

"Society must be controlled". "Green Pass" and the Experiment of a Society of Control in Italy

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ABSTRACT

The introduction in Italy in July 2021 of the “COVID-19 Green Certification”, known as the “Green Pass”, was a particularly important moment in the political and social history of the country. While its use for health reasons is debatable both logically and scientifically, its effects should be measured at the general sociological level. The “Green Pass” allowed Italian social life to be shaped according to a social and political profile that can be traced back to a “society of control”.

This paper, of a theoretical nature, intends to verify such an interpretation through a critical survey of Gilles Deleuze’s well-known *Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle* (1990) and relating the theories to it from cybernetic science, sociology of social systems and the continental philosophy, specifically Michel Foucault. After a short introduction on the history of the instrument’s introduction, the paper, divided into parts reflecting the set-up of Deleuze’s text, examines the systemic social effects of the “Green Pass” with regard to its logic, and concludes with a reflection on the programme of the instrument’s future developments.

The “Green Pass” put into practice a model of a society of control as anticipated by Deleuze, verified with particular reference to some instances of Luhmann’s theory of social systems, and in the perspective of a Foucault’s “normalizing society” in the process of definition and affirmation.

The “Green Pass” has been a controversial tool that has caused forms of social discrimination and exclusion and has seriously questioned the architecture of the rule of law. The conceptual paper tries to reflect on the premises and implications of this instrument.

The approach to the problem both in a critical key and according to concepts and theories of the sociology of social systems, cybernetics and continental philosophy.

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Experiment of a Society of Control in Italy**

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“Society must be controlled”

“Green Pass” and the Experiment of a Society of Control in Italy

Abstract

Purpose – The introduction in Italy in July 2021 of the “COVID-19 Green Certification”, known as the “Green Pass”, was a particularly important moment in the political and social history of the country. While its use for health reasons is debatable both logically and scientifically, its effects should be measured at the general sociological level. The “Green Pass” allowed Italian social life to be shaped according to a social and political profile that can be traced back to a “society of control”.

Design – This paper, of a theoretical nature, intends to verify such an interpretation through a critical survey of Gilles Deleuze’s well-known *Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle* (1990) and relating the theories to it from cybernetic science, sociology of social systems and the continental philosophy, specifically Michel Foucault. After a short introduction on the *history* of the instrument’s introduction, the paper, divided into parts reflecting the set-up of Deleuze’s text, examines the systemic social effects of the “Green Pass” with regard to its *logic*, and concludes with a reflection on the *programme* of the instrument’s future developments.

Findings – The “Green Pass” put into practice a model of a society of control as anticipated by Deleuze, verified with particular reference to some instances of Luhmann’s theory of social systems, and in the perspective of a Foucault’s “normalizing society” in the process of definition and affirmation.

Social implication – The “Green Pass” has been a controversial tool that has caused forms of social discrimination and exclusion and has seriously questioned the architecture of the rule of law. ~~It is therefore necessary to~~ The conceptual paper tries to reflect on the premises and implications of this instrument.

Originality – The approach to the problem both in a critical key and according to concepts and theories of the sociology of social systems, cybernetics and continental philosophy.

Keywords: Control, Covid, Social System, Deleuze, Luhmann, Foucault, Green Pass, Italy

1. History: introduction of the “Green Pass” in Italy

From the outbreak of the pandemic to the present, many innovative instruments, both technological and digital, have been introduced and used in numerous national and international contexts, such as tracking methods, the registration and control of individuals, states of health and access to places, services and activities (e.g. Couch *et al.*, 2020). Among them, we will examine the instrument introduced into Italy in August 2021 popularly known as the “Green Pass” and the effects it has had from the viewpoint of the sociology of social systems, cybernetic science and continental

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2 philosophy, starting from a very famous text by Gilles Deleuze called *Post-scriptum sur les sociétés*
3 *de contrôle* (1990).
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5 The instrument was presented by the President of the Council Mario Draghi on July 22, 2021 as a
6 system able to guarantee the potential of being in safe places among vaccinated people, therefore
7 protected and in a position to protect others. In his words: “The Green Pass is a measure through
8 which the Italians can continue to carry out activities [...] with the guarantee of being among
9 persons who are not contagious”. The Premier declared peremptorily: “Call not to get vaccinated is
10 a call to die: you don’t vaccinate, you become ill, you die; or make others die: you don’t vaccinate,
11 you become ill, you infect, him, she dies. [...] Without vaccination everything must shut down, yet
12 again” (Governo Italiano, 2021).
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14 The idea was that vaccination with experimental anti-Covid drugs (e.g. Cosentino, Marino, 2022),
15 approved as an emergency measure without sufficient time and means of experimentation and
16 verification (e.g. Doshi, 2021b; Thacker, 2021), without publicly sharing the data collected and the
17 analyses produced by the pharmaceutical companies (e.g. Doshi, 2021a; Tanveer et al., 2021), was
18 to be associated with a digital vaccination passport initially ratified by the EU only with a more
19 limited sphere of application for citizens moving among the countries in the Union (Reg. EU
20 2021/953, June 14, 2021). As an alternative to vaccination, people could exhibit the negative result
21 of the PCR test (“swab”) allowing them a temporary pass of extremely short validity (48/72 hours),
22 given that at the beginning no mandatory vaccination had been envisaged except for the medical-
23 health personnel.
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25 At its first introduction throughout Italy, the “Green Pass” was necessary to access indoor bars and
26 restaurants, gyms, cinemas, theaters, museums, stadiums and arenas for sporting events or concerts.
27 The only people exempt were children under 12 years of age, seeing that at that time there was no
28 drug authorized for this age range, and also those exempt for health reasons.
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30 From a strictly logical point of view, this measure for the regulation of public health would have
31 had some sense if, and only if, both the type of immunization conferred by the drug had been
32 known, that is whether the person vaccinated was in any case capable of infecting and of being
33 infected, and, above all, if the duration of such efficacy had been known. Such data, however, were
34 not known at the time the “Green Pass” was introduced and beyond (e.g. Osama *et al.*, 2021). In
35 spite of such logical and scientific uncertainty, in the many successive regulations on this measure,
36 the “Pass” saw its duration change from 12 to 9 and then to 6 months and then apparently was
37 suppressed since it was to be considered “unlimited” (Law 18 of March 4, 2022).
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39 Moreover, despite the lack of certainty regarding the duration and immunizing power and the
40 efficacy of the vaccines, the application of the “Pass” was extended more and more in terms of
41 binding obligation, primarily from the second decree on the subject onwards, including schools,
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2 transport and the world of work, whether public or private. Vaccination could indeed be replaced by
3 a PCR test of negativity still limited to a validity of 48/72 hours, thereby enforcing repeated tests,
4 each at a cost, on those who legitimately decided not to take the drug. We also recall that an even
5 hazier pathway involved the criteria for having recovered from the natural infection which, for
6 reasons that are unclear and with no scientific basis (Kojima *et al.*, 2021), recovery that was only
7 with great difficulty and only in certain cases or for certain periods considered at least equivalent to
8 the vaccination.

9
10 Later, the instrument was “enhanced” to a version popularly called the “Super Green Pass”. This
11 denoted singular tenacity, even when faced with increasingly serious inconsistencies, among which
12 the fact that, the duration and efficacy of protection not being clear, people who were vaccinated but
13 without the obligation of the swab even though perhaps infected and even with symptoms, were
14 allowed to transmit it everywhere through the “Pass” that gave them complete freedom of
15 movement and social life. However, the “Super Green Pass” was introduced on December 6, 2021
16 and was issued only to the vaccinated or to those who had recovered and was in use together with
17 the “basic” “Green Pass” issued to those who only had a “swab” done with a validity of 48/72
18 hours. Lastly, on December 15, 2021, the mandatory vaccination already in act for medical-health
19 personnel since the April 1, 2021, was extended to the administrative personnel in health facilities,
20 teachers and administrative personnel in schools, the military and the police forces, including the
21 prison police and the personnel of the emergency services. This obligation and the “Super Green
22 Pass” coincided and determined the profile of a society in which a tracking systems, as a tool that
23 keeps track of users of a service and movements within a territory, and the access authorization
24 included post offices, banks, public offices and so on. The “Green Pass” system in its most
25 extended version lasted until April 30, 2022. Currently at the end of the 2022, it is mandatory only
26 to access health facilities in specific cases.

2. Among the snake’s coils: Gilles Deleuze’s Society of control

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28 ~~There is a very famous short text by Gilles Deleuze called *Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle*~~
29 ~~(1990).~~ At a approximately 30 years since Deleuze’s essay, *Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de*
30 *contrôle (1990)*, the handling of the social and health SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic crisis has
31 highlighted and almost brought true his analyses. Divided into three parts – *History, Logic,*
32 *Program* – in it the philosopher presented the profile of a forthcoming “society of control” which
33 would historically follow upon two previous models of society: the “societies of sovereignty” and
34 the “disciplinary societies”, particularly analyzed in Michel Foucault’s studies (e.g. 1975). In
35 Foucault’s classical view, in the former the sovereign power would mainly deal with the issue of “to
36 tax rather than to organize production, to rule on death rather than to administer life”: such as came

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2 about, for example, in the societies of the *ancient régime* or where there were forms of traditional
3 authority (Deleuze, 1990, p. 3). In the latter, however, the great dominant model of social
4 organization was the internment of individuals, in diverse times and ways, in closed environments
5 such as prisons, the army, schools, factories and so on. With the aim, moreover, of enhancing the
6 individual's productive capacity through a system of physical and psychical discipline structured in
7 *knowledges/powers* largely coinciding with scientific *disciplines* and with the human and social
8 sciences, that would have found in the factory regime one of its most important expressions
9 (Melossi and Pavarini, 1981) culminated in Ford's industrial model and Taylorist scientific
10 management, the disciplinary societies arise and become more and more prevalent from the last part
11 of the eighteenth century until they were the main society model in the twentieth century.

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19 However, their day seems to have been short. Already in the nineteenth century, but even more so
20 later, from the second half of the eighteenth century the societies of control arise to become stable at
21 the end of the twentieth century. Starting from William Burroughs' (1978) visionary intuitions and
22 the sociological-philosophical insights of Paul Virilio (e.g. 1977), yet with more than one hidden
23 reference to Norbert Wiener and cybernetics (1948), Deleuze held that this type of society seemed
24 to be "a system of variable geometry the language of which is numerical (which doesn't necessarily
25 mean binary)" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 4). The starting point was the control theory: "controls are a
26 modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other,
27 or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point" (*ibidem*).

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34 After outlining the history, again very rapidly yet efficiently, Deleuze developed an interesting
35 comparison with the disciplinary society, pointing out two important aspects to explain their
36 specific "logic".

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40 On the one hand, regarding the first aspect, within them the use of "signature" and "number" typical
41 of disciplinary societies is outdated, and the order of "code" and "password" is affirmed. We go
42 from identifying an individual within a mass by means of a "serial number", unique to each member
43 of a group understood as a series, to a condition of continuous modulation connected to a code to
44 which state controls are linked, to which the subject is unceasingly submitted. Implicitly echoing
45 Baudrillard's language about the masses (e.g. 1978 [1983], p. 21 "orbital circulation"; p. 50: "the
46 orbital, interstitial, nuclear, tissual network of control and security"), Deleuze presented the "man of
47 control" as an individual "undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network". The individual really
48 becomes a "dividual" and the masses becomes "samples, data, markets or banks" (Deleuze, 1990,
49 p. 5).

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57 A perfect example of this anthropological and sociological transformation is offered by the
58 mutation of money: from a printed currency connected to a gold value and linked to a market of
59 material assets, it becomes a dematerialized, continuous financial flow connected to speculation on
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2 the derivatives market. This last is a transformation, we may add, that seems to take to extreme
3 consequences the characters in the *Philosophie des Geldes* (1907²), as described a little less than a
4 century earlier by Georg Simmel and indicated in the criteria of “an all-embracing teleological
5 nexus” (Simmel, 2005, p. 435) of means-ends at an integral extended social level, of formal
6 equality and *calculative* functions. Such features of money as a symbol of modern capitalistic
7 society were both a matrix and an expression of a structure of social relations in an instrumental
8 sense. For this reason, said Simmel, the style of modern life goes forward between a social sense
9 considered “objective”, claiming to be universal and with leveling effects at work over the whole of
10 society, and the multiple infinity of particular “subjectively differentiated forms of life” (ivi, p.
11 447). This condition is at the base of the deep, insoluble existential and cognitive contradiction
12 undergone by the individual in his life and experience.

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14 On the other hand, as the second aspect featured by societies of control, Deleuze underlined the
15 importance of machines and technology against a more general background that perceives a
16 connection, as evident as problematic, between the social structure and techno-scientific sphere.
17 Without openly saying so, this thinker adopted almost to the letter a thought of Norbert Wiener’s,
18 according to which “every age is reflected in its technique ... if the seventeenth and early eighteenth
19 centuries are the age of clocks, and the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constitute the age
20 of steam engines, the present time is the age of communication and control” (Wiener, 1989, p. II).
21 Deleuze modified this statement in part, pointing out that in societies of control there is a
22 domination by “machines of a third type” such as computers “whose passive danger is jamming and
23 whose active one is piracy and the introduction of viruses” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 6).

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25 Just as the reference to cybernetics was present, so was that to thinkers such as Jacques Ellul and
26 criticism of the “technical system” (e.g. 1977). In these pages we furthermore find condensed what
27 a good deal of sociological reflection was studying and highlighting (e.g. from Bell, 1973, to
28 Giddens, 1990, Bauman, 2000 and so on). The technological transformation of capitalism and the
29 succession of industrial revolutions had led to a first stage of production, distribution and
30 consumption of material goods, defined as “capitalism of concentration”, to a “capitalism of higher-
31 order production” centering on a cycle of the sale and consumption of immaterial goods and
32 services. Underlying this analysis are the processes colonizing the imaginary and the symbolic
33 world through the means of communication, ever wider, more multimedial and totalizing, and
34 tending to coincide with social reality as preconized by Marshall McLuhan (e.g. 1964). Today we
35 see clearly how the last stage of post-industrial capitalism had its own cultural logic (Jameson,
36 1991), the most recent expression of which is represented by the platform capitalism (Srnicsek,
37 2017).

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2 In other terms, contemporary capitalism in Deleuze's rapid insights appears almost exactly in
3 Baudrillard's terms (e.g. 1981): a radical order of simulacra centering on the notion of "service" and
4 coinciding with society throughout its extension and possessing a transformative anthropological
5 force. Instead of factories, today there are corporations; instead of the buying and selling of goods
6 and stocks, there is extreme financialization and the access to services of any kind, immaterial
7 above all, by means of standards of acquisition permanently extending through time. These aspects
8 have been thoroughly investigated in this and in further forms by numerous studies until they have
9 achieved the definition of a real *anthropology of debt* (e.g. Lazzarato, 2013; Stimilli, 2019).

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11 The historical and logical perimeter of the imminent society of control had ended with its
12 "program". In Deleuze's view, we were "at the beginning of something". Within the diverse
13 disciplinary internment environments, variations started to arise belonging to a society of control.
14 "Electronic collars" for inmates, "perpetual training" in the school system, forms of a "new
15 medicine" addressing "potential sick people and subjects at risk" in the health system, and new
16 forms of economy, money and work in the "corporate system": all "small examples" of a
17 "progressive and dispersed installation of a new system of domination" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 7).

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19 Emblemizing the society of control in the picture of a snake whose coils "are even more complex
20 than the burrows of a molehill" of the previous disciplinary society, Deleuze wrote a political text in
21 which he recalled the need "to look for new weapons" (ivi, p. 4) against what appeared to be the
22 unstoppable advance of a new model of society.

3. Logic: the "Green Pass" as a device of an integral cybernetic society

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24 We have dwelt at some length on Deleuze's text because it offers a theoretical platform still valid
25 with respect to a model of society of control, in the perspective of an evolution of the social systems
26 and in connection with the techno-scientific advancement. In fact, Deleuze's theory has been
27 variously recalled over time and recent studies have up-dated the terms within the present context
28 (Brusseau, 2020). Among these, The "Green Pass" has made an interesting social, political and
29 cultural laboratory out of Italy; starting from the Deleuze's thesis, we can now identify those
30 elements that characterize its particular *logic* in the outlook of cybernetic science and the sociology
31 of social systems.

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33 In the classical position, cybernetics is the science of governing living and non-living systems, the
34 science of "control and communication in the animal and the machine" (Wiener, 1989). Coined by
35 Norbert Wiener in 1947, coming from the Greek *kybernetes* equivalent to the Latin *gubernator*, the
36 term refers to the "steersman", so one could read 'cybernetics' as 'the science of steersmanship'
37 (Pickering, 2010, p. 3). This semantic curve on *governing* should be stressed. A science
38 constitutively interdisciplinary, founded on logical-mathematical models with numerous theoretical
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2 and applicative ramifications from physiology to engineering, from psychology to sociology etc.,
3 cybernetics is founded on certain basic principles, among which the relations between systems and
4 environment, the interaction and the exchange of material, energy and information among elements
5 that as a consequence change their state, the concept of feedback, and the control and
6 communication functions, this last of particular importance for the study of social systems.
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10 In the sociological environment, cybernetics finds independent confirmation and development
11 particularly in Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann's thinking. The structural-functionalist theory
12 of the former queries the understanding of social reality, setting the two systems of personality and
13 the social one beside the other (1951), developing a theory of the structure of social action (1937)
14 and introducing the quadrifunctional AGIL model (Adaptive, Goal Attainment, Integration,
15 Latency) based on the concepts of first-order cybernetics in which communication is pointed in a
16 single direction by the social system of the individual (1961).
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20 Since the Seventies, second-order cybernetics, promoted by the studies of von Foerster (e.g. 1960),
21 Maturana and Varela (e.g. 1975) and others, has introduced the concept of self-organization and
22 autopoiesis as the capacity of living systems to produce and reproduce the elements of which they
23 are made up. In this view, the systems may not only be open, but also closed, and information is at
24 the basis of the system's self-organization. A combination of the reflection brought about by first-
25 and second-order cybernetics finds in Niklas Luhmann's thinking its major theoretical setting in the
26 sociological field.
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30 For the sociologist, the main function of social systems is to reduce complexity. This indicates for
31 the human both the excessive opportunity for experience and action present in the environment and,
32 in the development of his thinking, a fundamental feature of the system itself. The reduction of
33 complexity on the environment and within it is brought about by the social system through the
34 production, autopoietic and self-referential, of specific structures having the selective capacity and
35 the use of specific means that allow the selection among the surplus of opportunities (Luhmann,
36 1984). Among the structures with a selective function, there is, for example, the right that
37 guarantees the appropriate generalization of regulatory expectations regarding behaviour (Luhmann,
38 1972), and power as the code of generalized symbols that guides the transfer of selective services
39 from one party to another (Luhmann, 1975). The social system over time tends to heighten the level
40 of internal complexity, determining an increase in the number and complexity of the same
41 functionally differentiated subsystems of which it is made up and of the connected selective
42 structures.
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46 If we adopt such a perspective of analysis in viewing the introduction into Italy of the "Green Pass",
47 the first thing to be stressed is that the function of complexity reduction has found in it an integral,
48 totalitarian instrument. Founding a biunique, reciprocal relation between the device and the
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1 individual to whom it is associated, the “Pass” envisages the image of a post-humanity and a post-
2 sociality in which the technological element is to be incorporated into the bio-psychic constitution
3 of the person, and it represents an extreme, molecular form of potentially global extension, of a vast
4 network governing populations. We recall Luhmann’s conception of the social system as a
5 connection possessing sense and actions referring one to the others, which can be limited with
6 regard to one environment, i.e., taking on the objective indeterminateness of the boundaries of the
7 system that is therefore defined only by its members: from this viewpoint, the “Green Pass” is an
8 instrument that makes it possible, validly, throughout the whole of the system itself, to establish the
9 limits of the social system according to rules that selectively predetermine possible, legitimate
10 actions and roles.
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12 Let us take a few examples among the many possible to make the point. In one of the strictures of
13 the device, parents were stopped from taking their children into, and fetching them out of, school
14 buildings if they were without the token, quite apart from how long they would be there, in general
15 only a few minutes; outside school buildings, parents and children could be together with no
16 problem. Again, children of 12 years of age were stopped from going to gyms, swimming pools and
17 indoor sporting facilities unless they had the “Pass”; whereas inside schools it was sufficient to
18 wear a face-mask during the whole of the day’s lessons. Another example: even to exercise the right
19 to work, the “Pass” was required: a fact leading to many suspensions and legal suits in the different
20 professional ambits covered by mandatory vaccination, yet this was not extended to all fields of
21 work.
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23 Clearly, the issue is not connected to the “applicability” or “feasibility” of certain measures with
24 respect to others, nor to their “consistency”, but to the general *logic* of the overall set-up. In the
25 logic of complex social systems, the “Green Pass” was a selective instrument mandatory by law that
26 rendered extreme the general principle of the reduction of complexity. In this case, such a reduction
27 was precisely aimed at limiting social infection and at a series of secondary motives such as
28 protecting the frail or safeguarding the national health system. To achieve such aims, which in fact
29 failed both for reasons within the social-health management and for reasons going back to (e.g.
30 Alfieri *et al.*, 2022), the government did not estimate any restructuring of the Italian social system,
31 causing forms of discrimination and social marginalization.
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33 The second aspect to point out is that the “Green Pass” was a symbolically generalized means of
34 communication valid for the whole of social life, if not in fact certainly in potential, implying a
35 transformation in the juridical dimension. With the “Green Pass”, the selective function
36 systemically laid down by positive rights was carried out in terms of the pre-determination of a
37 wide range of activities and social practices regulated by access and permit forms which varied as
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2 time went by. And here we should return to Deleuze's *Postscript* with his amazing predictive focus,
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4 as viewed in hindsight. Towards the end, we read:

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7 The conception of a control mechanism, giving the position of any element within an open environment at any given
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9 instant (whether animal in a reserve or human in a corporation, as with an electronic collar), is not necessarily one of
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11 science fiction. Félix Guattari has imagined a city where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's
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13 neighborhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be
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15 rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person
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17 – licit or illicit – and effects a universal modulation (Deleuze, 1990, p. 7).

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19 In a society with a high rate of systemic connection, functional specialization and role
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21 differentiation where the individual from a certain moment on – namely since the introduction of
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23 the “Green Pass” – sees his own freedom submitted to a regime of modulating, differential
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25 authorizations continually varying as regards expiry deadlines and deployed throughout social
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27 space, a pass identifying the individual becomes *ipso facto* the instrument that defines the sphere of
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29 his subjective rights such as the right to passage, entry to and exit from public and private locations
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31 and spaces, to exercising activities and practices and so on. According to Deleuze, the same
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33 possibility of accessing information could have been allowed or disallowed by the validity of a
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35 password, or a code, or a key while valid, or to which certain requisites were associated (ivi, p. 5),
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37 then with the “Green Pass” every point of social time/space was touched upon, or could have been
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39 touched upon, with no hindrance of any sort.

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41 The issue has therefore juridical aspects that are not merely formal and not easily found in doctrine
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43 and case history. Yet such aspects are unquestionably important for an understanding of the limits
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45 and tensions reached by the rule of law without plunging into some form of authoritarian or
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47 despotic state, when complex devices entailing such strong social and symbolic impacts as that
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49 under discussion are introduced into its order, yet which concern the onto-sociology of law. With
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51 reference again to Luhmann, the “Green Pass” drew to itself, consistently and univocally, the
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53 cognitive and normative strategies of reaction to disappointed expectations. With respect to the
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55 perceived risk of catching the virus, the “Pass” was an instrument on which the individual based his
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57 confidence that his expectation of non-infection would not be deluded through a class of other
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59 parties that official techno-science and public discourse had indicated as certain sources of
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infection. Mario Draghi's words reported above vividly illustrate the question. The issue, however,
is that in the collapse of the cognitive strategies, generalized by *scientific truth*, on top of the
normative ones, generalized by *law*, the one to be valued is clearly the *norm* understood by
Luhmann as counter-factual expectation which in this case reaches an unprecedented intensity. The
“Green Pass” firmly consolidated the temporal, social and material dimension of expectations

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2 regarding the danger of infection precisely in the form of an institutionalized generalization. Hence
3 we can understand both the high degree of institutionalization of consensus with respect to the
4 device and the extraordinary effect of social cohesion around it. The role of the mass-media, the
5 convincing suitability of the scientific and health assumptions, the forms of political activity and
6 debate in such a context, all remain outside our consideration.
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12 4. Programme: solidarity, fear and the frontiers of the normalizing society

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14 The reasoning continues, now, considering the programme of the society of control outlined by the
15 logic of “Green Pass”, correlating some instances of Luhmann’s sociology with a broader
16 sociological profile and, finally, with Michel Foucault’s reflection.
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21 4.1. Social order and *solidarity*: from Luhmann back to Durkheim

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23 In a late essay Niklas Luhmann (1997) had expressed doubt on the possibility that an ever stricter
24 form of control over contemporary social systems would be achieved. According to the sociologist,
25 the combination of self-referential operations and operational closure generates a surplus of possible
26 operations determining “the unresolvable indeterminacy or the intransparency of the system”. “Self-
27 reproduction (autopoiesis) is exactly the process which overdetermines a system and thereby
28 exposes it to that ‘unresolvable indeterminacy’”, the sociologist observes (Luhmann, 1997, p. 368).
29 The point was to be taken up later by Bruce Clarke (2016), underlining how for Luhmann the
30 “hypercomplex system” of contemporary societies “copes with its own ‘self-generated
31 intransparency’” produced by “the overwhelming unknowability both of the environment against
32 which the system holds itself distinct and of the totality of the system’s own complexity” (Clarke,
33 2016, p. 9). For this reason, Luhmann then observed, “concepts like control and steering lose their
34 normal outlines and are in need of definitions” (Luhmann, 1997, p. 367).

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36 Systemic indeterminacy had its own defining foundations introducing time and considering the past
37 and future as impassable frontiers of an action, always limited to the contingent dimension, and of a
38 system represented, from the time point of view, as “inevitably *bistable*”.

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40 Hence it was useful to distinguish *steering*, belonging “to the context of oscillation”, that is the
41 function of distinction between two values of a different state, as the system’s capacity to change
42 the conditions of existence present in order to determine diverse states of the system in future time;
43 and *control*, belonging “to the context of memory”, defined as “the retrospective self-observation of
44 a system which follows upon steering attempts”. In this interpretation, therefore, control is that
45 function of the system that exposes it to constant self-correction (Luhmann, 1997, p. 368).
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2 However, the essay concluded with a reflection on themes of ethics and epistemology that are
3 important for the issue we are dealing with. Both spring from the dynamic between oscillation and
4 the “sedimentation of connected memories” (ivi, p. 369). In effect, neither ethics as a discourse on
5 good and bad, nor epistemology as a discourse on true and false, are self-founded: “they have to
6 acknowledge the distinction true / false itself as true and the distinction good / bad itself as good”
7 (ivi, p. 369). This aporia at the basis of two such nullifying ambits for the human, for Luhmann
8 represents the inescapable conditions within which every social system is found and the
9 consequences of which determine an insuperable “self-produced indeterminateness, which can only
10 be treated further and changed into useful forms contingently” (*ibidem*).

11 Unlike what Luhmann might have thought, however, the “Green Pass” in Italy showed that a
12 society of control in which the dynamic between steering and oscillation is greatly reduced can be
13 introduced overnight. It is true that Luhmann’s reflection possessed a very wide theoretical
14 extension, yet it is just as true that the complexity and uncertainty inherent in the contingency of
15 social life did not prove strong enough to set up automatic forms of resistance when confronted with
16 the implementation of control systems such as that seen in Italy and elsewhere. The Italian social
17 system was reshaped by the “Green Pass” device without great problems of any sort for the majority
18 of the population. This plausibly came about, to no small extent, thanks to the role in the social
19 mechanism played by fear: of infection, of falling ill, of dying.

20 Already envisaged in Luhmann’s thinking as an element connected to danger and risk (1991) and
21 linked to the failure of expectations, fear in this case functioned as a relay capable of activating two
22 mechanisms coordinated at the level of the social body:

- 23 1. A subjective introjection of the processes of social disciplining: lockdowns, face-masks,
24 distancing, “swabs”, vaccination, etc.
- 25 2. An objective extroflexion in the systemic social dynamic in which the citizen participated just
26 as a piece of machinery in an integrated mechanism: this is the use of the “Green Pass”.

27 Here we may fully recuperate Durkheim’s concept of “solidarity” (1893), giving it a new meaning.
28 After the “mechanical solidarity” consisting in a social bond between individuals founded on low
29 individual distinctions and functional specializations of simple, archaic, primitive societies; and
30 after the “organic solidarity” of modern societies, by which individuals come together according to
31 relations of mutual interest and the sharing of functions carried forward separately; perhaps we see
32 a third type of profile: *bio-mechanical solidarity*. In pandemic society the individual appeared to be
33 someone who had lost his effective individuality, an outcome already under way, willing to undergo
34 voluntarily totalitarian social integration founded on fear and on the common sharing of his own
35 biological body in terms of both self-disciplining and submission to mass pharmacological
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2 treatment, crowned by the widespread adoption of a control and discriminatory instrument without
3 any logical and scientific basis.

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5 The fact that this passage came about due to fear of a virus extends our thinking to the sphere of
6 health and medicine, which needs to be considered conclusively in order to understand what the
7 frontiers of a programme already under way are, today, in a society of global control.
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10 11 12 4.2. Reading the society of control through the “normalizing society”

13 ~~Deleuze’s theory has been variously recalled over time and recent studies have up-dated the terms~~
14 ~~within the present context (Brusseau, 2020). Among these, Finally, to develop the interpretation of~~
15 ~~the “Green Pass” as instrument for the establishment of a society of control,~~ here we will examine
16 how Deleuze’s concept of control should be ~~reread~~integrated, in the light of Luhmann’s reflection,
17 with that of Michel Foucault’s biopower, placing it however in relation to a conception of a “~~society~~
18 ~~of normalization~~normalizing society”.

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21 *Il faut défendre la société*, the Course at the Collège de France held in 1976, contains the
22 formulation, which will be taken up again in the famous *La volonté de savoir* of the same year, of
23 the concepts of biopolitics and biopower. With the former term Foucault indicated a type of non-
24 disciplinary power arising in the second half of the eighteenth century that is applied “to man-as-
25 living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man-as-species” (Foucault, 1997, p. 242) and hence “with
26 the population, with the population as political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and
27 political, as a biological problem and as power’s problem” (ivi, p. 245). The latter term indicated
28 the combination of disciplinary power and biopolitics: although the thinker frequently used it as
29 being equivalent to the former term, it was in fact the result of the two forms of disciplinary power
30 on “man-as-body” and of biopolitics on “man-as-species” in a form comprehending both one and
31 the other.
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34 In a passage on the historical affirmation of such powers, Foucault commented on how, ever since
35 the nineteenth century, medicine had achieved a knowledge capable of establishing a link “between
36 scientific knowledge of both biological and organic processes (or in other words, the population and
37 the body)” and how it was ever more important “because, at the same time, medicine becomes a
38 political intervention-technique with specific power-effects” (ivi, p. 252). Developing over a long
39 time, the role of medicine and evidently its role too in handling epidemics – “the threat of which
40 had haunted political powers since the early Middle Ages (these famous epidemics were temporary
41 disasters that caused multiple deaths, times when everyone seemed to be in danger of imminent
42 death)” (ivi, p. 243) – becomes decisive at this point, managing to circulate, also through
43 interventions of health policy and public health, “between the body and the population alike” and to
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2 make it possible “to control both the disciplinary order of the body and the aleatory events that
3 occur in the biological multiplicity” (ivi, p. 252).

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5 Now, thanks to medicine as *knowledge/power* whose authority is recognized both over the
6 individual body and over the social body, the element that circulates among them becomes the
7 *norm*.
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12 The norm is something that can be applied to both the body one wishes to discipline and a population one wishes to
13 regularize. [...] The normalizing society is a society in which the norm of discipline and the norm of regulation intersect
14 along an orthogonal articulation” (ivi, p. 253).
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18 It is life as life, considered throughout its extension from the individual’s body to the whole
19 population, that becomes the object of power through medicine, and the norm becomes the
20 “orthogonal” principle that crosses and orientates the whole social system. The norm represents a
21 power that “needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms” (Foucault, 1976, p. 144)
22 “Normalization” is nothing more, one may theorize from this view, than the overlapping of the
23 cognitive (science and medicine) on the normative (law) strategies seen in Luhmann, but with the
24 specification that, as the “Green Pass” has shown, the normative is no longer simply referable to the
25 sphere of positive law but to a wider moral dimension, understood in Durkheim’s sense as *bio-*
26 *mechanical solidarity*, related to a generalized fear of getting ill and dying.
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29 Technologically sophisticated, detailed, outspread, control as the government, in the cybernetic
30 sense, of the population would be possible only through what Foucault again would have defined as
31 an “excess of biopower” connected to techno-scientific development. The power exercised on the
32 life of populations thus reaches a peak of extension and intensity “when it becomes technologically
33 and politically possible for man not only to manage life but to make it proliferate, to create living
34 matter, to build the monster, and, ultimately, to build viruses that cannot be controlled and that are
35 universally destructive” (ivi, p. 254).
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39 As Deleuze affirmed in taking almost word for word a number of Burroughs’ expressions (1978),
40 behind this historical-social process was an impetuous techno-scientific advance, which now
41 impacts directly on the fundamental anthropological constitution down to the genetic code of living
42 things. For the philosopher, “extraordinary pharmaceutical productions” and “genetic
43 manipulations” were already “slated to enter into the new process” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 4); and we
44 should remember that many were the preoccupations and reflections on such topics, among them
45 those of Habermas (2003), also in the wake of Hans Jonas’s seminal work (1977), work which
46 today seems yet more essential to critically understand widely implemented scenarios and their
47 possible consequences.
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5. Conclusions

The programme of a society of control, therefore, seems to have been well outlined and completely tested with the introduction and use of the “Green Pass” in Italy. Thanks to its capacity to redefine the social system according to a cybernetic logic that has made manifest the possibility of a society made up of individuals set within an enclosure of interactions and interdependencies, calculable, controllable, predeterminable, a number of the most lucid, disenchanting interpreters of the present have maintained that the “Pass” was the end and not the means (Agamben, 2021). Not mistakenly, if we observe countries such as China where such surveillance systems linked to “social credit system”, both enforcing laws and regulations and “standardizing and restricting civic behaviour”, are regularly used (e.g. Drinhausen, Brusee, 2022). Whether such critical positions have been excessively gloomy and pessimistic, or whether, based on facts, they have done no more than follow the sources of Deleuze’s reflections whence we set out, time only will tell, just as time only will show whether the “Green Pass” experiment is finished or if it is ready to start out again in new shapes or in shapes we already know.

Further researches on the topic will be able to verify the usefulness and applicability of the theoretical framework presented here, deepening some interpretative lines on the general social level or on specific fields such as legal, medical or economic sectors, also adopting a comparative perspective.

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