

Peter Wagner: Sociology of modernity

Basic concepts overview

SOC757 Contemporary Sociological Theory

Pavel Pospěch

Basic concepts

Phases of modernity

1. Restricted liberal modernity
2. First crisis (break of the 19th/20th century)
3. Organized modernity
4. Second crisis (beginning in 1970s)
5. Extended liberal modernity (?)

Principles of modernity

- Project of modernity vs. institutions/practices of modernity
- **The discourse of liberation**
 - Historical correlates
 - Rights
 - Movement towards freedom vs. containment
 - Individualization
- **The discourse of disciplinization**
 - State as restrictive container of modernity
 - Critiques: Marx, Weber, Frankfurt school, Foucault
 - „self-cancellation of modernity“
 - Postmodernism: pluralization as fragmentation, subject vanishing

Basic problem of restricted liberal modernity

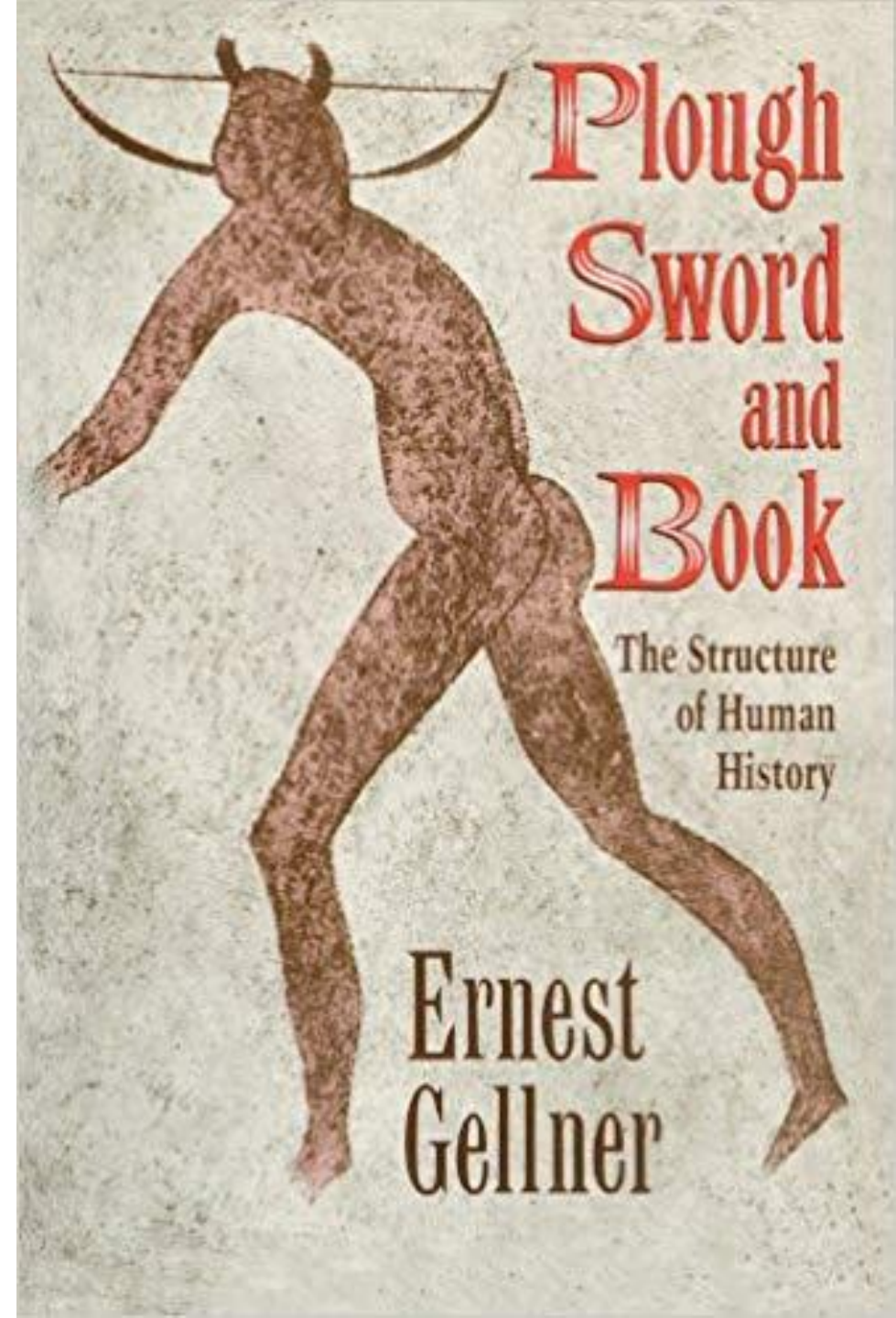
- How to link the normative idea of **liberty**, as a procedurally unlimitable right and obligation to self-rule and self-realization, to a notion of **collective good**? (human nature, reason, common good)

3 types of practices

3 types of institutions,

3 types of technologies/means

1. Practices of material allocation
2. Practices of authoritative power
3. Practices of signification



Modernization offensives

- Imaginary significations of modernity (C.Castoriadis)
- Modernization offensives from above and from below

Restricted liberal modernity

Modernity and the Other

- Modernity vs. Other (in time = tradition, in space = barbarism)
- Borderless autonomy and humanity vs. Restriction
 - Working classes, women and the mad
 - „dangerous classes“
- Rationality vs. Non-rationality

Modern identity

- Sovereignty, autonomy, control over one's fate = „cold universe“ (Weber, Lévi-Strauss); attempts at creating new ties („brotherhood“)
- Society/civilization vs. Nature
- Development
 - Ascriptive assumptions (restricted liberal modernity)
 - Socially acquired and quasi-natural (organised modernity)
 - Chosen and socially agreed (extended liberal modernity)

Restricted liberal modernity

- Nation
 - „national self-determination“ as an attempt to merge the territorial monopoly of the nation-state and the discourse of freedom
 - New cohesion
 - French vs. German nationalism
- Solidarity
 - „social question“
 - New collective identities
- Working class as a „class for itself“, „imagined communities“

The first crisis of modernity

The crisis

- Promotion of individualism, rationality vs. awareness of the impossibility of self-sustained individual liberalism
- Liberal theory claimed to have resolved the questions of political expression, economic interest and scientific validity by leaving them to open contest and competition
 - „automatic harmonization of society“ did not work out
 - In its place: new restrictions
 - Legitimacy crisis

Social change in the 19th century

- Urbanisation, industrialisation, structural transformation, market emerging as the single most important organising principle
- Rise of the nation state

4 Critiques of liberal modernity

1. Critique of political economy
2. Critique of large-scale organization and bureaucracy
3. Critique of the modern rationality, philosophy and science
4. Critique of morality

The closure of modernity:
organised modernity

I. Allocative practices

- The building of technical-organizational systems
- Conventionalization of work
- Normalization of consumption

II. Authoritative practices

- Polity
 - Political citizenship
 - Homogeneity vs. Exclusion (minorities, stateless persons)
- Politics
 - Representation
 - „Organised democracy“
- Policy
 - Welfare state, insurance, public vs. private
 - Disciplinization

III. Signification practices

- Modern science
 - Social sciences, statistics
 - Survey and the „Discovery of the average man“
 - Human being as a „consumer, voter and a subject“
- Cognitive mastery of society
 - „covering areas“ in all three kinds of practices

Organized modernity: key topics

- Conventionalization
- Naturalization of conventionalized social order
- Classifications, boundaries, exclusion
- Aiming for a predictable, controllable world

The crisis of organised
modernity and the path towards
extended liberal modernity

I. Restructuring allocative practices

- Breaking of the national-level agreement on industrial relations
- Decline of a (Keynesian) nation-based consumption economy
- Organisational changes, loosening of hierarchies
- Mass production replaced by flexible specialization

II. Restructuring authoritative practices

- Polity
 - Internationalization, power delegation, legitimacy crisis
- Politics
 - Decreased activity in established parties
 - Increase in civic/protest involvement
- Policy
 - Demands for deregulation
 - Bureaucratic crisis & interpretation crisis of the welfare state
 - Public vs. Private (Legitimacy and Sovereignty)

III. Signification: Sociology and contingency

- Critique
 - 1968: protest against organized modernity, attempt to rebuild a collective subject
 - From the 1960s: critique of the constraining effects of the boundaries and conventions of OM
- Decline of grand paradigms, reflexivity
- The postmodernist challenge and responses to it
 1. Zero reaction
 2. Hyper-scientization
 3. Theoretical readings of theory vs. Practice
 4. Postmodernism (end of... social science, modernity, subject)

Modernity and self-identity

- Identity in OM society
 - Social roles (Mead, Parsons, Merton)
 - Mass society
- Political identities (rejection of OM political identities)
- Economic identities (enterprise culture/enterprise self)
 - Identity rooted in consumption

Extended liberal modernity?

- Intelligibility and shapeability threatened
- Globalisation and individualisation
- Civil society
 - Social movements (Touraine) vs. Tribes (Maffesoli)