

13 Collective Action, Culture and Civil Society: Secularizing, Updating, Inverting, Revising and Displacing the Classical Model of Social Movements

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The sociologist . . . has to search for the conditions of the existence, the autonomy, and the development of civil society — in other words, of the social relations, conflicts, and political processes that weave the texture of social life — and he has to be able to recognize their hidden, degraded, and repressed forms. (Touraine, 1983a: 233–4)

Social movements refer to processes that are not institutionalized and to the groups that trigger them, to the political struggles, the organizations and the discourses of leaders and followers who have formed themselves in order to change the established distribution of rewards and sanctions, forms of individual interaction and overarching cultural ideals, often in a radical way.

The Classical Model

In the history of Western social theory and social science, the most influential approaches to such processes have followed a framework established by the historical understanding of revolutions. Social movements have been identified with, and modelled after, revolutionary movements conceived as mass mobilizations wresting power from an antagonistic state. The revolutionaries' goal, according to this view, is to replace an oppressive form of state power with one directed toward a different end but which makes use of similar means.

This classical approach to social movements is permeated by ontological materialism and epistemological realism, emphases derived from a commonsense understanding of the practical roots of radical change that has developed over the last three centuries and from the particular twist given to such philosophical empiricism by the emergence of industrial society. The intellectuals who organized and ideologized these revolutionary movements typically viewed them instrumentally, as the most efficient means to achieve the radical redistribution of goods. They accepted as an historical inevitability that these struggles depended upon coercion and violence. According to Sartre, the French revolution began with a bloody attack on the Bastille; according to Trotsky, the Russian ended with the storming of the Winter Palace. The success of both these upheavals involved pitched battles, and in the months and years following the revolutionary triumph the new rulers employed every possible means, including

violence and repression, to keep their enemies, the former rulers, from ever coming back to power again.

To have developed this historical reconstruction of 'classical' social movements and their theoretical frames is the singular accomplishment of Alain Touraine. 'The old social movements', he has written, 'were associated with the idea of revolution' (1992a: 143). This association produced a distinctive tactical orientation to power, violence and control. 'The essential matter was the control of power, and images of violence were considered the most symbolic: the occupation of the Bastille or the Winter Palace, mass demonstrations often violently dispersed by the police, occupations of factories and the theme of the general strike' (1992a: 143). These tactics were themselves associated with a strategic emphasis on 'the central role [of] institutional arrangements [and] the division of labor [and] forms of economic organization' (Touraine, 1985: 280). Yet these tactics and strategies, Touraine emphasizes (1984: 38), were less reflections of unavoidable social reality than reflections of the 'materialist social thought which has oriented the Western view of society since the eighteenth century.' It was because materialism created the 'architectonic representations of social life' that these nineteenth-century social movements took 'technological and economic resources' to be 'the foundations of a building . . . made of forms of social and political organization' (*ibid.*).

In an empirical sense, revolutionary movements were not, in fact, without cultural form or ethical content. Rather, it was the theoretical frameworks available to their leaders which limited their self-understanding. Revolutionary leaders conceived of their movements as instrumental means whose effectiveness depended upon the deployment of coercion and force. Ideals and practicalities seemed to them thoroughly intertwined, knowledge and power as one. Indeed, Touraine has spoken about an intellectual 'confusion' that limited the focus of revolutionary actors to the economic field (1977: 323). The 'meta-social warrant' of these earlier movements, he believes, was defined by the 'cultural model' generated by 'industrial society', which seemed to suggest that any significant social change would have 'to coincide with the field of economic relations'. As a consequence, the revolutionary narrative declared that only after new forms of structure had been instituted, only after technical transformations allowed goods and services to be redistributed in an egalitarian way, could ethical, moral and cultural considerations come into play.

As the first and greatest ideologist of these nineteenth-century revolutionary movements, Karl Marx did more to establish the classical model than anyone else, providing the meta-historical narrative that highlighted economic and material concerns and that relegated morality and solidarity as issues to be taken up only at a later historical time. In fact, it can be demonstrated that, far from the relegation of the subjectivity of social movements being dictated by social reality itself, the materialist framework emerged from shifts in the theoretical framework that Marx himself applied. Before he created the figure of the revolutionary leader whose actions are dictated by the logic of industrial society, Marx had argued in exactly the opposite way. He had agreed with other 'Young Hegelians' that revolutionary actors would have to be transformed in an emotional, moral and aesthetic manner before any more objective, structural changes could occur. As late as his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx insisted that private property could not be abolished unless alienation — the subjective basis for objectification — were abolished first: 'The supersession of private property is, therefore, the complete emancipation of all the human qualities

and senses . . . from the subjective as well as the objective point of view' (Marx, 1963 [1844]: 160).

Only after Marx had thoroughly internalized the theoretical logic political-economy did this perspective on revolution shift. Only at this point did he begin to theorize revolutionary social movements in a manner that excluded the imaginary and the normative. Adopting the framework of social scientific positivism, he came to believe that any truly empirical explanation of the workers' struggle, and any effective leadership in the practical sense as well, would have to keep humanism and subjectivity at bay: ideas and feelings about the utopian future society must not be allowed to intrude upon the struggle to transform the present one. Rather than arguing from emancipated subjectivity, Marx now proceeded from within the rubric of 'alienated' action and external order. In *The Holy Family* (1967 [1845]: 368) he wrote that 'it is not a question of what this or that proletarian or even the whole proletariat imagines to be the aim'; and in *The German Ideology* (1970 [1846]: 58–9) he insisted that 'communism is . . . not a state of affairs to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself.' 'It is a question of what the proletariat is and what it consequently is historically compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is prescribed, irrevocably and obviously in its own situation in life' (1967 [1845]: 368). It was from within this perspective that Marx separated socialism, now believed to represent the 'realistic' first stage of post-capitalist society, from communism, which he now understood as the normative and morally implicated second stage (Marx, 1962a [1875]). Labour would no longer be exploited in socialism — in the technical sense of labour power being sold and surplus value appropriated — but, rather, the instrumental character of labour itself, along with material life more generally and impersonal state control, would remain in place. In the revolutionary struggle to create socialism, force — 'the midwife of every old society pregnant with the new one' (Marx, 1962b [1867]: 751) — now assumed centre stage. Only in his preface to the posthumously published third volume of Marx's *Capital* did Engels admit the possibility that future revolutionary struggles could eschew the military violence of the barricades; yet, in the very act of doing so, Engels acknowledged how central force and power had been to the self-understanding of original Marxism and, more generally, to nineteenth-century revolutionary thought.

The Social Science of Social Movements

Secularizing the Classical Model

From the classical approach to social movements there emerged the most influential frameworks employed by social scientists, not only for understanding the sociology of revolutionary movements but for studying non-radical social movements as well.¹ In terms of contemporary social movement theorists, one might say that they have 'secularized' the classical model, denuding it of revolutionary teleology while maintaining its resolutely rational, distributive and materialist explanatory theory. Whether inspired by Marx, by Weber, by post-war conflict theorists or by theorists who emphasize individual and collective rational choice, the most influential macro-sociologists over the last two decades have understood social movements as practical and coherent

responses to the uneven social deprivations produced by institutional change. Oberschall put the case plainly in *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (1973), the work that marked the beginning of the most recent secularization phase. Social systems are made up of 'positions, strata, and classes', he wrote, which in turn are configured by 'the combination of the division of labor with super- and subordination.' Everything follows from these apparently simple facts, more or less unchanged since the beginning of social time. 'Those who are favored have a vested interest in conserving and consolidating their existing share; those who are negatively privileged seek to increase theirs, individually or collectively. Social conflict results from this clash of opposing interests' (Oberschall, 1973: 33). When this secularization of the classical model focused on more micro-level phenomena, it ignored the moral and affective dimensions of collective action, emphasizing instead the constraints of interlocking networks and the availability of organization. Only such factors, it is believed, can provide social actors with dependable and efficient means to mobilize the resources needed to achieve success. For effective organizations and structured patterns of personal relationships can be used in a practical way; with such infrastructural power (Mann, 1986, 1994), movements not only gain power but the leverage eventually to shift the distribution of material things. Whether micro or macro, social movements must always be considered in the pragmatic key.

Just as classical theorists took their cue from the self-understandings of intellectuals who led working-class social movements, contemporary social scientists have been inspired by what they take to be the outlooks of those who have led the most conspicuous social movements in our own day. 'In the course of activism', McCarthy and Zald (1977: 1212) wrote in their paradigm-defining essay on resource mobilization, 'leaders of movements' strategically create not only tactics but also 'general principles'; both are defined with the aim of 'overcoming hostile environments'. Movements are exercises in calculation; they aim at the 'manufacture of discontent' to alter the 'infrastructure of society'. To be successful, these strategic impulses must have recourse to power. 'Organizations' supply power in the proximate sense, for they allow movements to 'implement . . . goals'. But organizations can become powerful only if generalized resources exist, and it is these external conditions of action, conditions that are outside subjective control, that determine organizational strength and, ultimately, movement success. Meaning and motivation are not the point; rather, 'the amount of activity directed toward goal accomplishment is crudely a function of the resources controlled by an organization' (*ibid.*: 1221). If an organization is powerful enough, it can create a 'social movement industry', and this cost-efficient form of production will greatly increase the chance of success.

If social movements for contemporary macro-sociological thinkers resemble complex maximizing machines, it is hardly surprising that violence and force are treated by them merely as forms of efficient means. Tilly's historical studies secularize the classical model in exactly this way (cf. Cohen and Arato, 1992: 504ff.). He describes violence simply as an effective, more or less routine political resort. 'Group violence', he suggests, 'ordinarily grows out of collective actions which are not intrinsically violent — festivals, meetings, strikes, demonstrations' (1974: 46). Particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries group violence was the most conspicuously efficient means of 'pursuing a common set of interests'. Deployment of violence depends on whether or not external social conditions make it cost-effective, i.e., whether social actors employ violence to increase the marginal utility of their

political acts. Thus examining the 'changing conditions for violent protest in western countries', Tilly describes violence as the natural outgrowth of urbanization and industrialization (*ibid.*: 3). Because violence is so mundane and rational, Tilly must conclude that 'repression works'. It follows logically that 'the imposition of violent penalties — damage or seizure of persons or objects — on collective action diminishes its frequency and intensity' (*ibid.*: 285).

The revolutionary model in its secularized form can argue in no other way, despite the often striking incongruity that exists between this model and the contingent, courageous, utopian and undulating pathway along which successful revolutions actually proceed.² Skocpol's (1979) effort to explain social revolutions follows exactly the same line. Ideologies, solidarities and specific regime types are irrelevant in a causal sense. Violent actions, material ends and determined efforts to seize control of the levers of state coercion must be treated as means to ends that are themselves merely means to other ends in turn. Social movement ideologies are not specifications of broader moral concerns but strategies for mobilizing masses. Mann's (1994) 'organizational materialism', while more pluralistic and anti-deterministic, offers an approach to social movements via networks of power that differs in result but not in kind.

Given this general theoretical context, it seems hardly surprising that the most influential sociological investigations of the American civil rights movement have argued that the development of powerful organizations — 'movement centers' (Morris, 1984: 40–76) — was the principal cause of the movement's successful mass mobilizations. Subjective factors, such as leadership charisma (Branch, 1988) or the masses' moral aspirations for a new moral life (Eyerman and Jameson, 1991: 120–45), are understood by these secularizers of the classical model purely in functional terms, as highly efficient means to mobilize organizational resources (Morris, 1984: 91–3). The permeation of the civil rights movement by Christian religious themes and rituals is described by reigning social movement sociologists as an effective strategy, as having successfully motivated non-conformist political action by associating it with the higher, more legitimate and more stable social status of church membership (Friedman and McAdam, 1992: 163). In this way the passionate idealism and the moral emotivism that permeate powerful social movements are reduced to unconscious strategies; they are treated as cleverly employed devices that 'get around' the free rider problem (*ibid.*: 166–9). They are studied as commodities that organizations manipulate to increase organizational power and to gain greater material and non-material support (McAdam, 1988).

The hegemony of this social scientific secularization of the classical model is evident even in efforts to introduce a more cultural approach. While such efforts would seem in principle to offer an alternative to this hypostasization of rational choice, they have had the contrary effect, displacing the symbolic and the utopian with an overweening concern for the practical. Swidler has recently suggested, for example, that social movements develop cultural innovations because the latter are less expensive than efforts to change the more fundamental role arrangements of institutions.

The agendas of many social movements revolve around [just] such cultural recodings. Indeed, since most movements lack political power (this is precisely why they use unconventional political tactics) they can reshape the world more effectively through redefining its terms, rather than rearranging its sanctions. (Swidler, 1996: 9)

While acknowledging the symbolic content of social movement demands, such arguments have the effect of severing the relation between social movement ideology and pre-existing discursive traditions. Rather than speaking of solidarities produced by shared patterns of representations, for example, this approach undermines the relative autonomy of symbolic patterns, demonstrating how movement culture is determined by the conditions outside itself.

The cultures of social movements are shaped by the institutions the movements confront. Different regime types and different forms of repression generate different kinds of social movements with differing tactics and internal cultures. Dominant institutions shape the movement's deeper values. (*ibid.*: 11)

This instrumentalization of the cultural approach, its treatment of symbolic items and themes as a tool kit (Swidler, 1986) that organizations can take or leave at will, demonstrates the extraordinary influence that the classical model has come to exercise over contemporary social science.

Inverting the Classical Model

Yet, while the secularization of the classical model dominates contemporary macro-sociological approaches to social movements, the role of subjectivity has not gone entirely unrecognized. In the last decade a small but visible network of American social and political scientists led by David Snow and his colleagues (e.g., Snow *et al.*, 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988) has discussed how the cognitive and moral framing of issues plays an important role in generating the discontent upon which social movements thrive; Gamson (1988, 1992) has taken up themes like collective identity and public discourse; Klandermans (1988, 1992) has referred to consensus mobilization; Tarrow (1992, 1994) has elaborated on the role in radical social movements of collective action frames.

These reactions against the instrumentalizing and decontextualizing limitations of the dominant approach to social movements draw directly and indirectly upon earlier theoretical traditions that were established alongside, and in reaction to, the European theories that informed the classical model. In Europe itself, of course, alternatives to the revolutionary model were at one time widely known, alternatives that emphasized the emotional and irrational dimensions of group behaviour. Le Bon's instinctualist explorations of crowd behaviour represented the most influential example, one that informed Freud's studies of group psychology. That this alternative to the revolutionary model ultimately failed to inform the main paths of future social science can be attributed as much to its rejection of liberal and democratic ideology as to other, more explanatory objections that were raised at the time. Nonetheless, the undiluted emphasis on the irrationality of subjective motives that characterized such work did create an empirical blindness to the strategic and contingent, and seemed to deny the possibility that social movements could be guided by universalistic and individualistic moral ideals. There were, of course, important figures in classical social theory who, while focusing on non-rational elements, attached these concerns to the project of liberal democracy; still, these writers rarely focused in any systematic manner on

political mass movements for social change. When such movements did come into their purview, moreover, they were often discussed in a pejorative and pessimistic way. This was the case, for example, with Weber's insistence that democratic movements could succeed only in a plebiscitarian form that depended upon demagogic charisma; it was also the case with Durkheim's treatment of public meetings and mass movements according to the model of primitive rituals, an equation that appeared to give extremely short shrift to rationality and contingency. Tarde's studies of the interplay of fashion, conversation, newspapers and public opinion represented a highly original effort to move in a very different direction. Yet, while Tarde's ideas about the micro-sociology of social movements represented a more liberal, democratic and culturally-oriented alternative to the revolutionary model, his ideas were never incorporated into what later emerged as the mainstreams of sociological work.³

In the United States during this same period the situation was decidedly different. American pragmatism developed republican and democratic theories about subjective interests and moral identity as alternatives to the more pessimistic revolutionary model of instrumental motives and material interests on the one hand, and to market-driven theories on the other. Even in the writings of such early figures as Small (e.g., Small and Vincent, 1894: 325-6) and Giddings (1896: 134), individual action is stressed along with other, more institutional forms that mediated between local moral solidarities and national public spheres. Later thinkers continued these themes but emphasized individual creativity and responsiveness in a more explicitly pragmatic way. While Park was more influenced by European irrationalist thought, he made certain to distinguish between crowds and publics (e.g., 1972 [1904]: 80). Cooley (1909: 150) emphasized subjective communication, 'enlargement' and 'animation', and Mead (1964) provided a systematic philosophy of symbolic understanding and gestural communication.

As this pragmatic alternative to the revolutionary model matured, however, its relevance to macro-sociology diminished. On the one hand, responding to the more cynical and more industrialized climate after the First World War, Lippman (1922) and Dewey (1927) decried the decline of the public sphere, the manipulation of political life and the erosion of moral solidarity, themes that, in the more threatening and unstable climate of the 1930s and 1940s, facilitated the widespread embrace of European mass society theory (e.g., Lasswell, 1941). On the other hand, at the same time as this deflation of confidence in moral institutions and collective movements, there emerged strands of pragmatistic social science that withdrew from such societal-level considerations to more individual and interactional concerns. Blumer was the crucial figure here, translating more broadly philosophical tendencies into explanatory sociological models. The one-sided, micro-rather-than-macro, self-rather-than-social emphasis in Blumer's ideas comes through clearly in his assertion that social movements 'can be viewed as societies in miniature, and as such, represent the building up of organized and formalized collective behavior out of what was originally amorphous and undefined' (Blumer, 1951 [1939]: 214).

Blumer's emergentist understanding of social movements, which treated 'social organization', 'values' and 'institutional structure' as 'residue[s]' (*ibid.*) of action instead of acknowledging that they constituted its very foundations, marked a fundamental narrowing of the possibilities of the pragmatist tradition. Historical and comparative considerations were jettisoned; theorizing about the differential effects of institutional spheres was abandoned. In the work of Turner and Killian (1972), the

major theorists of the post-Blumer 'collective behavior' tradition, the attention to contingency illuminates important details about movement organization and construction, about how strain is transmuted into a sense of injustice, about the formation of issue-specific publics, and the creation of counter-movements and cooptative social control (cf. Alexander and Colomy, 1988). Yet the institutional and cultural references of these processes are treated as parameters, not as variables. For example, because Turner and Killian presuppose, rather than explain, the existence of constitutional guarantees for civil freedoms and, more broadly, the strength of a solidary civil community, they conceptualize the public as an emergent collectivity constituted by public discussion and debate alone (1972: 179-98).

While the disciplinary prestige and influence of this 'Chicago school' approach to social movements virtually disappeared under the impact first of functionalism (e.g., Smelser, 1962) and later resource mobilization theory, it re-emerged in the recent interpretative strands of social movement theory referred to above. Some of this work is highly innovative. Building upon the later Goffman's semiotically inspired theory of frame analysis, for example, Snow and his collaborators (1986) deepen the kind of detailed reconstruction of interpretative practices that Turner and Killian had begun. Rather than speaking simply of frame alignment as such, they develop a continuum of possible framing practices stretching from those that reinforce pre-existing normative rules — frame 'bridging' and 'amplification' — to more ambitious and original practices, which they call frame 'extension' and 'transformation'. Yet, despite their intrinsic interest, such arguments elaborate the subjective dimension of social movements in a purely micro-sociological way, often treating the interpretative strategies of social movement actors as if they were generated in an entirely situational, practical, here-and-now way.⁴ Indeed, in its current forms at least, interactionism constitutes more an inversion of the instrumentalism and determinism of the classical model than a true alternative to it.

The problem with these interactionist approaches is less what they include than what they leave out, less in their presences than their absences. Following Blumer's retreat into emergentism, even the most innovative interactionist approaches to social movements accept the institutional language and macro-sociological map that the resource mobilization model provides. They perceive their contributions as pointing to subjective and communicative 'mediating processes' (Klandermans, 1992: 77) rather than as indicating normative and institutional frameworks that exercise control over resource distribution itself. Tarrow, for example, thoroughly accepts Tilly's state-centred, power-oriented view of contemporary societies even while he advocates a systematic opening to the frame approach, and he concludes, quite wrongly in my view, that the 'ideological' and 'organizational' approaches to social movements are more complementary than opposed. Interactionists tend to present cultural processes simply as other kinds of 'solutions to the problem that movements need to solve: that is, how to mount, coordinate and sustain collective action among participants who lack more conventional resources and explicit programmatic goals' (Tarrow, 1994: 7). This argument manifests the same limitations as the cultural version of resource mobilization theory discussed above: the creative and subjective dimensions of social movements are treated as means to an end, not as ends that are pursued because they are meaningful in themselves, which would suggest that social movements themselves might have a cultural aim.⁵

As these limitations suggest, there is a crying need for an approach to social

movements that can challenge the classical model on its own ground, that can illuminate the importance of interpretative practices and cultural environments, while at the same time showing how they are interpenetrated with institutional and historical concerns (see also Sztompka, 1993: 274–300).

Updating the Classical Model

The necessity for an historical-cum-theoretical corrective to the classical approach, one which includes cultural meanings and psychological identities while institutional theorizing as well, would seem to lead directly to work on the new social movements. This important strand of recent sociology, which originated in Europe but is now widely known in the United States, studies social movements in a manner that is open to contingency and to the subjectivities of actors, while exhibiting a strong historical sensibility and institutional focus. By acknowledging the centrality of subjectivity in contemporary social movements, this perspective demands that analysts move beyond a theoretical framework rooted in ontological materialism and epistemological realism. At the same time it connects this growth of subjectivity to empirical shifts in macro-structure, to the movement from an industrial to a post-industrial society. Historical transformations in material production are said to have made the class-oriented revolutionary movements of an earlier day obsolete; their focus on material needs and their realistic epistemology are seen as having been displaced by new movements oriented to meaning and psychological identity. Yet, as this summary suggests, the problem with new social movement theory is the very mirror image of its strength. The fundamental theoretical challenge it has issued to the revolutionary model is camouflaged and ultimately undermined by its historicism and its emphasis on the primacy of institutional factors in social change.

While credit for initially formulating this historical perspective rests with Alain Touraine, whose work will be discussed in detail below, the most radical and precise articulations of its subjective and individualizing implications are those of Alberto Melucci. Melucci's early rationale (1980: 217–18) for this new approach makes precisely the kind of historicizing argument described here. He asks, 'what changes in the system of production allow us to speak of new class conflicts?' The answer he gives very much follows the classical model. 'The mechanisms of accumulation are no longer fed by the simple exploitation of labour force', he writes, 'but rather by the manipulation of complex organizational systems, by control over information and over the processes and institutions of symbol-formation, and by intervention in personal relations.' In short, there emerged in the 1960s and 1970s a new form of domination, for 'the control and manipulation of the centers of technocratic domination are increasingly penetrating everyday life, encroaching upon the individual's possibility of disposing of his time, his space, and his relationships [and] of being recognized as an individual.' To be effective instruments in overcoming such forces, social movements must change their form.

The movement for reappropriation which claims control over the resources produced by society is therefore carrying its fight into new territory. The personal and social identity of individuals is increasingly perceived as a product of social action. . . . Defense of the identity, continuity, and predictability

of personal existence is beginning to constitute the substance of the new conflicts. . . . Personal identity . . . is the property which is now being claimed and defended.

Melucci demands attention, in other words, to the subjective, affective and cultural dimensions of social movements today, but he does not portray this attention as being warranted by theoretical self-criticism on the part of those who uphold the classical model in its revolutionary or secularized form. The need for a shift in theoretical and empirical attention, rather, is presented as if it were the product of the cunning of history, of a new historical configuration created by social conditions that have emerged purely from economic shifts and only in recent times.

With new social movement theory, in other words, contemporary social scientists can embrace subjectivity without giving up an instrumental and materialistic approach to the conditions that foster social movements and ultimately determine their success. The mode of production has changed, new kinds of deprivations emerge, and new social movements are the logical result. Post-materialist, post-industrial, post-affluent, information-based societies are structural arrangements that have created, in this sequential order, new forms of stratification, new conflict groups, new patterns of domination and new perceptions of the goals and interests at stake. Because 'the model of collective action under industrial capitalist conditions is now exhausted' (Melucci, 1989: 246), new means are required to produce structural change. Rather than demanding redistribution, contemporary protest movements concentrate on codes, knowledge and language. Conflict over oppression becomes symbolic, and the analysis of this conflict calls for interpretative methods, not only explanatory frames.

Concrete concepts such as efficacy or success [can] now be considered unimportant. This is because conflict takes place principally on symbolic ground, by means of the challenging and upsetting of the dominant codes upon which social relationships are founded in high-density informational systems. (*ibid.*: 248)

New social movement theorizing has served as a legitimating bridge between the classical model of social movements and the empirical understanding of certain unavoidable tendencies in contemporary social life. It has allowed the old theoretical structure to remain in place, changing only its empirical referents. Is it surprising, then, that the weaknesses in new social movement theory mirror the ones identified here in the older, revolutionary model? The approach is not only theoretically inadequate, however; it is also historically inaccurate. This is not to say that there are not enormous differences between nineteenth-century social movements and those of the present day; it is to say, however, that these differences do not concern the relative weight given to objective and material, as compared with subjective and cultural, concerns. One must point here to certain basic empirical facts. As I suggested very briefly at the beginning of this essay and will elaborate below, from the late eighteenth century onward, and often earlier as well, radical movements in Western European and North American societies were already oriented to cultural norms and personal identities. Recent historians of the French revolution — Furet (1978) and his collaborators in France, and historians like Hunt (1984, 1989), Sewell (1980, 1985) and Baker (1990) in the United States — have strongly emphasized cultural factors in that

prototypically eighteenth-century, pre-industrial upheaval. These studies have made it abundantly clear that the classical model profoundly misunderstood the French revolution, which was less the first ultra-rational and 'modern' radical change than an extension of long-standing republican ideas to a new and unprecedented historical situation, one that encouraged the application to France of an ultra-democratic understanding of the French state. In a similar manner recent studies of nineteenth-century working-class struggles (e.g., Tucker, 1996) demonstrate that the classical model distorted these early radical movements by ignoring the decisive framing impact of local and folk traditions (Thompson, 1964), of egalitarian refractions of democratic and Christian ideas (e.g., Joyce, 1991) and of class-oriented versions of the 'republican' ideology that first crystallized in the quasi-civil societies of the Renaissance city states (e.g., Montgomery, 1980; Wilentz, 1984).

It is not enough to update the classical model, anymore than it is enough to secularize or invert it. Fundamental theoretical revisions must be made in the very understanding of what social change is, even in its most radical forms.

Displacing the Classical Model

The Importance and Ambiguity of Alain Touraine

The quotations from Touraine in the opening paragraphs of this chapter indicate the fundamental contributions he has made to the task of criticizing the materialism and reductionism of the classical model; indeed, it was Touraine who first problematized the very idea of a 'classical model'. At the same time, insofar as he has devoted his positive, explanatory efforts to creating an historicist approach to social change — new social movement theory — Touraine has tended to avoid a sustained confrontation with the classical model in the deepest presuppositional, or theoretical sense. Thus he has portrayed his more subjective, actor-centred approach to social movements as motivated by empirical changes in the objects of analysis rather than by theoretical shifts in the analysis itself. While he speaks pejoratively of 'the revolutionary model', he typically argues that it is the historical 'decline' of revolution as a mode of practice, not the weaknesses of the revolutionary model as a theory, that has allowed contemporary thinkers to give 'the central role to social movements and not to institutional arrangements' (1985: 281). Touraine criticizes the classical model for its myopic focus on institutions: as a theoretical framework, he writes, it describes 'the mainstream of the labor movement' only in terms of 'the desire to take control of the State.' Yet rather than relating this failure to its conceptual apparatus of the classical model, Touraine makes the empirical observation that 'the new social movements [are] very distant from the revolutionary model' (1983: 232).

In making this criticism, I do not wish to argue that Touraine has not encoded these observations about contemporary historicity in a theoretical frame; this is far from the case. As he developed his new empirical thinking about contemporary societies, he was also engaged in creating an 'action theory' that so often has been associated with his name. I do wish to suggest, however, that even here (e.g., Touraine, 1988), in his generalized arguments about the autonomy, subjectivity and reflexivity of the individual actor *vis-à-vis* social systems and institutions, Touraine has grounded his assertions in empirical observations about the changing nature of historical times.

But this historicist grounding leaves his 'action' approach in a particularly vulnerable state. Its validity depends on the empirical adequacy of his argument that new social movements are entirely defined by their emphasis on subjectivity and individuality. I will suggest below that in his most recent work Touraine implicitly acknowledges the failure of this empirical argument and that his action is displaced as a result.

Yet even as Touraine was elaborating his emphasis on actors versus systems and claiming his identity as an 'action theorist', one can also see his thinking developing in a very different way. Indeed, one might say that there emerges in his writing a kind of subterranean model of action and order that has the potential for grounding an empirical account of modern society that differs markedly from the historicism with which he has been associated in the public mind. Touraine's immersion in the mentalities and movements of the 1960s — a sympathetic, engaged exposure that distinguishes his intellectual biography from that of every other general theorist on the contemporary scene — stimulated not only a new form of historicism emphasizing contingency and radical reflexivity but a more collective, society-oriented understanding that explained social movements in a profoundly cultural way. In this strand of his thinking, action in post-industrial society is described as creative and expressive, but also as continuously oriented to an overarching symbolic order. Touraine argues that consensus-generating normative order encourages not only the reproduction of existing patterns but also changes within them; in fact, he insists that only an orientation to normative order can stimulate radical social change.

In this submerged dimension of his theoretical thinking, Touraine employs notions of social and cultural systems to challenge the strategic approach to social movements of the classical model.

A strategic concept of change entails the reduction of society [merely] to relations between the actors and particularly to power relations, detached from any reference to a social system. [In this view] there are no stakes in the social relation and there is no field other than [this] relation itself. (1981: 56)

Social scientists must pay attention not only to the relations between a social movement and the dominating power it seeks to overthrow but also to the relations linking this collective actor to the social system itself, relations of which domination are only one part. These larger, social relations define the stakes in the conflict between movements and power. To conceptualize this extra-political collective order and the anti-strategic relations it inspires, Touraine turns to the idea of a cultural system. Arguing that 'there can be no social relation unless the actors are operating in the same cultural field' (*ibid.*: 32), he 'categorically den[ies] that a social situation could be reduced to the internal logic of domination' (*ibid.*: 58). 'For a social situation is also based on a culture, i.e., on the construction of the norms which determine the relations between a community and its environment and which, instead of representing the ideology of the dominator, actually define a social field' (*ibid.*). 'Historical actors', he concludes, 'are determined as much by a cultural field as by a social conflict' (*ibid.*: 66; cf., Touraine, 1977: 329-30)

Once we recognize that there is a presuppositional character to Touraine's emphasis on the cultural dimension of social movements — that it contains a systemic and theoretical, not merely historical and empirical thrust — we are compelled to understand his account of industrial society in a new way. When he and his associates,

François Dubet and Michel Wieviorka, describe the traditional nineteenth-century working class, they interpret its economism not as a materially-oriented strategy but as a culturally-oriented act of collective interpretation. Stressing the cultural commitments to industrialism that members of the working class shared with capitalists, they write that, 'the workers, as well as experiencing social and cultural domination, are participating positively in industrial culture and expressing its values' (Touraine *et al.*, 1987: 19).

More than simply a mode of production and allocation, to invoke the terminology of Parsons and Shils (1951), capitalist society is here portrayed as a mode of integration as well. The hierarchy of classes exists within the broader cultural integration of industrial society; and fights over ideological hegemony, not over power or money alone, characterize struggles for social change. Radical social movements in industrial societies involved much more than an extension of organizations and networks and the mobilization of violence and force. 'Within the framework of [their] participation' in industrial culture, Touraine and his colleagues (*ibid.*: 19) write, these movements struggled 'to wrest cultural resources from the control of the industrialists and [to] put them at the disposal of the workers and the whole collectivity.'

This argument has profound implications for the empirical claims upon which Touraine's historicizing theory of action is based, for it suggests that long before post-industrial society, social movements were fights not about the distribution of material resources in and of themselves; rather, they were struggles over the distribution of culturally-defined resources and over which class could claim the normatively legitimate right to distribute such resources to the collectivity. Indeed, class conflict is intelligible to participants and observers alike only because it occurs against the background of consensual values. While 'it is necessary to consider the workers' movement as a social agent defined . . . by conflictual relations', it is also defined 'by a positive reference, which it shares with its opponent, to the cultural orientation of industrial society' (*ibid.*: xv).

Touraine goes out of his way to demonstrate how fundamentally this approach departs from the traditional approach of the radical left. While 'critical sociology', he writes (1981: 37), 'enables us to sidestep institutional sociology and avoid its conformity, [it] cannot by itself lead to the sociology of action, for it has not yet recognized that social behavior is normatively oriented.' Touraine warns his intellectual comrades on the left not to overlook the fact that the institutional and organizational networks within which social movements are embedded are themselves permeated by broad cultural understandings, understandings that typically are taken for granted by conservatives and radicals alike. Critical theory, he warns, 'does not see that the antagonistic actors — the dominating and the dominant — enter into conflict only because they belong to the same cultural field, because they have the same models in common' (*ibid.*).⁶

Equally surprising is the fact that Touraine devotes considerable effort to demonstrating the similarities between his new approach and the one associated with the decidedly non-radical theoretical tradition of functionalism. He goes so far as to describe his own theoretical effort as casting Parsons's 'problem of institutionalization' in a new way.⁷ Parsons made a careful distinction between broad value patterns and the normative, action-oriented directives that could be derived from them. He held that norms establish historically-specific forms of organization that focus, not on general values, but on the distribution of rewards and sanctions. Touraine follows this

Parsonian distinction quite exactly, contrasting what he calls the 'broad cultural orientations' that inform distinctive periods of historicity — periodizations like industrial or post-industrial society — with 'normatively organized' forms of production and exchange. Following Parsons, Touraine insists that the latter are informed by broader cultural orientations but not determined by them. In making the argument that broad culture can be specified in different ways, Touraine points to the fact that, while Parsons insisted upon the distinction between norms and values in principle, he tended to override it in practice. Conflating existing forms of social organization with the cultural ideals that informed them, Parsons made the idealist error of deriving norms from values. In doing so, he neutralized the tension between possibility and actuality that his differentiation of culture from social system had opened up.

In contrast, Touraine insists upon the relative autonomy of norms and values. Against Parsons's reductive application of his own theory, he demonstrates that only if the culture-social system relation is treated as a genuinely two-way street can the actual contingency of history be opened up. On the one hand, Touraine insists that actors are intentional and reflexive only because agency is rooted in idealistic, shared and highly symbolic visions. On the other hand, he insists that actors can create institutions and relationships only with the social resources at hand. This duality demonstrates that there is a wide variety of plausible institutional outcomes consistent with any particular cultural frame. What Touraine sees that Parsons did not, in other words, is that institutionalization is historically contingent and open-ended. It depends upon the ideas, the energy and the cultural capacities — upon the victories and defeats — of social movements. '[The] sociology of action ceases to believe that conduct must be a response to a situation, and claims rather that the situation is merely the changing and unstable result of relations between the actors who, through their social conflicts and via their cultural orientations, produce society' (1981: 80).

Because Parsons tended to identify actually existing social arrangements with that system's cultural values, he could understand social movements challenging these arrangements only as patterned departures, as deviance, from system values (cf. Smelser, 1962). The socialized motives of individual actors, Parsons believed, tended to be homologous not only with symbolic patterns but with the rewards and sanctions that defined organized roles. Touraine's contrasting argument resembles the position that Parsons and Shils (1951) forcefully articulated but to which the functionalist tradition so rarely returned. Parsons and Shils had argued that, whereas cultural integration *per se* is governed by the demand for pattern consistency, it is exigencies of functional coordination that affect integration in the social system. There is an endemic conflict between cultural and social integration, between ideals and their institutionalization, and it is this fundamental contradiction that creates social movements. At one point Touraine actually confronts Parsons in an overt way (1981: 62–3).

There is no direct link between . . . values and norms[,] for class relations are interposed between them. . . . Values are always class values, while cultural orientations, although torn apart by class conflicts, nevertheless do have an autonomous existence. . . . Here lies the uncrossable boundary-line separating the analysis presented here from that of Talcott Parsons and his school.

Egalitarian socialism, in other words, can be said to institutionalize industrial culture just as legitimately as the hierarchical, capitalist system that represents industrial culture

in its private property form. Precisely because Parsons did not understand this, he was unable to give a systematic role to social movements in industrial society, which, in fact, often took a socialist form. It is because Touraine does understand this that in the culturally-oriented strand of his theorizing he can give the radical social movements that challenged capitalist organization full play.

Touraine has succeeded in simultaneously producing a critique of neo-Marxist and functionalist theorizing. By relating culture and normativity to social movement struggle in a forceful and highly original way, he has established the foundations for the kind of hermeneutically-oriented yet critical social science for which communitarian thinkers like MacIntyre, Walzer and Taylor have so powerfully expressed the need. Yet the promise of this model is never fulfilled. Touraine is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to translate this overarching perspective on the relationship between action and order, value and norm, culture and social organization into an empirically-oriented explanatory scheme that can be applied in a coherent and consistent way.

There is a profound ambiguity that lies at the centre of Touraine's understanding of the nature of contemporary societies. To an important degree this reflects contradictions at the deepest, presuppositional level of his thought. Yet this ambiguity can also be articulated in a more directly empirical way. In his concepts of 'industrial' and 'post-industrial' society, Touraine periodizes Western societies and their core values according to the Marxist idea of modes of production, an approach that gives to economic culture pride of place. Yet 'industrial culture' hardly exhausts the influential value systems of nineteenth-century society. From the spheres of religion, family, gender, race, science and politics there also emerged broad and powerful cultural orientations. Not all of these spheres triggered social movements as powerful as class conflicts; yet each of these spheres did produce massively influential standards of evaluation that created institutional conflicts and often had fundamental effects on social movements in turn. Even more important, however, is the fact that Touraine neglects the possibility that there existed in the nineteenth century an overarching framework of non-economic ideas, an interlocking set of political-cum-legal-cum-social ideas that allowed contemporaries to speak of a democratic or civil society. To the degree that such a cultural system and its attendant normative institutions were operative, there existed a moral and political discourse that permeated the more particular differentiated spheres of nineteenth-century society, including the industrial, and provided a powerful critical cultural reference for the social movements of that day.

Posed in this way, the crucial issue for Touraine's sociology of social movements is whether or not his critical reconstruction of action theory allows for the possibility of a broad, historically-rooted civil society, one which establishes empirical continuities between developments in the nineteenth century and developments today. In Touraine's writings of the 1970s and 1980s he strongly resists this possibility, despite occasional suggestions that some continuity may indeed exist. In an historical aside, for example, Touraine acknowledges at one point that the specificity of Western history depended upon the emergence of an independent civil sphere: 'Long dominated by empires, the world saw the opening of small spaces — civil societies — first in Western Europe and then in various parts of the world' (Touraine, 1983a: 221). At another point he goes so far as to connect this historical fact to the political situation of the present day, cautioning that 'it's hard to defend the idea that Western modern societies are as closed, repressive and authoritarian as any other type of

societies in the world', adding that 'it is impossible to replace the classical couple, institution and socialization, by its opposite: repression and reproduction' (Touraine, 1984: 36). Throughout the vast majority of his writings, however, Touraine was much more likely to stress discontinuity. In responding to his own question, 'Are we witnessing the disappearance of civil society?' (1983: 221), his answer was positive yes: 'Classic civil societies [are] decomposing' (1983: 221).

The problem here goes back to Touraine's narrow equation of nineteenth-century culture with the values of industrial society, for he follows Marx — and the Marxified reading of Hegel — in defining civil society as 'the social space of production of social life by work and [its] creation of cultural values' (Touraine, 1992a: 134). Rather than acknowledging the strongly individualistic and libertarian themes in nineteenth-century protests, and their pluralistic institutional referents, Touraine emphasizes the collectivism, scientism and discipline of these movements, linking them to an industrial economy and the organization of factory life. He concludes that only in the industrial phase of capitalism was it possible to discipline individuality with the collective obligations of overarching values. With the movement toward a post-industrial information society, by contrast, 'power consists in inventing products and patterns whereby individual and collective experience can be shaped' (1983a: 229). In this 'permanent change society', nothing consensual, collective or institutional is left. Individualism and subjectivity reign supreme.

Society no longer has a nature, it is no longer based on any value or invariant; it is only what it makes itself, for better or for worse. It is irrelevant or superficial to appeal to moral principles, natural law, human rights, or religious values in order to organize social life. Society is nothing but the changing, unstable, loosely coherent product of social relations, cultural innovations, and political processes. (*ibid.*: 220)

Social movement strategies, even if they are cultural, 'can no longer make a positive appeal to needs, principles, or history' (*ibid.*: 229). Strategy is inspired, rather, simply by the need for self-preservation. The 'destruction of . . . permanent social structure[s]' that is produced by the technocratic mandate for 'permanent change', Touraine suggests, 'provokes behavior aimed at defending identity.' Yet this is an 'identity that is as void of content as the change, which becomes an end in itself' (*ibid.*: 224).

It is within this void created by this vision of the collapse of civil society that Touraine's anti-societal, actor-centred theory is legitimated and that his new social movement theory is born. For more than two decades of empirical studies Touraine devoted himself to the ambitious task of creating a systematic theory of the contradictions produced by a post-industrial economic system geared to commodifying information rather than material goods. On the one hand, he sought to update rather than displace Marx's model of class-based revolutionary social change. Searching among the bewildering variety of contemporary protest movements, he tried to discern elements of a new revolutionary class, a group whose members by virtue of the subordinate position they shared in the new system of production would transform their diffuse resistance to domination into a societal-wide social movement that could successfully demand the fundamental restructuring of late capitalist society: 'One must follow the slow, difficult, and partial formation of a social movement, the way in which it constitutes itself across more limited struggles and struggles that have

a different sense, just as the workers' movement formed itself across strikes, political struggles, the creation of cooperatives, and debates over ideas' (Touraine, 1980: 41). At the same time Touraine separates himself from Marx by emphasizing that this revolutionary social movement will be a struggle for cultural rather than physical control over social power: 'We understand by social movement a collective struggle taken by the actors of a class for the social control of the cultural orientations of a collectivity' (1978: 359).

Given the issues raised above, however, the critical question Touraine confronts is whether the theoretical framework he has employed in this project will allow him to understand the cultural logic of contemporary society in a manner that can thematize any 'collective' reference at all, either in a class or a more societal-wide sense. Within the industrial phase of capitalism, the dominant cultural orientation was more collective in form, emphasizing materialism, growth, progress and organization. The shift to an information society, by contrast, has produced a cultural logic of subjective relationships, limits, authenticity and individuality.

These new protest[s] . . . do not criticize the social use of progress, but progress itself . . . the defense of the consumer and more essentially of the cultural actor. This is the individual who tries to keep or regain control over his own cultural orientation and behavior against large organizations that have the capacity to produce, diffuse, and impose languages and information. [These organizations] produce representations of nature, of the social and historical reality, of the individual, of some collective personality or of the body itself. (Touraine, 1985: 280; cf. 1983: 36)

Within this contemporary cultural logic Touraine sees a pervasive and fundamental contradiction between the orientations of those who control the information industries and those who are dominated by them. 'Those who direct the great cultural industries', he writes (1992a: 141), 'speak in the name of individualism.' Yet, while 'they speak of creativity, liberation and liberty of choice', they construct 'health, education and information systems aimed at maximizing "output", i.e., developing as much as possible the quantity of medical, pedagogical and general information in circulation.' Those dominated by this new ruling class, by contrast, are committed by virtue of their structural position to individualism in a more qualitative and more radical sense. 'In the other camp, one also speaks of individualism, of liberty and of movement, but in a more defensive and more "utopian" manner, for here one speaks not merely for the individual, but in the name of his or her ability and desire to defend his or her individuality, his or her subjectivity' (*ibid.*).

In their ethnographic interventions into the protests of students, ecologists, women and regional separatist groups, Touraine and his colleagues argued that each of these movements manifested such a rebellious subjectivity in a different way.⁸ Thus both students and teachers share a commitment to a 'free university', but while the latter defend 'the rights of science' and the 'university corporation' which facilitates it, the former define freedom in purely negative terms, as 'a space and time of non-choice' so that they can 'maintain a distance from the constraints of the world of capitalist production' (Touraine, 1978: 218). The anti-nuclear protesters initially spoke primarily about 'the general threat to life' and made generalized appeals to liberty and 'humanity' (Touraine, 1983b: 31). Yet, while the 'generalized rejection of a social and

cultural order [was] transformed first of all into a creative utopia' (*ibid.*: 9), the movement soon became 'transformed into a confrontation with a technocratic apparatus all the more powerful for belonging to the State' (*ibid.*: 5). Eventually it 'moved away from the idea that society is modelled by technologies and has discovered that it is, on the contrary, the choice of an energy policy which is determined by the mode of decision-taking in society' (*ibid.*: 175). While the women's movement began by initiating 'a rupture with man', it eventually led to 'a general struggle for the right to a relation with the other', and, in doing so, became 'an important element of the more general social movement that contests the power of technocracy' (Touraine, 1980: 151). While regional independence movements such as those in 'Occitanie' manifest their share of traditionalism and romanticism, their cause was 'being transformed' into a political confrontation with 'the more and more brutal domination of the center over the periphery' (Touraine and Dubet, 1981: 293).

While these accounts aim at demonstrating how the ideologies of each particular protest manifest, each in its different way, the revolutionary subjectivity of a new revolutionary class, the assertions about 'individuality', 'subjectivity', 'identity' and 'freedom from control' seem more like abstract glosses of cultural intent than hermeneutical reconstructions of them. While Touraine and his colleagues offered detailed accounts of contextually-specific protests, they simultaneously reinterpreted them in a terminology that emerges not from the discourse of the actors themselves but from an already existing theory about the conflict between dominating and dominated in a post-industrial society. What is lost in this translation is the possibility that these collective actors experienced their concerns or their movement as intrinsically connected to the social whole. Rather than being tied to broader moral discourses of collective obligation, their goals are presented as autonomy and independence in relation to domination itself. When Touraine concludes (1984: 38) that the 'new social movements in industrialized countries oppose autonomy to power, no longer reason to tradition', he demonstrates how he has severed his analysis of contemporary movements from any strong sense of the specificity of Western societies. The movements are presented as nothing more than institutionally-specific protests against late capitalist society, informed by a culture that is so intensely subjective and individualistic that its various articulations become nothing more than transparent mediums through which actors' individual and group interests can be expressed.

Touraine does not give up entirely on the concept of civil society. What he does is to transform it into an expression of the anti-state 'freedom ideology' that marks contemporary capitalism and the difference between the new social movements and the old.

The idea of society receives a new meaning: instead of being defined by institutions and/or a central power, and provided that it can certainly no longer be defined by common values or permanent rules of social organization, society appears to be a field of debates and conflicts whose stake is the social use of the symbolic goods which are massively produced by our post-industrial society. (Touraine, 1984: 40)

Allowing that the shreds that remain of 'classical' civil society provide a space for the growing antagonism to technocracy, Touraine refuses, nonetheless, to treat the institutional and normative orders of civil society as relatively autonomous forces that contribute to the formation of social movements. To the contrary, it is civil society

that is the result of social movements, not the other way around: 'In these highly industrialized societies, conflicts and debates reach a certain unity by themselves in an autonomous way, without any intervention of an external principle of unification' (Touraine, 1984: 40). 'The action of a ruling technocracy . . . is to create an attempt to impose upon citizens a certain type of social life. A more civil society, on the other hand, a society that is an extension of democracy, is inevitably the product of social struggles and political processes' (*ibid.*).⁹ If social movements succeed, Touraine now argues, 'new' post-classical civil society will be the result: 'Such struggles may extend the area of political activity or create what one might call a new *Öffentlichkeit*' (1983a: 229). This new civil society emerges from the very emptiness of post-industrial public space. By remonstrating for self-control and self-management in the name of nothing except themselves, social movements create the basis for an anti-essentialist, reflexive, contingent and entirely actor-directed civil society. When Touraine argues that contemporaries must 'search for the conditions of the existence, the autonomy, and the development of civil society', he equates these with the search for 'the social relations, conflicts, and political processes that weave the texture of social life' (*ibid.*: 233-4). About the cultural, interactional and institutional structures of such a civil society, he has nothing substantive to say.

If Touraine's most recent writings (e.g., 1992b, 1994) can be taken as a guide, it seems that the program of research and theory described in the preceding paragraphs — what might be called the sociology of his 'revolutionary period' — may be coming to an end. It would be surprising, indeed, if the declension of the revolutionary spirit in recent history would not have exercised on this quintessentially political intellectual a considerable impact. In recent years (Alexander, 1995) the sense not only of the social possibility but the political and moral viability of revolutionary 'rupture' (Touraine, 1980: 9-26) has dramatically waned. To continue to engage the argument that cultural revolutionism has superseded more materialistic forms would be to devote oneself to parsing what has become in the contemporary period an increasingly irrelevant intellectual term.

At the basis of Touraine's revolutionary program (Touraine, 1983b: 140-4) lay the claim that with the emergence of industrial society the historical conflation of democracy, social movements and revolutions came to an end. Particularly in the twentieth century, social movements and democracy 'are not only different but often opposed to one another' (*ibid.*: 144). In his most recent writings, however, Touraine has increasingly focused on democracy, and this assertion about autonomization is directly challenged.

Still more than the creation of a just political society or than the abolition of all forms of domination and exploitation, the principal objective of democracy must be to permit individuals, groups, and collectivities to become free subjects, producers of their history capable of uniting in their action the universalism of reason and the particularities of personal and collective identity. (Touraine, 1994: 263)

Touraine now speaks of collective action, not as a socially produced movement that demonstrates the subterfuge of democratic promises, but as a process that deepens and expands them, and he describes 'liberty' and 'freedom' as political-cum-moral themes rather than as products of a new phase of capitalist society.

One part of the English, Dutch, American and French bourgeoisie first affirmed the general principles of liberty; the workers' movement then recognized that this liberty would have to be defended in the concrete relations of work; colonized or dependent nations fought for it [liberty] against a domination of foreign origin; in the same manner, women have asserted their identity against the domination they undergo as a gender: the history of liberty in the modern world is that of a closer and closer association between the universalism of the rights of human beings and the particularity of the situations and social relations in which these rights must be defended. (*ibid.*: 263)

Similarly, Touraine no longer speaks of social movements merely as negative responses to structures of domination, or of movement ideologies as variations of the individualizing culture that informs them.

There is a social movement only if collective action is given social objectives, that is, recognizes general social values and interests and, as a consequence, does not reduce political life to a confrontation of camps or classes even while it organizes and develops conflicts. It is only in democratic societies that social movements form themselves, because free political choice obliges each social actor to search simultaneously for the common good and the defence of particular interests. The greatest social movements have, for this reason, constantly employed universalist themes: liberty, equality, the rights of man, justice, solidarity, which directly establishes the link between social actor and political program. (*ibid.*: 88)

Finally, in the context of what might be called Touraine's '*retour à démocratie*', it is hardly surprising that he wishes to re-establish a positive and collectively binding approach to civil society in opposition to a negative and conflictual one.

The notion of social movement appears still more clearly linked to democracy and to the defense of fundamental human rights when one opposes it to the notion of class struggle. . . . The champions of class struggle speak of the contradictions of capitalism and proletarianization and want to destroy what destroys and negate the negation; on this basis they call for the seizure of state power. By contrast, a social movement is civil; it is an affirmation before being a critique and a negation. (*ibid.*: 89)

Rehistoricizing the Cultural and Institutional Context of Social Movements

In order finally to displace the classical model of social movements, we must follow Touraine's conflict approach to action, culture, norm and institution, while forcefully rejecting the debilitating historicism that, at least until recently, prevented this great French thinker from fully recognizing the role that moral and political obligations, and institutions, play in generating and regulating movement conflicts themselves. For the classical approach to social movements not only fails to comprehend the specificity of contemporary efforts at radical change; it also provides a highly distorted description of revolutionary movements themselves. Most of the so-called great revolutions — the English, French, Russian and Chinese — were made against *anciens régimes*,

traditional societies in which government control depended upon habit, custom and charisma, and in times of crises upon repression and force. In such societies the masses of persons do not have access to mechanisms that can control the state through force of law, public opinion or publicity, much less through electoral means. The alternative to state control via force is legitimate power, which occurs when obedience is voluntary rather than coerced, when rightness is attributed to power for moral reasons rather than for reasons of habituation or fear. This opportunity for will formation, to use Habermas's term, can be provided only when a 'civil' realm exists that to some degree is separated not only from the state but also from the other 'non-civil' spheres of religion, science, economy, family and primordial communities. Such an independent civil sphere can exist only insofar as the privacy of individual interaction is protected, institutional independence is guaranteed for the creation of law and public opinion, and normative symbolic patterns make honesty, rationality, individual autonomy, cooperation and impersonal trust the basic criteria for membership in the binding community that defines 'society'.

That such civil protections provide only formal rights and opportunities, not their substantive realization, by no means negates the historical importance of the emergence of civil society. For in societies that transformed the structures and cultures of *ancien régimes* in these ways, radical social movements demanding the redistribution of fundamental resources were not, in fact, primarily dependent on material force; nor did they aim solely at mobilizing the most efficient means. Whether such movements emerged, succeeded or failed was not simply a question of the availability of networks and organization, for the challenge was not merely instrumental. Nor could even the most radical movements be understood as mobilizing *vis-à-vis* state power as such. To the contrary, at least from the early nineteenth century, and often before, radical movements emerged in the midst of the partially realized structures and codes of civil societies, social systems in which civil solidarity was fragmented and institutional independence from non-civil spheres was crippled in systematic ways. To succeed, social movements in such societies had to orient themselves not only to the state but to communicative institutions, like the mass media, that could mobilize persuasion rather than force, and to regulative institutions, like the law, which were designed in part at least to enforce universalistic social and individual obligations rather than to facilitate oligarchic commands. Because social movements have to orient themselves in these ways, the question of legitimacy comes to the fore. *Vis-à-vis* potential supporters, social movements in civil societies must present themselves as typifying sacred values, as the bearers of social, national and even primordial myth, as cultural innovators who can create new norms and new institutions that will allow resources to be channelled in different ways. The power of such movements depends in the first instance less on organizational command and networks of exchange than on subjective commitments of loyalty and solidarity. Such commitments can be produced only when social movements create and sustain new forms of meaning and more attractive forms of personal and group identity.

Social Movements as Translations of Civil Societies

Only after the cultural and institutional context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social movements has been rehistoricized in this way is it possible to produce a

coherent alternative to the classical model. In this concluding section I sketch the main lines of what such an alternative would be.

In every relatively developed social system there are differentiated spheres that possess distinctive value regimes, and many social movements emerge and struggle within such spheres to gain justice in a discrete, pluralistic and self-regulating way.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the most significant idioms, codes and narratives employed by strong social movements, new and old, positive and negative, are independent of their structural position in particular spheres. Indeed, when one examines these tropes, one can plainly see that it is their very distance from particular institutional arenas that allows them to offer social movements leverage, that creates the possibility of an escape from immediate institutional demands, that encourages the very exercise of agency *vis-à-vis* institutional constraints that the very existence of a social movement implies.

These transcending, overarching symbolic frameworks refer to the existence of civil society, a sphere that is separated from other institutional domains even though it may intrude upon them. The 'function' of civil society is not to produce wealth or power, salvation, love or truth, but to create and maintain a community whose boundaries include such institutional domains and define the 'society' as such. To become a member of civil society is to participate in the broad and inclusive solidarity of 'institutionalized individualism' that declares all men and women brothers and sisters, which creates binding collective obligations even while it guarantees individual rights, and which provides for political participation in the distribution of highly valued social goods. To become a member of such a community is not easy, and, indeed, such membership has always been fiercely contested.

While membership in such a civil society is highly contingent, the categorical qualities that legitimate or deny membership are not. Members and would-be members have justified and prevented participation in terms of sets of symbolic oppositions that have remained remarkably constant over an extended period of time. There is a distinctive discourse that defines the cultural core of civil societies and which provides the meta-language employed by those who wish to participate in it (see, e.g., Alexander and Smith, 1993; Sherwood, 1994; Smith, 1994). Its structure is composed of interrelated antinomies that define highly valued positive qualities, and highly polluted negative ones, that taken together demarcate the motives, relationships and institutions that legitimate inclusion and exclusion from civil society. Independence/dependence, rationality/irrationality, honest/dishonest, critical/ingenuous illustrate the kinds of moral categories that define motivational possibilities. Trusting/suspicious, respectful/insulting, cooperative/antagonistic, open/secret suggest the alternative kinds of relationships that are paired. Public/private, participatory/authoritarian, flexible/rigid refer to the institutional possibilities that define important alternatives in themselves and which provide homologies with motivated relationships. These binary relationships, which demonstrate a high degree of intertextuality, define highly simplified qualities of good and bad, 'essences' that are believed to separate the pure from the impure, friends from enemies, the sacred from the profane. Polluted coding defines an identity worthy of repression, and purified coding constructs candidates who can perform this task.

Because this discourse of civil society has been institutionalized in very different ways and times, it seems important to emphasize that in historical terms it extends well beyond the relatively narrow and economically delimited 'historicities' defined

by Touraine and new social movement theory.¹¹ The notion of a broad and democratizing civil sphere has affected Western thought for thousands of years. Embryonic and uneven development of communicative and regulative institutions certainly can be found in various parts of Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in English villages, in Italian and Germany city states, in the internally egalitarian institutions of aristocratic parliaments which elected kings.¹² Elements of the discourse of civil society have informed major religious and cultural upheavals like the Reformation and the Renaissance, the economic institutions of market capitalism, newly rationalized state authorities and nascent democratic revolutions alike. Various combinations of institutional and cultural elements of civil society can be seen in craft guilds and in independent agricultural communities, in mercantilist economies, in industrial and post-industrial periods, in religious and secular societies, in pre-national formations and in nation states. Yet a strong and coherent conception of civil society, an imagined community inspired by the cultural dichotomies described above and organized by communicative and regulative institutions, did not begin to appear until the late seventeenth century. Not until such a partially independent civil sphere makes its appearance do social movements emerge as important phenomena and organized, sometimes radical social change become possible for the first time.

Social movements feed off the sense of a wider community. While they themselves constitute only one particular group, they either (1) make claims to 'represent' the wider society, its desires and best interests (e.g., an environmental or citizens' action group), or (2) speak directly to 'society' on behalf of a particular interest (e.g., a trade union, African-American or women's rights groups). Social movements must not be seen, therefore, simply as responding to existing problems, for example the strains generated by a particular kind of economy, state, geography, legality, family type or scientific domain; they should be seen, rather, as responding to the possibility of persuasively constructing 'problems' in this or that sphere and communicating this 'reality' to the society at large. Before a social movement develops, whether it be a workers' movement or a movement for women's liberation, few actors are aware that the problems it makes reference to even exist, much less that they can be solved. What legitimates this construction — indeed, what motivates it in the first place — is the latent reference to the obligations created by civil society.

When one examines the rhetoric of social movements, one sees that the image of 'fair and open discussion', of 'our day in court', of 'society' as a solidary moral and ethical representation seems always to be there. Behind social movements there is reference to a highly idealized community, one which demands, in Hegel's terms, that the universal becomes concrete. Such demands for a concrete universal are made, in other words, against the backdrop of a utopian notion of community, according to which rational actors spontaneously forge ties that are at once self-regulating, solidaristic and emancipatory, which are independent of market rewards, religious faith, family love, state coercion and scientific truth. Touraine refers to the self-regulating and self-constituting community as an imminent reality in post-industrial society, pointing to its existence as evidence that there is nothing left of 'society' as such. Surely, however, the very language of contemporary social movements suggests that this cannot be the case. Self-constituting communities are not realities but rather regulative ideals, ones that have inspired the meta-language of the 'progressive' and 'regressive' social movements not only of our time but in the past as well.

It is the existence of this regulating ideal, and perhaps even its partial realization

in the communicative and regulative institutions at a particular time, that allows protests that have emerged in one structural sector to be transferred into the domain of civil society. Rather than a particular institution, problems now concern society itself. They have the potential of creating a 'social crisis'. Collective action can be understood as a struggle for position *vis-à-vis* the categorical antipathies of civil life, as a struggle to represent others in negative and polluted categories and to re-present oneself in terms of the sacred. To move from a problem in a particular sphere of society to a problem in society as such requires that the leaders of social movements exercise creativity and imagination. This might be called the 'translation' problem, and it is where cultural creativity and political competence both come equally into play. Using an organization effectively means something much different than simply establishing membership rolls, hooking up telephone lines and raising money. It means learning how to translate experiences from the particular to the general, from the institutional to the civil and back again. Movement intellectuals often think of their task in quite different terms; viewing the movement's problems as real, they experience translation from particular to general as something that is 'always already there', as rooted in the materiality of the problem as such. The ambition of a social movement, however, must be to reposition particular demands, to shift them from particular institutions to a position inside civil society itself. Insofar as 'movement intellectuals' (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) succeed in this task, social movements 'strike up a conversation' with society and draw their members' attention to a more generalized understanding of their cause.¹³ When this happens, the social problem and group managing it enter firmly into public life.

Successful translation allows movements that emerged as protests in one structural sector — in one differentiated subsystem, one sphere of justice, one regime of justification — to be taken up by 'the society at large'. It allows alliances to be welded, mass lines to be formed, and publicity to be made. Domination in a particular sphere is challenged not because it violates the institutional culture that defines historicity, but because it is constructed as violating the collective representations of civil society. In this way dominating powers can be re-presented in terms of the categories of exclusion they themselves once used to legitimate the exclusion of others. In the dynamics of this inverse stigmatizing process, archetypical narrative structures come forcefully into play, inflating the challengers and deflating the powers that be. Movement leaders and organizations are transformed from being lonely and downtrodden into heroic figures embarking on a romantic quest. Melodrama paints the movement and its opponents in black and white, sentimentalizing the conflict in a moralistic and often simplistic ways. Comic devices like irony and comedy are employed to deflate further the importance of now polluted identities.

Workers and industrial capitalists did not wage a century-long struggle simply over antagonistic material interests, even if one allows for the framing effects of industrial culture. Rather, economic strains were translated into the categories of the civil sphere (cf. Pizzorno, 1978). Machine breaking, wage demands, strikes and unionization were conducted in terms of 'the rights of Englishmen'. The status of workers was upgraded and they became emblematic of humanity. They now felt entitled to demand full access to regulatory institutions, like the law and the courts, which made critical decisions in the distribution of means. With the help of social movements, the 'dark', 'soot-covered' workers, the dirty, dependent, violent and stubborn men, who were said to work only with their hands and not with their

brains, succeeded in reconstructing their selves and their group in less polluted and more sacred ways. They often succeeded in inverting the categorical identification of owners themselves, who were increasingly described as secretive in their motives, dependent in their relations and authoritarian in their institutions.

Religious emancipation did not work in a much different way. From the late medieval period on, movements were launched against ecclesiastical hierarchy on the basis of the more inclusive rights that were defined as immanent in the civil sphere. In a similar manner women in families gradually came to reject the identification of their selves with the patriarchy-defined domestic and mothering role. Like ghettoized Jews, repressed Protestants or exploited factory hands, women began to experience themselves as having dual membership, as not only members of a family structure in which loyalty, love and deference were basic criteria, but as members of civil society, which demanded criticism, respect and equality. In the 1960s youth movements, students rejected subordination in schools, families and work, arguing, in a similar way, that neither parental nor knowledge-based authority justified the subordination and objectification they now seemed to experience in schools and homes. Forming their own communities of strong moral and emotional solidarity, they demanded that the larger society treat them in terms of their citizenship roles. Movements for consumer and patient rights can also be seen as expressions of dual membership, as boundary tensions between civil society and the economic and professional spheres create pressure for redefining where civil obligations stop and more specialized interests begin. Dominated ethnic and racial minorities use their dual membership to demand assimilation or to legitimate multiculturalism. For the physically or mentally handicapped, for whom polluting categories like irrationality, insanity and dependence often assume an essentialism that is expressed in physical form, the process of translation is extremely demanding, and we have only begun to redefine the meaning of these physical qualities in recent times. If one considers environmentalism, one can see here how nature itself has been redefined. Once 'red in tooth and claw', it is now a potentially rational and cooperative partner and being awarded full membership status in civil societies.

Social movements can be seen as social devices that construct translations between the discourse of civil society and the institution-specific processes of a more particularist type. Social movements are practical and historical, yet at the same time they can succeed only if they can employ the civil meta-language to relate these practical problems to the symbolic centre of society and its utopian premises. We are very far from the classical model of social movements, with its realism and materialism and its exclusive concern with overturning the practical power of the state. Yet we are also quite a distance from new social movement theory, which describes symbolic arguments as defensive strategies responding to the isolation and vulnerability of actors confronted with new forms of technical domination. In one strand of his own argument, we have seen, Touraine suggests quite a different viewpoint. He describes social movements as idealizing responses to the tension between broadly utopian cultural orientations and the restricted institutional position that protestors experience in everyday life. The only way to follow up this seminal idea is to relate social movements to the culture and structures of civil society.

Politics is a discursive struggle. It is about the distribution of leaders and followers, groups and institutions across highly structured symbolic sets. Power conflicts are not simply about who gets what and how much. They are about who will be what.

and for how long. Whether in the interplay between communicative institutions and their public audiences a group is represented in terms of one set of symbolic categories rather than another is an absolutely critical question; sometimes it can even become a matter of life and death. In the course of social conflicts, individuals, organizations and large social groups may be transferred from one side of social classification to the other in rapid and often bewildering bursts of shifting historical time. Yet no matter how new they seem, these categorizations are playing variations on some very old and well established themes.

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Notes

- 1 "“Revolution” lives a double life, appearing in two guises. First, it belongs to societal discourse, pervading commonsense thinking [as what] might be called the myth of revolution. Second, it belongs to a sociological discourse, appear[ing] as scientific reasoning [in the] theory of revolution. . . . The theory of revolution draws heavily on the myth of revolution; with some inevitable time-lag it explicates and systematises what common people think about revolution’ (Sztompka, 1990: 129–30).
- 2 For a recent discussion of revolutions that emphasizes precisely these qualities, see Sztompka (1993), particularly pp. 259–73 and 301–21.
- 3 Elihu Katz has recently revived these elements in Tarde’s work in connection with his own studies on the impact of secondary, mediating organizations *vis-à-vis* mass media.
- 4 See the very relevant critique of such anti-cultural ‘social situationism’ in Campbell (1996).
- 5 Cf. Eyerman and Jamison’s argument that for most American sociologists of social movements, cultural ‘knowledge becomes disembodied; it is relegated to a largely marginal, ephemeral or superstructural level of reality, and not to the centrality of movement identity formation where . . . it belongs. . . . The knowledge interests of a social movement are frozen into static, ready-formed packages, providing the issues or ideologies around which movements mobilize resources or socialize individuals. . . . One of the main barriers to recognizing social movements as producers of knowledge is the widespread tendency to reify them, to identify social movements with organizations, parties, sects, institutions’ (1991: 46, 59).
- 6 This critique of traditional Marxian thinking closely resembles the one made by Gramsci, whose work must have influenced Touraine’s in a profound, if unacknowledged, way. For among the important intellectuals of the revolutionary tradition, it was Gramsci alone who managed to avoid the mistakes of the classical model. The revolutionary challenges of industrial workers would succeed, he argued, not by exercising efficient force or even by threatening to use it, but by gaining hegemonic control over the cultural frameworks within which material conflicts are understood. Gramsci realized that the communicative institutions of civil society, not the coercive organs of the state, must be the objects of struggle. Potential citizens had to be persuaded that communist ideas provided a more intellectually coherent and morally compelling vision of the good life.

- 7 This move recalls the famous warning to leftist social theorists that Habermas (1987: 199) offered at about the same time: 'No theory of society can be taken seriously today if it does not at least situate itself with respect to Parsons. To deceive oneself on this point is to be held captive by questions of topicality rather than being sensitive to them.'
- 8 Touraine's most lucid general account of these movements can be found in *L'après socialisme* (1980: 141-71).
- 9 Melucci makes exactly the same argument that civil society is the product of contemporary social movements.
- 10 Walzer (1984) and Boltanski and Thevenot (1990) present the most important such sphere-specific accounts.
- 11 Cf. Cohen and Arato (1992: 493-4): 'We do not believe it is possible to justify this claim about what is new in movements on the basis of a philosophy of history that links the "true essence" of what the movements "really are" (however heterogeneous their practices and forms of consciousness) to an allegedly new stage of history (postindustrial society). Nor does the theme "society against the state", which is shared by all contemporary movements . . . in itself imply something new in the sense of a radical break with the past. On the contrary, it implies continuity with what is worth preserving . . . in the institutions, norms, and political cultures of contemporary civil societies.'
- 12 Somers' recent work on the legal revolution in medieval England reveals that the theme of shared citizenship already permeated certain societies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See also Weber's understanding of rationalization, fraternization and city states.
- 13 'We use the term movement intellectual to refer to those individuals who through their activities articulate the knowledge interests and cognitive identity of social movements' (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 98).

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