

# Modernity/Postmodernity

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A major debate has now developed in the cultural and social sciences in consideration of the nature of the contemporary Western world which centres around the argument that it is undergoing processes of transformation which have moved it from a state of modernity to one of postmodernity.

The modern world, it is argued, is a world that emerged in the West largely from the seventeenth century onward in the form of a radical disjunction with traditional societies to become characterized in opposition to them by: a large and heterogeneous population; a high level of industrialization; a primarily capitalist and market economy; highly specific and structurally organized forms of social differentiation and division; a territorial and administrative system based on the nation-state in terms of which both citizenship and civic communal membership are organized and in which political activities and processes are shaped and structured; and an increasing domination by science and technology. Moreover, the forms of culture, belief systems and practices which modernity came to generate, in contrast to traditional societies, are primarily consensual, normative, rationalistic and secular.

This view of the contemporary modern world has recently been called into question. It is argued that, from around the 1960s, but with seeds taking shape at an earlier stage, the whole shape and organization of modern Western society at the levels of the social, the communal, the economic, the administrative and the cultural have been subject to disintegration, transformation and change to produce a postmodern world. Just as modernity constituted a radical departure from traditional societies, so

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postmodernity, it is argued, represents a fundamental disjunction with modernity. Postmodernity is a globalizing post-industrial world of media, communication and information systems. It is organized on the basis of a market-orientated world of consumption rather than work and production; a fragmented and pluralistic community of heterogeneous groups with diverse cultures and lifestyles; a world in which the nation-state has been shrunk by privatization, marketization, internationalization, and new forms of citizen and civil rights. Increasingly, in postmodernity, political life rejects traditional class- and party-based power politics for micro-political activities and social movements. Social existence and self-identity are seen as being organized primarily in terms of the varied internal rationalities of the languages, knowledge, beliefs, practices and styles of the heterogeneous subgroups that make up a fragmented society which has no distinct boundaries, or highly structured and fixed forms of social organization. That is, it is a world of culture in which tradition, consensual values, normative control, absolutist forms of knowledge and universal beliefs and standards have been challenged, undermined and rejected for heterogeneity, differentiation and difference. In consequence, it is argued that the very reality of the emergence of a postmodernist world has inevitably set up a new agenda for the social sciences (the agenda of postmodernism and its theoretical stance within and towards this world) since the existing one and its whole set of assumptions, concepts, methods and aspirations are no longer relevant. Its foundations lie in the investigation of and programmatic attempt to direct and control the modern world. What is required now is a new agenda with which to encounter the postmodern world and to engage with and within it.

## POSTMODERNISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Whereas it is possible to describe and characterize with some clarity the empirical and historical social and cultural processes of postmodernization which are argued to constitute the emergence of postmodern society, it is not so easy to establish a precise identity for postmodernism. That is, it is difficult to accurately delineate the thinking, ideas, issues, discourses and sensibility that constitute the new cultural, theoretical and analytical stance within and to postmodernity (the postmodern world) or, in these terms, provide the new agenda for sociology to engage with and analyse its nature. Postmodernism has flourished in a whole variety of discursive arenas including the arts, cultural studies and the social sciences. Because it is still the subject of much contentious discussion and debate, one is immediately confronted with a variety of different levels of meaning and usage of the term itself. But more than this, two other reasons stand out which make for a difficulty of characterization. First, as Huyssen (1986) has

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noted, the 'post' in postmodernism should provide a caution for those wishing to define what postmodernism *is* within closed boundaries because it indicates its relational character. Consequently postmodernism can only be addressed in terms of its relation to modernity and the modern, in which case it is best seen as 'a slowly emerging cultural transformation that entails a shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations' (1986: 186). Second, as the processes of postmodernization and the nature of postmodernity have been identified in terms which argue that heterogeneity, differentiation, fragmentation and difference lie at the heart of the postmodern, modernism too may be seen to be implicated in this. On this basis, Boyne and Rattansi (1990: 9) recognize that although postmodernism lacks conceptual coherence (as well as being inescapably fuzzy around the edges in relation to modernism), there is, nevertheless, a certain ironic unity to be found 'in the paradox of a set of cultural projects united by self-proclaimed commitment to heterogeneity, fragmentation and difference'. This relates closely to Jameson's by now classic formulation of the most salient stylistic features of postmodernism, which are: the erosion of 'key boundaries and separations', particularly the high/popular culture divide; 'diversity' as a value in itself; 'pastiche' and 'alliteration' as forms of aesthetic organization; and 'schizophrenia' as a mode of self-being and seeing; all of which are brought about through a reaction against 'established forms of high modernism . . . which conquered the university, the museum, the art gallery, the network and the foundation' (1985: 111). The term 'postmodernism', then, refers to developments in the arts, cultural products and cultural knowledge which are constitutive elements of that social, political and cultural configuration of the postmodern world that is postmodernity.

Although the philosophical roots of postmodernism can be traced to the late nineteenth century to the writings of Nietzsche, the word 'postmodernism' first appeared in the 1930s to point up a slight resistance to modernism (Featherstone 1988). In the late 1950s it was used in literature to denote a concern for the loss of the cutting edge of the modernist movement. As Huyssen (1986) points out, it was taken up in New York in the 1960s by literary critics and artists from different fields (Hassan, Fielder, Sontag, Cage, Rauschenberg, Rainer, etc.) as a response to the institutionalization of modernism in the arts and literature. In America in the 1970s and 1980s the term became commonplace across the arts, encompassing architecture, dance, theatre, painting, films and music. In all this, it confronted the European tradition of modernism with its aesthetic of 'high' art, the unity of forms, the necessarily critical representative, progressive avant-garde role of art, the cult of creative authorship, and the artist as individual genius. However, although American postmodernism originally took shape as a kind of avant-garde protest against the institutionalization of modernism in the form of 'high modernism', this was also a protest against the conservatism of the American socio-political world of the 1960s and part of the general protest movements of that era. By the 1970s, this

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critical form of avant-garde postmodern art – particularly the iconoclasm of pop – had disappeared under the pressure of commercial culture, the cementing of high/popular culture, and the critique of the naivety of counter-cultural politics to become something different (Huyssen 1986). Now feminism and other minority groups began to explore their ‘hidden’, ‘silenced’ traditions which provided a different impetus to the critique of high culture and to the generation of alternative forms of cultural production that served also to open out the original attack on modernity and modernism.

But now, and very central for sociology and the creation of a new agenda, came the emergence of **poststructuralism** and its association with postmodernism. By the 1970s postmodernism travelled to Europe and began to be taken up by writers such as Barthes, Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, and Lyotard in terms of what was being developed by them as poststructuralist thought (being both anti-phenomenological and anti-structuralist: see chapters ‘Subject/Object’ and ‘Idealism/Materialism’ for discussions of phenomenology and structuralism). Again, poststructuralism like postmodernism represents a diversity of thought and approaches struggling together under this one umbrella and refers to a number of intellectual initiatives in French thought (literary criticism, philosophy, history) which began to gain ground after the collapse of the socialist-led student revolts in 1968 which swept across Europe. It too, given the ‘post’ in it, is a relative term which Eagleton has argued ‘was a product of the blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968. Unable to break the structures of state-power, poststructuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language’ (1983: 142). But, despite the differences between the projects and the analyses of the various thinkers who are dubbed as poststructuralists, there are particular suppositions regarding languages, meaning and subjectivity (and the reflexive constructed and constituted nature of the human and the social in these terms) that they share in common.

Central to poststructuralist thought, as McNay (1992) argues, is the critique of the human subject or *cogito* which has dominated Western cultural thought. The mind/body dualism inscribed in Descartes’s first principle of philosophy in his *Discourse on Method* (1637), *cogito, ergo, sum*, ‘I think, therefore I am’ (Hampshire 1956: 68–9), has been of central importance to classical thought and to developments and achievements in scientific thought. For Descartes, the essence or nature of human beings consists only in thinking and is not dependent on any material thing. The human subject is constituted through the mind and the mind is wholly distinct from the body. Western cultural thought since the Enlightenment has been dominated by the privileging of the rational thinking subject and the negation or regulation of the ‘other’ (i.e. what is not part of the former) to a subservient position. Rationality takes precedence over emotions, idealism over materialism, culture over nature, objectivity over subjectivity.

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In poststructural theory the idea of the individual as a self-reflecting, rational, unified, fixed subject is rejected in favour of a dislocated, contradictory, fragmented subjectivity which is not fixed but reconstituted in language on each and every occasion we speak. The subject, in poststructuralist theory, contrary to the dominant Western humanist tradition, is constructed through language. Poststructuralist theory takes its starting point from Saussure's structuralist linguistic theory formulated around the turn of the twentieth century. Language, according to Saussure (1974), is an abstract system of relational signs which are arbitrary and extra-individual. It is a closed system where the signifiers (sounds) and the signifieds (meanings) are arbitrary, and the arbitrary relation of the signifier to the signified is fixed by social convention. Poststructuralism rejects the idea of language as a closed system and the relative fixing of the elements of the sign (which is the structuralism in Saussure's linguistic theory) in preference for the notion that the signifieds of language are never fixed but always in the process of being deferred (in this sense it is poststructuralist), continually breaking apart and reattaching in new combinations (Harvey 1989). So the focus moves away from the 'logocentrism' of the speaking subject (the word) to the 'text' and so the speaking subject is decentred. Cultural existence (and thus social existence too in the end) is seen as a succession of texts which converge with other texts that, in turn, produce other texts. Writers create texts on the basis of all the other texts they have ever come across and readers read texts on the same principle. This 'collage/montage' effect or 'intertextuality' has an existence of its own which gives rise to multiple (unintended) readings and meanings (1989: 49). And this heralds the 'death of the author' traditionally cast as the privileged speaking subject who creates the text and is the sole arbiter of meaning which, in turn, gives rise to the notion of the 'birth of the reader' (the consumer) as deconstructing and combining the elements in any way they like. Thus, the idea of 'real', 'true', 'fixed' meanings is called into question.

From the late 1970s poststructuralism, through initially crossing the Atlantic mainly through the ideas of Barthes and Derrida, has rekindled interest in philosophical pragmatism in philosophy and literary and cultural criticism to join hands in a general postmodernist stance. The battle cry of its discourse has been raised against humanism and the Enlightenment tradition even if, as its critics argue, much of its critical thrust has melted into a form of new conservatism (perhaps most visible in Baudrillard and least in Foucault), because of its anti-realism, its historicist and relativistic stance towards rationalism, and the link to the dialectics of culture and consumption that are seen to institute and enfold the post-modern world. But such criticism depends on what stance is adopted towards the pivotal theme of the modernist/postmodernist debate, particularly with regard to the critique of the Enlightenment project which constitutes the essence of modernity and the consequential issues and notions of intertextuality, difference, plurality and reflectivity. For some,

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such as Habermas (1985), who wishes to reinstate the emancipatory potential inscribed in the Enlightenment project into late-twentieth-century culture and society, postmodernism and poststructuralism represent neo-conservatism. For others equally critical, such as Jameson (1985), it represents a cultural shift, but one which follows upon and echoes a shift in the global capitalist economic order since 1945 and of which postmodernism is the cultural expression and logic. Jameson rejects the idea that there is a total epochal shift taking place towards post-industrialism or post-capitalism. Instead capitalism has moved into a new and late stage of modernity, *vis-à-vis* international global capitalism, which has developed new energies and strategies. The emergence of postmodernism is closely related to the emergence of this new late movement of capitalism which is a consumer capitalism in which representation has become the central focus of economic activity. Culture has become commonplace: style, images, representations no longer embellish economic products, rather they are themselves products. Postmodernism, then, is wedded to late modernity and the globalization of capitalism and consumer society. This, in turn, produces and undermines its ideological and critical claims to the new and more valid existence. However, for some, the postmodern condition has arrived and must be addressed in its own terms. For Lyotard (1984) this means the 'metanarratives' or **grand narratives** of rationalistic scientific discourse are, and thankfully, at an end. For Foucault (1979b), it requires a history of the present as an address on the discursive order and practices through which the panoptical governmentality of the contemporary world of society and identity in it is produced and sustained and through which it can be subverted. For Baudrillard (Connor 1989), the eruption and expansion of cultural commodities and signs has created a new world of simulation and hyper-reality based on the political economy of the sign, where signs have lost their referential function (as indicators of the economic and of a world outside of them) and instead there is a continuous play of signifiers which have their own existence and logic and which has led to a 'death of the real'.

So the modernism/postmodernism debate in the arts and the wider cultural arena and the modernity/postmodernity debate in the cultural and social sciences has now become a highly contested area with, as Featherstone (1988) has suggested, epochal meaning. Just as modernity refers to the process of development which led to the collapse of feudalism and the emergence and establishment of industrial capitalism in the West, so postmodernity, it is argued, is the process of development through which modernity is collapsing or has collapsed and with it the cultural sensibility, practices and discourse formations of modernism which were central to the constitution of modernity and against which postmodernism mounts a critique on behalf of heterogeneity, fragmentation and difference.

Crucially, the nature and agenda of sociology are caught up in this contest because it was the processes through which the modern world

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developed and their social consequences that preoccupied sociology in the early stages of its development and which, in turn, shaped its nature and agenda as a discipline. This legacy has maintained a firm hold upon sociology until this present moment of highly charged and contentious debate over and within the contemporary world (although critics may ask whether, at one level, this is very much still the Western world, despite all the talk of it developing on a global basis).

### MODERNIZATION, MODERNITY AND MODERNISM

The beginnings of the modern world (i.e. modernity) can be traced most particularly to Western Europe in the seventeenth century, in which a conjunction began between emergent structural changes taking place in society, most specifically in the arenas of its economic and political organization and the social divisions produced by such in association with and as part of new cultural forms and values that began to entail, most of all, a transformation of the nature and basis of knowledge which moved from the religious and theological to the secular and scientific. Central figures in the development and creation of this new scientific and rational knowledge and its application to the world are Bacon, Galileo, Hobbes and Machiavelli, but most particularly Descartes, because it was he who was the first to establish a thoroughgoing foundation for the rational knowledge of the world which distinguished between what was objective and true as opposed to merely subjective, and this original foundation has remained the primary basis of modern Western thought ever since. The foundation of rational knowledge, according to Descartes, had to be a rigorous methodological objectivity which was that of radical doubt, in which the human enquirer set aside the human body and all subjective qualities for the use of faculties of the mind alone, through its disinterested reason, to discover the data of physical reality which are all that objectively exists in the world.

This commitment to reason, rational knowledge and science began to flower into an extensive movement and unity of thought during the eighteenth century in Europe in what is referred to as the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thought is an essential and constitutive part of the process of modernization through which the modern world came into being and established itself culturally, intellectually and ideologically in association with the structural changes that were occurring in the processes of capitalist industrialization from (but with much earlier roots) the seventeenth century onwards.

What, then, constituted Enlightenment thought and how is it constitutive of modernization and modernity? It can be seen as having a fundamental set of characteristics which centre around reason as the basis of true knowledge which is tied to a project for the reconstruction of the world and

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the emancipation of the individual in terms of the application of the powers of reason and scientific knowledge to these tasks. It is this project which is absolutely central to an understanding of modernity since it functions as the knowledge, values and ideology in terms of which the modern Western world has defended and legitimated its whole existence: its strictures and institutions, its culture and forms of life and its sense of human identity.

What the Enlightenment entailed as thought and project, as Hollinger (1995) puts it, was a belief in a universal and objective knowledge which was generated through a rational epistemology which all human beings can share together: a moral unity of humankind in which universal rational moral principles are binding on all human beings as rational creatures and which provide absolute standards for conduct and judgement. Any impediment in thought, action and institutions which prevents the growth of universal knowledge or the moral unity of humankind hinders human progress and happiness and must be swept aside for a society based on science and universal values. Only the truth can make human beings free and happy, and the more we know scientifically about the world and ourselves the better human life will become; it is ignorance that causes immorality and unhappiness, and scientific knowledge will abolish ignorance to create progress and emancipation. So what occurred in the Enlightenment through its project was not just the consolidation of science, but also the birth of the social sciences in conjunction with the processes of industrialization taking place during this period; the birth of sociology as the science of 'man' engaged in an empirical and diagnostic enquiry into the newly emerging industrial and modern world using the rational methods of science and geared to the aim of providing the means for the reorganization of society and the reconstruction of morality through scientific sociological knowledge. Central to this sociology was the concept of structure which was viewed as constituting the essential nature of the reality of society (i.e. that social relationships have an objective and particular order and pattern of organization to them): that human social behaviour is structurally generated and that society and its structures can be empirically observed and scientifically explained in terms of their causal determination and valid and universal theories constructed about the nature of society and social life on this basis. This, in many ways, has remained the agenda of sociology until the present day but with considerable variations in its application at the level of theorizing, methodologies and aims that largely revolve around what social structures consist of and how social action is determined by them. But most, if not all, traditional sociologies are wedded to empirical and rational enquiry that attempts a separation between fact and value and so is committed to science, although not necessarily to the particular theories and methods of the natural sciences. But if sociology is implicated in modernity by its rational and scientific nature as a discipline, how has its agenda been set by modernity and the processes of modernization that it set out to tackle, analyse and



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explain? In what sense is it possible to call classical sociology a sociology of modernity in these terms? Moreover, is it the case that the relevance of classical sociology and its agenda for the analysis of social life has been overtaken by the transformation of events that are claimed to have generated a new and different postmodern social world?

In terms of its substantive theories of society and the topicalized structure and cultural analyses of the historical and empirical social processes of its constitution, classical sociology is undoubtedly a sociology of modernity. Its theories seek to establish the nature and foundations of social reality in terms of the primary issues of social order and stasis, of the organization of social relationships and conditions and processes through which they change, but always within the historical and empirical context of the structures, institutions, culture and self and social identities of the modern world and in terms also of a diagnostic examination of the problems and possibilities of that world. Moreover, the modern world is typically treated as a higher and more developed (if not progressive) state in a general and teleological process of social evolution, change and transformation which all societies are subject to and part of and in terms of which they can be placed relative to one another which strengthens the concern with modernity by making it the inevitable fate of society generally. Other than in this development societies can only become arrested, go into decline or die. Three major theories of modernity have been dominant within classical sociology, namely those of Marx, Durkheim and Weber and the adherents to and extensions of such. Each of these theories thematizes and explains the nature of modernity in terms of a particular and central condition and processes which pose oppositions between them, yet the analyses of the structure, institutions and culture of the modern world which they generate are very much interlinked and have become more so in the contemporary development and uses of these theoretical perspectives in sociology. Crook et al. (1992) and Waters (1994) clarify how each is a theory of societal transformation and so a theory of modernization and modernity which understands the constitutive processes that produce the modern world in its own specific topicalization and explanation of it.

### **Marxism**

For Marx and Marxism the process of modernization is a process of the commodification of the social relationships of society which is generated by the emergence and development of capitalism and its material organization of the mode of production of capitalist society. The capitalist mode of production entails the manufacture of commodities to be sold in a market for a profit which transforms production and products from use value to exchange value. But the basis of capitalist production is the use of labour power as its major force of production, and it entails its commodification

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through the sale of labour by the labourer for a wage to the manufacturer (entrepreneur) who uses it to manufacture commodities for sale in the market. The surplus value extracted from the labour of the labourer in this process, in terms of the difference between the cost of labour and the value of the commodities produced by it, constitutes the basis of profit. In turn this establishes a structure of social relationships within capitalist society which is one of class, in which a ruling class (the bourgeoisie) emerge as the owners of labour power in the form of capital and private property, and a subordinate class (the proletariat) can merely sell their labour. Capitalist society, then, is a class society and one which is inherently grounded and organized in the process of commodification which the capitalist system of production entails. In it, the labourer loses control of his or her own labour by virtue of its sale and use in the division of labour that is entailed in the industrial process of capitalist manufacture. This produces a state of alienation because he or she is divorced from their own human being which lies in their capacity for creative and self-directed labour. Moreover, the labourer is exploited because the profit and capital, in the form of private property, which gives the bourgeois their ruling position in society is nothing more than the congealed fruits of the labour power of the proletariat which has been acquired through the extraction of the surplus from its ownership and use by the capitalist manufacturer. So the system of production which is capitalism, and the modern world which it creates, is a world of commodified, exploitative and alienated social relationships between its members that are structured in terms of class. The political life of society is simply a reflection of this, whereby parliamentary democratic politics only enshrines and preserves the power of the bourgeoisie through institutionalizing and representing its interests and control over the levers and forms of public power in society. The state is nothing more than its executive and collective means of administration of the ruling class in society. Moreover, capitalism produces a dominant and hegemonic culture which ideologically legitimates and reproduces this class structure and the power relationships which it entails by presenting the market, and so the interests of the bourgeoisie which it serves, as the natural and necessary conditions for economic production. This disguises how it is a historically and socially determined form of production that depends on a particular organization of social relationships between producers that is essentially dehumanizing because of the commodity form which it takes.

Note, then, how the whole theory of modernization and the nature of the modern world is understood by Marx and Marxism in terms of the capitalist system of production and the commodified form which it takes. Consequently it focuses on how the social relationships of the modern world are structured and differentiated primarily in terms of class on a divisive basis by virtue of the central position of labour and property in the productive organization of the capitalist market system, and where culture and the other institutions of society (e.g. the state, the legal system) are

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generated as the superstructural ideological and hegemonic manifestations of it, and self and identity take the form of possessive individualism. Capitalism creates a modern world based on commodity and possession which ultimately possesses its members and commodifies their lives precisely as such, and it is this which gives it its particular nature as a system that is the modern world of capitalist society.

### **Weber and neo-Weberianism**

For Weber, the process of modernization consists of the rationalization of society in terms of the organization of action within it in terms of calculability and impersonality. In this, not only is tradition replaced as the basis of action, but an ethical foundation for action in terms of a commitment to moral values is replaced by the instrumental organization of action in terms of its costs and benefits. Through this the whole social and cultural organization of society changes because the worth and character of human activities are instrumentalized by subjecting them to criteria of measurement to determine their value. So work is measured by income and not creativity; education by qualifications and not learning; and art and literature by their contribution to leisure and relaxation and not their transcendental value and meaning. Culturally, rationalization changes the nature of consciousness, knowledge and ethics in the modern world. In terms of consciousness, a new kind of subject emerges which is no longer governed by traditional customs and unthinking habit but instead weighs up the means and ends of action before engaging in it. In these terms rational action is based upon knowledge which in modern society takes the rationalistic form of positivistic science and technology which achieves an almost total and singular legitimacy to the point of replacing religion. The result is that the world is intellectualized and demystified and with it a concern with discovering a meaning for life is replaced by the discovery of facts. Finally, this rationality of knowledge moves on to invade the ethical sphere of human existence to produce a value system that is committed to formal and instrumental ethics of work and duty. This rationalization of culture is tied to a thoroughgoing rationalization of the structure and social organization of society in the modern world of which the culture is a constitutive foundation and expressive product. In the sphere of economic activity and production, the modern world is based on industrial capitalism which is orientated to the market and profit and creates economic relationships between the members of society that are based on money, property, formally free and contracted labour and technological knowledge. Capitalism is the epitome of rationalization at an institutional level since it is a system of production based on a finely tuned calculation of the cost-benefit use of resources to achieve the maximum profitability of the industrial enterprise and the rational organization of work and the workforce in

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the activity of production. For Weber, capitalism is the major theatre in the rationalization of modern life, not only because of its structural organization but because, as the material foundation of modern society, the market enhances and constrains life chances in society in terms of inequalities of power in the ownership and control over market resources, and so is the nexus of social stratification within it. In this Weber stands in agreement with Marx. The market creates classes in terms of common life chances and the sale of labour.

But more important for Weber than class is the development of status as the major form of social stratification in modern society as a hierarchical rank order of prestige based on patterns of consumption and social enclosure by merit which is closely linked to but not determined by the market in the sense that market position may be dictated by status (e.g. ethnic minorities) and status by market position (e.g. professional groups who control their market position through qualifications). For Weber status stratification and not class had become the more important element in the social and political organization of modern society, particularly with the rise of administrative, managerial and white-collar workers who constitute highly solidaristic social groupings within it. In terms of politics and the administration, the rationalization processes that characterize modernization lead to the rise of the state and bureaucracy (although bureaucratization is characteristic of the development of industrial capitalism too).

Orderly exchange in the market needs governmental organization which depends on the creation of formal and abstract law. With it there emerged a political system based on a form of domination that was lodged in terms of legal-rational authority that is embodied in the state as a compulsory organization that possesses a monopoly of violence in society. So the administration of society is centralized in terms of the emergence of the state which accrues to itself control over the political organization and, through the granting of citizen rights and obligations and the creation of political institutions, governs and regulates the activities of the members of society. But crucial to the modern state is its machinery of administration, namely bureaucracy, that is administration by trained administrators. Bureaucracy, then, entails trained experts administering society on the basis of expert knowledge with a high degree of machine-like efficiency and instrumentality in which there is a distinction between the bureau and the official which produces the separation between public and private life that is a distinctive characteristic of modern society. But more important for modern society, bureaucracy monopolizes the knowledge needed to run society and the technical efficiency with which bureaucracy administers in terms of knowledge makes it indispensable for social organization. In these terms politics now becomes an autonomous centre of power and social division in society. So bureaucracy produces the dictatorship of the official within a coercive bureaucratic state in association with its managerial form of control in industry. The result is to increase the impersonalization of life

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in society and produce a machine-like participation in it. Crucially then, for Weber, the modern world is a rational and impersonal world in both the political and the economic sphere. In this respect Weber like Marx is talking about the modern world as a dehumanized and alienated world of social existence. In these terms, then, the modern world entails the technical rationalization of social relationships and the technical control over the world in which human beings are disciplined to conform with the instrumental needs of centrally organized industrial and administrative systems. These control individual actions through calculability and the empirical measurement of achievement, and instil obedience to their dictates through a commitment to materialistic consideration and duty which rejects transcendental values as a basis for giving meaning to life in favour of instrumental results.

What distinguishes Weber's theory of modernization from that of Marx is the focus upon the political organization of modern society and its autonomy from interpenetration with the economic organization of it. But otherwise the analysis of the rationalization of modern society is very close in many ways to Marx's discussion of commodification.

### ***Durkheim and functionalism***

For Durkheim, modernization is a process of differentiation brought out by the emergence and development of the social division of labour which creates a new complex and solidaristic (organic) organization of social relationships, in which society is structured and organized through the functional interdependence of highly differentiated and specialized activities and institutional spheres. Social relations become relationships of contractual exchange between the members of society; and culture, as a common overarching and consensual normative and cognitive system, underpins and cements the whole social order. What threatens the creation and maintenance of social order in the modern world is anomie which emerges if the division of labour is not accompanied by consensual and integrative norms (i.e. a common culture), because then the differentiation which it produces creates fragmentation instead of interdependence (a complete and chaotic heterogeneity of differences in the social world with nothing to bind them into a unity) and the egotism that is released when specialization separates out and autonomizes the individual but there are no societal normative controls over their desires as individuals (which precipitates excessive demands within a conflictual competition between them). The point for Durkheim is that it is social control (through a common culture of society) that is needed to ensure that individuals rein in their individual desires in favour of community and reciprocal obligations to one another, and to turn the complexity of differentiation and specialization of activities which the division of labour produces into an orderly

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and structured web of interdependence and institutional organization. Ultimately this can be achieved only if the economic activity of the capitalist market is socially regulated. This requires that the state represents the collective interests of all members of society; occupational specialization is tied to the natural ability in terms of which people fill occupations and not to inherited wealth and class position; and individual subjectivity is channelled into social participation and constrained by social commitment. The aim of Durkheim's scientific sociology is to utilize the objective scientific analysis of society – and modernization at the level of knowledge is seen by him as producing science as its cognitive system in opposition to religion – to supply, on the basis of factual understanding, the normative and integrative common culture that the modern world requires so as to create social participation and commitment and thereby resolve the anomic tendencies produced by the division of labour.

Functionalism picks up this Durkheimian position to argue that the modern world can be understood as an adaptive and advanced evolutionary response to the existential conditions of the environment within which society exists that has occurred through the reproduction of structural specialization and differentiation.

The shift in the Durkheimian–functionalist picture of modernity is to bring culture more centrally into the organization of the modern world as a constitutive basis of its institutional formation and social relationships, such that it generates a social order out of the complexity of differentiation and specialization which characterize them. Modernity and modernization represent the social and institutional nature of society and the processes and conditions of its emergence, establishment and development. Modernism, however, is the particular cultural and aesthetic movement which was generated within it towards the end of the nineteenth century. But it was a movement, as Kumar (1995) points out, which already had part of its roots in the romanticism that appeared with the birth of the modern world as a product of the revolution which was modernity in terms of the formal artistic innovations of romantic art, its largely utopian and political outlook and its emphasis on the ideal of the autonomous and self-making individuals, but challenging the whole socio-cultural basis on which the modern world stood by pitting imagination against reason, feeling against thought, the natural against artifice, spontaneity against calculation, the subjective against the objective, the visionary against the mundane and the supernatural against science. In this sense, then, romanticism represents not only a cultural and artistic movement on which modernism could draw to create its own aesthetic of avant-gardism with its emphasis on change, relativity and presentness but also a counter-cultural sensibility that actively subverted the rational, rationalist, commodified and institutionalized social order of the modern world.

Modernity already brought with itself from the beginning, then, a critical and complex cultural reaction to itself in which its official and dominant

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values and socio-economic structures of social relationships were subjected to challenge from within. Modernism can be seen as an artistic and cultural movement that articulates this reaction to modernity in a complex relationship of both affirmation through its absolute commitment to modernity and attack on tradition, and denial through the way it splits modernity as a social and political project of science, reason and industrialism (i.e. bourgeois modernity) from an aesthetic conception which rejects this for reflexivity, sentiment, intuition and the free play of imagination, albeit with many of the means that modernity placed, both of understanding and of technique, at its disposal in a restless and ceaseless quest for the new that rejects all tradition. Modernism, then, as it manifests itself in the artistic work of poets such as Eliot, Yeats, Mallarmé and Rilke; dramatists such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Pirandello and Brecht; musicians like Schoenberg, Berg and Webern; painters and sculptors like Picasso, Dali and Duchamp; and architects like Sullivan, Wright, Le Corbusier and Mies Van de Rohe, has a highly diverse nature. Though its works were an intensely living expression of its own modern times, it represents a complex reaction to them that reveals the split soul in the modernism of its aesthetic stance in which its eagerness to dissect and understand everything (the very essence of the modern outlook) is accompanied by a profound attack upon the modern age and the desire and need to overcome it. This ambivalence came now to find an echo in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century social thought which resonated with it in terms of a critical reassessment of modernity and the modern world in which the whole idea of reason and rationality (the Enlightenment project of progress and emancipation which is based upon it) began to be challenged and undermined. Leading thinkers here are Simmel, Weber and Pareto in sociology, Sorel and Mosca in politics, Nietzsche and Heidegger in philosophy, and Bergson, James and Le Bon in psychology, but most of all, perhaps, Freud whose ideas challenge the whole conception of the 'modern man' emancipated by reason from an originally primitive mentality, and 'modern civilization' as a progressive development of society in association with this, which form the essential basis of the idea of modernity and the legitimation and justification of the modern world.

There has been a tendency for the advocates of cultural postmodernism and postmodernity to present a one-dimensional view of modernism and modernity. Generally speaking, postmodernism's assault on modernism is targeted on the aesthetic of 'high modernism' which operated in terms of a minimalist canon celebrated by the influential art critic Greenberg in the 1950s. This aspect of modernism is best exemplified in painting by abstract expressionism and in architecture by the streamlined, stark, functionalist buildings of Le Corbusier and his followers. Although the rejection of tradition has been a major driving force of aesthetic modernism from its inception in the latter part of the nineteenth century, by the 1950s modernism was no longer in the avant-garde: ironically, it had become a tradition. High modernism had become the establishment high art and culture, a

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prime target for debunking. But high modernism represents only one side of the story of modernism, albeit one that has gained ascendancy and was appropriated by conservative hegemonic forces during the era of the Cold War.

Baudelaire's famous essay on 'The Painter of Modern Life' published in 1863 offers a more complex view of modernism (Baudelaire 1981). Modernity is defined by Baudelaire as 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable' (Harvey 1989: 10). High modernism is situated on the eternal and immutable side of modernism. As the previous discussion shows, this side of modernism was already inscribed in the scientific basis of classical sociology as reflected in the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim which was concerned to ground the understanding of the process of modernization in terms of the generalized principles of rational scientific enquiry. Science provided the tools to comprehend and thus control the fragmentary, ephemeral, chaotic world that characterized life. But it also needs to be recognized that even though all three thinkers insisted upon the absolute universal and authoritative nature of science, the scientific optimism of Marx had become a qualified enthusiasm in Durkheim, while it had reduced to a considerable degree of ambivalence and scepticism in Weber.

The tension between these two elements – the fragmentary, transitory, chaotic anti-tradition side of modernism where, as Marx noted, 'all that is solid melts into the air' (Berman 1983: 13), and the desire to find a common ground or language that would transcend the limitations of this 'tradition of the new' – is a useful way of not only understanding the complexity of modernism (and its problematic relation with rationality and modern industrial and social life) but also illuminating postmodernism's narrow view of modernism. The history of cultural modernism, as Harvey (1989) has noted, has oscillated between these two sides, and this has led to a variety of contradictory discourses, practices and cultural products that can lay claim to the features that modernism in its wider sense gives rise to: 'an aesthetic self-consciousness and reflexivity; a rejection of narrative structures in favour of simultaneity and montage; an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain nature of reality' (Featherstone 1988: 202). So the very features that are said to be central markers of postmodernism and the basis of its critique of modernism may also be seen to be inscribed in particular elements of postmodernism's despised other, modernism.

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The problem of the way in which postmodernism was founded on a specific image of modernism which is also encapsulated in itself makes it



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questionable whether it is appropriate to speak of postmodernism as a social, aesthetic and cultural configuration that is distinct and oppositional to modernism. However, its penetration into the discourses of the social sciences, philosophy, cultural analysis and feminism is characterized by one distinct trend running through these frameworks which is, as Boyne and Rattansi argue, a series of 'crises of representation' where:

older modes of defining, appropriating and recomposing the objects of artistic, philosophical, literary and social scientific languages are not credible and in which one common aspect is the dissolution of the very boundary between language and its object, this in turn being related to the acceptance of the inevitability of a plurality of perspectives and the dissolution of various older polarities (popular/elite forms, subject/object) and boundaries (for instance between disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, history and psycho-analysis). (1990: 12)

But these crises, in turn, can be understood, as Crook et al. (1992) have set out to demonstrate, as tied to and integral with what is argued to be the nature of the emergent postmodern world (i.e. postmodernism itself) and the processes which are constitutive of society, self and identity that compose it (i.e. the process of postmodernization). These processes can be said to centre around five kinds of configural transformations.

### **Structure**

The first is the dissolution of structure. The modern world has typically been conceived and treated by sociology as a bounded and organized system of interdependent institutions of structured social relationships. Central to this organization of the modern world is the role of production and its government of social processes generally (and particularly as the basis of social stratification and social divisions in society) and of the political and cultural arenas of society specifically. However, capitalism has now moved from being geared to production to being geared to consumption, and consumption in turn has moved from the material to the ideistic. The result is a destructuring of the market in favour of its enculturation in which mass production based on mechanical means of production for a mass market is replaced by flexible and niche production based on media, communication and informational technologies and systems using intensive advertising and focused marketing to maintain a continuous and innovative relation with and response to consumer tastes and demands. The argument is that the economic predatory pricing practices, control of labour costs, protectionism and government subsidy to eliminate competition and create a command relationship with consumers are transformed now into global but decentralized networks of production units which subcontract

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out more and more in their highly differentiated manufacturing activities, and where consumer choice begins to have a large degree of autonomy in dictating what they produce. In turn, that has changed the organization of work and production in manufacture. Not only is it the case that industrial manufacture is increasingly replaced by service industry (in part an outcome of the West's inability to compete with Third World industry) which creates administrative, managerial and white-collar work, but the technological organization of production has itself begun to change particularly as a result of information, intellectual and automated technologies. Instead of Taylorist management practices which treat labour as just another factor of production to be rationally manipulated like any other raw material, and **Fordist** mass production on the basis of the factory assembly line, batch production seeks to enhance and flexibly utilize labour skill which expands the capacity of workers to participate in the organization of production, although this also (together with subcontracting) produces a large reserve army of unskilled and part-time workers. At the same time, management, as part of this, is moving away from a bureaucratic hierarchical structure of organization to a flattened collegial structure that disperses organizational authority and responsibility by consolidating expertise and freeing organizational segments of the company to establish an autonomous contact with and effect a rapid response to market developments. So economic life generally, in the postmodern world, is becoming more and more decentralized as it is geared to a continuously changing consumer market which forces flexibility and breaks down production and the organization of labour into a whole mixture of forms of ownership, owner-worker relationships, production units and management and work practice.

But as economic life has changed so too, it is argued, has political life. What characterizes the political-administrative organization of late modernity is the corporate nation-state. The late modern corporate state with the bureaucratic organization and administration of society grew up as a response to the spectre of revolution, world war and economic depression which propelled welfare reforms, economic regulation and defensive nation-building on a societal scale. Warfare consolidated the major social forces of society, leading to the formation of their representation through political parties, trade unions and employees' organizations and the generation of state intervention and regulation (and their social acceptance) in the creation of war economics. What emerged was an elitist society operating under the aegis of the state which internally stabilized society through the mediation of industrial conflict and the regulation, co-ordination and harmonization of the economy including the creation of an infrastructure and training to sustain and organize it. In turn, too, the corporatist state consensually legitimated and mobilized mass support for its existence through the creation and extension of civil and political citizen rights into social rights and entitlements, which were defined as belonging to the domain of state

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power and state responsibility and could only be fulfilled through the concentration of state authority and the massive extension of the bureaucratic apparatus. Finally, the state preserved the external stability of society by safeguarding the national socio-political order through military and political bloc arrangements and treaties. So the state corporatist society of late modernity is one in which the state controls and regulates capitalism and private corporations by partial nationalization, control over credit, currencies and legal regulation, whilst simultaneously socially and politically enfranchising organized labour through its incorporation into government and economic administration in exchange for abandoning revolutionary programmes, tempering demands and respecting the rules. In this way, then, the state becomes the centralized and bureaucratic executive of society which preoccupies itself with economic planning and the overall co-ordination of internal social activities and external national relationships, in terms of the ideological and political control over interest articulation in society and the corporate brokerage of its articulation through the creation of functional power blocs which it licenses to take part in centralized decision-making as official representatives of capital, labour and the like. So in these terms, political life in the corporate state and society is established institutionally, structurally and culturally in terms of class and the class organization of society, and politics is the elite power and party politics of class conducted in terms of market interests within an ideology of social consensus and economic growth and according to political rules of the game which all the parties accept and in which political decisions are made pragmatically through intra-elite deals and where, consequently, there is a low degree of mass involvement and participation in them. Because it works through pragmatism, persuasion and the elitist and party mediation and management of interests, and not by coercion, so the state is tolerant of dissent and respects individual freedoms; and because it organizes through brokerage and regulation it doesn't seek total control of the economy but establishes itself in relation to and works within the market matrix as an administrative agent.

But it is argued that the corporate state is now beginning to break down and withdraw as the controlling apparatus of society for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the territorial sovereignty on which the state is based is being undermined by the globalization and internationalization of the economy and the polity and by the development of nuclear weapons which turn warfare into the threat of total destruction, so the state is forced to surrender its power and sovereignty internally and externally. Secondly, the expansion of the state has led to a spiral of spending, welfare expectations and taxation that is now too costly to maintain, and this, together with globalization, has forced the state into a position of retrenchment and decentralization which involves the privatization and marketization of formerly state-administered activities in which workforce replaces welfare and social provision is devolved from the state to the market, turning

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people from clients into consumers. Thirdly, and in turn, this has ideologically delegitimized the state. On the one hand, its failure to deliver on welfare and peace has produced the realization that the state cannot make people free, happy, safe, equal and rich. On the other hand, the enfranchisement of the population and the extension of civil rights has produced a better educated, informed and organized body of claimants who define their rights no longer in terms of state guardianship but in terms of human rights to freedom, personal development and the quality of life which are increasingly defined and protected in terms of international laws, conventions and agencies. Fourthly, the welfare state has inevitably shifted political conflict from class to a conflict between claimants and providers in which it is not just a question of the educated and informed who articulate political demands about the quality of life but also a matter that involves the empowering of politically and economically marginalized groups. Finally, as the market replaces the state and power shifts to the former whilst responsibility remains with the latter, the two are separated, with the state bearing the brunt of the conflict over resources, turning the market into an invisible agent that is not subject to pressure. So the state has reached a point of crisis to which it can only respond through decentralization, fragmentation, privatization and minimalization which destroys its autonomy and reunites it with the other economic, communal and cultural social domains of society.

But the result of all this is to reconstruct the political life of society in terms of these other domains in a way that decouples political conflict and cleavage from class and party politics (as evinced in the decline of class voting and the erosion of support for mass political parties) and associates it with political forces that are focused around issues, rights and social movements and which largely reject traditional politics and the structures of conventional politics (namely centralized state authority of government, bureaucratic parties, leadership and electoral competition) for mass representation and political activism using the media as their major instrument both as a means of mobilization and as a vehicle for action.

The point about this new politics is that it does not fit into the traditional categories of 'left' and 'right', nor is it structurally generated in terms of class and class interest. Essentially it sees this as a block upon its concerns. It is socio-cultural in nature and articulates itself generationally and culturally. What it entails is value- and issue-orientated cleavages that identify, in group terms, only like-minded people united and contingently generated through shared formative experience of either a social or a cultural character, focusing not so much on segmental economic interests and rights. Its concerns are moral; its politics is anti-elitist; its shape is iconic and symbolic; its instrument is the media; its organization is grass-roots; its activism is spectacle and drama; and its constituents are potentially and often global. What the new politics demands is a new society which rejects bureaucratic organization, and to this end it entails a constant convergence

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and interrelationship across social and cultural boundaries and divisions in a fluid politics of issue-orientated formation and reformation activated and amplified through grass-roots organization, direct action and media campaigns with a constituency that joins and disengages with it as the political context and personal circumstances change.

But its basis lies not simply in the dissolution of the corporate state but in the more central dissolution and decomposition of the whole organized and structural social divisions and inequalities that characterize modern society. The capitalist system of production originally generated, through the privatization of the means of production and the sale of labour, a class structure which radically distributed rewards and power unequally between capital and labour and produced a society organized around this class division and in terms of which gender relations were largely based on the disjunction between the domestic and public spheres of social existence which gave women a subordinate role in society. However, the development of organized capitalism fragmented ownership by separating it from control through the emergence of the joint stock company; created a whole new middle class of managers and professionals in terms of this fragmentation, and white-collar workers in the move to tertiary industry; and decomposed the working class through deskilling and machine control. To this, the rise of the state added wholly new classes of elite administrators, middle-level bureaucrats and state dependents. The result of all this was a highly complex pattern of class and status stratification in late modern society which dissolved capital-labour relations and which entailed a further process of increasing social differentiation as women too entered the labour market as another social group within it which transformed patriarchy into virarchy. However, and despite the structural complexity of this pattern of social division and differentiation in late modernity, it is a structure that has a generational and material basis in the system of production. The postmodern argument is that this structure has now decayed to the point where divisions of class, status and gender have disappeared into more fluid cultural patterns of social differentiation in which social membership is neither material nor structural but one of symbolic and imagined associations and community (that has a large media determination in it). It is no longer production but consumption that gives shape to society and, as a result, social differentiation moves from the social sphere to the cultural sphere with the shift from life chances to lifestyles that consumption entails. Moreover as consumption moves from goods to signs and signs are no longer representations but codes, so social groupings based upon them are founded in shared systems of meaning that operate in terms of fashion, media messages and information which are entirely self-referential and without material foundation. In this way consumption and cultural differentiation in terms of it detaches from structural constraint to create imagined communities which arise, not from a shared situation or interpersonal network of relations, but from media-induced versions of

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communities with common ascriptive characteristics, tastes, habits and concerns that foster what is a simulated version of fellowship and communal identity. Furthermore, just because they are media simulations, so they are created and mobilized by the media and find expression through media-directed market and political demands and representation in terms of media images and spectacles. They are culturally produced communities without any concrete referent in terms of any group or type of person and they produce a politics of social movement in terms of their simulated characteristics and interest and, with the globalization and destatization of society, they become transnational communities too. So social differentiation in the postmodern world becomes a fluid mosaic of media-simulated and media-imagined multiple status identities which are based, not on location in society or work, but in consumption and access to codes which display themselves in mass participation and social movement politics.

### **Culture**

The dissolution of structure points to the second and crucial transformation which it is argued characterizes postmodernity: the salience of culture and the creation of a discursive world on this basis. Prior to the mid 1970s sociologists who were interested in the arts and culture were situated on the margins of the discipline and there was little crossover between the sociology of art and culture and literary criticism, aesthetics and cultural history. Now, there is a visible shift in sociology towards the theorization of culture and the relaxing of traditional disciplinary boundaries. Culture is the common thread that runs through the range of meanings which prevail under the banner of postmodernism. In its armoury, the conceptual tools and justificatory strategies for analysing and critiquing texts are aesthetic and its models for life are organized around the aesthetics of life, but this is precisely because the salience of culture in the postmodern world constitutes, as Simmel (Frisby 1985) originally argued, a development in late modernity: that is, the aestheticization of everyday life, or art as life and life as art, as Featherstone (1991) puts it. Although these cultural questions and aesthetic issues have been forced to the centre of sociology by this new salience of culture which is postmodernism, it is important to note that feminism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, late Marxism and cultural studies have also contributed to the topicalization and analysis of culture. What the postmodern transformation argues, however, is more. Postmodernism constitutes a movement which makes culture the constitutive basis of social life which replaces structure and its determinations. What then is ushered in by this is a world, the postmodern world, which exists at the level of surface and appearance; which is depthless and spatial rather than historical and temporal; where identity is simulated, heterogeneity is without substance, and action consists of variations on the theme of

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consumption; and where tradition and the past have no value or reality apart from that of a cultural emporium of styles and taste. Moreover, in this world of culture there are no universalistic and hierarchical criteria in terms of which its products can be organized, evaluated and ranked. Rather, the danger is that 'anything goes'.

### **Body**

The third transformation which is indicative of the emergence of a post-modern world is the rediscovery of the body. This crucially affects the whole idea of the mass which, as Huyssen (1986) argues, has traditionally been the other of modernism and has been used to establish the identity of women through the location and representation of them in terms of their bodies. What the rediscovery of the body entails is a positioning of it as the central site of discourses and social control which objectify and subjectify it, which, in these terms, played a major part in creating and sustaining the social order of the modern world. Instead, postmodernism, with its emphasis on difference, and postmodernity, which is generated and emerges through heterogeneity, opens up the possibility for other (and once marginal) voices to be heard and accepted as legitimate. A crucial voice, here, is that of the body and with it, most specifically, the voice of women which modernity suppressed in terms of socially and culturally institutionalized patriarchy. Thus, poststructuralist feminists like Irigaray and Cixous insist on a rewriting of the body on the grounds that the feminine has been devalued and repressed through the logocentric structure of language in patriarchal culture (Weedon 1987). More generally, the rediscovery of the body entails rescuing it from the position it has been given in modernity through its dichotomization of nature and culture as an organic system which externally constrains the human actor and his/her action, towards a sense of the lived body and its symbolic significance to the interactional order of society. It also recovers it from the ways in which its institutionalized regulation became central in the growth of civilization which, as Featherstone et al. (1991) argue, 'required the restraint of the body and the cultivation of character in the interests of social stability'. Such regulation peaks, as Foucault (1979b) argues, in the Enlightenment and with the instrumentally rational modern world that it brought, which requires the disciplined suppression of desire to establish the governmentality that resolves its industrial needs. But now the body is in a process of release as a combination of many factors: the collapse of bourgeois morality, particularly in regard to sex; the commercial and consumerist interest in the body focused around health, beauty, keeping fit and the fight against age; the control of the use of erotic advertising; the feminist address of biology and gender; the psychoanalytic discovery of the unconscious; and the demographic transformation of the population in contemporary

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Western societies, which has produced an ageing population and consequently thrust the body into the centre of attention and raised a whole series of questions about it in terms of medical treatment and death. In all these ways, then, the body has moved into a central position in the contemporary world to constitute, it is argued, a central part of the move into a postmodern state.

### **Self**

The rediscovery of the body is tied to a fourth configural transformation which is constitutive of the postmodern, and that is the decentring of the self. Modernity is associated with humanism and its conception of the self, which is further sustained and expanded by the structural developments of modernization, namely free market capitalism and political liberalism, and their associated values, namely autonomy, privacy and the rule of law, to create the modern individual. It is dependent on a conception of human nature established largely by Descartes in which the human self is a subject defined by specific properties of which consciousness, free will and rationality are the most crucial and which give it a centred identity and a goal-directed and purposive conception of the self. But postmodernism and poststructuralism attack the logocentrism which this entails on the grounds that it rests on a series of unsupportable dualisms which privilege identity over difference, being over negation, presence over absence, nature over culture, male over female and, most of all, reason over anything that is 'other' to it. This normative hierarchy of binary oppositions not only marginalizes the other, but has also led to what Heidegger (1975) calls a 'Europeanization of Thought' in which its concepts and categories have ethnocentrically dominated all other systems of thought and thereby have played a major part in the Western conquest of the world. As Derrida (1979) argues, these are productive of the ideas of racism, sexism, colonialism and normality which violate the 'other' and force it into its own privileged mode of rationality. As such, then, the logocentric self creates a mythology about its consciousness and reason that becomes a form of appropriation and domination that makes everything and everyone the same as itself and establishes itself the master of all things. Instead, and following on from Nietzsche (1966) and Heidegger (1975), postmodernism and poststructuralism argue that identity is a function of difference. It is multiple and not fixed and always under construction. It has no overall blueprint since it is constituted by the play of its multiplicities at any given time. Particularly, as in Nietzsche, Lacan (1977) and Deleuze and Guattari (1984), this multiple self is seen in terms of a tension between the Dionysian excess of desire and the Apollonian principle of order in which they insist on the need for the liberation of the former in terms of the body, sexuality, play and difference, which has been repressed or sublimated by the



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Apollonian dimension as an 'iron cage' (to quote Weber) that constrains and disables the possibilities of self-existence and action. In Foucault (1979b) this release of desire is married to an argument that the self has become a subjugated subject produced by the technologies of governance and discipline that emerged from Enlightenment reason and thought and specifically scientific rationality. These need to be replaced by the ancient idea of the care of self as the art of living. In these terms, then, the human nature of the self is no longer to be seen as governed by natural and universalistic laws which are determining. Neither is it to be seen as structurally determined in its nature by the institutions of society, even when it is historically and culturally located. But in this latter respect we need to distinguish Foucault's argument that the social construction of self and identity in the contemporary world is the product of a disciplinary society in which historically contingent and particular knowledge/power discursive practices have become hegemonic, but which can be defeated by transgressing their limits; Derrida's (1979) deconstruction of logocentric thought; feminist critiques of phallogocentrism; and Baudrillard's (1988) argument that the very existence of society and the social has become problematic in the postmodern world of consumption, simulation and hyper-reality. For the last this world of consumerism has now itself become the basis of self as people use or are seduced into constructing their identities in terms of the consumption of codes, images, media and information. This ideational commodity fetishism has freed people from the old structures of society, replacing the social in the formation and construction of self through signification, albeit at the cost of the death of reality through its subsumption by the sign. This conflicts, of course, with those celebrants of the postmodern world who see the cultural heterogeneity and difference in which consumption is freedom, choice and self-expression in these terms and who argue that the new information and media systems and technologies of this world are enabling and liberating for its members.

### **Nature/culture**

Finally, one more configural transformation is presented as a characteristic of modernity which ties to all of the others and this is the breakdown of the nature/culture division in regard to the social world. A central part of the project of modernity has been the technical mastery of the world on behalf of culture, with science and scientific knowledge as the agent for its achievement. So the modern world has seen a vast and exponential growth of science and scientific knowledge in terms of a system of research and teaching establishments, roles, networks, etc. which is interlocked with the government and economy of society in terms of resources, practices and agendas, but which also constitutes a community with a considerable degree of autonomy and norms of cognition in its own right. The problem

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in the late twentieth century is that this system is now under attack because of the sheer cost of funding it, particularly 'big' theoretical scientific activity, and because the promise of a total control of nature which it once seemed to offer is no longer a real prospect. With regard to the former, science policy and science funding in the contemporary world have now become tied to choosing between research priorities and cost-effectiveness in relation to practical economic and social problems of the use of science as an instrument of economic growth, which imposes an instrumental government and commercial agenda that destroys the autonomy of science as science and the validity of any internal sense of the scientific project in terms of its knowledge. But more problematic is the now recognizable fact that the degree of knowledge of nature which science possesses is limited, that its use to tamper with nature can have malignant and irreversible effects, and that it creates a considerable degree of damage in its own right. All of this has become much more problematic as science and technology have moved into directly and actively supplanting nature with their own practices, such as, for example, genetic engineering. The result is that the whole metanarrative on which science has based its legitimacy has come into question. Science has become publicly challenged in terms of its results because nature has re-entered culture in a whole series of problematic and potentially disastrous ways (e.g. ecological crises, AIDS) which science and technology are unable to control and often actually precipitate. But paradoxically, just as nature has re-entered culture in this way (and made scientific and technological control problematic), so other things which were once conceived of as cultural have now been naturalized, such as unemployment, crime and poverty, and are seen as unavoidable, if unfortunate, conditions of human social life. Either way, the nature/culture divide which was characteristic of modernity and the modern world has been breached, and social life cannot be anything but affected in its economic, political and communal existence and its contours redrawn by this as the activities which compose these spheres are reconditioned and come into new relationships with one another that break down the old boundaries between them. Instead of this old divide between nature and culture, a new interpenetration has appeared. It is clear that there is a two-way dialectic in which social processes have natural consequences and natural processes have social consequences and the postmodern world is rooted in their interlock.

### **A SOCIOLOGY OF THE POSTMODERN OR A POSTMODERN SOCIOLOGY?**

Given the above discussion, there are three routes that sociology could take with regard to postmodernism. It could espouse that it is of no value, and

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thus ignore it. As we have shown, postmodernism offers an all too singular view of modernism, which is largely characterized by 'high modernism'. But as we have also seen, its presence is ubiquitous and it will not simply disappear. Moreover, as the preceding discussion indicates, postmodernism offers insights into the analyses of the contemporary social world that are both exciting and challenging. As Featherstone (1988) points out, it invites us to question how analytic models are constructed, the ideas that underpin them, and the authorial voice (the sociologist) that speaks of and on behalf of the 'other'. Thus, it requires to be examined and explained, not masked in a veil of silence as the body has been in sociological discourse. Moving to the other end of the spectrum, sociology might be tempted to take on the mantle wholesale and generate, as some propose, a postmodern sociology. Such a venture, however, we suggest, is not useful either. The very idea of postmodern sociology is a contradiction in terms. No matter how blurred sociology has become round the edges in recent years, it is nevertheless a product of modernity, part of the Enlightenment legacy, postmodernism's reviled other. As Featherstone (1988) argues, any attempt to construct a postmodern sociology is ultimately doomed to failure because it could not be other than a flawed attempt to construct another set of grand narratives. From a slightly different angle, as Featherstone further notes, the attachment of postmodern to sociology could only signal the dissolution of the discipline in as much as it would have to abandon its 'generalizing social science ambitions'. The position taken here is that, ultimately, neither of these two extremes is useful. Rather, on the basis of the preceding discussion and in agreement with Featherstone (1988) and Bauman (1992a), we take the position that, in order to understand the changes in contemporary culture, it is necessary to forgo the pitfalls and the allure of a postmodern sociology in favour of the development of a sociology of postmodernism.

### KEY CONCEPTS

**MODERNITY** Once a term of critique modernity has now become a way of describing not only the contemporary but also that which has become improved through the advent of our epoch. Given the background of capitalism and industrialization the advent of modernity in cultural forms has meant greater critical and reflexive self awareness. This is a description of our times.

**POSTMODERNITY** There is a major debate in the social sciences that modernity has run its course and that the methods, desires, aspirations

## CORE SOCIOLOGICAL DICHOTOMIES

and thought patterns that have sustained the accomplishments of our times have come to an end. This end, if it be so, heralds the era of the postmodern, a time of uncertainty and competing claims for validity.

**Poststructuralism** This complex body of theory arose out of the disappointment with the modern Marxist project and with its failure to secure a change in the social structure. Poststructuralism denies the commonality of human consciousness and seeks out difference as the political cause for the future. Identity politics is one of the developments that follows from poststructuralism.

**Grand narrative** These are the methods, desires, aspirations and thought patterns of modernity referred to in 'postmodernity' above.

**Fordism** This refers to the kind of economic base within a society that is based on uniform production and uniform provision. It also speaks of a society where people are differentiated by their relationship to the means of production. Post-Fordism implies that identity is established through consumption and consumption exercises the principles of difference and choice.