

IDENTITY: THE HIDDEN SIDE OF NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN
LATIN AMERICA

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I. Introduction

Who or what is moving in the so-called new social movements in Latin America? How? Why, and where? Our doubts have multiplied alongside the multiplication of these new social groupings: workers associations organizing independently and even in opposition to traditional trade union structures and political parties; squatter movements and neighbourhood councils springing up in virtually all the big cities of the region and communicating among each other on a local and even national level; numerous base level communities within the Catholic Church spreading even into large parts of the countryside; indigenist associations appearing autonomously on the political scene; women's associations and even decidedly feminist groupings; human rights committees converting themselves into focal points of social communication and consciousness; youth meetings; educational and artistic activities on a popular level; coalitions for the defence of regional traditions and interest; environmental movements; a patchwork of self-help groupings among unemployed and poor people. All this just in the three countries of which I have some personal knowledge: Brazil, Chile, Peru.

And in the same countries: hunger and criminality; gangs assaulting supermarkets, or even thousands of campesinos marching upon provincial towns in search of food; an armed anti-modernist rebellion (Sendero Luminoso); marks of misery, political oppression and cultural devastation on almost every lower class individual. And alongside all this: a well-established tradition of political parties, among them a variety of semi-clandestine leninist parties, but also attempts at a renewed, non-leninist socialism (PT, Convergencia Socialista); effective professional associations and econo-

mic interest groups....

Enough to bewilder any observer. Nothing seems to fit. Not only is reality changing, it is moving out of the realm of our modes of perception and instruments of interpretation. What has been said with regard to the West European industrialized countries probably applies just as much to Latin America: the ribbon between social movement and social knowledge has been torn, and any intent to knit it together again has to start off with the painful recognition of its rupture.¹

We do not know what these new social movements are, and whatever direction we take towards a new understanding, we shall err to some extent. Paradoxically, this has eased off the fear to err and cleared the field for 'schools' of a new, unconventional and creative thinking in (and on) Latin America.² The greatest error would obviously be to stick to old categories of proven inadequacy - we can therefore take the liberty to experiment. And in a way, this experiment will be part of the movement.

Maybe the most prudent starting point within this field consists precisely in reflecting this rupture between reality and perception: What is it, in these new phenomena, that subverts our categories?

The following pages are an essay in that direction. Its necessary limitations are clear from this starting point. What I mean to say can be summed up in four points.

1. Political power as a central category of social science is too limiting a conception for an understanding of new social movements; their potential is mainly not one of power, but of renewing socio-cultural and socio-psychic patterns of everyday social relations, penetrating the microstructure of society.
2. The direction of this creative process is necessarily open, embryonic, discontinuous and plagued by contradictions - and therefore difficult to perceive. As a first step towards an alternative society it represents something like the unorganized 'back side' of the social sphere whose front side of well-established, mutual systemic reinforcements is occupied by the

dominant society.

3. In a first attempt to give a name to the direction of this process, maybe the dichotomy 'alienation - identity' provides some insights.
4. Embedded in this process is the procreation of its proper subjects. As yet, these subjects cannot be thought of as social entities or individuals in their wholeness, but rather as fragments of subjectivity cutting through the consciousness and practice of individuals and organizations.

II. Some current interpretations: Broadening the sphere of 'the political'.

Of course, to state that we do not know what these movements are, definitely and precisely, does not mean that we do not know anything about them. On the contrary, we can draw upon quite an amount of accompanying reflections, starting with the constant efforts of self-reflection and expression of many of these movements themselves. Perhaps one of the hints to the essence of these movements lies precisely in this effort, especially visible for example in the new 'authentic' workers unions and in Catholic base level communities, to define themselves as new and distinctive with regard to traditional politics and to be the founders and wardens of their own traditions of social knowledge.

The main thrust of this quest for an autonomous identity appears to be directed against the generalized attitude and practice of tutelage with regard to social movements that characterizes traditional Latin America politics. This applies as much to conservative paternalism and populist manipulation as to the technicist understanding of history inherited by Latin American Marxists from the Third International, according to which the course of history can be known beforehand, thus legitimizing the illuminated vanguard in possession of this knowledge to command the process of production of the forthcoming revolution.³ Within this conception, social movements had at best the role of supposedly unstructured 'mass movements' to be integrated into the workers organizations as the social movement of the proletariat, or of special political

'fronts' to be subordinated to the party leadership as the sole organ of 'doing politics'.

Leaving aside interpretations in the line of marxist traditionalism which try in some way to reaffirm the political monopoly of parties, Latin American scholars have perceived this tendency toward taking politics into one's own hands as a broadening of the sphere of 'the political'. Precisely those efforts of military dictatorships to suppress politics, closing down the traditional channels of political articulation, had the counterproductive effect of politicising the primary expressions of social life such as housing, consumption, popular culture and religion. Coming at a time of a profound crisis of the left - less because of repression than because of the theoretical and practical defeat that led to it - the invention of new and autonomous forms of social expression was as much a necessity as an opportunity. The manifold variety of groups, workshops, centres of self help, committees, etc. was 'spontaneous' only in the sense that they followed no common plan and obeyed no central control; but behind this 'spontaneity' was a patient and arduous 'ants-labour' of organizing and structuring small nuclei which were trying to cope with the hardship of everyday life. If there was any centralized organization behind this, it was the Catholic church, in its progressive parts, that lent its roof to many of these initiatives.

Together with the emergence of new fields of political action, corresponding new ways of 'doing politics', alongside the associated new political agents, started to emerge.⁴ According to this line of interpretation, the intellectual task for today consists in "thinking the construction of a new hegemony through direct action of the masses, undertaking a reconceptualization of politics that broadens its realm and recovers as valid action the vast popular field with its everyday life, thus accepting the challenge of visualizing a project of society from the viewpoint of the practice of the popular classes".⁵ Instead of a '*partidista*' viewpoint, a '*movimientista*' standpoint is called for.⁶

This line of interpretation - whose richness I cannot possibly sum up in a few sentences - has given valuable impulses towards

an adequate understanding of the new social movements. Far from considering its findings false, I go along with them all the way - my concern is whether they go far enough in their search for new concepts. I feel that some parameters of the criticised traditional conceptions have escaped our critical eye and have successfully made their way into the new lines of thought.

Basically, this holds for the very idea of the centrality of politics. When we speak of 'rethinking politics' or of 'broadening its realm', what remains unchanged is the central and determining reference to politics itself. As a part of conceptual centralism, we continue to consider politics as a specialised sphere, toward which the various expressions of social life coalesce and from which they can be altered. Accordingly, the overall question guiding this new line of thought has not changed with regard to traditional thinking: to reappraise the political role of base level movements means that we are looking for the same thing, only with a better topic: its political potential.⁷

Even though we speak of social movements, we are obviously not interested in new social agents emerging from them, but in political ones; we are not paying attention to new ways of 'doing society', but of 'doing politics'. In one word, our universal measure continues to be that of power. What do these new practices represent, converted into the universal currency of power ?

Alongside points of rupture, there appear to be lines of semi-conscious continuity in our ways of thinking that make the whole operation look more like an opening up of old concepts rather than their supersession. The 'recognized' list of political actors and forms of action organized around the state and the sphere of production receives the important addenda of 'civil society' and of 'social movements'. With this, cultural production as well as the whole sphere of reproduction are accepted as valid political fields.⁸ Under the category of 'hegemony', it is accepted that within the perspective of an anti-capitalist movement a multi-issue reality (Gramsci) and a multi-class identity (Laclau and others) is not only inevitable, but positively indispensable

And it is admitted that these new political actors are not secondary to political parties, but at least parallel.

Nevertheless, the whole aim of this reformulation is to discover ways of enhancing the political within this new-found reality. Consequently, at the end of the discussion the question of a new political party emerges.⁹ New, different, incomparable, democratic, - but a political party, in the last resort.

I do not intend to question the validity of this line of understanding - who could negate the importance of political power? Nevertheless, I wonder whether power is the only or most important potential for social transformation we can find in these movements and groupings.

Much less do I intend to postulate that there are realms of social life exempt from politics; one thing we have learned is that power relations penetrate every aspect of social life. My point is rather the complementary one: it is sufficiently clear that to an even greater extent every power relation is penetrated by social life. Treating politics as something separable from the whole of social reality is by no means a natural law, but a historic construction of bourgeois society that has been internalized profoundly into the modes of perception of friend and foe alike. Of course, the century-old social and intellectual practice of this separation has had its strong material bearings on social structures, and thus a social knowledge organized around the abstraction of power is well warranted by historical experience.

Nevertheless, as an historical construction, our everyday practice - starting with our manner of perception - can be oriented toward reinforcing this separate centrality of power, or toward downgrading it. It is my impression that the 'new' element within the new social movements consists precisely in creating bits of social practice in which power is not central; and that we will not come to understand this potential as long as we look upon it from the viewpoint of power *a priori*.

One indication of this possible shortcoming in current interpretations is the fact that the emergence of new social movements

has not depended on the specific political situation created by military dictatorships nor on a clear-cut defeat of left parties; we find such movements in countries like Venezuela that have not suffered an interruption of their liberal institutions, or in Peru where the left has been expanding its influence alongside the emergence of new social movements.

The fact that the same term is being used for new forms of social expression in industrialized countries and that there are obvious analogies between these movements is a further indication that they owe their existence not to a specific political setting but to something very much rooted in the present day social development of capitalist societies.

III. Clues for a Different Understanding

All this leads me to the question: could it be that the historical contribution these movements are about to offer does not consist in enhancing the political potential of a revolutionary left, but on the contrary in rescuing fragments of a meaningful social life from the grip of politics (including that of the left) ? In other words: are these movements 'new' insofar as they are aimed at reappropriating society from the state?

For the necessity of organizing into an argument what is hardly more than an intuition I shall develop this idea through a sequence of four theses.

First thesis: The transformatory potential within new social movements is not political, but socio-cultural.

Among the recurrent traits of these new movements we have become accustomed to find (of course not in all of them) a relatively small number of participants; non-bureaucratic and even informal structures; collective decision making; relatively little social distance between members and leadership; a rather untheoretical immediate way of perceiving and presenting the social aims of the movement, etc. Many of the groupings are directly dedicated to cultural activities (in the broadest sense); others are making use of forms of cultural expression like music, theatre, dance,

poetry etc. for propagating their aims. For many participants, the fact of participating itself represents a strong educational aspect, even when the original motive was a material necessity like securing legal recognition for the plots of land occupied for housing.

Quite frequently, observers point to these traits as an indication of the weak, pre-political nature of these groupings. According to this viewpoint, cultural activities are either a tactical camouflage or a political naivety. And insofar as these movements have to survive and struggle within a given power reality, this viewpoint is justified.

Nevertheless, there could be another side to the coin on which these forms of associating and acting do not appear negatively as immature forms of politics, but positively as germs of a different social life less afflicted by the plagues of present day capitalism, in its peripheral version. Why should the experience of cooperation be illegitimate in a society marked by a ferocious competition for survival ? Why should personal relations on a more egalitarian and less utilitarian base be considered immature in a capitalist environment that tends to convert all social life into market relations ? Will culture as an original field of human expression have to wait until after the revolution ? Does solidarity have only an instrumental value within certain political aims ? And with regard to the openly political activities of some of these movements, for example that of the 'authentic' workers unions in São Paulo, why should their attempt at reunifying social interests with their political expression in the hands of the respective social sectors be considered a less valid political form than that dominated by professional bureaucratic mediators ?

Thus, the innovatory capacity of these movements appears to lie less in their political potential than in their ability to create and experiment with different forms of social relations in everyday life. Of course, this process is taking place at a level far below existing power structures and will probably never develop by itself into a revolutionary threat to the dominant society.

But is it therefore irrelevant?

Increasingly, we have come to understand that social structures have no existence outside a social practice. The existing reifications of these structures, like technology, constructions, laws etc. could not by themselves uphold the dominant order for a single minute, were they not put into action accordingly by social actors. It is the millions of small everyday acts of unreflected obedience to the existing order that create, reproduce and reinforce social structures.

This everyday practice is prefigured within the acting individuals by modes of perception, beliefs, values and orientation, most of them operating unconsciously. No structure of social domination could survive were it not for this representation on the socio-cultural and socio-physical level of everyday life.

It is within this cellular structure of society that the everyday 'doing it differently' of new social groupings takes its meaning. Exactly because these 'microphysics of power' depend on operating subconsciously, even a few, weak models of a deviant social practice signify a potential danger insofar as they tend to put into question the unconscious automatism of obedience. By creating spaces for the experience of more collective social relations, of a less market-oriented consciousness, of less alienated expressions of culture and of different basic values and assumptions, these movements represent a constant injection of an alien element within the social body of peripheral capitalism.

Of course, whatever effect we expect from this small-scale counter-culture will only become manifest in the very long term. But it could, in the long run, prove to be more incontestable and irreversible than many abrupt changes within the power cupola, because it has been rooted in the everyday practice and in the corresponding basic orientations in which all social structures have their foundations. By this, and by reclaiming politics as a constant element within social life and not separated from it, this socio-cultural potential of the new social movements may turn out to be not less, but more political than action directly oriented towards existing power structures.

- When discussing this point with my compañera, her objections came immediately: You must be thinking of middle class associations, she said, or at best of your Catholic base level communities in São Paulo with their strong working class component. The truly marginalized sectors of the poor population simply do not have the physical energy to go about creating popular culture and new forms of sociability. With regard to culture, their first concern is to reassure themselves of their human dignity, which will probably mean an effort at imitating the dominant culture. Whatever forms of association they create are dictated by pure necessity and dissolve the moment these necessities change.

These are serious objections. Social reality itself seems to conspire against 'new' social movements representing anything new. If there is anything new, in what shape can we expect to find it? This leads to the next thesis:

Second thesis: The direction of this counter-cultural remodelling of social patterns is open, forming part of a utopian 'hidden reverse side' of the social sphere, deformed by its 'front'. Obviously, new social movements are inserted in the dominant social and political context of their respective countries and receive from this context their first and foremost features. It is within this framework that the question of their political potential is valid and necessary and our habitual mode of perception is adequate. But, we will probably not perceive anything substantially new about these movements, viewing them from this perspective.

If there are new elements, they will probably appear in such awkward forms that we shall be unable to appraise them as such unless we adapt our expectations beforehand. Considering the constant pressure of existing realities, any pattern not adapting closely to this reality will appear to be weak, implausible, fragmented, disorganized, discontinuous and contradictory. At this point, a phrase written ten years ago by Negt/Kluge, a sociologist and a cineast working together on proletarian culture, comes to my mind: 'Under fully established capitalist domination',

they write, 'proletarian culture is something coherent from the aspect of non-emancipation; from the aspect of emancipation it is something incoherent'.¹⁰ Just as bourgeois society demanded centuries of cultural premonitions for its gestation and continued to be something improbable and inconceivable up to the 18th century, they argue, proletarian culture will not find its own expression until the advent of socialism. Within present society, proletarian culture is perversely organized in a way which stresses its subordinate situation; and whatever emancipatory element we can find will appear disorganized and crippled.

Leaving aside the aspect of the proletarian character of future societies, something that I am today less sure about, this is a precise expression of the difficulty we are liable to come across, in my opinion, when trying to rethink the potential of new social movements. We will not be able to understand the logic of the bits and pieces of new social practices except in the framework of a utopian projection of an alternative, non-capitalist society. This utopia would have to be projected from the pieces of social experience we have, trying to establish their hypothetical point of convergence. And at the same time, this is rendered impossible by the pressure of existing society that deforms these bits of new social practice almost beyond recognition.

To give some examples:

- In Brazil, there is a continuous struggle between *posseiros*, small peasants driven away by the expansion of capitalist *latifundio*, and Indian tribes whose land they invade. Of course, they are both victims of the same land tenure system, yet set against each other in their struggle for survival.
- On the occasion of the 'Second Feminist Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean' held near Lima in July 1983, there was considerable tension between feminist groupings and women considering the question of female emancipation as part of a social struggle. Moreover, representatives of indigenous and black women felt excluded by the relatively elegant place of the conference and the high registration fees, and lesbian women felt a psychological barrier

against the representation of their concerns. All these divisions are obviously very real and hinder a female solidarity - which in perspective would contribute to overcoming all the mechanisms of capitalist and patriarchal society that create these divisions. - In present day Chile, there is considerable tension between those currents of opposition identifying themselves with traditional party loyalties, and autonomous groupings that emerged during the years of dictatorship, some of them set up by a youth that has no active memory of the pre-73 years. For these groupings, a permanent dilemma of the new social movements in all parts of the world is making itself felt: will they have to integrate into established political structures to gain some efficiency, at the price of sacrificing their specific identity ?

- Or finally, the example mentioned by my compañera as an objection: the *favela* dweller who spends his last bit of money to imitate bourgeois patterns of consumption - for example, buying the Hong Kong-made plastic toy advertised on television as the one that 'all the children have' for his child - and for whom this act of objective submission has the subjective meaning of reasserting his human dignity.

To use a picture: the new social movements make their appearance along the fringe of the social sphere, in response to the various shortcomings of dominant society that appear on its periphery. But of course, society is not organized according to the problems of its periphery, but according to the needs of accumulation and political control by its central sectors, to which everything else is systemically related.

The aggregation of shortcomings, on the contrary, makes no systematic sense, except when projected to its hypothetical opposite of a different society. Dominant society is thus the well-illuminated and solid front of the social sphere, which exerts a permanent pressure on its contestatory fringe to adapt to existing power realities. The positive utopia toward which the new elements in these movements possibly point is as yet a hidden reverse side, in the dark of the future, accessible only to anticipatory social phantasy. Were it not for some inexplicable oscillation along

this fringe, we would not even suspect that the social sphere had a reverse side.

The alternatives open to these movements are, then: either to yield to the weight of reality, accepting a certain breathing space and maybe some spoils of power, as an established opposition within the framework of dominant society at the price of resigning itself to its position; or to try to uphold an identity of its own, at the price of remaining weak, inefficient and plagued by contradictions. In reality, the only chance of existence of new social movements as such consists in a precarious combination of both alternatives - maybe the Brazilian experience with the '*Partido dos Trabalhadores*' is the most substantial example of this.

Our elaborations of social knowledge with regard to these movements are inevitably trapped in the same dilemma. From the standpoint of power apriori, we are on the firm ground of established reality, even contributing with our mode of perception to the pressure of this reality; we cannot err much in our analysis, but we will not see much that could justify calling these movements 'new' ones. If, on the contrary, we try to come to an understanding of these new elements, we have first to adapt our organs of perception to the almost imperceptible nature of these elements, knowing we are looking for something that is as yet predominantly 'represented by its felt absence'¹¹: a society with more solidarity.

Is this an idealistic approach? Probably. But any anticipatory thinking is necessarily partly idealistic. There cannot be a sound political effort without a utopia; and there cannot be a projection of a more just and humane society for Latin America that would not take the new social movements into account as its present day premonitions.

Third thesis: Central aspects of the counter-cultural construction within new social movements can be understood alongside the dichotomy 'alienation - identity'.

If it is an audacity to link the heterogeneous new elements within new social movements together in order to interpret them as

embryonic aspects of a common social utopia, it is even more audacious to proceed to name the direction of this utopian construction. On the other hand, only audacious anticipation can help a utopia into being.

In my perception, the rebellion against existing society hidden within the new social movements is not against any specific aspect of capitalist society, even though the different movements tend to specialize around the issues that gave birth to each of them. The thrust seems to be against alienation as such, in all its aspects: alienation of man from himself, from the product of his work, from other human beings and from nature.¹²

In the opposite direction, the final perspective is that of a libertarian, egalitarian and communitarian society, of 'an association in which the free development of each one is the condition for the free development of all' (Marx/Engels).¹³

Possibly, this is a goal that will never be reached, and is it not pure sarcasm to even name it, in the face of present day realities in Latin America ? Even for the first step to be taken, a destination must be in mind. One of the reasons for the crisis of the Latin American left could be that it lost its utopia, at least as a libertarian perspective.

In the long emancipatory process leading away from alienation, what can be of any practical relevance to the present day social movements will help the members of these movements in the initial and difficult task of becoming the subjects of their own history. Perhaps the notion of identity is most appropriate for outlining the basic content of this first phase. On an individual as well as on a collective level, the difficult first task consists in coming to a realistic self-perception of one's own characteristics, potentials and limitations, overcoming offers of false identity from outside and passing through the tempests of alternating over- and underestimation. At the very fundamental level, this means a reassertion of one's own human dignity, vis-à-vis the everyday experience of misery, oppression and cultural devastation. For better-off groupings, this can mean a contribution

to popular culture or even to a national self-recognition, especially after times of social crisis. Possibly we could even draw the dividing line between traditional social organizations and the field of 'different' phenomena we have come to name 'new social movements' according to this quest for an autonomous identity.

What is meant by 'identity' ? Obviously, there cannot be one precise definition of the term, and nor can there be one for the other two terms with which it forms a *continuum*: 'autonomy' and 'emancipation'. 'Identity' is probably one of the most multifaceted and intriguing notions of the human sciences, and naming it as one central aspect of the new social movements cannot be taken as an answer to the many riddles of these movements, but rather as a direction in which possible answers should be sought. There cannot be any fewer aspects of 'identity' than of the term 'alienation', to which it is counterposed. Any domination is a theft of identity - and what forms of domination have Latin Americans not suffered! Within its very limited forces, no movement can do more than try to recover some very specific fragments of identity, struggling on one (or very few) of many possible 'fronts' of domination, thus tacitly accepting the *status quo* on all other 'fronts'. Precisely for this reason there will be numerous contradictions inside as well as among these movements, making it so difficult to bring them together, practically as well as conceptually.

Nevertheless, in terms of the *locus* of a central problem, the idea of identity - under this or some other wording - seems to be increasingly on the mind of participants and observers of these movements. To cite some recent - and very incidental - examples: 'maybe the grand theme produced by the social movements for the practice of the left is the question of autonomy' writes Marilena Chaui, a member of the Brazilian PT.¹⁴ With regard to Argentina, Juan Carlos Portantiero defines the present crisis 'as a crisis of identity which faces a society with the necessity to change all its fundamental certitudes'.¹⁵ For the Chilean case, Tomás Moulián demands a vision of politics 'for which the centre

of action lies in the reconstruction of the social movement, of cells of an alternative hegemony', with cultural work as one of its basic aspects.¹⁶ A leaflet calling for the Second Day of National Protest in Chile on July 14th, summed up the experience of the previous day of protest on May 11th as 'a success, because it enables us to rediscover our identity as a free and sovereign people.'¹⁷ In Venezuela, there even exists a movement expressively baptized '*Movimiento de Identidad Nacional*'.¹⁸

It is not by chance that we have struck upon a notion with a long tradition within the Latin American literature. Earlier and more insistently than social scientists, Latin American writers have interpreted the unsolved 'national question' as a question of the lack of identity.

Maybe the attempts at resolving the 'national question' within the paradigms of traditional politics had to fail: by definition, identity is a do-it-yourself matter that cannot be given to us by someone else - even less can it be passed down from the heights of political power. It has to be constructed from below, on the base of a conscious and self-determined social practice - again, something I associate with the new social movements.

At the same time, the principal problems with which these movements have to cope stem from domination and exploitation of the lower class - thus, the 'social question' is very much present in these movements as well. Maybe the much sought for linkage between the national and the social question can effectively be found in the everyday 'ant's work' of these movements to rescue bits of meaningful individual and collective existence from dominant society. Moreover, it can probably not be found anywhere else; and the olympic heights of the national whole from which some heirs of dependency theory are searching for this linkage are definitely too far from the social base for this grassroot construction to be perceived.

And maybe this hidden side of the new social movements conceals also the profound necessity for the reappraisal of democracy as a central notion within recent discussion. Identity cannot be found within authoritarian structures, and, what is more, it ex-

cludes uniformity: it can only develop in the midst of variety which demands a political setting in which 'all the voices, all of them' (as one Chilean song has it) can express themselves.

Weak and fragmented as they are, the new social movements thus hold a key position for any emancipatory project in Latin America. They are it.

Fourth thesis: Together with the emergence of germs of an alternative project, the new social movements procreate the germs of the corresponding subjects.

In the process of creating new patterns of socio-cultural practice and of reconstructing fragments of an autonomous identity, the individuals involved as well as the group as a whole constitute themselves as the subjects of this process. To be more precise, they develop the corresponding fragments of a new subjectivity within themselves. This, of course, entails a profound revision of traditional concepts of social subjects, and of the process of their constitution as such.

Within the Marxist tradition, social subjects had an apriori objective existence, in the form of social classes; they constituted themselves subjectively as such by developing a consciousness that gradually approximated to this objective reality, and the conversion into political agents operated by enlarging the organization representing this full consciousness of reality through the incorporation of a progressive number of individuals.

None of this seems to hold for our present understanding of social processes in Latin America. We can no longer conceive a positive utopia as a fixed historical aim to be reached through pre-established means, but as a long and sinuous process of emancipation whose end - if there is one - is unknown. Accordingly, the subject would be the wholly realized individual within a disalienated society - in other words, a subject that will not exist at the beginning, but will only appear at the hypothetical end of the process. All the way through this process there will be some difficult dialectics in which an advance in social structures depends on an advance of the subject, and vice versa. In all probability, there will never be anything else but a rudimentary subject-coming-into-being, struggling with correspondingly

imperfect structures-in-the-making.

If this holds good, the consequences for our traditional ways of conceptualizing historical subjects could not be more far-reaching. Two points stand out:

First, if the process of emancipation is a never-ending one, so is the process of constitution of its subjects. No individual and no collective entity can therefore ever be regarded as being, wholly, subject. They are bearers of fragments of subjectivity, in so far as they have succeeded in overcoming some aspects of alienation and in constructing some first traits of an autonomous identity.

At first sight, this way of perceiving social subjectivity as a necessarily fragmented phenomenon cutting across social consciousness and practice may seem artificial and contradictory with our current perception of individuals being exactly that they are indivisible. Upon brief reflection, though, we will find this assumption of a cross-personal subjectivity as the only one compatible with all we know about the complex and contradictory compositions of individual consciousness. And with regard to collectivities, the assumption of heterogeneity rests on even more evidence.

Secondly, the possible directions of emancipation are just as multiform as the aspects of alienation - and all of them count ! There is no unalterably preestablished hierarchy of emancipatory aims, and accordingly no ontologically privileged subjects.¹⁹

This is not to deny that there are nodal points, within social structures, and that there are barriers more difficult and more important to overcome than others. And within capitalist society, exploitation and private appropriation form, without doubt, a nodal point. But it is not the only front that counts, and any advance in a different - for example, socio-cultural, socio-psychic direction has its relevance.

Is this anti-theoretical ? The fact is that maybe no aspect of social life has been so thoroughly and validly theorized as the field of political economy, and of course basically by Marx. But do other aspects of social life simply not exist as possible

fields of theory, just because they escape the realm of Marx's theory and have not been as validly theorized by someone else ? Maybe it is just that another Marx would be needed to elaborate on problems such as patriarchy or the psychology of domination, or human consciousness and action, or language... For example, is it anti-theoretical when we pass from Marx to Freud ?

IV. How New are the New Social Movements ?

Has it not always been like this, perhaps, and is it just our perception that is clumsily catching up with reality ? Could these lines not have been written at any previous time ?

Yes and no.

Probably, it was false from the beginning to pose the socialization of the means of production as the only and absolute goal of emancipation, and the proletariat as its sole subject. Further, and obviously, the problems of identity, emancipation and utopia are permanent themes.

But equally obviously, they are embedded in an historical process with changing socio-economic and cultural patterns, according to which issues emerge and fade away, spaces open and close again.

Within this permanent shifting of emphasis, it is new, in my opinion, that social movements are not questioning a specific form of political power, but the centrality of the power criterion itself. The question of a reappropriation of society from the state has become thinkable. Why ? Is this merely an idealistic return to the proto-socialists and anarchists of the 19th century ?

I have no conclusive answer, but I have some ideas on the direction in which an answer should be sought. To a great extent, present political structures, as embodied in the bourgeois state but even more in leninist parties, are a reproduction of the hierarchy within a capitalist factory. It is not by chance that they have evolved along with capitalist industrialism and reflect this industrialist mentality. And so do, even more crudely, the traditional socialist utopias. Aims like 'freeing the productive forces' or the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' are an apotheosis of in-

dustrial development.

By now, capitalist industrialization has reached a phase that is commonly referred to as the 'third industrial revolution'. With the generalization of electronics and cybernetics, automation and communication have become the defining aspects of present-day capitalism. We all know what that entails, in its dominant centralizing version as administered by transnational capital and the state apparatuses of the leading Western powers - the classical industrial workers are rapidly diminishing in numbers, swelling the tertiary sector and, worse, the mass of unemployed. With the automatization of production, the social existence of individuals and groups is increasingly defined through their potential for consumption, or in less euphemistic words, social life is mercantiled and dehumanized to extremes, and large sectors of the population are marginalized. In perspective, culture, society, a meaningful human existence itself are being dissolved and reduced to market relations, for which no other political structure is necessary but a market police that efficiently represses any other expression of human life apart from that of commodity owners. In their necrophilic obsession, the destructive forces freed by the third industrial revolution are about to destroy the natural environment of mankind, if not mankind itself in nuclear war. War is, in fact, already going on throughout the world with millions of victims, through arms or starvation.

Once again, the negative effects of this revolution are concentrated in the countries of the capitalist periphery.

For Latin America, this is having the consequence that social projects centred around the idea of industrialization apparently belong to the past, at least as viable ones. On a conscious level, the equation between industrialization and emancipation dear to generations of the Latin American left has lost its credibility. Correspondingly, forms of organization and action that paraphrase the production process within an old-type capitalist factory are no longer plausible. Rigid hierarchies could be made acceptable as long as they could be presented as indispensable for the social project pursued - why still submit to them once this project has faded away ?

Of course, the same goes for traditional bourgeois projects in Latin America. There is a wide spread sentiment of being in a *cul-de-sac*; the generalized economic crisis has eroded what bits of legitimacy there remained; states themselves have fallen into discredit.

For all possible contenders, hegemony has to be reconstructed. Not by accident, many of the military dictatorships presented their project with the pretension of being the founding fathers of a New Republic; of them all, only the Brazilian had a partial and transient success. But in itself, the perception of being in a phase of Latin American history marked by the bitter need for a founding project is shared by all segments of the respective societies.

In a way, the new socio-cultural patterns of everyday sociability that germinate within the new social movements are part of that founding effort. They are the embryos of a popular counter-foundation, in response to the ill-fated efforts from above. The dissolution of established socio-economic structures and socio-cultural orientations has had the effect, coupled with a devastating social disintegration, of 'setting free' what remained of a constructive potential to find new, self-determined orientations and openings.

Some observers have pointed to the puzzling fact that some of the new impulses coming out of these base level groupings have similarities with the ultra-liberal ideology of Friedman. They share - it is said - an anti-statist posture and a reappraisal of individual freedom... Looking a bit closer, what they share is the contemporaneity of crisis and the necessity to find some solution to it - but the directions in which they are looking for it are diametrically opposed to one other. The dominant centralizing solution intends to dismantle all non-repressive functions of the state, leaving intact and even enhancing its aspect of pure and abstract domination, through the repressive apparatus. New social movements, on the contrary, are not taking a stance against the organizational and auxiliary functions of the state, but against its expression of domination. The individual freedom referred to by Friedman and his followers is that

of the commodity owner on the market. For the counter-foundation elements within new social movements, it is precisely the non-market elements within social relations that are being reappraised; and so is human expression in all aspects except that of buying power.

Automation and communication are not 'bad' in themselves and could be set into motion so as to fulfil age-old dreams of human realization. The 'hidden side' of present day societies of which the new social movements are a vague premonition could conceal a popular, decentralising alternative to the dominant model of the third industrial revolution.

Significantly, within these movements, pre-capitalist and even pre-mercantile elements and values reappear - in that sense, the 'new' within these movements is also archaic.

V. How to be political without being only that

Of course, the reality of political power is there, and the new social movements are the first to feel its weight, with every tiny attempt they make to call relations other than power relations into being. To rescue society from politics is in itself a political task and needs political power to advance. And expressed more starkly everyday life for most of these groupings is marked by political oppression and economic misery, and every bit of political potential is bitterly needed for survival. How does this reality match, then, with a search for social relationships that are not primarily relations of domination ?

The question of a 'new party' has eventually to be faced.

It is a very common experience that social movements, after a phase of broadening mobilization around concrete issues, gain some access to established political structures. In order to expand their efficiency, its leaders get engaged in these structures - and the movement falls into decay, at least as an authentic expression of determinate social interest and as an experience of vivid social life. Can this be avoided ?

Probably it cannot be avoided totally. But quite another thing is to actively (if unconsciously) preclude anything else from happen-

ing, which is precisely the effect of the still prevailing criterion of the power potential.

Perhaps as a remnant of the traditional base-superstructure perspective, there is still an almost unbroken consensus that culture is something inferior to the 'hard facts' of economy and politics. Quite often, we can find some writer analysing the progress (sic) of a social movement from a 'still purely' cultural expression, via its social articulation to a political presence. And very naturally, this line is described as a line of growing consciousness. No doubt it is (if analysed correctly) a line of growing political consciousness - the point is that there are other forms and contents of social consciousness that are lost in that way. For example, a movement for the defence of a region against its ecological devastation and social disintegration for the sake of export crops will produce an enormous advance in ecological, economic, historical, and regionalist consciousness among its participants, along with strong links of solidarity and cooperation - and all this may well be lost the moment this movement 'gains political consciousness' by nominating its leaders as candidates within the lists of established parties.

Hence, a movement's increased potential for political power can carry with it a decrease in its long-term socio-cultural potential. More power means, almost invariably, less identity, more alienation.

To use a comparison, to view social movements under no other criterion than that of power is like asking for nothing else except the amount of calories represented by a quantity of petroleum - a highly reasonable question, but one that presupposes that petroleum is for burning, leaving aside all its qualities of chemical transformation.

Social movements cannot exist without political expression, which has to articulate the aims of the movement with the existing alienated - and alienating - power structures. In terms of alienation vs. identity, the political expression of social movements is, thus, a necessary retrospective part of its existence.

Transferred to the perspective of a 'new type of party' that in some countries may some day take upon itself the political expression of a broad culture of new social movements, this means that these parties would have to accept the role of not only not being the vanguard, but of being the rearguard in relation to the contents of these movements. They would have to be conceptualized as servants, not as masters of these movements. Of course, this excludes from the beginning any idea of control. And it imposes open, democratic structures, in which the open expression of variety, including contradictions among participants, is more important than unity of outward action.²⁰

- Possibly the present crisis of the Brazilian PT, as the only practical experience of relevance in that direction, is due to tendencies to 'free' itself from allegiance with regard to the social movements that gave birth to it.²¹

VI. Finally: Who are the New Social Movements ?

We are, at the end, coming back to our initial question. Who or what is moving in the new social movements ?

In the beginning, I was specific in considering the new social movements in Latin America, with some empirical evidence from only three countries. I am now leaving out this specification. After all I have said, it is clear that in my view the essence of these movements is the same, wherever they occur. If it was not for that, there would be no justification in calling by the same name such apparently incomparable social phenomena as - say - the anti-nuclear movement in West Germany and a 'popular kitchen' in Chile.²²

Of course, account has to be taken of the enormous differences that separate the various expressions of this essence from the specific modalities of their existence under concrete historical circumstances. Actually, this is the field of study of the new social movements, and unless this vast field of historical experiences is ever-present in our minds, the general vision I tried to give would dry out to become sheer ideology. But vice versa, without such a general vision, our efforts to understand concrete cases run the danger of missing the essential, and therefore, of

contributing actively to their 'asphyxiation' ?

The essence of these movements is, in my view, their capacity to generate germs of a new social subjectivity - new as much in content as in self-consciousness. By taking up the age-old themes of emancipation and self-determination, this 'new' subjectivity is, at the same time, the most advanced and the oldest.

It is also new in the sense that it subverts our modes of perception. Our monolithic concepts of social subjectivity have exploded, and we find that the aggregate state of subjectivity is not solid, but liquid or even gaseous, penetrating - and blending with - the most varied elements within the social texture. Paradoxically, we have thought of social subjectivity as something that could be objectivized and used as a tool - now we come to accept that it is, definitely and radically, subjective, inextricably linked to human life itself, and therefore just as insubordinate to reification as life itself. Thus, we come to understand that whenever we speak of social or political subjectivity as something different from human subjectivity as such the distinction is, ultimately, an artificial and analytical one.

This may mean a sacrifice of long-standing intellectual certainties - but in return we receive an infinitely wider and more fertile field of action and reflection.

How can we tell this to the dweller of an *estera* hut outside Lima ?

Do we need to tell him ? He knows the obstacles he must - and can, possibly - overcome next, maybe better than a West German industrial worker.

Of course it would be cynical to claim that everybody should only care for his own emancipation and leave the poor to resolve theirs. The process of pushing back alienation will have to use present-day means which, of themselves, cannot be free of alienation. Any purism would be an escape from responsibility.

But basically , whenever a step of de-alienation is brought about by the help of another, it contains an element of re-alienation and has to be done over again by the beneficiary. Whatever element

of alienation is overcome by an individual or a group for itself is then out of the world for good. And maybe this is the most effective help one can give to another.

At least, it will not go without this help. We are the new social movements.

NOTES

1. Adalbert Evers and Zoltan Szankay: Das gerissene Band. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von sozialem Wissen und sozialer Bewegung, in: *Prokla* (Berlin) No. 43, 1981, pp. 43-59.
2. For example, see the contributions to the reader edited by Norbert Lechner: *¿Qué significa hacer política?*, Lima: Desco, 1982; or to another reader edited by Francisco Rojas Aravena: *Autoritarismo y alternativas populares en América Latina* San José: Colección 25 años FLASCO, EUNED, 1982; or in: *Alternativas populares da democracia: Brasil, años 80*, by José Alvares Moisés and others, Petropolis: Vozes/CEDEC, 1982; or the collection of articles in No. 64 of 'Nueva Sociedad' (Caracas) on 'Nuevas formas de hacer política' (Jan/Febr.1983). The works and authors cited in the following footnotes contain many further examples.
3. Again, there is an increasingly vast literature criticising this conception of politics, for example; Henry Pease García: Vanguardia iluminada y organización de masas, in *Nueva Sociedad* No 64, Jan/Febr. 1983, pp. 33-38; Fernando Mires: Retaguardias sin Vanguardias, in: *Nueva Sociedad* No. 61, July/Aug. 1982, pp. 35-54; Norbert Lechner: Revolución y ruptura pactada, Madrid: Trabajo presentado al simposio 'Caminos de la democracia en América Latina', Fundación Pablo Iglesias, 30th of May to 5th of June, 1983, mimeo.
4. For example, Lechner, *ibid.* p. 10; Mires *op cit.*
5. Henry Pease García, *op.cit.* p. 38.
6. Mires *op.cit.* p. 35; and by the same author: Acerca de la necesidad y las condiciones que se dan en Chile para el surgimiento (no necesariamente en plazos inmediatos) de un nuevo partido político, Oldenburg: mimeo, August 1983.
7. This has been the basic line of my own previous work on Latin American social movements (but not my invention) - explicitly for example in: Tilman Evers, Clarita Müller-Plantenberg, Stefanie Spessart: Stadtteilbewegung und Staat. Kämpfe im Reproduktionsbereich in Lateinamerika, in: *Lateinamerika - Analysen und Berichte* Vol.3, Berlin: Olle & Wolter, 1979, pp. 118-170 (Spanish version: *Movimientos barriales y estado. Luchas en la esfera de la reproducción en América Latina*, Bogotá: CINEP, 1983, Colección Teoría y Sociedad No.11: Portuguese version in: José Alvaro Moises and others: *Cidade, Povo o Poder*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra/CEDEC, 1981, pp. 110-164); see also Tilman Evers: Os Movimentos sociais urbanos: O caso do 'Movimento do Custo de Vida', in: J.A. Moisés and others: *Alternativas populares da democracia*, *op.cit.*, pp. 73-98 (Spanish version in: *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* No. 4/81, pp. 1371-1393). Nevertheless, the central 'message' of these works was to say that political potential was lost through methods of instrumentalization of social movements by left parties, and that their autonomy should be respected.
8. See Evers, Müller-Plantenberg, Spessart, *op.cit.* 7.

9. Fernando Mires: *Acerca de la necesidad...*, op.cit.
10. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge: *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*. Frankfurt: *Suhrkamp*, 1972, p. 485.
11. Ernst Bloch: *Prinzip Hoffnung*. Frankfurt: *Suhrkamp*, 7th ed. 1980, vol. 1, p. 223.
12. See Hartmut Kärner: *Los movimientos sociales: Revoluciones de lo cotidiano*, in: *Nueva Sociedad* No. 64, pp. 25-32, esp. p. 26.
13. Marx, Engels: *Communist Manifesto*.
14. Marilena Chaui: *Notas sobre la crisis de la izquierda en Brasil*, in: *Nueva Sociedad*, No. 61, July/Aug. 1982, pp. 67-80, p. 77.
15. Juan Carlos Portantiero: *Transición a la democracia en Argentina: ¿ Un trabajo de Sísifo ?*, in: *Cuadernos de Marcha (México)*, July 1983, pp. 15-26, p.15.
16. Tomás Moulán: *La crisis de la izquierda*, in: *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* No. 2/82, pp. 649-664, pp. 663/664.
17. Cited by: Clarita Müller-Plantenberg: *Wer sind die Subjekte der Interessenvertretung im neoliberalen Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftsmodell in Lateinamerika ?* paper presented to the seminar 'Massenkultur und religiöse und soziale Bewegungen', Bielefeld (West Germany) 7/8th of June 1983, mimeo, p. 38; see by the same author: *La vida por la vida. Autonome Frauenkomitees, Indianerräte und Basisgruppen*, in: same author (ed.): *Frauen und Familie im chilenischen Befreiungsprozess*, Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1983; and same author: *Ueberlebungs-kampf und Selbstbestimmung. Zur Arbeiter- und Volksbewegung in kolumbianischen Städten*. Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1983.
18. Francisco Mires: *Alternativas de organización y poder popular*, in: *Nueva Sociedad* No. 64, pp. 47-55, p.53. - The list of examples could be infinite: see for example; Paul Singer and Vinicius Caldeira Brant (org.): *O povo em movimento*. Petropolis: Vozes/CEBRAP, 1980.
19. Again, for many others: Norbert Lechner: *Revolución y ruptura pactada*, op.cit., p.10.
20. All this presupposes a different concept of politics; for an interesting metaphor, see Jorge Sanchez Vega: *El Ajedrez y el Go: ¿ Dos formas de hacer política ?* Paper presented to the II Encuentro de Chantilly, 2nd to 4th of Sept. 1983, Paris: CETRAL. See also: Manuel Antonio Garretón M.: *Democracia, transición política y alternativa socialista en el capitalismo autoritario del Cono Sur*, Madrid: Paper presented to the Symposium 'Los Caminos de la Democracia en América Latina', Fundación Pablo Iglesias, 30th of May to 3rd of June, 1983, mimeo, esp. p. 14.
21. While writing these pages, I received a letter from a colleague in Bogotá: 'A few days ago I attended the congress for the founding of a 'Movimiento Popular Nacional', sponsored by

Orlando Fals Borda and other people that could generically be called non-dogmatic socialists. It is meant to group all popular movements, maintaining their respective individuality and excluding any attempts of instrumentalization by the left. (...) It is, nevertheless, beyond doubt that for the moment this movimiento would not exist without Fals Borda'. Contradictions of reality !

22. See Tilman Evers: De costas para o estado, longe do parlamento. Os movimentos alternativos na Alemanha Occidental, in: *Novos Estudos* CEBRAP (São Paulo) Apr. 83, pp. 25-39; and same author: Kleinerer Goliath - oder David ? Frage nach dem Subjekt in den grün/alternativen Bewegungen. Berlin/Todtmoos-Rütte: mimeo, August 1983.

