Bartholomew, A. and M. Mayer, "Nomads of the Present: Melucci's Contribution to New Social Movement Theory", *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 9, no.4, 1992, pp. 141-159.

Alberto Melucci's work has made fascinating contributions to social movement theory and research. Informed by sensitive empirical analyses of, and engagements with, contemporary youth, women's, peace and ecology movements in Italy, he has recast existing theoretical approaches under a new focus and thus raised innovative concepts and frameworks to explain contemporary social movements. In this article, we shall highlight the explanatory power of the analytical concepts he develops, focussing on his constructivist approach, his formulation of collective action as socially constructed, composite action systems, and of collective identity as the product of continual tensions and negotiations. Assessing these innovative concepts and the framework within which Melucci develops them also reveals, however, some problems which flow from the non-hierarchical conception of `complex society' which he employs and from a `cultural reductionism' Melucci falls prey to in his effort to overcome the `political reductionism' characteristic of earlier theories. While the study of social movements will profit greatly from applying his constructivist approach, a more finely-tuned conception of the "field" of social movements will have to be developed in order to grasp the historically-situated and (therefore) changing social anchors of collective identity and symbolic challenges.

I. Theoretical and conceptual innovations

While traditional collective behavior approaches emphasize collective action as a response to disorder, and while marxist approaches emphasize the objective conditions of collective action, from which also derives the meaning of the action, Melucci argues that both positions share a problematic epistemological assumption; that the collective phenomenon is treated as a "unified empirical datum" (1989: 18; cf. 1988: 329-332) such that collective action is reified into a "given," the production of which does not merit specific investigation. The result is a view of social movements marching through history "toward a destiny of liberation, or as crowds in the grip of suggestion" (1989: 19).

Such approaches are particularly inadequate for considering contemporary movements located within "complex societies," a significant feature of which is the increasing fragmentation of actors, fields and forms of action as struggles around citizenship and social and cultural issues and codes of life become differentiated and movements are correspondingly

heterogeneous, fragile and complex. These transformations "disqualify" both the images of collective actors as characters in a play and as "an amorphous crowd" (1988: 331) and raise as an analytical (and political) problem the unity of the collective actor. They heighten the urgency of developing an approach which treats collective action as the "outcome of multiple processes", which can explain how and why heterogeneous elements form a collective actor and how unity is maintained (1989: 25).

The 1970s saw the emergence of several new types of analysis of social movements and collective action; structural analyses such as that of Habermas' systems theory, resource mobilization and political exchange theories. Melucci views each as having strengths, yet each as also limited. Structural theories are capable of explaining why a movement is established and persists, but not how it does so, while resource mobilization theory can cope relatively well with the "how", but not the "why" of mobilization. What is required is an analysis "of the how without neglecting the why of collective action" (1989: 22). Melucci sees some possibility of such an approach developing within resource mobilization theory, political opportunity structure and political exchange models. Yet, such analyses remain hobbled, at least in respect of their capacity to understand significant aspects of contemporary social movements, by their political reductionism[1]. Contemporary movements "more than others in the past, have shifted towards a non-political terrain: the need for self-realization in everyday life" (1989: 23). According to Melucci's observations, contemporary social movements (CSMs) are active on various levels within and outside of the political realm, in fact construct their collective identity outside the political realm, and "translate their action into symbolic challenges that overturn the dominant cultural codes" (1989: 75). So, what seems to be specifically remarkable about CSMs -- the achievement of producing unity in the face of differentiation and heterogenity, the symbolic challenges which they pose, and their "pre"- and "meta- political" character[2] -- cannot be grasped with the existing approaches which have a penchant for analyzing only the outcome of action and are politically reductionist.

1. Constructivist Approach

In order to overcome these deficiencies, Melucci develops a constructivist approach which addresses, first, how individuals get involved in collective action; second, how actors construct collective action and unity; and third, how one can get at the meaning which is produced out of heterogeneity and plurality (1989: 20, 58-62). This approach abandons the

view of collective actors, or movements, as characters or subjects. Agency is treated as central by emphasizing the active, cognitive construction of collective actors and collective action. Collective action is thus treated as the active creation, the product and the accomplishment of actors, produced within the limits and possibilities posed by "complex society". Hence, Melucci claims that by understanding the actions and processes, and by fostering sensitivity to the plurality of meanings, orientations and relationships, one can seek to understand crucial aspects of contemporary social movements obscured by other approaches.

The claim that collective actors are not subjects or characters, but are the products of social action, leads him to "the underlying structure of action", i.e. to a research methodology where, rather than counting demonstrations or interviewing demonstrators, he observes the "submerged reality of the movements" (1988: 338).

This constructivist approach is particularly appropriate for analyzing the fragile, conflictual character of contemporary movements, not adequately attended to by other approaches. Movements are continually stricken by the need to produce and reproduce unity and solidarity in the face of diversity and tension. Unity is in fact seldom achieved to the degree it is represented by terms such as "the" peace movement or "the" women's movement (cf. 1990). The problems of solidarity and unity are not themselves new, as is attested to by the history of socialist politics and "the" labor movement. However, the characteristics of contemporary movements, such as the peace, ecology and women's movements, which bring together diverse actors with varying goals, multiple identities and the like, combined with the contemporary commitment to respecting and protecting difference and diversity and the goal of not squelching particular(istic) identities even while pursuing common goals does complicate the problem of solidarity. Disputes, splits, acrimony and recurrent negotiations mark, for example, the North American women's movement over the treatment of class and race, with important divergences between working class feminism and bourgeois feminism, and efforts by black feminists and white feminists to find a way of expressing and respecting solidarity-in-diversity[3]. The merit of Melucci's constructivist approach is that it does not cover up, but exposes the likelihood of such problems of constructing solidarity by refusing to assume the unity of social movements and treating unity as a specific problem (solidarity in difference).

2. Collective Identity

In attempting to grasp how individuals get involved in collective action Melucci stresses the concept of collective identity as the crucial mediating variable missing in much existing work on social movements. "Collective identity" is not equivalent to "mobilizing interests" (as in Resource Mobilization's market conception of interests and benefits), but is precisely a constructivist concept, which can appear only outside the assumptions and framework of (pluralist or elite) liberal theory. It requires an intermediate level of analysis which brings into relief how individuals come to decide that they share certain orientations and decide to act collectively. Many approaches to social movements have been bedeviled by the problem of bridging the gap between the structural foundations for action and collective action itself (cf. Mayer, 1991). This problem is starkly revealed in the marxist conundrum of how to understand the formation of a class-for-itself from the existence of a class-in-itself. Such problematics, dependent as they are on always-already present interests, have failed to uncover the processes by which "actors define the circumstances of common action" (1989: 20).

Melucci's contribution is to insist that arguments about expectations are dependent upon a conceptualization of the role of collective identity. He posits that expectations are formulated by actors "who are capable of defining themselves and the field of their action. The result of this process of constructing an action system I call collective identity" (1989: 34). Until one knows, in at least some rudimentary way, the boundaries and content of the "we" (and the "them" as well), expectations cannot be fully developed. As a process, the formation of collective identity involves the construction of a "we" by developing common cognitive frameworks regarding orientations, entering into relationships through which individuals can recognize themselves as part of a collectivity (1989: 35). This process permits individuals then to calculate action, evaluate the environment and the like.[4]

Thus, Melucci replaces the view of collective action as a "unified empirical datum" with the notion that it is the product of continual tensions, negotiations and cognitive processes within a "multipolar action system" (1988: 332; 1989: 25-30), a "composite action system, in which widely differing means, ends and forms of solidarity and organization converge in a more or less stable manner" (1989: 28). These orientations are in tension, and there are potential tensions even within a particular dimension requiring continual negotiation. The more typically studied collective action is the <u>product</u> of the processes of negotiating unity. Instead of the product, Melucci studies the processes of interaction, negotiation, conflict and compromise

among a variety of different actors (1989: 217), which either succeed or fail to produce the unity and collective identity of movements. These processes are detectable only by working at the subterranean or submerged organizational level of analysis (1988: 333).

3. Submerged Networks: the place of the production of alternative meanings

While much scholarly attention has been paid to the visible side of social movements in the form of mobilizations, latency is extremely important, according to Melucci, as it "creates new cultural codes and makes individuals practice them" while visibility permits the demonstration of the opposition to the logic of the system (1989:60). In order to pursue the level of analysis necessary to analyze contemporary movements as composite action systems, Melucci attends to the networks which "constitute the submerged reality of the movements before, during and after [visible] events" (1988: 338). Networks are the small groups, submerged in everyday life, which require a personal involvement and produce "alternative frameworks of meaning" (1989: 70). They are "networks of meaning" or signs (1989: 58) which put into practice the alternative meanings which they produce and reproduce (1989: 71). The form of the movement is thus itself a message (1989: 60).

Thus, CSMs operate not only in the pre-political dimensions of everyday life (in the laboratory work of inventing new meanings and testing them out), but are also seen as meta-political, as they publicize the existence of some basic dilemmas of complex societies which cannot be resolved by means of political decisions (1989: 222). Melucci contends that contemporary movements "operate primarily as `signs.' They are not preoccupied with the production and distribution of material goods and resources" (1989: 205). The symbolic challenges of social movements have systemic effects, predominantly in "rendering power visible" (1989: 76). An example of such challenges would be the women's movement which, according to Melucci, "operates ... predominantly in the sphere of symbolic codes. In this way the women's movement supplies alternative definitions of otherness and communication, and transmits to the rest of society the message of a possible difference" (1989: 95).

Since the active and ambivalent construction of collective frames and alternative meanings is not visible (1990: 12), sociological analysis cannot rely on surveys and documents alone, but has to design appropriate research techniques to get at this "deep constructive activity".[5]

4. Complex Society

The concepts introduced so far are all grounded in a specific reading of the contours of the present and the new possibilities, risks, conflicts, actors and themes it issues. The novel features of contemporary social movements are all related to features of "complex society" (1989: 205-6). Complex society is defined by a significant decline of material production and its replacement with the "production of signs and social relations" (1989: 45). In complex society, power is dispersed, it becomes "autonomous and neutral" (1989: 88), invisible (1989: 76-77), and increasingly resides, and, indeed, hides, in forms of regulation and operational codes. This is why the most important systemic effect of contemporary social movements consists in heightening the visibility of power. With complex society's "production of signs", fundamental paradoxes emerge, the core of which is located in the education, self-reflexivity and learning required in order to produce, exchange and consume information. This produces individuals who are educated, self-reflexive, individuated; but it also produces heightened social differentiation and disintegration of traditional ties, loyalties and identities which, Melucci argues in a functionalist fashion, creates a "need for greater integration and intensification of control" (1989: 45). Such intervention takes the form of increased regulation of everyday life as "we" become increasingly capable of socially (and scientifically) intervening in heretofore `naturally' determined realms of reproduction and existence; reproduction, health, survival become targets of, and amenable to, increased human intervention and pluralized choices. While individual choices are multiplied (1989: 83), so too are risks and the possibilities for regulation, normalization, intervention and discipline. Consequently, new "systemic" conflicts "centre on the ability of groups and individuals to control the conditions of their own action" (1989: 45). The paradox gets played out in an increased intervention "in the production of meaning [which] extends to those areas which previously escaped control and regulation: areas of self-definition, emotional relationships, sexuality and `biological' needs" (1989: 45). Simultaneously, there are "parallel" demands "from below for control over the conditions of personal existence" (1989: 46).

This indicates why CSMs are predominantly (although by no means exclusively) pitched at the level of the cultural and symbolic, rather than the political or economic. "[C]onflicts develop in those areas of the system which are crucial for the production of information and symbolic resources, and which are subject at the same time to the greatest

pressure to conform" (1989: 55). In complex societies those who are particularly exposed to these tendencies are most likely to get involved in CSM's (1989: 47).

II. Problems and Limitations

While Melucci's conceptualization of "complex society" is a distinct advance over Foucault and Habermas' analyses, by virtue of its attention to the paradoxes and dialectic of control and emancipation, and thus to the social space for action and agency, it is still heavily marked by the Foucauldian themes of the dispersal of power and the overwhelming importance of information and signs[6]. In this section we want to show that a consequence of this way of conceptualizing complex society is to weaken his treatment of collective identity, cultural codes and symbolic challenges and lead him towards a "cultural reductionism".

1. Problems flowing from his conception of "Complex Society"

While Melucci acknowledges that individuals who are particularly exposed to the "pressures of the field" and who have more access to resources are likely to get involved in contemporary movements[7], and while he also acknowledges that the new middle class, old middle class and newly marginalized have different capacities for developing collective identities and therefore different capacities for developing expectations (1989: 54), understanding of the field as structured by relations of hierarchy and unequal power is largely missing.[8] Complex society appears as a vast and open plain of pluralized choices and risks, posing radically new opportunities for individual choices and for new forms of regulation -- rather than as a hierarchically structured arena and fractured terrain (see especially 1989: 119-61). This choice-regulation couplet, repeatedly employed by Melucci, is attentive only to regulative bodies and codes as constituting nodes where power congeals. More structural power relations, the forms and bases of those, and the significance of them for the actions, symbolic challenges and collective identities of CSMs do not appear as relevant.[9] This produces an analysis which treats codes/regulation as neutral in the sense of lacking inscription of relations of inequality and domination.

Melucci's formulation of complex society is simultaneously too broad and too imprecise to guide the development of conceptual tools for the analysis of contemporary social movements. Historical and national specificities of the "post-industrial" transition remain unelucidated; the process of historical change itself and its societal forms do not figure as part of the "field" of the new movements; new social, political and cultural cleavages matter only insofar as they relate to the heightened reflexivity, learning and education and the potential for greater control, which constitute, for Melucci, the central paradox of complex society. However, both the role and meaning of the new social movements seem to us also to be shaped by the specificity of the crisis and of the emergent societal models, which advanced capitalist nations have been experiencing over the past two decades. While the "increased intervention in the production of meaning" extending to areas which previously escaped regulation ("areas of self-definition, emotional relationships, sexuality and `biological' needs" [1989: 46]) may very well indicate why movements emerge demanding control over the conditions of personal existence, this background does not help to explain their concrete dynamic and transformations, nor does it explain the spread of movements not concerned with these issues at all, but with apparently `traditional' ones of survival or political opposition (cf. Mayer 1991b). The surge of social movements which came on the scene in the 1970s and 1980s challenging and, indeed, in many ways transforming the way things were done and represented, have gradually developed into an increasingly diffuse movement scene part of which is institutionalized, professionalized, or otherwise absorbed into a pluralism of lifestyles as well as politics, but another part of which is marginalized, suspicious of the `innovators' of an earlier era, but constituting some kind of political or subcultural opposition. The unquestionable increase of individuation and reflexivity thus apparently provides "choice" and flexibility not in some general, sweeping fashion, but in a hierarchical mode, structured by class, gender, and other relations of oppression and subordination -- with varied consequences for collective actors. In order to analyze why the novel elements of contemporary social movements, which Melucci detects with his constructivist approach, emerge in the context of a variety movements and how they get transformed into more "normal" or "institutionalized" processes (which may still hold ambiguity), we need a more finely-tuned social-theoretical background than `complex society' allows. Social movements of the 1980s and 90s are both more ambiguous and more varied than Melucci's generalization would allow.

a) Movements are more ambiguous

Any snapshot of a country's movement scene, or even an individual case study in the early 1990s will reveal that movements have gone through transformations, diffusion, institutionalization, splits and dislocation. Different strands have increasingly divided from each other, producing a network of sometimes hostile, sometimes peaceful coexistence of pragmatic groups working with public administrations, separate subcultures, militant grouplets, alternative parties, and various NSM milieus. This empirical reality does not fit very well with Melucci's definition of the development of CSMs: "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" (1989: 231). Because his concept of complex society defines for social movements an unambiguous role on one side of the central paradox, outside of and challenging the dominant cultural codes, the empirical development of movement milieus (implying continually shifting interactions between different currents, changing relationships between visibility and latency, mobilization and demobilization, politicization and depoliticization) becomes difficult to grasp. Just as the codes and forms of regulation, which CSMs challenge, are represented by Melucci in monolithic and neutral terms, the movements are presented as unambiguous challengers (or cease to be movements). While some empirical studies have shown that prolonged phases of latency as well as institutionalization of movement scenes may still hold challenges and remain bases for visible and challenging social action (cf. Roth, 1988; Roth and Rucht, 1991), others point to the divisive and depoliticizing processes which have led to the loss of challenge, in fact to a supportive role for certain modernization processes played by other movements (e.g. Katz and Mayer, 1985).

b) Movements are more varied

The empirical reality is also characterized by a reemergence of collective action which is a reaction to economic and social restructuring processes in the wake of the crisis of the post-war growth model, creating new lines of social polarization, marginalization and negative forms of flexibilization in growing sectors. Since complex society is not conceived by Melucci as a hierarchical formation, it precludes focus on these new lines of social polarization, which are the basis for very different types of movements: from its "privileged" sector, e.g. ecology-related slow-growth or no-growth movements may emerge, while from its marginalized sector, movements for civil rights and for redistributive goals reappear. Especially this sector,

characterized by a newly flexibilized, unprotected workforce and out-of-workforce, seems hidden in complex society, and consequently, there is no direct attention paid to movements which reflect and develop their collective identity around unemployment, homelessness or similar newly relevant survival issues (cf. Mayer 1991b). Thus, the concept of complex society and the definition of novelty (as those elements of CSMs which relate to complex society) threaten to obscure other aspects of CSMs/ other movements springing up under the current conditions of restructuring. But also the symbolic challenges posed by CSMs which fit the definition cannot be fully understood without reference to the social grounding of these challenges.

Let us look at the women's movement to illustrate this last problem. Melucci deals at some length with issues which are at the heart of women's movements: choice, reproduction, representation and difference. He argues that women mounted a massive challenge against "a narrow domestic identity" (1989: 93) in the 1970s and simultaneously challenged discriminatory social policies and the like in the political arena. With certain victories in institutional politics, the women's movement went into a period of latency which "brought out its specific form of solidarity. For example, the awareness of difference broadened out from the initial stance against a male-dominated world to the recognition of plurality within the actual female subject herself" (1989: 93). With the development of "women's culture," the "female difference becomes the basis for the elaboration of alternative symbolic codes at odds with the dominant cultural and political codes" (1989: 95). Melucci appears to assume that the women's movement has moved **from** a concern with male domination **to** a concern with difference, associated with a shift from political challenges to symbolic and cultural ones. While the latter claim may be correct, the construction of difference is still affected by (even if not directly about) unequal relations of power including male dominance. It seems to us that it is only in a context of domination that one has to fight for (whether on cultural or political terms) the recognition of difference, as it is suppressed or devalued by dominance. The claim to difference is a claim to the 'space' to be different, which presupposes that that space has heretofore been denied.

Collective identities are themselves constructed in structured environments. As Jenson has argued, "not all identities are possible" (1989a: 75). Because the construction of collective identities is social activity, the process is limited and inflected by both the `weight of the past' and the current balance of forces. While women's movements are represented as being about difference, choice and autonomy, Melucci does not locate the challenges around reproductive choice, for example, within the context of unequal social relations, nor are the scientific and

medicalized codes themselves treated as inscribed by these power relations. The struggles for reproductive choice, against medicalization and scientific interventions do not occur in an abstract, ungendered, unclassed environment. Movements and symbolic struggles against pornography and for reproductive freedom, to take two prominent examples which fit neatly into Melucci's concerns, are not mobilized against ungendered, unclassed scientific practices, "cultural codes", or system logics. Rather, they have been struggles to reveal precisely that these are gendered, and sometimes classed, representations, meanings and practices. The collective identities developed in those struggles are constructed precisely as responses to patriarchal power. Thus, if we want to adequately capture and assess the challenges being constructed and practiced and the collective identities and solidarities being (re)formulated, the grounding of unequal social relations cannot be ignored.

The women's movement may also be looked at to illustrate how movements challenge predominant cultural codes in ways which are rather more complex and variable than Melucci's analysis would allow, involving in some cases an articulation of existing discourses with new discourses.

There are networks within the women's movement in the U.S., which Melucci might very well see as `new' as they challenge representations of women and sexuality in cultural ways, but they echo important neo-conservative codes and end up bolstering neo-conservative conceptions of women, sexual desire and representation (cf. Ramazanoglu: 1989). While a complete analysis of the women's movement and sexual representation would obviously require attention to the various tendencies and networks comprising the movement and tensions and struggles over these issues -- something which Melucci's constructivist approach precisely encourages us to do --, this example illustrates that the symbolic challenges posed by new elements of CSMs may be far more ambivalent than Melucci suggests. It is far from clear that new collective actors always challenge or reverse dominant cultural codes. This example also suggests how crucial the relationship between the politically oriented and the non-political groups can be. In this case, the cultural elements affected the strategy of the political elements.

2. Cultural Reductionism

The last example already indicates that the construction of collective identity may not be exclusively the outcome of processes "in the sphere of symbolic codes", but may be shaped, also, by political struggle and the relationship between political and cultural dimensions of a

movement. Inspite of the merits of Melucci's formulation of the concept of collective identity, we think he distinguishes too sharply between political action and collective identity formation.

Melucci's focus on "how" collective identity is formulated and continually reformulated has the advantage of shifting the analytical attention away from what structures have done to actors to what actors **do** within the space produced by the limits and possibilities thrown up by structures. This is a fruitful analytical inclination because it emphasizes that actors are not simply the 'hailed' or interpellated subjects of post-structuralist theory, nor is history a matter of agentless structures as in functionalist marxism. This emphasis on active participants who can now be held accountable for their strategies, victories and defeats is an empowering, rather than a disabling, social theory.

An illustration of the usefulness, but also of the limitations of this line of inquiry may be provided by applying it to the civil rights movement in the U.S. Melucci's constructivist approach and the attention to collective identity can illuminate heretofore clouded issues in studies of the civil rights movement, sometimes considered an "old" social movement. First, the civil rights movement was not just about inclusion into the polity, accomodation and citizenship. It was also about constructing a new collective identity and posing symbolic challenges at the level of everyday life. The slogans "Black is beautiful" and "Black Power" exemplify this feature of the civil rights movement[10]. These were claims about identity and difference which can only be grasped with the sort of conceptual apparatus suggested by Melucci.

But these were also challenges to the racist configurations of citizenship itself. Moreover, struggles specifically over citizenship in political arenas were **themselves** also symbolic struggles about collective identity as well as about instrumental political goals (cf. Crenshaw, 1988). Rather than exploring the confluence of and relationship between political struggles and collective identity formation, Melucci decides that political engagements with the state are not relevant to the construction of collective identity.[11] This cuts off consideration of a wide variety of actions which CSMs engage in which may affect the construction of their collective identity.

While some contemporary movements may develop their identity "at a distance from political organization" (1989: 12), in other cases this is not so clear. Omi and Winant contend, for example, that in the U.S. the collective identity "Asian-American" was, in fact, constructed as a result of state policies and practices which treated disparate groups. like Korean Americans, Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans, similarly. As a consequence, "groups which had

not previously considered themselves as having a common political agenda" were able to consider themselves an identifiable, solidary force (Omi and Winant 1986: 84). Women's movements have constructed their collective identities differently across space, even when the identitty constructed is everywhere one of `difference'. The various specific meanings and inflections of difference depend, in part, on the ways in which political engagements with the state crystallized in the forms of laws, rights, policies and ideologies structure the terrain. For example, the women's movement in the U.S. in the early twentieth century constructed an identity of women as "specialized citizens"; that is, as citizens marked by difference based on "female qualities of nurture and maternity" (Jenson 1989b: 252). This construction was conditioned by a Supreme Court decision which formally announced and justified a biologically essentialist conception of women's difference (Jenson 1989b: 243; 251).

The last example raises a final and more speculative consideration. Movements in North America, at least, have often relied on the discourse of rights (cf. Bowles and Gintis 1986) and have pursued rights strategies in various ways. Three uses of rights seem to be prominent: to (attempt to) protect movement organizations and actors from coercion or repression; to press claims instrumentally, for example, attempting to stop the construction of a nuclear power plant; and, the use of rights as cultural symbols mobilized in political struggles as discourses to break into or, less frequently perhaps, out of dominat cultural codes (cf. Bartholomew and Hunt 1991; Hunt 1990). The animal rights movement provides an illustration of a movement employing a rights discourse in order to break into a dominant cultural code, the code of rights, and possibly of citizenship (cf. Turner 1986). Questions arise over the effects of such strategies for the identity construction of movements. Returning to the civil rights movement, it is an often noted feature of that movement that the legalistic orientation of some parts of it contributed to its `liberalization'. This is generally taken to mean that it moderated its political demands and was institutionalized or `coopted'. However, it is also worth considering whether its political (and legal) practices contributed to the construction of an identity around citizenship and whether, even if this was an identity of `racially different' citizenship, the construction of <u>this</u> identity foreclosed, at least for some time, more radical identity possibilities. But Melucci does not explore such questions as he erects an overly sharp dichotomy between political-strategic-instrumental action and political representation on the one hand and everyday life, culture, identity formation and symbolic challenges on the other.

This dichotomy limits the investigation of identity construction to claims and discourses which are purely cultural, symbolic or about everyday life. Under conditions, however, where "the political system" itself no longer has clear boundaries but is fraying out at the margins,

such inattention to the relationship between cultural/symbolic and political elements of CSMs appears to be a problem. The state, the ruling institutions, and the hegemonic cultural codes are undergoing changes, incorporating some of the innovative movements in the process[12], and thereby continually shifting the "line of conflict." Collective identity formation needs therefore to be understood as composed of a broader set of processes, not only because both cultural and political dimensions are often relevant or present, but also because they are related to one another in a way in which we can expect each to condition the other.

These examples from the realm of empirical movements have to suffice to illustrate some problems which seem to flow from Melucci's conception of complex society, its lack of history and its inattention to power relations. The limitations of these conceptions can probably be related back to the basis of Melucci's research, indicating that he may have generalized from a moment in Italian movement history: the specific movement sectors (feminism, youth movement of 1976/77, spiritualism) and their lack of political involvement. Their characteristic features may, however, be a result of the particularities of the Italian metropolis, where the `new topics' -- unlike in other West European countries -- could gain hold only by breaking with the revolutionary class-struggle versions of political militance. Secondly, the fact that only few visible movement activities were registered during the research period, and few dealings with the state occurred, led Melucci to introduce and to highlight "latency", but the relationship between visibility and latency remains unclear. Since a mobilizing capacity of the `movement' sectors is not demonstrated, it is not clear what exactly the distinguishing factor between social movements (visible) and subcultures/scenes (latent) might be.[13] In a parallel fashion, he introduced and highlighted the concept of collective identity formation, to be investigated through claims and discourses which are purely cultural, symbolic, about everyday life. We have presented examples of how identity may also be formed <u>in</u> political struggle, in friction with the state, as well as in movement discourses developed to break <u>into</u> dominant cultural codes. Since the "field" of collective action (conceived as complex society) is void of relations of oppression, unequal power relations, class or gender hierarchies in Melucci's formulation, the significance of such structures of inequality for collective identities and symbolic challenges cannot be traced.

III. Perspectives for Social Movement Research

Looking into the future, Melucci demands the expansion and official recognition of "public spaces" for protecting CSMs and for enriching democracy. "A new process of `post-industrial' democratization based on the widening and consolidation of public spaces would build on the principles of rights, citizenship and equality" (1989: 227). He assumes such "independent" public spaces, which "already exist to some extent", would help movements "to articulate and publicize to the rest of society the themes and dilemmas they consider important" (1989: 228). This vision of "neutral", "independent" territories is, unfortunately, nowhere bolstered by empirical analysis. Melucci does not research existing public spaces such as movement media, economic infrastructures, living arrangements or the places of their cultural activities, nor does he indicate what developments might lead to the widening and consolidation of such public spaces. Available case studies of such new intermediary public spheres in different cities and regions come up with landscapes that are anything but neutral or independent.[14] Also painfully absent is a critical assessment of the transformation processes social movements have been undergoing: whether commercialization or professionalization, whether institutionalization or other forms of "normalization" -- the effects have been tensions and splits and dislocations in contemporary social movements. Some of these changes seem to be related to the openings and opportunities as well as the closures created by broader political restructuring processes, indicating that not everything about the movements' dynamic and development can be explained out of their self-generation. Hence, a more precise understanding of the "field" of SMs is crucial. A more finely-tuned social-theoretical approach is needed, that would allow an analysis of the trends of societal transformation and not reduce the complex and shifting empirical reality of CSMs (cf. Hirsch, 1988; Jenson, 1989a). Rather than assuming that social movements play an essential and unambiguous role (on the challenging side of a central conflict), this role would precisely need to be the object of the research. An implication for the design of the research would have to be that not particular movement groups -- taken as reflection or representation of the movement as a whole -- would be studied. Assuming that individual movement groups adequately reflect the movement as a whole overlooks the fact that quite different forms of (inter)action are at work at higher levels than at the (studied) group level. For an understanding of a movement as a whole, different levels as well as the interplay of the different levels have to be studied. The analysis would have to include the social infrastructure of the movement, the development of movement milieus, the expansion of the intermediary political culture, as well as various

institutionalization processes of movements. Besides a vision of what CSMs offer in terms of challenging the dominant codes, we need analysis of pragmatic mobilization and demobilization processes; we require descriptions of the ambivalent development of the new social movements, of both their success in politicizing major spheres of society and of their diffusion into pragmatization or innovation, while still other parts of the CSMs have become marginalized or repressed and/or pushed towards militance. For the contemporary social movements are certainly one actor in the transition to a post-Fordist capitalism: they assert political themes in new fields and create new social and cultural patterns which have rippled into a variety of institutions. But the extent to which they prefigure a genuine alternative or pose challenges on relevant levels of a societal formation, is the research question to be analyzed, not assumed.

Endnotes

1. A politically reductionist analysis considers social movements "only as political actors" (1989: 43) and thus "underestimates the great significance of the social and cultural dimensions of contemporary collective action" (1989: 44; cf. 1988: 338).

2. "New conflicts develop in those areas of the system where both symbolic investments and pressures to conform are heaviest. These conflicts act increasingly at a distance from political organizations. They are interwoven with the fabric of everyday life and individual experience" (1989: 12).

3. For two statements amongst many see Adams (1989) and Ramazanoglu (1989). Melucci's editors Keane and Mier aptly describe this as "contested solidarity" (Melucci 1989: 217).

4. The concept of collective identity does not help to explain the likelihood of particular individuals from specific groups involving themselves in contemporary movements. Here, Melucci resorts to a structural analysis which, in his version, suggests that those who are apprised of information and who are caught most tightly in the paradoxes of complex society are more likely to participate than individuals for whom neither of these conditions obtain (1989: 39, 47, 61). This explains the often-noted empirical feature of the CSMs: the prominence of the new middle class, and it suggests as well that inquiry into the conflicts and "resources" available to other groups may help explain their participation or non-participation in particular movements (1989: 52, 54)).

5. Cf. the appendix on the methodology of researching social movements (1989: 235ff, particularly 239/40).

6. While there are similarities between Melucci and Foucault with regard to the ubiquity or dispersal of power, the attention to symbolic codes and signs and the growing processes of `normalization' and surveillance, the important difference between Melucci and Foucault's analysis of power is evident in the former's more "dialectical" understanding of complex society with a correspondingly larger role for struggles against the control side of the emancipation-control dialectic. Against the "one-dimensional" view of power which Melucci attributes to Foucault ("the construction and administration of subjects"), he sees reality in complex societies as the resultant of both, powerful organizations which attempt to define the meaning of reality and actors and networks who use the resources of these same organizations to define reality in novel ways. (1989: 208-9).

Similarly, Melucci suggests a more dialectical redefinition to Habermas' notion of colonization of the life world: "Colonization is a deeply ambiguous process. It entails the (attempted) domination of the life world as well as the injection of resources which can be used by people to transform the conditions of everyday life. The health policies of the welfare state are a typical example. Health information and sickness prevention policies -- as the campaign against AIDS illustrates -- invade everyday life more than any other policy field. Health care services manipulate and control people in the most intimate sense. And yet at the same time people acquire through these same channels new information about the conditions of health and a new awareness of their health needs and rights. This enables people to organize themselves in new and more meaningful relationships. Of course, this process of inventing new forms of action is always frustrated by inequalities of power and resources, and this is why conflicts and movements are a fundamental aspect of the colonization process. Nevertheless, the colonization of everyday life by large-scale organizations is not a one-dimensional process. It extends forms of administrative control **and** encourages new meanings and forms of sociability" (Melucci, 1989: 196).

7. "The main actors of the `new' movements enjoy a privileged access to the resources most suitable for this type of investment; and, at the same time, they are subjected to the most direct impact of the system's contradictory requirements" (1989: 61).

8. As the quote reproduced in note 6 illustrates, Melucci does occasionally mention unequal power and inequality of resources. As well, he mentions the subordination of women (1989: 94, 151). Our claim is not that he ignores inequality or subordination, but rather that he fails to bring an analysis of unequal power relations to bear on his analysis of the contours of complex society, i.e. to view codes/regulation as constituting condensations of those relations of power and inequality.

9. It seems that inattention to unequal social relations is a conscious choice Melucci has made in his analysis since he has moved from an analysis which attempted to consider class relations (1980) to one which all but ignores them and it appears to be part of his attempt to articulate what is specific about contemporary society and what is "new" about contemporary social movements (1989: 185-7).

10. See Omi and Winant (1986) who use the notion of collective identity in their consideration of the civil rights movement and the formation of a `racial state'.

11. Also with regard to the women's movement, Melucci distinguishes between political actions, on the one hand, and identity issues and symbolic challenges, on the other: "In the women's movement, for example, awareness of inequality and exclusion based on gender has grown among those women affected by the contradictory processes of higher education, political participation and working life, where women's participation is restricted by continuing male prerogatives. But the women's movement involves more than the affirmation of new rights and the demand for equality. It also claims the importance of difference, the need for alternative codes which demand recognition. Women raise the question of difference for the whole of society, and urge that everyone can be recognized as different" (1989: 56).

12. E.g. allowing some representations of the new movements' demands into the state, such as women's bureaus or environmental task forces.

13. Cf. on this Koopmans, 1990.

14. See e.g. Beywl, 1991; Heider, 1988; Roth et al., 1990; Roth, 1991; Stamm, 1988; Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen 3/90: Strukturwandel und neue soziale Milieus; Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen 1/89: Medien und Neue Soziale Bewegungen.