DO WE KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT MODERNITY TO ANALYSE IT ACCURATELY?

WHAT AMBIGUITIES EXIST IN THE CONCEPT OF MODERNITY?

'An important contribution to the contemporary debate on modernity and postmodernity ... a first-rate attempt at theoretical synthesis and an important diagnosis of our time.'

Professor Hans Joas, *Freie Universität Berlin*

'The best book on modernity that I have read in recent years ... This is a "must read" book for anyone interested in sociological theory, in the study of modernity and in the analysis of the present with more than café-style clichés of "post-modernism".'

Jonathan H. Turner, Professor of Sociology, *University of California, Riverside*

This book offers a sociology of modernity in terms of an historical account of social transformations over the last two centuries. The current restructuring is discussed as both a revival of some key concerns of the 'modern project', in particular the ideas of liberty, plurality and individual autonomy, and as a threat to others, most notably the creation of social identities and the possibility of politics.

Peter Wagner is Research Fellow at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung.

Cover image: Festival Exhibition, South Bank Site, London. A view of the Islanders on the River Walk, showing the Skylon at the South Bank Exhibition (1951). Reproduced by permission of Hulton Deutsch Collection Ltd.
Cover design: Daren Ellis

Sociology/Political science/Philosophy

A SOCIOLOGY OF MODERNITY
LIBERTY AND DISCIPLINE
Peter Wagner

A SOCIOLOGY OF MODERNITY
Liberty and Discipline
PETER WAGNER
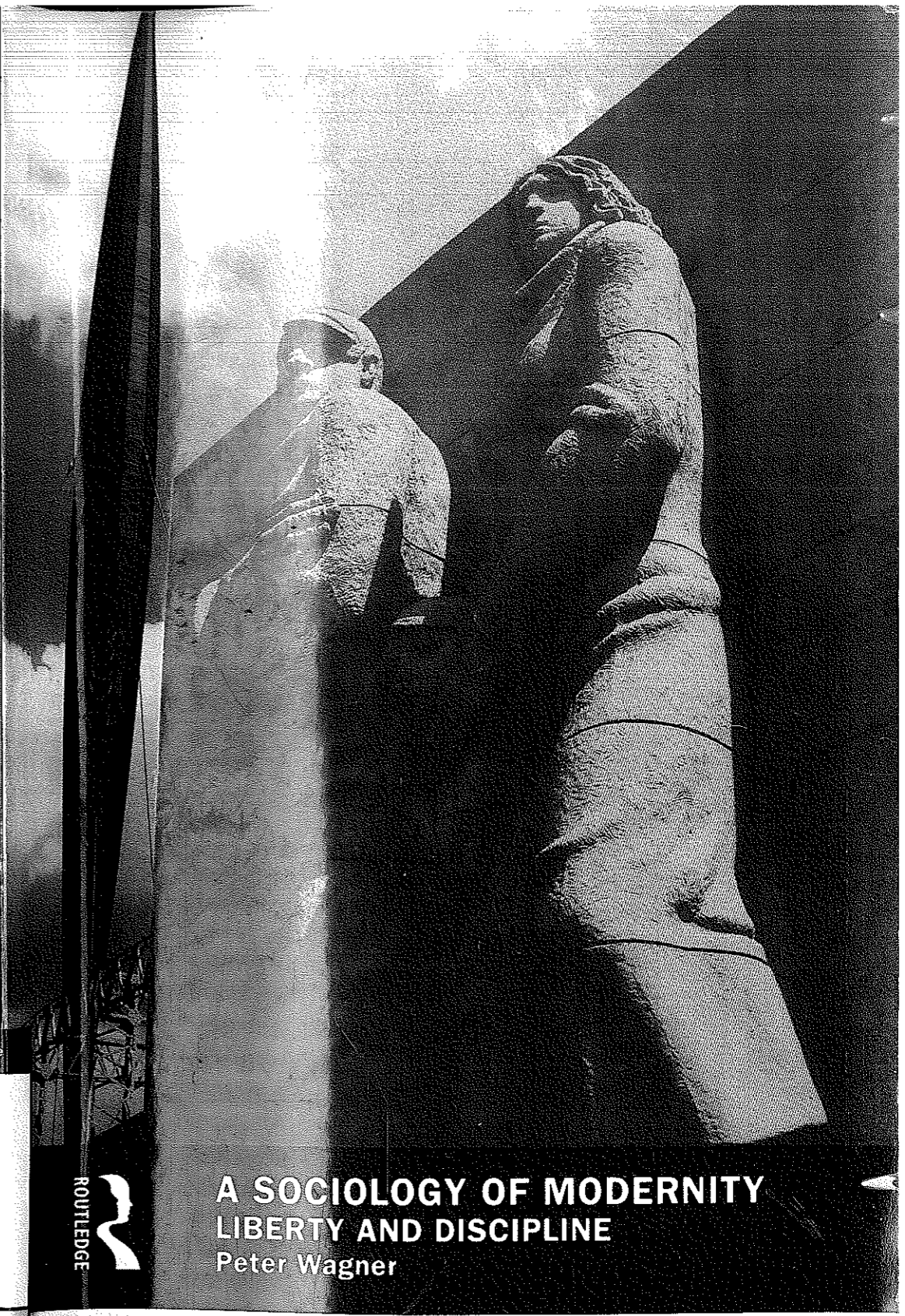
Modernity and self-identity

Liberation and disembedding

ORGANIZED MODERNITY AND SELF-IDENTITY: THE ELIMINATION OF AMBIVALENCE

The question of the historically changing relation of individual selves, social identities and societal configurations accompanied the preceding account of the history of organized modernity – its emergence, temporary consolidation and crisis. This question may now be faced in somewhat more explicit – though hardly conclusive – terms than was possible throughout the analysis. The two major approaches to this question during organized modernity itself have been, first, the mainstream sociological debate on social roles and, second, the view of the fate of the individual in theories of mass society.

The concept of the social role was the main tool by which sociology tried to handle the relation of 'social structure and personality'.[1] In the classical era of sociology very little of that problematic can be found. That discourse was marked by its historical situation, namely that 'modernity' was just being extended to include all members of a society. This meant that the modern ideal of the self was present, but the sociologists were not really able to think that this ideal could reach beyond the bourgeois groups. Many of the sociological theories of the time contained, or were even explicitly based on, elitist elements. Elitism, however, allows an avoidance of the question. To put it schematically, there are some human beings whom one would look at with a focus on personality, and many others to whom the analysis of social structure can be applied.

In twentieth-century social thought, these internal boundaries between entirely different kinds of human beings were visibly eroding, and sociology had to take account of this – not surprisingly in North America first. A conception that allowed one to see both self-identity and society as emerging from the ways human beings actively relate to others was proposed by George Herbert Mead and entered into the works of the Chicago School. For Mead, a 'me' emerges from somebody's perception of the attitude others hold towards her or him.[2] My identity is formed from my way of combining the different 'me's I am confronted with. Mead's conceptualization is a very open one. It allows for identities to emerge or not emerge, depending on the individual's abilities to reconcile different expectations and on the divergence of expectations itself. It also allows for the finding of socially or historically typical forms of social identity. However, much of this openness was soon lost again.

In his attempt to formulate a general theory of society, Talcott Parsons drew on Mead but also on the works of the anthropologist Ralph Linton who proposed seeing individuals as having a determined social status in the structure of a society. The status involved rights and duties and entailed the expectation, on the part of others, of a certain behaviour. Social role, as the dynamic aspect of a status, is the living up to such expectations. In the 1950s and 1960s, Parsons, Robert Merton and others broadened this very deterministic concept without, however, really altering it. Trying to link a theory of action with a theory of order, Parsons stressed the value standards and the 'orientation system' of individuals, and he introduced the idea of functionality of role behaviour for a social order. He writes, 'what the actor does in his relations with others seen in the context of its functional significance for the system ... we shall call his *role*.'[3] Merton emphasized the multitude of roles in any status position and spoke of a 'role-set'. This idea allowed the possibility of role conflicts, and Merton was concerned about the capacity of individuals to master diverse expectations and still perform functionally in their positions. But it also allowed the introduction of individual autonomy, given the need for managing and negotiating expectations to make them compatible.[4]

This latter aspect is important in most recent contributions to the debate, which tend to dissolve the earlier argument on normative and functional integration. The complexity of role-sets is then seen as a difficulty, which may increase the feeling of alienation for the individual and threaten the disruption of functional behaviour. But the very same complexity is also the source of individuation and, consequently, individual autonomy. 'The lack of a basic source of disturbance is also a lack of a basic source for reflection.'[5]

More structurally oriented sociology focused on the social determinants of roles. The basic idea was that diversity of one's social environment would increase the complexity of role-sets. Generally, increasing such diversity would be seen as a feature of modern society. However, no unilinear development to greater complexity would occur, since there were countervailing tendencies. It was observed that class differences often do not promote complex role-sets,

> because they imply that people make invidious social distinctions among strata and discriminate in their role relations on the basis of these class distinctions. Indeed, any ethnic distinctions and ingroup preferences involves discrimination in establishing social relations that counteract the otherwise positive influence of a diverse population structure on complex role-sets.

The same is said to hold for residential segregation, while social and spatial mobility should enhance role-complexity.[6]

Much of this writing is very modernist sociology in the sense that the objectivist view of the detached sociologist sees the limits and determinations of the lives of others in a very clear-cut way, while he only reluctantly grants the sameness of the other to himself. However, it is likely that the observations, while referring to

modern society as such, capture something of the organization of modernity. Clearly recognizing that even the lower-class member of society can no longer simply be said to be tied by tradition, the sociologist discovers other determinations that make less of a free individual creating himself and choosing his social identity.

Re-reading this research as a partial self-portrait of organized modernity, we find that, after an initial conceptual openness, the relation of individuals to society is streamlined. The borrowing from anthropology is significant itself, since early anthropology saw 'primitive societies' as ahistoric and static, devoid of conflict and motion. In the Parsonian system, individual self, social role and societal integration are conceptually interlinked to form the 'stable social system',[7] which was how the emerging order of organized modernity was indeed regarded. The more recent emphasis on the capacity of the individual to deal actively with role offers and expectations may then be related to changes in society that mark the end of the very organized form of modernity.[8] I shall return to this question after having briefly discussed the alternative view on modern, mass society.

Off the mainstream of disciplinary debate, the critical theories of mass society, as discussed above, dealt with the question of the relation of the individuals to society more in terms of social philosophy. They tended to stress that opportunities for individuals to define themselves and create their own identity are extremely limited under conditions of a highly organized capitalist society. Daniel Bell's early and exemplary criticism of theorizing about the individual in mass society provides a way of showing into which problems any such reasoning runs.[9]

Some of these approaches, most of which were published between the 1930s and the 1950s, stress the 'disorganization of society', a notion by which they refer to the demise of differentiated social structures, that is, in the form of the estates, and the counterposition of a homogeneous mass of atomized individuals to an all-powerful state. These views deplore the loneliness and powerlessness of the isolated individual, the loss of the variety of possible relations between different people, and often also the loss of cultural values in a general process of downward homogenization. The passive TV spectator, isolated in her suburban home, is a recurrent example. Other approaches, however, focus on the bureaucratization of society, on the establishment of machine-like relations between human beings in a society that is essentially over-organized. While here, too, the destruction of an older social fabric is seen, the bureaucratic over-organization rather leads to a constant mobilization of individuals, but a mobilization merely as 'cogs in the machine' without enabling participation and self-expression.

Bell points out that these approaches, which he identifies – following Edward Shils – as coming from both conservative and neo-Marxist sides, share an 'aristocratic' longing for a less crowded past, and he raises doubts about the desirability of their implicit wishes: 'Mass society is ... the bringing of the "masses" into society, from which they once were excluded.'[10] But also analytically he sees them as weak. Their 'large-scale abstractions' fail to recognize the degrees to which forms of association, communality, diversity and

nonconformism exist in, for instance, American society.[11] All of Bell's critical remarks are well justified: the recourse to a simplistic theoretical dichotomy, the contradictory conceptualization of that dichotomy with regard to the relation of individual and society, and the lack of empirical grounding of the strong claims. Indeed, some of the contributions to the debate on 'postmodernity' today suffer from the same weaknesses.[12]

Given these problems, all of which are still with us, it would be adventurous to offer a full-scale reformulation of the issue of the self in organized modernity. Against the background of my preceding argument and the observations of recent changes in the discourse on self and identity, however, a more fruitful starting-point for further investigation may be proposed. The notion of recurring crises of modernity and the identification of processes of disembedding and reembedding, which are historically distinct as to whom and what kinds of social identities they affect, could be the basis for a socially more specific analysis of the formation and stability of social identities.

Fundamentally modern is exactly 'the idea that we construct our own social identity'.[13] The social existence of this idea is what the societies we look at have in common throughout the entire period of two centuries that is of interest here. As such, thus, it does not give any guidance in defining different configurations. Therefore, I would like to introduce three qualifying criteria.

First, the existence of the idea of identity construction still leaves open the question of whether all human beings living in a given social context share it and are affected by it. The *social permeation* of the idea may be limited. Second, human beings in the process of constructing their social identities may consider this as a matter of *choice*, as a truly modernist perspective would have it. In many circumstances, however, though a knowledge and a sense of the social construction of identities prevails, it may appear to human beings as almost natural, as in a looser sense pre-given or ascribed, which social identity they are going to have. Third, the *stability* of any identity one has chosen may vary. Such a construction of identity may be considered a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence, but may also be regarded as less committing and, for instance, open to reconsideration and change at a later age.

In the order in which they are listed these criteria widen the scope of *constructability* of identities. All conditions of identity-construction have existed for some individuals or groups at any time during the past two centuries in the West. However, I think one can see the width of constructability of identity as a distinguishing feature between the three broad types of modern configurations. To put the thesis the other way round, the widening of the scope of identity construction marks the transitions from one to another social configuration of modernity. These transitions entail social processes of disembedding and provoke transformations of social identities, in the course of which not only other identities are acquired but the possibility of construction is also more widely perceived.

Restricted liberal modernity was a configuration in which the constructability of social identity was hardly accessible to the majority of the population, the

peasant and industrial working classes and most women. Exactly for this reason, it may be said that membership in modernity was denied them. This configuration is sharply divided on this issue. Counterposed to the situation of this majority, a small, predominantly male, elite minority hailed the idea of 'making oneself', 'realizing oneself', in terms of social and personal identity, as the advent of true freedom and humanity. This was true for both the intellectual elites and the commercial elites, it was merely the basic understandings of what self-realization meant that differed widely. The predominance of such attitudes among the elites allows one to call the entire configuration one of modernity, though restricted. Historically, their orientations should have decisive impact on the shaping of the social practices and would draw everybody else into modernity, too (see Chapter 4).

The double bourgeois emphasis, intellectually and commercially, on the constructability of social identity introduced the potential for a hitherto unknown openness into social life. In line with a view that emerged around the turn to the nineteenth century, Claude Lefort maintains in emphatic words that

> modern society and the modern individual are constituted by the experience of the dissolution of the ultimate markers of certainty; ... their dissolution inaugurates an adventure – and it is constantly threatened by the resistance it provokes – in which the foundations of power, the foundations of right and the foundations of knowledge are all called into question – a truly historical adventure in the sense that it can never end, in that the boundaries of the possible and the thinkable constantly recede.[14]

By mid-century, this openness and uncertainty could surely be felt, at least in some realms of social life. From Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto* and Charles Baudelaire's writings on modern life onwards, this is a view on modernity that has in fact continuously reasserted itself throughout the history of modernity. And the questioning of all foundations was the major feature of the cultural-intellectual crisis of modernity around the turn of the century.

In more specific historico-sociological terms, however, one needs to put more emphasis on the resistance that modernity constantly provokes than Lefort does. This resistance was the energy behind the building of organized modernity, and it came from very different social groups with highly varying interests. When these interests had met for political accommodation, an order could be constructed that could temporarily arrest modernity. At that point, the image could emerge that the boundaries of both the possible and the thinkable had again been firmly set.

The wide extension of market and factory practices, which occurred during the nineteenth century, meant a social process of disembedding for large parts of the population and a questioning of whatever understandings of themselves they had held. The resources to create new social identities would be provided, on the one hand, by the intellectual elites and their discourses on national communities and their boundaries and, on the other hand, by 'the making of the working class', to borrow E.P. Thompson's formulation. These identities were the material on the basis of which a reshaping of social practices could occur to build a new social order in which most inhabitants of a territory could secure a place. The building of this order, which I have described as organized modernity, provided for the conditions of a reembedding.[15]

If one looks at phenomena such as class cultures or class votes, and also at nationalist movements throughout the first half of the twentieth century, I think one can fairly safely assume that such a reembedding indeed took place. Membership in a class or nation was an important marker for orientation.[16] In cases where one orientation was played against the other, as in National Socialism, violent struggles with high participation occurred as well as cruel oppression after the victory of the Nazi movement. In cases where both orientations were joined, such as in Swedish social democracy, an indeed almost homely social atmosphere was created. Though less strongly expressed, the latter became the model of social organization in Western Europe after the defeat of Nazism.

By the 1950s the order of organized modernity was well established. Limited as such expressions are, the high consent of the population to this order in the absence of direct repression may be an indicator for the degree of solid re-embedding of individuals in this social configuration. Through the first half of this century, 'external' national and 'internal' social boundaries had been clearly set. You were German and a white-collar employee, or English and a worker, but whatever you were, it was not by your own choice. Ambivalences had been eliminated by comprehensive classificatory orders and the enforcing of these orders in practice. Mostly, individuals knew where they belonged, but did not have the impression that they had a major part in defining this place. The closure of modernity under the sign of modernization came close to reversing the condition of modernity, as compared to its earlier, restricted liberal, form. The life of the modern human being would no longer be fleeting, contingent and uncertain, but stable, certain and smoothly progressing.

This was the society which many critics, but not only critics, were to label mass society. Daniel Bell was right to dissect inconsistencies in the critical analyses; there was more variety, individuality and sociality than most critics recognized. But their intuition did not really betray them. They saw organized society from the perspective of, not aristocracy but, liberal modernity. That was how they recognized that the bourgeois ideal was indeed abandoned in the sense that, now that people were formally free members of modernity, they did not fully avail themselves of the possibility of constructing their own identities. This was what the theorem of the loss of the individual really referred to – and causes were searched for in the social condition. As insufficient as those social analyses often were, the basic diagnosis was not invalid.

The relative stability and certainty of organized modernity, though, were not to remain. They rested on the organization of social practices in such a way that the practices would join into each other and provide places for (almost) everybody in a society. The process of establishing such practices rested on the existence (and promotion) of organizing criteria that gave them meaning in the eyes of those who

would constantly reenact them in their daily lives. Once established and habitualized, such practices may well go on after their (historical-genealogical) organizing criteria have disappeared.

By organizing criteria I refer here to the social identities in terms of nationality and class consciousness. Their disparition, or rather weakening, can indeed be observed during the 1950s and 1960s.[17] While being founded on these identities, the dynamics of organized modernity tended to undermine them by eroding them in more affluent and more homogeneous, 'middle-class', 'mass' culture. It emptied them of their substance, as can be read also from political and sociological terms like 'class compromise' or 'levelled middle-class society' (Schelsky) that were current at that time. All of this may have little impact, as long as the habitualized practices are not affected. But when, in a situation of eroded foundational identities, the order of practices is shaken – for whatever reasons – they cannot be kept up or re-established, since no collective orientations or social identities are at hand to rebuild them.[18] This was the situation that spelt the end of organized modernity and led to the emergence of the phenomenon that came to be known as 'postmodernity'. The transition entailed a further widening of the scope of social-identity construction.

Before I turn to describing the conditions of identity formation after the end of organized modernity, I want to return briefly to the erosion of the organized order of practices (as portrayed in Chapter 8). The relation of the individuals to the institutions changed along with the institutional change. With regard to authoritative practices, the changes entailed a weakening of the linkage between the individual and the polity. With regard to allocative practices, they signalled the return of uncertainty.

THE FLIGHT OF THE CITIZEN

At its height, organized democracy *cum* interventionist welfare state provided a set of well-established routines in which the citizens, in their own best interest, would take their assigned places and fulfil their limited political obligations. The places and obligations, as well as the benefits the citizens could obtain, were originally defined in substantive social or political terms, but with the universalization of policies and the routinization of organized politics they were being de-substantivized.

The organization of authoritative practices was a collective action based on the experience of violent conflicts and of unacceptable dangers and uncertainties in modern life. So, the encapsulation of conflicts – the 'decline of political passions'[19] – and the homogenization of modes of life – expressing them in the language of statistics – cannot be seen as unintended effects, even though the effects went beyond, and outlasted, the intentions. The relative apathy of the citizen and the passivity of the classified welfare recipient and policy object more generally were part of the new order and a requirement to make it work. And so it did, for a while.

It is not really well understood what happened then in the relation between the

citizen and the polity. The evidence as given earlier is ambiguous. On the one hand, it points to a re-activation of the political life of the citizenry when people participate unconventionally or even form their own new parties. On the other hand, some observations, such as on abstentionism and declining party member-ships, indicate an increasing rejection of politics. In my view, most of the observed phenomena can and need to be interpreted in common as a way of dealing with the experiences of organized modernity.

At first sight it appears contradictory that a trend towards the ever more detailed institutionalization of social relations, which indicates a high degree of mastery and monitoring of those relations, should be accompanied by a kind of 'liberation, a flight of the individuals escaping from the duty to appear as a subject'.[20] But it is exactly the experience of the certainties and routines of political life in the interventionist welfare states that allows individuals to begin to play with the rules on their part, interpret them, use them against the intentions of the rule-makers, and the like.

Media research has given an impetus to rethinking the relations between the political class and the ordinary citizen. Early critical media studies had often assumed that the recipients would be helplessly and passively exposed to whatever messages the media companies wanted to feed them. Later interpretations, how-ever, stressed the active dealing with the signs, which may be played with or composed with regard to specific messages that might only emerge in the relation between the media and the particular individual. A very suggestive, and provocative, transposition of such a perspective on political processes has been offered by Jean Baudrillard in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*,[21] an essay which I shall appropriate here on my own terms.

In organized democracy, the political class has established a very asymmetric, almost a one-way, relation to the citizenry. On the one side, it covers it with opinion polls in forms and on subjects that are processable in party terms. On the other side, it feeds back election platforms and, if in power, policy programmes that are intended to solicit and maintain electoral support. This is practically all the interaction there is, and it is completely structured by the strategic interests of the political class. The citizenry has mostly conformed to this interaction pattern, initially maybe even on the assumption that this instrument enhances political communication. But increasingly it has recognized the strategic reduction of its own role, of 'people's sovereignty', by this means. Given that, thus, the idea of representation was undermined by the political class, the citizenry also came to refuse to be represented and began to use its responses stategically, too.

Drawing implicitly on a social-interest theory of representation, the political class had designed the 'electoral game' as one in which there are (competing) players only on one side, whereas the other side is characterized by determined preferences that merely need to be detected and activated by the players.[22] Such a conception led to the mobilization of the people by and for organizational elites, which was typical of organized modernity. However, the full conventionalization of this mode and its instruments – opinion research and the elections themselves –

allowed the citizens to draw on the rules on their part and to transform the exchange into a more balanced two-way communication, though a very reduced one.

There is no good means of knowing, by empirical research, whether such an inversion or reciprocation indeed takes place, since strategic considerations and 'second thoughts' are not easily revealed by standardized questioning. However, a number of phenomena can sensibly be interpreted in terms of an electoral attitude that is at the same time more active and more distanced toward the political game than the standard view on organized democracy assumes. First, the share of the electorate that exercises a stable party vote tends to decline. Less voters feel they have a quasi-ascriptive relation to a party. Even when they may continue to have stable inclinations, they may play with their vote to effect change in their party. The famous 'Reagan Democrats' are an example of such an attitude as are social democrats who vote occasionally for the Green Party in Germany. Second, voters have recognized that the traditional cleavage parties are not the only ones that may exist. Besides new parties such as environmentalist ones,[23] 'protest' parties or candidates run with increasing success in many countries. Third, voters have noted that established-party governments do indeed respond to their defections and expressions of dissent. They may vote for an anti-tax or xenophobic party expecting – and often rightly so – that governments will no longer dare to raise taxes or will restrict immigration, if they are 'punished' in this way. And, fourth, as a basis of all such considerations, voters assume rightly that party strategists will get to know what the voters try to express via opinion research and media coverage.

In a typically postmodernist gesture, Jean Baudrillard refuses to make up his mind whether he should regard such phenomena as showing resistance or hyperconformism on the part of the masses.[24] But his undecidedness actually captures much of the constellation. The behaviour may be called hyperconformist in that it fully accepts the reduction of politics to the conventions and technologies that have been introduced to encapsulate conflicts. It is resistant, however, in that it turns these tools against the existing political class – and it proves to do so effectively.

The key to understanding the double nature of this transformation is to regard it as the effective undermining of the social-interest based conventions of organized representation. When these conventions are broken, the individual citizens are effectively liberated from the social determination to express their views according to their social location.[25] However, this liberation tends to weaken the linkage between the individuals and the polity even further than the 'thin theory of citizenship' of organized modernity did. Devoid of the substantive underpinning of any social theory, the only connection that exists from the citizenry to the electoral parties is through survey research and media – and the vote. In such a situation, the party elites are as dependent on the electorate as oligopolistic companies are on the consumers.[26] If it is the case (which we do not know with any degree of certainty), that the citizenry from its side has indeed transformed its relation to the polity into one that is analogous to a product market, this is certainly a process of distanciation and a rejection of offers of social identities. It is a

liberation from imposed concepts of representation and simultaneously a disembedding, since no other mode of representation takes its place. More specifically, any potential concept of collective agency is abandoned, apart from the mere numerical aggregation of votes analogous to the structuring of a market by accumulated individual consumer preferences.

The combined effects of the two major historical transformations of authoritative practices – the building of organized representation and its destruction – make up for a crucial part of what I will call the historical tendency of the modern project towards self-cancellation. The building of highly organized authoritative institutions was an attempt to create collective agency in the face of disembedding social practices that called for collectivist responses. The building of these institutions, however, also entailed a reduction of the forms of communicative interaction in the realm of authoritative practices. This reduction, in turn, undermined the possibility of politics so that, when the organized rules became inadequate, there were no means left to restore a fuller understanding and a fuller mode of representation of collective action. The second transformation brought the liberation from the constraints of social conventions, but it did so at the cost of a further reduction of political communication. Both transformations signalled an increase of individual autonomy: in the first case with regard to the exposure to social disembedding in the form of collective creativity, in the second case with regard to the constraints by conventions in the form of individual liberation. After the twofold liberations, the prospects for achieving collective self-determination, however, one of the major ambitions of the modern project, are dimmer than at any time before.

Should this partial self-cancellation of modernity be taken light-heartedly? I shall try to give an answer to this question in the following chapter when looking more comprehensively at the present condition of modernity. I think, however, that it is observable that citizens are often aware of it and generally do not take it light-heartedly. It is a common attitude to judge the state of the polity as unsatisfactory and to hope for betterment through an, even if unlikely, collective process of renewal in the realm of politics. This is why new and promising challengers in this realm are likely to be greeted with a degree of interest and sympathy that is at odds with the well-known likelihood of their failure. This interest and sympathy indicate a remaining, very fundamental, ambivalence. Still, it is not (yet?) possible to live completely without the idea of politics. There is a nostalgic yearning for a hero, despite all experience and insight. The way to deal with this real-world ambivalence is to try to regard such political efforts like a spectacle, with sympathies clearly distributed but with the distance retained that is necessary to avoid disappointments. Ultimately, then, such politicians

> are the heroes of a kind of film in real time which, some variants and modifications of the 'casting' apart, tells always more or less the same story, which finishes badly. That story can certainly not be taken for a historical project. But, at least, it allows to keep its scenography functioning of which we retain an irremediable nostalgia.[27]

THE ENTERPRISING SELF AND THE TWO-THIRDS SOCIETY

In the preceding section it was argued that the relation between polity, party and voter in the realm of authoritative practices tends to model itself analogously to the one between market, producer and consumer. At the same time, the relation of the individual to the social order was gradually transformed in the realm of allocative practices, too. During organized modernity the ideal-typical 'economic subject' was the employee/consumer who performed routine tasks in a hierarchical organization for mass production and bought these standardized products, thereby contributing to the mode of mass consumption. This mode of allocative organization allowed most contemporary observers only two ways of interpreting the relation of the individual to the social order, either in terms of obedience and conformity or in terms of resistance and refusal. The break-up of organized modernity, in contrast, has been accompanied by other views which stress creative involvement and self-realization.

In recent years, fuelled by the impact of Thatcherism, a debate on the meaning of 'enterprise culture' has emerged in England.[28] While the term was little more than a political slogan, it meant to underline the need to revitalize British society at the beginning of the Thatcher era, a decade later it appears to have translated into real social transformations. The British situation may even be exemplary for some of the reorientations occurring throughout societies in the Northern hemisphere.

The programme for the enterprise culture consisted of two major, consecutive parts.[29] The initial idea was that privatizations should restore a market economy to make efficiency criteria govern more of economic life. Beyond the actual privatizations, the more general idea was that ' "the commercial enterprise" takes on a paradigmatic status'[30] for other social institutions, too. This extension of the initial idea was marked by the insight that a market economy would only deliver the desired results if it was run by enterprising individuals. Consequently, the political programme also meant to encourage the qualities of the 'enterprising self', namely self-reliance, goal orientation, activism and reward expectation. The perfect member of this society would be 'running [his] own life as a small business'.[31]

This shift is supposed to occur with regard to both the producer aspect and the consumer aspect of the individual. But – against the hopes of Thatcherism – it is clearly more pronounced as a transformation of consumer culture. As such it has caught much attention, not least in postmodernist readings of social change. The possibility of creating multiple worlds of objects is seen as a basis for a very distanced sense of both the world, appearing as simulated or hyperreal, and of one's own identity, the 'end of the subject'. The shift in discourse is very clear in this area. Critical analyses during organized modernity tended to see consumer culture as the displacement of desires for self-realization into a world of objects and pointed to the production of standardized social identities through the orientation towards mass-produced goods. More recent interpretations tend to acknowledge that identity-building may indeed occur also via material objects, and

hail both the current diversity of products and the diversity of cultural orientations that it supports.[32]

The flexibilization of production may then be seen to enable – if not really the emergence of individual consumption patterns, then at least – a greater leeway for the creation of modes of 'distinction' and small-group standards. The break-up of organized modernity brings a 'shift from socialised to privatised modes of consumption'.[33] Pierre Bourdieu's landmark study in the sociology of culture, *Distinction*, is possibly the last great analysis of culture under conditions of organized modernity. While he shows that consumer choices are not unidimensionally related to class position, he still observes (for France in the 1960s) a clear structure reproducible on two axes. Arguably, this is no longer the case, but there is far greater choice in consumer practices and greater diversity and variability in defining and creating one's social identity.[34]

If, in some way or other, the phenomenon of 'enterprise culture' exists, the problem is to assess its impact on the relation of individual human beings to the social order which they live in and create. Some critical analyses have seen these developments as another turn in the development of capitalism, as the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'.[35] While it would be fallacious to neglect the commodification of human desires in a comprehensive social analysis, it is equally fallacious to reduce the current developments to this aspect and see them as driven by an abstract logic. In contrast, it is easy to point to, first, the fact that the social opening of standardized modes of self-expression through objects was the work, not of a logic but, of contestants and 'counter-cultural' movements, and that the diffusion of such orientations throughout society was seen with concern by conservative, stability-oriented commentators.[36] Second, from a critical perspective that supports the idea of autonomy it is difficult to deny the actual liberating effects of this shift, since it 'might be argued that neither the figure of the sovereign consumer, nor that of the enterprising producer are altogether illusory', even if they have to be heavily qualified.[37]

On the one hand, the shift towards the 'enterprising self' places new demands on the individual human being. Rather than resting on a secured place in a stable social order, individuals are asked to engage themselves actively in shaping their lives and social positions in a constantly moving social context. Such a shift must increase uncertainties and even anxieties. Visibly, the market offer of expertise to cope with any thinkable situation one might enter into has increased over the past two decades – a development which one may see, from the demand side, rather as a helpful new mode of orientation or, from the supply side, as ways to guide individuals to socially compatible behaviour without resorting to command and force.[38] On the other hand, the social shift towards the 'enterprising self' creates opportunities, it enlarges the scope for self-realization. To assess the relevance and impact of the current transformations on the individual more precisely, we have to locate them in their social contexts. The problematic of the transformations of allocative practices lies in potentially misleading assumptions about their social dimensions and depths.

If the term 'enterprise culture' was a political slogan in favour of the dissolution of the organized practices of post-war Western societies and for the freeing of individuals from the ties of regulations and constraints, the term 'two-thirds society' points critically to the differential impact such a programme might have on different groups in society. Basically, it states that the liberations brought about in the enterprise culture are to the benefit of some, even many, but at the high cost to a sizeable minority.

The term two-thirds society was common in Germany at the turn of the 1970s when the social-democratic conception of the welfare state, a conception of comprehensive coverage, still lingered on, but was threatened.[39] It was supposed to mean that up to one third of society would be regarded as not capable of full integration, in terms of secure employment, living standards, etc. While the exact numbers of that 'third' of the population are never analytically determined (but are regularly still below one third, regardless of measure, in all Western societies), the coining of the term has a political implication. It points out that a part of the population which is sizeable, but at the same time below the threshold of electoral-political relevance, unless coalitions can be formed, is excluded from the main spheres of society in which social identities can be formed. The social democratic conception of politics during organized modernity, in contrast, was based on the assumption that a welfare-state/full-employment coalition would always comprise electoral majorities in industrial societies. If this is no longer the case, then the authoritative rules allow the neglect of the third 'third' – and the discourse on the 'enterprise culture' allows the shifting of the blame for that neglect to these people themselves. They were obviously incapable of gaining an acceptable place, to run the business of their own successfully enough.

In the context of my argument, the reference to the two-thirds society serves only the purpose of pointing to the possibility that the social configuration that succeeds organized modernity may produce an inherent unevenness analogous to those that restricted liberal and organized modernity had shown. In the former, a major part of the population in a given territory was formally excluded from modernity. In the latter, full inclusion had been reached at the price of restricting modes of expression and action. The emerging social configuration may restore the width of modes of expression and action, but it may place new requirements on the availability of the means of self-realization. These requirements are *socially* identifiable as the material, cultural, intellectual means needed to appropriate the vast offer of possible forms of self-creation. However, the reason for whether somebody possesses or acquires them or not tends to be located in the *individuals* themselves.

If the discourse of the enterprise culture becomes the dominant mode of social representation and if simultaneously a two-thirds society emerges, then general conditions of social uncertainty will be created under which the individuals may restrict themselves, may choose not to avail themselves of the opportunities of self-realization that are on offer. In such a situation, some may accept the demands of the enterprise culture and will then struggle to secure social locations that they

consider acceptable, not least by resorting to the tools of expertise for self-management that are on offer.[40] Others may try to shift the blame and organize collectively to either develop a mode of representation to discharge themselves (any theory of historical suppression of one's own capabilities, such as nationalisms) or to appropriate by other means what could not be gained through the established rules (such as organized crime).

Before drawing such general conclusions, however, actual modes of identity-building under current conditions shall be considered in somewhat more detail. For this look, I shall limit myself to a more general guiding assumption: the changes that are observed, with regard to both authoritative and allocative practices, tend to enlarge the social space in which identity can be formed. They do not always, however, enlarge the capability of the individual human beings to inhabit these larger spaces, or their interest and motivation to do so.

'POSTMODERNITY' AND SELF-IDENTITY: THE RETURN OF AMBIVALENCE

How far the mode of constitution of individual and social identities today differs from the one during organized modernity is a major theme in writings on postmodernity. Sometimes a 'new individualism' is diagnosed, whereas in other views the ultimate fragmentation and dispersion of the individual is assumed. Many such sweeping interpretations of postmodernity do not take the situation of actually living human beings really seriously, human beings who define their lives, act and are constrained from acting, in and by very real social contexts. As Marlis Buchmann writes, the

> *hypostatization of the individual* in the conception of the subject as the main form of social reality marks one extreme [of social theorizing], the *dismissal of the subject as pure fiction* in the notion of random subjectivity, the other. Both ways of looking at the individual are one-sided interpretations of social reality, insofar as they reify one element in the development of advanced industrial society and neglect the other.[41]

A more adequate analysis has to get closer at the social transformations of the past two or three decades – of which the discourse on postmodernity is a part, in the realm of practices of signification, rather than an explanation.

Let us take a look at cultural practices. The distinction between a sincere and heavy (organized) modernity and a playful and light (extended liberal) postmodernity has itself become part of the cultural-intellectual self-representation of the present age. Architecture and literature are the most widely debated examples, but the postmodernist conceptions extend far beyond these realms and reach wide segments of society. And if we are not inclined to see cultural practices as somehow loosely floating on top of the real streams of society, as a superstructure that is disconnected from, or a false representation of, the base, then some first indications of a general social shift can be found in these realms – even

though it is very likely that a look at new cultural practices and the imagery they provide of 'eras' exaggerates social changes.

It is striking that a common comparison today is the one between the 1950s and the 1980s.[42] In many respects, the 1950s now appear to embody a solid, somewhat inert modernity. From functionalist modernism in architecture to role distribution in the 'modern' nuclear family to well-integrated economic and political institutions, they are counterposed to the current playfulness, instabilities and disintegration. In terms of the constitution of self and person, a generational change is often marked. It seems deliberate, for instance, that one of the heroes of a TV series that has often been analysed as prototypically postmodernist, *Miami Vice*, has been given the family name of a hero of a TV series from the 1950s. The earlier Crockett, Davey by first name, was a 'stolid bourgeois', whereas Sonny of *Miami Vice*, who could well be Davey's son, 'is portrayed in multiple relationships, relatively unstructured and subject to quick change'.[43]

The same comparison of social configurations and their typical modes of identity-building is used in a recent 'replica' of a popular sociological study of the 1950s. William H. Whyte's *Organization Man* was a text that emphasized the ways human beings integrated themselves into their contexts and subordinated their lives to the goals of the organizations they belonged to. Paul Leinberger and Bruce Tucker's *The New Individualists*, a study of *The Generation after the Organization Man* is based on interviews with the children of 'organization man'.[44] The authors searched Whyte's interviewees and posed their children similar questions about the orientations in their lives and their views of themselves. Not surprisingly, given the context of 'postmodernity', the interviewees (and the authors, one of whom is himself a descendant of organization man) came up with self-images that were strongly opposed to those of their parents.

Often, it is difficult to disentangle the relations between, not least wishful, self-presentations and the actually ongoing social practices, whether such phenomena should be taken as indications for social change or rather as playing with the fashionable cultural code of postmodernity. Nevertheless, at least an attempt to open some of these questions to further inquiry shall be made.

One of the few writers in the realm of the postmodernist discourse who tries to keep analytical distinctions clear is Douglas Kellner. He asserts that 'the modern self is aware of the constructed nature of identity and that one can always change and modify one's identity at will',[45] and does not claim this to be a characteristic of postmodernity. On the basis of media analysis, he continues to argue that 'far from identity disappearing in contemporary society, it is rather reconstructed and redefined.' Still, he sees a major difference between the condition of modernity in the 1960s and that of the 1990s. In the earlier period, 'a stable, substantial identity – albeit self-reflexive and freely chosen – was at least a normative goal for the modern self.' Today, however, identity 'becomes a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self, in which one is able to present oneself in a variety of roles, images, and activities, relatively unconcerned about shifts, trans- formations, and dramatic changes'.[46]

Or in other, more sociologically readable, terms:

While the locus of modern identity revolved around one's occupation, one's function in the public sphere (or family), postmodern identity revolves around leisure, centred on looks, images, and consumption. Modern identity was a serious affair involving fundamental choices that defined who one was (profession, family, political identifications, etc.), while postmodern identity is a function of leisure and is grounded in play, in gamesmanship.[47]

Leinberger and Tucker, too, cast their observations in terms of 'changing conception [s] of what constitutes an individual'. Building on David Riesman's work of the 1950s, they distinguish three different relations of identity-conceptions and social configurations, 'historical modes of conformity'. The inner-directed self was typical of the nineteenth century, valued character and expressed itself through productivity. The members of Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* of the first three quarters of the twentieth century were outer-directed, valued personality and expressed themselves through sociability. The 'new individualists', who emerged in recent years, express themselves through creativity, value the self and may be called subject-directed.[48]

Several recent empirical studies of social practices and identity construction broadly confirm such conceptions. In a sociopsychological study of upper middle-class orientations, Kenneth Gergen works with a similar distinction between modernist and postmodernist conceptions of the self. The former emphasizes predictability and sincerity. In social terms,

modernists believe in educational systems, a stable family life, moral training, and rational choice of marriage partners. . . . Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction. . . . Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality.[49]

The very notion of selfhood is dissolved in the concept of social relations.[50]

Judith Stacey's study of Californian families stresses the steady construction and reconstruction of everyday practices, too. Gergen's analysis of upper middle-class families traced this phenomenon to technologically enhanced saturation with fleeting, place-unspecific social relations. However, Stacey's lower-class 'families' – that is, a postmodern multitude of sustaining co-operative ties – live in a condition of constant material uncertainty and its members, especially the women, create a variety of social activities and relations not least to make ends meet. For them, a turn to religion reconstitutes some certainty in social life.[51] In a recent study of everyday life among contemporary youths, by Philip Wexler and his collaborators, too, a dissolution of former certainties is identified, which is more often regarded as problematic than as liberating.[52]

A bold attempt to relate the breaking of standardized practices to the formation of social identities has been offered by Marlis Buchmann on the basis of studies of life conditions and life experiences of youth between the 1960s and the 1980s. In

her analysis, modern society was characterized until recently by a high standardization, even institutionalization, of the life-course due to state regulation in conjunction with economic rationalization. This order, however, had tended to break up in more recent years, when stages in the life-course were de-standardized and biographical perspectives emerged more strongly. Comparing the experiences of high school classes of the 1960s and the 1980s, Buchmann argues conclusively that 'the 1960 cohort's biographical orientations and subsequent transition behaviors are greatly determined by *social status boundaries*, whereas the 1980 cohort's orientations and actions show more *individually stratified* patterns.'[53]

In line with the argument pursued here, her findings allow her to assume that 'over the last two decades, the[se] highly standardized life trajectories have been "shattered" by structural and cultural developments in *all* major social institutions.' Hypothesizing an 'interplay between the standardization of the life course and the shifts in identity patterns', she relates the 'partial transformation of the life course regime' to the emergence of 'the formation of a highly individu-alistic, transient, and fluid identity'.[54]

These findings do not give much more than hints, but taken all together, they do indicate that the conditions for identity-formation have significantly changed over the past three or four decades. Social identities had been comparatively stable under organized modernity, but they were so no longer on strong substantive grounds; they were only weakly – and decreasingly – grounded in concepts of belonging and strong evaluations about who to become. If they were stable, they were so because of being firmly bound into coherent and integrative social practices.

The (relative) dissolution of these practices frees the construction of identities. Let us look again at the 'golden age' of capitalism. The growth during these thirty years was based on the arrangements of organized modernity, but the very size and dynamics of these developments undermined the order of practices. An extended period of material growth also transforms the social positions and orientations of the individuals and generations who live through it. This seems to be the common finding of the studies on identity-formation. Thus, we may regard this period as another major process of disembedding. In scope it can probably be likened to that of the second half of the nineteenth century.

At least for the time being, however, no major reembedding is recognizable. Those who are able to do so, may now freely combine identities and switch them almost at will; those who are not will suffer more strongly from anxieties or will resort to, escape into, strong identities, such as religious ones or again nationalist ones. Ability here is probably dependent on personality traits, on the one hand, but also on material possibility, on the other, in a society in which identity is often created and displayed via purchasable objects.

And there is also a problem beyond the uneven distribution of abilities to construct identities. Identity-building relies on some sort of social validation. This even holds for 'fluid identities' which, I guess, can only be sustained in a context in which fluidity of identities is socially accepted and appreciated. If a great

diversity of forms of identity-construction prevails, then there will be a broadly equivalent diversity of social contexts which may validate these identities. How, though, may such social contexts relate to each other within a wider order of social practices?