

# **MULTIPLE MEDIATION PROCESSES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: SIX YEARS OF EUROMADAY PARADE IN ITALY.**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper deals with two main topics related to the complex relationship between social movements and the media. On the one side, social movements are thought as active communicative agents, who are constantly involved in a varied range of mediation processes: from alternative mediated public sphere construction to mainstream media oriented tactics. On the other side, the environment in which social movements act is seen as a composite mediascape made up of various layers where media texts circulate, contributing to create spaces of resistance to dominant discourse about a certain conflictual issue.

The case study chosen to illustrate interactions between social movement and the media is the long-lasting protest campaign against precarity in Italy, named Euro May Day Parade (EMDP), which is born in Milan in 2001 and progressively transform itself into a transnational social movement coalition organizing a common day of mobilization in Europe, namely the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. In particular, the EMDP in Milan is taken into consideration from 2001 to 2006 from a symbolic perspective, since this protest event could be seen as the peak of a broader protest campaign which seeks to construct an alternative discourse about labour market flexibility.<sup>1</sup> Briefly, political activists are engaged into different kinds of mediation processes, which develop in parallel and often intertwine. First, the construction of an alternative mediated public sphere in which the EMDP is covered from an internal point of view. Second, the elaboration of a series of strategies and tactics oriented towards mainstream media. Third, the redefinition of the media concept itself, due to the construction of the so-called “social media” thought as political tool mainly directed to precarious workers audiences. The three main processes outlined above may influence in different ways the mediated public sphere itself, where the conflictual issue at stake circulates creating temporary places of active resistance, areas of immediate visibility and spaces of controversial silence.

The paper is made up of four main parts. First, recent dominant discourses about labour market flexibility in Italy are briefly described in order to show the broad context in which the precarity discourse develops (§2). Second, the most important concepts related to social movements and the media are discussed to root the analysis at the theoretical level, while the main methodological choices are presented to understand the fieldwork perspective on which the empirical research rests (§3). Third, alternative discourses about precarity in general and the one produced by the EMDP in particular are described (§4 and §5). Fourth, different kind of media oriented strategies and tactics

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<sup>1</sup> The transnational nature of the EMDP is in line with many contemporary social movements, whose mobilizations are characterized by protest targets and claims overcoming national boundaries (Tarrow, 2005; della Porta and Tarrow, 2004). Nonetheless, in this paper the transnational side of the EMDP is left on the background, since the Italian precarity discourse is the starting point of the empirical analysis.

within the EMDP process are analyzed, giving back a complex repertoire of communication (§6, §7 and §8). Finally, the set of mediation processes outlined in the previous part of the paper will be discussed and further lines of investigation will be proposed (§9).

## 2. FROM LABOUR MARKET FLEXIBILITY TO PRECARIETY IN ITALY

The construction of the precarity discourse is strictly linked with transformations occurred within a larger political, social and economic discourse regarding the Italian labour market structure and development. This general topic contains varied issues which have been addressed by an extremely wide range of social and political actors. In Italy, at the end of the 80's, entrepreneurs, traditional trade unionists and politicians convey towards a common dominant discourse, which could be called the one of "labour market flexibility". Even though there are some exceptions,<sup>2</sup> this umbrella expression spread like a virus within both the specialized and not specialized media. For instance, "Il Sole 24 Ore", the most important economic newspaper owned by the national manufacturers association "Confindustria", publishes more than 200 articles about flexibility from 1997 to 1998 (Gallino, 1998), while the national centre-left newspaper "La Repubblica" publishes about 400 articles about labour market flexibility in the same period of time.<sup>3</sup> The majority of these articles is characterized by a positive attitude towards labour market flexibility, as the following titles suggest: "Labour flexibility is the recipe to enter Europe" (La Repubblica, 28 August 1997), "Fazio: more flexibility to help the economic recovery" (La Repubblica, 10 February 1998), "Employment, flexibility needed" (La Repubblica, 19 April 1998).<sup>4</sup> Since it is a very ambiguous expression, "labour market flexibility" or even "flexibility", is utilized to indicate different collective action frames within the dominant discourse. According to the social or political actor claiming labour market flexibility, the expression assumed a particular *nuance*, which represents a certain interpretation of the Italian labour market and its demanded developments. For instance, entrepreneurs continuously ask for flexibility in order to face a more and more competitive and globalised market. Traditional trade unionists demand "regulated flexibility" to face the unemployment emergency without opening a savage deregulation season within the labour market sector. Both centre-left and centre-right politicians plan and propose structural reforms concerning labour market in order to make it more flexible and adaptable to economic crisis.

The main results at the institutional political level are two laws which contribute to undermine the traditional pillar of the Italian labour market: full time and open end contract. First, the so-called "Pacchetto Treu" (law 196/97) is approved in 1997,

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<sup>2</sup> The most interesting contribution about labour market flexibility from a critical perspective comes both from the academic field (Gallino, 2001) and the social movement milieu (Bologna and Fumagalli, 1997), where reflections about basic income and salary begin to be spread. Moreover, the 35 hours working week proposal by the PRC – Partito della Rifondazione Comunista - in 1997, following the France example, introduces another controversial topic within the labour market flexibility dominant discourse.

<sup>3</sup> The reconstruction of dominant discourses about labour market flexibility in Italy from 1990 to 2005 is based on a systematic content analysis of the national newspaper "La Repubblica", inserted in a larger research project about familiaristic welfare state responses to post-industrial pressures, coordinated by the professor Ito Peng, from the Toronto University.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Fazio is the former Italian Bank governor.

introducing private temporary employment agencies and extending part time and fixed term contracts to new labour market sectors. Second, the so-called “Legge Biagi” (law 30/03) is passed in 2003, increasing the kinds of fixed term contracts and broadening their application.<sup>5</sup> In sum, both the centre-left coalition in 1997 and the centre-right coalition in 2003 contributed to render the Italian labour market more flexible, especially with regard to its entrance. Nonetheless, the debate about this topic remains vivid and, from late in the 90’s, the dominant discourse begins to be challenged. The spread of non conventional workers within the Italian society allows isolated voices against the dominant frame to find a common ground with those women and men suffering from their working conditions. In this respect, an alternative discourse is developed, which could be called the one of “precarity”, a term used to indicate the uncertainty due to fixed term contracts, the lack of basic working rights and the absence of new social rights. A more and more numerous range of social and political actors participates to the construction of such an alternative discourse about labour market flexibility. Therefore, various competitive frames develop, especially during the right-wing coalition government, when even left-wing political parties begin to stress the difference between flexibility and precarity. In sum, the focus is not only on unemployment as social problem and flexibility as solution, but also on precarity as social problem and flexibility as its main cause.

This shift in the public discourse is certainly linked with the increase of political and social conflicts with regard to the issue at stake, namely precarity. Traditional trade unions open new sections entirely devoted to non conventional workers and begin to speak of precarious workers, rather than of labour market flexibility *per se*.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, these political actors have a marginal position in the definition of the precarity discourse, which is mainly constructed by grassroots unions, self-organized precarious workers and political activists linked to the global justice movement.<sup>7</sup> These subjects represent precarious workers’ claims within the public sphere through a varied repertoires of action based on non conventional political mobilizations linked to the auto-representation principle. They develop radical and alternative discourses about precarity, elaborating an *ad hoc* lexicon to give voice and visibility to a new assorted collective actor which suffers from the precarity condition. While the dominant discourse about labour market flexibility is constructed by well established social and political actors, like entrepreneurs represented by the “Confindustria” association, the alternative discourse about precarity is an attempt to construct a new collective identity from below within the public and political arena. Therefore, the need for visibility and political representation is strictly linked with the process of identity building, where different kinds of media, from

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<sup>5</sup> The progressive introduction of fixed term and part time contracts within the Italian labour market is extensively discussed in Fullin (2004).

<sup>6</sup> At the end of the 90’s, each of the three traditional trade unions establish its own section devoted to non standard workers, namely Nidil-Cgil (Nuove Identità di Lavoro), Cpo-Uil (Coordinamento per l’Occupazione) and Alai-Cisl (Associazione Lavoratori Atipici e Interinali). Moreover, during the last general elections campaign, Nidil-Cgil promotes a petition in order to insert the precarity conflictual issue within the left-wing coalition program. Source: [www.nidil.cgil.it](http://www.nidil.cgil.it)

<sup>7</sup> To investigate precarious workers mobilizations allows singling out interesting features about the controversial relationship between traditional trade unions and social movements (Curcio, 2006; Brancaccio et al. 2005).

mainstream ones to alternative ones, play an interesting role in both reflecting this process and participating to it.

### **3. CONTENDERS IN A MULTIFACETED MEDIATED PUBLIC SPHERE**

The precarity discourse construction could be also seen as a process of identity building. In fact, precarious workers not only suffer from their working conditions, but also from both their lack of representation at the political level and their substantial invisibility at the public and political discourse level. Therefore, the mediated public sphere (Thompson, 1995) is extremely important since it may allow precarious workers to recognize themselves as part of a single social problem. In other words, it is not only the public arena where precarious workers begin to exist as a social and political actor, but it is also the place in which media texts circulation is the basis for the development of a shared collective identity which could reinforce and eventually also change the precarity discourse itself.

In this regard, it should be noticed that social movements involved in the precarity conflictual issue act as challengers at the symbolic level in various ways (Melucci, 1996). First, they attempt to elaborate a collective identity based on shared values and beliefs (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). Second, they try to construct a collective action frame related to a certain conflictual issue (Snow and Benford, 1988). Third, they seek visibility and voice at the public level in order to raise their conflictual issue and eventually to participate to the agenda building process (Lipsky, 1969). The result is not only the establishment of new political actors within societies, making claims and demands through unconventional political means, but also the attempt to spread alternative discourses, innovative systems of meanings and new cultural grammars about labour market flexibility (Virno, 2001; Autonome A.f.r.i.k.a Gruppe, 2001).

As a result, communication in a broad sense seems to be a central process as well as an indispensable product of political activists' daily life. From this point of view, social movements could be seen as collective actors who are constantly engaged in different kind of mediation processes, namely in those "mass of processes of doing things with particular media and technologies having a particular representational effect [...] which certain people perform at a particular places and times, with effects on other places and times" (Couldry, 2001: 5). In other words, mediation processes may allow transmitting such cultural devices as collective identities and collective action frames both within social movements themselves and beyond their own fluid boundaries. In this regard, a varied and sometimes unexpected range of mediation processes may be invented by political activists belonging to the same social movement coalition, giving back a composite repertoire of communication, which rests on and shape the mediated public sphere where it is performed. This means that national and local mainstream media are surrounded by a varied range of mediation processes which are the terrain where new conflictual issues circulate, assuming different forms. Similar to the critical community role with regard to social movements' issues formation (Rochon, 1998), the mediated public sphere contains in itself spaces of resistance where alternative discourses and innovative cultures travel. For instance, the presence of broker media may assure a certain degree of visibility within the mediated public sphere, due to both their history

and political orientation.<sup>8</sup> In sum, to start from the mediation process theoretical perspective allows not looking at the mainstream media as the centre of the mediated public sphere, which is then considered as a multilayer space in which a discourse is transferred and thus translated in various directions and with different consequences at the symbolic level (Terranova, 2004). Therefore, it is interesting to analyze the presence of multiple mediation processes within a certain social movement coalition in order to understand in which way political activists face the mediated public sphere as a whole and temporary reinvent it, through unconventional media oriented strategies and tactics.

To investigate mediation processes in a complex mediascape the following is adopted. On the one side, an explorative analysis of social movements involved in the precarity conflictual issue is conducted in order to single out the most important radical groups mobilizing in Italy from 2001 to 2006. In this regard, left-wing radical newspapers and alternative informational websites are the main sources together with a deep knowledge of the field under investigation. After this first step, a content analysis of documents produced by political activists and precarious workers allows to single out a set of collective action frames which are all part of the precarity discourse. Herein, the collective action frame concept is used as a tool to analyze social movements' documents. More in detail, the prognostic, diagnostic and motivational frame is singled out in official declarations, call for action, posters, leaflets and press releases, following the definition proposed by literature on framing processes and social movements (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow and Benford, 1988;). A more detailed analysis is carried on with regard to the case study at stake, namely the EMDP. In fact, besides the longitudinal reconstruction of collective action frames from 2001 to 2006, the focus of this piece of research is to understand which kind of mediation processes are carried on within the EMDP process and how they develop within a complex mediascape. Therefore, the main sources are mailing lists used to organize the protest event at stake and to share knowledge about the precarity conflictual issue, alternative informational websites, precarious workers and political activists' websites as well as media material produced by media-activists involved in the demonstration.<sup>9</sup> All these documents are integrated with participant observation during the two preparatory meetings of the EMDP last edition – in Hamburg (October 2005) and Milan (February 2006) – and the demonstration in Milan in both 2005 and 2006. A qualitative analysis of written, spoken and audio material is undertaken paying particular attention to all those moments in which political activists and media-activists are engaged in any kind of mediation process. In sum, an inner point of view is privileged and dynamic mechanisms, rather than their outcome in the mediated public sphere, are the starting point of the analysis proposed in this paper.

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of broker media is extremely useful with regards to social movements, since it allows putting a further differentiator element within the continuum from alternative media and mainstream media. In fact, broker media are inserted within the competitive media market where even mainstream media, but their political orientation leads to a redefinition of the classical newsmaking values (Wolf, 1989). An emblematic example is the daily newspaper "Il Manifesto", established in 1974 by a group of political activists linked to the Communist Party and then expelled from it.

<sup>9</sup> Precisely, the main sources are: Euromayday mailing list; Neurogreen mailing list; Italy Indymedia website; Global Project website; Chainworkers website; NGV website; Radio Onda D'Urto; Radio Hacktive. These sources are chosen according to their relevance related to the protest event at stake.

#### 4. PRECARIOUS WORKERS STRUGGLES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRECARIETY DISCOURSE

To understand the relationship between precarious workers mobilized against precarity and the mediated public sphere, it is necessary to start from the development of the precarity discourse within political activists groups. As mentioned above, a varied range of mobilizations against precarity occurs in Italy from 2001 to 2006.<sup>10</sup> Three main collective action frames could be singled out looking at political actions and claims undertaken by precarious workers from late in the 90's, which result from a combination of different material conditions, such as the labour market sector or the particular workplace, and different political attitudes and experiences.

First, there are protest events narrowly oriented towards a specific workplace or working category, whose collective action frame is the return to open end contracts and working conditions improvement. In this regard, the public administration sector together with the service sector is the place of struggle against fixed term contracts. Mobilizations against fixed term contracts principally occur at the local level and they are often organized without traditional trade unions support. An emblematic example is long-lasting protest campaign carried on by the Precari Atesia group, in Rome.<sup>11</sup> Different strikes are organized by this autonomous group of precarious workers, even against traditional trade unions position during collective negotiations related to fixed term contracts and other labour issues. Briefly, protestors want to improve their working conditions, by introducing such fundamental working rights as the right to have paid illness and maternity leaves. At a first glance, this kind of protest events is not mainly oriented towards the mediated public sphere, since visibility is to be obtained within the local context in which precarious workers daily act. Rather, collective negotiations with their managers are the short-term objective to be reached, while the precarity discourse remains in the background.

Second, there are mobilizations related to a certain labour market sector, where narrow goals and broader aims intertwine. This is also due to the presence of a composite social movement coalition, giving back a complex collective action frame in which the return of open end contracts, a general opposition to precarity and a great reflection about knowledge role within societies go hand in hand. The most important protest campaign is the one carried on within the public education system, where students, researchers and sometimes even professors mobilize against the education reform drafted by the former Education and University Ministry, Letizia Moratti. Namely, two waves of protest follow one another in less than three years: in 2004 and in 2005 many Italian universities become the centre of widespread oppositions to the education reform. In particular, there are lesson blocks, lessons hold within cities square by young researchers, demonstrations organized by university students. The symbol of these struggles is “La Sapienza” University, in Rome, where quite all the faculties are

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<sup>10</sup> In the following paragraphs, three main kinds of protest events against precarity will be singled out. Nonetheless, it should be noticed that they are simplified, especially with regard to discourses *nuance* and intertwining, due both to the fluidity of contemporary social movements and to the spread of multiple belongings among contemporary political activists (Andretta, della Porta, Mosca, Reiter, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Atesia is the biggest call-centre in Italy and one of the biggest in Europe. The Precari Atesia Group is formally established in 2005 in order to represent precarious workers overcoming traditional trade unions negotiations with the Atesia managers. Source: [www.precariatesia.altervista.org](http://www.precariatesia.altervista.org).

occupied by students from late in September 2005 until the end of the year. The 2005 wave of protest culminate with a huge national demonstration in Rome, which is completely managed and organized by university students, PhD students and young researchers, without neither political parties nor traditional trade unions support. About 100.000 protestors participate to the protest event, occurring the same day in which the last vote is taking place in order to pass the education reform at stake. Despite the law is finally passed by the parliament, these two waves of mobilization contribute to construct and deepen the precarity discourse, which is seen as strictly linked with the education system and its organization by protestors. In fact, researchers stress that quality of universities would be undermined by the extension of precarity within the education system, while students claim that the new knowledge conception, on which the education reform rests, seemed to be thought to prepare young people to enter and eventually accept a neo-liberal market entirely based on a deregulated flexibility. In sum, a more systematic and advanced collective action frame about precarity is developed, even though it is framed within a particular context in which such issues as knowledge, research development and the education role within society made up the indispensable background. Therefore, two main claims are made. First, fixed term contract abolition and working condition improvement. Second, the autonomy of knowledge and research activities from market rules – one of the slogans is “our brains are not on sale” – and the right to have free-circulation of knowledge and culture, which means a shift towards the copy-left philosophy and juridical devices like the so-called creative-commons license.<sup>12</sup> The social movement coalition against the education reform is varied, since it is composed by women and men who have different roles within the public education system: students, professors, teachers, researchers, PhD students, administration operators and even parents, with regards to primary school mobilizations, protest against the education reform. Therefore, the precarity discourse is not always central and it is more developed within certain sector of the coalition than in others. For instance, researchers, assistant professors and PhD students frame precarity as the most important problem to face, so that the National Network of Precarious Researchers is established in 2004 and a series of initiatives are organized at the public and political level.<sup>13</sup>

Third, there are political actions which temporary modify a certain space, introducing a disruption within daily consumption places, whose collective action frame focuses on the basic income need for everyone. From 2004 to 2005 these political actions are organized by an extremely fluid social movement coalition, which changes according to the territorial level in which they are planned.<sup>14</sup> Usually, they are direct actions called “San Precario Appearances”, from the name of the protector saint of all precarious workers, namely San Precario, an icon created within the EMDP process in 2004. The first of them occurs in Milan before the EMDP 2004 and took place into a supermarket.

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12 The creative commons license is thought to “use private rights to create public goods: creative works set free for certain uses. Like the free software and open-source movements, our ends are cooperative and community-minded, but our means are voluntary and libertarian. We work to offer creators a best-of-both-worlds way to protect their works while encouraging certain uses of them — to declare ‘some rights reserved’. Source: [www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org)

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed analysis of university students and researchers protests, see Roggero (2005) and

<sup>14</sup> Usually, precarious workers groups, the Disobbedienti Network and political activists linked to “Giovani/e Comunisti/e” and “Verdi” are the main organizers of the protest events at stake. A broader analysis of the San Precario icon is developed by Tari’ and Vanni (2005).

As the months go by, similar political actions are organized in Padua, Bologna, Venice, Rome and again in Milan. Obviously, there could be slight changes according to the place in which the political action occurs: the stress is on knowledge within bookshops, cinema and museum, while the high cost of life is underlined during political actions within supermarkets, malls and restaurants. The common element is the so-called “auto-reduction” autonomously applied on goods prices by political activists: the San Precario statue is brought into procession by political activists, who sometimes could be disguised as priests, monks and nuns, while the San Precario prayer is intoned by protestors.<sup>15</sup> The saint icon with the prayer is distributed to common customers, together with a bonus in order to have a discount of a certain percentage. After having chosen good to buy, political activists go towards cashes desks, where they are supposed to pay. Instead, there is the formal request to have a discount, blocking cashes desk and framing this behaviour as a political action which could be also followed by common customers who have the San Precario bonus distributed at the beginning of the political action itself.<sup>16</sup> As could be noticed, protestors conceive of precarity as a difficult condition which is not only linked to work. In fact, the key term is “social precarity”, rather than simply precarity or working precarity, which means a general life condition in which the spread of fixed term contracts, the lack of a welfare state system considering precarious workers needs, and the high cost of life are the three main pillars from which protest events are planned. Precisely, the main claim does not focus neither on open end contracts return nor on working conditions improvement, rather it is centred on the basic income for everyone demand. In other words, even though working conditions improvement are considered important, the final purpose is to obtain a basic income, supplied through both services and money.

The three kinds of protest events mentioned above – services workers strikes, public education system demonstrations and San Precario appearances – are all part of and contribute to construct the broad alternative discourse about precarity, challenging the labour market flexibility dominant discourse.

## **5. THE EMDP COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAME FROM 2001 TO 2006: MAJOR SHIFTS AND REDEFINITIONS**

The EMDP belongs to those kind of protest events, whose collective action frame is mainly based on the basic income for everyone demands. It is a national demonstration against precarity, whose first edition is organized in Milan in 2001 and occurring the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, the national holiday traditionally devoted to workers and labour issue. Three main political subjects invent it: “Chainworkers”, an autonomous group of precarious workers, “CUB”, a grassroots union, and “Deposito Bulk”, a squatted space. The demonstration grows up exponentially: protest participants in Milan are about 5.000

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<sup>15</sup> The San Precario prayer is available at <http://www.globalproject.info/art-2477.html>

<sup>16</sup> Sometimes, the “san Precario appearances” occur within broader demonstration. For instance, the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2004, during a national demonstration against precarity in Rome, two separate San Precario appearances are organized at the Feltrinelli bookshop and within the Panorama mall. In this regard, mainstream media speak of violent and illegal demonstrations, strictly connected with the so-called “proletarian expropriations” organized during the 70’s in various Italian cities.

during the first edition and about 100.000 six years later, in 2006.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, at the very beginning, the EMDP is organized on a regional basis, but it then becomes a national protest event occurring in various Italian cities.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, from 2004 a transnational network of European political activists is formally established, during the so-called “Beyond the ESF” forum, a counter-European Social Forum organized at the Middlesex University by the Wombles. Even though in 2004 the demonstration is already framed as European, since it is organized in Milan, Barcelona, Helsinki, Dublin and Palermo, after the so-called “Middlesex Declaration” it really spread all over Europe: in 2005 the EMDP is organized in 19 European cities, which become 22 in 2006. Therefore, the demonstration could be seen as a long-lasting protest campaign, in which varied protest events could be inserted – such as the “San Precario appearances” mentioned above – and which is organized through a large number of national and transnational preparatory meetings. Consequently, numerous changes occur from 2001, the first year of the demonstration, and 2006.

Besides repertoire of action enrichment and scale shift within the EMDP process, it is interesting to look at the progressive changes related to collective identity construction attempts.<sup>19</sup> As mentioned above, since the very beginning, the formation of a shared collective identity seems to be the most important challenge to face for precarious workers and political activists involved in the EMDP process. In fact, there are many kinds of fixed term contract, which contribute to isolate precarious workers one from another, since they do not start from similar working conditions, sometimes even within the same workplace. Moreover, flexible forms of labour are spread into different labour market sectors, thus it is difficult to construct a common draft package of demands. As should be notice, in many cases precarious workers struggles are circumscribed: the “Precari Atesia” group is especially interested in call-centre operators, while mobilizations of precarious researchers are inserted within the cycle of mobilization related to the education labour market.

Nonetheless, the EMDP is a clear attempt to construct a pluralistic political subject, able to represent itself within the public and political sphere. Different steps could be singled out in this attempt. In 2001, it is already clear that a common identity cannot be based on a particular labour contract, but rather on a similar condition which is summarized by the definition of “youth precariat”, where the stress is on the generational belonging as well as on the general experience of precarious form of contracts.<sup>20</sup> In 2002, there is a shift towards a more general definition, namely “social precariat”: the stress is no more on the generational aspect of precarious workers, but rather on a broader condition experienced by all these subjects which do not see a fulfilment of their (new)

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<sup>17</sup> Precisely, according to the parade organizers, the number of protestors was: 5.000 in 2001, 25.000 in 2002, 35.000 in 2003, 100.000 in 2004 and 120.000 in 2005. Source: [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org), EMDP mailing list at [www.euomadaday.org](http://www.euomadaday.org)

<sup>18</sup> The other Italian cities are Naples, Palermo, L’Aquila from 2004 to 2006 and Leghorn, Florence and Turin in 2006

<sup>19</sup> Scale shift is “a complex process that not only diffuses contention across space or social sectors, but creates instances for new coordination at a higher or a lower level than its initiation” (Tilly and Tarrow, 2006: 127). The most important scale shift regarding the EMDP is clearly the attempt to place the protest event within the European political space.

<sup>20</sup> Source: 2001 call for action, available at [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org)

social rights due to precarity.<sup>21</sup> In 2003, the “social precariat” is openly inserted within the global justice movement, as the call for action declares: *“The global movement of Seattle, Porto Alegre, Genoa and Florence, opposing to the Iraqi invasion, had rise and spread in Europe a new political subject [...]. This new political subject is the social precariat”*.<sup>22</sup> The last step occurs in 2004, when the “social precariat” connotes itself as European: the demonstration is no more called May Day Parade, as from 2001 to 2003, but its name is turned into EMDP. Moreover, it is organized not only in Milan, but also in Barcelona, Helsinki, Dublin and Palermo. Precarity is then considered as a European conflictual issue, affecting millions of people all over Europe. The poster of the parade openly stressed this fact, using mixed languages – French, Italian, Spanish and English – and claiming “European social rights”.<sup>23</sup> In sum, there is an early collective identity, focused on young precarious workers, which is progressively enlarged including more and more people within the precarization process. The result is an extremely varied collective identity in which different categories of protestors, such as immigrants, women, students, chain workers, cognitive workers are combined into a single collective social actor.

## 6. FROM MEDIUM TO IDENTITY: THE CREATION OF “SOCIAL MEDIA”

After the 2004 EMDP edition, a new tool is developed in order to keep together this particular collective identity and create a shared imagery related to precarity: the so-called “social media” in which the identification process meets the mediation process thanks to particular media tactics actively carried on within the EMDP organization. Precisely, “social media” allow face-to-face interactions among precarious workers, political activists and protestors to be both the base and the result of this particular kind of mediation process. To understand the meaning that political activists give to this kind of mediation process, it could be useful to start from the demonstration construction. In fact, also the EMDP itself is considered as a social medium, able to increase the number of its participants as the years go by: *“the mayday parade is a communication agency able to activate people through relationships and to allow precarious people to represent themselves without any form of mediation. It is a process, a way of being, a mechanism that works, reproduces itself, and evolves”*.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, pure “social media” could be seen at work both in 2005 and 2006. In 2005, the “Unbeatable(s)” are created: during the EMDP, 19 stickers and the related album are distributed to the parade participants. They are defined by political activists as *“little jewellers of experience, capability and relations, which will find their expression*

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<sup>21</sup> Source: 2002 call for action, available at [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org)

<sup>22</sup> Source: [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org)

<sup>23</sup> In this regard, it should be noticed that the transnational social movement network involved in the EMDP process is characterized by a vivid internal debate about the European identity of political activists. On the one side, there are those political activists who see the Europe as a common space of struggle recognizing the European Union as a political institution to which address protests and claims. On the other side, there are those political activists who position themselves more clearly within the global justice movement, refusing to look at the European space as a field of struggle and more in favour of a global day of protest against precarity. Source: [www.euromaday.org](http://www.euromaday.org).

<sup>24</sup> Source: [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org)

*before and during the May Day Parade*".<sup>25</sup> Among the others, there is a sticker representing precarious workers employed in theatres, called "Teatrix". He is a "superflexible technicians, made up of geometrical figures with multiple possibilities to be wedged in, you put him where you want and when you want, holidays and nights included, he does not need the rest day".<sup>26</sup> Then, there is "Supeflex" who experienced every kind of fixed term contract, developing a particular kind of superpower: "Stress leads to a pleasant mutation of her/his own molecules, developing the more hidden skills of her/his own brain: in fact, she/he is able to mentally communicate with all superflexs, starting the universal precarious conspiracy".<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, each of these stickers represents a particular kind of precarious worker linked to an existing struggle against precarity, since different groups of precarious workers participate to the creation of their own stickers. Moreover, in the album there are all the references to keep in contact with these groups of precarious workers. On the other hand, during the demonstration, the parade participants exchange the stickers in order to complete the album. Each of them is distributed by a particular truck, thus protestors establish a direct face-to-face interaction grounded in the precarity issue.

A step forward is made in 2006, when the EMDP is thought as a narrative path in which four pillars are singled out: affections, mobility, knowledge and income. These four issues are not a novelty within the EMDP, since they are presented together with the San Precario icon since 2004. Nonetheless, in the last edition of the EMDP they are also the basis for the development of another social medium, namely the "Kit Map". Herein, there are different gadgets, which are distributed during the EMDP by specific trucks, constructed around one of the four issues mentioned above. These gadgets are made up by a series of information about particular aspects of precarious workers life and by concrete objects. For instance, the healthy kit underlines the lack of those rights which are normally enjoyed by conventional workers, such as the right to have paid illness days, the right to ask for maternity leaves to take care of a sick child. The focus is also on the high cost of medicines and specialized doctors, thus the gadget included in the healthy kit is a declaration of poverty useful to take advantage of various economic benefits. This declaration is obviously false, but it is useful to stress that the precarity condition is often a synonymous of poverty. The "Kit Map" follows the same logic of the "Unbeatable(s)", since each kit is distributed by different trucks along the parade pathway and various political groups take part in the creation of this survival tools, which contain information about precarious workers condition and suggestions in order to organize resistance tactics and political struggles: "The Kit Map is information besides information. By collecting the kits, it will be possible, as by osmosis, to acquire useful notions to defend one's rights, but – this is more important – in many kits little jewellers of precarious counter-attack are contained. Experiences, advices, tricks, wicked actions of people who laboriously succeeded in auto-organize their own conflict. Commuters, Scala workers, Feltrinelli workers, bicyclists, Vodafone workers, social workers, municipal employees, sex workers

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<sup>25</sup> Source: [www.chainworkers.org/imbattibili](http://www.chainworkers.org/imbattibili)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*

*or sensuality liberators. To speak of income, in a world which does not give anything away, means to speak of conflict”.*<sup>28</sup>

In sum, social media could be seen as a particular kind of mediation process, which is mainly oriented towards the construction of a collective identity in which different features of precarious workers daily life convey to a combined political subject, able to spread struggles and conflict against precarity into the Italian society. The concept of mass media is also revisited in a particular way: the “Unbeatable(s)” and the “Kit Map” are not mass media in a strict sense, since they are intended to reach a relatively small audience during a particular protest event. Therefore, they are deeply situated in a defined context, in which they release their whole conflict and informational potential. Nonetheless, they spring from a long-lasting mediation process in which precarious workers and political activists construct meaningful political tools in order to give back what is extremely difficult to achieve within the EMDP: first, the picture of a political subject which is highly composite and extremely varied in its composition, even though it tries to carry on common struggles against precarity; second, the individuation of shared short-term goals, namely the development of the social media themselves, allowing precarious workers and political activists to construct or reinforce political relationships among them and with new potential insurgents. In other words, not only the final outcome, namely stickers about precarious workers or survival kit to face precarity, but also the mediation process leading to it, namely the creation of social media, are extremely important. In sum, in this respect more than in other situations, it seems possible to state that the medium is also the message, using the famous expression invented by McLuhan (1967).

## **7. BECOMING THE MEDIA: ALTERNATIVE MEDIATION PROCESSES IN THE EMDP**

Thanks to the recent implementation and spread of ICT’s, social movements have a relatively economic tool in order to carry on their own mediation processes. Even though counter information and alternative media are not a novelty within social movements’ history, it is out of doubt that in the recent years new digital technologies, such as digital camera, and the web development, changed the way in which protestors construct and tell their own political actions. For instance, the habit of organizing an Independent Media Centre, which could provide live broadcasting of the protest event and allow media-activists to spread their own information through the web, springs from the famous Seattle demonstration in 1999, where the international media-activists network called Indymedia is established.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, during the 2001 demonstrations against the G8 summit in Genoa, police violent acts against protestors are documented in details not only thanks to journalists, but also to media-activists and protest participants. The result is a great amount of visual and audio materials offering a varied range of

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<sup>28</sup> Source: [www.italy.indymedia.org](http://www.italy.indymedia.org) 02/05/06. The “Scala” is the most important opera theatre in Italy, while Flettrinelli is a national bookshop chain.

<sup>29</sup> Nowadays the Indymedia informational website has numerous local nodes all over the world. It is based on the open publishing system, which lead to the absence of preventive censorship, thus everyone may post its own article and receive comments by net-users. For a more detailed description of the Indymedia history and features, see Halleck (2002).

peculiar points of view about the demonstrations in Genoa, which are lavished on the web as well as in traditional media.<sup>30</sup>

The EMDP could be seen as an interesting space of experimentation concerning alternative mediation processes managing. From the very beginning, media-activists are considered as an extremely important part of the social movement coalition, which states that its “*arms are media-activism and conflict*”.<sup>31</sup> As in other protest events planned by the global justice movement, Indymedia is deeply connected with the EMDP political activists: in 2003 the alternative informational website is engaged in the protest event coverage and media activists create a mobile media centre able to follow the parade along its way. Besides the 2001 mobilizations against the G8 summit in Genoa, it is the first time that an Italian demonstration has its own systematic alternative media coverage. The result is a live broadcasting made possible by the use of wireless connections given by common citizens living along the parade way. In fact, before the demonstration a campaign called “adopt a media-activist” is thought in order to ask people from Milan to allow the use of their wireless internet connection during the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. In 2004, Indymedia offers to every protestor the possibility of posting his or her own reports during the parade. Thanks to the so-called PIMP software - Phone Indy Media Patch - developed by Australian media-activists, phone calls and sms could be immediately published on the website, where protestors may directly tell their own EMDP experience. As a result, the Indymedia website is able to provide about 50 short reports, either in textual or audio format, from the parade participants.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, from 2004 there is the attempt to have a European coverage of the protest event. Reports from other European countries are posted in the Indymedia website, while Global Project assure a living coverage in which reports from Milan are mixed with those from other European cities.<sup>33</sup> In 2005 and 2006, other alternative radios streamed through the web do the same in other European country such as Slovenia and Germany.<sup>34</sup> In sum, a temporary alternative European public sphere is constructed around the protest event at stake: “[...] *Mayday Milan calls Mayday Barcelona. Then, how do the preparations for the May Day go on? Hi, here it is going on pretty well, there is much more people than expected, the most numerous group is migrants people, with different banners. One of them reminds us that we are all migrants. Then there are various groups of precarious*

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<sup>30</sup> Besides the Indymedia website, it is interesting to notice that even broker media decide to publish pictures taken by common citizens and media-activists in order to show what happened during the demonstrations in Genoa. For instance, the left-wing weekly journal “Diario della Settimana”, published a special edition entirely made up of pictures sent by people who was in Genoa during those days of protest.

<sup>31</sup> Source: [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org)

<sup>32</sup> What follows is an example of sms published thanks to the PIMP software: ““*This precarious SMS has been sent from a mobile during the EuroMayDay 2004. Picket at the Upim in Como. Action just finished. It lasted 30 minutes. Not much workers behind us. In a short time, there will be the adopted train to Milan. 50 people from Como*””. Source: [www.italy.indymedia.org](http://www.italy.indymedia.org), 01/05/04

<sup>33</sup> Global Project is an alternative informational website which combines text, audio and video materials by media activists involved in the project. It is strictly linked with the Disobbedienti network and it is not completely based on open publishing as Indymedia is. For instance, it is not possible to comment articles and other material published on the website and there is a sort of spread editorial staff, based on local nodes, which produce news.

<sup>34</sup> Source: EMDP mailing list at [www.euomaday.org](http://www.euomaday.org)

*workers, even different one from another, but that find in the Mayday a common path [...]”*<sup>35</sup>

With regard to the alternative media coverage of the Italian EMDP, the Global Project crew use the same communication means: mobile telephones and radio web streaming. From early in the morning correspondent from different Italian cities update news from trains which are arriving in Milan. Once arrived in Milan, direct actions and the parade itself are reported as well: “[...] *Now I’m in San Babila where one of the blockages of the “adopt a chain” campaign is going on. It is a colourful blockage, which has been defined as a pink one*”.<sup>36</sup> In 2005, similar coverage is spread thanks to another alternative radio streamed through both air and the web. It is Radio May Day, a temporary network of more than ten Italian free radios, like Radio Onda D’Urto: “[...] *There is a rave atmosphere, thinking about the rave as a precarious moment, as a precarious feast [...]. Like a T.A.Z., a Temporary Autonomous Zone. Even this camper now is a T.A.Z., even Porta Ticinese now is a T.A.Z., a zone in which there is no need of revolutions because the revolution is here now, because alternative media are here now and they work at maximum speed [...]*”.<sup>37</sup>

In sum, from 2003 different ways of producing alternative media coverage are explored by media-activists, even though the synchronized use of mobile phones and live broadcasting through the web seem to be the most exploited mediation process. In fact, it is used in different EMDP edition and by different media-activists group in order to obtain a live broadcasting at both the Italian and European level.<sup>38</sup>

With regard to these examples, media-activists manage their own media, providing an extensive alternative coverage of the EMDP, through collaborative efforts in which different subjects, groups well as individuals, share their technical knowledge in order to give back accurate reports of the protest event at stake. Despite the novelty of a European alternative media coverage, it should be notice that the mediation process is to some extent near to the mainstream media one: one or more media-activists take charge of the live broadcasting, namely they describe the parade and organize the phone calls by correspondents at the local and European level. Other kinds of mediation processes, directed towards common people rather than entirely managed by media-activists, such as the adopt-a-media-activist campaign in 2003 and the P.I.M.P. technology in 2004, are less successful and they are no more take into consideration even thought they appear to be more innovative and linked to an explicit information-from-below approach.

Besides live broadcasting, the EMDP is covered in other ways by alternative media. In fact, information about the demonstration is spread through alternative informational websites and mailing lists. Nonetheless, this kind of coverage is not well developed at the very beginning, but rather it grows up as the years go by. For instance, the Indymedia and Global Project websites publish only 2 articles in 2001, 10 articles in 2002 and 19 articles

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<sup>35</sup> Source: [www.globalproject.info](http://www.globalproject.info) 01/05/04

<sup>36</sup> Source: [www.globalproject.info](http://www.globalproject.info) 01/05/04. The campaign “adopt a chain” consist in pickets outsidesshops and commercial chains which are open during the 1<sup>st</sup> of May.

<sup>37</sup> Source: Radio May Day, 01/05/05, available at [www.radioondadurto.org](http://www.radioondadurto.org)

<sup>38</sup> Besides live broadcasting, it should be stressed that the Indymedia website as well as the EMDP mailing list, established in 2004, are virtual spaces in which a varied range of materials about the demonstrations are exchanged. In particular, a great amount of pictures is shared among the mailing list subscribers, giving back the idea of a real European protest event, distributed in different cities.

in 2003 about the protest event in Milan.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, at a first glance in the next years their number increases, even though not in a progressive way: 194 articles in 2004, 72 in 2005 and 68 in 2006.<sup>40</sup> This means that even within alternative media, a protest event needs a certain period of time in order to be extensively covered. Moreover, the great amount of news registered from 2004 matches with the increased number of protestors conveying in Milan to take part to the EMDP, which became a central protest event within the Italian mobilization field. This is true especially in the Indymedia website case, where potentially everyone may post its own article without the editorial board intervention. Therefore, Indymedia does not function as a pure mediation process facilitator, but rather it is also a public space where collective debates are carried on. In fact, in 2004 political activists debate about the possibility of organizing the EMDP in Melfi, where FIAT workers have been engaged in strikes and pickets to improve their working conditions.<sup>41</sup> While in 2005 a long-lasting discussion develops after the EMDP, where internal fights among political groups participating to the demonstration lead to an isolated episode of violence among political activists.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, different political subjects use the Indymedia website to advertise their own political actions related to the EMDP or their own alternative media coverage: Global Project, Radio Onda d'Urto, Radio Hacktive and the like post brief written reports with a link to their own website, where the entire media coverage is available. Finally, quite all mainstream and broker media articles are published within the Indymedia website, which becomes the public space where press review about the EMDP is available. The pure alternative media role, that is to produce counter information, is to some extent shadowed by other functions such as public discussion forum, organizational tool, advertisement place, and mainstream and broker media texts container. In sum, the number of articles posted in the Indymedia website becomes more and more high, but only few of them are reports of the EMDP. This is in line with previous studies about the use of ICT's technology by social movements, which shows the multiple use of websites and mailing lists, which play different roles at the same time (Bennett, 2003).

## **8. BETWEEN COMMUNICATION GUERRILLA AND PROFESSIONALISM: MAINSTREAM MEDIA ORIENTED STRATEGIES AND TACTICS**

Political activists involved in the EMDP are also involved in mediation processes carried on by mainstream and broker media. In other words, they try to enter the mediated public sphere not only through the development of their own media, namely alternative media, but also through the exploitation of more institutionalized media channels. In this respect, social movements' role is deeply different, since they have to struggle with other public events in order to raise mainstream and broker media attention on the precarity conflictual issue, challenging the dominant discourse about labour market flexibility. In other words, political activists struggling against precarity are in a very weak position, since they are not supported by political institutional actors, like

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<sup>39</sup> Source: [www.italy.indymedia.org](http://www.italy.indymedia.org). Herein, only those articles explicitly dealing with the EMDP in Milan are considered, while articles about the EMDP in other Italian and European cities are not included.

<sup>40</sup> Source: [www.italy.indymedia.org](http://www.italy.indymedia.org)

<sup>41</sup> Source: [www.italy.indymedia.org](http://www.italy.indymedia.org)

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*

political parties and traditional trade unions, which have a well established relationship with both mainstream and broker media. The protest event organization could be seen as a first step to gain visibility within the mediated public sphere, as the first call for action poster claim in 2001: “[...] *We are the majority of those who enter the labor market. But we have no voice. We do not exist. Our condition is obscure, suffered in silence and isolation [...]*”<sup>43</sup>

To go into the street in order to protest is the traditional mean utilized by social movements to raise their claims within societies. In fact, disruptive protest events could be seen as those unusual and unexpected social facts which may match the needed newsworthiness to receive a certain amount of media coverage. In line with this, the EMDP is very different from other demonstrations occurring during the 1<sup>st</sup> of May in Italy, since in the past decades this holiday is seen above all as a day of feast, rather than a day of political struggle. For instance, two main routine public events are organized by traditional trade unions to celebrate this day: first, the traditional trade unions demonstration, occurring in a different place and underlying different labour issue each year; second, the traditional big and free concert in Rome, financed by traditional trade unions, where Italian and foreign bands follow one another all day long. Both of the two public events receive a great amount of media coverage. In particular, one of the national public television channels assures live broadcasting of the concert in Rome, while traditional trade unionists and their demonstrations are extensively covered by all mainstream and broker media.

In sum, the EMDP present itself as a disruptive protest event in comparison to traditional public events organized during the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. First, it is completely self-organized by political activists, radical trade unionists and precarious workers. Second, it is thought as a day of joyful struggle, in which the precarious workers could give voice to their own claims. Third, the parade is often combined with minor direct actions carried on by small group of political activists which want to claim their opposition to precarity sanctioning from below particular targets such as commercial chains, banks, corporations, temporary employment agencies and so on. Physical damages and graffiti are part of the EMDP, which combines different repertoire of action within the same protest event.<sup>44</sup> Fourth, even though at the very beginning the number of participants is limited, from 2004 about 100.000 protestors take part to the demonstration, which fast becomes the biggest protest event during the 1<sup>st</sup> of May in Italy. Briefly, three classical newsworthiness criteria are present: novelty, violence, high numbers (McCarthy, McPhail and Smith, 1996; Snyder and Kelly, 1977). Besides the demonstration itself, political activists try to enter the mediated public sphere in other ways. As the years go by, political activists involved in the EMDP seems to be more and more aware of the mainstream and broker mediation processes. In this regard, two main mechanisms are present.

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<sup>43</sup> Source: [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org)

<sup>44</sup> For instance, in 2005 besides the parade with dancing protestors and direct actions against the symbols of neoliberalism and precarity, there are many ways of interpreting the demonstration: from bicyclists of the critical mass movement to green activists promoting ecological issues, from media-activists interviewing protestors during the parade to activists from the copy-left movement distributing pirate copies of famous films.

On the one hand, political activists finally adapt themselves to the newsmaking process in order to obtain media coverage even before the EMDP takes place. For instance, in 2003 they launch the demonstration during high school students' mobilizations against the education reform, in 2005 the EMDP network decide to organize a series of common protest events during April, in order to construct a path towards the 1<sup>st</sup> of May demonstration. The most important day of struggle is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, dedicated to migrants and against temporary detention centres. During each of these protest events, a call for action is made in order to address journalists' attention to the EMDP. Finally, in 2006 a common press conference is organized in Bruxelles the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, followed by a demonstration in the European quarter. For the first time, European political activists involved in the EMDP network are present together in a public space in order to announce the forthcoming demonstration in more than 20 European cities. Moreover, a very press release with varied contribution is prepared and given to journalists. The message is clearly oriented towards the construction of a European conflictual issue, able to overcome the boundaries of each country and to make visible a transnational network of political activists which: "[...] will demonstrate and protest against precarity, the most crucial and burning social issue in Europe today [...]. Precarity is a widespread work and life condition for millions of Europeans [...]".<sup>45</sup> As should be noticed, to some extent it is possible to speak of a progressive professionalization of the EMDP network, which seems to be completely aware of the newsmaking process. This is due also to the fact that some political activists, which are precarious workers employed in the media and communication sector.

On the other hand, a step forward is done and the mainstream mediation process is not only favoured, but also finally disrupted. After San Precario, the protector saint of all precarious workers invented in 2004, Serpica Naro is born. She is an Anglo-Nippon fashion designer, who actually does not exist. Rather, she is created by Chainworkers and by a group of precarious fashion industry workers in order to be present during the Milan Fashion Week at the end of February 2005. Political activists produce the Serpica Naro website, her press-office and *ad hoc* press releases. Moreover, they inscribe the young fashion stylist to the "Camera della Moda", the Italian institution which controls the Milan Fashion Week, in order to provide her a fashion show during this event. Only during the fashion show, where clothes for precarious workers are exhibited, political activists announce to journalists that Serpica Naro is an icon of precarious workers utilized to highlight that precarity affects fashion workers as well.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the press conference organized in Bruxelles, the Serpica Naro case explicitly challenges the mainstream mediation process, through a subvertising protest event linked to the culture-jamming tradition.<sup>47</sup>

Briefly, there is a direct intervention within the mainstream mediation process, in order to use it in a twofold active way. On the one side, political activists use their knowledge about the newsmaking process to create public events expressively for

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<sup>45</sup> Source: [www.euromayday.org](http://www.euromayday.org)

<sup>46</sup> Source: [www.serpicanaro.com](http://www.serpicanaro.com)

<sup>47</sup> Culture jamming is defined as "media hacking, information warfare, terror-art, and guerrilla semiotics, all in one. Billboard bandits, pirate TV and radio broadcasters, media hoaxers, and other vernacular media wrenches who intrude on the intruders, investing ads, newscasts, and other media artefacts with subversive meanings are all culture jammers" (Dery, 1990).

journalists. On the other side, political activists engage themselves in subverting tactics, which are based on famous media event, such as the fashion week in Milan, to disrupt the mediation process itself.

The two mechanisms mentioned above require an active intervention within the mainstream mediation processes, temporary directed towards political activists' protest events. Nonetheless, there is another disruptive mechanism considering the mainstream mediation processes' product, namely media texts. In this regard, alternative media habits of publishing mainstream media texts about social movements protest events, becomes an opportunity to collectively comments and criticize the newsmaking process and journalistic biases. In this way, the mediation process is put into question by those political activists who actually participate to the demonstration or its preparatory meetings. This happens within a public space potentially available to everyone, like Indymedia. This mechanism is certainly more passive and not successful on a short term-basis, since it does not produce a real modification of mainstream mediation processes. However, social movements show their role of privileged audience, which could operate an extensive demystification of the mainstream newsmaking process, which represent at the public level a protest event to which political activists themselves take part. Therefore, an active denaturalization of the mainstream media frame is possible and actually happens (Couldry, 2000).<sup>48</sup>

Finally, it should be noticed that strategies and tactics oriented towards mainstream media are usually directed towards broker media as well. Press release and protest event are not constructed having in mind only mainstream media, but rather a more general mediated public sphere to which also broker media belong. It is also true that broker media have a particular position within the mediated public sphere, since they are supposed to be nearer to social movement collective action frames, so that the EMDP could be considered more newsworthy by a broker media than by a mainstream media. Nonetheless, political activists involved in the EMDP thought *ad hoc* tactics to enter directly broker media even before the protest event occurrence. What is at stake are social networks of individuals belonging to the same critical community in which the precarity conflictual issue has been discussed and developed (Rochon, 1998). For instance, linkages among journalists, academics and political activists lead to media texts written by the EMDP organizers in order to launch the demonstration and published on broker media.<sup>49</sup>

## 9. CONCLUSION

The varied range of mediation processes presented above shows that political activists involved in the EMDP are engaged at different levels within the mediated public sphere. The result is a set of media texts related to the same protest campaign, which may be represented in various ways affecting both the identification and the framing process. In other words, the EMDP is a mixed model of media oriented strategies and tactics, in

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<sup>48</sup> Couldry (2000) speaks of denaturalization of the media frame when individuals belonging to a particular audience see the mainstream media mechanisms at work and put them into question through their own mediation processes.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, see the article "The European network of possibilities" by Francesco Raparelli, political activist involved in the EMDP process, published in "Il Manifesto" (20/04/05).

which it is possible to find out the four main attitudes which usually characterize social movements with regard to the media: abstention, attack, adaptation and alternative (Rucht, 2004). There is a certain degree of abstention when “social media” are created, since they are thought to construct a shared collective imagery among precarious workers, rather than to be covered by the media. However, there is also a certain degree of attack during the Serpica Naro communication guerrilla action and eventually even within mailing lists, where mainstream mediation processes are often put into question and openly criticized. Moreover, political activists are aware of the mainstream and broker media newsmaking processes, which are exploited to obtain visibility and voices, organizing press conferences and other *ad hoc* media public events. This is a typical adaptation process. Finally, alternative mediation processes are putted at work, giving back an extensive media coverage of the EMDP from an internal point of view.

Besides the recognition of a political subject, namely the social precariat, which develops a multiple communication repertoire, it is interesting to understand the temporary and fluid consequences of the four kinds of mediation processes mentioned above. Even though outcomes at the collective identity and collective action frames level are certainly interesting, herein the analytical attention focuses on the mediated public sphere, which is seen as a changeable environment of communication, symbolic exchanges and identity affirmation. Precisely, it is interesting to notice that the development of different kind of mediation processes contribute to displace the barycentre of the mediated public sphere itself. Political and media activists are not only engaged in the definition of the precarity discourse at the public level, but thanks to their media tactics and strategies they put into question the mainstream media relevance within the mediated public sphere itself. For instance, the EMDP continues to increase, despite it is broadly ignored within certain zones of the mediated public sphere. It is not by chance, then, that political activists define the EMDP as a communication agency based on face-to-face communication and alternative mediation processes. In this regard, the development of the social media concept is extremely important because not only it contributes to the collective identity formation and to the collective action frames construction, but also it contains an implicit redefinition of the mediated public sphere where political activists act. In line with this, also media activists put into question mainstream media centrality, through the development of new communicative tools, such as the P.I.M.P. software, which propose the imagery of community media directly managed by ordinary people in order to bypass mainstream media. Moreover, from 2004 the EMDP receive a live broadcasting thanks to radio streamed through the web: besides technical experimentation, what seems to be extremely important is the creation of a temporary European space, where Europe is physically present and perceivable.

To conclude, two main concerns have to be considered. The first one is about methodological choices. It is clear that the analysis of mediation processes from a social movement perspective does not give back the whole mass of mechanisms occurring among journalists, political activists and media-activists within the mediated public sphere. In fact, the investigation proposed in this paper, mainly based on the observation of social movement practices in natural settings such as demonstrations, preparatory meetings and mailing lists, enlightens some interesting aspects of social movements backstage, where the complex relationship between media and social movements takes shape ((Ferree et al., 2002). Nonetheless, what is still missed is mediation process

outcome within the mediated public sphere, which should be completed with a detailed analysis of media texts circulating regarding the EMDP, and the perception of both mediation processes and their main outcomes by political activists, media-activists and journalists, which could be achieved thanks to a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups.<sup>50</sup> The second remark is related to the case study at stake. In fact, it should be noticed that the EMDP process is a particular case in which different kinds of mediation processes are carried on in parallel within the same social movement coalition. This is probably because from the very beginning this protest campaign focuses on the creation of a new imagery about precarity and among political activists there are many persons involved in the communication labour market sector. Therefore, it is certainly interesting to take into consideration other struggles in order to have a deeper understating of Italian social movements involved in the construction of the precarity discourse and their different attitudes towards the mediated public sphere. For instance, the Precari Atesia group and the so-called San Precario appearances could be a fruitful line of investigation to look at other kinds of mediation processes leading to different mediated public sphere configurations.

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<sup>50</sup> For a detailed analysis of the 2005 EMDP as it is represented within the mediated public sphere see Mattoni (2006).

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