provide emotional compensations to the individual, which neutralize the emotional control requested by his professional life (Hochschild 2003), it's not sufficient to satisfy all the needs which are strictly restrained elsewhere. This certainly depends on the family life routines and on the fact that this, in relation with the greater equality of power between genders and generations, produces new restrictions and tensions. In this light, the reciprocal sense of responsibility between partners, but also between parents and children, represents a quite onerous commitment requested from these and a bond which becomes impossible to be avoided.

The authors' considerations represented the starting point for a wide range of studies, not exclusively in the sociological field, which underlines the crisis of collective ties and the progressive affirmation of an individualistic society. Nevertheless, we often forget that the need of reciprocity, recognition and significant social relations remains for the two authors, an human fundamental requirement which becomes even more urgent in contemporary society because we can't have confidence in that recognition and that identification anymore, while they were obvious and taken for granted before: in the past these were provided by the affiliation to the social circles and by the social position at birth, typical of pre-modern societies. It's therefore from the analysis of these delicate mechanisms, which make the interaction and figuration possible, that we have to start again considering that, for both the authors, individuals should be considered as structurally relational<sup>11</sup> (Picchio 2010b). In effect, according to Simmel, hearty feelings, often tender, inevitably develop inside the more distant social relationships. This is unavoidable because the social cohesion could not be founded on mere utilitarian considerations, external constrains or any type of ethics, if the social feelings also do not interweave with the relationships shaped by rational forces, which make possible the opening and the reciprocal dispositions. The law only can't bind together a society if the moral voluntary acts of kindness, honesty and goodwill are lacking; but neither the voluntary acts together with the law can shape any society, if they do not have on their side «those emotional attitudes, that affect and courtesy without which the similarity and intimacy, and the reciprocal continuous contact, sociologically speaking, would be absolutely intolerable» (Simmel 1921: 59).

In order to emerge from the sense of disorientation and vulnerability, that the urban life implies, it becomes necessary to create 'recreational forms of association' that is the 'sociability', to be together, to 'make society' as a purpose in itself. Sociability is deemed an art, a sophisticated form, an individual and social behavioural elaboration. As Turnaturi has pointed out, it's not so much to 'play with emotions' (as sometimes, in the common language, is meant in a disparaging way) as to 'play the game of emotions', accepting the statement of that vital process which is the uncertainty, the ambivalence and the ambiguity. In the sociable attitude every man gives up, at least in part, the pursuing of his egoistic objectives and the affirmation of his unilateral individuality: he liberally accepts to model his behaviour in order to create a common space in which the reciprocal interaction could be source of

<sup>11</sup> We remind the readers that to this end Elias speaks of *homines aperti*.

pleasure or, at least, easy (Jedlowski 2007). In conversation, for example, we learn how to reach the sociable ethic inspired point of balance. The conversation, which Simmel refers to, is the mundane one which was performed both in the ancient regime courts and the salons of his contemporary bourgeoisie. That is a light conversation but not a vacuous one, intelligent but neither pedantic nor grave, in which the participants aim is not the exhibition of themselves but rather the entertainment of the others: it's an end in itself and it reproduces itself for the pure sake of talking. All that could obstacle, delay or paralyse the conversation is eliminated from it, giving free course to the arts of entertainment, seducing and respecting the other, who constantly turns from listener to entertainer, from seduced to seducer. The reciprocal acknowledgement and the fact of giving each other the space to perform, allow a constant exchange among equals, a form of democratic interaction. Sociability becomes a gift that all the individuals reciprocally interested exchange: the characters are real in the reality of the 'game', that is a new recreational dimension created by themselves. Social actors forget what they are in the practical reality to turn into new persons: the individual is in making himself society, being together with the others. In these occasions, the space for the senses expands: encounters among several people request more care and attention to clothing, adornments, food and drink (in these groups the individual, even if he observes the formal rules, can allow himself that freedom which is forbidden or unthinkable in smaller groups). If Simmel rediscovers the importance of the emotional dimension in sociability, Elias underlines also in his reflexion the role of sociability as an element of leisure, fundamental for the individual who lives in highly differentiated societies. In a passage of the work "Sport and aggressiveness" Elias and Dunning write, in my opinion, openly bringing to mind the simmelian essay on Sociability:

Sociability as a basic element of leisure plays a part in most, if not all, leisure activities. That is to say, an element of the enjoyment is pleasurable arousal through being in the company of others without commitment, without any obligations to these others apart from those taken on voluntarily. This type of stimulation plays a part if one goes to the races, trains for an athletic contest, goes to a gambling club, to a hunt, to a dance, and even if one goes to a restaurant with one's husband or wife: event there, as we have said before, the fact that one is eating out among others, although one may not know any of them, plays a part in one's enjoyment, even though it may be secondary to other primary elements in the leisure situation. Sociability itself plays the primary part in gatherings such as parties, pub-going, visits to friends, and so on (Elias, Dunning 1986: 150).

Therefore the sociability plays also a relevant role in the direction of a possible re-proposal of a leisure-*gemeinschaften*. Forms of communitarian association develop offering the possibility of a major social integration through the role played by the emotionality, which is surely different from that deemed normal in professional contacts and in the non leisure life. Elias is very clear on this point, as already Simmel was: it's not the re-proposal of communitarian life forms, typical of the past, since many people, who participate to convivial meetings in their leisure time, could not appreciate these if they were a permanent way of life. They are rather temporary 'enclave' characterised by intense emotions and a relatively spontaneous but not durable integration, created by individuals who intend to meet each other without having any particular talent, without "showing off" either for themselves or for the others but simply enjoying the reciprocal company in order to feel a greater emotional warmth, a social integration through the presence of the others, a playful stimulation without either serious commitments or the related risks. According to Elias these communities break the routines of everyday life and the reproduction of the relatively impersonal social contacts which are predominant in the no leisure spheres of society. Thus, for example, it's in these contexts that we can understand the reasons for the collective consumption of alcoholic drinks. We probably consume these in society because

By depressing the inhibitory centres of the brain, it facilitates the friendly reciprocal stimulation on a relatively high level of emotionality which is the essence of leisure sociability. A glass or two enables people to loosen relatively quickly the often rather deeply ingrown armour of restraints and thus to open themselves to the mutuality of playful arousal which serves as a counter-agent to the relative loneliness of the fully armoured individual and to his or her commitments and routines in non-leisure spheres including that of family life. Thus, leisure-*gemeinschaften* reinforced by drinking provide, like many other leisure events, opportunities for raising the level of overt emotionality in public, in the presence of others (Elias, Dunning 1986: 153).

Naturally Elias acknowledges that the risk for the individual can be real both in these and in others leisure activities but in spite of this 'playing with fire' can be a constitutive part of the pleasure: the same risk seems in fact to contribute to the enjoyable excitement and therefore to the enjoyment of leisure-*gemeinschaften*. This is the demonstration that the needs of emotional stimulations by the individual, even if not specific, undemanding and relatively moderated, are stronger and generalised than we normally recognise. If in the reproduction of society, the emotional barriers among individuals and the restrictions requested of them are high, the creation of many type of leisure communities, indicates a constant need for the individuals to eliminate the barriers, to establish human contacts in an emotional climate.

With reference to our introduction, we have to think of the passions and, more generally, of the emotions, and feelings as conditions which are not simply added to any conscience but which are rather constitutive of the tonality of every individual and of every cognitive orientation. They should be conceived as marked forms of communication, languages or expressive acts which elaborate and convey at the same time, messages oriented, modulated, articulated and graduated both in direction and intensity (Bodei 1997). Certainly, in the contemporary society, which someone has defined the age of the cold intimacies (Illouz 2004), we seem to observe a progressive 'emotional freezing' even if it's important to specify, as recently done by Turnaturi (2007), that we should not confuse the 'cold' of both the market and the instrumental reason with the cold of reflection, discretion and respect. Moreover, treasuring the Elias' thought, we have to admit that the emotions and their expression are strictly interweaved with the social contexts in which they form and show themselves; thus, while different societies produce different emotional cultures, the change of the forms more appropriate to express them has gone hand in hand with the socio-economic transformations and with the transition from the pre-modernity to the modernity. This is an important recognition which has been acknowledged and developed by different disciplinary fields: in fact we cannot forget that, beside the sociological reflection, today the role of emotions is also being strongly underlined in the psychological area as far as the sociability is concerned. Thus, the same concepts of tact and courtesy, which Simmel and Elias have been dealing with for a long time, have been resumed by Axia, who reminds us that, as in the case of tact, it's not simply a way to mask the individual intentions: the real tact consists rather in finding the right balance between masking and revealing oneself which respects the desire of involvement of the other (Axia 1996).

Concerning the courtesy, the presence of a constant attention to someone else feelings in the courteous behaviour, the fact that it's an universal phenomenon, the existence, in case of its absence, of a cost imposed on the emotional well being of someone else, all these factors make it difficult to place the courtesy in the domain of the pure social conventions. It's more probable that this phenomenon is a part of those events that are at the boundary between the realm of pure conventions and the realm of moral rules. Therefore we can consider the courtesy as a pre-social behaviour: its motivational deeper core should correspond to an emotional primary source the nature of which is affectionate and positive (Axia 1996). The inner core of the courtesy is primitive: it's the capacity of feeling emotions for the others and desiring to make them feel good. It's the real 'moral' base of the courtesy. To be courteous is an art which depends on the strong commitment in the use of intelligence in order to understand the others' mood. This commitment, sometimes hard and with uncertain results, can realize itself only if it's supported by the motivation of taking care of the others' feelings. The courteous person has a polite soul, sensible to the human sufferance and he feels a sense of obligation for doing his best in order to lighten the difficulties of life. He is someone who uses with lightness but constantly the natural instruments of every individual: a little attention, a minimal reflection, a choice of words. The very courteous individual, according to Axia, cannot content himself with expressing deference and respect for the other but "goes further" in the sense that he uses his intelligence to explore what the others could want and mainly to understand what the others think of the reciprocal thoughts and feelings. It's therefore a form of intelligence supported by affectivity and respect for both himself and the others (Axia 1996: 128-129).

Hochschild has recently reminded us too that, even if in highly bureaucratic societies feelings become more and more standardized and commodified, some expressions of 'commercialized sympathy' such as the 'enjoy your meal' pronounced by of a restaurant waiter or the smile of a secretary on the job have in reality a great importance for the social life: they are a form of reassurance which anyone needs in order to feel out of danger with the

others. We could rather assert that the kindness of the others is a sustenance of life even if it needs care and could deteriorate (Hochschild 2003). It's therefore necessary a thorough research of the conventions which regulate the feelings in social interactions: they're defined, interpreted and controlled. On the other hand, the frenzied life in the contemporary society requires the emotional control because our constant bustling about can be a way to suppress those emotions and ideas that could counter both the status quo and the market culture (Hochschild 2003).

If emotions are the fundamental tools through which the human relations are structured, the psychologist Oatley reminds us that, as the grooming is one of the main tools to keep the emotional relationships in the groups of primates, the conversation is a kind of verbal grooming: even if we have not lost the powerful emotional instrument of tact and the others ways of expressing emotions, the language could integrate them. It's an adaptation which has allowed our ancestors to keep warm relations with a larger number of individuals. If we think that the individuals need deeply to communicate their emotions and that they get a great benefit from this; the conversation with its commitment to the others, finalized both to pool the projects and to share the beliefs, it's a very effective tool in order to make and keep relationships (Oatley 2004).

It's also for this reason, it's seems to me, that we observe an unexpected rising of new public spaces as opposed to the process of both domestic implosion and the withdrawing into privacy which has been characterizing our society in the last years. Besides this, even if it's difficult to deny that in the contemporary society we are witnessing a process of increasing emotional merchandizing thus the expression of our emotions in the public sphere seems to have become a collective ritual request for assistance (Furedi 2004), nevertheless the emotions keep representing an important instrument of mobilization. It's then necessary to wonder about both the effective existence of emotions, that are not exclusively linked to the utilitarian paradigm and the presence of communitarian passions in which the other is not considered as either the enemy or the rival or the fellow creature, invested with the self referential projections of the inner self; rather (the other) is constitutive of the same identity of the inner self, that is necessary for setting up his sensory universe (Pulcini 2005).

If we are living in an age characterised by the anthropology of vacuum and absence, we can imagine different results on the emotional plane: in the identity it can generate not a purely instrumental need of the other, but, on the contrary, a desire of the other as an object of his own relational tension, of his own need of tie and belonging. The challenge consists in supposing that the individuals are not only motivated by the interests and by the profit search but that they act pressed by a set of motivations such as generosity, the desire of giving, the alliance and the friendship as well, which make the social tie the objective of the action. It's a challenge that combines different actors who, for example, identify themselves in the theory of the gift and in the need of setting up an alternative paradigm as opposite of the utilitarian one. The gift exists, it's not an archaic and old fashioned residual (Godbout 1996). Even if hidden, it continues to operate in the contemporary reality under a multiplicity of forms – from the ritual and familiar gift to the gift of organs, blood, time, life – all united by an autonomous logic, not reducible to the two main systems of goods and circulation of services, which form the framework of the modern society: the mercantile business and the national release, the economic and the politic ones (Pulcini 2005). The gift seems to presume the love as the cohesion's force par excellence, a desire of compensating for his own partiality and inadequacy by rejoining with the other as a missing part. Thus the passion for giving originates from the suffering of the individual for his own deprivation, from the inconvenience produced by his own separation. It's an embarrassment which is translated into a peculiar form of giving to the strangers, in an active desire of restoring a contact, a connection with the other as such: not with the specific and particular 'other' but with the distant and unknown one, in which the figure of the 'radical' other personifies. We donate because we want to belong, we desire to be tied to the other and with this we recreate a group movement, a 'communal movement' (Pulcini 2005). From this point of view, the contemporary society, defined according to the various meanings, society of modernity, uncertainty, risk, liquid, still seems to allow the free distribution of reciprocal actions/interactions, which goes against the trend, toward the foundation of new forms of communal sociability, based on an emotional and excited marked support, in which the individual seems to look for the 'fusion us' and almost the loss of his own self into the other. We can mention, for example, the development of a series of events linked to the different utilizations of leisure time, which try to introduce alternative forms of social interaction, through real and virtual modality, such as the meetings and the associations on/for social relevant themes (solidarity, ecology, public and civil ethics).

We would like to conclude referring to three examples which are particularly significant, even if in different ways, of this new longing which can be defined 'emotional sociability'.

The first is represented by the several Festivals, which have been flourishing in recent years, and still are, both in well known and unknown locations of our country: from the Mantua Literature Festival to the Modena Philosophical one, from the Piacenza Law Festival to the Sarzana Mind one...etc. They are opportunities for encounters, in which the persons seem to interact freely, without objectives or aims to specific results. These events, which last an average of three or four days, seem to offer an interaction freed by the needs and they represent an opportunity to exchange ideas and for reciprocal listening, which are highly demanded by the individuals. If it's true that these opportunities for encounters are cleverly orchestrated by the events organizational directions, it's difficult to deny that these opportunities, by this time neither sporadic nor occasional any more, but rather strongly institutionalized (in fact they are reproduced year after year), produce a kind of a creative energy, a type of collective effervescence which seems to make the individuals able to get easily into reciprocal contact and to be approachable by the others. As everybody has experimented, while attending these events as a 'participant observant', both during the public cultural events, such as conferences, lectures, roundtables and in less organized free spaces, such as the coffee breaks, the After Festivals, we can constantly observe the presence of a certain emotional strain: this is produced by the participation of individuals who go to any length to enter into reciprocal interaction, for example commenting the philosophical lessons or vivaciously debating about a book presentation.

It's also to be observed the great development of 'Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale' (GAS – Solidarity purchasing groups), actually around 800 in Italy: they are social groups which are born out of the reflection on the necessity of a deep change in both behaviours and lifestyle. As many other experiences of critical consumption, these groups wish also to introduce an 'ethic question' into the market in order to drive it toward an economy which focuses on both the individual and his social relationships. A purchasing group becomes a solidarity purchasing group when it decides to use the solidarity concept as a principle in the choice of products. That is a kind of solidarity which starts among the members of the group and that is extended to the little producers who provide the (food) products, respecting the environment, the people of the South (countries) and the people suffering (because of the unfair sharing of wealth) the inequitable consequences of our development model. If every GAS is born out of its own motivations, often at the roots we find a deep criticism of the model of consumption and the prevailing global economy in conjunction with the search of a really practicable alternative: the group is fundamental because it helps the individuals to feel not alone in their criticism to the consumerism, to share experiences and support, to verify their own choices. The solidarity purchasing groups are linked together in a network which tries to aid them and to spread this experience through the information sharing.

Lastly, the third experience, maybe the most challenging, is the crucial experiment of *cohousing*, a phenomenon born in Scandinavia in the 60's and particularly spread today in Holland, England, United States, Canada, Australia and Japan. This experience combines the autonomy of the individually titled houses with the advantages of shared services, resources and spaces (nurseries, workshops, car sharing, gyms, gardens... etc.) with benefits under both the social and the environmental points of view. Usually, these are settlements made of many houses, for singles or families, who have decided to live as a "neighbourhoods community" in order to realize, through a participation planning process, settlements where private spaces (the house) and common spaces (shared services) can coexist. The participatory planning concerns both the building design – where the design facilitates contacts and social relationships - and the community project, that is the decision concerning what and how to share and to manage both the common services and spaces. The reasons which lead to the *cohousing* are the aspiration to rediscover the lost dimensions of sociability, the mutual support, the neighbourliness and, at the same time, the desire to reduce the life's complexity, the stress and the operating costs of everyday life.

Thus, these are alternative experiences of sociability which, even if with their characteristics of experimentation and unsystematically, seem to denote the presence of some emotional tension anyway: firstly the feeling of reciprocal trust, a kind of trust which is not pre-existing but that, even adopting the uncertain and hazardous shades of a bet and a challenge – because it's a result which has to be aimed at from time to time – occurs and spreads more than we can imagine. It's seems to open a great opportunity for the sociological analysis: given the omnipresence of emotions and feelings in our everyday life, the sociologist should to return to wonder about

what is their role in the present and future research (Toschi 2010). We have to use a hand lens in order to identify the innumerable, even latent ones, ties which remain between a world that sets up the individuals' feelings and individuals who feel (Hochschild 2003).

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