11. week

The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements

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Action Systems

Sociological theory and research during the seventies have undoubtedly provided a deeper understanding of contemporary social movements. The forms of collective action which have emerged during the past twenty years in fields previously untouched by social conflicts (age, sex differences, health, relation to nature, human survival) are taking by now an increasing importance in sociological analysis and they become controversial and stimulating topics for both theory and research. The eighties seem to offer new material to this reflection, since collective action is shifting more and more from the "political" form, which was common to traditional opposition movements in Western societies, to a cultural ground.

Theoretical frameworks and empirical knowledge of contemporary complex societies suggest that:

(1) The emergent conflicts have a permanent and nonconjunctural nature; new forms of solidarity and action coexist with more traditional memberships (such as classes, interest groups, associations). Though their empirical features can vary widely, they become stable and irreversible components of contemporary social systems, because they are strictly connected to deep structural changes in these systems.

(2) Widespread networks of conflictual solidarity fulfill a function of socialization and "submerged" participation. They open new channels for grouping and acting

the more traditional ones. The ways of political socialization, the patterns of cultural innovation, the means of institutional modernization are therefore redefined outside the action of already established agencies.

(3) One of the main problems of "complexity" is the gap between institutional systems of representation and decision making and "civil society." Needs and forms of action arising from the society are not easily adaptable to the existing channels of political participation and to the organizational forms of political agencies; moreover, since the outcomes of collective action are difficult to predict, this increases the already high degree of uncertainty systems are confronted with.

A reflection on both theoretical and empirical dimensions of contemporary movements is thus a step which cannot be avoided in the debate on paradigms allowing a satisfactory understanding of complex systems.

In the field of social movements, sociology inherits a legacy of dualism from philosophies of history. Collective action has always been treated either as an effect of structural crises and contradictions or as an expression of shared beliefs and orientations. The dualism between structure and actors seems to be the common feature of traditional analysis of collective action, in both Marxist and functionalist approaches.

The duality can be formulated in terms of *breakdown/solidarity*.[1] The former approach is represented by theories of collective behavior and mass society[2] and holds collective action to be a result of economic crisis and social disintegration, particularly among the rootless. The latter considers social movements as expressions of shared interests within a common structural location (especially a class condition, as in any viewpoints derived from Marxism). Breakdown theories disregard the dimension of conflict within collective action and easily reduce it to pathological reaction and marginality. Solidarity models are unable to explain the passage from a given social condition to collective action. The classical Marxist problem (how to pass from class condition to class consciousness) still exists and can't be solved without taking into consideration how a collective actor is formed and how his identity is maintained.

[1] Following C. Tilly, L. Tilly, and R. Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830–1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), and B. Useem, "Solidarity Model, Breakdown Model, and the Boston Anti-Busing Movement," *American Sociological Review* 45 (1980).

[2] See especially N. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), and A. Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959).

Duality can be viewed also in terms of *structure/motivation*:[3] collective action is seen as a product of the logic of the system, or as a result of personal beliefs. The stress is in the first case on social-economic context, in the second on the role of ideology and values. Either actors are dispossessed of the meanings of their action, or they produce meanings and goals apparently without any constraints.

The seventies enabled sociological theory to move beyond the breakdown/solidarity or structure/motivation alternatives. In Europe the analyses of Touraine and Habermas, based on a systemic approach, tried to establish a link between the new forms of conflict and the emerging structure of postindustrial capitalism.[4] Some American authors focused their reflection on how a movement is made up, if and how it survives in time and in relation to its environment, in terms of *resource mobilization*.[5]

[3] Following K. Webb, "Social Movements: Contingent or Inherent Phenomena?", paper presented at the Conference on Social Movements and Political Systems, Milan, June 1985.

[4] A. Touraine, *Production de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1973) and *La voix et le regard* (Paris: Seuil, 1978); J. Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976).

[5] J. D. McCarthy and M. N. Zald, *The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization* (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1973) and "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (1977); M. N. Zald and J. D. McCarthy, eds., *The Dynamics of Social Movements* (Cambridge: Winthrop, 1979); W. A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1975); A. Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973); C. Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978). For a review and discussion of the resource mobilization approach, see J. C. Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983), and J. Freeman, ed., *Social Movements of the Sixties and Seventies* (New York: Longman, 1983).

The seventies leave us what I would call a "skeptical paradigm" toward social movements: collective action is not a "thing," nor does it merely express what movements say of themselves; analysis has rather to discover the system of internal and external relationships which constitutes the action. But the seventies' theories also leave two problems unresolved. Structural theories, based on system analysis, explain *why* but not *how* a movement is set up and maintains its structure, that is, they only hypothesize about potential conflict without accounting for concrete collective action and actors. On the other hand, the resource mobilization approach regards such action as mere data and fails to examine its meaning and orientation. In this case, *how* but not *why*. Each question could be legitimate within its limits, but frequently authors tend to present their theories as global explanations of social movements.[6] In my view, the analysis should concentrate on the systemic relationships rather than on the simple logic of actors. But at the same time action cannot be considered only within structural contradictions. Action has to be viewed as an interplay of aims, resources, and obstacles, as *a purposive orientation which is set up within a system of opportunities and constraints*. Movements are *action systems* operating in a *systemic field* of possibilities and limits.[7] That is why the *organization* becomes a critical point of observation, an analytical level too often underestimated or reduced to formal structures. The way the movement actors set up their action is the *concrete link between orientations and systemic opportunities/constraints*.

Movements are social constructions. Rather than a consequence of crises or dysfunctions, rather than an expression of beliefs, collective action is "built" by an organizational investment. "Organization" is not here an empirical feature but an analytical level. Keeping together individuals and mobilizing resources for the action means allocating values, capabilities, decisions in a field which is delimited: possibilities and boundaries provided by social relationships shape the action, but neither resources nor constraints can be activated outside the action itself.

Social movements are thus action *systems* in that they have structures: the unity and continuity of the action would not be possible without integration and interdependence of individuals and groups, in spite of the apparent looseness of this kind of social phenomena. But movements are *action* systems in that their structures are built by aims, beliefs, decisions, and exchanges operating in a systemic field. A *collective identity* is nothing else than a shared definition of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action: "shared" means constructed and negotiated through a repeated process of "activation" of social relationships connecting the actors.[8]

To consider a movement as an action system means to stop treating it just as an empirical phenomenon. The empirical forms of collective action are objects of analysis, and they are not meaningful in themselves. Currently one speaks of a "movement" as a unity, to which one attributes goals, choices, interests, decisions. But this unity, if any, is a result rather than a point of departure; otherwise one must assume that there is a sort of deep "mind" of the movement, instead of considering it as a system of social relationships. A collective action can't be explained without taking into account how internal and external resources are mobilized, how organizational structures are built and maintained, how leadership

[6] For a wider discussion of the theoretical legacy of the seventies, see A. Melucci, ed., *Altri codici: Aree di movimento nella metropoli* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984); and "An End to Social Movements?", *Social Science Information* 24 (1984).

[7] This concept is derived from different theoretical frameworks. Cf. Touraine, *Production de la société*; M. Crozier and E. Friedberg, *L'acteur et le système* (Paris: Seuil, 1977); J. S. Coleman, "Social Structure and a Theory of Action," *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, no. 1/2 (1975).

[8] On the concept of collective identity, see A. Pizzorno, "Scambio politico e identità collettiva nel conflitto di classe," in C. Crouch and A. Pizzorno, eds., *Conflitti in Europa* (Milan: Etas Libri, 1977) and "Identità e interesse," in L. Sciolla, ed., *Identità* (Turin: Rosenberg, 1983); E. Reynaud, "Identités collectives et changement social: Les cultures collectives comme dynamique d'action," **Sociologie du Travail 22 (1980). The** construction of organizational settings as systems of action is presented **and Friedberg, *L'acteur et le système*.**

functions are assured. What empirically is called a "social movement" is a system of action, connecting plural orientations and meanings. A single collective action, moreover, contains different kinds of behavior, and the analysis has to break its apparent unity and to find out the various elements converging in it and possibly having different outcomes. Only by separating different analytical elements can one understand how they are kept together by an "organizational" structure, how a collective identity is built through a complex system of negotiations, exchanges, decisions; how action can occur as a result of systemic determinations *and* of individual and group orientations.

The field of social movements theory needs a shift away from empirical generalizations to analytical definitions. Just for a methodological purpose I will indicate the essential lines of my own theoretical path.[9] I assume that the meaning of collective action depends on its *system of reference* and on its *analytical dimensions*. The same empirical behavior can be viewed in different ways, whether or not it refers to an organizational system, to a political system, to a mode of production: claims against an ineffective authority are different from demands for broadening participation and are still different from action challenging the production and appropriation of resources in a system. Apart from the system of reference, action can be analyzed also according to its internal analytical dimensions. Using *conflict, solidarity,* and the *breaking of the system limits,* I have differentiated among various types of collective action.

I define conflict as a relationship between opposed actors fighting for the same resources, to which both give value. Solidarity is the capability of an actor to share a collective identity, that is, the capability of recognizing and being recognized as a part of the same system of social relationships. Limits of a system indicate the range of variations tolerated within its existing structure. A breaking of these limits pushes a system beyond the acceptable range of variations.

I define analytically a social movement as a form of collective action (a) based on solidarity, (b) carrying on a conflict, (c) breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs. These dimensions, which are entirely analytical, enable one to separate social movements from other collective phenomena which are very often empirically associated with "movements" and "protest": one can speak of deviance, regulated grievances, aggregated-mass behavior, according to which of these dimensions is present or absent. Moreover, different kinds of movements and collective actions can be assessed according to the system of reference of action.

Beyond the actual content of a definition (which is always an operational tool and not a metaphysical truth), what is important to me is the methodological orientation. Since a movement is not a thing but a system of action, we have to improve our capability of going beyond the empirical unity through analytical instruments as sophisticated as possible. What I have outlined above is a way, still roughly designed, of making our tools more effective.

The Systemic Field and the Actors

Complex systems require a growing intervention in social relationships, in symbolic production, in individual identity and needs. Postindustrial societies no longer have an "economic" basis; they produce by an increasing integration of economic, political, and cultural structures. "Material" goods are produced and consumed with the mediation of huge informational and symbolic systems.

Social conflicts move from the traditional economic/industrial system to cultural grounds: they affect personal

[9] I have developed my theoretical reflections in several works. See particularly A. Melucci, "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach," *Social Science Information* 19 (1980), *L'invenzione del presente: Movimenti, identità, bisogni individuali* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982), and "End to Social Movements?"

identity, the time and the space in everyday life, the motivation and the cultural patterns of individual action. Conflicts reveal a major shift in the structure of complex systems, and new contradictions appear affecting their fundamental logic. On the one hand, highly differentiated systems increasingly produce and distribute resources for individualization, for self-realization, for an autonomous building of personal and collective identities. And that is because complex systems are informational systems and they cannot survive without assuming a certain autonomous capacity in individual elements, which have to be able to produce and receive information. Consequently the system must improve the autonomy of individuals and groups and their capacity for becoming effective terminals of complex informational networks.

On the other hand, these systems need more and more integration. They have to extend their control over the same fundamental resources which allow their functioning, if they want to survive. Power must affect everyday life, the deep motivation of individual action must be manipulated, the process by which people give meaning to things and their action must be under control. One can speak of "power microphysics"[10] or of a shift in social action from external to "internal nature."[11] The conflicts of the eighties reveal these new contradictions, and they imply an intense redefinition of the location of social movements and of their forms of action. They involve social groups more directly affected by the processes outlined above. They arise in those areas of the system which are connected to the most intensive informational and symbolic investments and exposed to the greatest pressures for conformity. The actors in these conflicts are no longer social classes, that is, stable groups defined by a specific social condition and culture (as the working class was during capitalistic industrialization).

Actors in conflicts are increasingly *temporary*, and their function is to *reveal the stakes*, to announce to society that a fundamental problem exists in a given area. They have a growing symbolic function; one can probably speak of a *prophetic function*. They are a kind of *new media*.[12] They do not fight merely for material goals, or to increase their participation in the system. They fight for symbolic and cultural stakes, for a different meaning and orientation of social action. They try to change people's lives, they believe that you can change your life today while fighting for more general changes in society.[13]

Because it apprehends a movement only as a given empirical actor, resource mobilization theory is unable to explain the meaning of these contemporary forms of action. The field of new social conflicts is created by the system and its contradictory requirements. The activation of specific issues depends rather on historical and conjunctural factors. Specific empirical conflicts are carried out by different groups which converge on the ground provided by the system. The field and the stakes of antagonistic conflicts must therefore be defined at the synchronic level of the system. Actors, on the contrary, can be identified only by taking into account diachronic, conjunctural factors, particularly the functioning of the political system. Resource mobilization theory can help in understanding how different elements converge in activating specific forms of collective action, but cannot explain why action arises and where it is going.

The resource mobilization approach avoids the macrolevel

[12] J. H. Marx and B. Holzner, "The Social Construction of Strain and Ideological Models of Grievance in Contemporary Movements," *Pacific Sociological Review* 20 (1977); J. Sassoon, "Ideology, Symbolism and Rituality in Social Movements," *Social Science Information* 24 (1984).

[13] A discussion of these topics connecting them to general changes in [illegible] societies is proposed in A. Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses for the Analysis of [illegible]," in D. Pinto, ed., *Contemporary Italian Sociology* ([illegible] University Press, 1981) and "New Movements, [illegible]

(which is the main interest of theories such as Touraine's or Habermas's), but in fact it tends to reduce every collective action to the political level. But that way it misses the cultural orientation of the emerging social conflicts. Elsewhere I have spoken of "political overload" of many contemporary analyses on social movements.[14] Sometimes implicitly, very often explicitly, the relationship between movements and the political system becomes the focus of attention and debate. Of course this viewpoint is legitimate, unless it exhausts any possible consideration of other dimensions.[15] Contemporary social conflicts are not just political, since they affect the system's cultural production. Collective action is not carried out simply for exchanging goods in the political market or for improving the participation in the system. It challenges the logic governing production and appropriation of social resources.

The concept of movement itself seems increasingly inadequate, if referred to recent phenomena. I prefer to speak of *movement networks* or *movement areas* as the network of groups

[14] Melucci, "End to Social Movements?"

[15] An analysis of social movements which takes account of systemic interaction and the political system responses is proposed by K. Webb et al., "Etiology and Outcomes of Protest: New European Perspectives," *American Behavioral Scientist* 26 (1983); S. Tarrow, "Movimenti e organizzazioni sociali: Che cosa sono, quando hanno successo," *Laboratorio politico* 2 (1982) and *Struggling to Reform: Social Movements and Policy Change During Cycles of Protest*, Western Societies Occasional Papers, no. 15 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1983); D. Della Porta, "Leadership Strategies and Organizational Resources: The Crisis of the French Women's Movement," paper presented at the 6th EGOS Colloquium, Florence, November 1983; V. Ergas, "Politica sociale e governo della protesta," in S. Belligni, ed., *Governare la democrazia* (Milan: Angeli, 1981); A. Marsh, *Protest and Political Consciousness* (London: Sage, 1977); J. Wilson, "Social Protest and Social Control," *Social Problems* 24 (1977); F. Fox Piven and R. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements* (New York: Pantheon, 1977). A "political" reduction of the women's movement can be found in J. Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation* (New York: Longman, 1975), and J. Gelb, *Women and Public Policies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). For a critique of this reduction, see Y. Ergas, "The Disintegrative Revolution: Welfare Politics and Emergent Collective Identities," paper presented at the Conference on Performance of Italian Institutions, Bellagio, June 1985.

Referring to contemporary movements, I have used the expression "postpolitical movements" (Melucci, *L'invenzione del presente*). Offe speaks of the "metapolitical paradigm" of these movements (C. Offe, "New Social Movements as a Metapolitical Challenge," unpublished paper, University of Bielefeld, 1983).

and individuals sharing a conflictual culture and a collective identity. This definition includes not only "formal" organizations but also the network of "informal" relationships connecting core individuals and groups to a broader area of participants and "users" of services and cultural goods produced by the movement.[16]

The inadequacy of the concept of social movement is a symptom of a more general epistemological problem. The concept of movement belongs to the same semantic and conceptual framework in which other notions, such as progress or revolution, were formed. In a world where change means crisis management and maintenance of systemic equilibrium, where "no future" is not only a slogan but the recognition that the system is both planetary and dramatically vulnerable, in such a world the historicist paradigm fades and reveals the need for new conceptual frames.

In the field of collective action the lack of more adequate concepts makes it difficult to get rid of a notion such as "social movement"; but I am aware that the concept of "movement network" is a temporary adjustment covering a lack of more satisfactory definitions and perhaps facilitating the transition to another paradigm.

But such a concept indicates also that collective action is changing its organizational forms, which are becoming fairly different from traditional political organizations. Moreover, they are increasing autonomous from political systems; a proper space for collective action is created within complex societies as a specific subsystem. It becomes the point of convergence for different forms of behavior which the system cannot integrate (including not only conflicting orientations but also deviant behavior, cultural innovation, etc.).

[16] See also, although referred to more formal organizations, the concepts of "social movement industry" (McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization") and "social movement sector" (R. Garner and M. N. Zald, "Social Movement Sectors and Systematic Constraint," Working Paper no. 258, Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan, 1981).

The normal situation of today's "movement" is a network of small groups submerged in everyday life which require a personal involvement in experiencing and practicing cultural innovation. They emerge only on specific issues, as for instance the big mobilizations for peace, for abortion, against nuclear policy, etc. The submerged network, although composed of separate small groups, is a system of exchange (persons and information circulate along the network; some agencies, such as local free radios, bookshops, magazines provide a certain unity).[17]

Such networks (first outlined by Gerlach and Hine[18]) have the following characteristics: (a) they allow multiple membership; (b) militantism is only part-time and short-term; (c) personal involvement and affective solidarity is required as a condition for participation in many of the groups. This is not a temporary phenomenon but a morphological shift in the structure of collective action.

One can speak of a *two-pole model*: *latency* and *visibility*, each having two different functions. Latency allows people to experience directly new cultural models—changes in the system of meanings—which are very often opposed to the dominant social codes: the meaning of sexual differences, time and space, relationship to nature, to the body, and so on. Latency creates new cultural codes and makes individuals practice them. When small groups emerge to confront a political authority on a specific issue, visibility demonstrates the opposition to the logic underlying decision making with regard to public policy. At the same time, public mobilization indicates to the rest of society that the specific problem is connected to

[17] I am referring to the results of broad empirical research on new forms of collective action (youth, women, environmentalists, neoreligious) in the Milan metropolitan area. See Melucci, *Altri codici*; P. R. Donati, "Organization Between Movement and Institution," *Social Science Information* 24 (1984); Sassoon, "Ideology, Symbolism, and Rituality."

[18] L. P. Gerlach and V. H. Hine, *People, Power and Change* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970).

the general logic of the system, and also that alternative cultural models are possible.

These two poles, visibility and latency, are reciprocally correlated. Latency allows visibility in that it feeds the former with solidarity resources and with a cultural framework for mobilization. Visibility reinforces submerged networks. It provides energies to renew solidarity, facilitates creation of new groups and recruitment of new militants attracted by public mobilization who then flow into the submerged network.

The new organizational form of contemporary movements is not just "instrumental" for their goals. It is a goal in itself. Since the action is focused on cultural codes, the *form* of the movement is a message, a symbolic challenge to the dominant patterns. Short-term and reversible commitment, multiple leadership that can be challenged, temporary and ad hoc organizational structures are the bases for internal collective identity, but also for a symbolic confrontation with the system. People are offered the possibility of another experience of time, space, interpersonal relations, which opposes operational rationality of apparatuses. A different way of naming the world suddenly reverses the dominant codes.

The medium, the movement itself as a new medium, is the message. As prophets without enchantment, contemporary movements practice in the present the change they are struggling for: they redefine the meaning of social action for the whole society.

Peace Mobilizations: Political or Symbolic?

I will try now to apply the conceptual framework o[illegible] above to the unexpected wave of mobili[illegible] which has been troubling all We[illegible] [illegible] of the

the main capitals of the Western world. Two general questions can be raised: What produces these forms of mobilization? What is the meaning of individual and collective action?

For both questions the answers might seem obvious: mobilization is a reaction to the changing political and military scene, after the decisions regarding nuclear weapons in Europe; peace is the goal, as a universal good threatened by the nuclear race and by the risk of total warfare.

These answers are as obvious as they are incomplete and partial: they contain the same simplification in the "peace movement" as that already applied to other recent collective mobilizations in complex societies.

So far I have spoken of peace *mobilizations* and not of peace movement because as I explained before I don't think that "peace movement" has any analytical unity. Empirical phenomena of recent years are multidimensional realities which converge, only in a specific conjuncture, on the ground offered by peace mobilizations.

The changes in military policies offer the conjunctural opportunity for the emergence and coagulation of different elements:

(1) There is first of all a *reaction* to the changes in military policies which has two main aspects: (a) *mobilization of political actors* (in a broad sense of parties, unions, pressure groups, associations); (b) collective fear of an irreversible catastrophe. In the first case, the logic of action can be explained almost entirely within the national political systems. Inner dynamics, already operating in these systems, are activated by international conjuncture: the residual political "new left" of the seventies in West Germany, or the Communist party in Italy, find on the peace ground an opportunity for their political action. The second element of reaction is collective fear, which can be analyzed as a sum of atomized behaviors, following the classical analyses of crowd behavior or aggregative behavior.[19]

[19] Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*; F. Alberoni, *Movimento e istituzione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1981).

(2) A second component of peace mobilizations is what I would call a *moral utopianism* that is not just a contemporary phenomenon. Every social system contains a certain amount of moral and totalizing expectations toward happiness, justice, truth, and so on. These claims do not have social attributions, do not involve specific social interests or practical-historical projects. They live on the borders of great religions or great cultural and political waves, in the form of small sects, heretical cults, theological circles. The great collective processes offer a channel to express this moral utopianism, which otherwise would survive in marginal enclaves.

The peace issue is a ground of expression for these totalizing aspirations, which become visible through a cyclical up and down wave. Contemporary international conjuncture offers a social and cultural opportunity for a phenomenon which has only an occasional link with the activating situation.

(3) But peace mobilizations are not only a reaction to the recent military policies. Political actors have only a minor role in mobilization. The fear of the bomb doesn't explain the patterns of solidarity, organization, identity of recent collective action, which is very different from an aggregative behavior such as a panic. Moral utopianism could not leave its marginality if it were not pushed by collective processes which have their roots elsewhere.

My hypothesis is that peace mobilizations also express conflicts of a complex society. There is a qualitative gap between recent mobilizations and pacifism of the fifties. There is, on the contrary, a continuity with other mobilizations of the seventies and early eighties (youth, women, ecological mobilizations).

An understanding of peace mobilizations of the eighties thus needs a consideration not only of the nuclear war threat but of the whole system in which this possibility occurs.

Information has today become a central resource, and contemporary systems depend on it for their survival and development. The capability of collecting, processing, transferring information has been developed in the last twenty years at a

level which is not comparable to that of the whole history of mankind.

That increases the *artificial*, "built" characteristics of social life. A large amount of our everyday experiences occur in a socially produced environment. Media represent and reflect our actions; individuals incorporate and reproduce these messages in a sort of self-growing spiral. Where are "nature" and "reality" outside the cultural representations and images we receive from and produce for our social world?

Social system acquires a planetary dimension, and the events are not important in themselves or for the place and people where they occur but for their symbolic impact on the world system.

Informational societies develop a cultural production not directly connected to the needs for survival or for reproduction: in that they are "postmaterial" societies and they produce a "cultural surplus." Since information cannot be separated from human capability of perceiving it, social intervention affects more and more man himself. Large investments in biological research, motivational research, brain research, recent developments of neurosciences, particularly in the most developed countries, show that the deepest bases of human behavior become a field of exploration and intervention: biological and motivational structure of humans becomes a valuable resource.

A society based on information redefines *space* and *time*. Space loses its physical limits and can be extended or contracted at a degree that one could hardly imagine only few years ago. A whole library can be stocked in a space smaller than a book, but the symbolic space everybody can be in touch with reaches the whole planet and even extraterrestrial space.

The time needed to produce and process information has been reduced so rapidly in recent years that we can already experience the dramatic gap regarding other human time experiences. The gap between the time a computer needs to process information and the time for human analysis of the

output is still very high. However, research on artificial intelligence has been growing in the direction of the reduction of this lag. But the most dramatic is the gap concerning other times of our everyday experience: the inner times, times of feelings and emotions, times of questions without answers, times for unifying the fragments of personal identity.

Control over informational production, accumulation, and circulation depends on codes which organize and make information understandable. In complex societies, power consists more and more of operational codes, formal rules, knowledge organizers. In the operational logic, information is not a shared resource accessible to everybody, but an empty sign, the key of which is controlled by only a few people. The access to knowledge becomes a field of a new kind of power and conflicts. Moreover, the possibility of unifying individual experience beyond the operational rationality becomes more and more difficult: there is no place for questions concerning individual destiny and choices, life, birth, death, love.

The "nuclear situation" as the possibility of total destruction has to be considered within the framework I have just outlined.

(1) The nuclear situation is the extreme, paradoxical example of social capability of intervening on society itself. It is the ultimate expression of an "artificial," self-reflexive social life. Contemporary societies produce themselves to a degree that includes the possibility of final destruction.

(2) This situation, for the first time in human history, transforms peace and war into a *global social problem*. Society in itself is concerned with a question which affects the survival of mankind and which cannot therefore be restricted to the separate area of technical, military, or political decision. While the war, from the point of view of technology, becomes more and more a specialist's field, its meaning is paradoxically re- and becomes a general social question concer- everybody.

(3) For the first time in hi-

planetary dimension and break the limits of relations among the states which have maintained in modern history a monopoly over them. The complex system of relations we call society acquires the power of self-destruction but at the same time disposes of the chances of survival and development. "The social" becomes the field of power, risk, and responsibility.

(4) The "nuclear situation" brings the war threat to the informational field, particularly to a symbolic ground. The actual war would be the end of war, bringing with it the disappearance of mankind. So the confrontation within these limits is necessarily a symbolic fight and a struggle for controlling information. The concept of deterrence, a key concept in contemporary political and military international relations, operates mainly on symbolic ground. It intervenes in information and representations of opponents, by creating a mirror game in which every player tries to influence the other and to take advantage of the enemy's misperception.

The nuclear situation contains two paradoxes. First, if society produces the power of self-destruction, it shows both the highest level of self-reflection, of action on itself, *and* the potential and final end of this capability. Second, the nuclear situation is the product of an information society and, as such, it is no longer reversible. It is virtually impossible for information on the nuclear bomb and its production to disappear and therefore to come back to a prenuclear society. One has to imagine a catastrophe or situation in which there is total control over information and the erasing of facts and the rewriting of history, in Orwellian terms. Otherwise the bomb is an incumbent and irreversible possibility of human society, both a result of the largest widening of choices and opportunities ever produced by material and cultural evolution and an irreversible risk. We can only go beyond, confronting it.

The "nuclear situation" has substantial analogies with other contemporary forms of intervention of society on itself. Particularly genetic engineering, and all forms of voluntary action on biological bases of behavior, reproduction, thought, life itself are as radical interventions on human destiny as the nuclear threat. The difference is not the irreversibility (which could also be true for genetic manipulation or ecological disasters) but the specific characteristics of nuclear threat: *time* (destruction would be almost instantaneous) and *space* (destruction could be global), which make nuclear war incomparable with any other intervention on the future of mankind.

So what is at stake in contemporary movements, and particularly in peace mobilizations, is *the production of the human species*, at the individual and collective level: the possibility for men, as individuals and as species, to control not only their "products" but their "making," culturally and socially (and more and more biologically). What is at stake is the production of human existence and its quality.

In collective action for peace, one can find some dimensions of this emerging field of conflicts.

(1) Struggle against military policies reveals the *transnational* nature of contemporary problems and conflicts[20] and the *global interdependence* of the planetary system. Collective action challenges not only the actual shape of international relations but the logic governing them. The world system is formally a set of relations among sovereign states, but in fact it is dominated by the two-blocs logic and by the imbalances between North and South. Within the two empires, technocratic and military apparatuses control informational and decisional resources for survival and they are also responsible for the unequal exchange among different areas of the planet. The exhausting of the nation-state system is perhaps the fundamental message of contemporary pacifism, even if there are still a good deal of "national" questions unresolved.[21] Through the peace issue one can hear an appeal to give society the power of deciding and

[20] S. Hegedus, "Pacifisme, neutralisme ou un nouveau mouvement transnational pour la paix?", presented at Feltrinelli Foundation Conference, Milan, June 1985.

[21] A. Melucci and M. Diani, *Nazioni senza stato: I movimenti etnico-nazionali in Occidente* (Turin: Loescher, 1983).

controlling its own existence, in a new set of relations among its elements (groups, interests, cultures, "nations"). A new *intersocietal* order is not a utopia but great aspiration of our planetary situation where the nation-states are extinguishing themselves not because of socialism (the myth of the end of the state) but because they lose their authority: from above, a planetary, multinational political and economic interdependence moves the center of actual decision making elsewhere; from below, multiplication of autonomous centers of decision gives "civil societies" a power they never had during the development of modern states.

The problem of political management of this new situation is not an easy one; but the planetary system has to start from the *social* transformation of its nature, if it wants to find new *political* means for its survival.

(2) Peace mobilizations point out the increasing *decisional* dimension of the contemporary situation. Society and its destiny are constructed, as a result of decisions and choices, products of social relationships and not of the apparently fatal logic of apparatuses, pretending they have a right to a monopoly of "rationality."

(3) Collective action for peace reveals, finally, the *contractual* nature of social life in complex systems: the survival of mankind depends on the capability of negotiating ends. Discussion on ends disappears from the scene of collective debates, nullified by the operational criteria of efficacity or by the pure consumption of signs. Collective action says that the ends must be visible, negotiable, under control.

Acceptance of the contractual nature of contemporary societies means: (a) to recognize that the differences of interests and a certain amount of conflict can't be eliminated in complex systems; (b) to recognize the necessity of limits, that is, rules of the game, which can be established and changed by negotiation; (c) power is one of these limits and its negotiability depends on its *visibility*; (d) to recognize the *risk*, that is, the **openness and uncertainness of every decisional process re-**

ducing uncertainty. Risk, which in ethical terms means responsibility and freedom, is an irreversible component of the contemporary situation. It is not bigger for the nuclear situation than it is for other possibilities of destruction (biological, chemical, ecological) connected to the increasing intervention of society on itself. The risk points out definitely that the destiny of humans has been put into their hands.

Naming the World

The *form* of contemporary movements, and of peace mobilizations as well, is the most direct expression of the message collective action announces to the society. The meaning of the action has to be found in the action itself more than in the pursued goals: movements are not qualified by what they do but by what they are.

The legacy of industrial society is an image of social movements as tragic characters. They act on the historical scene, heroes or villains depending on the point of view, but always oriented toward great ideals or a dramatic destiny. The history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is full of these images, not merely rhetorical. They have maintained their force until recent years. Movements of the sixties and also the first wave of feminism in the seventies still belong to this epic representation: in the struggle of progress against barbarism, everyone can choose his side and can be sure of the opponent's necessary breakdown!

At the beginning of the eighties almost nothing seems to survive of these epic representations. Movements are lost, and there is no character occupying the scene. But there are a lot of submerged networks, of groups and experiences that insist on considering themselves "against." But who cares about them? They seem more interested in themselves than in the outer world, they apparently ignore politics, they don't fight against power. They don't have big leaders, organization

seems quite inefficient, disenchantment has superseded great ideals. Many observers consider these realities, which don't challenge the political system and are not interested in the institutional effects of their action, as residual, folkloristic phenomena in the big scenario of politics.

I am convinced, on the contrary, that these poor and disenchanted forms of action are the seeds of a qualitative change in contemporary collective action. Certainly contemporary movements produce some effects on political institutions, although they are not mainly oriented toward political change. They modernize institutions, they furnish them new elites who renew culture and organization. But conflict goes beyond institutional renewal and affects the meaning of individual action and the codes which shape behaviors. Thus contemporary movements have to be read on different levels.

There is in their action a component which influences institutions, governments, policies; there are pushes toward the renewal of cultures, languages, habits. All these effects facilitate the adaptation of complex systems to the transformations of the environment and to the accelerated pace of internal changes they are exposed to.

But beyond modernization, beyond cultural innovation, movements question society on something "else": who decides on codes, who establishes rules of normality, what is the space for difference, how can one be recognized not for being included but for being accepted as different, not for increasing the amount of exchanges but for affirming another kind of exchange?

This is the deepest and the most hidden message of the movements. Movements present to the rationalizing apparatuses questions which are not allowed. While the problem becomes to operationalize what an anonymous power has decided, they ask where we are going and why. Their voice is difficult to hear because they speak from a particularistic point of view, starting from a specific condition or location (as being young, being a woman, and so on). Nevertheless, they speak to

the whole society. The problems they raise affect the global logic of contemporary systems.

Starting from a temporary biological and social condition, the youth movement has presented to society the problem of *time*. Youth is no more a simple biological condition but has become a symbolic definition. One is not young only because of one's age but because one assumes cultural characteristics of variability and temporariness proper to youth. The condition of the young is a mirror through which a more general appeal is raised: the right to reverse the life time, to make temporary existential and professional choices, to dispose of a time measured not only by the rhythm of operational efficacity.

Rooted in the particularism of a condition marked by biology and history, the women's movement has raised a fundamental question concerning everyone in complex systems: how communication is possible, how to communicate with "another" without denying the difference by power relations. Beyond the demand for equality, beyond the inclusion in the field of masculine rights, women are yet speaking of the right to difference and to "otherness." That is why they sometimes choose silence, because it is difficult to find words other than those of the dominant language.

The ecological nebula grown in the last decade collects different elements: modernization of the system, new elites in formation, but also conflictual orientations which challenge the logic of relationships between man and nature and between man and *his* nature. This ecological culture raises the question of how to deal with nature inside and outside ourselves. The body, the biological structure, the environment are the limits for the "destructive creation" of technological societies. Where can human intervention stop? What is the place for "nature" still constituting and surrounding human life?

Contemporary societies have eliminated from the field of human experience what was not measurable and controllable, what in the traditional world belonged to the dimension of

the sacred. The final meaning of existence, questions on what escapes individual experience, feed a new "religious" research or simply a need for connecting the external change to an interior growth. A heterogeneous area emerges looking for a "new consciousness." It seems very far from traditional forms of conflictual movements. Nevertheless, when we are not confronted with multinational corporations selling security, we can observe a way of resistance to operational codes, an appeal to shadow, a search for an interior unity against the imperatives of efficacity.

All these forms of collective action challenge the dominant logic on a symbolic ground. They question definition of codes, *nomination* of reality. They don't ask, they offer. They offer by their own existence other ways of defining the meaning of individual and collective action. They don't separate individual change from collective action, they translate a general appeal in the here and now of individual experience. They act as new media: they enlighten what every system doesn't say of itself, the amount of silence, violence, irrationality which is always hidden in dominant codes.

At the same time, through what they do, or rather through how they do it, movements announce to society that something "else" is possible.

Peace mobilizations like other forms of mobilizations coagulate and make visible this submerged "nebula." They offer a field for external action to networks of solidarity which live in different areas of society and share the cultural reversal and the symbolic challenge to the system. Contractual and short-term involvements, coincidence between collective goals and individual experience of change, globalism of symbolic appeal and particularism of actors' social locations, all these are aspects of collective mobilizations. In the peace issue, as in other forms of contemporary mobilizations, we can see the end of a distinction between instrumental and expressive dimensions of action. Medium is the message, and action sends back to the system its own paradoxes.

Coming Back to Politics

Apparently the outcome of contemporary forms of collective action cannot be measured. Movements realize the paradox of being both winners and losers. Since they challenge the dominant cultural codes, their mere existence is a reversal of symbolic systems embodied in power relationships. Success and failure are thus meaningless concepts if referred to the symbolic challenge.

But movements don't exist only in their cultural message; they are also social organizations, and they confront political systems when they choose public mobilization. From this point of view they produce modernization, stimulate innovation, push to reform. They provide new elites, assure the change of the personnel in political institutions, create new patterns of behavior and new models of organization. Here their outcome can be measured, but one must not forget that this is only one part, and not always the most important, of contemporary collective action.

Those stressing the lack of efficacity of these forms of action not only don't catch the symbolic antagonism but also underestimate the political impact of mobilizations.

For instance, the peace mobilizations have fundamental *transnational effects*: for the first time action, also located in a specific national context, has effects at the planetary level and on the system of international relations. The lack of mobilizations in Eastern countries is paradoxically a part of the same scene: it reveals and makes clear the authoritarian structure of these societies and the amount of repression power has to use to control them.

Collective action acts also as a *symbolic multiplier*: since it is not aiming for efficacity, it challenges the operational logic of technocratic-military apparatuses and questions the bases of their power. It makes apparatuses to produce justifications, it pushes them to reveal their logic and the weakness of their "reasons." It makes the power *visible*. In systems where the

power becomes increasingly anonymous and neutral, where it is incorporated in formal procedures, to make it visible is a fundamental *political* achievement: the only condition for negotiating the rules and for making social decisions more transparent.

What peace mobilizations propose to the collective consciousness is that survival of societies, like individual life, is not assured anymore by a metasocial order or by an historical law (progress or revolution). For the first time societies become radically aware of their contingency, they realize they "are thrown" in the world, they discover they are not necessary and thus they are irreversibly responsible for their destinies. Catastrophe, suffering, freedom, all belong to the possible future, and they are not fatal events. Moreover, no collective well-being can be assured as a final solution. It has to be renewed by decisions, negotiations, actions. That is, by *polis* activity.

But, if so, a critical problem of complex societies is the relationship between political institutions and actors and the emerging pattern of collective action. What kind of representation could offer political effectiveness to the movements without negating their autonomy? How can movements translate their messages into effective political changes? These questions can't find easy answers, of course. But if we assume that the structure and orientations of contemporary movements are likely to shift in the direction outlined above, two consequences can be pointed out.

First, the organizational forms of traditional political institutions, also those coming from the leftist inheritance, are in themselves inadequate to represent the new collective demands. Political organizations are shaped for representing relatively stable interests, for achieving long-term goals through the accumulation of short-term results, for mediating among different demands through the professional action of representatives. This structure, although submitted to increasing

adjustments, still fulfills important functions in Western political systems. But it can't even hear the voice of movements, and when it does, it is unable to adapt itself to the variability of the actors and issues collective action involves.

Second, because of the fragmentation of collective action, social movements can't survive in complex societies without some forms of political representation. The existence of channels of representation and of institutional actors capable of translating in "policies" the message of collective action is the only condition preserving movements from atomization or from marginal violence. Openness and responsiveness of political representation keep clear an appropriate space for collective action and let it exist. But movements don't exhaust themselves in representation; collective action survives beyond institutional mediation; it reappears in different areas of the social system and feeds new conflicts.

Mobilizations of the eighties show that in the passage from latency to visibility a function is carried out by temporary organizations providing financial and technical resources for public campaigns on specific issues while recognizing the autonomy of submerged networks. It is a way of redefining and inventing forms of political representation, and also an opportunity for the more traditional political actors to meet new demands.

A new political space is designed beyond the traditional distinction between s 'e and "civil society": an intermediate *public space*, whose function is not to institutionalize the movements nor to transform them into parties, but to make society hear their messages and translate these messages into political decision making, while the movements maintain their autonomy.[22]

[22] See J. Cohen, "Crisis Management and Social Movements," *Telos*, no. 52 (1982): 24–41, and "Rethinking Social Movements," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 28 (1983): 97–113.