

There are several ways in which *constraints* may emerge.<sup>29</sup> One is, quite simply, material impossibility. Where a city has been built, farming is impossible. Another one is a restructuring of benefits and advantages that will make one unlikely to pursue certain options. Where one type of rule offering certain opportunities (markets and money, for instance) is widely extended, those who try (possibly for good reasons) to work with a different rule for other opportunities (exchange by barter, for example), may suffer disadvantages. Third, an institution may enable in such a way (regarding the substance of the opportunity and its social distribution) that a change to another arrangement can no longer be effected, given the need for a strong collective expression of will and the structure and stratification of individual wills.<sup>30</sup>

As this description and set of concepts may sound utterly abstract before being used in historical analysis, I shall give another illustration of a quite different kind. The material transformation of land- and city-scape by highway construction during the past half-century is probably unequalled in history on any count one may think of. Nevertheless it has, as far as I can see, never been submitted to a sociological analysis in terms of 'modernization'.

Once their linkages to social rules of action – both enabling and constraining – are recognized, inner-city highways, such as Robert Moses' Cross-Bronx Expressway in New York,<sup>31</sup> can be regarded as an important modern 'institution' structuring parts of the condition of modernity. A new kind of social relations in the public sphere had been created by the transformation of the major cities in the second half of the nineteenth century that had Baron Haussmann, the architect of the Paris boulevards, as one of its promoters, and the rapid growth of urban industrial zones as its social context. The multiplicity of casual encounters, the perpetual fleetingness, the enigma of the many unknown others, the public privacy of the 'family of eyes' has been regarded as the epitome of modernity from Charles Baudelaire to Georg Simmel to Walter Benjamin. It depended on spaces that would invite the display of relatively unguarded bodily presence, such as sitting, walking, talking, looking.

Such ambiances had survived well and even flourished during the growth of many cities between the 1870s and the 1920s. However, the physical presence of such city life came to be an obstacle for new kinds of enablements materialized in the car and the truck. The plans of Robert Moses, New York's twentieth-century Haussmann, were clearly shaped by a modernist view on the enhancement of mastery and of human autonomy. Moses loved the modern city and wanted to improve it. It should be fast, orderly, clean and beautiful; inner-city highways were a major means to that effect. In contrast to some of his followers, who endorsed the new 'space-time feeling' provoked by the 'steady flow' of driving,<sup>32</sup> Moses himself probably did not realize that his conception, driven to perfection, would destroy not only the spatial roots of specific, living human beings, but an entire mode of life. The enabling institution, the highway, literally would be a barrier to many interactions and exchanges. Physically and materially, it constrains those who do not have the means of access (the car) or the desire to profit from its

specific achievements (to go fast and far through a city quarter), it prevents them from pursuing activities they may prefer to pursue.

Putting the 'meat axe', as Moses said, to work in a dense urban environment like the Bronx meant literally tearing down many boundaries and liberating traffic to a free flow across the city. But it also entailed the drawing of new boundaries, literally the tracks of the roads. These boundaries have the purpose of securing the formalization of action inside the new institution and of limiting and regulating access to it by excluding those who, for whatever reason, are not fit to apply the rules. In this sense, they disciplined both the users of the institutions and the excluded others.

It would be erroneous to generally model modern institutions after the example of a material technology.<sup>33</sup> But it is important to see that material technologies are used in the building of modern institutions to whose formalization they contribute. When 'in use', they link human activities to formalized rules in a way that also formalizes the 'attached' living human activities, in more or less rigid ways.<sup>34</sup> Rules of highway traffic include prohibitions to stopping or getting out, a fast and steady speed, and unidirectionality, among others. They are not only incompatible with the boulevard, but are more rigid and inflexible. During periods of regular use, it is impossible to communicate about the applicability of its rules, once you are on the highway. Shaping a formalized habitualized practice, boundaries are established that secure rule-following 'inside' and keep those who will not or cannot follow the rules 'outside'.

The restriction of communication to a limited number of officially endorsed signs and the complete exclusion of meta-communication during regular times is indeed a specific feature of the introduction of 'modern' rules more generally, a feature Giddens tries to capture with the term 'abstract systems'.<sup>35</sup> Formalization leads to a reduced concern for particulars of situations and to an increasing rigidity of action. A basic feature of such formalizations of actions and action possibilities is that the more extended and the more rigid an institution is, the more beneficial it is for individuals to comply with its rules than to deviate from them. The institution honours compliance, and the more rigid and extended (or, pervasive) an institution is, the higher are the costs of deviation.

Throughout my argument, I shall employ the imagery of tearing down conventional boundaries and setting up new ones, to make historical processes of liberation and disciplinization understood. When related to concepts of enablement and constraint, of formalization of action and reach of action chains, these terms are more than mere arbitrarily chosen images; they allow one to grasp the historical production of social formations under the significations of modernity. Also, they will allow a view of liberation as more than autonomy, and disciplinization as more than imposition. Historically, liberations may be enforced and not willed by many of those who are exposed to them. And disciplinizations may be a countermove against external impositions by means of establishing capable collective agency.