

**DO WE KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT
MODERNITY TO ANALYSE IT
ACCURATELY?**

**WHAT AMBIGUITIES EXIST IN THE
CONCEPT OF MODERNITY?**

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

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

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A SOCIOLOGY OF MODERNITY
LIBERTY AND DISCIPLINE
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Modes of narrating modernity

THE MODERN RUPTURE

For several decades, the term 'modern society' has rather unquestioningly been applied to the social formations of the Northwestern quarter of the world during the past few centuries. It relies on a basic distinction between these social formations and 'traditional' societies.¹ However, it has been immensely difficult to both exactly define the characteristics of modern societies and to show when they actually broke with traditional social formations.

Often, processes of urbanization, industrialization, democratization, the emergence of an empirical-analytical approach to knowledge are referred to.² All of these processes, however, extend over long periods of time, they do not always occur simultaneously, and some of them can be traced to regions and times quite distant from the so-called modern world and era. More specifically then, the so-called industrial and democratic revolutions are sometimes seen as the social phenomena constituting modernity.³

Even these revolutions are fairly extended and uneven phenomena in time and space. But if one starts with the political changes in seventeenth-century England and the economic transformations in the late eighteenth century, some demarcation is achieved. Furthermore, it can be argued that these developments had impacts, even if only gradually, on the rest of the world by changing the general conditions for phrasing political ideas and organizing economic practices. The close coincidence of the American and French Revolutions then seemed to provide a sufficiently short period that could be seen as the beginning of political modernity.⁴ During the nineteenth century, periods of industrial take-off in a number of European countries and in the US have come to be seen as marking a similar economic rupture.⁵

To many observers, these transformations lay so far apart and were so little connected that serious doubts could be raised on whether they constituted a major social transition. Social historical and anthropological research, in particular, could show that very little had changed in the orientations and practices of most human beings during and after these supposedly revolutionary events. If modernity was to mark a 'condition' or an 'experience',⁶ then the qualifications required to show its existence were largely absent in the allegedly modern societies during the

nineteenth century, and for a still fairly large number of people during the first half of the twentieth century.⁷

Some recent research, though, has re-emphasized the idea of the modern rupture, and a critical look at this research may help to clarify the issue. Michel Foucault sees the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a period in which new discursive formations emerged in the humanities, namely the tripartite set of discourses of biology, political economy and linguistics. From a perspective of the history of concepts, Reinhart Koselleck speaks of a major turn in the development of key philosophical and political ideas. Partly following Koselleck, Jürgen Habermas identifies the emergence of a self-reflective philosophy of modernity and the opening of the time horizon. The beginning of a social time of history marks the possibility of a view of history as a project. Inversely, Wolf Lepenies identifies the end of natural history. These analyses would indeed locate the beginning of modernity at the turn to the nineteenth century.⁸

I generally concur with this perspective, but one of its features needs to be emphasized. Broadly understood, all of these works are contributions to a history of concepts and of philosophy. Hardly any similarly clear ruptures occurred in terms of economic, social and political practices throughout society.⁹ In such terms, the prevailing view seems to be that the revolutions were much less revolutionary, that is, pronounced ruptures during a short time-span, than the discourses about the revolutions. In as much as the studies by Foucault, Koselleck and others are about practices, they are about those of the very small minorities in a given society who were directly involved in the production of these discourses, namely about (proto-) intellectuals and (proto-) professionals.¹⁰

If these findings are reliable, one can understand the difficult relation between the judgement and the analysis of modernity, which haunts our thinking, in sociohistorical terms. It is the relation of affinity, but non-identity between ideas and institutions of modernity that is at the root of most of the problems in analysing the history of modernity.¹¹ The normative issue, that is, the *project* of modernity, may then possibly be more or less neatly identified historically and theoretically, even with all its internal tensions. However, this project has never translated into similarly neat and pure institutions.

To pursue an analysis of modernity, then, requires a distinction between the discourse on the modern project (itself ambiguous and amenable to a sociology of knowledge as well as subject to historical transformations), and the practices and institutions of modern society. Far from trying to erect some idealistic – normative and suprahistorical – notion of modernity, this merely acknowledges, *sociologically* and *historically*, that some break in the discourses on human beings and society occurred more than two centuries ago. This discursive rupture brought about the establishment of the modern ideas as new imaginary significations for both individuals and society and, as such, it instituted new kinds of social and political issues and conflicts.¹²

TWO PORTRAITS OF MODERNITY

The discourse of modernity is based most firmly on the idea of freedom and autonomy. Historically, it was used to interpret and reinterpret observable social practices in the light of this imaginary signification. By way of an introduction, I shall briefly sketch the main cognitive opposition that emerged in this process, the opposition between the realization of liberty and the undermining of liberty. Thus, two very common, but incompatible, portraits of modernity will appear. These are two opposed narratives, one of which may be called the discourse of liberation, the other the discourse of disciplinization. This sketch does not aspire to intellectual historiography, rather it is meant to generate the issues that a sociology of modernity will have to pay attention to.

The *discourse of liberation* stood at the very origins of modern times.¹³ It goes back to the quest for autonomy for scientific pursuits during the so-called scientific revolution, to the demand for self-determination in the political revolutions – the model cases of which were the American and French ones – and to the liberation of economic activities from the supervision and regulation of an absolutist state.

In each of these cases freedom was seen as a basic – ‘unalienable’, ‘self-evident’ – human right. But it was also argued for with the collective outcome of liberations in mind, namely the enhancement of the striving for truth, the building of a polity to whose rules everybody had contributed and in which, thus, violence was no longer a legitimate means of action, and the increase of ‘the wealth of nations’. In both ways – the establishment of individual rights and the collective justification for the use of these rights – the discourse of liberation was and is of major importance as a means of self-interpretation of and for ‘modern’ societies.

Throughout the past two centuries, however, the adequacy of this discourse has not remained unquestioned. It had not only an intellectual genealogy, but also a particular social location. It was pursued only by some groups, and it was socially conditioned. An early critique focused on the contrast between the discourse and the practices of the social groups that were supporting it.

A particularly strong version of such a ‘critique of ideology’ was launched by Karl Marx. He held that the allegedly universalist and scientific theories of political economy merely masked the interests of the emerging bourgeoisie. Rather than discarding them completely, however, he tried to separate their real insights into the workings of the economy from their ideological elements. Thus, he indeed subscribed to a notion of the need for liberating the productive forces; it was rather the social context in which such a project was to be carried out that had to be revolutionized so that all humankind could benefit from this liberation.

Quite regardless of whether one concurs with Marx’s particular analysis, nineteenth-century European societies displayed, to almost any observer, striking contradictions between a universalist rhetoric and the strong boundaries between social groups as to the availability of liberties. The opportunities of entrepreneurship, of expressing one’s views and interests within political institutions, of participating in the academic search for truth, were limited to a very small part

of the population and the barriers erected were often formal (like the restriction of the suffrage), or at least formidable. In fact, the idea of *containing the liberal utopia* within certain limits, of creating boundaries against the consequences of its own claims is crucial to any understanding of modernity, as shall be shown throughout this book.

Still, from a twentieth-century perspective, it may appear as if the power of the idea of liberty ultimately overcame these boundaries. Not only were formal rules of exclusion lifted, but social mobility also increased. Related to such social transformations, the discourse of liberation itself changed its form. The functionality of social arrangements in 'modern' society was itself regarded as liberating human beings. The higher performance of economy, politics and science would set the individual free from many of the concerns of 'traditional' societies. It was recognized that the new arrangements also put new strains on the individuals who would have to comply with multiple role expectations according to their status in different spheres of society. But in many of the analyses put forward during the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, the gains in terms of liberty were seen as far superior to the losses.

The most sophisticated, and far from uncritical, version of such a discourse is put forward by Jürgen Habermas. While praising the performance of modern institutions and accepting their historical inevitability, he fully recognizes their liberty-constraining effects. He reconciles this ambiguous finding with the attempt to safeguard the 'project of modernity' by counterposing those institutions against a 'life-world' in which authentic, unmediated communication is possible and from which renewals of an emphatic understanding of modernity may always re-emerge.¹⁴

During the past two decades, such views of a functionally ordered society, be they generally affirmative or critical, have lost their persuasive power. From within this intellectual tradition some observers saw a gradual dissolution of the order; moreover, empirical findings on pluralization and disintegration of both institutional arrangements and social life-styles were reported, which were difficult to accommodate in mere terms of functionality. In this current phase, the emphasis on order is relaxed, and the discourse of liberation takes the form of a praise of individualization.

Ultimately, then, modernity is about the increase of individualism and individuality. In an early phase, few may have benefited at the expense of many. In a second era, differentiation may have occurred group- and role-wise, but not really on the level of the individual. Nowadays, however, modernity's achievements allow the development of a great plurality and variety of individual life-styles and life-projects, available to the great majority of the population of Western societies.

If such a discourse of liberation, all modifications notwithstanding, shows a continuity through more than two centuries of modernity, it is plausible to assume that it reflects important features of these societies. However, it has never been without a critical counterpart, the *discourse of disciplinization*.

A starting-point for the latter was the observation that liberation actually never occurred the way it was conceived in the liberal ideas. European revolutionary societies between 1750 and 1850 were marked by continuities, and the most important continuity was the centrality of the state apparatus. If we look at the Enlightenment writings, we shall see that the state, while feudal and absolutist in historical origins, was often regarded as the means to make Enlightenment social practices possible. One major argument focused on the necessity of the state for social order, another saw in the state a social incarnation of Reason, raised as a universal entity above the particularistic society.¹⁵ In both cases, its nature as an effective and legitimate boundary to the potential infinity of possible autonomous social practices becomes evident. The *state form* as the container – safeguard and limit – of modernity is another major issue throughout this book.

The idea of the state as container of modernity, as an instrument to restrict practices and to discipline individuals, drew on an existing social institution. A second, and historically later, variant of the theory of disciplinization postulated the unintended self-limitation of modernity as the outcome of modern practices. Far from fulfilling the bourgeois-humanist promise of human self-realization through autonomy, so the argument goes, modern practices, once started, would transform human beings in both idea and reality so that the very notion of realizing a self becomes untenable.

Elements of such a discourse can be found in Marx's writings about alienation and fetishization as a result of the exposure of human beings to the market. Analogously, Weber argues that the achievements of the workings of bureaucratic and market rationalities transform the 'life destiny' of human beings and rob human life of some of its important qualities. Modern scientific practices, even if they were begun in its name, would turn out to be unable to maintain the quest for truth. And according to Nietzsche, the moral-religious project of a Christianity that was focused on the individual undermined its own foundations and cancelled any possibility of morality from social life. The argumentative figure of the *self-cancellation of modernity* in and through its own practices is a further theme that needs to be explored in this socio-historical account of modernity.

Such portraits were drawn from the experience of a modernity that had begun to unfold its full powers, powers that were seen as residing in the multitude of morally, economically, politically and intellectually freed individuals. While the societal effects of the interactions of these individuals were the problem at the heart of these analyses, the dynamic itself was seen as being unleashed by the freeing of the individuals.

The experience of twentieth-century modernity tended to alter the portrait of disciplinization again, with Weber already marking a different tone. However, a full new narrative of modernity, focusing on the subjection and disciplinization of individuals, only came into being with fascism, the Second World War and the massive material transformations of the modern societyscape between the 1930s and the 1960s. Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse as well as Michel Foucault identified a disciplining alliance of instrumental reason and

will to power in the organized, administered societies of that time. Under the almighty coalition of knowledge and power, the question of resistance or compliance hardly seemed to pose itself any longer.

With plurality and difference apparently reemerging during the past two decades, images of instrumentality and one-dimensionality have lost their appeal. Still, the discourse of disciplinization has not given way to a new and unquestioned hegemony of the discourse of liberation. At least one strand of the postmodernist debate interprets pluralization not as a condition of the self-realization of the individual but as the expression of a fragmentation of selfhood, and sees the subject finally completely vanishing, disappearing even from the utopian point from which claims for societal alternatives could be made. Such kinds of arguments point to the possibility of a *historical transformation of the self* and to the conditions for, and understanding of, self-realization.

These two portraits of modernity were always in co-existence and, as I have tried to indicate, they even underwent analogous transformations over time. They were not always as completely separate as I described them. The most sensitive observers of modernity, such as Marx and Weber, contributed to both images. However, the gallery of modernity is full of pictures that emphasize either one or the other side. What we may conclude from this is, first, that the authors have indeed caught some relevant and crucial aspects of modern times. It is unlikely that they have all failed to see clearly. Apparently liberty and discipline are key features of modernity. The real task though seems to be to paint, so to speak, both sides of modernity simultaneously, to conclude on an irreducibly double nature of modernity. A more adequate portrait, then, would have to merge the two existing perspectives into one which maintains the ambiguity.

AMBIGUITIES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

We shall reconsider the Enlightenment and, with it, the modern project, as being haunted by a fundamental ambiguity. There is a number of ways of formulating this ambiguity. One side is fairly clear – there is the idea of self-rule, the rejection of any external, superior being or principle that could impose maxims for action. This is the very foundation of liberty as autonomy. By its very nature, it is without limits and boundaries. A radically modern conception allows no actor or instance to provide criteria or rules for setting boundaries to self-determination.

On the other side, most social philosophies in the realm of modernity do not rely exclusively on such a conception. The discourses of modernity reject the *imposition* of a substantive notion of good and right, as ordained by a God, but many of them accept the idea of the *recognition* of worldly values and rules, existing before and beyond the individual, to be discovered, known and followed by human beings. There are varieties of such conceptions, which I will not discuss in detail here.¹⁶ Just three different basic ideas shall be mentioned, which can be found in various combinations. First, there is the idea of human *nature* as an anthropological frame for liberty. It may not only involve the concept of natural,

unalienable rights of the individual, but also views on natural social orders, such as, for instance, the family and the public representation of the family by the man as head of the household. Second, there is the idea of *reason*. Reason was seen as some supra-individual and, maybe, supra-human category that, while it could be specified in different ways, would be invoked as a reference-point to which the strivings of free individuals would lead. Third, the idea of the need to consider the *common good*, beyond the right to individual autonomy, was a collectivist notion which could not be unequivocally derived from individual wills. The idea of the common good relates to the question of the foundation of the polity on liberal principles. It entails a distinction, in Isaiah Berlin's famous terms, of negative and positive liberty, liberty from constraints and liberty to achieve substantive goals, together with others, in community.¹⁷ In different ways, all of these concepts (re-)introduced some 'other' criterion that could potentially be in conflict with the volition of individual, living human beings.

Two questions are important in this context. First, (a) how is the potential conflict between the two basic criteria of modernity handled? And second, (b) how is the 'other side' to the criterion of individual autonomy exactly determined?¹⁸

(a) The potential conflict between two criteria, if they were independent of each other, was well recognized. The most intriguing solution to the problem of the modern double-sidedness was the identification of the two sides. Free and knowledgeable subjects would strive towards the realization of their nature, of reason, and of common well-being. This Enlightenment faith, however, was soon shaken – though it still lives on, for instance, in the claim, upheld in neoclassical economics, that an economic order with a multitude of independent actors would regulate itself toward achieving a stable optimum position.

A way of upholding the optimistic proposition while taking real-world deviations into account was to argue that the individuals were not as free and knowledgeable as they were supposed to be. Education and/or exclusion were to be the means of dealing with the problems they posed. Such a view presupposes that some know better than others what is natural, reasonable or good. They may lead others towards this insight, but until that stage is reached, it is only they who have full membership rights to modernity.¹⁹

Put in these terms, we may distinguish two co-existing, though conflicting strands of Enlightenment thought, the regulating one and the self-guiding one.²⁰ It is important to note that the strengthening of one strand at the expense of the other, while dealing with some problems, tends to suppress or neglect basic features of modernity. The regulating strand suppresses the right to individual autonomy of those who are classified as unfit for modernity. The self-guiding strand, while underlining the idea of individual autonomy, neglects the questions of what the substantive aspects of human life are and how they can be identified and approached.²¹ It is to this issue that I now turn.

(b) The idea of autonomy seems fairly unproblematic as long as we take it to refer to a single individual. Modernity, then, is about the possibility (opportunity and capability) of an individual subject's self-realization. Now, hardly anybody is

ready to argue – though a few are – that it could make sense to speak of individual self-realization without any reference to a substantive goal and to social relations to other human beings. If asked about their understanding of a good life, most people would either give answers that refer to others directly or indicate objectives that need to be socially conceived. References to social *substance* and to *collectivity*, that is, to the fact that some values may be upheld only by collective arrangement, enter into the modern condition. They do so obviously empirically, and it can also be argued that they are inevitable in terms of principles of justification. From the point onwards that individual autonomy and liberty were thought of, their various complements co-existed with them. Both substance and collectivity set boundaries to the practice of individual autonomy. The ideas of individual autonomy and liberty neither could nor did exist intellectually or socially unbound. Controversies are rather about how substance and collectivity are determined. To advance the argument, I shall introduce a very crude distinction at this point.²²

Early modernists argue that there are some cultural ascriptions that precede any practice of individual autonomy, both in terms of substance and of collectivity. Human beings, for instance, are born into a cultural-linguistic formation which gives form and sets boundaries to individual strivings. However an individual may define herself, she will draw on these forms and will relate to the community inside the boundaries as well as contribute to the historical path of this collective. Of course, this is the reasoning that stands behind the idea of the nation-state as the modern polity, and I shall discuss its relevance to the history of modernity later (see Chapter 3).

Classical modernists tend to turn from those substantive foundations to more procedural ones.²³ They put forward the idea of various separate conceptualizations of basic spheres of society, as realms of economics, politics, science and culture. The construction of these spheres and their relations to each other as a new kind of naturally interlocking order is largely the result of attempts to link individual autonomy to social outcomes. The power of the revolutions of modernity – the scientific, industrial and bourgeois ones – resided not least in the establishment of such new sets of assumptions about the conditions for the beneficial cohabitation of human beings. In all of these conceptualizations, the complement to the idea of individual autonomy is one of rationality, actually of specific rationalities in each realm. Then the argument is developed that human beings as rational agents will follow these rationalities, if they are free to do so. If everyone does so, then the interaction of all human beings will both advance their individual objectives and be of benefit to all. Thus, a means of reconciliation of the duality of individual autonomy and its 'other' has been provided.²⁴ Far from actually identifying and describing real social practices, these conceptualizations remained largely fictitious. Rather than reality, they described the 'project of modernity'. Knowing well that they were a fiction, the modernizers' optimistic assumption was that they would realize themselves once the appropriate social conditions were created.

Late modernists dwell on this fictitious character of the conceptual order of high modernism. They argue that even the idea of procedural rationalities makes too many assumptions and cannot be upheld for any general analysis, or as a basis for politics. In their view, everything – language, self and community, to use Richard Rorty's terms²⁵ – is contingent. I do not want to discuss here such anti-foundationalism in philosophical terms, but I want to point to some political implications (on sociological implications see Chapter 9).

Politically, anti-foundationalism opens the way for a critical analysis of the modernist ideology. At the same time, it is a strong assertion of the idea of individual autonomy, since, in a contingent world, every individual decides for herself who she wants to be and to which collective she wants to belong. In terms of political theory, it is a call for a radical liberalism, based on what we may call an individualistic political ontology. Indeed, we may accept as a historical fact that the transformation of the modern ideas into social practices occurred – and, as a complete set, possibly could only occur – in the guise of liberalism. 'Actually existing liberalisms', though, often included substantivistic and collectivistic theories – such as, most prominently, in the fusion of liberalism and nationalism in the nineteenth century.

Still, the organization of allocative and authoritative practices relied heavily on the idea of an autonomous individual, capable of goal-directed action, as the basic unit of social organization – as is most evident in the rules of law and political participation. Law is the institution *par excellence* that creates, in the view of the relevant others, autonomous individuals responsible for their actions. If this is the case, then a sort of imbalance is inscribed in the modern ambiguity, a shift towards individual autonomy. In rights-based liberalism, however incomplete, the individual is the only category that need not, often in fact, cannot, be debated. The individual is simply there, whereas what human nature is or how the collective good should be determined needs to be argued about. Substantive aspects of human interaction are subject to communication and consensus. And, to make the issue even more complicated, with whom one should enter into communication (that is, the boundaries of the community) is itself not given, but subject to agreement.

At this stage of the argument, I only want to take note of two very general points. First, this bias that is inscribed into the modern ambiguity may well allow for a gradual shift to a hegemony of individual autonomy, aligned only with a disengaged, instrumental concept of reason, in the historically dominant conceptions of modernity. Second, the shift in conceptions of modernity – from 'early' to 'classical' to 'late', though it is not linear and far from unequivocal – may be a first indicator of historical processes of de-substantivization and de-collectivization of the foundations of modernity.²⁶ Both points are not conclusions of any sort, but elements of a guiding hypothesis for a historical sociology of modernity.

Such a sociology then needs to search for the boundaries which are *actually* taken for granted in social practices and do in fact limit the range of individual self-rule, and for the kinds of activities which are *actually* considered as within the

realm of possible self-realization. While there is obviously a great range of ways in which individual human beings make use of the available rules and resources for self-realization, there are also distinct historical forms of the construction of social identities. Such questions cannot be posed in purely individualistic terms since the nature of the boundaries depends on how present and relevant others see them. While they are not fixed by any supra-human will, neither can they be created or destroyed by individual will. One needs to transform the issue of contingency into a question for a historical sociology – as an issue of actual, rather than principled contingency.

FROM THE PHILOSOPHY TO A HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF MODERNITY

The ambiguity of modernity takes on varied forms at different times and in different places. Some authors have observed that the double nature of modernity may be due to the specificities of its *intellectual genealogy*, at least in continental Europe. While the main substantive argument was one of commitment to self-rule, it pointed historically towards a rethinking of the prevailing religious notion of the heteronomy of the human condition as being determined by God. To present its argument, Enlightenment thought thus had to link up to the predominant rhetoric form and was phrased as a 'secularized religion' with Reason taking the place of God and History the place of Providence.²⁷ In tension with the substance of the proposition that should entail an emphasis on openness, liberation, plurality and individuality, the historical form emphasized the advent of a new order that was universal and total and demanded conformity and discipline rather than anything else.

The issue of how to supersede an old order was posed with regard to *social practices* as much as with regard to intellectual modes of reasoning. Again, the conditions of the historical advent of modernity, at least in (continental) Europe, entailed a bias towards an 'organized' or 'imposed' transition rather than an open one in which the outcome would be left to the free workings of a plural society. Pronounced differences in the sociopolitical backgrounds against which the modern project was proposed and developed distinguish the European experience markedly from the North American one. One of the specificities of the French Revolution was that there was a centralized state, endowed with the idea of sovereignty and a bureaucracy to practice it. It seemed quite natural merely to re-interpret this state, then seize it and put it to different uses, if one wanted to transform society. In the absence of such well-established institutions, the situation of the American revolutionaries at the time of their struggle for independence was quite different.

While the main argument of this book is focused on European developments, I shall also repeatedly refer to the North American part of the history of modernity. Apart from helping to understand '*American exceptionalism*', this comparison offers opportunities for a more profound understanding of the dynamics of modernity.

In Europe, the social movements that advanced the 'project of modernity' were well aware of the fact that the liberations they were striving for could not be obtained without conflicting with organized adversaries, not the least of which were the absolutist state and the aristocratic and religious elites of the late feudal period.²⁸ While they deemed themselves certain of promoting a progress that was inevitable in the long run, they also saw a need to impose it against still-powerful opponents. Among these adversaries were those who faced the threat of losing power, wealth and status. The case against them could easily be argued in terms of modern principles. However, there were also those who would ultimately gain, but who apparently did not yet have insight into the advantages to them. While they could and should be educated, the (temporary) imposition of the reasonable was seen as necessary to avoid risks to liberation. In this respect, the view of some bourgeois revolutionaries on a society, the majority of which was against them, shows analogies to that of Communist revolutionaries in the early Soviet Union and in East European societies after the Second World War.²⁹

In the Soviet Union, the issue was phrased as the problem of 'socialism in one country'. This formulation refers very directly to the question of setting boundaries and imposing (a superior) order. Far from presenting a derailment of the modern project or the emergence of some kind of anti-modernity, Soviet socialism emphasizes certain features of modernity, though obviously at the expense of others. Just as American exceptionalism can be regarded as the epitome of one kind of modernity, so should socialism be seen as the epitome of another kind. The *modernity of Soviet socialism*, then, is a second issue for discussion by which I shall compare the West European experience to others, with a view to more firmly grasping the modern ambiguity.

With the help of this *spatial comparison* it is easier to understand why it is so fallacious when major parts of the present debates counterpose a notion of 'postmodernity' to one of modernity. The current distinction of modernity and postmodernity throws light (or casts shadows) on the modern double-sidedness, on the two sides of the modern ambiguity itself. Social phenomena that are labelled postmodern point to one relatively extreme social instantiation of modernity, whereas socialism finds itself close to the other extreme. Both social formations, however, move within the same sociohistorical space, the one created by, as Castoriadis would say, the double imaginary signification of modernity.

The spatial comparison demonstrates that there are varieties of 'actually existing modernities' – with the societies of the United States, Western Europe and the Soviet Union as three major twentieth-century types. It does not yet allow anything to be said about an inherent movement of modernity. On its own, the spatial comparison may, at worst, achieve nothing more than a somewhat more sociologically informed restatement of the dichotomy of liberation and disciplinization. To assess the validity of the hypothesis of de-substantivization and de-collectivization and, eventually, to demonstrate how such processes may come about, the spatial comparison of social formations along the lines of their expression of the modern ambiguity needs to be complemented by a *historical comparison*.

The historical construction of these social formations, as well as their transformations and – partly – demise, may be used to investigate the dynamics inherent to the overall modern project. De-substantivization and de-collectivization of modernity, if they occur, are not self-propelled trends but historical processes, of which there are also partial reversals, created by interacting human beings. For further analysis, the crucial issues are how, when and what kinds of shifts between the foundational imaginary significations occur. All this amounts to a quest for a historical analysis of the transformations of modernity. Such an analysis will begin with the modern rupture, that is, with the emergence of the master discourse of 'classical' modernity.

Historically, this fiction generated its own problems – problems that we can derive from the master discourse and can use for identifying the analytical issues for a sociology of modernity. As pointed out above, modern reasonings on the constitution of society suffer from the aporia of having 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, be it merely in terms of a minimal livable order or be it in terms of substantive objectives of humankind, such as wealth, democracy or truth. Even if one held the idea, as probably some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers did, that a social contract and its rules of implementation could be signed once and for all, the philosophical problematic was troubling enough.

To complicate things, though, each of the reasonings laid foundations for a *historical increase of liberties* and, it seemed, greater substantive achievements if contrasted with the 'pre-modern' regimes. Compared to the late feudal and absolutist regimes with their ascriptive hierarchies and their detailed regulation of all aspects of everyday life, these ideas were no doubt liberating in the sense of setting free a dynamic of human-made change. In their theoretical stringency, they even developed a liberating momentum that has still not exhausted its potential and keeps providing justifications for claims which are valid and unfulfilled today. This is the incomplete character of the project of modernity that Habermas keeps emphasizing.

Here we can also identify the basic tension that characterizes this notion of liberty as part of a socially ambiguous double concept. We may consider 'rational mastery' (Castoriadis) or 'disengaged, instrumental reason' (Taylor) as expressions for the tendency towards an increase of opportunities, an extension of social institutions into time and space, a growth of enablements. This tendency is itself set free by the individual right and obligation to 'autonomy'. In social practice, those liberations tended to alter the kinds of substantive goals human beings were able to accomplish – by extending the reach of human-made institutions. Then, the question of the *collective determination of the substantive objectives of human strivings* (including the question of how far these objectives should in fact be collectively determined), which is an essential element of modernity, became ever more problematic, in at least three respects.

First, the achievable mode of life became a moving target itself. If scientific

activities increased knowledge and economic activities increased wealth, changes in the conditions for collective self-determination would arise that would constantly have to be taken into consideration.³⁰ The agreement over substantive aspects of modes of social life, which was a formidable problem in the absence of pre-given criteria anyhow, would then be a *continuous* task in *continuously changing* circumstances.

Second, even if liberated scientific and economic practices indeed entailed a rather steady increase of human capabilities, it cannot be taken for granted that enablements would not be, at least temporarily, accompanied by constraints, or that both would be evenly distributed socially, spatially and temporally. From the nineteenth-century 'valley of tears' of 'primitive accumulation' to the twentieth-century concepts of 'deferred gratifications' as well as of 'modernization' and 'development', much of modern socioeconomic debate has centred on this problematic. The more uneven the distribution of enablements and constraints is, the harder one may expect collective self-determination under conditions of comprehensive participation (that is, the full development of political liberty) to be.

Third, beyond more or less directly perceivable, and perhaps even measurable, social distributions of enablements and constraints, the use and diffusion of all kinds of modern achievements will penetrate society and transform all of it to such an extent that certain values and practices will be impossible to uphold. Members of a society could be forced into a situation in which they will have to forfeit crucial identity-constituting practices, elements of their lives that they would not want to trade against anything else.³¹ The self-determination of a collective, of whether achievements may be used, becomes fraught with imponderable contradictions and conflicts in such a situation.

The master discourse of liberal modernity denies the fundamental relevance of all of these issues. In its view, the normative potential of revolutionary liberal theorizing resided in a notion of the autonomy of the economic, political, scientific and cultural spheres from each other, and in their capability of self-steering if left to the free interaction of the participating individuals. The differentiation of these spheres, as in functionalist theorizing, is then the guarantor of liberty. For the past two centuries, much of 'modernist' social theory has relied far too much on such assumptions without really scrutinizing them. A redescription of modernity may possibly re-open the debate.

REPROPOSING A NARRATIVE OF MODERNITY³²

I began my considerations above with the two concepts of liberation and disciplinization, as they can be found in narratives of modernity. In a second step, I have tried to transform this dichotomy into an ambiguity which is characteristic of modernity. This ambiguity resides in the double imaginary signification of modernity as individual autonomy and its substantive or collective other. I have argued that only a comparative-historical analysis can come closer to

understanding this ambiguity, since there is no general principle combining these significations. The next task, then, is to transfer the concept of a double imaginary signification into the language and tradition of social science.

Whereas modernist social science tends to take the existence of self-regulated sets of institutions, such as the market, the state or scientific institutions, for granted and sees them as supra-human entities having causal effects on individuals, the kinds of institutions and their modes of working both have to be made problematic. I shall base my approach on a concept of 'duality of structure', as cast by Anthony Giddens, which sees institutions as simultaneously enabling and constraining human action, and as being reproduced through human action. A sociohistorical analysis will then have to spell out exactly who and what kind of activity is enabled and who and what is constrained. For this purpose, a distinction between different kinds of social practices shall be introduced (Chapter 2). I shall, for my own objectives, refer to only three kinds of practices: of allocation, of domination, and of signification and symbolic representation. The historical ways of habitualizing such practices and, thereby, extending them over time and space and making them into social institutions, shall be the key object of my analysis of modernity.

The historical analysis itself will start with a brief portrait of early post-revolutionary social configurations, that is, societies in the Europe of the first half of the nineteenth century. In a sense, this era was the heyday of liberal ideology, with the bourgeoisie in the ascendancy to power, as it has often been portrayed. While such a view is not invalid, I shall emphasize that the applicability of ideas of autonomy was effectively contained. With a number of institutional devices, not least the inherited state, boundaries were set to the modern project. This contained form of the bourgeois utopia, which was far from encompassing all members of a society, shall be labelled *restricted liberal modernity* (Chapter 3).

A certain self-confidence of the bourgeois elites with regard to the feasibility of their project was indeed temporarily achieved. However, from as early as the French Revolution onwards, restrictions could no longer be justified, and were increasingly contested. Also, the dynamics of liberation itself, the extension of mastery of the world and its impact on social orders, tended to upset those same orders. Often, the year 1848 is conveniently marked as the historical point after which major transformations of the restricted liberal social configuration and its self-understanding commenced. By the turn of the century, so many of the boundaries were shaken or even broken; so many people had been, often traumatically, *disembedded* from their social, cultural and economic contexts that one can speak of a *first crisis of modernity*, as a consequence of which societal developments were set on a different path (see Chapter 4).

One effect of the upsetting of social orders during the nineteenth century was that far greater parts of the population of a territory had come under the reach of modern practices. Consequently, they also had to be formally included into modern institutions. Of course, the most important of such social groups were the workers. With hindsight at least, the workers' movement and the formation of trade unions

and labour parties can be seen as a major collective action towards the full inclusion of a hitherto barred part of the population into modern practices and institutions and their achievements. The obvious example is the granting of universal and equal suffrage; however, I also want to refer to participation in such modern practices as consumption of industrial commodities, the shaping of societal self-understandings in cultural production or to the extension of reachable space by means of technologies.

We may speak of this process as an extension of modernity, an increase of the permeation of society by modernity. The process of extension was one of the breaking of boundaries. As such, it was accompanied, at least among the elites, by strong feelings about the lack of both manageability and intelligibility of 'modern society'. This perception is an important background, if not the basis, of the cultural-intellectual crisis of modernity around the turn to the twentieth century. At that time, however, social transformations had already started that were to change the nature of modern institutions along with their expansion. These transformations entailed a *reembedding* of society's individuals into a new order – to be achieved by means of an increasing formalization of practices, their conventionalization and homogenization. As the extension was reached and the social access widened, practices were standardized and new constraints as to the types of permissible activities introduced.

These transformations occurred, *mutatis mutandis*, in all major kinds of social practices. I shall first sketch the practices of allocation, where they included the building of technical-organizational systems that were operated society-wide, as well as the conventionalization of work statuses and the standardization of consumption (Chapter 5). The emergence of the mass party and its restriction to electoral politics channelled the modes of political participation. The extension of policies of social support, later to be known as the welfare state, considerably reduced material uncertainties; at the same time it extended disciplining and homogenizing practices of domination into the realm of family lives (Chapter 6). Under the impetus of establishing cognitive mastery over society, new techniques, classifications and concepts were developed in the social sciences, establishing a new mode of representation of society. One of its features is a tendency to reify major social institutions (Chapter 7).

Taken together, these sets of social practices have almost been all-inclusive with regard to members of a society. However, these practices have been highly organized. Ascriptive roles do not exist under modern conditions, of course. But for a given position in society and a given activity, these practices have prescribed a very limited set of modes of action. I shall propose to describe the social configuration that has been characterized by such practices as *organized modernity*, and the transformations that led to it as a *closure of modernity*. It is the crisis of this organized modernity that postmodernist writings refer to when proclaiming the 'end of modernity'. It seems indeed appropriate to characterize some of the institutional changes in Western societies during the past two decades as a (partial) breakdown of established arrangements and as a re-opening of 'closed' practices.

If and in as far as these changes amount to a major social transformation, though, one should see this as a *second major crisis of modernity*, rather than the end of modernity. It includes strong trends towards de-conventionalization and pluralization of practices, not least the loss of a working understanding of collective agency that once stood behind societywide organized practices (Chapter 8). This loss of collective agency obviously entails a loss of manageability, the disappearance of any actor who is legitimate, powerful and knowledgeable enough to steer interventions into social practices. As such, the disorganization of practices of allocation and domination is directly linked to a 'crisis of representation' of society, in social science as well as in other intellectual practices. Quite a number of the assumptions of modernist social science do not survive this situation unscathed. However, the question of the intelligibility of, at least, parts of the social world remains on the agenda even in an era of 'crisis of representation' and alleged 'end of social science'. The main objective of social science, as I see it, namely to contribute to our own understanding of the social world in which we live, may seem more ambitious than ever, but it is by no means superseded (Chapter 9).

Quite certainly, these crises do not spell the end of modernity as a social configuration. They mark a transition to a new historical era of it. Some intellectual doubts notwithstanding, the double imaginary signification of modernity – autonomy and rational mastery – seems widely untouched and fully intact. An optimistic interpreter of present changes may want to term this new phase *extended liberal modernity*. Under conditions of the full inclusion of all members of society, the organizing and disciplining institutions are dismantled and respective practices relaxed. Difference and plurality, sociality and solidarity could be the key words of the future, as some argue. At the same time, the building of social identities has become a more open and more precarious process, and the erosion of once-reliable boundaries has rephrased the issue of exclusion and inclusion. The decrease of certainties may entail opportunities, but also introduces new constraints and anxieties (Chapter 10).

Thus, I tend to be much more sceptical, in the face of the building of more widely extended institutions (such as global technical and economic arrangements) and of the emergence of new kinds of boundaries inside such a more intensely globalized society. These transformations may entail a new process of social disembedding, of possibly unprecedented dimensions. During the building of the social formation of organized modernity, many violent and oppressive attempts at different kinds of reembedding were started and often violently interrupted. Similar processes may occur again; at the very least, the questions of social identity and political community are badly in need of new answers (Chapter 11).

Enablement and constraint

Understanding modern institutions

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AS SETS OF RULES AND CONVENTIONS

The modernist view on contemporary society, as I have briefly portrayed it in the preceding chapter, emphasizes the autonomy of individual action, occurring in separately organized spheres of interaction each guided by its own norms. Claiming the beneficial, even optimum, outcome of social interactions in such a setting, justification precedes analysis in the master discourse of modernity. Such a perspective is not totally unfounded, since clearly human beings try to justify their actions and the social order to which those actions contribute. Imaginary significations have an impact on the organization of social practices. However, just as myths need to be placed in context in anthropological analysis, a social analysis of modernity needs to start with the actual social practices of human beings and to relate the modern myths to the organization of these practices.¹

Social institutions are here understood as relatively durable sets of rules and resources, which human beings draw on in their actions. Institutions may pre-exist any actual living human being, but they are created by human action and only continue to exist by being continuously recreated. They are habitualized practices, the knowledge about them being transmitted in interaction, most strongly in socialization and education, but also in any other everyday practice. If we say that such kinds of human activity are routinized, we mean that they are part of the practical consciousness, of knowing 'how to go on', rather than of a discursive consciousness in which reasons and intentions are provided. However, human beings are in principle capable of giving reasons for their actions and of altering them. They are capable of continuous creative activities, of working with the rules and resources of institutions and thereby transforming them.²

It has been argued that theories of the constitution of society exaggerate the knowledgeable ability and capability of human beings with regard to the social order.³ However, an understanding of social institutions in terms of a duality of structure does not preclude the identification of constraints on human action. Actions are situated in contexts in which the individual applies her own 'historical' knowledge (as traces in her memory) of rules and their meaning, of their concrete applicability and the likely outcome of their application or alteration, and is faced with the varying interpretations of the same or even other rules by other individuals. The

judgement of 'applicability', both in the sense of possibility and of necessity, implies a view, by the agent, on the durability and solidity of the rules, that is a judgement on whether modifications will have adverse consequences, will be rejected, will be indifferently received, or may even induce a positive process of rule change.⁴ In terms of their relative durability and solidity, it may be said that institutions also shape and re-shape the individuals, that they imply 'certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes'.⁵ That is why institutions are always enabling and constraining at the same time.

In more specific and historically concrete terms, this means that the 'structures', to which human beings appear to be exposed and to draw on in their actions, are the effects of earlier human action, of the modes of habitualization and conventionalization, and the material results of such action. Habits and conventions define the applicability of social rules. One may then distinguish two key sets of analytical questions, those pertaining to the construction of such conventions and those pertaining to their effects on individual human action once they exist.⁶ These questions will generate a set of terms and concepts, presented in this chapter in rudimentary form, that can be used and developed for a historical sociology of modernity, to be elaborated in the remainder of this book.

With regard to the *creation* of social conventions, the social actors who promote change, their guiding ideas and their interests will be the focus of the analysis. If, as will be the case throughout most of this study, their guiding ideas are framed by the imaginary signification of modernity, and if the interests can be understood as the enhancement of autonomy and rational mastery, then we can call the agents of change *modernizers*. Since they will often be a small group in any given society, situated mostly in influential social locations, we may speak of modernizing elites, and of their project as *modernizing offensives*, in which they use their *power* to spread modernity into society.

The key analytical questions as to the *workings* of social conventions are then: over which realms do these conventions extend (*extension* and *boundaries*)? How completely do they cover the social space over which they extend (*coverage*)? How deeply do they reach into the practices of human beings (*social permeation*)? How strongly and rigidly do they define the capabilities of a living human being who draws on them (*discipline* and *formalization*)? How are the various kinds of practices related to each other and to a common social space (*coherence*)?

Before presenting these concepts more fully, a way of talking about the various kinds of human activities in the world must be introduced. In very broad terms, views on such a basic social ontology seem to be converging on distinguishing – in various ways, though – several basic aspects of human activity and in relating this distinction to different modes of habitualizing practices. Throughout his life-work, Ernest Gellner, for instance, has distinguished 'power, wealth, and belief' as the three kinds of human ties to the world, or has metaphorically termed the three major means with which human beings work on the world as 'plough, sword, and book'.⁷ Michael Mann speaks similarly of 'ideological, economic and

political' and additionally of 'military power' as the four forms in which human beings organize societies as networks of power.⁸

Drawing on these and other conceptual and classificatory considerations, the following account of modernity will focus on three types of *practices*, practices of material allocation, practices of authoritative power (or domination), and practices of signification (or symbolic representation).⁹ When particular practices in these realms become habitualized and rules become set societywide, we can speak of *institutions* of material allocation, of authoritative power and of signification respectively. And when referring to the means by which human beings interact with, and work on, nature and matter, society and other human beings, and on themselves, we may speak of *technologies* of material allocation, of authoritative power and of signification.

The formalized modes of production and exchange in society are referred to as *institutions of material allocation*. They regulate the extraction of goods from nature and the transfer of labour into means of physical and cultural reproduction. Under capitalist conditions this includes significantly the transfer of labour power into income and the transfer of income into (consumer) goods and services. In societies with prevalent capitalist rules of material allocation, then, major – though far from exclusive – means of material allocation are money and markets. *Institutions of authoritative power* in modernity are most importantly, but again not exclusively, bureaucracies and, specifically, the modern state. The crucial problem regarding Western societies – societies under the imaginary signification of autonomy and reason – is to grasp the nature of government at 'the interface between the exercise of power and the exercise of liberty', to analyse the state as 'a mechanism at once of individualization and of totalization'.¹⁰ *Institutions of signification* are the means of providing self-understandings in relation to modes of social organization and to the relation between individuals and society. While a very broad range of such means exists in contemporary society, including religion and technologies of the soul,¹¹ the focus is here on the discursive representation of society both in 'lay' discourses and in the academic discourses of the social and human sciences.

Though I am quite open with regard to the choice of terminology and exact demarcation of these kinds of practices, three intentions behind my own approach need to be stressed and made explicit. First, I shall try to avoid the terms 'economic', 'political' and 'scientific/ideological', which are used both in the master discourse of modernity and its major critiques. These terms do not only presuppose a fairly strong idea of the separation of social spheres according to different logics, but they also introduce assumptions – affirmative or negative ones – about the normative bases and empirical outcomes of social practices, if they are organized according to these logics. As I tried to explain above, it is very difficult to escape these assumptions, if one does not try to keep a distance from the modern myth. Instead, I shall look at all social practices 'symmetrically', to use a term of the Edinburgh strong programme in the sociology of knowledge.¹² This approach does not entail a denial of the validity of the quest for efficiency, common wealth and truth, but it rejects prejudgements on ways of socially reaching such goals.

Second, this view on social practices does not presuppose that it is proto-typical bourgeois-humanist subjects who engage in them, but it does assume that the human being in her or his bodily existence is a highly relevant ontological unit in social analysis. The condition of human social practices as the interactions of individual human beings is the centre of interest. The organization and transformations of these kinds of social practices are analysed in terms of their impact on human knowledgeability and capability. All three types of institutions are creating and potentially transforming the idea and the reality of the human self over time. Thus, the 'end of the individual' or the 'end of the subject' is a possible, though extreme, finding at the end of the analysis – as, indeed, is also the dominance of the rational and autonomous individual that is hailed in economic and rationalist approaches. But neither one nor the other enters as an assumption into my argument.

Third, at the same time it is difficult to imagine that the absolute predominance of one or the other extreme conception would result from a sociohistorical analysis of modernity. Rather, they mark the space over which the modern condition may be historically traced. In this sense, a delineation of key modes of habitualized social practices at different historical points, and especially of the transformations of these practices, is a means of locating the specific condition of modernity inside this space. The general classification of practices is based on the assumption that the major characteristics of the *social formations* of modernity can thus be identified as historically varying constellations of those institutions of modernity. With these considerations in mind then, the rationales for which will, I hope, become more evident in the historical account, it should be possible to accept this initial typology.

MODERNITY AND POWER: MODERNIZATION OFFENSIVES

In modernity, notions like 'interest', 'control' and 'means' that link ideas of autonomy with ideas of mastery are crucial. Means that are developed and employed, by and for oneself or a self-defined collective, that is, autonomously, in the interest of knowing and controlling nature, social relations or oneself are almost self-justifying; mostly, it is very difficult to argue against them, under modern conditions. This is what Castoriadis tries to capture with the idea of imaginary significations of modernity. These significations provide a common basis of justification for human activities.

It is important to recognize that *all* kinds of 'modern' practices involve both strivings, for increased autonomy and for increased rational mastery, and that both these significations may be embodied in all the habitualizations of such practices, in all modern institutions. Such an approach precludes the kind of – again apriorist, I think – argumentative strategy that has been employed by many critical social theorists (and practitioners of critical involvement). It makes it impossible to posit the mode of socialization of one kind of institution against another one. The most common of such rhetorical moves is to put 'politics' against 'markets', as is done

in the socialist tradition. After the critique of bureaucracy had been more widely accepted due to twentieth-century experiences, life-worlds, communities or cultures were placed against both politics and markets. Most recently, the revival of the concept of civil society has been placed in the same intellectual tradition.¹³ As close as I may find myself to the problematic that occupies these authors, most of these kinds of reasonings, in my view, combine superficial social analysis and/or overly detached social theorizing with purely wishful thinking.

To put the conceptual problem another way: some of the postmodernist intellectuals, mostly the French ones, have been reproached for conflating a critique of capitalism with an across-the-board critique of modernity. If the dispute is phrased in those terms, I think the postmodernists have the upper hand. 'Capitalism' just refers to some, admittedly important, modern practices which, however, share common features with others. If this is an insight that the post-modernity debate has produced, it was well worth the effort. What is needed is a critique of modernity that comprises a critique of capitalism as one of its major themes.¹⁴

Many critical social theories, ranging from liberal to Marxian approaches, tend to start from two fundamental normative assumptions. First, the autonomy of the individual, her desire for self-realization and self-fulfilment is hailed; and second, domination, the submission of some human beings to the power of others, is denounced. In analytical terms, their common problem is how to account for the fact that one person's exercise of autonomy may entail domination over another person. Critical theories of capitalism have explained this undeniable fact by sources and mechanisms that lie outside the true desires of human beings, possibly historical residues, or by the erection of the basically modern order on some flawed assumptions or its incompleteness. It is time to recognize, though, after centuries of modern practices, that the problem is inside modernity itself, in the fundamental ambiguity of modern reasoning and modern social practices.

However, there is a tendency in postmodernist writings to link the critique of modernity to its wholesale rejection. It is at this point, I think, that a kind of inverse fallacy is committed, especially because an image of modernity is produced that is rather one-dimensional and poor in terms of modern contradictions. In fact, postmodernists rather fail to provide the needed critique of modernity, the task of which is to grasp the inescapable ambivalence of modernity, in both analytical and normative terms.

In one basic respect, the perspective I try to develop here is close to broadly understood postmodernist conceptions, and crucially different from reifying conceptions in modernist sociological theory: modern institutions are not regarded as autonomous and self-organizing or as occupying specific spheres of life or society, but rather as being structured in and giving structure to an *everyday life*. Taken together, these institutions provide for life forms. Everyday life is not separate from social institutions, but is lived, to varying degrees, in and with such forms of knowledge and habitualized practices. Institutions are built in everyday practices, as much as they provide rules and resources for living one's life.¹⁵

However, a sociology of modernity needs to go beyond studying the multitude

of existing social practices towards identifying the specificities of the institutions of Western societies. The task is to see which of their characteristics causes them to be built and maintained, how they structure life, give opportunities and impose constraints on action. The sum of these enablements and limitations in the everyday practices of individuals in society forms the *condition of modernity*.

If institutions exist only as long as they are recurrently reproduced by living human beings, then it is necessary to focus on their *enabling* effects on at least some individuals or groups. It is quite simply unthinkable that either a transcendental capital subject or any other fully reified institution may continue to exist if it completely dominates all human subjects, as some critical theories tend to argue. However, it may well be possible that by acquiring and using the possibilities that new institutions offer, that is, through their own actions and the effects of these actions, people may subvert certain other avenues of action.

A minimal requirement for developing such an approach is to emphasize the sociohistorical unevenness of modernity. Talk of 'modern society' conceals the fact that orientations and practices in a given social context may be more or less based on the modern imaginary. In the beginning, this imaginary was propagated by elite intellectuals who found some support, partly for quite independent reasons, in society. 'Modernity', so to speak, had very few citizens by 1800, not many by 1900, and still today it is hardly the right word to characterize many current practices. A number of social practices can indeed be better understood as a – partial or radical – rejection of the imaginary signification of modernity, the impact of which gave rise to their development. Exactly what one may call the changing degree of *social permeation* of a 'modern' understanding of individual and social life, *cum* the identification of those actors who promote such an understanding, is a key to the historical transformations of the Northwestern societies over the past two centuries.

Elements of such a reasoning can be found in the works of both Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault. Elias' theory of the civilization of societies of individuals is fundamentally one of *power*, in which the enhancement of control – control over nature, over others, and over oneself – is the key. But it is one that has a full view on the dialectics of power, in which the increase of control by the one may limit the freedom of others. As he never formalizes his tripartite distinction (and in spite of his general evolutionary perspective), he also leaves the possibility of cross-cutting impacts open, for example, that the increase of some people's control over nature may limit the control of others over their social relations or over themselves.¹⁶ Foucault's theorizing has, basically rightly, become known as emphasizing *discipline* and disciplinization. Especially in his later works, however, he was fully aware of special characteristics that the process acquired under modern conditions. In modern societies, such disciplining technologies are developed in and for 'cultures of personal autonomy predicated on a condition of liberty'.¹⁷

The introduction of the idea of an inevitable dialectics of enablement and constraint in modern institutions and of a power differential as a mover of

institutional change shows that the notion of a 'modernization process' is inappropriately socially neutralizing. In its stead, one could speak of *modernization offensives*, which are regularly pursued by certain, often small, groups with certain expectations in mind, whereas other groups, often majorities, who are less well informed about the modernization effects, may have little to expect in terms of enablements, at least in the short run, and possibly do object, or would object if they had the necessary information and power.¹⁸

On a historical level, a major (though admittedly still crude) distinction between two kinds of modernization offensives should be made. *Modernization offensives from above* use the existing power differential to create enabling institutions, in which others will participate only later and often against the interests of the original promoters. *Modernization offensives from below* are counter-moves to defend groups who are the objects of modernizations from above against the constraints and exclusions effected by those modernizations.¹⁹ They normally involve collective action, a mobilization of people who are made equal according to a new classification and subjected to new kinds of rules as such a classificatory group. The modernizing effects reside, then, in the acceptance of the new classification as a 'post-traditional' group, in the collective formation as a 'conceptual community' (Benedict Anderson) or 'class for itself' (Karl Marx) due to the mobilization, and ultimately in the full inclusion of the represented group in the new social arrangement as the result of this action.

Modernization offensives promote new rules for social practices. The introduction of a new set of formal rules will regularly both be based on power and go along with changes in power relations. Most generally, one can see existing *power differentials* as a major moving force of 'modernization'. Generally (and almost trivially), the condition for the introduction of new sets of rules will be optimal, if the expectation of enabling effects is greater than the expectation of accompanying constraints, as weighed by the relative power of the various holders of expectations. The power differential refers to the possibility of making people do and get things done, but it also includes differentials with regard to access to valid knowledge about the effects of rules, and access to the media of communication about rule-setting.

The expectational aspect needs to be stressed, because it is difficult to find any great modern project for which the outcome does not strongly deviate from the identifiable expectations of the promoters. Because of their enabling effects and because modernity's imaginary significations do not permit a general and lasting restriction of the social use of enabling technologies, new institutional arrangements will tend to get generalized throughout society. Once any set of new rules is generalized (and often *because* it gets generalized beyond the group of initial beneficiaries), it may and will involve a more general societal change, often regardless of the intentions of either the promoters or the mass users.

DISCIPLINE AND FORMALIZATION

Is it then possible to talk of a specifically modern mode of structuring the relation of enablement and constraint? A general characteristic of modernity seems to be the wide social and spatial extension of its institutions. Again this feature has been emphasized by Norbert Elias, who speaks of the lengthening of interaction chains in the process of civilization. Georg Simmel had already earlier pointed out, as had Marx in a different way, that money can be regarded as the proto-typical means of lengthening interaction chains.

The most illustrative example of this is the world-market, which has been truly global in respect of a sizeable number of goods for centuries. Also, the depth of permeation of world-market rules into local allocative practices seems to be almost steadily increasing.²⁰ Another example is the modern state, though this may seem counter-intuitive. Historically, earlier empires were often more widely extended and longer lasting than in more recent times. However, mostly they shaped actual everyday practices only to a very small extent. Only the development of the modern state, from absolutism to the present, is truly marked by the extension of administrative rules far into the everyday life of the subjects and citizens.²¹

The extension of reach, both spatially and into social practices, is clearly related to technical innovations, not least those of transport and communication.²² Faster and more reliable means of sea travel, and new means of fast long-distance communication would be historical examples relevant to world-market and state expansion respectively. However, the idea of technical advance has to be broadly conceived, it needs to include any formalized modes of operation that do not necessarily involve new technical knowledge or materials. Double book-keeping is an obvious example, not only because its invention happened to coincide with the 'discovery' of America. Census-keeping is a related example for administrative practices.

It is exactly this *formalization* of modes of action that almost all these inventions have in common. Formalization is a way of reinterpreting the world and re-classifying its elements with a view to increasing manageability. The achievements of modern institutions in terms of the extension of reach are regularly based on such kinds of formalization. My understanding of this term is close to Weber's concept of rationalization, provided that the emphasis in Weber's famous sentence is maintained: 'Increasing intellectualization and rationalization do *not*, therefore, indicate an increasing general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives.' They merely mean, Weber continues, a belief in the *knowability* and, following from it, in the *mastery* of the world by means of *calculation*.²³ Re-reading Weber in the light of recent sociology of knowledge and of postmodernism, one may note the explicit disjunction between epistemological validity claims and the sociological observation of spreading techniques of calculation that effectively change the world *and* the outlook of human beings in it. It is not very far from there to Lyotard's (analytical, not normative) emphasis on performativity as the dominant criterion for knowledge evaluation.²⁴

Formalization is always based on a *classificatory* procedure. Certain phenomena of reality are ordered and the orders given linguistic expression, thereby a first step of separating them from their context is taken. Classification entails the construction of concepts that *represent* certain aspects of the world rather than merely naming them. Modern practices, not least because of their extension, always involve representations, the presenting of something which is not literally present, that is, money for a good or work, an electronic wave for a sound, a group of human beings selected according to a certain rule for the collective will of the political community, a concept of social science for a part of social life, etc. The rules of formalization are related to the form, rigidity and reach of the representations; a change in those rules will normally involve a restructuring of the social world.

With classification, *boundaries* are also created towards other phenomena in the world that are different, and phenomena of the same class are made equal to each other. To envisage a monetary and market economy, for instance, the first conceptual move is to see certain social phenomena as 'goods' to which monetary values, that is, descriptors in the same unit, can be attached. This move may have been the more important one compared to the derivative notions of self-regulation and enhancement of national wealth.²⁵

The lack of any resolution to the debate on the labour theory of value shows the *theoretical* underdetermination (if not arbitrariness) and relative openness of description in unitary terms.²⁶ *Sociologically*, however, the increasing use of this mode meant a social convention of the formalization of a certain kind of economic expression. The convention was astoundingly 'successful' in increasing the reach of allocative practices generally, and also in enabling individual holders of value access to a wider range of allocative exchange. Formalization, however, to continue on this illustration, also meant that only phenomena that were socially expressible and expressed in money had access to this wider range of exchange. A social valuation process was introduced on the formal basis of this unifying descriptor and regardless of whatever qualities were actually included or excluded by it. The same holds true for the actors in allocative practices, the solely important criterion for which became whether they were holders of money and moneywise valuable qualities or not.²⁷

Formalization is a reductive process. By reducing reality to one or a few decisive qualities, it makes it intelligible and manageable. By such effects, it is *enabling*. At the same time, it makes possession of such a quality the decisive access-point to its enabling features. By the very means of classification, it applies strong inclusion-exclusion rules and structures possibilities for action. Its main *constraining* effects reside in the setting of boundaries by excluding certain features from communication and consideration and by excluding certain people under certain circumstances, or with certain intentions, from action possibilities. Such boundaries are always social conventions, created by human beings in identifiable historical circumstances. But at a given point of their existence, they may appear to all or most of the living human beings who draw on them, as *natural*.²⁸

RULE TRANSFORMATION AND CRISES OF MODERNITY

In such a perspective, historical transformations of modernity will be conceived of as sequences of major rule changes, of institutional innovations, and as changes in configurations of institutions. Promoters of new rule-sets have to be identified, and the enabling and constraining characters of such rule-sets for different groups at different points of their diffusion and application have to be discerned. In spite of possibly lasting unintended effects that appear disconnected from modernizing intentions, 'modernizations' are not self-propelled processes, but modernization offensives, pursued by certain groups of actors for reasons linked to the nature of the institutional changes they promote. To anchor this attempt at a historical sociology of modernity in chronological history will need some sort of periodization. I shall propose a notion of 'crisis of modernity' as a step towards this end.

The term 'crisis' has been too widely diffused in the social sciences to be used innocently any longer. In its Greek origins, the medical term referred to the phase of an illness in which either recovery sets in or death threatens. In its everyday usage, the term lost its neutrality in terms of outcomes, and the connotation of danger and threat, of possibly terminal decline is emphasized. In the social sciences, the term appears to be originally related to organicist thinking, in which a crisis would be exactly equivalent to the critical phase of an illness.³⁶ It was revived in systemic thinking in the sense that a crisis exists when the reproductive needs of a system are not fulfilled. As in the case of a living body, systemic thinking has to assume a critical level of fulfilment below which reproduction becomes impossible.³⁷

Such a strict understanding cannot be upheld, because societies normally cannot be understood as bodies or systems. These concepts presuppose an organic coherence or a functional interrelatedness and self-reference; on such a basis, one may identify illness or crisis as a problem in system maintenance and death or breakdown as a failure of system maintenance. However, conditions of coherence such as may be found in bodies and in purposefully created technical devices are difficult to envisage for the social practices of a multitude of individuals. Sociological thought, as long as it continues along this line, remains trapped in the misconceptions of two of its constitutive phases. The first is the Enlightenment tradition in which coherence and integration were conceived in normative terms as the necessary and inevitable outcome of the use of reason. The second is the classical era of sociological reasoning, about a century later, when the European nation-state empirically seemed to be such a case of an ordered set of social practices, spatially circumscribed and resting in themselves. Also, and maybe equally importantly, intellectual practices themselves were oriented toward the nation and based in national institutions. Since then, sociologists have tended to conflate the general concept of 'society' with the empirical phenomenon of territorially bounded social practices. The *coherence* of social practices, however, cannot be assumed, but its degree has to be made part of the empirical inquiry.

In general terms, it is more appropriate to view societies openly as configurations of institutions, where institutions are seen as habitualized practices. It is the constant reenactment of practices that forms institutions. If we see institutions as relatively stable sets of social conventions, then we may regard the building of such institutions as a process of *conventionalization*, and a crisis as being marked by tendencies towards de-conventionalization, followed by the creation of new sets of conventions. The chains of interaction that link human beings may be reoriented or extended and the kinds of linkages that are used may be altered, and so societies change their shape and extension. Crises will then be understood as periods when individuals and groups change their social practices to such an extent that major social institutions and, with them, the prevailing configuration of institutions undergo a transformation.

Such crises often go along with a sense of decline or rupture or end of an order. Such a sense of 'crisis' (in an everyday meaning) may stem from the fact that many of those people who do not actively change their habits will, during such changes, be exposed to the effects of decisions taken by others. More generally, such periods of transformation are problem-ridden in the view of those who live through it, because it simply is difficult to perceive the collective outcome of many concurrent changes at the time they are enacted. Finally, however, the sense of crisis may also well be limited to those steady observers of society who have come to be called intellectuals from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards. Intellectuals tend to emphasize the need for coherence and to link order strongly with significations. Lack of integration and of signification may often affect many other people quite differently. For instance, the likelihoods for decline or rise of their own position and trade may be reassessed, and one may merely change one's own practices accordingly, often thereby accelerating the change of the configuration.

I shall argue that, in such a perspective, Western societies have experienced two major crises of modernity since its inception.³⁸ First, attempts to restructure the social order accumulated during the second half of the nineteenth century; and between the closing years of that century and the end of the First World War, the practices of modernity were set on a new social path. Second, from the 1960s onwards, doubts about the adequacy and desirability of the mode of social organization have again increased, and social practices are being restructured. In cultural and intellectual terms, one may say that such reorientations cumulated first in the *fin de siècle* and now in the postmodernity debate. However, in spite of their appearance in some of the self-reflective discourses, such crises are not primarily philosophical or epistemological ones. Most of the philosophical issues are hardly new, they rather recur and gain new attention.

MODERNITY AND CONTINGENCY

The final question that needs to be touched on at this stage, then, is whether the successive crises and transformations of modernity lead in a specific historical direction. This question is not meant to inadvertently let the discussion glide into

evolutionism. However, it may be the case that through their recurring attempts at conventionalization and de-conventionalization, human beings may consistently emphasize certain kinds of rules over others, and may make some kinds of rules historically unachievable.

Often, the history of modernity is taken to involve a steady widening of the scope of institutions. The development of the world-market, again, is the prime example. The range of applications of a homogeneous set of social rules is steadily extending, and more and more social practices are guided by these rules. Scope and depth of inclusion increase constantly. Such a globalization of the very few characteristically modern conventions is then seen to entail the dissolution of the historical, locally specific modes of boundary-setting and of rule-making, at least with regard to key sets of social practices. Modernity breaks all boundaries, melts everything into the air.

There is a sense in which this image of the destruction of all boundaries is valid. The acceptance of the idea of individual autonomy as a basic imaginary signification has – in a limited, but important sense – irreversibly transformed the conditions of social development.

When he is defined as independent, the individual does not . . . acquire a new certainty in place of the old . . . He is doomed to be tormented by a secret uncertainty. . . . The emergence of the individual does not merely mean that he is destined to control his own destiny; he also has been dispossessed of his assurance as to his identity – of the assurance which he once appeared to derive from his station, from his social condition, or from the possibility of attaching himself to a legitimate authority.³⁹

This statement is fully acceptable in terms of a political philosophy of modernity. Thus far, modernity indeed means contingency. Still, if this term were to describe a mode of social life, it probably does not hold for any historical group of actual living human beings. Actual human beings will – and have to – devise means of decreasing contingency. The relevant question for a sociohistorical analysis is whether the conditions for them to do so change.

Though some historical processes can be viewed in terms of increasing contingency, as a general sociological interpretation such a theorem is flawed. It is exactly during periods of crisis that there may be a strong desire to limit the scope of rules by referring to social conditions and invoking authorities. More widely extended institutions are, almost by definition, less amenable to intervention and control by any specific group among those human beings who fall under their range of applicability. But exactly for this reason, we may also find that attempts to decrease sociopolitical (and also individual) contingency are more strongly forthcoming. These institutions invite efforts at limitation and the setting of new boundaries, efforts which are in no way doomed to fail from the start, owing to some inescapable logics of modernity. As I will show later, successful efforts at limiting the scope of modern institutions have strongly shaped the history of modernity – and there is no reason to assume that this will not be the case in the future.

Still, if we survey briefly the history of modernity, anticipating the argument of this book, then we may well find a general increase of contingency. In this context, the current normative political debate on communitarianism is a significant indicator of the present condition of modernity. It is the most recent instance of arguing for boundaries, for limiting the impact of individual liberalism. But compared to earlier political theories with related ambitions, it is the least substantively defined. While it is easy to recognize the problems of individual liberalism, it is extremely difficult, under current conditions, to argue for *any* general norm or rule that sets boundaries to individual autonomy and defines community.⁴⁰

Very little appears as naturally given any longer, and it is difficult to justify a collective rule or outcome when its 'naturalness' cannot be invoked. Current aporias of political theory often emerge because implicit assumptions of earlier thinking have to be withdrawn as norms of social interaction are being de-naturalized. Nation- and culture-specific norms, for example, emerge visibly as set norms when they are questioned by international and intercultural interaction. The increase in social constructedness as well as the awareness of such constructedness, thus make the political issue of justification highly problematic.

In the above terms, a political sociology of modernity must also study the historically changing devices of justification. Modern institutions may vary in the exact degree to which they tend to define moments of social life as situations that have to be treated in common.⁴¹ Historically, the hypothesis is that towards the end of the nineteenth century a greater set of situations was thus defined, and the relevant community was often determined as the nation. Currently, however, the converse seems to be the case, at least in the West. An astonishing feature of many contemporary debates, for instance, is that only deliberately set norms count as being in need of justification, whereas the 'unruly' outcome of many individual practices, such as that of the market or the supremacy of cars as a means of transport, is regarded as 'natural', because it is in line with the fundamental assumption of individual autonomy. Proposals for collective deliberations on substantive matters bear 'the onus of argument', as Charles Taylor formulates it.⁴² To see more clearly what arguments have been and can be proposed for what kinds of collective and substantive objectives, we now have to turn to the sociohistorical analysis.

Part II

The first crisis of modernity

Chapter 3

Restricted liberal modernity

The incomplete elaboration of the modern project

The project of a liberal society, focused as it was on the idea of human autonomy, was universal and without boundaries in principle. As such it was truly utopian. A global society, inclusive of all individuals in an egalitarian way, seemed a rather abstract and far-fetched imagery. In historical reality, indeed, the more concrete visions of societal renewal, as they were held by the promoters of the project, were much more limited and very well bounded. A historical sociology of the first century of modernity, so to speak, can rest on the analysis of two main social phenomena of the nineteenth century. First, the socially dangerous openness of modernity was well recognized. As a consequence, the foundations of such a society were only very incompletely elaborated in practice, and means were developed to contain the modern project (Chapter 3).

Second, after the contours of such a contained, restricted liberal society had become visible, a corpus of critical ideas emerged. Its authors tended to claim that the project, in the form in which it had been proposed, was not feasible. Ongoing tensions between the liberation promises and the containment needs seemed to call for new authoritative responses to remedy the problems inherent in the socio-historical realization of the project. By the end of the nineteenth century, the 'post-liberal' compromise that had been reached appeared unstable and unsatisfactory to most of its observers and participants, and – from the end of the First World War onwards, at the latest – new sets of social conventions were being constructed. This extended transformation can be described as the first crisis of modernity (Chapter 4).

My argument on the containment of the modern project will proceed in three steps. Looking at some practices of signification, first, the *intellectual means* of setting boundaries will be discussed in terms of historically varying ways of providing identity for oneself by constructing the other as an inverse image of oneself. Second, focusing on the most important practices of domination, the *institutional form* of enforcing the boundaries towards the other will be analysed by taking a look at the state and law. Third, the *substantive exclusions* will be discussed as ways of externalizing social phenomena that could not be handled in modernist practices of the nineteenth century. After these three steps have been taken, the boundaries can be identified of a social formation that lived up to the

universalism and individualism of the liberal project only in a very restricted sense. Ultimately, a brief first excursion will be made into the United States of America which, while not without boundaries of its own making, showed less restrictions than its European counterparts.

BOUNDARY-SETTING (I): MODERNITY AND THE OTHER

As anthropologists maintain, 'cultures' can form only if they define themselves in comparison to something which they are not.¹ The notion of savagery, for instance,

belongs to a set of culturally self-authenticating devices which includes, among many others, the ideas of 'madness' and 'heresy' as well. . . . They do not so much refer to a specific thing, place, or condition as dictate a particular attitude governing a relationship between a lived reality and some area of problematical existence that cannot be accommodated easily to conventional conceptions of the normal or familiar.²

Its sociological or anthropological basis is the 'conception of a divided humanity, and a humanity in which differentness was conceived to reflect a qualitative rather than merely a quantitative variation'.³

Similarly, modernist social scientists have often tried to understand their societies in contrast to some other, earlier or distant, counterpart, mostly labelled 'traditional' society. The dichotomy of 'modernity' and 'tradition' has merely succeeded, but not fundamentally altered earlier ones. It is hardly surprising then that only very few social scientists have bothered to give evidence of the existence of such a homogeneous counterpart to 'modernity' nor have they been able to argue for its systematic distinctiveness from their own society. 'Traditional society' is largely a sociological construct that was developed as a tool of comparison when trying to grasp the present.⁴

The discourses of modernity displayed a universalism of reason that provided the basis for its totalizing claims: these were new insights that should basically hold for all humankind. However, not everybody was convinced of the validity of the modernist claims, nor did observations of social reality decisively underpin its validity. Such a situation was clearly a dilemma for a universalist project. It needed to set boundaries in the name of reason. Universality was to be restricted on actual grounds of lacking empirical plausibility as well as political feasibility, and such restrictions were theoretically argued for by making basic distinctions in the realm of universality itself.

Such boundaries were set by the construction and, thereby, the distancing of the other, the removal of the other from the same time-space of humanity. The concept of the barbarian is basically a means of *distancing in space*, barbarians lived elsewhere. The concept of tradition, in contrast, is rather a mode of *distancing in time*. It may seem less radical than the idea of the barbarian, because it allows for a developmental perspective, the mere postponement of full integration of the others into the future. However, it does so only under the condition that the others

give up their otherness. As Johannes Fabian has pointed out, the modern perspective is marked by a 'denial of coevalness' to any form of life different from its own. It erected a wall between the other and itself, where 'the very notion of containing walls and boundaries creates order and sense based on discontinuity'.⁵ The other is defined 'in a way that *a priori* decides its inferior and, indeed, transient and (until disappearance) illegitimate status. In an age of the forward march of reason-guided progress, describing the Other as outdated, backward, obsolete, primitive, and altogether "pre-", was equivalent to such a decision'.⁶

Enlightenment discourse had developed an encompassing and universal concept of humankind, against the concepts of both king and God. Once the idea of Enlightenment as the exit from self-caused heteronomy was pronounced, it proved uncontrollable and its own dynamics very soon pushed it beyond the initial conceptions. 'Humanity' and 'autonomy' do hardly allow for social limitations, they seem boundary-less, as was recognized at the time. After the French Revolution at the latest, however, it became obvious that the modern project had less secure foundations than it seemed in those self-conscious and optimistic writings. Given the fear, nourished by the *terreur* of the French Revolution, that society could get out of control, a major intellectual struggle was to contain the concept, to close it, to try to set boundaries.⁷ The others inside one's own society were identified by their lack of reason and civilization; they comprised most importantly the *lower, working classes*, the *women* and the *mad*.

When the feudal orders disassembled, the lower classes, including farm workers, industrial workers and servants, who were unbound and appeared less controlled, turned into a threat to the social order in the eyes of many observers. Soon the industrial workers were singled out from the paupers. 'Words and notions such as "proletariat," "dangerous classes," haunted the discourse and imagination of the first half of the nineteenth century'.⁸ They were seen as inherently more dangerous, because they were easily recognized as a product of the emerging bourgeois society itself. Just like the bourgeoisie they stood at the beginning of their historical existence and could expect to have a future, as, of course, Karl Marx soon recognized and took as a basis for his own philosophy of history. So even if, or precisely because, the lower classes' coevality was hard to deny, clear boundaries had to be set and maintained:

At the basis of the discussion of the nature of the new 'dangerous classes' of mass society stands a deep and abiding anxiety over the very concept of humanity itself, a concept which, in turn, has its origin in an identification of true humanity with membership in a specific social class.⁹

The exclusion of the lower classes from the liberal order was probably the most prominent topic of political debates and struggles for more than a century after the French Revolution. Many different elements entered into the political theories that were – explicitly or implicitly – applied, ranging from a clinging to feudal conceptions, to linkages between property ownership and the assumption of political responsibility, to issues of moral education and conceptions of representation and representability.

In contrast, the systematic character of the exclusion of women has been much less widely debated and generally been accepted, outside feminist and women's rights circles. Gender in liberal political theory was a silenced issue. From the point of view of many discussants, this restriction was hardly a question of strongly willed exclusion, rather a quite natural extension of a double basic assumption, namely the distinction of a public and a private sphere *cum* the identification of the former with the man and the latter with the woman. Civil society was formed in the public sphere where men represented their property, including wife and children, house and estate, and servants. Only the male, property-owning head of a household, who was capable of sharing the burden as a citizen, could be regarded as a being endowed with full rights.¹⁰

Only in recent years has the history of the gendering of politics and society been more systematically reworked. It has been shown that the explicit designation of a special status to women is consistently found in the areas of philosophy, the human and social sciences, political theory and actual forms of political participation.¹¹ Far from liberating women and enabling them to full participation in all social realms, the bourgeois restructuring introduced more formalized rules and formally excluded women from a range of activities, most prominently political participation, to which they could contribute more informally under the Old Regimes, at least under favourable circumstances. In the terms of Joan Landes, 'the collapse of the older patriarchy gave way to a more pervasive *gendering* of the public sphere.' The creation of a realm of collective political self-determination in electoral institutions set boundaries in such a way that women were placed outside. In politics, as in the other discourses, the main argument given was on the natural endowments of women, a specific female anthropology that focused on emotions and lack of control, thus also lack of civilization and amenability to reason. 'The exclusion of women from the bourgeois public was not incidental but central to its incarnation.'¹²

The distinction between reason and unreason is at the roots of all modern attempts at boundary-setting. Its ultimate form hits at the very core of unreason, namely madness. Again, like in the case of the special anthropology of the female sex, very little doubt was voiced until recently about the validity of the discourses on madness and the adequacy of the respective practices of seclusion and control. The extreme shakiness of the ground on which these rested could only be identified when the fundamental affirmative assumption of the need to separate reason and unreason was given up, and detached 'archeological' and 'genealogical' studies into the history of these very discourses were undertaken.¹³ I shall not go deeper into this discussion in which others are far more knowledgeable and competent than I am. Rather, I shall draw together some of the strands of this brief outline with a view to its relevance for a sociology of modernity.

Arguably, we can find in every culture sets of classifications which orient everyday activities and structure social institutions. In the modern discourses, the basic classificatory distinction is made between reason and civilization, on the one side, and its inversion on the other: wildness, tradition, disorder, emotion, insanity. A main theme of modern reasoning is the creation of order, by the imposition of

order on wildness or, if that is impossible, by the separation of the disorderly from the orderly. This theme is obviously related to the idea of rational mastery; disorder defies prediction and control.

A certain shift in the construction of the other during modernity can be observed, though there is no clear temporal sequence, rather a superimposition of themes with shifting emphases. The mode of distancing became ever more problematic and subtle, in a historical process of *approaching* the other. While the savages could be seen as far away in space and members of traditional social formations as far away in time, workers, women and the mad were indubitably present. And yet, even those were not similarly present. The lower classes were present in one's own society (and firm, possibly), the women in one's own family and intimate relations, and madness in one's own body and mind.

From one perspective, it may be argued that the distancing of the other became more difficult the closer it came. Without doubt, the workers' movement, the women's movement and the debates on psychoanalysis and psychiatry have forced themes on the agenda of the bourgeois revolution that the revolutionaries and their established followers would have preferred to avoid. They were taken by their claim to universality and autonomy, and the unjustified and unjustifiable boundaries they had erected were questioned and, partly at least, dismantled over time. This discourse is, ultimately, one of liberation; it is a specific one, though, because the rhetorical figure under which the observed processes are put is that of the return of the repressed.

From another perspective, one can relate the process of repression and re-thematization to historical changes in the social formation. Then, the argument could be that there was socially threatening otherness in the lower classes, the women and the mad at the outset of the bourgeois project. But throughout its historical development, the social formation was itself transformed, and transformed otherness, in such a way that the danger was reduced. This interpretation is not uncommon for the historical complex of the workers' movement, the 'social question' and the transformation of allocative institutions, and I shall return to it at several points below. Historical transformations of the place of women in society, of the family and of intimacy as well as of modes of constituting self-identity can probably be interpreted along similar lines.¹⁴ The transformations of the social formation can then be read as an actually successful imposition of order on wildness. What was (and had to be) repressed at the outset of modernity, was increasingly controlled and mastered so that it could ultimately be set free.¹⁵

Both perspectives would accept the historical account as one of the initial setting of boundaries and their gradual, or also less gradual, erosion over time. Later in this chapter, I shall try to show how the substantive terms of some of these boundaries provided the material for a construction of social identity. The modes of construction of social identity themselves changed historically, they became ever more modern, that is self-constituted rather than ascribed or 'natural'. But before going into the substantive analysis, the institutional form, which was used for such purposes and which was to contain the collective identity, needs to be

introduced. This form is the state, as a set of rules of domination that was pre-given to the bourgeois movements, but also creatively appropriated and transformed in their struggles.

BOUNDARY-SETTING (II): MODERNITY AND THE STATE

What is at issue in the question of the state is the fencing-in of the new society against its own consequences. In the view of the emancipatory movements, the Old Regime was built on untenable foundations and had to be destroyed. But it proved to be the case that the order of reason would not grow naturally, that instead, to avoid being undermined by the dynamics of its own premises, it had to be defined. Criteria had to be developed for social practices that could then be imposed on an often recalcitrant society.¹⁶

For the European context, which is at the centre of my argument, it is essential to see that the perceived need for boundary-setting did not come up in a politically de-structured setting. By contrast, the Old Regime had left a very prominent form in, and through, which the new order could be established, namely the modern state that had emerged from feudalism. By the eighteenth century, this order had already been endowed with the notion of *sovereignty*, with a certain degree of formalization of the still personalized power of the ruler by the means of *law*, and with a set of disciplining practices of *governmentality*.¹⁷

The concept of sovereignty over a territory and the people who lived in it emerged in the conflicts between royal rulers and between the rulers and the estates in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the time when the legitimacy of the king was questioned, the conception that everything that was subject to a ruler formed some sort of entity was well established. Rather than abandoning any notion of preconceived entities, as radically liberal thought would have to see it, merely the location of the ultimate source of legitimacy was changed.

When society can no longer be represented as a body and is no longer embodied in the figure of the prince, it is true that people, state and nation acquire a new force and become the major poles by which social identity and social communality can be signified.¹⁸

Basically then, the existing and accepted concept of sovereignty had only to be reinterpreted in constitutional and republican ways.¹⁹

In Europe, this conceptual shift rested most importantly on the existence of the state institutions, and the continuity of these institutions through revolutionary upheavals is evidence of the fact that the shift 'worked' in practical terms. In theoretical terms, however, the tension between individualist and collectivist foundations of the polity, which was characteristic of all social contract theory, had not been alleviated. Rather, it was exaggerated by the experience of 'the people' threatening to indeed exercise its sovereignty during the French Revolution. Hegel, for instance, appreciated both the bourgeois, liberal values and the revolutions, but he strongly recognized the unbounded character of the new society. His

understanding of the state as the embodiment of higher reason was a conceptual means of reconciling individual autonomies and particularities with the need for a unifying whole. In those terms, one can put the Hegelian problematic as the reconciliation of the historical achievement of abstract liberties and the need for a reconstitution of collective identity in community.²⁰

A similarly paradoxical (or dialectical) development can be observed with regard to policy practices. During the Old Regime, increasingly detailed orders and decrees were issued that tended to regulate ever more aspects of the everyday lives of the ruler's subjects. This was a government invasion into activities hitherto uncontrolled or, at least, not centrally controlled. It had the purpose of enforcing discipline, deepening the hold of state power into society and transforming it into governance. Michel Foucault speaks of the very emergence of 'governance' from a broader and looser concept of rule. It was accompanied by the promotion of the so-called cameral and police sciences at the universities that were supposed to develop systematic knowledge about such policy interventions.²¹

But these changes altered the character of the personalized rule of feudal rulers. While they were not meant to abolish or substitute this rule, they introduced objectified, formalized regulation in the form of public law. In this form, the existence of a set of formally regulated activities provided the space free of public regulation and with it the precondition of the idea of liberty *from* the state. It was in this space, created by the all-pervasive cameralist state practices, that the discourse on liberation could later flourish.²²

Zygmunt Bauman has put the historical relation between the Enlightenment discourse of liberty and the use of state institutions as follows:

Harsh realities of politics in the aftermath of . . . the final collapse of the feudal order made the diversity of lives and relativity of truths much less attractive. . . . Enlightened and not-so-enlightened rulers set out to build anew, willfully and by design, the order of things. . . . The new, modern order took off as a desperate search for structure in a world suddenly denuded of structure.²³

In an impressive range of writings, Bauman has painted a picture of modernity with very sharp contours. In his view, the constitution of modernity should be seen as the monopolistic imposition of a new regime characterized by the will to identify otherness, legislate order and eliminate ambivalence. The monopolistic claim of the modern state to the territory and its people showed close cognitive affinity to the universal claim to truth by philosophy and (social) science. Thus, modern, legislating intellectual practices can be distinguished from postmodern, interpreting ones that emerge later as a response to modern impositions.²⁴

This is a powerful portrait, and in an era in which 'actually existing' modernity and modernization are again equated with normative and functional superiority, it is a very timely reminder of quasi-totalitarian domination in the name of the universal idea of reason. But, though he is rarely explicit about historical periods, Bauman shows a peculiar tendency to bracket his main line of argument on the modern imposition of order with two fringe lines. As the quotation above shows,

modernity was initially about liberty, diversity and relativity, in his view. This proved untenable, and modernity turned to ordering the chaos, to eliminating ambivalence in the name of reason and by the means of bureaucratic control. Nazism and Stalinism came to be the epitomes of modernity. However, the subflow was never completely suppressed, and liberty, diversity and relativity re-emerged under the sign of postmodernity. Bauman prefers these tendencies, though he recognizes problems of fragmentation and dispersion due to insufficient communication and lack of social consensus and solidarity.²⁵

This distinction of main and fringe lines of argument is not very satisfactory. It is conceptually inadequate, since it does not capture the fundamental ambivalence of modernity itself. Also, it distorts the historical occurrences. The quote above suggests that fear of freedom followed on the post-revolutionary experience of uncertainty and led to the turn towards order. But neither the latter nor the former is true, at least not as the direct and immediate linkage that Bauman suggests. The discourse on modernity included notions of reason, order and control from the beginning, that is, before the revolutions. And, though the idea of a social void has been related to the *terreur* of the French Revolution, the historical experience of diversity and relativity was very limited in post-revolutionary Europe. True, the Revolution heightened the awareness of the need for new boundaries. But the rules provided by the pre-revolutionary states mostly remained (and were often consciously kept) intact, and they were used and transformed for the *bounded* shaping of the new order.

The Enlightenment discourse should not be mistaken for the social practices of the bourgeois revolutionaries. Very soon, the latter were willing to enter into factual coalitions with the more moderate and enlightened of their opponents. Conservative warnings of an inappropriately egalitarian homogenization of society and bourgeois concerns about a containment of the processes set in motion often went hand in hand, in the reasoning of political actors and in the actual reforms and their limitations. The sets of mostly state-organized institutions, like the schools, the prisons and the asylums, which have most penetratingly been analysed by Michel Foucault, showed simultaneously an educational, disciplinary and exclusionary character, as also the respective discourses about them reveal in their more Enlightenment-style or more conservative taint.

On both sides, the conservative and the liberal ones, it also became increasingly clear that the state form might not suffice to maintain social order. Many observers recognized that the containment of the liberal utopia needed to be based on some substantive elements.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

Modern discourse constructed the human being as capable of teleological action, controlling his body and nature, and as autonomous towards his fellow human beings. These are the essentials of a rational-individualistic theory of human

action, which, as the imaginary signification of modernity, is reflected not least in the modernist social sciences.²⁶ The unreality of this conception did not escape even its promoters and some of their more sceptical contemporaries. Partly, it was seen as a programme, indeed the project of modernity, to liberate human beings from their subjection to nature, from unchosen ties to others, and from the contradictions within themselves. 'After all, modernity is a rebellion against fate and ascription.'²⁷

Partly, however, modernizers and their critics were aware of a deep-rooted deficiency in the entire approach. It was suspected that it would create a cold universe, that it would destroy any sense of belonging. In its most optimistic version, the modern discourse regarded the liberations as breaking all unwanted ties, all imposed relations, but freeing human beings to recreate communities of their own choosing. The third item of the French revolutionary slogan, 'brotherhood' (its sexist bias notwithstanding), represents these hopes and expectations.

If not principally, this idea was at least sociologically unrealistic. The modernizing elites themselves based their practices implicitly on the continuity of some 'natural' bonds. And the larger parts of the population who were more exposed to modernity than they had chosen to be, were very open to accepting new collectively binding arrangements without having individually and rationally considered them. Much of the remaining part of this chapter – and actually of the entire book – will be about these two types of bonds, the remaining 'natural' ones, in the process of further dissolution, and the newly created ones, permanently vulnerable to destruction and open to modified recreation.

To some extent, the discussion can be led by taking up again the various othernesses from which modern man tried to distance himself. Modern reasoning emphasized the objective of controlling nature and one's own body. It introduced a strict boundary between the human and the *natural*. This was no short and linear process. From first seeing humankind as an integral part of a harmonious natural order to viewing nature as a source, with the help of which humans can awaken their inner selves, the modern discourse gradually moves towards an instrumental stance towards nature. Rather than being a clear objective, this stand-point was enforced by an intellectual dilemma, namely that of combining the negation of religion with the affirmation of the significance of nature. 'The language that seemed necessary for the first left no place for the second. . . . The problem is denied, the inarticulate remains semi-repressed.'²⁸ This move did not go fully uncontested. Post-revolutionary romanticism, for instance, tried to reintroduce an idea of natural unity. However, the basic steps for de-deifying nature and for making it amenable to instrumental treatment and exploitation were taken in the modern discourse.²⁹

The uncontrolled and unpredictable elements in human behaviour, including madness, were also generally seen as remnants of nature that were to be suppressed. The control of mind and body has, since Freud, been discussed under the rhetorical figure of repression and the 'return of the repressed'. The

uncalculated, but nevertheless damaging impact of human activities on nature (after separation, called 'environment') has more recently been debated, as proposed by economists, under the figure of the 'externalization of effects'. Both forms of rhetoric draw on the concept of boundary-setting and exclusion. Once something is defined, a boundary between inside and outside is drawn. Phenomena will structure themselves according to their position towards the boundary, inside or outside. Benefits may be gained from imposing a boundary, but the 'costs' will anyhow occur, though they may be partially (that is, socially, temporarily) invisibilized. Parts of reality are repressed in order to develop other ones. One may argue, though, that the inside ultimately can only be privileged at the cost of a 'return of the repressed'.³⁰

Regularly, modern reasoning drew a boundary at places where more open, fluid conceptions prevailed before modernity. The issue of the *genderization* of the public sphere has already briefly been touched upon. While under the Old Regime women of high standing could well contribute to public debate, the French Revolution as well as all later suffrage rules throughout the nineteenth century formally excluded women from institutionalized political participation. Full equality was established in these terms only in the twentieth century, sometimes only after the Second World War.

In contrast to 'the ecological question', 'the woman question' should appear to be 'solvable' on the basis of modern principles, namely by the application of equal rights. Significantly though, the modern way has long been the road not taken in practice. The modern closure seems to consist here in the fact that the social rule for fulfilling the human desire for intimate sociality is written *in ascriptive terms*, namely as an asymmetric bondage through a marriage that subordinates women, confined to the *private realm* of the house. A 'truly modern' focus on the isolated self-centred individual would need to universalize the rules for allocative and authoritative practices and to 'open' the issue of intimate sociality (as well as human procreation). It would let men and women, with all the uncertainties it may entail, self-create these rules in their own practice. So, the genderization of the public sphere and the under-thematization of the issue of gender generally have their systematic place as maintainers of a guarded, bounded realm that is not intended to be exposed to modern liberty.³¹

Gender and nature are clearly two of the key issues of modernity that remain unresolved. Significantly, movements to reconsider both questions, though never completely silent, increased their strength at about the turn to the twentieth century, that is, in the period that I shall label the first crisis of modernity, and after the 1960s, that is, during the second crisis of modernity.

At this point of my argument, I want to stress two other issues that were historically used to settle the contradictions of modernity, at least temporarily. These are the issues of *cultural-linguistic identity* (the national question) and of *social solidarity* (the social question), around which a temporary containment of modernity was achieved. Before discussing these two themes in more detail, the general interlinkage of boundary-setting and identity-building shall be

recapitulated. Far from living up to the abstract ideal of isolated individuals set free from all ties and constraints, some boundaries were maintained and others erected in the early history of modernity. Some of the early solutions to the self-created problems of modernity worked with concepts of *natural* givenness. Ethnicity, language and gender provided criteria for how to distribute individuals among social orders and how to place them inside these social orders.³²

None of these criteria have obviously completely eroded. During the history of modernity, however, even though they have repeatedly been strongly applied, they have tended to become less persuasive. Large-scale migrations made it difficult to allot cultural-linguistic groups to contiguous territories, and attempts at cultural assimilation – though they were often brutally tried – did not always have the intended result. Increasing access to 'public' allocative and authoritative practices as well as the impact of the women's movement have altered the position of women in society. Although complete genderwise contingency of social practices is far from being achieved, a conception of the household as a sociopolitical unit is impossible to maintain. Ascriptive criteria, through which it is completely predetermined whether an individual forms part of a social group or not, are widely seen as inapplicable.

In a first historical step, so to speak, such criteria have been complemented by criteria of interest according to social location. Social identity was then constructed by membership in a class. The class location of an individual was no longer naturally fixed and not completely unalterable. But most of the political discourses between the middle of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth century treated it as quasi-natural. An individual was born and socialized into it and would most likely not leave it. As such, it provided a strong social basis for the construction of collective identity.

Most recently, the boundaries of class constructions have tended to erode, too. The likelihood of changing a class position has increased. And, more importantly in terms of identity building, social practices are much less generally organized in parallel terms to an economically determined class location. Current social identity-conveying communities are often also collectively agreed, and not immediately transmitted through socialization. The living individual members themselves participate in the construction and reconstruction of such communities. The feeling of collective identity may be very strong for the individuals concerned, not least because they built it themselves. For the same reason, however, it is open to reflection and often unstable over the life-time of the participating individuals.

This sketch is overly schematic; it will be taken up again and elaborated later. Obviously, at any point in the history of modernity all three forms co-existed, no linear trend through all of a society should be assumed. Still, one can argue for the validity of a more general observation, namely a historical weakening of the assumptions for constructing social identities, from ascriptive and natural to socially acquired and quasi-natural to chosen and socially agreed. Very broadly, and rather as a heuristic guideline for further analysis than as historical fact, the first type can be related to the social formation of restricted liberal modernity (to

be further discussed in the following section), the second one to organized modernity, and the third one to extended liberal modernity.

RESTRICTED LIBERAL MODERNITY: THE CONTOURS OF THE CONTAINMENT OF THE LIBERAL UTOPIA

The historical struggles over the feasibility of modernity in Europe focused on the two issues of cultural-linguistic identity and social solidarity which I have already briefly mentioned above. These were struggles about the limitation of the sociohistorical meaning of modernity. While the concept is open and uncontained in principle, attempts were made to contain its impact within collectively controllable limits. The substance of these two limiting criteria is different. Nationhood has been developed as a *constitutive* boundary in terms of social identity. Solidarity, though the idea was already present in the Revolution, is a criterion that rather developed in response to the *impact* of modernity on society. I shall thus deal first with the former, then with the latter issue.

The form that political societies gradually acquired after the modern rupture was not merely a politically liberal and democratic one, but it was the cultural-linguistically based nation-state, at least as an ideal to strive for. The cultural-linguistic basis, as such, has very little to do with the modern notion of autonomy. Erecting a frontier around a territory and defining the inhabitants of the territory in terms of nationality was in contradiction with the idea of the universalism of rights. Also, in terms of its cultural and linguistic substance, it was not an established tradition, rather a new form of boundary. 'The traditional aristocratic elites in pre-modern Europe had found no particular difficulties in governing diverse ethnic or national groups.'³³

Nevertheless, the idea of the nation-state was soon seized upon as the conceptually appropriate instrument for a workable imposition of modernity. The linkage between liberal ideas and national ideas was the concept of *national* self-determination. 'The fusion of popular sovereignty with the sovereignty and self-determination of the nation – prefigured in the 1789 declaration of human rights – subordinates the modern project of autonomy to a supposedly paradigmatic – but only partly modern – form of collective identity.'³⁴ The problem then, of course, was who formed part of the collective called nation.

In many European countries, not least Germany and Italy, political intellectuals fused the idea of a liberal polity with the search for a somehow natural collective that should form this polity. The notion was developed that there are such collectives of historical belonging in Europe that are defined by their common, historically transmitted, culture and language. In Germany, Johann Gottfried Herder proposed the concept of *Volk* (people) as an ontological unit, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, in a move that appears now as almost postmodernist, linked the very possibility of knowledge to common linguistic practices and concluded that one should strive to keep the speakers of a common language together. In Italy, the intellectuals of the *risorgimento* were aware that they were not simply arguing for

bringing together what belonged together, but indeed constructing a community out of a variety of different cultural orientations and social backgrounds. The basis for belonging then is common history or, at least, the idea of common history.³⁵ Arguably, the understanding of nation that was prevalent in France was more truly modern, because it merely saw the nation as a necessary frame for individual emancipation (the nation as a collection of individuals), whereas the German ideas were dominated by the concept that the unity of culture and language preceded actual human beings (the nation as a collective individual). But in these two forms, these concepts expressed jointly 'the difficulty that the modern ideology has in providing a sufficient image of social life'.³⁶

These intellectual endeavours were far from the aggressive nationalism that became widespread by the end of the nineteenth century, but they clearly intended to set boundaries, to define and contain collective self-determination around the construction of imagined social identities, as, of course, most of the presumed Italians and Germans never had formed an active community in any sense.³⁷ As such, these efforts were a response to the general opening of social relations that the revolutionary concepts, and increasingly the bourgeois allocative practices, entailed. 'While traditional social lineages and loyalties had lost much of their binding force, the national idea proved to be a substitute for them in as much as it provided a new sort of cohesion among the various social and political groupings.'³⁸

Where such an offer for cohesion was accepted and territorially accomplished, external boundaries of the modern polity could be set. During the nineteenth century, however, the question of who should participate in the modern project inside the national society, also became an internally disputed issue. This new dispute was triggered not least by the experience that the dynamics of liberated allocative practices had had an adverse impact on living and working conditions of many compatriots. This is one way of formulating what became known as 'the social question'; its formulation presupposed external boundaries to the polity. The question itself, however, referred to the internal boundaries of early modernity.

Though many of the more moderate revolutionaries in France had not considered the lower classes as fully entitled citizens of modernity, the imaginary of the Revolution was all-inclusive and egalitarian. Among the republicans, furthermore, the expectation was that the establishment of the desired political order, the republic with universal suffrage, would take care of all other problems, since everybody concerned would have a say in collective matters. Later, however, the failure of the Second Republic to satisfy the material needs of its electorate – a failure that entailed the early end of the republic itself – made evident that the social question would remain a key issue even for a democratic polity. 'The social question, thus, appears first as the recognition of a deficiency of social reality with regard to the political imaginary of the Republic.'³⁹ From then on and especially after the republic had been set on a more secure footing in 1871, much of French political debate centred around the question of how a criterion could be introduced into liberal and democratic reasoning that would allow for dealing with the social question without re-imposing a strong state on the volitions and activities of

individuals. Though often put in different terms, the same issue appeared strongly on the political agendas of other countries, too (see Chapter 4).

At this stage of my argument, I merely want to point to two consequences of these historical experiences. First, this early republican problematic showed that the modern polity, all individualism and egalitarianism notwithstanding, showed internal social structures that somehow would have to be taken into account in its social practices. In this sense, the social question can be seen as giving rise to sociology, as the liberal awareness of the persistence of problems of social order. In France, the linkage of the transformation of classical liberalism to the formation of a social group with specific demands becomes crucially evident. In the liberal atmosphere after the July 1830 Revolution the workers turned optimistically to the new regime with their demands, but were rejected. They

responded by developing a new political and organizational language that met the regime on its chosen terrain: the discourse of liberty. In doing so, the workers embraced, but also modified and elaborated, the liberal language of the French Revolution. Class consciousness, in other words, was a transformed version of liberal revolutionary discourse.⁴⁰

Second, the social question incited the construction of a new, partial collective identity inside modernity. In the late eighteenth century, nobody spoke of workers in the present sense, much less of a *working class*. Working people started to speak of themselves as workers and to generalize their sense of solidarity – gradually and unevenly between trades and countries – between 1780 and 1840 in England, France, the US and Germany.⁴¹ When Marx, not many years later, wrote about the working class, he was featuring what a few years ago had still been a ‘taxonomic neologism’.⁴² Though partly superseded by the events, his distinction between ‘class in itself’ and ‘class for itself’ pointed to the need for constructing a social phenomenon by the mobilization in common activities, discursive and practical. This distinction also shows, in its special way, the very common, if not universal, link between the descriptive and the prescriptive aspect of classifications, ‘between addition (rendering equivalent) and coalition (action)’.⁴³

The national and the social question were both linked to notions of *collective identity* and of *collective agency*, namely nation-state and class. The handling of these questions by creating organized collective agents should be seen as historical ways and means of containing the unlimited challenges of modernity, of the liberal utopia.⁴⁴ Just like nation and nationalism, working class and class struggle have been invented to make collective action possible or to make members of presumed collectives, ‘conceptual communities’ (Benedict Anderson), really relate to each other, to act together, or to be acted upon.

These identities have, of course, not been invented out of a complete void. In the former case, social elements, like proximity of language and of habits, that existed before the breakthrough of modernity have been used to forge the identity of a territorially defined collective.⁴⁵ In the latter case, the consequences of capitalist modernity were assumed to homogenize living conditions and ‘class

positions’, and the socialist writers deemed it necessary to stress this emerging homogeneity discursively to foster the recognition of common interests and enhance solidarity. But in both cases, boundaries were often unclear, people were unwilling to adhere to cultural-linguistically defined states because they felt different, or rejected solidarity because they did not want to see themselves as part of such a working class. And in both cases as well, organizational apparatuses that represented the classificatory convention, the nation-state and working-class organizations, often went far in enforcing the boundaries and repressing dissent.⁴⁶

Regarding the concepts of class and class solidarity, my conceptual considerations have, at this point of the argument, gone too far in historical terms. The class struggle that was fully evolving in the second half of the nineteenth century was rather an attempt to offset the limitations of a regime whose containments the bourgeois elites had considered rather stable by mid-century, at least before the revolts of 1848, and some time later again, after everything had calmed down. This regime was one that we can term *restricted liberal modernity*. It was based on the modern imaginary significations of autonomy and rational mastery, but it also tried to contain their impact by tying actors into restrictive rules.

Restrictions were imposed by means of the state form and the law. States were indeed developed as containers for the building of the modern institutions; their boundaries defined the limits of the reach of the institutions, in territorial terms and otherwise. In economic terms, the ‘unbound’ Smithian notion of market efficiency was soon countered by the Listian idea of setting protective boundaries to make a national economy prosper.⁴⁷ Cultural-linguistic terms, of course, provided the very foundation for the nation-state. Far from remaining in the discursive realm, however, these ideas were also put in institutional forms by the setting up of nationally organized academic institutions, fostering national intellectual traditions, and of national networks of communication and public spheres. In terms of authoritative power, an important limit to autonomy was the restriction of suffrage, which dammed the liberal ideas of modernity against their alleged abuse by the masses.

LIBERAL MODERNITY AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM (I)

In terms of world history, the fact that, in 1776, a number of far-away and scarcely populated colonies of farmers and tradespeople declared their independence from their mother country, England, itself still rising in power, should have been of little import. As it turned out, it could hardly have mattered more. Almost *immediately*, the American events had an encouraging effect on all those who were striving for democratic reforms in Europe. To the French revolutionaries, in particular, who had been debating the feasibility and specific institutional design of a republic for decades, the constitutions of the American states and the US constitution were examples of the possibility of putting such ideas into practice.

With the philosophy of the Enlightenment [French reformers] could lift the American Revolution out of its provincial context, and the American Revolution in turn invested their discursive thought with a reality it had not known before. . . . In the eyes of many Frenchmen, here was the first example of popular self-government and free institutions.⁴⁸

Some decades later, when the US had consolidated and developed its own social and economic momentum, it became clear that the North American society was to establish a general, permanent alternative to the European, contained model of modernity. This alternative did not just exist beside European societies, but exerted a continuous influence on them and tended to break up their self-set boundaries. Two aspects may be distinguished. On the one hand, the US could increasingly be seen as an individual alternative, that is, as the locus of emigration. On the other hand, the American mode of organizing allocative practices could gradually alter the European ways by changing the competitive conditions. 'The emergence of the United States as an independent state with an unlimited (in a theoretical sense) supply of land that could be rendered valuable only with a large input of labor altered the basic parameters of the ongoing system' of interrelated societies and nation-states.⁴⁹ Both aspects become relevant, of course, only if the US indeed turns out to be more powerful in productive and allocative terms and more attractive in individual terms. In what way then was the US different?

Often, liberal individualism has been mentioned as the foundation of society and politics in the US.⁵⁰ While any comparative observation of the US and European societies appears to confirm this view, it fails to provide a sufficient historical explanation. There is no reason for assuming that the early settlers, up to independence, were more liberal or more individualistic than the people they left behind in Europe. In so far as religious oppression was the background to emigration, one could even expect them to be more 'communitarian' than the average European.⁵¹ In fact, more recent historiography has emphasized that a kind of liberal republicanism, focusing on civic virtue and community, should be seen as the original, early American political tradition. It was only during the first half of the nineteenth century that this republicanism gave way to a much more individualist liberalism.⁵²

If these findings are valid, then we may conclude that it was less the political orientations of the founders and the successive generations of Americans than the particular historical conditions under which they tried to build their society that shaped the new order. Superficially it may appear that the American Revolution was very much of the same kind as the French one and other European attempts; indeed, it was basically led for the same principles. However, in contrast to the European struggle against strong adversaries, both in terms of the actual institutions of authoritative power and in terms of the coherence and acceptance of a discourse of societal representation, there were only 'weak competing principles' to the revolutionary ones in North America.⁵³ Slightly exaggerating the point, one might say that, willing or not, liberal democracy and rights-based individualism

remained the only solution the Americans could resort to, after they had done away with the colonial regime. While rules and practices remained habitually in place in France after the Revolution unless they were consciously and radically changed, the Americans really had to build a new order and had to find and *construct* consensual solutions for any social practice. Without any substantive rules to draw on, pluralism and individual rights are all that remain.

In this sense, it was the absence of any self-evident larger political community that furthered the dominance of individualism – or, more precisely, group-mindedness – in the US. In other terms, one may consider the building of the United States as the *construction of modernity without an Old Regime*. The confrontation with the more open, boundless American experience highlights the particularly contained character of historical modernity in Europe. Again with a slight exaggeration, we may say that the key aspects of nineteenth-century European modernity were almost absent in North America. The US knew hardly any state and no restrictions to political participation, no homogeneous cultural-linguistic identity (though a stronger kind of religious one), and no expressible social question.

Americans were (and still are) very reluctant to delegate political powers to centralized, 'far-away' institutions. While factually federal government has become much more powerful, especially after the 1930s, the basic idea is that 'the people' in state and community may reappropriate these powers. Self-determination may apply to any self-formed collective, and may also include, importantly, the right to secede, that is the right to redraw the boundaries of political communities. 'In Hegel's sense, there was no "State" in the United States, no unified, rational will expressed in a political order, but only individual self-interest and a passion for liberty.'⁵⁴

A weak sense of the larger community has an important impact on the understanding of social belonging. Though there was the famous white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant dominance in the early US, the society was far too plurally composed for any sense of ethnic or religious identity common to all Americans to emerge. With the rise of even more multi-ethnic immigration towards the end of the nineteenth century, any such idea had to be abandoned, and the notion of 'cultural pluralism' came about.⁵⁵ As harmonious as this linguistic predecessor of current 'multiculturalism' may sound, there are also adverse impacts of weak substantive identities. Thus, it is often argued, basically rightly I think, that the weakness of the welfare state in the US stems from the impossibility of defining obligations with regard to national citizenship. At least in social terms, there is no strong sense of inclusive boundaries, which would enable one to see the poor as 'our poor', to whom one has moral obligations.

And also more generally, the emphasis on plurality itself does not solve any problem. To find in the belief in a unitarian state, as it was dominant in Europe,

a sign of pure illusion, as liberal thought encourages us to do, is to deny the very notion of society, to erase both the question of sovereignty and that of the

meaning of the institution, which are always bound up with the ultimate question of the legitimacy of that which exists. . . . If we adopt this view, we replace the fiction of unity-in-itself with that of diversity-in-itself.⁵⁶

The fallacies of the self-sustaining character of individualism and of the possibility of diversity-in-itself are two of the specific features of American modernity. Both stem from the relatively unbounded origins of American society. What makes them particularly important for my considerations is that they appear to be paradigmatic for the development of modernity in general, a development which then has also been called 'Americanization'. To understand the interdependencies between less and more contained social formations of modernity, it is necessary to analyse the historical development of both. With this in view, I shall repeatedly return to the American society from my European observation-point.

Crisis and transformation of modernity

The end of the liberal utopia

LIBERTY AND SELF-FULFILMENT: THE IDEAL OF THE SELF AND PRACTICES OF IDENTITY-FORMATION

Broadly speaking we can consider the period from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century as the time of the building of early, restricted liberal, modernity in the Northwestern quarter of the world. It brought with it the emergence of what we may call modern culture as 'a new moral culture [that] radiates outward and downward from the upper middle classes of England, America, and (for some facets) France'. This modern culture is predicated, not least, on a certain conception of the human self.

It is a culture which is individualist in . . . three senses . . . : it prizes autonomy; it gives an important place to self-exploration; and its visions of the good life involve personal commitment. As a consequence, in its political language, it formulates the immunities due people in terms of subjective rights. Because of its egalitarian bent, it conceives these rights as universal.¹

It both enables and obliges individual human beings to create their selves and to self-define their location among other human beings.

By about 1850, such conceptions indeed formed a culture in the sense that they were deeply shared by a substantial number of human beings in this part of the world. They can be found in post-Reformation religious orientations, in the commercial ethos of capitalist entrepreneurs, and they were expressed by the authors of the 'modern novel', focusing on individual development, and the Enlightenment political philosophers. Though the idea of a gradual but inevitable trickling down of high-cultural orientations from the upper to the lower classes (which Taylor's image of out- and downward radiation also conveys) is highly problematic, one can probably say that modern culture spread somewhat through society during the nineteenth century. One very simple reason for this diffusion may well be the fact that the practices of the 'modernist' upper middle classes transformed society and uprooted other cultural orientations to the degree that they became unfeasible.

If this is the case, though, then the social configuration of the nineteenth century is marked by a strong paradox. On the one hand, the rising elites promoted modern,

individualist and rationalist, culture and tended to eradicate any alternative to it. On the other hand, there was a feeling – and, often enough, also an awareness – of the impossibility of a self-sustained individualist liberalism. Early modernity resided on the strength of pre-existing boundaries to its application and on the lack of a full social permeation of its concepts, while at the same time the modernizers, intentionally or not, worked at the elimination of those boundaries and at a fuller social permeation. The brief hint at a spatial comparison between North America and Western Europe in the preceding chapter gave a first idea of how distinct varieties of modernity could look if they differed along such lines. A temporal comparison, elements of which I will propose in the remainder of this book, will show the effects of changing boundaries and degrees of social permeation.

One of the guiding assumptions in these considerations is that the very ideal of the modern self may be at stake in these social transformations. At no point during the past two centuries is the idea of the reason-guided, individually self-exploring and self-realizing human being totally discarded. Generally speaking, rather the opposite is true; its diffusion is more and more widely extended. This was no steady process, however. Time and again, alternative conceptualizations of the human being were proposed and, more importantly, socially *practiced*. This occurred not least in reaction to what was perceived as the social impact of modernity. In such a perspective, I shall try to trace conceptions of the self and their transformations through the history of modernity. The starting-point has to be the understanding of the self that was part of the philosophies that stood at the outset of modernity.²

Speaking about the self, the term *identity* will be used to refer to the understanding somebody has of her or his life, to the orientations one gives to one's life. In current usage, it conveys the idea of certainty and inner stability, of residing firmly in oneself. A sense of identity may possibly be evolving over one's life-time as part of the process of self-realization, as the bourgeois ideal will have it. Stability or only steady change are not necessary implications of the concept, though, and notions such as fleeting identities or multiple identities will also be used to name specific temporal or situational contexts.³ If I speak specifically of *self-identity*, I focus on the image an individual person has of herself, in relation to her ideas of self-realization. The term *social identity* will instead refer to the effective rooting of individual identities in collective contexts. Both are of course related, in two senses. First, every process of identity-formation is necessarily a social process. And second, to see oneself as part of a larger group may be the crucial element of one's self-identity.⁴

The sociohistorical assumption that I work with is that larger social transformations tend to uproot generally held social identities, and consequently also self-identities. If that is the case, I shall speak of major processes of *disembedding*, that is, processes through which people are ejected from identity-providing social contexts.⁵ In contrast, I shall speak of *reembedding* when new contexts are created such that new social identities may be built. Human beings may be exposed to disembedding processes, such as in forced migration

after wars, or they may expose themselves voluntarily to them, that is, 'leaving home' in the literal or the figurative sense. Reembedding, however, can only take place through the active, creative involvement of the concerned human beings, through their development or appropriation of identity options, drawing on the cognitive-cultural material that they find 'offered' in their social contexts.⁶

Moving now back to the historical account, we can probably assume that a basically modern conception of the self, as briefly portrayed above, prevailed among the bourgeois economic and intellectual elites during restricted liberal modernity. The social identity of the members of these groups was shaped by their belief that they belonged to the progressive forces of society, those who would advance humankind from its often-enough miserable fate. We know very little about conceptions of self and the social identity of peasants and workers. For a long time, historians and sociologists have ascribed a very limited – localist and family- and community-oriented – world- and self-view to these groups.⁷ More recently, such interpretations have been challenged, not least because it was recognized that they provided a far too convenient mirror image to the progressive views of the modernizers to be true.

Despite this uncertainty, though, we may assume that those conceptions of self and social identity were shaken and stirred up when the effects of the modernization offensives of the bourgeois groups hit the workers and peasants. As a reaction to these effects, and as an attempt to find their own social position under the changing conditions, those who until then had been excluded from modernity defined themselves in their own right and claimed a place in the newly emerging social order. The formation of the workers' movement can be seen as a struggle for social identity in which a collective is formed and social places are created for each individual member of this collective. Again then, as a reaction to these struggles, the bourgeois social identity was shaken, both among the economic and, even more strongly, among the intellectual members of this group. From the combined effect of these collective reorientations emerged what I shall call the first crisis of modernity.

This problematic, though in other terms, had become generally accepted by the late nineteenth century, when the working of a capitalist market economy had drastically changed many aspects of social life and was seen, if uncontrolled, as a major threat to bourgeois values and life-styles themselves. Historically, the main social movement of the time, reaching from conservative academics to working-class radicals, tried to solve the social question by introducing new boundaries that would limit and constrain some kinds of practices while at the same time enabling other ones. This was a process of reconstitution of society in which more of its members were involved than probably ever before and which entailed a major effort at establishing collective agency. In its course, many of the established practices were upset and new institutions built. The process had a first culmination between the turn of the nineteenth century and the end of the First World War. During those years, the – even temporary – outcome was still very open, and the view that no new consolidated order might be establishable was widespread, at least among the elites (and for various reasons).

DISEMBEDDING AND TRANSFORMISM: A POSTLIBERAL COMPROMISE

In the preceding chapter I have tried to show how the emancipatory movements of the bourgeois revolutions, which established the new imaginary signification, recognized that it exceeded their own political ambitions by far. As a consequence, they tried to contain – quite successfully for a while – their own project by drawing on older social resources. However, the dynamics of the newly formed social configuration remained in effect. 'All that is solid melts into air', was Marx's famous description of the effect of bourgeois hegemony on society in the *Communist Manifesto*. Very soon, new tensions emerged in the contained liberal society. Before taking a closer look at the major struggles over the elimination of old containments and the setting of new ones that occurred between the 1880s and the 1960s (through many discontinuities and ruptures) the dynamics that set off the social formation of restricted liberal modernity must be presented.

Liberal theory claimed to have resolved the questions of political expression, economic interest and scientific validity by leaving them to open contest and competition. This was how, in principle, democracy, efficiency and truth were to be achieved. In *practice*, however, from early on most of the nineteenth-century liberals did not trust the conceptions they had themselves proposed. New restrictions were introduced by drawing on established, pre-liberal criteria such as gender, culture, social standing. Much of the force of liberal *theory* had resided in the fact that it did not need to resort to such criteria. One fundamental problem of legitimacy thus arose when liberals did not stand by their own claim.⁸ The second problem was that, whether restricted or not, the practices of bourgeois society did not at all appear to fulfil the substantive claim of achieving efficiency, democracy and truth.

The strong claims of liberal theorizing had been its universalism and its assumption of the automatic harmonization of society. Once liberals themselves had abdicated both claims, all questions of political, social and cognitive representation were forcefully brought back to the agenda of social theory and political practice. This was the main feature of the social struggles of the late nineteenth century, a period that, for this reason, I would call the beginning of a postliberal era.⁹

Major conceptual challenges to the restricted liberal version of political order arose with social changes during the second half of the nineteenth century. Bourgeois capitalization had indeed initiated a dynamics that entailed a number of technological innovations, the growth of industry and the growth of cities as new economic-industrial centres. On the part of the working population, these changes in dominant allocative practices provoked strong migration flows from rural into urban areas as well as emigration, often to the Americas. In many respects, this was a major process of disembedding of individuals from the social contexts in which they had grown up.¹⁰ It created widespread uncertainty among those who were disembedded about their individual fate and about their place in society, and among the elites about the order and stability of society as a whole.¹¹

As a consequence, a rather radical reconceptualization of society was at stake. In the liberal view, 'the social question' should not have emerged in the first place. Automatic adaptation of individual wills and preferences would have precluded persistent imbalances of this sort. Such a belief, however, had lost most of its plausibility when poverty and hardship spread, when the increase in the wealth of the nation appeared to be too long delayed for too many, when uncertainty prevailed after many people had moved out of the social contexts they were socialized into, and when they had already begun to resort to collective action. Against all classical liberal conceptions, this reaction was an attempt at collectively reappropriating an agential capacity that had been threatened by the dynamics of liberal capitalism.¹²

The major objective of reform movements during the latter half of the nineteenth century was to re-establish some solidity and certainty into the social fabric. Many reformers came from the bourgeois elites, and their idea was, not least, to safeguard order. But the probably more important element was the self-constitution of the working class as a collective capable of defining and representing its own interests. Socialism, trade unions and labour parties spring from this attempt at developing organized responses to social change on the part of a new collective, the working class.¹³ Besides their political and economic objectives, the movement also created a new social identity as an industrial worker, fighting for a full place in society or even combining the forces of the future of humankind.¹⁴

As much of the societal problematic came together in the so-called 'social question', it shall be described here in a bit more detail and with a view to the variations in the ways of reconceptualizing society. All industrializing societies saw themselves as in some fundamental way faced with this question in the latter part of the nineteenth century. They devoted quite some intellectual effort to exploring ways of solving that question, efforts which in many cases came to translate into the constitution of new types of policies such as accident, old age or sickness insurance. 'New forms of social knowledge . . . emerged in tandem with social reform legislation in the earliest phase of European state social policy during the 1880s and 1890s.'¹⁵ However, this apparent parallelism in problem attention cross-nationally should not conceal the fact that both the solutions sought and, indeed, the precise nature of the problems perceived, were premised on significantly different discourses and institutional constellations.

The building of an early welfare state *avant la lettre* was a process whose character as a major societal reorientation by no means escaped the minds of the actors involved. Thus the protagonists of the struggle for poverty relief and for workers' accident insurance were perfectly well aware of the fact that the creation of new collective institutions might involve a major step in a fundamental reorganization of society. A basic form of argument by the proponents of innovation was that society itself had changed and needed institutional adaptation. Industrialization had altered the nature of work and of wealth, what was required were new concepts of risk and of poverty. In Anson Rabinbach's words, 'the idea

of social risk was a phenomenon of modernity, a recognition that impersonal forces rather than individual wills were often the determinants of destiny.' Such a discourse, to be found in the words of many contemporary actors, spelled the end of the liberal idea of society.¹⁶

In the German debates in the *Verein für Socialpolitik* (Association for Social Policy) – founded in 1872–3, shortly after the establishment of the imperial state – the dominant group around Gustav Schmoller adhered basically to a conception of the state as a being with a superior mission standing above class struggles and other particularistic conflicts in society. Its task, to be pursued through a strong bureaucracy in a monarchic system, was to secure a harmonious development of society, to intervene everywhere where conflicts could mount to endanger the well-being of the nation. The founders of the Association saw themselves as being called to contribute to the accomplishment of this new state's task. They stressed the healthy continuity of Prussian stateness which, in their view, was the most important asset Germany could draw on when facing the turmoils of industrialization and organized class dispute.¹⁷ They themselves stood, apart from some minority positions, in the tradition of state-centred thinking, from Hegel onwards, which saw the state as the embodiment of some higher reason.

While there was something of a brief era of liberalism in German states in the mid-nineteenth century, liberal ideas never achieved full societal hegemony in Germany, and liberal institutions flourished only momentarily and only in parts of the territory of the later nation-state. In terms of academic discourse, classical political economy – 'Smithianism' or 'Manchesterism' as it was called somewhat disdainfully by many scholars – never asserted itself strongly, and in the tradition of the state sciences it rather remained an interlude. The work of Robert von Mohl, one of the southwestern liberals, has rightly been characterized as transitory:

Mohl's policy science as a work of transition looks Janus-faced to two eras. On the one side, there is the old police state, . . . much governing, regulating from above, busy and concerned for everything, but without clear objectives and without understanding the bourgeoisie's striving for autonomy; on the other side, the social movements of the second half of the 19th century announce their appearance from afar, movements which will pose giant tasks to public administration.¹⁸

French society, by contrast, was shaped by a relatively successful bourgeoisie striving for autonomy, and her state tradition, while extremely strong, was of a different nature to the German one. The continuity of this tradition was important for the struggles on social policy. It gave the proponents the opportunity not to argue for a complete break with earlier principles, but for a rephrasing of a century-old concern in French politics.

Governments of the Third Republic thought they had the means fully to apply in a methodical way the principles stated in 1789, and they eventually laid down the bases for the modern institutional set of social services in contemporary society.¹⁹

Among these principles, of course, were both freedom, on the one side, and solidarity, on the other. While under these circumstances it could never be successfully argued that some superior institution could violate freedom of contracts and the equality principle in labour contracts, and shift burdens of responsibility for accidents one-sidedly to the employers, as German insurance laws did, it proved possible to propose substantive state intervention in another way, namely through the solidarity principle.

Many of the republican debates in the 1880s and 1890s were based on solidarism, a political theory which became something like the official social philosophy of the Third Republic. Solidarism introduced into political theory the idea of society as an entity with rights and obligations which co-existed with, and were related to, individual rights. Human beings did not enter into relations with others as isolated individuals, but as already social beings; thus, social rights could be formulated alongside individual rights. The theory of solidarity and the political slogans of solidarism had close links to Durkheimian sociology and its grounding of a theory of society in 'social facts'.

The debates in the United States, in contrast to both France and Germany, show a stronger emphasis on individualist reasoning and related difficulties in justifying social policy institutions. While in France the theory of solidarity was 'a way of synthesizing two different lines of thought: that competition could be the only law of social life, as liberalism claimed, and at the same time that solidarity enhanced contractual relations rather than state authority,' the US debates on social policy 'had remained caught up in an opposition between public and private'.²⁰ While there were some institutional innovations such as State Boards on Charities, or the US Children's Bureau, national social policy on a scale comparable to European turn-of-the-century measures was undertaken as late as 1935.²¹

A comparison of poverty relief in the US and France shows that a social definition of poverty, instead of an individual one, could be highly contested and ultimately largely rejected in one case and, if not welcomed by general consensus, at least comparatively smoothly accepted in another setting.²² These outcomes are related to long-standing institutional structures, such as heritages of absolutism and the French Revolution, and intellectual traditions, such as the Comtean one. Both of those saw nation and society essentially as a unit which carried specific characteristics and responsibilities beyond the individual ones. This feature receives even more emphasis in a comparison of two statist, continental European societies, France and Germany. True, there were disputes about the distributional effects of workers' accident insurance, disputes which were underpinned by various conceptions of freedom and responsibility as well as – increasingly – by 'social facts' provided by statistics and social research. But the concepts of a people and a nation as a being superior to individuals – a more typically German argument – or as an aspect of human existence inseparable from individuality – more characteristic of French debates – and of the state as the expression of this social being, were deeply entrenched in public and academic debate alike. Such concepts could relatively easily be drawn upon in policy debates and give rise to expressions such

as 'capital of the nation' to describe the labourer's working power. That working power thus became something to be protected by collective action rather than by individual capability and responsibility alone.²³

In different ways then, the liberal concept of the individual and his autonomy had been eroded in the public debates and policy deliberations until the turn of the century. One conceptual element from which such erosion could start resided with the bourgeois revolution from the beginning, namely the concept of brotherhood in the French Revolution, later to be transformed into solidarity. The revolutionary upheavals of the first half of the nineteenth century, 1830 and 1848, mark further passage points on the way to the undermining of pure liberal-individualist political theory. Only after 1870, however, was the transformation of the restricted liberal societies in full swing. Industrialization and urbanization were more marked, and with the establishment of nation-states in Italy and Germany the national strivings appeared to have ended. The latter point is important, because it entails that boundaries were established, inside which political debate could unfold. Or, in other words, a consolidated political addressee, the state, to which the social question could be posed, was generally available.

By the end of the nineteenth century, economic organization and sociopolitical struggles within the nation-states had developed up to a point where the founding concepts of liberal theory clearly seemed inapplicable.²⁴ The free and only loosely organized formation of public opinion in political clubs and circles had given way to a range of organized opinion-makers.²⁵ In the most dynamic sectors of the economy, national monopolies or oligopolies had formed and often the owner had given way to the manager in the direction of firms.²⁶ In the closing years of the century, workers were on the barricades in many places, making the claim that they marched with history widely believed. The First World War, whatever other causes and meanings it had had, not least showed through its societal mobilization that the organized masses had fully entered history. This did not fail to leave its mark on those who tried to rebuild society after the war's end.

The 1914-18 War was in Europe as decisive a turning-point as the revolution of 1789. It perhaps marked the clear beginning of the end of pure capitalism. . . . It marked the beginning of the refutation of all the progressive social theories of the nineteenth century.²⁷

CRITIQUES: THE MODERN TENDENCY TOWARDS SELF-CANCELLATION

A series of major inquiries into the dynamics of modernity was elaborated successively from after the middle of the nineteenth century up until the 1920s. These analyses may be called the grand critiques of modernity. Their *grandeur*, in my view, resides in the fact that they identified basic problems in the practices of modernity, but that they remained reluctant or unwilling to abandon the imaginary significations of modernity as a consequence. They did not solve the problems, but

they achieved a clarity of problem recognition that most other social theories, at the same time or after, could not meet.²⁸

Intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were generally well aware of the failure of liberal theory, in politics as well as in economics, to either understand the changes in societal practices or to provide criteria for their regulation. All referring to the prevalent liberal mode of societal self-understanding, they developed critical analyses of societal practices, mostly with a view to safeguarding as much as they could of this liberal mode. Four principal types of such critiques can be distinguished. They all problematize, although in very different ways, the tension between the unleashing of the modern dynamics of autonomy and rational mastery, on the one hand, and its, often unintended, collective outcome in the form of major societal institutions. In this context, they all observe deviations from liberal theory in societal practice, and may also question liberal assumptions in their own thinking.²⁹

The first was the critique of political *economy* as developed mainly by Karl Marx. In contrast to some of the conservative critics of capitalism, such as the German historical economists who flatly denounced its rationalist individualism, Marx basically adhered to the Enlightenment tradition of individual autonomy. His ideal was 'the free association of free human beings'. In the workings of the 'free' market in capitalism, however, he discovered a societal effect of human economic interaction that asserted itself 'behind the backs' of the actors.

In an economy based on market exchange and the forced sale of labour-power, relations between human beings would turn into relations between things, because they were mediated by commodities. Driven by laws of abstract value, markets would transform phenomena with a use value into commodities, the sole important criterion of which was the money value against which they could be exchanged. The result of such fetishization of products and money and of the reification of social relations would be the alienation of human beings from their own products, from other human beings and from themselves. In such an alienated condition, the possibility for autonomy and sovereignty of the economic actors on either markets of labour, production or consumption would be completely eradicated, though these actors would indeed constantly reproduce these conditions by their own action.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the discourse on political economy had split into two rather neatly distinct parts. The liberal theory of the economy revived inside the academy, when the marginalist revolution seemed to offer a way out of some its theoretical dilemmas. The upshot of this revolution, neoclassical economics, returned to optimism with regard to the collective outcome of individual strivings, if only the individuals could act freely. Marxist discourse, in contrast, consolidated as the political theory of some working-class organizations, most notably German social democracy. In this context of mass organization, not only its economic critique, but also its rudimentary political theory of revolution was taken for granted rather than being further elaborated.

At this point, the critique of modernity tended to shift from the economy to the

polity. The second grand critique was the critique of large-scale *organization and bureaucracy*, as analysed most prominently by Robert Michels and Max Weber and, in the context of elite theories of politics and society, by Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto. With a view to the enhancement of rational mastery of the world, it postulated the tendency for the formation of stratified bodies with hierarchical chains of command and generalized, abstract rules of action. In the context of a universal-suffrage polity and universalist welfare state (that is, in 'large' societies in which all individuals had to be included on a formal, that is, legally equal, basis in all major regulations), such 'iron cages' had emerged as state apparatuses, big industrial enterprises and mass parties, and would spread further in all realms of social life. While such institutions in fact enhanced the reach of human action generally, they limited it to the application of the rules, inside the cage so to speak, at the same time.

While some 'realist' analyses saw this development as simply inevitable, others, notably Weber's, problematized the construction of iron cages in a more general perspective, as subjecting human beings to the dominance of instrumental rationalities. At this point, we arrive again at the, in my view, most important element of the grand critiques, namely the observation of an undermining of modern principles in and by their application. Weber was particularly torn between the insight in the 'progress' of rationalization, because it enabled the achievement of the hitherto unachievable, and the social loss of criteria, to the use of which the enablement of rationalization could be put. In Karl Löwith's terms, Weber

attempted to make intelligible this general process of the rationalisation of our whole existence precisely because the rationality which emerges from this process is something specifically irrational and incomprehensible. . . . The elementary and decisive fact is this: every instance of radical rationalisation is inevitably fated to engender irrationality.³⁰

Many of the difficulties in reading Weber as a sociologist stem from his desire to search for ways out of such deep contradictions in individual and social life. All that remains, for him, is the personal commitment of the individual and its potential social impact in the form of charismatic leadership.

In these terms, a variant of a critique of conceptions of rationality is that of modern *philosophy and science*, the third grand critique. Weber, too, was aware of the great loss the 'disenchantment of the world' in rational domination entailed. Still, he understood his own social science in rational and value-neutral terms, as he thought no other approach could prevail under conditions of modernity. In contrast, radical and explicit critiques of science were put forward by others in very different forms. The elaboration of a non-scientistic approach to science was attempted in idealist *Lebensphilosophie* as well as, differently, in early twentieth-century 'Western' Marxism, that is, by Max Horkheimer and the early Frankfurt School.³¹ In some respects, pragmatism in the US can also be ranged under the critiques of science in as much as a relinkage of philosophy, anthropology and social science was proposed against the unfounded separation of spheres of

knowledge in the disciplinary sciences, a relinkage that would also bring the sciences back to a concern for the fundamental issues of the contemporary social world.³² Notwithstanding all their differences, especially in terms of alternative proposals, these analyses can be summarized as a rejection of positivist, empiricist and determinist science as incapable of reflecting the essentials of human action.

It was in pragmatism in particular – and in Europe in Durkheim's sociology – that a link between moral philosophy, social science and politics was maintained, or rather recreated with a view to responding to the contemporary problems of societal restructuring. Accepting and supporting the basic modern tenets of individual liberty and democracy, these authors recognized that it could only be from the collective endeavours of the human beings themselves that a moral order and 'social control' could be created on such premises.

Thus, we arrive at the fourth critique, that of *morality*.³³ Whereas elements of it can be found very often elsewhere, this theme is most developed in Emile Durkheim's writings. With the emergence of industrial society, Durkheim diagnosed a major transition from mechanic to organic forms of solidarity, in line with a functional division of labour in society. Though traditional religions would hardly be upheld, sociological knowledge about how parts of society related to each other could ground a viable moral education. Functional division of labour, organic solidarity and an adequate social knowledge, thus, were Durkheim's solutions to a problem that was widely diagnosed, in different variants of an alleged transition from community to society.

The problem may be schematically reconstructed as follows. The development of modern society entailed the risk of moral impoverishment, mainly due to two phenomena. The inevitable decline of unquestioned faith eroded a source which could provide foundations for moral behaviour. And if it is true that recurring face-to-face interaction is the basis for the solidarity-supporting insight to the human likeness of the other, such kinds of interaction would be decreasingly relevant in mass societies integrated on the scale of a nation. The two questions that arise are: first, how to ground ethics at all, when no foundational criteria are universally accepted; and second, how to develop adequate standards for morality, when social relations are predominantly 'thin' and at the same time widely extended in space and time, that is to relatively distant others. In such a view, the requirements for ethics have been raised, while the likelihood of agreeing on any ethics at all may have diminished. Again, it is the achievement of reflexively questioning any imposed standards of morality that may subvert the possibility of any standard at all. 'The protestant in search of salvation produces an iron cage incompatible with moral discourse and personal religious status.'³⁴

Synthetically, then, an argumentative figure emerges as follows. In the historical development of 'liberal' society, the self-produced emergence of overarching structures, such as capitalism and the market, organization and bureaucracy, modern philosophy and science, and the division of labour, is identified. These structures work on the individual subjects and their possibilities for self-realization – up to the threat of *self-cancellation* of modernity. The more

generalized modern practices become, the more they themselves may undermine the realizability of modernity as a historical project.³⁵

In actual fact, the undermining of modernity by its own principles did not mean that modernity became unfeasible. Rather, it acquired a quite different shape. In the words of Max Weber, it is

as if, knowingly and deliberately, we actually *ought* to become men who require 'order' and nothing but order, who grow nervous and cowardly if this order falters for a moment, and who become helpless if they are uprooted from their exclusive adaptation to this order.³⁶

This seemed to be exactly the case between the two great wars of the twentieth century.

TRANSFORMATIONS: STRONGER INSTITUTIONS IN THE NAME OF COLLECTIVE EMANCIPATION

The period between the First and the Second World War with planned (war-time) economy, fascism, national socialism and Soviet socialism seemed to witness the ultimate demise of the liberal notions of politics, economy and science. In the view of many participants and observers of the most diverse political leanings and beliefs, the experience of the (first) war-time economy and social management meant that the full establishment or re-establishment of the liberal institutions was neither possible nor desirable.

Many of the proposals that were made in a protracted struggle over societal reorganization during the inter-war period headed for a greater degree of social organization than any liberal political or economic theory prescribed. Now, the ingenuous idea that atomistic individuals might autonomously achieve a viable organization of society was widely seen as flawed and replaced by notions of more class-, culture- or ethnicity-based collective polities.

The reorganization proposals reached from class-based Soviet socialism, over the French People's Front, the Swedish people's home and the American New Deal to the Vichy regime, Italian fascism and German National Socialism. The Swedish social democratic welfare state and the German National Socialist warfare state, for instance, shared ideological roots. They both relied on notions of new homes and communities that their policies were to provide for the disembodied children of their nations. In the Swedish context, it was the *folkhem*, 'people's home', a concept proposed by Rudolf Kjellén, a conservative political theorist who died in 1923, and used by the social democrats on their way to building a broad political alliance. The concept travelled to Germany via Karl Haushofer, a professor of geopolitics and Nazi theorist, was adapted to German conceptual traditions as *Volksgemeinschaft*, 'people's community', and became a key term of Nazi propaganda.³⁷ The more ambitious of those approaches in terms of political philosophy may be understood as varieties of 'existential collectivism'. George Lukács, for instance, took great pains to identify the proletariat as a philosophically foundational and politically superior collective that could and

would overcome the aporias of capitalist modernity. Martin Heidegger performed a similar manoeuvre in some of his writings with regard to the German people and its opposition to technology-driven mass society.³⁸

The consistent position of the US at the individualist edge of the spectrum of societal constellations is also evident here. Michael Walzer has recently pointed out that, unlike in Europe, the term 'home' has never been used in political contexts in the US, that instead it consistently refers to private, personal settings, such as the family or the local background.³⁹ Still, the Americans, too, felt the need to get together, to define some collective project for themselves as Americans, when they experienced the turmoils of the 1920s and 1930s. The notion of the 'American dream' was coined in the context of the economic crisis to denote the existence and persistence of a specifically American way of life. While this focuses significantly on the freedom of individuals and their pursuit of happiness, Americans nevertheless needed to regain awareness that its vitality lies in having it *in common* and in having to strive together.⁴⁰

It may sound outrageous to relate these political projects to each other in such a direct way.⁴¹ The undeniable argument for such a relation, however, is that it was perceived to exist in the eyes of the contemporary actors. A number of policy intellectuals and economic experts in France, Italy and Germany moved between socialism, fascism and Keynesian economic steering. The 'Roosevelt revolution', as the New Deal was called by Georges Boris, a French socialist, was commonly seen as of a kind with the Italian corporate economy or Stalin's collectivizations. In Italian debates of the 1930s, for instance, fascism is sometimes seen 'as an anticipated response – and, that is, the most serious and advanced one – to the great capitalist crisis', in which the liberal distinctions between individual and universal, between public and private are overcome.⁴²

In fact, all these proposals were responses to the perceived instabilities of the postliberal regimes. They were all based on the definition of a, mostly national, collective and on the mobilization of the members of such a collective under the leadership of the state. In their programmes and practices, they all restricted the notion of individual liberty in the name of some collectivity, though of course to highly varying degrees. Often, the political reorientation was seen, and portrayed in propaganda, as some new awakening, a new beginning.⁴³ As such, it appeared as a collective liberation rather than as the introduction of constraints to individual action.

These discourses are indicative of attempts at a closure of modernity – which was far from being achieved at that point, though maybe it was only the appropriate form of closure that was fought about. The analyses stem from the observation of an exhaustion of the dynamics of liberal modernity. Between the turn of the century and the 1930s, the feeling for the crisis of liberalism seemed to be all-pervasive. It could take the dramatic form of a general conviction that civilized mankind had come to its end, as in the writings of Oswald Spengler and others, and in the mood that has come to be called the *fin de siècle*. But the end of liberalism and of its overly abstract understandings of society could also be desired and seen

as overdue, as in the national reawakenings and formations of organically conceived societies in Italy and Germany. Or it could be considered as the historically ripened superseding of an old social formation, as in Marxist-Leninist theorizing. A less fundamental shift occurred in other contexts, such as the American or British ones.

At first sight, our political minds refuse to place these reorientations, some of which were seen as diametrically opposed, under a similar analytical perspective. However, the direction of these reorientations away from a liberal theory of society and towards the formation of collective arrangements which exist prior to any given individual is a common one. And by taking a closer look at the actual modes of organization of social practices, rather than merely at cultural-intellectual statements whose social significance is difficult to assess, some important similarities become visible.⁴⁴

In such terms, *liberal* practices would be based on the free communication and association of a multitude of individual agents, with a view to determining the degree and actual substance of collective arrangements in society. If this is an acceptable description, then it can be argued that such liberal practices were decreasingly important from the 1890s through to the 1960s. They gave way to *organized* practices that relied on the aggregation of groups of individuals according to some social criterion. Communication and decision-making about collective arrangements were made in and between the organizations by leaders who were speaking and acting on behalf of (that is, *representing*) their allegedly homogeneous memberships.

While such socially organizing processes were reaching increasingly higher levels throughout this period of approximately seven-decades, this was no steady course but was characterized by ruptures and discontinuities. Sweepingly applying this perspective across Western Europe, one can say that periods of accelerating organization were the 1890s with the building of national economic monopolies, the growth of socialist (as well as conservative) parties and the decline of electoral political liberalism; the First World War with its concerted war efforts in which employers, trade unions and the state participated under the banner of patriotism; the 1930s with the building of fascism, National Socialism, Stalinism, People's Front (and later Vichy), people's home and New Deal; the Second World War led by such kinds of regimes; and the 1960s with its allegedly de-ideologized post-industrial society. Intermittent breakdowns of organized arrangements and revivals of liberal expectations were witnessed mainly during the 1920s and, at least with regard to allocative practices, the 1950s.

In the following analysis, the unsteady history and comparative dissimilarities will rather be neglected in favour of a, maybe ideal-typical, portrait of a particular social formation that I shall label organized modernity.⁴⁵ In such a formation, the setting of boundaries and social production of certainties is generally privileged over and above the liberal assertion of the unlimited autonomy of everybody to create and recreate themselves and their social contexts.

Such a characterization of twentieth-century West European societies is prone

to a number of misunderstandings. First, the strategies that were pursued – and to some extent they were conscious strategies indeed – far from intending to halt the dynamics of modernity generally, were meant to channel it into more predictable paths. If brakes were attached to certain social vehicles, then this did not mean that they were to slow down. The existence of brakes indeed allowed an even faster march, to use Schumpeter's apt statement of the time.⁴⁶

Second, if reembedding and increase of certainties were objectives of the organization of practices, the comfort that could be enjoyed varied considerably. Organization means hierarchization and it means exclusion. Those who found themselves at the bottom or outside of the realm of organized practices suffered often more than before. The most terrifying practice of organized modernity was the exclusion of the European Jewry from the right to live under the expansionist and warring Nazi regime. With all its dissimilarity to any other occurrence in modern history, I concur with Zygmunt Bauman's portrayal of the Holocaust as an extreme exemplification of organized modernity rather than as a terrible deviation from an otherwise benevolent rule.⁴⁷

The preceding chapters were meant to portray the social configuration of a restricted liberal modernity and its contradictions. Its own dynamics led to a situation in which a number of restrictions could not be upheld any longer. However, a mere loosening of the restrictions seemed to lead to unacceptable uncertainties and actual breakdowns of regimes, such as the Imperial German and Hapsburg ones in the War and its aftermath, and most Central European ones during the 1920s and 1930s with the onset of the various fascisms. It is the task of the following section to spell out the peculiar features of the social formation that can be seen as, through many reversals, succeeding restricted liberal modernity, and is here called organized modernity.

From the preceding argument it should be clear that it is not intended to reify the notion of organized modernity, to prove the existence of such a social formation over extended timespans and areas. Rather, the concept is meant to serve as a designation, in order to grasp certain historical tendencies towards a different organization of social practices. In the following chapters, an analytical description of these organized practices shall be given, first for the social practices of allocation (Chapter 5), then for those of domination (Chapter 6), and finally for those of signification and representation (Chapter 7).

Part IV

The second crisis of
modernity

Chapter 8

Pluralization of practices

The crisis of organized modernity

DE-CONVENTIONALIZATION AND THE DEMISE OF ORGANIZED MODERNITY

The preceding portrait of organized modernity could draw on a fairly consolidated knowledge in various fields of the social sciences, even if the reports had to be read with a sociology of knowledge perspective in mind. My main objective was to propose a conceptual perspective that allows an understanding of the construction of social configurations from the interdependent actions of human beings and from the habitualization of forms of action. On the basis of the portrait of organized modernity that has emerged, the task of the remainder of this book is to use such a perspective for grasping the demise of that configuration and to understand the present condition of modernity.

In terms of a major social restructuring, this means trying to advance an understanding of a process which is still very much under way. As far as I can see, nobody can justly claim to have a firm cognitive grip on the present social transformations. The following chapters, thus, should be considered less as an offer for a full explanation, but rather as a proposal of how one can read and interpret current changes in social practices. Much of what follows, then, are also questions for further research and proposals of how to formulate key issues of the modern condition.

In this chapter, I shall try to characterize what I essentially regard as the break-up of the order of organized modernity, analysed in terms of changes of major allocative and authoritative practices. The following chapter is devoted to disorientations regarding the cognitive representation of modernity. While it had seemed possible to provide coherent images of organized modernity, the demise of organized practices has led to an increased awareness of the difficulties of any science of society. One element of the discourse on postmodernity is, of course, exactly the doubt about the very possibility of any cognitive representation of society. At the end of this part, in Chapter 10, I shall return to the issue of the formation of self and social identity, under conditions after the end of organized modernity.

If the building of organized modernity could be analysed in terms of the conventionalization of social practices within set boundaries, much of the more

recent changes entail the erosion of boundaries and processes of de-conventionalization. With regard to allocative practices, the coherence of the institutions of organized modernity broke down because the reach of the practices was increasingly extended beyond the controlled boundaries of the national society. The conventionalized practices of domination and signification were upset, partly because their misfit with the allocative practices was experienced as a decreasing performance of these institutions, and partly because the constraining aspects of their own conventions were recognized and fought against.

All of this happened in a context of the erosion of the substantive bases of collective identities. Working-class and national identification had been building blocks for organized modernity. But over time, their relevance appears to have declined, since such boundaries seemed much less important after the full inclusion of the workers into modernity had been achieved and could be materially underpinned. However, the issue of boundaries and identities becomes important again when collective reorientations seem necessary. At that point, the cognitive resources to sustain them, the material from which they were built, may well prove to be exhausted.

With very few exceptions, current analyses of the organization of sets of social practices stress the breaking up of established rules. In some cases, a terminology is chosen that leads to positive associations. Then there may be talk of flexibilization and pluralization. In others, when the emphasis is on disorganization, instability or fragmentation, negative connotations prevail. Regardless of normative aspects, I think many of these analyses can be read as the identification of the upsetting of practice-orienting conventionalizations, or even the breakdown of orders of conventions.

That such processes occur throughout all major fields of social practices should allow us to speak of a crisis of the contemporary social formation, the second crisis of modernity. The main task of the following three chapters is to show what shape this crisis takes. The guiding question is: which of the conventionalizations do still hold, or are even reinforced, and which are breaking up or are reshaped? By a differentiated analysis it should be possible to arrive at the identification of at least the outlines of a new societal configuration.

CHANGES IN THE MODE OF CONTROL: THE RESTRUCTURING OF ALLOCATIVE PRACTICES

The economic crisis of 1974-5, which entailed a decline in real gross national product in most Western countries for the first time in three decades, was the ultimate and unmistakable sign that '*les trente glorieuses*'¹ had come to an end. From the late 1960s onwards, other indications had appeared, but they had either been weaker or limited to only a few countries: increased industrial action and the breakdown of 'concerted action' between employers, unions and government, slackening productivity growth, rising inflation rates, international imbalances with the abandoning of the dollar convertibility into gold and the switch to floating

currency exchange rates.² By the second half of the 1970s, all these signs added up to a general awareness of the end of an economic era.

The changes in allocative practices, which started at the turn of the 1960s and are still going on, can be described as the breaking of many of the social conventions that had characterized the model of organized modernity. They entail the

disappearance of the socioeconomic regularities, the reconsideration of the contours of most post-war organizational forms, the bursting of the representations and the expectations and, thus, a major uncertainty as to the looks into the future, the tearing up of solidarities and of constituted interests, etc.³

In my brief presentation I shall focus on four major aspects: the 'agreement' to set the terms of industrial relations on the national level was broken; the Keynesian consensus to develop a national consumption-based economy eroded; the organizational rules that fixed and secured position and task for each actor were reshaped; and technical innovations whose applications tended to break existing conventions were no longer upheld.

(a) It was a common feature of many Western economies during the 1950s and 1960s that unemployment tended to decrease, that the wage share in total national income tended to rise, and that profitability of capital diminished. By the early 1970s, this constellation had given rise to an explanation of economic stagnation from the 'lack of profitable production opportunities' due to the wage level or, in other words, from the 'full employment profit squeeze'.⁴ The basic idea was that the lack of qualified labour would strengthen the bargaining power of the unions to such an extent that, even if there were still opportunities for market expansion, the return would be 'squeezed' between wage costs on the one side, and market limits to pricing on the other, so that companies would be hesitant to invest. The important point to mark here is that this explanation may apply only under conditions of economies that are *closed* in the sense of restricting migration of labour, or outflow of capital towards labour. It is more likely under *organized* conditions in the sense of successful coalition-building on the part of labour, so that a homogenous labour market exists. Both conditions are generally fulfilled much less now than they were at the beginning of the 1970s.

Domestically, the emergence of a dual labour market can be observed. Due to changes in labour law, (legal or illegal) immigration and/or emerging long-term unemployment after years of economic stagnation, a sizeable part of the working population benefits only in parts, or not at all, from the wage rigidity and fringe regulations that had been introduced during organized modernity. Viewed from the employers' side, the 'choice' between terms of employment reintroduces flexibility. It is a change of conventions whose potential importance far exceeds the share of the less protected segment in the overall labour market: 'the emergence of a fringe of workers outside the central safety-net threatened the comprehensiveness of the system which had been a hallmark of the golden age.'⁵

(b) Furthermore, the strengthening of the bargaining power of the domestic

work force during the long boom provided an incentive for companies to internationalize their production.⁶ Under relatively liberal terms of world market trade, it was possible to produce in 'newly industrializing countries' (NICs) and import the commodities to the home countries. During the 'golden age' already, world trade had risen again more strongly than production, producing a rapid internationalization of the economies marked by high increases of import penetration rates. From the 1970s onwards, however, this trend turned against some sectors in the industrial countries, which reacted with some protectionist measures even though there was an economists' consensus that such policies needed to be avoided. At the same time, the demise of a manipulable international monetary arrangement such as the Bretton Woods agreement, together with the emergence of speculative currency markets, exposed all countries, particularly smaller ones, more unguardedly to occurrences on the world market. Evidently, such internationalization strongly affected the ability to regulate an economy through national demand management and strategic use of the exchange rate mechanism.

Beginning already after the Second World War, but accelerating after the crisis of the 1970s, one may speak of a 'gradual disappearance of the coherence of national productive systems'.⁷ In terms of agency, this is to say that there is no 'fit' any longer between an extended social phenomenon, namely the spatial extension of exchange structures, and a relevant collective actor which would want to observe, control and direct this social phenomenon, namely the state on its territory.⁸

The relevance of the problematic is indicated by the fact that those 'intellectual technologies'⁹ that were to re-present the state of the national economy in the offices of the ministries of finance and economic affairs did not work any longer: concepts like the money supply, the foreign balances or the Phillips curve are all focused on the nation. Once the allocative practices no longer cohere in the nation, the phenomena escape the reach of the economic policy-makers and the movements of the indicators for these concepts get out of control. The best-known example is the attempt of the first Mitterrand government in France in 1981 to expand the economy along the lines of Keynesian recipes, only to learn that its interdependence with the neighbouring economies was so strong that adverse international effects outweighed the rise in domestic activities. Having watched this experience of a fairly strong economy, no other government since has even tried to pursue an economic policy against the stream of the majority trend.¹⁰

The potential of opportunities offered by pursuing certain allocative practices clashed with the limits imposed by the concrete set of arrangements as it existed by the 1960s. For the time being, we witness a gradual demolishing of these arrangements, mostly without them being replaced yet by analogous arrangements that might be more adequate to the situation. The main problem is that no level of collectivity offers itself in the same way as the nation-state did at the end of the nineteenth century, when the first steps on the path to organized modernity were taken. This is a diagnosis that holds not only for allocative, but for authoritative and signifying practices as well, as shall be argued later.

The breakdown of nationally agreed social conventions liberates individual

actors – both employers and employees, producers and consumers – from having to follow rules that might not apply well to their specific case, even though they may have been designed as sensible protection rules. In this sense, 'deregulation' indeed provides new opportunities, as the jargon of its promoters will have it. These opportunities are offered to those who benefit from breaking the existing conventions. In terms of economic functions, these are multinational companies which move between nations using differences in conventions; (some) small- and medium-sized companies which could have had greater difficulties following general conventions due to specificities of their activities; and consumers who may benefit from enlarged offers and reduced prices due to internationalized trade.¹¹

The opportunities are provided, however, at the cost of existing power differentials having a direct impact on the individual (person or company) instead of being mediated through collective arrangements – a mediation that can be seen as the major argument behind the construction of the arrangements of organized modernity. In the realm of allocative practices, the present restructuring has obvious adverse consequences on the economic steering possibilities of those collective actors who had developed their specific organizational form with regard to the exigencies of (nationally) organized capitalism, namely the state and the unions. The very idea of macro-economic management, which, until as late as the 1960s, was hailed as putting an end to economic crises, had proven to be laden with a complex set of preconditions that could be attained only for a very short period. The Keynesian concepts had bred the universalist idea of an overall and comprehensive guidance of the economic process. As a consequence of the de-nationalization of the economy, it was gradually abandoned, mostly in favour of much more selective intervention and crisis management. More recent economic policy proposals no longer envisage the comprehensive oversight and control of a realm of practices by an entity that is somehow placed in a superior position. Rather, they envisage the actor itself as moving inside the realm of action and trying to enhance its own position by developing the specific strengths and assets that it may have.

The most striking example, indicating indeed a shift in the entire sociopolitical formation, is the abandoning of the commitment to full employment on the part of the national government. Though governments do not explicitly declare that this is the case, their practices since the late 1970s document this clearly. In 1974–5, when unemployment figures rose for the first time again strongly in West Germany after the Second World War, the then chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, explicitly preferred inflation to unemployment. His widely debated statement exemplified in two ways the order of organized modernity. First, he undoubtedly assumed an inverse correlation between the two economic phenomena, the so-called Phillips curve. Indeed, this had been true for the past decades, but ceased to be so at that precise point in time. Second, he implicitly expressed that he saw the political stability of the order based on full employment. Since then, governments have not only accepted the co-existence of both phenomena, but often enough stressed monetary stability even if it were at the price of a higher unemployment level.¹²

If the current transformations involve a loss of agential capacity and of the degree of control which two major organized collectives, the state and the trade unions, have had over a certain realm of practices, then one should trace these institutions back to their guiding ideas – instead of merely either deploring or welcoming these developments. The interventionist state rested on the assumption that there is a common interest of the national collective that has its specific legitimacy and needs a particular organization; similarly, the idea underlying statewide union organization was that there is a common interest of a social class, namely workers and employees.¹³ These ideas have given state and union their particular form in the context of the nationwide conventionalization of social practices, and it is first of all this form which is now in question. 'It is the "Fordist-Keynesian" form of this state which went into crisis.' What this means for interest organization after organized modernity is very unclear as yet. 'What is at stake is certainly a new synergy between individual interests, social rights, and economic efficacy.'¹⁴ But the outcome in terms of a new temporarily stable synthesis is quite open.

Instead of generally referring to a loss of agency and control, it seems more appropriate to speak of a *change in the locus of agency* and a *change in the mode of control* of social practices. At least two more such transformations need to be discussed with regard to allocative practices.

During recent years, observers have noted changes in the dominant technical mode of production. Whereas mass production of standardized goods had been seen as the model of efficiency at least since Taylorism and Ford's model T, innovations in productive activity now aimed increasingly at enhancing flexibility and specialization instead of merely improving the output-input ratio. A strong variant of such a thesis was proposed about a decade ago by Michael Piore and Charles Sabel, who argued that economic practices were at a second great historical divide, after the one that led from artisanal to industrial production. The new industrial divide was to be of similar dimension but in an inverse direction.¹⁵ I shall distinguish a more organizational (c) from a more technical aspect (d).

(c) The organizational changes may be summarized as a movement towards the loosening of formal hierarchies. The organized modernity approach had emphasized, first, increase in organizational size as a means of 'internalizing' what would otherwise be the environment of the firm and, second, minute definitions of tasks and hierarchies inside the firm as a means of establishing certainty about processes and outcomes. In contrast, the more recent tendencies are towards diminution of the space of total control and more open, less defined relations between the various actors in an interaction chain.¹⁶

The vertical integration of the production process, long a desired achievement, has been abandoned in favour of relations between a major organizing company and many suppliers, who are formally independent, though they may normally sell most of their product to the one big company. Thus, for instance, FIAT automobile company virtually owned most of the Turin industrial economy in the 1950s, whereas now a great number of suppliers co-operate with FIAT. Major companies

in the apparel and fashion business hardly produce at all, but merely put their label into articles of clothing that have been produced according to their specifications by autonomous companies.¹⁷ For decades, the major trend was to incorporate research and development functions into the producing company. Increasingly, more or less stable collaborations are now sought with independent R & D firms or public research laboratories and universities.¹⁸

Inside the firm a related process occurs, which has programmatically been labelled a move 'from control to commitment'.¹⁹ Instead of fighting the mind and will of the workers, so the argument goes, their capabilities and involvement are encouraged and demanded, by assigning responsibilities for parts of the work process to them. A new concept of human resources is proposed that appears to have a much wider conception of the human actor than the economic concept of human capital had a few decades ago.²⁰ Employees are seen not merely as receivers of commands nor as purely economic assets on whom return should be maximized, but as subjects developing their own sense of tasks, responsibilities and satisfaction with regard to the work they are doing.

So far, only very limited parts of the overall economic organization are affected by these changes, and there is no reason not to assume that part of the debate merely serves as rhetoric with the aim of enhancing the commitment of the workers because of the adverse effects of Taylorist organization (such as 'work-to-rule' action, sabotage, absenteeism, inflexibility). Nevertheless, there are reasons of economic viability behind these changes. It had been noted that dense regional networks of small- and medium-sized firms, operating below the level of standardized mass production, had weathered the crises of the 1970s much better than big companies. It was held that they were able to react more flexibly to changing signals from their clients and customers, first because of the greater adaptability of a network of autonomous units compared to one hierarchical unit and, second, because of their lower commitment to a technically rigid organization of production.

If this is the case then, what would be the consequences of such a general relaxing of rigid forms of control? On the one hand, the space for self-employment may increase. On the other, spaces of action may be enlarged for employees, and management may rely more strongly on the self-control of the employees in accordance with company objectives. Both these changes demand a self-understanding of the economic actor – the employee as well as the self-employed – that is different from the one on which Taylorism was built. From the mere acceptance of minute commands and signals, much more self-initiated interpretation of and action on the social world will be expected and required from economic actors. The social effects of such changes on the position and practices of the self will be discussed below (see Chapter 10).

(d) In contrast – but not in contradiction – to organizational sociologists, industrial sociologists stress that recent changes in allocative practices are related to a reassessment of the paradigm of mass production and a turn to 'flexible specialization', that is, the production of smaller series of a greater variety of

goods. The existence of another major technological rupture in advanced industrial societies over the past two or three decades is hardly doubted any longer, though it still appears to be difficult to define its exact nature. 'Technologists frequently observe that we are currently undergoing a shift of ... the technoeconomic paradigm, from one centred around Fordist mass production, to one centred around high technology based on advances in microelectronics.'²¹ Against the background of a variety of technical innovations – among which are laser technology, new materials, satellites and possibly soon genetic technologies, besides microelectronics²² – some have argued that the dominance of the rationality of scale and the pattern of standardization and homogenization have subsided. The types of intervention into materials, living nature and – also – human beings have become finer, more closely directed to the objective of the intervention, and there are more possibilities for informational and communicative control of the effects of an intervention as well as possibilities for correction.

Without wanting (or being able) to analyse this reorientation in depth, I would like to discuss briefly the claim of a trend towards flexibilization, or, *vice versa*, toward the end of standardization. I shall distinguish flexibilization of production from flexibilization of utilization. Generally, the term flexible specialization seems to cover some tendencies of technological potentials in both the production and use of technologies, beyond manufacturing technologies for which it was introduced. Now, a feature of this process is that it does not entail the dismantling of the characteristic technical systems of organized modernity that enhanced the conventionalization of practices (as described in Chapter 5). Instead, it is built on, or hooked up to, them and uses the basic structuring of practices that these systems have provided. Owing to this feature, the technical systems of organized modernity have already been called primary systems, and the more recently added systems secondary ones.²³ Though this terminology is a bit overly schematic, I will stay with it for a moment.

With the recent technical changes, it has been possible to increase speed and precision in the management of information, matter and energy. In so far as the changed practices of allocation allow a greater variety of products to be produced according to more specific demand, this indeed entails de-standardization. However, the same shift involves a strengthening of trends towards the globalization of allocation. Much more often than, say, twenty years ago, production and product markets are effectively or potentially global. The market increase itself enhances standardization. But more importantly, it tends to demand the setting of global standards in cases in which a century ago, quite naturally, national standards would have been sought and established.²⁴ Often, globally homogeneous component parts will be assembled by means of globally homogeneous manufacturing technology at many different places into a great variety of different products. The notion of secondarization of technical systems captures well this situation of technical flexibility and variety attached onto a generalized pattern.²⁵

The emphasis shifts when we begin to look at the utilization of 'new' technologies and the goods that are produced with them. Most of the technical

systems of organized modernity involved the standardization of material objects in such a way that their usage led to the standardization of patterns of behaviour and the collectivization of modes of action. The secondary systems, in contrast, often allow diversification of objects and individualization of behaviour patterns. 'Related to the privatization of technology, a tendency towards such systems is evident that enhance the users' freedom to choose.'²⁶ The flexible specialization of manufacturing, for instance, increases the variety of objects that are affordable to average consumers.

One should not interpret, though, such changes as the foundations of organized modernity being shaken by technical pushes. Indeed, one may argue the other way round: the present societal transformations may have favoured a certain direction of technical development. In the current social restructuring, innovations are applied that were 'hitherto contained by the rules of the social game'.²⁷

Furthermore, beyond its first heuristic use, the comparison of primary and secondary technologies and their historical location in social configurations has its limits, which may be shown by discussing examples of technologies that appear to deviate from the historical pattern, the car and the telephone. Historically, the diffusion of both techniques falls squarely into the social configuration of organized modernity, the car as a product even being the prime example for the emergence of an 'organized' production and consumption pattern. However, the forms of use both techniques allow are highly individual and private, and were early on recognized as such by the users. In both cases, early restricted patterns of use, such as for military and for business purposes, were soon exceeded, and these techniques became the symbols of independence, autonomy and individuality. The car-and-road system even tended to supersede and replace a transportation system that was much more collectively arranged, the railroad.

So, the broad historical pattern I try to carve out must not be misunderstood as a strong scheme superimposed on diverse and conflict-ridden social realities. In the case of these two techniques, however, a closer look at diffusion patterns reinserts them into a comparative analysis of – more organized or more liberal – modernity. The car received its first diffusion boom in France, a culture known for its individualism, and was an upper-class means of asserting liberty and individuality in an emerging mass society.²⁸ The full breakthrough of the automobile then occurred obviously in the US, where it seemed to combine the independence drive of the most liberal modernity with the historical path for organized production and consumption. Characteristically, in a culture known for being more collectivist, the German one, the car reached diffusion levels comparable to that of the French one as late as the 1960s. The telephone, analogously, became standard equipment in private households first in the US, whereas in Europe its use remained long limited to military and business purposes, where actually in the army context for some time the one-way, top-down communication was maintained, though two-way communication was technically feasible.²⁹

To capture the sum of these recent changes of allocative practices, the notion of the 'disorganization of capitalism' has been proposed by some authors, though it

has not really been widely accepted.³⁰ It conveys the idea that an old, highly organized order is breaking down, but it does not really offer an understanding of the current structure of practices. The transformations do not mark the collapse of all practices, but rather the fact that some of them are extending beyond the boundaries in which they were ordered and which were a precondition for their ordering.

Many of the practices of allocation do indeed work on a more extended scale than ever before. In many regards, effective globalization is happening in realms in which strong barriers had to be surmounted before, when moving from one country to another. Currency and trade unions are a major expression of such extensions; an immediately striking example to any traveller is the working of the banking-machine/credit-card system. Without linguistically-based communication and in practically no time, for hypothetically tens of thousands of users simultaneously, a specific and individual linkage is created between available resources at somebody's place of residence and a distant location, a linkage which is effective in enabling, for instance, consumption acts that may otherwise have been impossible.

The alleged disorganization is in fact accompanied by strong reorganization attempts and, indeed, elements of the emergence of a new, global, order. However, the 'system' lacks the coherence of the old one and does not (yet) provide certainty to a similar extent that the order of organized modernity did.³¹

REOPENING POLITICAL BOUNDARIES: THE CRISIS OF THE WELFARE STATE AND THE BREAKDOWN OF SOCIALISM

Earlier, I described the organization of the practices of authoritative power under organized modernity as a broadly successful range of attempts to limit the scope of the polity, politics and policy relative to the liberal ideal (see Chapter 6). It was, by and large, established that the boundaries of the polity should coincide with those of a nation; that political representation could be practised through competitive parties and political deliberation be reached through top-level bargaining; and that the legitimate activities of the state should extend beyond safeguarding law and order to guaranteeing a decent living to every member of the polity.

These rules were largely created in response to obvious problems in the idea and the history of liberal modernity. Once the relevant actors had recognized their potential for stabilizing the social order, deliberate efforts were devoted to enhancing or maintaining the thus constructed coherence of organized modernity. At the historical point when the greatest coherence was reached – mostly during the 1960s – new strains emerged, and the boundaries were increasingly questioned and began to shake. It is under such a guiding theme that I shall discuss the recent transformations of authoritative practices. Again, I shall proceed by distinguishing the boundaries (a) of policy-making, (b) of politics and (c) of the polity.

(a) At the height of organized modernity, say, by the 1960s, the state was

regarded as strong and coherent. In principle, at least, it could acquire all necessary knowledge about society; and it had the ability to intervene into society in a regulating and harmonizing way.³² Furthermore, the scope of its interventions was consensually defined as vast and was continuously expanding. By the 1990s, the image of the state had changed in all three dimensions.

The call for 'deregulation' is often seen as stemming from the entrepreneurial desire not to be hampered in the pursuit of profitable activities by overdrawn social concern expressed in administrative decrees. While such a view is not entirely wrong, it is based on a counterposition of an economic sphere in which only profitability counts, and a political sphere in which the public good may be defended and the welfare of all be pursued. Such a perspective underestimates the extent to which state regulation may impede liberties in general, and not merely economic liberties. In recent years, all kinds of compulsory arrangements – from public schools to public broadcasting to compulsory insurance schemes – have come under the criticism of citizens who would prefer other substantive arrangements than the state prescribes. In many cases, these demands are raised in the name of plurality and diversity, and have little or nothing to do with commercial considerations – though they may carry an elite bias and may also be directed against the lower quality of publicly provided services. Nevertheless what is visible here is a revival of the liberal idea of limits to state intervention and a renewed emphasis placed on the societal capacity for self-organization.

Beyond the open criticism of entrepreneurs and clients, the planning-oriented, interventionist state also faced internal problems. Ideally, the interventionist state had relied on the idea of a central steering capacity, in which the relation of problem analysis, policy design, policy implementation and policy effects would be unproblematically governed by a hierarchical chain.³³ However, the hierarchical notion of the policy process underestimated the multitude of actors and variety of actor positions that would be involved in any such process. If conceived as an undisturbed top-down process, policies required control and surveillance needs beyond any initial expectations. As a consequence, policy programmes would often be put into effect only in ways which deviated markedly from the intentions, a phenomenon somewhat euphemistically called 'implementation problems', the policy research variant of the sociological notion of unintended consequences. This phenomenon could be called the 'bureaucratic crisis of the welfare state'.³⁴

Furthermore, interventionist policy-making had relied far too strongly on the idea of the possible cognitive mastery of society. The definition and analysis of societal issues that could be turned into policy problems seemed relatively unproblematic at the height of social science optimism. For policy-makers and administrators it was often an incomprehensible and painful experience to see that the instruments they offered had been derived from a problem definition which their clients and supposed beneficiaries did not at all share. Beyond implementation problems, policies faced interpretation problems, which were often enough much more persistent.

As a result, the policy-making parts of the political class, including the supporting experts and professionals, have become much more modest with regard to their capabilities than they had been two decades ago. It is observable among these groups how the self-proliferated all-powerful conception of the state is gradually, and sometimes radically, withdrawn. From posing as the omniscient regulator and leader the state is reposed as a partner and moderator.³⁵ This withdrawal includes the diffusion of arrangements in which the state disposes of its absolute rights to decree and regulate, and rather delegates these functions to private bodies or performs them in conjunction with such bodies.³⁶

In all three respects – the scope, the definition and the execution of policies – the clarity of the model of the all-pervasive interventionist state has disappeared and has given way to a new diffuseness of the boundaries between the spheres of public and private regulation. It would be too simple to state that merely the boundary of public regulation is being pushed back again, a reversal of a hundred-years' historical trend that moved away from the liberal towards the welfarist conception of the state. Rather, the entire relation between public and private spheres is in motion. Due to interpretative and deliberative activities that are pursued in common by public officials and varieties of private groups, the very location of a policy decision in one or the other sphere becomes increasingly problematic.³⁷ This blurring of boundaries raises issues of legitimacy and sovereignty.

(b) The questioning of the boundaries of organized democracy has taken two main forms, the resort to extra-institutional protest on the one hand, significantly called 'unconventional political action', and the erosion of the electoral institutions on the other.

From the late 1960s onwards, Western societies experienced increased social unrest. Protest movements formed which directed themselves against specific policies, but also expressed a general opposition against forms and substance of politics in 'advanced industrial society'. While the actual dimensions of contestation were not very remarkable in a long-term historical perspective, the common view that '1968' and its aftermaths shook Western societies is nevertheless valid. What was disturbing was that, first, the broad involvement of students showed that potential members of the future elites were ready to violate established rules and, second, that the protest tended to break the widely held imagery of society as a stable and coherent system of rules.³⁸

The very notion of unconventional forms of political action, coined by political scientists, reveals this feature.³⁹ By that time, a consensus was assumed about the regular forms of political participation, namely through elections and – for those who were civic-minded beyond the average citizen – within the organizations of the established parties. To choose not to stay within the realm defined by those conventions meant more than just uttering a deviant opinion. It entailed questioning the very adequacy and legitimacy of those conventions.

Over a short time, unconventional political action transformed from a movement of broad political protests of short duration and small numbers into a

great variety of contestations and civic interventions with often greater continuity and more limited, often local, objectives.⁴⁰ An example that is often cited is the movement against the use of nuclear energy, which organized nationally and internationally but was also based on continuous activity in local groups working for local objectives.⁴¹ But in many more cases, goals are defined in even more limited terms and of clearly only local relevance. Thus, it is no exaggeration to state that civic involvement has increased across the board, subverting the conventions of organized democracy.

The increased unconventional activity of citizens goes broadly along with a decreased activity in the conventional forms. With regard to elections, the erosion of the party system manifests itself in abstentionism and in decreasing support for the 'established' parties. With regard to party competition, it is visible through the formation of new parties, and the internal restructuring of old parties.⁴² Here, a distinction may be made in terms of the attitude to political participation. Some of these activities can be interpreted as attempts to restructure the political institutions so that they may reflect better, and respond more appropriately to, the will of the population. Others, however, must be seen as a turn away from participation in the form in which it is offered.

The distinction is often not very clear in reality, since one attitude may easily shift into the other, provoked by new experiences. However, the difference is evidently great with regard to the consequences. So the formation of some parties may be taken as an example of the former, especially in the case of some environmentalist parties which have emerged from the experience of unconventional participation. In other cases though, such as parties of the New Right, it shows features of an abdication of the idea of participation and of the delegation of civic rights to a leader.

The same ambiguity is characteristic of the attempts at internal restructuring in the old parties. Not least provoked by losses in membership and the concomitant relative successes of 'movement parties' (such as the German Green Party or the Italian Radical Party), some old parties (again most notably the German Social Democratic Party and the former Italian Communist Party) have tried to revive their own heritage by opening up to current social movements and offering themselves as the organized political expression of such movements. Apart from the substantive changes that these manoeuvres entail, they tend to transform the understanding of party organization. What is at stake is exactly the enabling character of an organization with regard to collective action. These openings tend to shift the emphasis from the forceful expression of a common interest to the communicative formation of such an interest. In this sense, they may appear as a reversal of the historical process of party construction and a return to 'mobilization from below'. If they are pursued seriously, the strengthening of will formation is likely to go along with a weakening of the power of the party in party competition – as long as the conventional rules apply in that competition.

The more likely outcome, however, is – without doubting the sincerity of some of the promoters of change – a general de-structuring of the party organization, so

that the distribution of influence in the organization becomes less predictable and the durable programmatic profile of the parties withers away. The possibility of the emergence of 'political entrepreneurship' increases also in hitherto tight party systems.⁴³ It is significant that this kind of entrepreneurship is the common pattern in the US, which again sets this always more liberal modernity apart from more organized ones in Europe.

(c) Since at least the 1960s, it has often been argued that national states, in particular small ones, factually lose their autonomy when allocative practices cross boundaries to a great extent, and when the power of economic actors, often measured in financial resources, far exceeds that of the states on whose territories they are active. Claiming that the reasoning was exaggerated, a counter-argument held that its unique disposal over sovereignty rights would keep crucial power with the state. This is basically where that debate left off.⁴⁴

Granting the validity of both arguments, any assessment would have to rely on the closer examination of interdependencies. Such studies would have to focus on the degree of internationality of practices and the power differentials between actors, on the one hand, and on changes in the distribution of sovereignty rights within the nation-state and between states, on the other.⁴⁵ Without anticipating any more detailed studies, two trends over the past two decades are obvious.

First, social practices have tended to become more internationalized at an increasing pace. This is not only true for allocative practices specifically, but has a much broader impact as a consequence of the trend towards globalization of information and communication. Besides the impact of economic interdependence, the 'culture' of a nation is much less of a frame of reference for the minds of the citizens than it used to be, given easier flow of communication and increased cross-boundary travel. It is worth pointing this out since the factual limits to information flow and elite control over it, which were still relevant by the turn to this century, had arguably a strong supportive impact on the formation of a national imagined community. While state sovereignty allows the restriction of both economic and informational internationalism, the use of this power has been made more difficult not only for technical reasons, but also with regard to the threat of losing legitimacy.⁴⁶

In this context, a special aspect is added by an issue which the polities of organized modernity had almost completely neglected, because it had been considered fixed, namely the cultural stability and continuity of the population inside a nationally defined territory. People have immigrated into West European countries for a variety of reasons – as entitled citizens of former colonies, as hired immigrant workers, as political refugees, as refugees from the plight of the Third World, or for reasons of personal preference. In any case, as a result of accumulated immigration hardly any of these countries can consider themselves monocultural – if they ever could. Even beyond the political issues of the day, such as suffrage rights, refugee rights, etc., the plurality and mobility of current populations reopens the issue of the definition of the political entity towards the 'outside'.⁴⁷

Second, many European nation-states have started to dispose of rights of sovereignty and have handed them either internally to regional polities or externally to international regimes. Most of these moves have been taken as a reaction to the changing extension of social practices. Proposals for monetary unions, for instance, are a response to the strengthened business interactions across boundaries and the expected material benefits from such interactions. The granting of regional autonomy, on the other hand, is a response to the criticism that the nationally operating interventionist state disregards the specific organization of practices in regions and communities.

Broadly, any attempt to make polity boundaries correspond to the boundaries of spatially extended habitual practices appears sound, both in terms of expected efficiency of regulations and with regard to normative concerns of democracy. However, one also needs to note that such attempts basically merely ratify the losses of boundary control and abdicate the idea of the unity of the polity. Many of the changes in state organization are basically analogous to those occurring in business organization. The state, though, is not an organization like any other, it carries a universalist reference to representation and legitimation that it cannot really get rid of. Being territorially and population-wise defined, it has to stick to some idea of comprehensive coverage instead of 'groping' in and with a diffuse social realm. I shall return to these issues later (see Chapter 11).

The state of organized modernity could not 'hold', 'contain', as it was designed to do, the transformations of social practices.⁴⁸ In the discourse of the Keynesian welfare state, though, it had taken over the responsibility for the orderly continuation of social practices, a promise it was unable to fulfil from the middle of the 1970s onwards. With reference to such strong claims, and with a view of the first signs of strains on the state capacity, a number of social theorists argued at that time that a 'legitimacy crisis' might emerge from the gap between the claim and the reality.⁴⁹ In a sense, this came to be the case, though in a different way than was expected.

From the mid-1970s onwards, policy-makers in Western societies were in fact faced with rising and contradictory demands on the part of different social groups. On the one hand, the conditions for reaching socially accepted economic goals, such as full employment, had worsened. On the other hand, in the light of the strong image of the state as the great harmonizer which had been conveyed in earlier years, demands were raised with regard not only to the elimination of poverty but also the enhancement of the quality of life. Instead of trying to reshape authoritative practices with regard to meeting the higher requirements, as some political groups tried, the dominant reaction to this situation came to be the dismissal of the demands as unfulfillable and tendentially illegitimate themselves.⁵⁰

The major discursive means of underpinning this reaction was a renewed emphasis on the liberal foundations of the social order that required that the state do only what other actors could not do. The political classes in Western states withdrew from their earlier claims of strength and will and returned, in line with a

liberal ideology, to a more moderate position. For at least a decade, the 1980s, this move precluded any legitimacy crisis to arise in a strong sense. However, the changes in social practices, together with that reinterpretation of the realm of authoritative practices, may have a stronger long-term impact, given that both changes tend to loosen the relation between the individual and the polity (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 10).

At this point of my argument, I will return to briefly considering Soviet socialism in comparison with Western modernity. For the time being, the life-span of this social order seems to be almost fixed in history. After protracted struggles that brought the organized workers' movements ever closer to power, the first such regime was established in Russia in 1917. Socialism spread to East Central Europe after, and as a result of, the Second World War. It lived through a major crisis in the late 1960s, from which it would never fully recover, and broke down in the late 1980s. Sketched this way, the historical path of socialism coincided very neatly with that of organized modernity. As a way of organizing social practices, this path can be interpreted in the broader historical context of societal development.

If the organization of modernity was much more radical in Soviet socialism than in the West (see Chapter 6), then the same turned out to be true for the demise of socialism as compared to that of organized modernity. It is quicker, leaves less of the old boundaries, and destroys collective arrangements more thoroughly. The political classes in the socialist states were, *mutatis mutandis*, faced with problems similar to those of their counterparts in the West; social practices tended to break out of the conventions in which they were held. However, the marked difference is that socialism had gone much further in the encapsulation of practices than Western organized modernity. After the 1960s, at the latest, the stronger encapsulation became a liability rather than an asset – even from an elite perspective. At that point, the divergence between socialism and the Western societies reemerged, as the ability or inability to respond to the difficulties of an organized-modern social formation became crucial. Elements for an analysis of the demise of socialism can be elaborated from such a perspective.

The organization of allocative practices on the basis of a central plan had developed its own momentum. Other signals from other sources being excluded, the only way to deal with deviations from the envisaged performance was to introduce new performance indicators and monitor the production processes more closely and more often.⁵¹ As long as it could be considered a valid assumption that production technology was fixed and that the only relevant parameter was economies of scale, such a fine-grading of control appeared possible at least in principle, if hardly always in practice. However, some economists recognized early that this would not be the case.

In the 1960s, economic reforms that were to introduce elements of market co-ordination and enhance flexibility were tried in most socialist states. Hungary aside, however, they were all almost completely withdrawn after the suppression of the Prague Spring. It appears as if the economic performance started to decrease then. Even a phenomenon analogous to 'stagflation' emerged when increased

unemployment 'on the job' went along with inflation, the latter being measured as an average of subsidized staple goods and expensive new products. If this is correct, it shows a first striking parallel between the restructuring processes in both social formations. Only, the socialist economies did not resort to the techno-organizational instruments that were increasingly employed in the West. One of the reasons may have been that it was suspected that a shift from hierarchical control to self-control in the realm of allocative practices would spread soon to the realm of authoritative practices. The suppression of the Prague Spring was followed by the re-centralization of the production apparatus.

The political classes of socialism were much more obsessed with control and surveillance than their Western counterparts. They had organized authoritative practices in a much more closed form, and proved mostly unable to withdraw to a more flexible position. With variations between countries, proposals outside the established principles and organized channels were regularly not tolerated, no rules to process such proposals were developed, and 'unconventional political action' where it occurred was usually immediately suppressed. At the same time, some sort of loosening of the party organization can be observed. The East German party relaxed the condition that membership must go along with intense political activity. As a consequence, membership figures rose – to gain access to privileges and careers⁵² – and political activities declined. Generally, the parties tried to present themselves as the best representatives of the new interests, such as environmentalist ones, whose emergence they recognized as well, though more slowly, as the established Western parties did.

With regard to both allocative and authoritative practices, the socialist political class had to deal with a subversion of the orders of practices, beginning gradually after the end of Stalinism. A certain deal had by then been struck between the political class and the population. With regard to allocation, this deal was known, at least in Poland and the Soviet Union, by the workers' saying: 'They pretend they pay us, we pretend we work.'⁵³ Such an informal assessment of the state of the economy and its rules legitimated the elaboration of a 'hidden economy'. Though it could never be measured, it can be guessed that the share of exchange that did not follow the plans – as private or inter-firm rechannellings – in the East was greater than the share of exchange that was not reported to the tax authorities in the West.

The equivalent saying in the realm of authority would be (though I never heard it said in explicitly these terms): 'They pretend they govern, we pretend we follow.' The deal entailed that the regime would rule out open repression, as long as the population refrained from open revolt. This rule allowed the hidden distanciation from the foundational political maxims of socialism. While it was struck by the elites to maintain internal stability and manoeuvrability in the world order, it contributed to undermining the regime. Among the people it was by then widely recognized that, as long as the deal was kept, the political class was also in a dependent position with regard to everyday practices, not only the other way round. With the regime strongly committed to providing income maintenance

(though at a lower level than in most OECD countries), social security, health care and basic education in universal form and having no disciplinary means at its disposal when 'full employment' was guaranteed and social mobility almost non-existent as a 'career incentive', disciplinary enforcement of obedience as well as work performance was very limited.

It is well known that awareness of crises was not totally absent in the political classes of socialism. One problem was that it could hardly be voiced without sanction from most, except the top, positions in the hierarchy. The other problem was that the classes were caught inside their own, highly conventionalized practices of signification. The way in which the unity of society, state and party had been made a corner-stone for the entire building, there was no conception of other, relatively autonomous spheres in society to which the regulation of some social practices could be handed over and the demand on the political class relieved.⁵⁴

In sum, the political classes of socialism had to defend a very strongly erected system of closed boundaries that proved undefendable as a whole at a time when practices could no longer be kept inside those boundaries. The German Democratic Republic is only the most extreme case of loss of boundary control in this respect. The few years after the end of socialism show more generally that the cognitive and communicative resources needed to re-establish politics on more open principles are very limited in the realm of former socialism. However, the breakdown of the order beyond the old border between West and East should not turn attention away from the fact that the reorientations underway on this side of that border face analogous problems. And the fall of socialism may have exacerbated, rather than eased them. The breakdown of a strongly guarded order of social practices in close vicinity will have a strong impact on the possibilities for safeguarding or restructuring collective arrangements in the West European nation-states or the European community.

Sociology and contingency

The crisis of the organized mode of representation

CONTESTING ORGANIZED MODERNITY

In the preceding chapter I have tried to characterize what I see as a major societal transformation going on since the 1960s. This transformation entails the breakdown of many of the organized social practices that came to be established over long and partly violent struggles between the beginning of the century and the 1960s. Early on, during these recent transformations, something occurred which soon came to be seen as a major event of high significance, though there was (and is) hardly any agreement regarding in what way it was to be significant. The importance it acquired in the collective memory of the Western societies can be gathered from the fact that the event was given a short designation that is understood by many members of these societies: 1968.

In a sense, what really happened had to seem of minor importance to any sober observer. A couple of thousands of students arrived at political views on current affairs that deviated from those of all major political parties, and when they felt that their sensible opinions were not given due attention, they resorted to direct action at their universities and in their cities. In some countries, these student activities happened to coincide with a wave of industrial action that was stronger than what one had become used to during the preceding decade. Of course, some of the activists on both the students' and the workers' side tried to link the one struggle to the other, but it could sensibly be argued that these struggles had ultimately little in common so that any kind of coalition-building was bound to fail.

While such a characterization does not seem particularly flawed, it had very little appeal to contemporaries. In France, as rumour had it, the President of the Republic was about to flee the country much like the king on the occasion of the French Revolution did. In the US, the National Guard was sent to university campuses where they shot protesting students. In Italy, the country was seen as being on the verge of a social revolution and factions of the political class were secretly preparing a coup and a military dictatorship to put an end to the unrest. From a present viewpoint though, these reactions appear widely exaggerated.

It seems as if not only many of the contestants but also the political elites adhered to political imageries that tended to enlarge the size of the events and

Part V

Towards extended liberal
modernity?

Incoherent practices and postmodern selves

The current condition of modernity

MODERNITY AFTER ITS SECOND CRISIS

More than two centuries ago, the modern rupture brought a transformation of the reflexive discourses of society in such a way that the social struggles of the time were cast in new terms (see Chapter 1). Since then the discourse of modernity was effective in shaping social struggles and their outcomes in the form of new rules and institutions, but at no point was something like the project of modernity achieved. In recent times, rather, the opinion has been voiced that the project itself has gradually been used up in the struggles over its realization, that the ideas have been consumed.

The notion of the end of history is nonsensical if it is supposed to mean that there will be no longer be any major struggles over societal reorganizations. The notion of the end of modernity is wrong if it is to denote that our times can no longer be considered as living with the imaginary significations of modernity, that is, with individual autonomy and rational mastery. However, if the former theorem calls for realizing that there is no goal inscribed – nor inscribable – into History, and the latter that the intellectual and social energies that were put into the modern project are exhausted, then these notions do possibly describe an important aspect of our time. Historical processes may continue without the meaning they were once endowed with; habitualized practices that were created with the project of modernity in mind may go on after having lost their legitimacy.¹ Based on the preceding analysis of the historical transformations of modernity, a – limited – argument can be made that this is indeed the case.

The project of modernity rests on two very basic assumptions, those of the intelligibility and the shapeability (or manageability) of the social world. At the origins of modernity, very strong and clear-cut ideas on how a social order worked were combined with general and far-reaching conclusions on the requirements for reaching a desirable order. One may say that, at that point, society was yet unshaped by modernist interventions, at the same time it was deemed well-understood and perfectly shapeable. In those terms, we can now describe the – meandering, not linear – historical process of the disenchantment of the modern project. The history of the discourses of modernity can be read as variations of this theme, as explorations into how the social world can be known and how it can be changed in an orderly manner.

The crises of modernity are periods in which both intelligibility and shapeability are strongly doubted. Then, a peculiar feature of these ideas becomes visible, namely a reliance on a notion of 'legislative reason', or the idea that intelligibility and shapeability are to be linked.² These crises and transformations of modernity are 'progressive' in the sense that ever more intellectual efforts have to be put into the rebuilding of a notion of legislative reason.

In the original ideas, social practices were to form an interlocking order, the possibility of social knowledge was not doubted, and a state was conceived above social practices and endowed with higher historical reason and a unitary will. During the first crisis, practices were no longer seen as self-regulating but were to be organized with the help of a social knowledge whose character was disputed, and by a state that was now seen as an apparatus, erected in the name of a nation and/or a class. Instead of building on natural trends toward coherence and certainty, incoherence and uncertainty had to be actively fought against. The transformation of modernity from a restricted liberal to an organized one should not least be understood in such terms.

During the second crisis, the very possibility of social knowledge of entire societies is denied, and social practices are considered as so incoherent and open to multiple interpretation that the consequences of interventions can in no way be anticipated. Furthermore, the space from which such an intervention could be undertaken, previously held by the state, is seen as non-existent or empty. Terms like disorganization or pluralization appear plausible, since highly organized and bounded practices lose coherence and open up. While some practices of allocation and of signification are effectively globalized, others, some authoritative practices in particular, appear to be losing reach and coverage.

Like the preceding crisis of modernity, the current condition is marked by the confluence of the two kinds of doubts, in intelligibility and in shapeability. The more widely diffused awareness of the constructedness and constructability of the social world has strengthened doubts in the possibility of valid, natural knowledge. The awareness of the plurality and diversity of social practices makes it difficult to imagine a collective actor which would intervene in the name and for the sake of universalist ideas.

These doubts tend to strengthen each other. A loosening of the relatively coherent set of practices of organized modernity is accompanied by a new and stronger emphasis on basic issues of a philosophy of contingency. Such an openness of view, in turn, once it is widespread and applied to every social phenomenon, makes visible the shallow foundations on which the practices of organized modernity were built. One of the great achievements of organized modernity was to make practices somewhat coherent. But the other, similarly important, achievement was to make these arrangements appear as quasi-natural. The naturalization of the social order closed the foundational issues and precluded strong doubts about their viability as well as the very thought of an alternative. This naturalization has now been shaken, if not broken. The confluence is one of a factual loosening of the coherence of organized social practices, on the one hand,

and the loss of the very idea of intelligibility and manageability of social practices on the global scale on which this is now required, on the other.

Where the transition from organized modernity leads to is still open. Its outcome depends not least on how it is perceived by the now living human beings and what kinds of action they think they are capable of and would be willing to engage in. In this process, it is very likely that their – our – predominant experience is the dissolution and dismantling of organized modernity. We appear to be more ready than ever – even if forced rather than willingly at times – to accept a social philosophy of contingency as the basic tool of our self-understanding. What such an experience may mean for the possibilities and forms of individual and collective self-determination after the end of organized modernity is to be discussed in the remainder of this chapter – starting with a second explicit look at American exceptionalism.

LIBERAL MODERNITY AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM (II)

'Americans regarded their own revolution, unlike the French, as a success.'³ This entailed that no further revolutions were necessary; it was a revolution to end all revolutions. True, there could well be further conflicts of interests. But those conflicts could be handled and solved in a limited discursive space that was marked by a broad consensus moving only between individualist liberalism and civic republicanism, and in the open social space of a society that was only just building itself, with plenty of resources to distribute and few rules that were already set. In continental European societies, in contrast, the social space in which conflicts could be handled was comparatively limited, whereas the discursive space opened by the French Revolution – in which the ideologies of the nineteenth century were to unfold – was wide.

After their revolution, Americans built a less restricted, more liberal modernity than the Europeans, and they never saw a reason to deviate as strongly from that form as the Europeans did at later times. They never decidedly abandoned liberal modernity, one could say – notably not in the forms of fascism or socialism either. If the current transformation entails, broadly, a move from an organized to a more liberal modernity, then it may be worthwhile to study the shape of a society which has always been comparatively more liberal. If the transition from organized modernity is accompanied by a de-substantivization and de-collectivization of rule-setting, then, too, it may be elucidating to take a look at that place where people have consistently refused to recognize the centrality of problems that others had considered as fundamental and divisive.

Modernity was always less restricted in the US, and where it was the restrictions were of a different kind. No clear boundaries were drawn to the lower classes in the nineteenth century, in so far as those were white. The possibility of upward mobility and the lack of formal barriers to it were part of the motivations to emigrate and became an essential element to societal self-understanding, as cast in the so-called 'American dream'.⁴ The theorem of the 'frontier society' points to

the openness of boundaries in a quite literal sense. The idea of full control over a territory and, by extension, over a society which was a basic feature of European states was very far from realization through most of American history and was often not seen as desirable either.

In the US, the idea of small-scale communities as the basis of society is part of conventional political wisdom. Historically, social projects and collective identities often have their location in the local community. It is no exaggeration to state that the idea of a society as it exists in Europe is not fully developed in the US.⁵ The social practices have started as basically communal and highly diverse ones, often in fact going back to joint settlements. In a comparatively short period they were 'perforated' with nationalized allocative practices from railroads to nationwide products and retail chains to highways. Some of them were in fact disintegrating during that time and their individuals reassembled at quite different places.⁶ But despite the nationalization of allocative practices, no strong national society emerged – at least if compared to European societies that were more bounded, had longer and stronger traditions of state institutions, and experienced stronger collectivization efforts.

True, there was some degree of organization of social practices also in the US. From the wave of company mergers before the turn of the century and the heyday of American socialism early in the twentieth century to the New Deal and the War on Poverty as the zenith of the American welfare state, a historical narrative can be provided that runs largely parallel to the European one, including also the break-up of organized modernity. Even during its more collectivistically oriented periods, the Progressive Era and the third-of-a-century between the New Deal and the Great Society (including McCarthyism), the American equivalent to organized modernity remained less organized than most European societies.⁷

The evidence for this consistent distinctiveness of the United States is so overwhelming that it needs hardly any illustration. A few examples may suffice. In the realm of authoritative practices, the most striking feature is the persistent difficulty of supporting a strong role of the state. The share of government revenues in the domestic product is drastically lower than in any European country. Every government measure has to face a principled argument over its justification in terms of a political theory that stresses individual liberties as freedom from government. The lack of public revenues for social purposes is partly offset by private donations and charity, but under such arrangements the uncommunicated outcome of many individual decisions decides on social priorities instead of political deliberation.

Political parties are only loosely organized on the state and federal level and are used for temporary mobilization and interest organization rather than steady programmatic activity on the basis of conceptions of national welfare.⁸ The right to self-determination is often understood as inclusive of the right to determine the boundaries of the collective. Such a principle enhances segregation and fragmentation and undermines the long-term stability of polities when interests change.⁹ Compulsory collectivist arrangements have remained scarce. Insurance, in

particular, is mostly practiced on the basis of free contract or adherence to organizations rather than national or state citizenship.

In the realm of practices of signification, the strength of liberal-individualist reasoning is obviously the most consistent comparative characteristics of the American discursive tradition. Currently, though, two other sociopolitical theories stand at the centre of interest, namely postmodernism and communitarianism. The latter is often regarded as a uniquely American approach, whereas the former flourishes particularly strongly in the US, though it appears everywhere in Western societies.

Postmodernism rejects the idea of substantive foundations of human social life, including bases for universalist values, and stresses difference and plurality instead. In political terms, claims to universality and consensuality are then regarded as expressions of the interests of the dominant white, male Anglo-Saxons in society. A focus on multi-culturalism often goes along with the denial of any commonality between cultures and a priority given to the right of politico-cultural expression of the separate groups. Though spokespersons of postmodernist perspectives – under this or other names – would usually see themselves on the political left, their discourse rather seems to provide a mirror image of a highly segregated and fragmented society.

In contrast, the political theory of communitarianism appears at first sight as a counter-image to the present state of North America. It is a severe critique of 'Lockean individualism' as a foundational political philosophy in a twentieth century of widely extended institutions such as markets and bureaucracies.¹⁰ This critique is then linked to a call for morality and community as corner-stones for a different, good society. The idea of a counter-image vanishes, of course, as soon as one recognizes that this theorizing is built on an endorsement of local community life – of small-scale America, so to say – and tries to extend the moral density of that life to a national scale.¹¹

Postmodernism and communitarianism show inverse deficiencies as political discourses of our time. These deficiencies mark the major problematics of social organization in the US – or more generally under conditions of what one may call extended liberal modernity. In postmodernism, there is an almost complete neglect of the issue of political communication and deliberation about common matters. It receives its strength and appeal from a posture against conformity and for diversity and in support of suppressed groups. However, it is incapable of developing any argument for practices on the level of the polity as a whole comprising several 'cultures'. Communitarianism, in turn, focuses on the issue of handling matters of common concern in common practices. However, between philosophical analysis and ethical call, communitarian writings are often at a loss to account for the diagnosed lack of community (or the plurality of diverse communities with few relations between each other) in terms of a social analysis and a social theory. In other words, their analyses fail to recognize how the existing rules of practices support present life-forms, on the one hand, and undermine attempts to change them, on the other.

This brief portrait of the current state of American society and its political debates is meant to help in getting the problematics of social organization after the end of organized modernity into focus. Arguments that position the US as the 'lead society' of modernity or as the 'model' of social development exposing Europe and the rest of the world to 'Americanization' have either been too uncritically accepted or prematurely rejected. 'Americanization' is a theorem that assumes that the North American social configuration basically precedes other ones in the world, especially European ones, timewise, and that by some inevitable, and most often unexplained, historical law these other societies will follow the model. The theorem dates back to the time of the American Revolution, and was probably fully expressed for the first time by Alexis de Tocqueville. In modernization theories of the 1950s and 1960s it was developed into a full-scale social theory, of American origin and widely copied throughout the world.¹² Significantly, with all their rejection of meta-narratives, some postmodernists accept the basic comparative proposition. Or how else should one read Jean Baudrillard's ingenious epigraph to *L'Amérique*, borrowed from the writing on the mirror of US cars: 'Caution: Objects in this mirror may be closer than they appear'¹³

Often, the theorem is voiced by non-Americans, and not rarely with some hesitation as to the desirability of the process.¹⁴ Then it takes the form of 'anti-Americanism'. Paul Hollander has recently offered an immense collection of expressions of 'anti-American sentiments'. In an additional essay, he proposes an interpretation of these sentiments, arguing summarizingly that

the hostility American culture provokes is in some ways well-founded. Nonetheless, most critics misidentify the problem. It is not American capitalism, imperialism or mass culture. Rather, it is modernity as represented by the United States. Americanization remains the major form and carrier of modernity in the world today. . . . American culture has come to embody certain fundamental human dilemmas that modernity has thrust into sharp relief. How long can people go on living in a society that offers fewer and fewer certainties? Is modernity as experienced in the US compatible with certain basic human needs, including those of a well-defined moral universe, accessible communities and widely accepted guidelines and limitations to personal ambitions?¹⁵

Sociologically speaking, anti-Americanism is part of the 'resistance that modernity constantly provokes' (Claude Lefort), and Americanization is a term used for the restructuring of social practices according to the ideas of individual autonomy and rational mastery. Concretely, these phenomena have very little to do with the US. The reference to the US indicates nothing other than that the US tends to be seen as a more (liberally) modern society. To say whether modernity diffuses from North American soil would require a theory on intersocietal impacts in which I will not enter here. For my purposes, these two terms point to the usefulness of a comparative view on the history of modernity. More specifically, they indicate that

the problematics resulting from the breaking of organized social practices can more easily be identified in the US.

In this sense, the portrait of the US generates three broad problematics. First, if the 'society' that we can consider as the epitome of liberal modernity knows coherent social practices only to a very limited extent, the concept of society itself may need to be rethought in social analysis, both as an entity with boundaries and a significant degree of cohesion and self-reference and in its relation to the 'economy' and the 'polity'. Second, an answer to these questions can only be given by trying to understand how individuals actually do orient themselves in this world and how they define their own identities after the end of organized modernity. Third, in the present social context it will be much less evident that the commitments and obligations of individuals relate, or can be made to relate, to a bounded polity than modernist thought would have it. If they do not, however, the very possibility of politics is questioned.

THE IDEA OF (CIVIL) SOCIETY

The concept of society has two parallel meanings. First, it is meant to denote a set of bounded social practices. As such, it was most often empirically set along with the territorial (nation-) state, which was supposed to set and define the boundaries relevant for practices. Second, it is used to refer to those social relations that are not part of modernist institutions. Society is then foundational, residual or complementary to those institutions, most notably the state (but now also the market). Over the past two centuries, three main, basically consecutive versions of the latter notion of society can be distinguished.¹⁶

Modern understandings of the term society rely on a distinction between society and state.¹⁷ Society as the association of free and equal individuals may be regarded as the foundation of the state as the contractually agreed means of securing freedom and equality. Or, in a more historical perspective, the modern state may be seen as the institution that provides the space in which society, as the interaction of individuals, can unfold. During much of the nineteenth century, emphasis was placed on the autonomy and dynamics of the interactions of human beings as members of society. Both the liberty of the entrepreneur and the liberty of the citizen should be restricted as little as necessary to safeguard order. More or less dichotomous or dialectical formulae were elaborated to construct a state which is capable of preserving the unity of the whole while not impeding the play of the particularistic forces of society. With the stress on liberties (which, though, were mostly not extended to everybody), this strong view of society can be regarded as characteristic of restricted liberal modernity.

From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, this view was increasingly challenged, not least because it became more and more evident that the forces of society were much more particularistic than envisaged and endangered the whole, and the liberal state, as it was conceived, was incapable of providing security and order. Society needed to be 'organized', as Heinrich von Treitschke said in

Germany from a conservative viewpoint. And the workers' movement in fact began to organize its part of society as a means of creating collective capabilities. These discourses and practices indicate the transition towards organized modernity.

In such views, both the dynamics and the restrictions of early modernity revealed the deficiencies of predominantly philosophical understandings of society and made the discourses on society focus on the social as something that can and needs to be organized. Now the organizer of this society would be the state, and the major tension would be shifted to the conceptual pair, 'society' and 'economy', a new, relatively separate modern institution. The effect of liberated market practices had been to erode the forms of society. Rather than being the source of civility and morality, society had to be protected itself against its possible colonization.

With increasing attempts at the 'administration of the social' (Hannah Arendt) by the state, the critique of the undermining of free, unregulated and diverse social practices has been extended from the economy to cover also the bureaucratic state, the second major modernist institution. The 'colonization of the life-worlds' by these systems is the major theme of Jürgen Habermas' diagnosis of modernity. While Habermas sees the potential of communicative interaction and its societal renewal as still residing in these life-worlds, theorists of mass society have often assumed that the original liberating power of societal self-organization had been effectively destroyed by the closure of the modern order. Then, it becomes possible to argue that the 'idea of the social' has historically failed, as some French theorists do.¹⁸ The failure would be due to the very attempt at safeguarding the social. The authoritative organization of society by national bureaucratic states would empty it of its diversity and creative potential no less than its permeation by market practices and the commodification of social relations.

In this context, a third view of society emerges after the end of organized modernity. It postulates a resurgence of civil society, or at least potential resurgence, as a civic reaction to the reductions and reifications of the organized institutions. Many of the writings on the 'new' civil society limit themselves to demonstrating the social-theoretical possibility, analytical consistency and/or liberal political necessity of such a renewal, of the emergence of 'post-traditional, post-conventional egalitarian and democratic forms of association, publicity, solidarity and identity'.¹⁹

The renewed debate about civil society has to be seen in the double context of disappointed hopes of turning the (socialist or social democratic) state into an agent of societal renewal and of the actual experience of disintegration of coherent institutions in which, at least potentially, collective agency and social-identity formation could have their roots.²⁰ Such a discourse of civil society, though, needs to be rooted in the observation of social practices. Among those, relatively few, contributions to the debate that aim beyond 'normative attractiveness', at a 'plausibility in terms of empirical analysis and diagnosis of our time',²¹ I would like to distinguish two forms. Their difference lies in the significance they attach to changes in authoritative practices.

Both Alain Touraine in his theory of social movements and Michel Maffesoli in his writings on 'post-modern sociality' argue for the need to abandon notions of society which are based on foundations and coherence, and adopt instead more processual, fluid, action-oriented notions. However, they reject theories of individualization that are held by other authors who continue to work in the perspective of modernization theory. Instead they observe the building of new collectives and the creation of new, actual or imagined, communities that provide identities and boundaries inside West European societies. Declarations of allegiances of various sorts, such as regionalism, sexual communities, varieties of quasi-organized youth cultures, etc., fall under this as much as goal-oriented social movements.

The two perspectives differ, though, in their attempts at locating these new social phenomena in the broader community. Maffesoli speaks of tribalization and emphasizes the diversity and plurality of these tribes, who do not add up to a wholeness and do not care about this.²² Touraine instead sees social movements as the potential source and core of a collective renewal of society. They develop a notion and a desire for broader social change; they are built on the creation of identity, precisely where none may exist now, and that creation is intended to foster collective agency.²³ Where it turns empirical the debate on the new forms of 'society' develops widely divergent views on the actual orientation of individuals and groups as well as on the chances for collective deliberation on common matters. More or less explicitly, they call for a need to redefine the very understanding of politics, because the kinds of social identity that are formed in 'tribes' or 'movements' do not relate to a modernist concept of the political. These two issues, the conditions of identity formation and the possibility of politics after the end of organized modernity, remain to be discussed in the concluding sections.

LIBERTY AND DISCIPLINE: SOCIAL IDENTITY BETWEEN GLOBALIZATION AND INDIVIDUALIZATION

Much of modernist social theory, including prominently the classical sociological tradition, was centrally concerned with what was perceived as 'an increasing split between the world of direct interpersonal relationships and that of large-scale collective organization', the assumption being that 'there is a tradeoff between the expansion of cross-cutting relations linking people widely in a population and the density and intensity of in-group relations within specific sub-populations, including local communities'.²⁴ The proposition is basically valid. However, social science has either tended to take the historical solution of the problematic for granted by postulating the formation of 'society' as the ultimate outcome of the dissolution of *Gemeinschaft*, or by considering the problematic itself as vanishing due to increasing individualization. Both ways are very modernist indeed, and since then 'society' and 'individual' have led an uneasy co-existence in the social sciences.

Rather – one may say with hindsight – in the era of classical sociology the creation of *imagined* communities, such as nation and class, should have been

recognized as a *temporary* fixation of the problematic, over which fierce struggles were led at the time of Durkheim and Weber and afterwards. To the contemporaries, however, these communities did not appear as creations and imaginations but as the natural locations of human beings in a post-traditional society. And in fact, a certain reembedding was achieved of the individuals who were disembedded by the modern turmoils of the building of industries, cities and transportation networks.

The achievement of organized modernity was to effectively focus 'modernized' social practices. While this process had a strong elite bias, it can nevertheless be seen as having its roots in collective action involving many members of those societies. Focusing involved a double movement. On the one hand, theoretically global, open-ended practices were reduced to national, bounded ones. On the other hand, the theoretically infinite plurality and diversity of people on a territory was ordered and bound by a relatively coherent set of conventions for action. By drawing on institutional and cultural means that were available in the nineteenth century, the actual structure and extension of social practices (what came to be called *society*) was made to overlap strongly with the rules for collective deliberation (the *polity*) and many of the socially important means of individual orientation (*social identities*). Many of the phenomena that can be observed during the last quarter of a century can be read as a falling apart of this triple coherence.²⁵

Accordingly, analyses of our time stress processes of globalization and of individualization. There is no lack of marked statements of either sort. So theorists of globalization may argue that

the world market . . . has erased the territorial inscriptions of the productive structures. . . . The occidentalization of the world is a broad movement of uniformization of the imaginary involving the loss of cultural identities.²⁶

And theorists of individualization may claim that all stable social orientations like class, culture and family break up and leave the individual human beings in much greater uncertainty and risk when shaping their lives. The constitution of social identity is today placed in a context of global interrelations and interdependencies, regardless of whether observable strategies of identity-building embrace this as a chance or try to deny it.²⁷

If these two observations are joined together, then a second-crisis-of-modernity equivalent of the theory of the mass society emerges. Theorists of the latter had argued that the nation-state is the grand individualizer that destroys social structures and collective identities, isolates human beings and makes them dependent on its own, anonymous and machine-like organization. Currently, the same is said to occur on a global scale and the nation-state appears as an almost homely, 'intermediary' institution and container for authentic cultural expression. Such ideas are found both in those theories of postmodernity that have an air of the tragic, since they see these developments as losses *and* as inevitable,²⁸ and by conservatives who try to maintain or reconstruct bounded institutions based on substantive notions of culture.

These theories are flawed in exactly the same sense in which theories of mass society were flawed. They do recognize the main directions of social developments but they overinterpret the tendencies. With regard to globalization they tend to exaggerate the homogenizing effects and neglect the building of new structures below the global level. With regard to individualization they underestimate the agential capacities of human beings. This is because they see them as merely exposed to homogenizing tendencies without recognizing their potential to draw actively on new rules and build social contexts under changed conditions.

Significantly, a normatively opposite interpretation of the same observations is also possible. Then, the trends toward globalization would be seen as enhancing enablements, as widening and easing the human capability of reaching out widely in space and time. And individualization would be regarded as a liberation from social constraints which limited and channelled the ways in which human beings could draw on the historically available enablements. These views can be found in continuations of the modernist perspective in social thought, but also in those strands of postmodernism that hail the new liberations. Clearly, the interpretations are not completely invalid, and I am certain most readers of this book have experienced and appreciated aspects of these new enablements.

Where, though, does this twofold assessment of globalization and individualization leave us with regard to the current condition of modernity? I shall try to work myself towards an answer by reassessing the questions of community and selfhood in view of their contingency under modern conditions.²⁹

The concept of the nation was strongly based on an idea of the historical depth of community, of bonds and commonalities created over long periods. Such a concept heads for the naturalization of boundaries: it invites one to draw sharp distinctions to the others outside the historical community and to ask for limitations of cross-boundary exchange. Arguably, the depth of the class concept was lower than that of the nation, and not least for that reason its identity-constituting potential was more short-lived. However, it is probably generally valid to say that the hold of these quasi-natural identities has been loosening over the past quarter of a century in the West. Furthermore, the cultural revolution against organized modernity emphasized the normative unacceptability of such limitations and doubted the persuasiveness of the idea of natural community at all. What is witnessed instead is, not individualization but, the creation of communities on other substantive grounds that are not historical but chosen by the acting human beings themselves. This holds both for Touraine's social movements and Maffesoli's tribes.³⁰ Significantly, adherence to communities will also be looser and may change several times during the course of life.

The resulting fluidity of community formation is related to the organization of social practices. What I have called the quasi-naturalness of the social identities during organized modernity stemmed from the overlap of social identities with coherent sets of practices and polity boundaries. Under such conditions, there may be very little choice of social identity, even if an awareness prevails that identities are not ascribed but 'only' socially determined. After the end of organized

modernity this overlap has ceased to exist, and the formation of social identities is freed from such predetermination.

This liberation is in a sense a precondition for approaching real individual autonomy as the right and ability to choose the others one wants to associate with as well as the substantive and procedural terms of association. However, it also relieves the search for identity of its existential dimensions. If identities can be changed, if there can be multiple and only relatively obliging bonds to others, and if identity formation may even be temporarily suspended without losing one's social position, then the entire concept of identity may undergo a transformation. Elements of such a transformation are revealed by analyses of 'empirical postmodernism' as shown above (see Chapter 10).

In terms of moral philosophy, one may insist that the very concept of identity needs the assumption of relative stability (or, at least, steady development) and could not do without strong evaluations. As Charles Taylor writes, 'the notion of an identity defined by some mere *de facto*, not strongly valued preference is incoherent.' Put in these terms, one would have to argue sociologically, though, that such a concept of identity may be partially superseded by social developments. As Taylor himself shows, an existentially relaxed idea of identity goes along well with a 'naturalist', that is, scientific, supposition on the superfluous character of moral frameworks for action. Postmodernism and scientism may agree on a notion

of human agency where one could answer the question *Who?* without accepting any qualitative distinctions, just on the basis of desires and aversions, likes and dislikes. On this picture, [moral-evaluative] frameworks are things we invent, not answers to questions which inescapably pre-exist for us, independent of our answer or inability to answer.³¹

This unintentional mutual reinforcement of performance-oriented scientific practices and the proliferation of postmodernist life-worlds was already inherent in Jean-François Lyotard's description of the postmodern condition. While it can be rejected on grounds of moral philosophy, as Taylor does, it appears highly valid as an element of a sociology of modernity.

All this has to do with the workings of the double imaginary signification of modernity – and this itself is the strongest reason to keep talking about our social formation as one of modernity. The liberal conception of modern institutions (restricted or extended, depending on the extent of social permeation) is the one that best reconciles the two significations of autonomy and rational domination. It proliferates extended structures as chains of more or less formalized interaction, which allow impacts to spread widely over time and space. At the same time, it appears to leave to the discretion of the choosing individual whether she wants to avail herself of this power and in what way she wants to do so.

While this sounds like the best of all possible worlds, it is marked by at least three fundamental problems. The first relates to the socially uneven availability of the material, intellectual and cultural means that modernity provides. In a social world that refuses to provide other collective identifications, distributive justice

acquires increasing importance as a provider of access to the material of autonomous identity formation.

Second, even if that were the case, such a modernity may demand more in terms of autonomous identity formation than many individuals would want to choose, if the choice of restricting one's choices were still perceivable. In individual terms, the modern condition is characterized by the demand to 'transform contingency into destiny' (Agnes Heller) when designing one's own course of life. And I would agree with Charles Taylor that this demand is inescapable. Even the rejection of the idea of stable identities and of a firm guide for self-realization is a sort of choice.

Third, a great variety of offers will decrease the likelihood for coming to collective arrangements with high substantive implications. If the general condition of contingency (in philosophical terms) factually translates into a great variety of choices, destinies and social practices (in sociological terms), then this fact itself will have an impact on the modes of social life that are 'available', that can be chosen. It raises the question of the very possibility of politics.

THE POSSIBILITY OF POLITICS

'The exact character of our associational life is something that has to be argued about.' While Michael Walzer like many others endorses a normative notion of civil society, he stresses the need for communicative deliberation in common, a need which cannot be assumed to be met in the concept. It is 'the paradox of the civil society argument', Walzer argues, that the question of how and among whom communication should occur remains underdetermined and requires a turn to the state.

The state itself is unlike all the other associations. It both frames civil society and occupies space within it. It fixes the boundary conditions and the basic rules of all associational activity. . . . It compels association members to think about a common good, beyond their own conceptions of the good life. . . . Civil society requires political agency.³²

Political agency during organized modernity resided in the sovereign nation-state and its idea of representation, both of which are now strongly challenged. If the present problems are more than a passing historical conjuncture – and there are many indicators that this is the case – then politics faces a radical dilemma. On the one hand, the very idea of political deliberation depends on concepts of boundaries, membership and representation. On the other hand, the social practices to which politics has to refer may become increasingly 'a-topic',³³ not confinable to any space, so that no possible definable membership group could be found for deliberation, far less any community with a significant degree of shared values and, thus, a substantive basis for common deliberation.

Taking the historical experience into account, it has been suggested that the building of imagined communities may again be the appropriate way to deal with

the current experiences of disembedding, several generations and one historical social configuration later.³⁴ But the present situation is different. The split between the organization of social practices, boundaries of politics and modes of identity formation is wider and the social and cognitive resources to bridge it scarcer than in the otherwise analogous situation about a century ago. It appears as if there is a much stronger break with modernist views on social identities and that a bounded community cannot as comparatively easily – and the process was not at all smooth – be restored again, as was possible after the first crisis of modernity.

To formulate the issue positively, the creation of a certain overlap between social identities, political boundaries and social practices is a precondition for (re-)establishing political agency. To assess the potential for achievement of such an overlap, it is necessary to sociologize and historicize the question of the contingency of community and then search for the actual 'relations of association' between human beings.³⁵

Such an *analysis of the state of community* has to go beyond a study of the conditions of sociality and morality, as they were hinted at in the preceding section.³⁶ (a) The community has to be looked at as a potential political community with regard to the extensions and permeations of practices that human beings share with others and therefore should want to regulate in community. (b) Relations of association have to be analysed with regard to the conditions of such a potential political community, that is, the possibility of proceeding with common deliberation in authoritative practices of such a form that they meet the other social practices at their level of extension, reach and impact.³⁷

(a) As noted above, the social sciences have tried to grasp what appeared as specific modes of extension and organization of allocative and authoritative practices by separating the analysis of these realms from the study of other social relations. The disciplinary subdivision of the social sciences has further deepened the gulf between the 'economy' and bureaucratic politics on one side and other social relations on the other. More comprehensive theories, such as most prominently Jürgen Habermas' *theory of communicative action*, have tried to reconnect the fragments of the study of society while acknowledging the specificity of relatively autonomous subspheres at the same time. These social theories can summarizingly be called dualistic, since their characteristic is that they make a basic distinction between systemic arrangements and the different sphere of a 'life-world' – by this or any other name.

Most of these theories are – implicitly or explicitly – based on the acknowledgement of some functional superiority of the rationalization of action in markets and bureaucracies. Sometimes this view appears to be based on the argumentative position that what historically prevails must be superior. Sometimes it is more explicitly argued that such modes of rationalization relieve some social functions from the need for communicative interaction. They are highly enabling precisely through this relieving effect. Normative problems – pathologies – result when the formalized spheres invade and colonize the life-world.

This analytical decoupling of systems and life-world has implications for the

concept of politics. It grants that the administration of common matters can basically be handled through the formalized bureaucratic mode of action. The only political problem that seems to remain is to limit the social space of rationalized administration so that the life-world is not too far invaded. This view of functional democracy in dualistic theories has been criticized as entailing 'above all the elimination of the very idea of a democratic project and a corresponding reduction in the meaning and scope of democratic institutions'.³⁸ To remedy this normative problem of a critical theory, the possibility of a structuring impact of the life-world/civil society on the systemic arrangements is maintained (as generally in Habermas' thinking) and re-emphasized (in recent works), such as through 'the acquisition of influence by publics on the state and economy, and the institutionalization of the gains of movements within the life-world'.³⁹ As the dualism is maintained, however, it is principally unclear how far such a reverse impact may go and what would remain excluded from re-thematization. The assumption of such dualism raises not only normative problems, it is also analytically troubling.⁴⁰

Such theorizing is based on the valid observation that formalization of action is a key characteristic of modernity. It is also evident that formalization occurred unevenly, that some practices underwent earlier, more rapid and more thorough formalizations. However, the construction of a basic dualism is untenable. First, it reifies the systems that emerge from non-linguistic organization by endowing them with a particular, (relatively) inaccessible logic. In contrast, it needs to be emphasized that any institution – even a money-based, effectively globalized world-market – is based on social conventions that may be altered in principle. The very building of organized modernity was a major process of renegotiating the conventions on which social practices should be built. While the result may not have met anybody's expectations, it was clearly successful in transforming the rules of restricted liberal modernity.

Second, social conventions are not only modifiable in principle, their existence requires the continuous reenactment by living human beings in their everyday practices. No market or bureaucracy can continue to 'function' if their rules are not upheld by those who actually offer and buy, command and obey. While this statement may sound trivial, it is of crucial importance for any social theory. Formalization increases the rigidity of rules, but still hardly any action can be regarded as exactly rule-following, given the specificities of time, space and social context. In a broad sense, every action is a specific, potentially rule-transforming behaviour. The breaking up of the conventions of organized modernity shows how allocative and authoritative practices – at the very core of the 'systems' – are themselves transformed in human action, as ambiguous as the outcomes may be.

Third, while it may please theorists of the new civil society, the preceding argument has a reverse side. Although no supposed 'system' is as formalized as dualistic theorists think, no kind of human action is inaccessible to formalization either. By seeing colonization of the life-world as emanating from the systems, Habermas underestimates both the possibility of formalization and the attractiveness it may have for individuals in every walk of life. The channelling of

communication into prestructured paths may be a means of increasing certainty and mastery over the individually relevant parts of the world. The spaces of open communicative action – in the emphatic sense that underlies Habermas' critical thinking – are much more reducible and may actually be much more reduced than dualistic theories normally perceive. Moreover, the space for collective processes of communication may be limited through the diversity of ways in which individuals formalize their 'life-worlds'.⁴¹ In fact, the condition of 'postmodernity' may precisely be that practices are formalized in quite different ways over different spaces and times, and that no common space for a relevant group of people and a relevant set of practices exists.

It is with regard to such deficiencies of dualistic theories, whose preconceptions distort the view of the relation between social practices and the polity, that perspectives on the decline of politics and the public sphere as they were offered by Hannah Arendt some decades ago and are currently found in 'postmodernist' views are pertinent.⁴² Hannah Arendt's problem is one that one may call the emptiness of the political space. Her concern is for political articulation, for the maintenance or creation of conditions in which the members of a community could together communicate about, and deliberate on, all issues they have in common. A minimal requirement of political practices should be a communicative process about what it is that various social groups, spanning the globe or dwelling in neighbouring villages, have in common under current social practices, and to find out whether they have to commonly regulate the impacts of these practices. How grand this *koiné* – the space of the common – then is, depends on the ongoing practices and the outcome of communication about them. Arendt bases her sceptical assertion of the decline of politics as she understands it on the view that authoritative practices are founded less and less on collective communication and common deliberation. She also points to the lack of a 'match' between the boundaries of real communities and the range of practices.⁴³

This diagnosis is built on two key observations, the devaluation of political action as compared to other human activities and the absence of a public space as a precondition for a reassertion of political discourse in this strong sense. This latter observation, in particular, links up closely to postmodernist diagnoses of the multitude of mutually untranslatable languages and the competition for a fragmented space of public attention. 'In the postmodern habitat of diffuse others and free choices, public attention is the scarcest of all commodities. . . . "Reality", and hence also the power and authority of an imagined community, is the function of that attention.'⁴⁴

Still, it may be legitimately asked why such a perspective should be relevant in our condition – especially given that it was mostly regarded as superseded at the time of Arendt's writing. Liberal modernity could be seen as the desirable social formation; the one where it is possible to follow any practice, to set up any form of institution together with those who share the same substantive notions of the good life, and where the diverse practices and institutions that arise could exist side by side, without (negatively) interfering with each other. Then, in fact, would

politics indeed not be needed. Modernist political reasoning – including dualistic theorizing that isolates major parts of social practices from political action – often proceeds as if this were the case.⁴⁵

Such a view, however, is inappropriate. The expansion of modernity was always accompanied by the (creative, to use Schumpeter's term) destruction of life forms. That is how the metaphor arose that modernity nourishes itself by consuming 'traditions'. As I have tried to show at length, that idea is misleading since 'post-traditional' conventions are equally prone to be broken again under changed circumstances. There is no element in modern reasoning that would guarantee that a diverse variety of 'modern practices', that is, autonomously set conventions, could co-exist peacefully. Especially the widely extended present institutions, increasingly global ones, have a strong impact on many phenomena and people around them who neither really chose membership nor set the rules. They limit the possibility for choosing one's own set of practices.

It is here that the Arendtian problematic reemerges. The thin theory of citizenship that prevailed during organized modernity had reduced political participation to the process of elite selection, had de-substantivized political communication, and had made politics itself appear as the mere administration of the social. Currently, such practices cannot easily be upheld, either because they are actively contested or because issues resurface that cannot be handled along those lines. The paradoxical situation has emerged that political issues have been re-opened, while at the same time the limited available means of handling political matters are further disabled.

(b) Or are they? Should the de-conventionalization of organized practices not rather be seen as an opportunity to reappropriate politics than as its ultimate retreat? My portrait of the most recent time has focused on the demise of organized institutions and the emergence of new modes of action and of control. While it is indeed generally true that 'the absence of any single organizing centre in modern western societies does not decrease the possibility for action, nor the capacity for changing social relationships', it remains open to investigation whether 'the fact that modern, western societies have lost their organizing centres allows greater possibilities for a project of democratization than would otherwise be the case.'⁴⁶

Indeed, to really break with modernist political thought and conventional social science, it should not be regarded as predetermined that a disciplinary, bureaucratic organization like the state imposing itself on a bounded, well-regulated society is the only form for organizing the care for what we have in common. Analytically as well as politically, one needs to rethink the kinds of interaction chains that exist or may be built. The observed withdrawal of formal controls and renewed emphasis on responsibility demands an internalization of task understanding and willingness to comply and contribute actively and creatively on the part of the individual. There are indeed more actors and there is more space for agency, but in a highly stratified setting and an inescapably global context. The potentiality of political agency is clearly reduced only if a traditional model of collective action and the building of counter-hierarchies (unions, parties) is assumed. The case is

different if one assumes that the concept of long, more openly related interaction chains may also work 'inversely', would produce opportunities for open and creative collective agency.

In terms of Michael Walzer's 'critical associationism' we could imagine 'a large number of different and uncoordinated processes' that would build a kind of solidarity that is adequate to the present condition of modernity.⁴⁷ The question is whether the relations of association exist, or can be created, that can shape social practices in a commonly desired way without interfering with the liberal principle of individual autonomy.⁴⁸ Something like a strong sense of a weak community would be needed. No strong conceptions of a common good can be enforced if societies, as they regularly do today, do not have common history and culture to the degree that they consent about the good. Nor could such a conception be enforced if our understanding of liberty allows for movements between social spaces and precludes very firm boundaries. A strong sense of weak community renounces the idea of a common good except for the permanent obligation to communicate over what people have in common.⁴⁹

While such political conceptions provide a valid general basis, there are many reasons for assuming that the actual conditions lend themselves very little to the rebuilding of a modernity that would be organized in this new – liberal, inclusive and democratic – sense. Most of the usable resources society-builders could draw on a century ago appear rather exhausted. Most obviously, there is much less cultural material to build collective identities with. The only community that seems appropriate, given the extension of social practices, is the global one. A global identity, however, is sociologically difficult to imagine, as identities are boundaries against something else, something considered alien. If it occurs at all, all indications point to a reorganization on a 'semi-continental' level. North America, Western Europe and East Asia may form political communities, each with strong boundaries to the outside, and some, though probably insufficient, degree of co-ordinated, communicative deliberation internally.

Then, there are hardly any agents who could and would effectively pursue such a rebuilding. In contrast to the preceding turn of the century when nation and class were strongly present in many minds, the coming one does not really offer potential speakers and active collectives who could establish such a further transition of modernity while keeping within the realm of the modern imaginary signification. Also the authority of the intellectuals, who played a strong part in the building of both national and class identities, is discredited with the demise of universalist discourse. There are only two major types of 'intellectuals' who, ignoring or disregarding this situation, dare to speak in an authoritative voice. On the one side, neo-liberals strongly object to any collective reorganization and appear to uphold the old idea of an unbounded modernity. On the other side, intellectual boundary construction is undertaken at the expense of the truly universalist ideas of modernity – even though the word may be invoked. These are those writers whose goal it is to prepare the US for 'the coming war with Japan' or Europe for its struggle against Islam.⁵⁰

Furthermore, there is probably not the minimum of already conventionalized practices that one would need to draw on in rebuilding a somewhat more organized modernity. This minimum was provided by the idea and apparatuses of the European states during the first crisis of modernity. Within the state context and oriented towards it, other institutions existed already – like schools and universities – or could be built – like parties and unions. Neither does the necessary means of unrestricted communication, that is, a public sphere in the emphatic sense, exist, in and through which the open communication over new communities could be led.

All this does not at all mean that fragmentation and dissolution will continue endlessly. Our societies are structured and show very uneven distributions of power. And reorganization and new collectivization may well issue from established power positions. In that case though, this transformation will not meet the requirement I would want to insist on, namely to remain with the modern imaginary signification of human autonomy and self-realization. It may be marked by coercion and oppression, exclusion and extermination.

As this may well be the case, there are widespread and perfectly legitimate doubts as to whether one should really want a reorganization of modernity. Ultimately, the record of organized modernity is a very mixed one. Any of its strong institutions and discourses was enabling and constraining, liberating and disciplining at the same time. The same would almost inevitably be true for another attempt at institution-building. In the present intellectual climate, the constraining impact figures so strongly that almost any argument for collective action and deliberation appears discredited from the start. And who indeed could, with a good conscience, neglect twentieth-century experiences of constraints and disciplines? But how else, on the other hand, can we create the conditions to live our diverse views of the good life in liberty?