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Sociological Theory as a Theory of Social Movements?

A Critique of Alain Touraine

Dieter Rucht

Introduction

Probably no social scientist in Europe has devoted more energy to analyzing social movements than the French sociologist Alain Touraine. And probably no contemporary researcher in this field has provoked such controversy both at home and abroad. Surveying the reviews of Touraine's publications, one is struck by the degree to which opinion is divided in the scientific community. Some praise his work as »a major contribution to political sociology« and extol his »powerful and sound methodology« (Freiberg 1973, 273). Many others harshly criticize his work arguing that the substance of the book in consideration is »obscure« (Nagel 1983, 923), »highly unsatisfactory in methodological terms« (Rüdiger and Lowe 1984, 22), and that the author's »excursions into grand social theory force the reader into a marsh of confusing concepts« (Smith 1976, 981). Still others, confronted with one of Touraine's numerous books, apparently feel confused: »This is one of those books academic reviewers could despair of. It is a very intellectual book, yet its appeal is essentially emotional. You either like it or you don't.« (Lebas 1985, 329)

This article offers a critical assessment of Touraine's writings on social movements.¹ Such an effort may be warranted for at least two reasons. First,

¹ This article was originally inspired by a six-month research stay in Paris in 1984, where I was loosely affiliated with Touraine's institute. I wish to thank Alain Touraine for his hospitality. For comments on earlier versions of this essay, I owe thanks to Hanspeter Kriesi, Alberto Melucci, Christopher Rootes and Roland Roth. I am also grateful to Richard Rogers, Bruce Spear and Jeffrey Butler for assistance with the English version.

Touraine's work has been unevenly and incompletely assimilated. Many authors, especially those engaged in quantitative empirical research on social movements in the Anglo-american community, ignore Touraine's work and borrow their theories and categories from other authors. Scholars dealing explicitly with general concepts on social movements tend to mention Touraine, but usually neither discuss his work in detail nor draw on his conceptual propositions. Still others pick up some catchwords or categories without attending carefully to their theoretical contexts and implications. Only a few researchers seem fairly familiar with Touraine's approach, and still fewer explicitly develop their own concepts in the light of his work.²

A second reason why it may be fruitful to discuss Touraine's approach is that it now appears ready for a critical examination; surveying the development of his thought over the last four decades, one may begin to discern the conclusion of a distinct working phase. This is not to say that Touraine's productivity has diminished but rather, that the ambitious research program on social movements based on a particular body of theories and methods, can now be assessed with respect to both its premises and its concrete results. It may now be appropriate to assess how Touraine, while developing and applying his research program, drew any practical conclusion in responding to those critics who particularly focused on theoretical and methodological questions. After presenting a short overview of Touraine's scientific biography and its relation to political events, in the second section I will deal with the theoretical content of this work and its implication for the concept of social movements. Special attention will be paid to the author's interpretation of the present stage of social development, the role of social movements in ushering in a new era, and his perception of the discipline of sociology as a whole. Third, I will focus on the author's empirically-oriented work on social movements, and in particular, on the method he has created and applied. Finally, after summing up these interpretations and criticisms, I will offer a few concise judgements on his work.

2 One of the few exceptions is Alberto Melucci in Italy, who has done his doctorate with Touraine, and, to a lesser degree, Klaus Eder in West Germany. Not surprisingly, both scholars do have close affiliations to French sociologists. Other social scientists, which have paid some attention to Touraine, are Klaus Japp (1984), Roland Roth (1984) and Ron Eyerman (1984).

I. Some Notes on Touraine's Scientific Biography

In the early phase of his career, in the 1950s and early 1960s, Touraine was engaged in the field of industrial sociology under the mentorship of Georges Friedman.³ Through his studies on the conditions and the consciousness of the labor force Touraine became convinced that these features have to be considered as they are linked to the general system of power in a given society. Consequently, he began to widen his horizon of interest. His dissertation »Sociologie de l'action« (1965) proposed at least three areas of interest Touraine has continued to develop up to the present. These include the sociology of »industrial civilization,« the conceptualization of sociology as a »science of social action,« and the analysis of social movements regarded as the central actors in society.

Besides numerous articles, Touraine has also written, or co-authored as the principal researcher, some twenty books. Facing this impressive body of literature the scholar is struck by how persistently he has pursued a research program beginning 1951, worked out in a provisional form by 1961, and continuing to this day. Touraine is not only a researcher, but also, a committed citizen who actively intervenes in the political and intellectual discourse.⁴ Although distancing himself from the Marxism which appealed to many French intellectuals during the postwar era, his politics are clearly

3 Together with other young academics such as Michel Crozier, Jean-Daniel Reynaud, Viviane Isambert-Jamati, Serge Moscovici, Joffre Dumazdier and Edgar Morin, Touraine was associated with a circle of researchers around Georges Friedman (see Düll 1975; Rose, 1979). Most, including Touraine (who studied history at the Ecole Normale Supérieure), were not originally trained in sociology. In the mid-fifties, Touraine dissociated himself from Friedman's ideas, and in particular, his mentor's conception of industrial work (Düll 1975, 113). From 1958 onward, Touraine founded and headed a research institution (»Laboratoire de Sociologie Industrielle«) at the Paris-based Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. He was also a co-founder and co-editor of the journal »Sociologie de Travail« launched in 1959. His analysis of the three distinct phases of work in contemporary societies became very influential in the field of industrial sociology.

4 Raymond Aron, telling in his memoirs how Touraine defended his thesis, gives us an insight into Touraine's vital character. »A. Touraine presented his thesis with the élan of a conquistador, then concluded with a poem in Spanish. The president of the jury then gave me the floor and I began: »Returning to the earth.«« (cited according to Lembert 1986, 691).

those of the Left.⁵ He has always felt an urgent need for change in the given social and political order; he was and remains in search of those actors who could bring it about. During the early stages of his professional work Touraine hoped the labor movement might play a vital role in creating the alternative society he was striving for. But his analysis of the conditions and consciousness of industrial workers revealed that the labor movement had become more or less compromised with the given social order (1965; 1966).⁶ »This institutionalization of the labor conflicts which transform the worker's movement into a truly political force has made it lose its role as a central social movement...« (1981, 12). Moreover, Touraine was skeptical about »industrial democracy;« he criticized the mainstream concepts used in industrial sociology, the »technocratic illusion« of conflict settlement (1955, 178), the dominant role of functionalist theory in sociology,⁷ and conventional methods of empirical investigation based on interviews and the interpretation of documents (1966, 346).

Teaching at the university of Nanterre, Touraine witnessed at first hand the birth of the movement of May '68. Since the department of sociology was an epicenter of the unrest he became directly involved in the conflicts and by and large defended the rebellious students.⁸ The energy and creativity of this revolt deeply impressed the sociologist. In the same year, Touraine published a book on the movement where he put forward the idea that this

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- 5 »Touraine considers himself as »belonging to the leftists who are hostile to doctrines ... and are fascinated by all revolts and all revolutions.« (1965, 15*) »Yes, I would like to see an expansion of a social democracy, of self-regulation, of rights of minorities, of the possibility to contest, and I do believe in the existence of grassroots movements which will never become institutionalized.« (1977, 256*)
 - 6 All bibliographical references containing only the respective year of publication and not author's name refer to works by Alain Touraine. Citations marked with a »*«, for instance, (1973, 12*), are my own translations from French or German editions of Touraine's writings.
 - 7 In 1952, during a stay at Harvard University, Touraine was confronted by Talcott Parsons. That encounter seems to have deeply impressed Touraine – in a negative sense. »I have difficulties in bearing this false liberal aristocracy. And still worse was accepting the teaching of Talcott Parsons, the key figure in American sociology, who I never ceased fighting against.« (1977, 64) In spite of his strong antiparsonian bias, however, the theory Touraine later developed resembles Parson's early theory to some extent. For instance, Touraine gives the concept of action systems a central role in his theory.
 - 8 Some students, including Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who were accused by a type of tribunal initiated by university officials, were defended by Touraine and Henri Leveuvre (cf. Touraine 1977, 200).

revolt, despite its obvious limits, heralded a new era in history – a thesis which he worked out in more detail in his subsequent collection of essays entitled *»La société postindustrielle«* (1969).

Inspired by the events of May '68, as well as disappointed by the fall of the popular movement in Chile,⁹ Touraine turned to social movements both as a researcher and a political man. He wrote on the Chilean military coup (1973a) and developed his experiences during a stay in California into a book about the student movement and the American university system (1972). This shift of interest, from industrial sociology to the study of social movements, is also reflected by his departure from the *»Laboratoire de Sociologie Industrielle«*, which he had established in 1958, to create the *»Laboratoire des Mouvements Sociaux«*, the forerunner of the *»Centre d'Etudes des Mouvements Sociaux.«*

In 1973, Touraine published his major theoretical book *»Production de la société«* which he had started to work on in 1966. Here one finds the basic concepts, categories and positions informing his approach to this day. This book can be considered a key to Touraine's approach, the so-called *»sociologie actionnaliste.«*¹⁰

In 1976, when tens of thousands of French students engaged in a major strike, Touraine had a chance to apply the experimental research method he had been reflecting on for a couple of years – a task which to him had absolute priority (1974a, 243*). The elaboration and application of this method, which he termed *»intervention sociologique,«* became his dominant interest. Partly because not all of the people in his environment shared his concerns, Touraine left this second institute. He established a new research unit devoted mainly to his approach,¹¹ and consequently has named after his method: *»Centre d'analyse et d'intervention sociologique.«* In the following ten years, Touraine and his collaborators applied the method to other movements including the French antinuclear movement (1980b), the regionalist movements in France (1981a), the Polish Solidarity Movement (1983a), and

9 Married to a woman from Chile, Touraine was continually interested in the fate of popular movements in Latin America and especially in Chile (see Touraine 1973a; 1988). Occasionally he spent some time travelling or teaching in Latin America.

10 For the debate surrounding this concept see Reynaud and Bourdieu (1966) and Touraine's reply to them (1966a); see also Ackermann and Moscovici (1966).

11 The most comprehensive presentation of this method can be found in Touraine 1978 and Touraine et al. 1983. Moreover, there are chapters in the empirical studies in which the method is explained.

the French labor movement (1984).¹² The initial motive for these studies was »to increase the capacity of these movements for collective action, and with this, that of the society as a whole.« (1977, 271)

Today it seems that Touraine's ambitions, both in political and scientific terms, remained largely unfulfilled. His conceptual writings run the risk of becoming repetitive. The intense research period on social movements is gradually coming to an end. This impression is also supported by the fact that Touraine's recent book on society and politics in Latin America (1988) is not really centered around the study of social movements.

II. Social Movements, Sociology, and Society

Again and again Touraine posed the fundamental question, formulated as early as 1965, of conflicts and actors who will shape our future: »Though it is still too early to identify and name the new cleavages, to define and to discuss consciously and passionately the weapons of the new social struggles, it is already time to aim at defining a new social structure, the new conflicts and the new social movements.« (1969, 118*)

Only years later did Touraine find an answer to this question. The new promising actor appeared to be the student movement, even though he was uncertain whether this collective actor was likely to become a social movement or if it had already attained this elevated status.¹³ Faced with the end of the student movement a few years later, Touraine is again in search of the agent of history. In his »Production de la société« he addresses the fundamental question: »Which type of social movement in the industrial civilization will assume the role that the labor movement had during the central period of capitalist economy and nationalism at the beginning of industrialization?« (1965, 469*) Now his hopes are directed towards those movements

12 For various reasons, studies on the feminist and peace movements, carried out in the first half of the 1980s, were not completed.

13 On the one hand he writes: »The unrest and the student revolt will become a social movement only at the moment when they will call not for a specific but for a general fight.« (1969, 105*) »It is not yet an autonomous and fully developed movement.« (1969, 135*) But on the other hand, Touraine states: »As a matter of fact, a social movement of the highest significance has entered the historical stage...« (1969, 135*) »The student movement is truly a social movement.« (1969, 97*)

which he interprets as the heirs of May '68. »The century of socialism is over, and likewise the decade of the counter-culture. Now we have to concentrate on the really important aspect, that is the formation of new social movements which attack technocracy... The grandeur of the May movement stems from the fact that for the first time it has recognized this new battle field and fired the initial salvoes in that direction even though the movement has also fought battles of retreat. The antinuclearists are the direct heirs of May 68, and the women's movement, the regional or national movements also are engaged in this anti-technocratic battle which defines the new social movement.« (1980, 262*)

A. The Approach and its Position in Sociology

Since Touraine's concept of social movements is intimately linked to the way he perceives society as a whole it is necessary to refer to his general theory. What is the status of his approach? Which elements constitute the basis of an »actionalist« sociology, and how does this approach relate to other theories? Even though it is not easy to give an adequate presentation of this concept – Touraine offers dozens of theorems, categories and schemas, some of them varying not only from publication to publication, but also, within the same one – an effort will be made to characterize the status of this approach and to outline some basic assumptions.¹⁴

Remarkably, it is difficult to detect direct references to other work in sociology and philosophy. Only in his earlier writings does he conceive of his »actionalist« approach as a complement to structuralist and functionalist theories (1965, 90). But in his later work, without discussing these rival concepts in detail, he simply puts them aside with a testy gesture. Polemically, he rejects not only structuralist and functionalist concepts, but also, symbolic interactionism, empiricism, evolutionary theories of society and social phi-

14 Admitted, some of the key categories were not very clear to me and thus will likely be less clear for the reader of this article. What Gamson noted in reviewing »The voice and the eye« is not out of the ordinary for Touraine's work: »Those who contend that sociology is a form of mystification will find ample evidence throughout this book. Neologism abound and existent words are given special meanings, confusingly different from their ordinary meaning. One wades through a bog of paragraph-long sentences, grateful for the occasional simple declarative. Complicated schematic diagrams abound in the theoretical chapters, but these rarely clarify.« (Gamson 1983, 813)

losophy, and thus, leaving the impression that he stood in a desert: »The field of sociology is no longer occupied by the battalions of functionalism – they have withdrawn in disarray. This field lies nearly deserted before us; there are only some riders crossing through at a gallop, raising dust while disappearing.« (1974, 242*)

But Touraine also offers a more dramatic picture of sociology, a picture of fights and struggles, and of »sociology in crisis«. Fortunately, as we know, where is danger there is also a chance for rescue. »In my view,« Touraine tells us, »never before has sociology been in a more favorable situation than now.« (1969, 312*) There is no doubt that actionalist sociology promoted by Touraine is the way out of this crisis.¹⁵ Without being overly modest, Touraine characterizes his approach as the key concept of sociology: »Actionalist analysis does not define the entity of sociology, but rather, its foundation as an autonomous social science.« (1965, 92*) Surprisingly, he identifies his actionalist sociology with the study of social movements. Thus it is to be understood more in terms of its content than its method (1965, 112). In more recent publications he maintains his aim »to reorganize the entire body of sociological analysis around this new idea, that of social movement.« (1981, 78; see also 1985, 786)

B. Society as a Hierarchy of Action Systems

Touraine's central theoretical principle is that contemporary society is not a system of reproduction but is creating itself in conflictual processes. Society is basically perceived as a »hierarchized set of *systems of action*, i.e. of social relations between actors who may have conflicting interests but who belong to the same social sphere and therefore share certain cultural

15 Over many years Touraine has apparently maintained his self-image as the authoritative author who solves the crisis of sociology. A reviewer of Touraine's collection of essays »Le retour de l'acteur« (1984a) describes this attitude sarcastically: »... this books reads like a manifesto in which Touraine offers a remedy to what he perceives as a detrimental crisis in sociology. Of course, the solution is to be found in the research that he has directed for the last 20 years and that consists of the analysis of social movements. The circle is complete and Touraine becomes involved in a justificatory argument that seeks to legitimize his own approach to society. Thus, sociology becomes the study of social movements.« (Desan 1985, 438)

orientations. A society is not founded upon its economy, nor upon ideas; it is not a combination of sub-systems or sub-levels. It has only two fundamental components: historicity, i.e. its capacity to produce the models by which it functions, and the class relations through which these orientations become social practices, still marked by a form of social domination. A society has neither nature nor foundations; it is neither a machine nor an organization; it is action and social relations. This idea sets a sociology of action against all the variants of functionalism and structuralism.« (1981, 25) The aforementioned hierarchy consists of three levels. The highest and most important level is conceived of as the field of »*historicity*« (l'*historicité*), which is formed by two dialectically interwoven components: *Class system* and the *system of historical action*. It is at this level where Touraine situates the category of »dominance« and the realm of class conflict, and thus, of social movement activities. Historicity, undoubtedly the corner stone of Touraine's theoretical framework, defines what is at stake for society as a whole. Historicity relates to the fundamental mode of dominance and the actors involved in this struggle over the content and forms of dominance.

On the second level of the so-called *institutional system* Touraine places the political institutions, and in particular, the state. In functional terms, Touraine ascribes the making of legitimate decisions here, emphasizing the category of »influence«. At this level Touraine situates *political* actors and conflicts, not to be confused with social conflicts, which take place only at the upper level. By definition, political struggles and political movements are not decisive in the production of society. Thus, they should be strictly separated from social movements. Only the latter can be attributed to the crucial battle over historicity.

Finally, there is the »*organizational system*« at the third and lowest level and related to the category of »differentiation.«

According to Touraine, the relationship of these three action systems on different levels cannot be conceived of as a unidirectional dependency: »Each system possesses a certain autonomy, but is also controlled by higher systems, to which, in turn, it is a restrictive factor.« (1976, 117f*) Taking the example of the political system, this relationship means that the system »is autonomous insofar as it is defined by a political collectivity, a specific social unity, which does not directly correspond to a field of historicity ... However, it is subordinated to historicity, i.e., both to the restrictions of a historical action system and the modes of dominance exerted by the ruling class.« (1974, 118*) Despite their subordinate position, action systems on

lower levels may deviate from the logics of higher systems. At the level of the institutional systems, these deviations take the form of oppositional or innovative actions, which, optimally, may even anticipate a new quality of historicity. At the level of the organizational system, the exertion of social control may provoke resistance or the refusal of achievement. Thus, the overall system composed of specific sub-systems does not absorb and control all forms of behavior it produces. It also creates behavior which is transformed into either deviance or social change. (cf. 1974, 120) Because, by definition, the decisive conflicts of a society take place at the level of historicity, and it is there that social movements act, these become the key objects for Touraine's sociological analysis.

C. What is a Social Movement?

In his early studies of the consciousness of workers, Touraine distinguished three elements which ideally constitute class consciousness: identity, opposition, and totality (cf. 1966, 17). To be sure, the empirically existing consciousness is not necessarily class consciousness insofar as it may reflect these principles only in a distorted and unbalanced way. In his later work, Touraine applies this categorical triad more strictly to social movements (cf. 1973, 369ff.; 1981, 80ff.).

Identity refers to the conscious self-definition of a social actor. This definition, however, is not created through contemplative reflection, but only through a conflict which constitutes and organizes the actor. In turn, organization happens only when a social actor realizes who his real opponent is and thus constitutes the principle of *opposition*. These principles can also be applied to particular and marginal conflicts. With respect to social movements, however, Touraine conceives of identity and opposition in a stronger sense. The actor has to be challenged by a fundamental social force in a conflict in which the general orientations of social lives are at stake. This condition leads to the third principle, that of *totality*, which is »nothing other than the *historical action system*, whose antagonists ... strive for domination.« (1973, 363*) Thus, a social movement is »a collective behavior which is not directed towards the values of a social organization or towards participation in decision-making systems, but towards the stake of class conflicts, i.e., the historical actions system.« (1973, 365*) It follows from this definition that in each type of society only two social movements can exist. »Corresponding

to a system of historical action there is a main class relation and consequently a pair of antagonistic social movements.« (1981, 94)

Social movement has to be understood as an analytical category. Empirically, »a social movement is never ›pure‹, because, on the one hand, it merges with organizational and institutional behavior, and on the other, it also has to be taken as an organization and sometimes nearly as a state within the state.« (1973, 367f*) But in an analytical sense Touraine stresses the dividing line between social movements and related phenomena: »A party, a trade union, a voluntary association, regardless which type they may represent, can never be identified as a social movement because these forms can also represent the reaction to an organizational crisis or to tensions within the institutional system.« (1973, 368f*) Once collective actors lose the capacity to integrate and to balance the principles of identity, opposition and totality, the actors – measured by the idea of a social movement – manifest themselves only in various deficient forms which either do not reach the level of a social movement or manifest themselves as a product of decay of a once viable movement. But it has to be acknowledged that these forms situated below the level of the historical action system, and which are called struggles (»lutttes«), »cultural«, or »political« movements, may well be the heralds of a coming social movement.

Since, according to Touraine, past as well as contemporary societies are marked by class conflicts, and social movements are situated at this level of conflict, most of the empirical phenomena, for instance the fascist movement, are excluded by definition. This is the case because only *one* singular movement refers to each social class. Consequently, the categories of class and social movements have to be equated: »Social movement and class struggle are synonymous expressions; only the former will be used here, because to speak of class struggle would seem to indicate that classes, objectively defined, enter the struggle to defend contradictory interests. To speak of social movements is to state, on the contrary, that *there exist no class relations separable from class action*, from its cultural orientations and from the social conflict in which the movement occurs.« (1981, 94) Once the society is defined as a class society, and classes are equated with or at least closely related to social movements, the latter have to be considered as »normal« phenomena which are not related to specific periods or specific areas. Rather than being dramatic and extraordinary phenomena, social movements have a permanent character in the heart of social life. Although social classes are involved in conflicts, they still refer positively to a com-

mon basis, i.e. the same cultural patterns. (cf. 1984b, 8) For instance, both capitalists and the working class, though fighting over the control of means of production, accepted industry as a tool for societal progress.

Interestingly, in his more recent publications, Touraine tends to differentiate social movements from class. The latter »can be defined as a situation, whereas a social movement is an action, the action of a subject, that is, of an actor who calls into question the social form of historicity.« (1984a, 68) In particular, for our contemporary society, Touraine seems to feel uneasy about his former statements on the central role of class: »We cannot analyze our societies with the concepts of cast or *Stand* and less and less of class.« (1985, 777)¹⁶

D. Towards a Programmed Society and a New Social Movement

Touraine is not the kind of researcher who limits himself to descriptive analysis and/or to high specialization. His basic motive is to understand how society as a whole works, and what type of society we should expect in the future.

In principle, Touraine's visions about the future follow a scheme he has used to interpret the past. In his view, »the functioning of a society is dominated by its historicity and by its class relations, and therefore, by its social movements. But its change, in particular its transition from one societal type to another, requires another order of analysis in which the *state* occupies central place. This separation ... between the analysis of functioning and that of change, between *synchronic* and *diachronic* analysis, entails the abandonment of the evolutionist conceptions which claim that the functioning of a society can be explained by that society's place in an evolution leading, for instance, from the simple to the complex, from the transmitted to the acquired, or from the symbolic to the rational.« (1981, 26)

Taking a diachronic perspective, Touraine distinguishes between four types of societies: the agrarian, merchant, industrial and post-industrial society. Drawing on his aforementioned threefold hierarchy of interactive sys-

¹⁶ In another essay, Touraine goes a step further still in dismissing the category of class. Because social classes are more and more defined through a relation of dominance on the cultural level, on the level of ideas and needs, it becomes impossible to separate class situation and class action, class in itself and class for itself. »Therefore the term class has to be replaced by that of *social movement*.« (1986, 26*)

tems, he presupposes that within the agrarian society these interaction systems are still integrated. In the merchant society it is the organizational system which becomes distinct and separated from the rest. In the industrial society there is an additional differentiation between the institutional system and system of class relations. Finally, a post-industrial society is characterized by a differentiation on the highest level, that is, the separation of class relations and the system of historical action. According to Touraine, these various steps of societal differentiation include a growing willingness and capacity within a society of self-control. Thus, it is the post-industrial society which, for the first time in history, will reach a total capacity of self-control and self-production. Unlike earlier societies, this full capacity will be based on information. Hence, it is the struggle over the access and distribution of knowledge – and not over the means of production as in industrial societies – which is the substance of the decisive conflict. As a consequence of this potential for total self-production, conflicts no longer focus on a specific societal subsystem but may emerge everywhere, including in institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals, or homes for elderly people, and that is, institutions which formerly have been considered as marginal. In his most recent statements, Touraine emphasizes particularly the role of »culture« as a field of growing social conflicts.¹⁷

The transitions from one type to another are salient breaks marked by powerful social movements – Touraine's *historical movements*.¹⁸ Thus, it was the liberal bourgeois movement that led to the merchant society, the worker's movement to the industrial society, and – still in statu nascendi – the new social movement to the programmed society.¹⁹

17 According to Touraine, from the seventies until today there was a displacement of protest from the economic to the cultural field (cf. 1985, 784; see also 1980, 20). For the emphasis on culture, see also his presentation entitled »Trois types d'action collective«, delivered to the Annual Meeting of the French Society of Sociology, 29-30 September 1989 in Paris.

18 »*Historical movements* are organized actions to control a process of passage from one societal type to another one. Here actors are no longer defined in purely social terms but first of all by their relationship with the State, which is the central agent of such historical transformations.« (1985, 776)

19 Interestingly, Touraine has a clear idea – although he presents virtually no evidence – about seven different stages which mark the transition from the industrial society to the programmed society (Touraine 1981, 21). He confirms that our society has already experienced three steps (decline of the old social movement, cultural crisis, the great refusal)

Each of these societies has to be conceived of as a class society. These antagonisms represent precisely the productive element of society. Emphasizing this aspect, Touraine strictly rejects the idea of the »reproduction of society«. Only »interests and privileges, only the forms of social and cultural organizations, have a tendency to reproduce themselves. By contrast, forces of production and class conflicts permanently exist as principles of change and elements of social strife.« (1974, 221*)

E. Critical Remarks

1. To be sure, Touraine's concept is richer and more differentiated than that presented in this essay. But in its basic structure, far from being substantiated by a discussion of relevant work in social history and an analysis of contemporary society, it has a voluntaristic character.²⁰ Given the present state of social science and its high degree of division of labor and specialization, Touraine's ambition to see himself as a later day Marx, to define the central concern and the key approach of sociology as a whole, may be impressive and courageous, but it risks becoming excessive and overloaded. There are doubts if the study of social movements can and should be the core of sociological analysis (cf. Boudon 1980, 109) and whether »sociology can only be constructed from the study of social movements, which, alone, can save us from the vain search for the nature or essence of society ...« (1981, 39). Many problems which may be crucial for a society and its related scientific disciplines are not articulated by social movements, and consequently, would be neglected in a purely actor-centered sociology focusing on social movements.

On the whole, Touraine tends to downplay the variety and significance of other approaches, although he acknowledges, at least in his more recent writings, »the relative autonomy of other schools.« (1985), 786)²¹ As in vir-

and will experience four other steps (critique of the state, communitarian retreat, populism, new social movements).

20 »... Touraine is hampered by vagueness and an occasionally uneven and superficial familiarity with relevant sociological traditions.« (Hall 1985, 145)

21 Touraine seems to regard these other schools being of minor importance in so far as, according to him, they are not encompassing. They only refer to specific forms of the decomposition of social movements whereas a sociology of action »deserves a central

tually all fields of theory building and research, every scholar depends heavily on the work others have already done or are currently doing. At least one should be aware of these efforts and results. What is missing in Touraine's work is not only an intense and explicit discussion of other theories and concepts, but also, how he relates his work to empirical analyses in the same field. He seems to consider his own approach strong and powerful enough to stand alone.²² Hence, he is not overly concerned with a cumulative and integrative effort in the field of social movements and it is hard to detect who the scientific ancestors on whom he relies might be. Probably, he dislikes the idea of building upon others. But, as one may rightly argue, we can see much more if we take a stand on the shoulders of others, and preferably, of »giants.« (cf. Merton 1965)

2. Reviewing Touraine's theoretical effort over the last decades one is impressed by its remarkable continuity. But this quality also has its negative side in the sense that he was overly attached to and probably enraptured by his early ideas. Rather than examining and revising his concepts in the light of ongoing debates, criticisms and self-critique,²³ the author was more engaged in a process of confirming and stabilizing his earlier positions, be it by radicalization, further refinement, variation, or simply repetition.²⁴ To be fair, it has to be noted that during recent years he has made some gradual conceptual shifts. As already mentioned, he tends to differentiate more clearly the notions of class and social movements. Recently, he has also placed more emphasis on cultural orientations and he has been more careful in making predictions about the heralds of a new society. But on the whole, he shows an outstanding tendency to make strong judgements, to distinguish sharply between what is wrong and right, what is central or marginal, what is out of date and what will be the essence of social conflicts in the future – statements which raise doubts about the assertion that the actionalist ap-

place precisely because of its capacity to understand and reinterpret other approaches.« (1985, 770)

22 »Touraine is apparently uninterested in or unaware of recent American work on social movements.« (Gamson 1983, 814)

23 For one of the few examples of self-critique, which, however, remains largely symbolic, see Touraine 1980a, 429.

24 »The method of *sociological intervention*, already ten times presented and discussed, entails no surprise.« (Segrestin 1985, 731*)

proach »is not a doctrine but a theory.« (1965, 473*) Indications of this orthodox attitude are the frequent use of words such as »always« and »never,« the readiness to reconstruct society from the archimedian point-of-view, the pertinent search for the highest meaning of a phenomenon, or the classification of protest groups as social movements or anti-movements, etc.

Over the years and even decades Touraine has employed an inflationary use of a rhetoric of crises, be it that of society as a whole, political parties, the French Left, sociology, etc. And in many cases, the author seems to perceive himself as the man who has assumed the burden not only of crisis analysis, but also of therapy. Not accidentally some observers have characterized the »evangelistic« (D.S. Bell) or »missionary« (A. Melucci) leaning of Touraine, whose attraction stems more from his passion and his engagement than from his scrutiny. In his work there is a tendency to overestimate not only the role of sociology²⁵ and intellectuals²⁶ in general, but also, his own approach both with respect to social sciences and social conflicts.

3. Particularly with reference to social movements and related phenomena, Touraine presents a multitude of categories, concepts, and schemas. He seems to be undecided about the direction of his own effort. On the one hand, he declares that »we should not invest too much time clarifying our categories; the real task is to create sociological theory.« (1974, 53*) On the other, he emphasizes that the goal of sociology is to formulate »precise statements about social mechanisms.« (1974, 54*) Apart from the contradiction between both statements, one wonders, regarding the former, if there is such a trade-off between the search for clarification of categories and the creation of theory as Touraine assumes. If we take the second statement seriously, we find that Touraine's hypotheses are usually situated on a too ab-

25 »Sociology is an act of enlightenment (»connaissance«) in the service of liberty. The latter cannot exist without the former.« (1973, 527*) Sociology is »an instrument for innovation and liberation.« (1974, 60*) Sociology »holds a central place in the programmed society just as economics did in the industrial society or political philosophy in merchant societies.« (1974, 91*)

26 »The intellectuals play an important role when they uncover historicity and the conflicts which accrete around historicity, but they have no power unless their ideas are embodied in the apparatus of control and management.« (1981, 220)

stract level to be really verifiable,²⁷ and there are also too few significant efforts to substantiate fundamental theoretical assumptions.²⁸ As far as I can see, the approach ends up with more taxonomy than theory.²⁹

Taking the example of his hierarchy of action systems, one could raise a number of pertinent questions. What do the various terms mean (dominance, system of organization, etc.) and how are they related? What is the relevance of this theoretical construct for research? How can one substantiate the assumption of an hierarchical order in which, for instance, political conflicts have to be considered inferior to social conflicts, but superior to institutional conflicts? Taking the problem of technocracy, why is it that struggles against technocratic domination cannot be located at the level of the political system and the organizational system? Is it, apart from the taxonomic interest, really enlightening to attribute empirical phenomena to a certain level? Are there clear criteria for such attributions? How can we classify a complex, heterogeneous collective actor if only parts of it can be located at a certain level, if at all?

Referring to Touraine's terminology of action systems, one could question the implications of the category of »system« in an approach which distances itself from system theory. Referring to the premises of the actionalist interpretation of history, one could challenge the idea that history is only the product of conflicts. Can one neglect the flow of uncoordinated and uncontrolled events, of routine, unspectacular, and partly unconscious change as forms of societal reproduction?

27 The fundamental question which oriented the research program, that is if we witness the emergence of a new social movement, has already been answered before the research was carried out, or it has lead to the conclusion that some of the empirical movements may have the potential to become real movements. Only in the case of the 1976 student movement was a very clear statement made, saying that by no means is this a social movement. In that case, however, sociological research started when the movement was already over and the main result was not very surprising.

28 Although Touraine argues that »the role of a sociologist is to prove sociological assertions« (1974, 242*), critics say that he does not follow this maxim. »The concepts are too vague, the terminology too obscure, and the thinking too unsystematic to form a convincing or testable theory.« (Smith 1982, 981) »We are confronted with more affirmations than demonstrations.« (Dumazedier 1975, 604*)

29 »Touraine's is indeed a general systematic theory, but I would not call it a very successful one in explanatory terms.« (Collins 1976, 1506)

Another question, for instance, is why one should introduce the category of social movements, which, according to Touraine's earlier writings, is synonymous to that of class? If the latter explicitly distinguishes between »class in itself« and »class for itself,« there is no difficulty in avoiding the objectivist bias which Touraine wants to compensate for by using the term social movement.

4. Touraine's interpretation of the societal stages in history and the respective roles of social movements is overly crude. It is not grounded in the rich work of social historians. Moreover, one wonders why there should necessarily be only one pair of movements in one type of society. Are there not many indications that contemporary societies will become more differentiated, more fragmented, and thus may include many social movements, which, »in a strict sense, represent conflicting efforts to control cultural patterns (knowledge, investment, ethics) in a given societal type« (1985, 776)? Even if we would assume that in past history there was only one pair of social movements in a given society, this may change in future societies.

Is there only *one* meaning within a social movement? And why it is so important to unveil the meaning of a movement, thus neglecting its organization, strategy, adherents, public resonance, outcome, etc.? Surprisingly, Touraine is not very interested in questions, as many other scholars in the field of social movements persuasively argue, which are related to a movement's ideologies and aims, i.e., features which certainly have to do with the »meaning« of a movement's struggle? And why should »technocracy« be the only point of reference for a promising social movement in our society? Are such concerns as those emphasized by other movements such as »peace« or »environmental protection« or »personal identity,« necessarily of relatively minor importance? Would an escape from technocratic control guarantee peace, ecological reproduction, and identity? Even if we would take for granted the idea Touraine shares with many other social scientists, that information is the key factor for future societies, there are few reasons to separate the problem of information from that of wealth, power, and the means of production.

More than two decades after Touraine proclaimed the coming of a post-industrial or »programmed« society, he has made hardly an attempt to clarify the contours of this type of society. It is not enough to say that »research and development, information processing, biomedical science and techniques, and mass media are the four main components of post-industrial society, while bureaucratic activities of production of electrical and electronic

equipment are just growing sectors of an industrial society defined by production of goods more than by new channels of communications and the creation of artificial languages.« (1985, 781)

5. A further point of critique relates to the fact that some categories and statements have not only remained vague, but also, confusing. Without presenting a detailed list of references here I would maintain that Touraine is not only undecided, but explicitly contradictory: Is he aiming at creating a theory? Is sociology in a crisis, and if so, should it be guided by values³⁰ and aim at the study of social actors? Is the labor movement a historical movement (defined as an actor that initiates the passage from one type of society to another) or a genuine social movement (as social class within an already established type of society)? Were the movements of '68, and later the anti-nuclear movements, genuine new social movements having reached the level of historicity?

III. Sociology and/or Intervention?

During the mid-seventies Touraine began to dwell on some of his earlier ideas in order to develop the distinct method for the analysis of social movements which he later called »sociological intervention.« The aim of this new method, as well as the actionalist approach formulated in the 1960s, was to »discover the social movement which in a programmed society will occupy the central position held by the worker's movement in industrial society and the civil liberties movement in the market society by which it was preceded.« (1981, 24) But Touraine wants to go far beyond a mere scientific discovery. According to him, sociological intervention aims »to recompose social movements wherever possible, to raise the level of conflicts, and to revivify historical action. I should not have undertaken this research programme had I not believed it was necessary and possible to define the actors, the field of struggle and the new stakes and hence theoretically and practically to re-form the analysis of society.« (1981, 221)

30 For this point of critique, see Dumazedier (1975, 604) and Trimberger (1978).

A. What is Sociological Intervention?

The method of sociological intervention has been presented in a whole series of publications by Touraine and his collaborators. This is not the place to go into details, but rather, to present a rough idea of the method's status and basics.

Sociological intervention differs radically from the methods usually applied in the study of social movements. »The analysis bears neither on a situation nor on opinions, but on the *self-analysis* which militants perform upon their collective action.« (1981, 27) Such an analysis requires the assistance of the researcher, who – in contrast to perceptions in mainstream sociology – cannot watch a movement as an object, but rather, has to intervene into the field he is studying although he may be rejected and the results of his intervention may be neutralized. »The researcher is used to entering his field of investigation equipped with plans, questionnaires and comparative data. Today, however, we need much more to recognize that the researcher and the orientation of his work are largely a product of research.« (1974, 270*) Consequently, the researcher has to be at the same time analyst and actor, without, however, confusing these two roles. »He stimulates the *self-analysis* of the group and at the same time, is the *actor of the intervention* ... He urges the activists to analyze the conditions necessary to bring the struggle up to the level of a social movement. The researcher speaks from a position which the activists can attain only by undergoing their *conversion*. Hence, the researcher has to take both the position of the analyst and that of the social movement. He *elevates the group*.« (1980b, 356*) The role of the researcher is quite unique in this methodological approach. »Intervention requires that the researcher be an *intermediary* between the militant group and the social movement by which its action is conveyed. It is this new conception of the researcher as neither observer nor ideologist that most clearly distinguishes intervention from other methods.« (1981, 27)

Because it is captured by its ideology and visions of utopia, the group itself is apparently not able to reach the level of historicity by its own means. »This can be done only if one no longer adopts the outlook of the actor, but takes instead the point of view of social relations. Only the sociologist succeeds in doing so, though as yet only in his analysis. If he wishes to transform the ideology into directives, he becomes not better than a doctrinaire whose influence weakens the action.« (1981, 98) Thus the researcher has to

dissociate himself from the actor to the extent that the actor unveils the meaning of his action (cf. 1974, 22).

During the self-analysis of the group the crucial passage is the *conversion* initiated by the intervening researcher. This conversion of the group, in turn, must be preceded by a conversion of the researcher. The conversion enables the group to understand its action (1980b, 21). This means that the group recognizes the central hypotheses of the researcher as it is directed towards the most elaborated meaning of action. By this process the group transcends its level of ideological restriction and adequately realizes, according to a given historical situation, the principles of identity, opposition, and totality. This state is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for becoming a movement. The rise and success of a movement depend not only on the conversion of other combatants, but also, on the battles themselves. The actor's effort to transform their analysis into an action program is the concern of an ongoing process of reflection both on the part of the activists and the researchers. For this process Touraine has coined the term »permanent sociology« (cf. 1981, 148f).

In practical terms, sociological intervention focuses on groups that have been recruited according to the researcher's preferences. Usually, the number of groups initiated by Touraine and his collaborators is small and ranges from two (studies of the 1976 student protests and the anti-nuclear protest) to five (study of the *Solidarity Movement*). These groups, composed basically of activists engaged in protest movements, are occasionally confronted with other people, among them experts, representatives of the state apparatus and firms, including outspoken opponents of the protest groups. The groups meet from time to time within a period ranging, from four months to roughly one year and a half, depending on the studies. The interactions and debates within these groups form the central, albeit not exclusive, body of »data«, from which the analysis of the movements and its environment are based.

The team of researchers develops ideas about the »highest meaning« of the struggle in which the group's activists are involved. The team confronts the activists with these hypotheses, and finally, ends up with an acceptance – and thus the conversion of the groups – or a rejection of them.

Obviously, this method has some remarkable parallels to the psychoanalytical situation in which the self-analysis (read: conversion) of the therapist (read: researcher) is a precondition for a successful therapeutic treatment of the client (read: discovery of the highest meaning of the conflict). The success of the client, who has learned to analyze this personal situation and to

cope with his problems, corresponds to the success of the collective actor, who, by recognizing what is at stake in a given society and what his historical mission is, has reached the level of historicity. There is yet another parallel to psychoanalysis in Touraine's methodology in that the author tells us that it should be the activist who calls for the researcher (1974, 22).³¹

B. Some Critical Remarks

The method of sociological intervention has already attracted heavy criticism (cf. Amiot 1980; Barkan 1984; Gamson 1983; Kivisto 1982; Law 1984; Nagel 1983; Melucci 1989; Nelissen 1981; Rüdig and Lowe 1984; Smith 1982). I only want to recall some of these arguments and to add some new elements of critique.

1. One can question if an analysis of a movement as a whole can be done by focusing on only two or more sub-groups within it. These groups were, moreover, not natural but created by the research team. Why not study already existing groups and organizations within a movement belonging to different ideological strands, coming from different social strata, generations, localities, etc.?

2. Because the composition and internal dynamics within these groups are induced mainly by the research team, it is hard to control the extent to which this dynamic depends on contingencies such as the researchers' personalities, number, intensity of intervention, etc. Is there not a high probability that the same method, employed by a different team at a different place with a different group, would lead to different results? As far as I can see, problems of data selection, of potential artefacts, etc., are not seriously reflected. Touraine is aware of the problem that the researcher may influence the be-

31 On the one hand, Touraine states that a precondition for his method is that the actor calls for *and* (my emphasis) accepts the need of intervention (1974, 22), on the other he writes that actor must accept *or* (my emphasis) demand the intervention (1981, 27). In general, without really discussing the problem, Touraine seems to be aware of the extent to which his method comes close to a therapeutic constellation. Assuming that a sociologist who wants to understand social relations must intervene directly, Touraine rhetorically asks: »Isn't that analogous to the practices of a psychoanalyst?« (1974a, 243) For the striking parallel of Touraine's approach to psychoanalysis, see also Amiot (1980) and Touraine's response on that point, which ends with the statement that »it is not forbidden to establish a convergence (>rapprochement<>) between the intervention and psychoanalysis.« (1980a, 426*)

havior and the answers of the actors. In the methodological appendix of the original (and not the English!) edition of Touraine and his collaborators' study on the French anti-nuclear movement they claim that »the comparison of at least two actor groups allows for the control of that researcher's impact« (1980b, 348*). It could be asked, however, how such a design would allow for a control if one team of researchers focuses on the actor group A based in Y, whereas the other team, composed of different researchers, focuses on actor group B based in Z. In the aforementioned study, the problem of controlling various factors is even more aggravated, because the two groups differed in many respects. The Paris-based actor group consisted of intellectuals not directly engaged in a struggle against a specific nuclear reactor; the second group, much more heterogeneously composed, was faced with the fast breeder reactor project in the countryside.

3. One can ask if the search for the highest potential meaning is a fruitful task. Even assuming that this highest meaning can be found in one or all of the groups under investigation one may ask if this tells us much about the dynamics and the historical relevance of the movement as a whole or if it reflects only the ideas of a number of activists, which, in turn, may be influenced by researchers. Still more fundamental is the question of what »high« meaning really means and what the empirical consequences would be if this meaning could be found in groups or even in movement as a whole? And what are the conclusions if, as was the case in the study of the two anti-nuclear groups, one group realizes the »conversion« and thus reaches the highest level of meaning while the other fails to do so? And, related to that case, one may ask if this is not a result of the different compositions and settings of the two groups under investigation. As a matter of fact the intellectual anti-nuclearists in Paris, far more open to sociological reflection, achieved their conversion whereas the group which was deeply involved in a local struggle against the fast breeder in Creys-Malville failed to do so. Unfortunately, Touraine is not very clear whether such a rejection of the researcher's hypothesis means the hypothesis was wrong, the researchers were not able to adequately present their hypotheses, or the group under consideration simply failed to acknowledge the adequacy of the hypothesis.

4. Even though Touraine insists on the pure sociological character of his investigation, one can ask if this method is not closer to a therapeutic, if not psychoanalytic, constellation, although the author points out the difference between an individual pathology and an oppressed social group. However, he seems much more interested in revealing what is still unconscious to the

actors through a dialogue than in studying their actual behavior. Moreover, in order to detect the hidden meaning of the group's struggle, the researcher himself has first to realize a kind of conversion as a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for inducing the conversion of the group under consideration. But does a social actor necessarily need this interpretive offer to know what is really at stake in his struggles? Is it not a doubtful »missionary role of the researcher« (Melucci 1989, 201) at work here especially in a situation where the sociologist has to assist and enlighten the actor? And if there were an unconscious meaning in the actor's struggle, would it not require – as in the case of a psychoanalyst – the researcher to accompany the »client« over a long period, and listen attentively to him in order to unveil such a meaning?

5. If the sociological intervention has to be taken as a necessary but not sufficient condition enabling existing groups to find out the highest meaning of their action, one wonders how such historical movements as the labor movement could have ever attained the status of a social movement as long as it were not assumed that people like Marx and Engels practised a type of sociological intervention. Moreover, does the necessity of intervention mean that those movements which are not in the fortuitous position of being the object of sociological intervention, or which deliberately refuse to become engaged in the process of »permanent sociology« (as was the case with a lesbian group in Paris³²), will have no chance of reaching the level of historicity?

6. It seems that Touraine, as the principal investigator, already had a preconceived notion of the highest meaning of a social movement before he started empirical research. Since the late 1960s it has been quite clear, according to Touraine, that this is the struggle for control in a programmed society. This was the explicit criterion required of an empirical group under investigation either to reach or to miss the level of historicity, and thus by definition, to be or not to be considered a social movement. In a similar vein, it was not surprising to find out through sociological intervention in the early 1980s that the worker's movement has come to an end, particularly since Touraine has been articulating this thesis since the mid-sixties.

Given their fluid and dynamic character, the study of social movements is certainly fraught with difficulties, and particularly as one respects such

32 In 1983 and 1984, Touraine's collaborators, aiming to study the feminist movement, failed to carry out a sociological intervention with respect to specific groups.

conventional methodological standards as representativity, validity, and reliability. But the problem with »sociological intervention« is that it makes little effort to go in this direction³³ or to formulate different standards which are transparent for the scientific community. Taking the admittedly extreme case of the study on the Polish *Solidarnosc* Movement, where many group discussions were recorded and transcribed, one wonders how and according to what criteria these many thousands of pages were evaluated and how the book could be published only four months after the completion of the data collection.³⁴

IV. Conclusion

At least in France, talking about the sociological analysis of social movements is almost synonymous with talking about Touraine. He is an important element in the French scientific and intellectual community, inspiring not only sociology, but also political actors.³⁵ His name, and to a lesser extent his work, is well-known in many other countries for his studies in industrial sociology, his ideas about the coming of a programmed society, and his writings on social movements. Several of his books have been translated into various languages, including English, Spanish, German and Italian. Above all, Touraine aims not only to define the central concerns and key concepts

33 With regard to the problem of representativity, as it has been put by Amiot (1980), Touraine acknowledges the limits of his research (Touraine 1980a, 427). But when he refers to this problem in the study of the anti-nuclear movement, his explanations are highly unsatisfactory (see the methodological appendix which has been omitted from the English edition of the study). Also, the article of Dubet (1983) claiming to treat the question of validity in sociological intervention is hardly convincing.

34 For this point, see Kitschelt (1984). The study on the *Solidarity Movement* is perhaps a special case. In a conversation with Chris Rootes, Touraine admitted that this was not really an intervention in the way that the others were. Touraine intended to support his Polish colleagues for political reasons. Hence, the study's aim was more to give publicity to the Solidarity Movement than to write a scientific work (Letter from Chris Rootes to the author).

35 To a certain degree, Touraine seems to have contributed to the socialist party's partial acceptance of the anti-nuclear movement. There are also indications that he has had some influence on the discourse of the anti-nuclear movement in the late 1970s (cf. Rüdiger and Lowe 1984).

of sociology, but also, to answer crucial questions about the present and future states of our societies.

Even though many observers may disagree on whether Touraine may be counted among the key figures in contemporary sociology³⁶, there is no doubt that he should be classified as one of the most important scholars in the field of social movements. He has produced an impressive body of literature based on an ambitious, but also, highly debatable approach. Unlike most of his colleagues, he tries to relate grand theory and micro-sociological empirical analysis. Rarely do sociologists take such clear, uncompromising stances. Touraine does not hesitate to reject competing approaches and he is seemingly not afraid of coming under attack himself. Whatever may be said for or against Touraine, there is certainly a wide recognition of his ambition and courage to create grand theory, to challenge virtually all major theoretical strands, and to put forward questions that concern not only the fate of sociology but society in general. In this sense, he counter-balances the strong tendency of social sciences to become fragmented into a host of overly specialized, unrelated subdisciplines.

Since progress in science is induced more by critique than by acknowledgement and affirmation, my intention was to unveil the pitfalls and flaws of Touraine's approach both on the theoretical and methodological level.

Summarizing my critique of Touraine's general concept, the following points can be made: First, the approach aspires to a hegemonic position in respect to the very core of sociology; it is too self-centered and not really developed in the light of competing concepts and theories. Second, there is a highly problematic tendency to guide and enlighten collective actors about the »meaning« of their struggle. Third, many hypotheses and statements are too vague to be tested empirically by Touraine's own attempts or to be confronted with other empirical research in the field. Fourth, even if we take the approach as a heuristic instrument there is an abundance of concepts, dictums, tables and categories which raise many questions but remain largely unanswered in his writings. Finally, there is a series of explicit contradictions in Touraine's work including several which are related to the central elements of the approach.

36 For instance, a publishing house states that Touraine is »one of the most prominent and influential social scientists in Europe« (backcover of the German edition of Touraine's *Production de la société*). Also, some sociologists rank him similarly (see Beosjes-Hommes 1974).

As for the method of »sociological intervention,« one has to admit that it is an innovative contribution to social movement research. During the last 15 years its elaboration and application to various movements has been his main concern. The creation of this method can be perceived as a reaction to certain deficiencies of conventional research on social movements, and particularly, research which often pretends to take a »neutral« position vis-a-vis its object under investigation. I believe that Touraine rightly points out that the study of a social movement can hardly be done through arm-chair reflection. And he is certainly right to demonstrate that being a researcher close to the social actor does not necessarily mean to merge or confuse the role of the analyst and activist. The researcher has to be both close to and distant from his object.

Nevertheless, there are some fundamental flaws in Touraine's method which have already been listed above. In a nutshell, it seems to me that the method tends to tell us much more about the profile and idiosyncracies of its creator than about his research object. This is not to say that one cannot find valuable insights in these empirical studies. But there are serious doubts that this method is the central key in analyzing social movements, that the method can be controlled³⁷ and thus used as an empirical test, or at least as a viable basis for interpretation, or that the study of social movements unveils the dynamics of our society.

In conclusion, I want to stress the need for a more intense study of Touraine's work by scholars in the field of social movement research – and vice versa. Mutual ignorance, global rejection, but also mere rites of citation can hardly contribute to progress in science.

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37 »The problem is that the researcher can never be sure whether or not the observed action is the product of his or her interventions. Touraine's research procedure is unable to control its own effects.« Melucci 1989, 201.

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