



# Rethinking New Social Movements from a Relational Perspective

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**Abstract:** This article aims to reconceptualize new social movements from a relational sociological perspective, replacing outdated typological classifications and identity-centered paradigms. Recent studies on new social movements find the focus on traditional collective identity, organization, and cultural factors insufficient, instead centering on distributed network-based and emotional characteristics. In this context, drawing particularly on the work of relational sociologists like Harrison White, and building upon Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory, Iris Marion Young's concept of seriality, and Lauren Berlant's curiel optimism, the article aims to develop a relational sociological Network Intensification Model to analyze current new social movements. The proposed model represents a significant innovation contributing to the existing literature by conceptualizing social movements not as stable collective actors, but as temporary network intensifications arising from serial positioning and sustained by emotional ties. This model highlights the role of not only humans but also non-humans, algorithms, platforms, images, and material objects in the emergence of social movements. Instead of focusing on fixed categories such as "environmental" or "feminist" movements, the model emphasizes degrees of network density, synchronization thresholds, emotional circulation, and algorithmic visibility. Drawing on relational sociological principles and focusing on process analysis rather than typological classifications, the article attempts to contribute to the dynamic and non-anthropocentric ontology of collective action. In this context, the article presents contemporary social movements as cyclical formations that intensify, dissolve, and potentially re-emerge through relational structures. This theoretical work also gains value by offering new methodological and theoretical avenues for examining digitally mediated and emotionally structured forms of movement.

**Keywords:** New social movements, relational sociology, Actor-Network Theory, seriality, cruel optimism, Network Intensification Model.

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## INTRODUCTION

Social movements have been seen as one of the fundamental motives for social change throughout history. While social movements in the classical period were generally evaluated within the framework of economic interests and class struggle (Marx & Engels, 1848/1978), new social movements emerging in post-industrial societies are defined as cultural, identity-based, and value-oriented (Melucci, 1989; Touraine, 1981;1992). These movements, now considered outdated, not only oppose state policies or economic power structures but also center on the production of meaning, the restructuring of cultural norms, and the formation of identity (Habermas, 1987; Offe, 1985).

The rise of new social movements began to manifest itself particularly in the 1960s and 1970s in areas such as gender, environment, human rights, and peace. For example, while feminist movements question norms regarding gender roles, the LGBT+ rights

movement has brought to the forefront demands for identity recognition and acceptance beyond the heteronormative order (Butler, 1990; Paternotte, 2014). Similarly, environmental and ecological movements advocate not only for the protection of nature but also for relational balance between human and non-human actors and alternative visions for the future (Latour, 2004; Haraway, 1991). In this context, new social movements emerge as practices that reshape the subject-society relationship at both individual and collective levels.

A characteristic feature of new social movements is their focus on identity, values, and quality of life rather than economic demands (Offe, 1985). In this respect, these movements go beyond classic class-based protests, aiming to change social norms, symbolic arrangements, and cultural codes. Melucci (1980) defines these movements as processes in which individuals redefine social norms by collectively producing meaning, while Habermas (1987) points out that the cultural field has become the focal point of modern conflicts.

However, in post-industrial societies, the new generations called millennials (Çevik, 2022) are adding different dimensions to social movements through the production (regeneration) of new knowledge and policies, technological networks, and global communication opportunities. For example, movements such as Fridays For Future (FFF) and Extinction Rebellion create global awareness through social media and shape the experiences and future visions of participants (Soler-i Marti et al., 2024). This shows that social movements are effective not only through physical actions but also through digital and symbolic networks.

Over the past forty years, the concept of “new social movements” has become a central category for explaining the shift from class-based collective action to identity-based, cultural, and lifestyle-oriented movements. Feminist and environmental movements, LGBT+ struggles, digital activism, and migrant rights resistance are typical examples of this literature. However, despite its initial analytical novelty, the concept itself faces certain limitations today. In particular, the tendency to classify movements through typologies fails to adequately explain the variable, fragile, and network-like forms of contemporary activism.

This article proposes rethinking new social movements through a relational ontology, rather than categorizing them typologically. This approach focuses on dispersed and transient processes of subjectivation that occur within a network of relationships, rather than treating the collective actor as a fixed subject. In this context, the article aims to develop a new analytical framework, drawing particularly on the relational sociology tradition (Harrison White, 2008; ), which focuses on initial uncertainties and processes, Actor-Network Theory (Bruno Latour, 2005), the concept of “seriality” (Iris Marion Young, 2009;2011;), and the “cruel optimism” approach (Lauren Berlant, 2011).

The literature on new social movements has emphasized the central role of collective identity since the 1980s. Identity has been seen as both the source of mobilization and the ground for solidarity. However, under digitalization, platforming, and late neoliberal conditions, collective identity is being replaced by more fragile, serial, and network-based relationships. Participants often engage in the process through temporary forms of participation, hashtag campaigns, online signature chains, and instantaneous mobilizations, rather than strong organizational belonging. This situation necessitates a re-examination of the ontological status of the collective subject. As is known, relational

sociology claims to explain social reality through relationships rather than fixed entities. As Harrison White (1992;2008) emphasizes, identities arise from positions within networks; actors cannot be considered independently of relational contexts. This perspective makes it possible to treat new social movements not as pre-given collective entities, but as temporary nodes in specific network structures. Thus, "movement" can be conceptualized not as a subject, but as a relational process of becoming.

This approach is further deepened by the understanding of the symmetrical relationship established by Actor-Network Theory between human and non-human actors. In the framework developed by Bruno Latour (2005), digital platforms, algorithms, data streams, disaster objects, or visual images are not merely tools; they are constitutive components of agency. Such a perspective is critically important, especially when analyzing the movements of the digital age. Indeed, hashtags, algorithmic visibility, viral visuals, or live streaming practices are no longer passive carriers of new social movements, but direct actants.

On the other hand, the concept of "seriality" instead of collective identity is important for explaining how individuals, scattered but exposed to common conditions, can form a temporary political unity. Iris Marion Young (1994/2009) defines the concept of seriality as a form of sociality in which individuals are connected to each other due to similar structural positionings without possessing a shared sense of identity. This concept offers a powerful analytical tool, particularly for understanding the loose and flexible forms of participation in the digital age. In addition, the sustainability and motivational sources of movements cannot be explained solely by rational self-interest calculations. More is needed, and Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism" helps us by expressing the subject's attachment to an object of hope that may hinder their own well-being. This form of attachment can explain the continuation of activism despite failure or disappointment. The continued participation in new social movements, often observed despite the constantly delayed expectation of victory, is thus more clearly understood. In other words, the continuation of participation can be attributed to the existence of these fragile hopes.

To summarize, the main argument of this article is that New Social Movements should no longer be understood as collective actors based on fixed identities, but rather as temporary clusters of subjectification formed through networked relationships, serial positioning, and fragile attachments to hope. This approach is valuable because it goes beyond the effort of producing typologies and attempts to make it possible to conceptualize movements as dynamic and relational processes.

Since this article is designed as a theoretical study and aims to offer an alternative model to new social movement analyses, the existing literature has been critically evaluated.

### **CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS LITERATURE**

New social movements theory was developed to explain the environmental, feminist, peace advocacy, and identity-based mobilizations that emerged in Western Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Unlike classical working-class movements, this approach drew attention to forms of collective action organized around cultural, symbolic, and identity demands, rather than economic interests. Thus, an alternative to class reductionism was

offered, and the concept of collective identity was placed at the center of the analyses. One of the important contributions of this literature is that it shows that conflict in modern society is produced not only in the field of production but also in areas such as lifestyle, body politics, environment, gender, and public visibility. However, over time, it has been observed that this approach also produces certain fixating assumptions. The tendency to link "movement" to a specific collective subject, "identity," and organizational continuity is insufficient in explaining contemporary forms of social movement (White et al., 2007).

**The Limitations of Collective Identity-Centered Analysis:** In the literature on new social movements, collective identity has been considered both a precondition and a consequence of mobilization. Shared experience, shared victimization, and a shared symbolic framework have been considered as fundamental unifying elements of action. However, in the age of digitalization and platforming, collective identity often emerges not as a pre-established whole, but as a temporary and fragmented sense of belonging. Today, many mobilizations do not require a strong organizational structure or long-term membership. Participation often occurs through online signatures, social media sharing, short-term street actions, or symbolic solidarity practices. This situation makes the continuity and integrity of collective identity debatable. Participants may position themselves not as "members of a specific movement," but as part of a specific event or moment.

In this context, the approach that bases movements on fixed collective subjects is very inadequate in understanding current forms of activism. This is because new forms of mobilization often exhibit characteristics of discontinuity, fluidity, and network permeability.

**Digitalization and Network Mobilization:** The widespread adoption of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the organizational forms of social movements. Social media platforms enable instant mobilization; they accelerate information circulation and provide visibility. However, to view this transformation solely as a technical change is to be ignorant or uninformed. Because here, the ontology of activism is also changing.

The perspective offered by relational sociology is extremely illuminating here. As Harrison White (2008) emphasizes, identities are not fixed phenomena. They are more the product of positioning within networks. In today's digital world, individuals can connect to different networks simultaneously, thus producing multiple positionings. The ability of individuals to assume permeable roles between movements increasingly blurs the boundaries of the collective subject. Similarly, Bruno Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory offers a powerful framework for analyzing digital mobilization through its understanding of the symmetrical relationship between human and non-human elements. In fact, algorithms, hashtags, data streams, and platforms are no longer passive tools of action; they are actants that shape mobilization. This perspective represents a significant breakthrough by avoiding reducing movement analysis solely to human subjects. Another characteristic of digital mobilization is its tendency to produce moments of intensification rather than continuity. Viral campaigns rise rapidly, reach large audiences, and fade away just as quickly. This fluctuating structure, which moves much faster than in the past, is now inadequately understood and explained through classical organizational and institutionalization models.

**Seriality and Loose Collectivism:** As collective identity weakens, loose, individualistic, and more independent socialities gain importance (Kashima, et al., 2025).

In this context, the concept of seriality, developed by Iris Marion Young (2009), refers to individuals connecting with each other due to similar structural positions without a shared sense of identity. Here, "serial" refers to a social form created by parallel positionings rather than an organized unity. Today, many movements emerge through serial positionings rather than producing a fully organized collective identity. For example, individuals exposed to a particular gender experience, environmental concerns, or economic insecurity can act as part of the same structural conditions, even if they do not know each other directly. This situation itself is a different way of establishing solidarity than the classical understanding of unity. The concept of seriality is particularly important in explaining the loose ties of the digital age. Thousands of people gathering around a hashtag can establish a temporary unity through parallel experiences rather than a shared ideological program. This association, as a social reality, may not always produce a fixed identity, but it can have political effects.

**Emotion and Cruel Optimism:** As is known, the literature on new social movements has long progressed within the framework of rational self-interest, identity, and resource mobilization. However, in recent years, the role of emotion, especially hope and disappointment, in mobilization processes has become sociologically significant ( Stets and Turner, 2014). In this context, Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism" refers to the subject's attachment to an object of hope, even if it may not always lead to their own well-being. This attachment continues despite the possibility of failure. The continuation of mobilization, frequently observed in new social movements, even if gains are not achieved, may be related to this fragile regime of hope. Climate change movements, demands for democratization, or struggles for equality, in particular, are directed towards long-term and uncertain goals. Participants continue their activism even though they know that the goals may not be achieved. This situation can be explained not only by strategic calculations but also by emotional attachment. For example, people do not change parties and continue to vote even knowing they will lose. Similarly, retirees and young unemployed people do not give up street protests even knowing they will face tear gas.

**General Limitations of the Literature:** In light of these discussions, three main limitations of the literature on new social movements can be mentioned:

- a) Tendency to fixate the collective subject
- b) Anthropocentric analysis
- c) Ignoring the affective dimension

These limitations make it difficult to fully grasp the dynamic, networked, and fragile nature of contemporary social movements. Therefore, instead of producing typologies, a rethinking at the ontological level is needed.

## **Objectives**

This article proposes to reconceptualize new social movements through a relational model. It attempts to answer the following research questions:

- a) Is a new ontological foundation needed for new social movements? If so, how and where can it be provided?

- b) Which features of Actor Network Theory contribute to new social movements and how?
- c) How can a relational model for new social movements be proposed?

### METHOD

It should first be stated that the theoretical model proposed in this article requires considering both the diversity of human and non-human actors and relational dynamics when analyzing new social movements. However, in this way, movements can be conceptualized not only through structural or individual perspectives, but also through a network of relationships at the micro, macro, and digital levels.

In other words, the relational model proposed in this article aims to understand new social movements through a network of relationships involving micro and macro-level actors. To provide more detailed information, the model has three main components or levels:

- a) Individual level: This refers to the subjectivities, identity productions, and motivations of movement participants. Here, the emotional experiences and expectations of participants are discussed in relation to Berlant's (2011) concept of Cruel Optimism, and how individuals guide movements within a cycle of hope and disappointment is explored.
- b) Collective level: This encompasses the organizational forms, solidarity mechanisms, and normative structures of movements. This dimension is addressed within the framework of Harrison White's relational sociology approach; individuals' actions are understood through their positions within the collective structure and network. The concepts of liminality, turning point, and uncertainties are used, drawing upon Turner (1974;1988 )and White ( 1992; 2008).
- c) Non-human actors: Based on the ANT perspective, the role of non-human actors such as digital platforms, environmental data, and campaign materials as technology-based actants in organizing the movement is discussed (Latour, 2005). Non-human actors, or actants, are included in the theoretical model not only as supporting tools but also as active nodes shaping the organizational and strategic structure of the movement.

**How the Model Works:** The theoretical model allows for understanding the dynamics of new social movements through the intensity and diversity of relationships between actors. In this context, there is a continuous interaction between individual experiences and collective forms of organization. Non-human actors function as tools that strengthen or limit this interaction. For example, digital platforms appear in the model as an actor that both facilitates communication and defines the boundaries of the movement.

The theoretical basic assumptions that form the basis of this article can be summarized under three headings:

- **Relational Perspective:** The model allows understanding social movements not only through the motivations of individuals or social structures, but also through a network of relationships.

- Actor Network Theory: By making visible the role of non-human actors in determining movement dynamics, it adds a new dimension to the classical social movement literature.
- Emphasis on the Emotional Dimension: From a Cruel Optimism perspective, the interaction between individuals' motivations for participating in movements and their emotional experiences is theoretically explained.

The article sections have been created in line with the research objectives.

### **Relational Sociology and Network Ontology**

The attempt to rethink new social movements primarily requires an ontological intervention. Our way of analyzing movements is based on our assumptions about what social reality is. If we understand the social through fixed actors, groups, and institutions, we also link movements to these fixed subjects. However, relational sociology defines social reality not through fixed entities, but through relationships. This approach has radical consequences in movement analysis.

**Fundamental Assumptions of Relational Ontology:** Relational sociology argues that social units (individuals, groups, institutions) are not pre-given essences; they are formed within relational positionings. From this perspective, actors cannot be considered independently of the connections within the network. Identity, interests, strategy, and even the processes of subjectification are products of relational configurations.

Harrison White (2008), a prominent representative of this approach, defines identity as "a positional effect formed within efforts to control uncertainties." In an environment of uncertainty, actors develop network positions while trying to produce meaning and stability in order to overcome uncertainties. Therefore, relationally, identity is not a fixed essence; It is a relational performance (White et al., 2007).

This ontology critiques and problematizes the assumption of the collective subject, which is prevalent in the literature on new social movements. If identity is formed within a network, then "movement" is not a pre-existing subject; it is a temporary result of a specific relational intensification. This necessitates analyzing movements as processes, which are the fundamental indicator of relational sociology, rather than as fixed structures.

**Movement as Network Intensification:** From a relational perspective, a social movement is the intensification of relationships in a specific time and space. This intensification can occur between individuals, as well as between human and non-human elements. At this point, Bruno Latour's (1991;2004; 2005) Actor-Network Theory offers an important possibility. According to Latour, the social is not a space between people; it is a network formed by heterogeneous elements (humans as well as non-humans, i.e., technologies, documents, objects, algorithms). This approach removes anthropocentrism from the analysis of movement. For example, let's consider a digital protest. Here, the hashtag is not just a symbol. An algorithm is not merely a technical background. A visual image is not merely a representation. Each of these acts determines the direction, speed, and visibility of a social movement. Therefore, analyzing a movement requires following not only the intentions of the participants but also all the components of the network. This perspective better explains the dispersed and temporal nature of new social movements.

The movement is no longer a structure managed by a central subject; it is a temporary synchronization of different nodes.

**Uncertainty, Control, and Temporality:** Another important contribution of relational sociology is placing uncertainty at the center of its analysis. In Harrison White's (2008; Kasapoglu, 2016) work, social life constantly produces uncertainty. Actors try to create areas of control within this uncertainty, both in relationships and values.

New social movements similarly emerge in an environment of uncertainty: uncertainty of outcomes, discontinuity of participation, transience of alliances, and algorithmic fluctuation of visibility are all present.

In this context, the movement is not a stable institutional structure; it is a collective response to uncertainty. However, this response itself is not permanent. The network dissolves, the nodes disperse, and the concentration ends. This temporality contradicts the classical organizational theories' expectation of "institutionalization." Yet, in contemporary mobilizations, fluctuation has become the norm instead of continuity.

**The Distributed Nature of Subjectification:** Relational ontology treats the subject not as a central consciousness, but as a distributed process. In this context, the "subject of action" is not a singular collective actor. Subjectification occurs simultaneously at different network nodes. This becomes clearer when considered together with the concept of seriality. As defined by Iris Marion Young (2006; 2009; 2011), a series is established through shared positioning rather than shared identity. Serial individuals can be part of the same structural configuration without directly relating to each other. The relational perspective reinterprets this serial structure in network terms. A series is a large but low-density network formed by loose connections. This network can create a movement effect by intensifying at certain moments.

**Affective Networks and Cruel Optimism:** Network ontology encompasses not only structural connections but also affective circulation. Emotions such as hope, anger, fear, and solidarity circulate within the network, strengthening or weakening mobilization. Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism" refers to the subject's attachment to a potentially harmful object of hope. In a relational framework, this attachment is not an individual psychology but a form of network circulation. The object of hope is constantly reproduced within the network, keeping participants connected. This perspective helps explain why movements don't dissipate or why they reappear repeatedly. The network may dissolve; however, the attachment of hope can be re-established at different nodes.

**Transition from Typology to Model:** The most important contribution of relational ontology is that it allows us to transcend the tendency to produce typologies. Typologies divide movements into fixed categories: environmental, feminist, digital, identity-based, etc. However, the relational perspective makes these categories themselves the focus and subject of analysis.

Movements can now be understood as follows:

- Network intensifications
- Serial positioning
- Synchronization of human and non-human actors
- Affective attachments

This understanding allows for a more dynamic and processual analysis of new social movements. In the next section, this theoretical framework will be further expanded, and Actor-Network Theory will be discussed in detail, demonstrating how non-human actors can be included in the analysis of movements. This discussion will form one of the cornerstones of the relational model to be proposed.

### **Actor-Network Theory and the Activism of Non-Human Actors**

The analysis of new social movements has often focused on human subjects, collective identities, and organizational structures. However, in the contemporary context where digitalization, platforming, and technical infrastructures have become decisive, this anthropocentric approach is insufficient. At this point, Actor-Network Theory (ANT), developed by Bruno Latour (2005), offers an ontological expansion to the analysis of social movements.

**Redefining the Social:** Actor-Network Theory does not consider the “social” as a pre-given field. According to Latour, the social is formed by the temporary coming together of heterogeneous elements. People, technologies, documents, algorithms, spaces, and material objects are all part of the same network. Each of these elements is an “actant”; that is, it contributes to the formation of the action (Kasapoglu, 2016).

This approach requires a significant transformation when analyzing new social movements. Movement is no longer solely the collective will of conscious individuals. Movement is a network effect produced by the combined effects of elements such as:

- Algorithmic prioritization of digital platforms
- The visibility capacity of hashtags
- The speed of circulation of visual images
- The instantaneous mobilization power of live streaming technologies
- The architecture of physical space

Therefore, to understand movement, it is necessary to examine not only the motivations of the actors but also the technical and material components of the network.

**Algorithmic Mediation and Visibility Regimes:** In digital age movements, visibility is one of the most critical dimensions of mobilization. However, this visibility is not evenly distributed. Algorithms are invisible regulators that determine which content will spread and which call will reach large audiences. In this context, the algorithm is not a passive tool; it is an active actant. It shapes the rhythm of the movement by highlighting or suppressing certain content. The rapid rise and fall of viral campaigns are largely related to these algorithmic arrangements. This situation problematizes the classic concept of “organizational strategy” in movement analysis. Strategy is no longer merely the planning of human actors; it is a negotiation process involving platform architecture. Movement exists within a bargaining process established with technical infrastructure.

**Material Objects and Political Intensification:** Actor-Network Theory also makes visible the political role of material objects. A banner, a mask, a tent, or an object of environmental disaster goes beyond being a symbolic tool of mobilization. These objects trigger affective intensification, facilitate media circulation, and generate collective

attention. For example, images of destruction emerging after an environmental disaster are not merely representational; they are a constitutive component of action. The visual image circulates within the network, generating anger, empathy, and solidarity. Thus, a non-human element is placed at the center of political mobilization. This analysis allows us to understand new social movements beyond the symbolic level, as the interaction of material and technical networks.

**Distributed Agency:** One of the most important conceptual tools offered by ANT is "distributed agency." The action cannot be attributed to a single subject; it is spread throughout the entire network. This makes it easier to understand the leadership crises and lack of central organization observed in new social movements. Contemporary social movements often lack a clear leader. Decisions circulate within horizontal networks. Calls to action spread virally.

Instead of viewing this structure as a weakness, it is possible to interpret it as distributed agency. The strength of the movement may lie in its lack of centralization. However, this same characteristic dialectically also brings with it fragility.

**The Intersection of Seriality and ANT:** When Iris Marion Young's (2006; 2009) concept of seriality is considered together with Actor-Network Theory, the specific structure of new social movements becomes clearer. While serial individuals connect through parallel positioning rather than a shared identity, ANT makes the technical and material infrastructure of this connection visible. A serial is a low-density but extensive network. Certain events, images, or algorithmic surges temporarily intensify this network. Thus, the serial structure can produce a short-lived but powerful political impact. This model differs from the classical understanding of "organization." Here, the movement is not a continuous institutional structure; it is a network synchronization that occurs repeatedly.

**Fragility and Cruel Optimism:** The distributed and networked structure also produces fragility. The continuity of the movement depends on the stability of the technical infrastructure and affective circulation. If visibility decreases or the object of hope loses its credibility, the network quickly dissolves. At this point, Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism" regains importance. The object of hope - for example, justice, equality, or a solution to the climate crisis - is the affective bond that prevents the network from disintegrating. However, this object may often not be realized. The movement continues despite this possibility of non-realization. In a relational framework, cruel optimism is a form of attachment that ensures the continuity of the network but also exhausts the subject. This explains both the resistance and exhaustion of contemporary movements.

**De-Anthropocentrism:** Reading new social movements solely through identity politics carries an anthropocentric limitation. However, the climate crisis, the pandemic, digital platforms, and biotechnological developments clearly demonstrate the political determinism of non-human elements. Actor-Network Theory offers a more inclusive framework by including these elements in the analysis. Thus, the movement ceases to be a product of human will; it becomes the effect of a heterogeneous network that also includes non-humans (Latour, 2017).

## **A Relational Model Proposal for New Social Movements**

This article aims to propose two models, one simple and the other more complex.

### ***Basic Characteristics of the Simple Model***

The simple relational model analyzes new social movements in three dimensions:

- a) Inter-actor relations: Networks between human and non-human actors (technology, nature, symbols).
- b) Cultural and symbolic production: The meaning-making processes of movements, ways of transforming social norms.
- c) Future imaginings: Alternative future visions of movements and the processes of generating hope.

This model emphasizes that movements are organized not only through individual or collective interests, but also through relational networks and cultural meanings. In summary, it is based on a threefold classification:

- a) Identity-based movements: Focused on inter-actor relations, social recognition, and identity production.
- b) Issue-based movements: Networks are established around specific issues, and cultural and political impact is produced.
- c) Hybrid movements: Multi-layered networks and cultural production processes operate simultaneously, both on the axis of identity and thematic change.

The relational perspective allows new social movements to move beyond classical economic and class-based explanations. Analyzing movements in terms of identity, culture, and future visions helps us better understand their capacity to transform social norms and cultural structures. In this framework, new social movements should be seen not only as tools of protest or change, but also as mechanisms for producing social meaning. The relational model offers a powerful tool for explaining the multi-actor, multi-level, and dynamic nature of movements.

### ***Complex Model: The Relational Intensification Model***

This article attempts to propose a second, more complex model. First, it demonstrates how social relations are reshaped through identity, cultural production, and future imaginings, using a simple model. The relational model makes visible the interactions between individuals, culture, and social structures within movements. This approach reveals that social movements trigger social transformation not only through economic or political goals, but also through cultural, symbolic, and social meaning production. However, it should be reiterated that the main claim of this article is that new social movements should be understood not as fixed collective actors, but as relational intensifications. Accordingly, a second conceptual framework, which can be called the "Relational Intensification Model," is proposed here. In fact, various models have been developed regarding the intensification of relationships in the fields of education, health, communication and industry (Babkin et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2024).

The model is based on three fundamental axes: These three axes are extremely important because they explain the temporal synchronization of human and non-human actors within heterogeneous networks.

- a) Network Intensification
- b) Serial Positionality
- c) Affective Attachments.

Movement as Network Intensification: From a relational perspective, movement is not a static subject; it is a network that intensifies at a given moment. This concentration has the following characteristics:

- Increase in nodes (a jump in the number of participants)
- Bond density (increase in the frequency of interaction)
- Increased visibility (media and digital circulation)
- Synchronization (simultaneous action production)

In this model, movement is conceived as a “threshold phenomenon” (Kahn and Kalai, 2007) rather than an organized structure. When a certain intensity threshold is exceeded, the “movement” becomes visible; when it falls below the threshold, it dissolves. This approach abandons the classical expectation of institutionalization. The disintegration of the movement is not a failure; it is the natural dissolution process of the network. In the serial structure defined by Iris Marion Young (2009), individuals are exposed to parallel structural conditions even without a shared sense of identity.

In the relational model, serial positioning works as follows:

- Shared experience ≠ shared identity
- Parallel victimization → potential synchronization
- Loose bonds → broad mobilization capacity

The serial structure is a low-density but extensive network. This network can intensify thanks to a specific triggering event (e.g., crisis, violent incident, environmental disaster, political decision). Therefore, the model explains the movement not with a pre-existing collective consciousness, but with its potential capacity for synchronization.

Affective Attachment and Fragile Continuity: The third axis of the model involves affective circulation. The sustainability of the movement depends not only on structural positioning but also on the circulation of emotions such as hope, anger, and solidarity. As mentioned earlier, Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of “cruel optimism” is explanatory at this point. Movement participants become attached to an object of hope that may not be realized. This attachment is twofold:

- It delays the disintegration of the network
- It produces exhaustion

Therefore, the model explains both the resilience and fragility of movements simultaneously.

When affective attachment weakens, the network dissolves; however, the object of hope can re-ente Integration of Non-Human Actors: The model is not anthropocentric. Based on Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory:

Algorithms, digital platforms, visual images, material objects and spatial arrangements are considered the constituent elements of the network. These elements both determine visibility and affect the concentration threshold. They accelerate or slow down affective circulation. Therefore, the emergence of movement depends not only on human will but also on the coordination of a heterogeneous network.

The Relational Intensification Model is not linear but cyclical: 1. Serial positioning (potential network) 2. Triggering event 3. Network concentration 4. Affective circulation 5. Dissolution 6. Re-emergence of potential serial states. This cycle explains why contemporary movements reappear repeatedly. Each dissolution is not an end; it is a potential stage of re-intensification.

From Typology to Process Analysis: The most important contribution of this model is that it abandons typological classification and turns to process analysis. Movements are no longer limited to "environmental," "feminist," or "digital" categories. They can be analyzed more through a) degrees of network concentration b) serial breadth capacity c) affective attachment strength d) algorithmic visibility level. This approach conceptualizes new social movements as dynamic, transient, and relational phenomena.

The theoretical contribution of the proposed model actually stems from combining four fundamental literatures. Because this synthesis, achieved with relational sociology (Harrison White) and actor-network theory (Bruno Latour) and seriality theory (Iris Young) and emotional theory (Lauren Berlant), removes new social movements from the identity-centered paradigm and places them in a network and affective ontology.

## CONCLUSION

The Relational Intensification Model proposed in this article intervenes in the literature on new social movements at three levels: ontological, analytical, and methodological.

The model primarily transforms the ontological status of the collective actor. The literature on new social movements is largely built upon the concept of collective identity. However, here, movement is conceived not as a fixed subject, but as a network intensification. This approach repositions identity by bringing Harrison White's (1992; 2008) relational ontology into the analysis of movement.

Furthermore, the model moves away from anthropocentric analysis and, in line with Bruno Latour's (2004; 2005) Actor-Network Theory, includes heterogeneous actors (algorithms, platforms, objects, images) as constitutive components of the movement. Thus, social movement becomes a network phenomenon that is not reduced solely to conscious subjects.

The model abandons the tendency to produce typologies and turns towards process analysis. Common categories in the literature such as "environmental movement," "feminist movement," and "digital movement" serve a stabilizing function around specific identities and themes. The relational model, however, suggests analyzing movements through the following variables:

- Network density level
- Serial positioning width

- Affective circulation capacity
- Algorithmic visibility level

This approach makes it possible to compare levels of density and synchronization, rather than making categorical distinctions between different movements. Iris Marion Young's (2006;2009;2011) concept of seriality offers a form of connection beyond collective identity; while Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism" approach explains why movements are fragile yet resilient. The model integrates these two concepts with network ontology, addressing both the structural and affective dimensions together. This synthesis shows that movements cannot be explained solely through rational self-interest or identity politics; hope, disappointment, and recurring attachments also play a constitutive role.

This article proposes conceptualizing new social movements not as fixed collective actors, but as network intensifications. The Relational Intensification Model analyzes movements along three main axes: serial positioning, network intensification, and affective attachment. This framework goes beyond typological classification, offering a process-oriented paradigm.

The model shifts the literature on new social movements from an identity-centered paradigm to a relational and heterogeneous ontology. This transformation places movement analysis on a more dynamic, temporal, and network-like foundation. Movement is no longer a structure aiming for institutionalization; it is a process that intensifies and dissolves at specific thresholds.

### Suggestions

This approach also requires a change in research methods. Future studies should:

- Combine network analysis techniques (e.g., software like UCINET)
- Digital ethnography and platform studies
- Affect discourse analysis
- Methodologies for monitoring non-human actors. Movement research can no longer be limited to examining organizational structure; it must also encompass algorithmic circulation, visual regimes, and technical infrastructure.

The relational model is particularly applicable in the following areas:

- Climate crisis-related mobilizations
- Digital hashtag movements
- Post-disaster solidarity networks
- Migration and citizenship struggles
- LGBT+ visibility campaigns

In these contexts, the model can be used to analyze how movements intensify, how they dissolve, and through which affective connections they are sustained.

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