

era. It would also enable the movements to live more fully their double existence within the invisible networks of civil society and in the temporary mobilizations through which they become publicly visible. The consolidation of independent public spaces would help the movements to articulate and publicize to the rest of society the themes and dilemmas which they consider to be important. And it would enable political actors to receive the messages of the movements more clearly.

Q: Would you give some examples of the new institutions of representation which you have in mind?

These public spaces already exist to some extent. But their further development would be especially important in three areas of complex societies. Among the most important would be knowledge-producing institutions, such as universities, cultural foundations and research institutes. Knowledge is a key resource of complex societies. It is produced by professionals and appropriated by corporate and state power as well as by the general public. These actors could negotiate more openly with each other through bodies set aside for their purpose within the knowledge-producing institutions themselves. Public spaces could also be strengthened within the field of collective consumption – in the areas of transportation, housing, health and other public services where the everyday needs and demands of civil society could interface more freely with the established policy-making bodies. Finally, public spaces could also be strengthened within the field of communications media. I am aware of the enormous difficulties here, and I don't have any ready-made solutions. But attempts to create spaces of confrontation and negotiation among various actors within the media would help to ensure their greater accessibility and responsiveness. The public spaces I have in mind for each of these three policy areas would not necessarily function as arenas of conflict. They would neither be dominated by political parties nor would electoral success be their guiding criterion. Since they would not be burdened by the pressures of reaching final decisions, they might resemble neutral territory, in which different interests could interact without necessarily clashing head on. They would require legal protection. And they

certainly would include task forces, committees, and other temporary forms of representation – 'bio-degradable organizations' as the Italian Greens call them – which matched the sporadic mobilizations of the new social movements.

Q: Wouldn't the development of these public spaces suppose a radical break with conventional views about the primacy of political parties in relation to social movements?

It certainly implies a dramatic change of attitude among traditional political actors, including political parties, who could not expect immediate electoral or political gains from these spaces.

Q: Even when that point is granted, your proposal still seems to understate the reasons why movements are compelled – even if only to survive – to directly enter the party-political arena. The point is that competitive, democratically organized political parties can perform several functions which the public spaces you have in mind cannot. For example, parties can help crystallize disparate opinions into stable coalitions of interests; they can develop, under pressures of time and circumstances, policy programmes; and they can help citizens to defend their social interests while keeping an eye on state power. These functions of democratic political parties have often been ignored within the new movements. But there are signs, awareness of the necessary dependence of movements upon parties. Daniel Cohn-Bendit is a case in point. In 1968 Cohn-Bendit remarked: 'To bring politics into everyday life is to get rid of the politicians.' He now accepts the need for movements to get involved in party politics: 'The problem with the social movements is that they are not obliged to institutionalize and protect themselves. They have spread rapidly, sure, but we have learned . . . that you can spread very fast and then get beaten back very fast. That is what happened to us in '68. What we are now concerned to do is to give a presence to what has been achieved, and that is very, very difficult now. . . . I want to be able to say that we can try to achieve this with a political

party, but a political party is by definition a bureaucratic organization. The thing is that the Greens are pushed by the social movements which force them to bargain with their political power. With a party like the Greens we can begin to change the institutions of the country. I now accept that this is as important as anything else.' How do you react to Cohn-Bendit's change of heart?

I would emphasize that the functions performed by political parties are also performed by other organizations. Trade unions, pressure groups and voluntary associations can also stabilize opinions, represent social demands and formulate long-term policy programmes. I would also stress that the functions performed by social movements are not reducible to those of political parties. This point should be clear from our discussion. Political parties and other political bodies mostly exercise power at the macro-levels of complex societies. The role of public spaces is different. They permit movements to articulate the demands of civil society and to render the power relations of complex systems more visible. Given that power in these systems tends to conceal itself behind a veil of allegedly neutral or technical decision-making procedures, this critical function of public spaces is indispensable and probably of primary importance in the present period.

Q: Sympathetic observers and supporters of the new social movements often express alarm about their fragility and vulnerability to political and social repression. For example, this fear is presently evident within the gay and lesbian movements. Everywhere these movements are being subjected to a wave of cultural, legal and political harassment. Your writings don't address this problem of the forcible elimination of movements. In fact, you say in *Nomads of the Present* that the new movements have a permanent and non-conjunctural nature – that they are a stable and irreversible component of complex societies. What is the basis of this conviction? Isn't it overly optimistic?

Some might consider my view hopelessly Italian – as somehow

based on voluntarist and optimistic assumptions. This judgement would be unfair, since I am aware that considerations of the future of social movements should not be reduced to questions of optimism or pessimism, personal taste or political preference. Moreover, our conversations during the past two days have emphasized the fragile and ephemeral character of contemporary social movements. Their existence evidently depends on conjunctural factors, such as the degree of political democracy in a country, and their normal destiny is either to become institutionalized – to produce new elites and to introduce cultural changes in everyday life – or to disappear into the streams of daily existence.

I grant these points. Nevertheless, I maintain that social movements are permanent and irreversible features of complex societies. This is partly because these societies produce – as well as require – the forms of individual participation and collective mobilization generated by these movements. In functionalist terms – which I normally don't use – a sub-system of movements is a permanent feature of complex systems. What I mean is that these systems, which are both highly centralized and complex, encourage the development of spaces in which collective action becomes possible. These systems resemble an organization equipped with several mainframe computers, which are linked together and accessed by a network of terminals. The central computers require the periphery of terminals as a condition of their own operation. Without the information resources provided by the terminals, the computers simply couldn't operate. The same is true of complex societies. They require for their functioning constant inputs of individual and collective motivation. This requirement is the soil in which social movements grow. They exploit the fact that there is a deeply ambivalent relationship between the 'centres' and 'peripheries' of complex systems, and that the centres of these systems cannot impose their power, but must exercise it in co-operation with the peripheries. This structural tension lies at the heart of complex systems, and that is why social movements are likely to continue to play a role in questioning their cultural codes and power relations.

There is another reason why social movements are unlikely to disappear. This has to do with the fact that life cannot be

reduced permanently to the level of simple reproduction. Human beings want more than to eat, sleep, procreate and to stay alive. They are also motivated to transcend their given forms of existence. Awareness of this fact is growing in our times because metasocial principles, such as the Will of God or the Laws of History, are losing their grip on society. For the first time ever, society itself senses that it is contingent and in need of continuous reconstruction. Social movements feed upon this sense of contingency as well as reinforce it. They have heightened our awareness of our own ability to create and to destroy ourselves as a species. We live in an unprecedented situation. No previous form of society has exercised such power over itself. Our future now depends almost entirely on our own choices and decisions. Social life has never been so risky. That is why social movements are unlikely to disappear. They are a sign of this awesome power we have over ourselves – and of our enormous obligation to exercise this power responsibly.

IV

APPENDIX