

Sociological Responses to Postmodernity

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Most current concepts of postmodernity refer solely to intellectual phenomena. In some cases, they focus narrowly on arts. In some other, they spill over to include a wider spectrum of cultural forms and precepts. In a few cases they reach deeper, into the fundamental preconceptions of contemporary consciousness. Rarely, if at all, they step beyond the boundary of the spiritual, into the changing social figuration which the artistic, cultural and cognitive developments, bracketed as postmodern, may reflect.

Such a self-limitation of the postmodernity discourse, and its legitimacy, is of crucial importance for the future of sociology.

Indeed, if postmodernity means what the current concepts imply: *a reform of culture, of world-perception, of the intellectual stance*¹—then sociology faces the task of an essentially strategical adjustment. It must make itself resonant with new, postmodern culture, and break its links with the ontological and epistemological premises of modernity. It must transform itself into a postmodern sociology. In particular, it must follow other elements of postmodern culture by accepting (in theory as much as in practice) the self-containment and self-grounding of the production and reproduction of meanings. It must abandon its traditional identity of a discourse characterized by an attempt to decode such meanings as products, reflections, aspects or rationalizations of social figurations and their dynamics. If, on the other hand, the self-containment of contemporary culture, and the associated implosion of vision, signal processes which reach beyond the realm of culture proper, (if they accompany transformations in, say, principles of systemic organization or power arrangements)—then it is not the traditional strategy of sociology which calls for revision, but a new focus of inquiry is needed, and a new set of categories geared to the changed social reality. In this case—without resigning its formative questions—sociology must develop into a sociology of postmodernity. In particular, it must accept

the distinctiveness of the postmodern figuration, instead of treating it as a diseased or degraded form of modern society.

POSTMODERN SOCIOLOGY

At the threshold of postmodernity, sociology arrived in the form aptly called by Anthony Giddens the orthodox consensus. This form was constituted by the widely shared strategy of rational analysis of society, understood as a nation-state; such a society, it was agreed, was subject to the processes of continuing rationalization, not necessarily free from contradictions and upsets (or, indeed, temporary retreats), yet sufficiently dominant to offer a safe frame against which information about social reality could be plotted. Constantly lurking behind the scene in the orthodox vision of social reality was the powerful image of the social system—this synonym of an ordered, structured space of interaction, in which probable actions had been, so to speak, pre-selected by the mechanisms of domination or value-sharing. It was a “principally coordinated” (in Talcott Parsons’ rendition of Weber’s imagery) space, inside which the cultural, the political and the economic levels of supra-individual organization were all resonant with each other and functionally complementary. In a memorable Parsons’ phrase, sociology was best understood as an ongoing effort to solve the Hobbesian problem: the mystery of non-randomness, regularity of behaviour of essentially free and voluntary subjects. The orthodox consensus focused accordingly on mechanisms which trimmed or eliminated the randomness and multidirectionality of human action and thus imposed coordination upon otherwise centrifugal forces; order upon chaos.

The first victim of advancing postmodernity was the invisibly present, tacitly assumed spectre of the *system*, the source and the guarantee of the meaningfulness of the sociological project and, in particular, of the orthodox consensus. The immediate outcome was a widespread feeling of unease and erosion of confidence. Well before the exact nature of postmodern change was articulated, the signs had appeared of growing disaffection with the way the business of sociology had been conducted in the era of orthodox consensus. Symbols of that era (Parsons’ structural functionalism above all) came increasingly under attack, often for reasons only tenuously connected with the character of sensed change. Truly at stake was the *overall delegitimation of the orthodox consensus*, rather than the ostensible topic of the assault: replacement of specific

theoretical assumptions or strategic principles. As T.H. Marshall wrote on a different occasion, sociologists knew what they were running from; they did not know yet where to.

At the time the rebellion started, there was little awareness of the link between the new spirit of theoretical and strategical restlessness and the changing social reality. The call to revise the practice of sociology was expressed in *universalistic* terms. It was not supposed that the orthodox consensus had outlived its usefulness and hence was ripe for reform; instead, the consensus was proclaimed wrong from the start; a sad case of error, of self-deception, or ideological surrender. Paradoxically (though not unexpectedly) the effort to discredit the modern view of the social world needed the thoroughly *modern* understanding of truth for self-validation. Without necessarily saying this in so many words, the rebels aimed at the substitution of new consensus for the old (they often spoke of the search for a "new paradigm"). In reality, their efforts led to the constitution of what one would best call a postmodern sociology (as distinct from the sociology of postmodernity).

Postmodern sociology received its original boost from Garfinkel's techniques conceived to expose the endemic fragility and brittleness of social reality, its "merely" conversational and conventional groundings, its negotiability, perpetual and irreparable *underdetermination*. Soon it adopted Alfred Schutz as its spiritual ancestor, with his contemplation of the marvel of social action and its self-propelling capacity, with his debunking of "because-of" explanations as hidden "in-order-to" motives, with his dissolution of systemic order into a plethora of *multiple realities and universes of meaning*. Shortly afterwards it turned to Wittgenstein and Gadamer for philosophical inspiration and the certificate of academic respectability. From Wittgenstein, the idea of *language games* was borrowed and skilfully adapted to justify the elimination of all "tougher", extra-conversational constituents of social reality. From Gadamer came the vision of the *life-world* as a communally produced and traditionally validated assembly of meanings, and the courage to abandon the search for universal, supra-local, "objective" (i.e., referring to none of the communally confined experiences) truth.

It was the postmodern world which lend animus and momentum to postmodern sociology; the latter reflects the former much in the same way the collage of the postmodern art "realistically represents" (in the "conceptual sense of realism")² randomly assembled experience

of postmodern life. And yet the postmodern sociology is distinguished by avoiding confrontation with postmodernity as a certain form of *social reality*, as a new departure set apart by new attributes. Postmodern sociology denies it kinship with a specific stage in history of social life. In a curious way, this sociology which took impetus from dissatisfaction with visions born of universalistic aspiration of the Western, capitalist form of life, conceives of itself in universalistic, extemporal and exspatial, terms. It prefers to see its attainment as rectification of blunder, discovery of truth, finding of right direction, rather than as a self-adaptation to the transformed object of study. The attributes of social reality, made salient by the fading hopes of missionary culture and brought into relief by postmodern world-view, the postmodern sociology promoted to the status of perpetual, (though heretofore overlooked) essences of social life in general.

One may say that postmodern sociology does not have the concept of postmodernity. One suspects that it would find it difficult to generate and legitimate such a concept without radically transforming itself. It is precisely because it is so well adapted to the postmodern cultural setting, that postmodern sociology (its tendency to argue non-universality of truth in universalistic terms notwithstanding) cannot conceive of itself as an event in history. Indeed, it is singularly unfit to conceptualize the twin phenomena of the logic of *historical succession* and of the social *embeddedness of ideas*.

Postmodern sociology has responded to the postmodern condition through mimesis; it informs of that condition obliquely, in a coded way: through the isomorphism of its own structure, through commutation (Hjelmslev) between its structure and the structure of that extra-sociological reality of which it is a part. One can say that postmodern sociology is a *signifier*, with postmodern condition as its *signified*. One can obtain a valid insight into the postmodern condition through the analysis of practices of postmodern sociology. For the discursive knowledge of postmodernity as a type of social reality with a place in history and social space, one needs however to turn to other sociological responses.

Postmodern sociology can be best understood as a representation of the postmodern condition. But it can be also seen as a pragmatic response to this condition. Description of the social world is in it inextricably interwoven with *praxeological choices*. Indeed, the acceptance

of communal sovereignty over meaning-production and truth-validation casts the sociologist, with no need of further argument, into the role of the interpreter,³ of the semiotic broker with a function to facilitate communication *between* communities and traditions. A postmodern sociologist is one who, securely embedded in his own, "native" tradition, penetrates deeply into successive layers of meanings upheld by the relatively alien tradition to be investigated. The process of *penetration* is simultaneously that of *translation*. In the person of the sociologist, two or more traditions are brought into communicative contact—and thus open up to each other their respective contents which otherwise would remain opaque. The postmodern sociologist aims at "giving voice" to cultures which without his help would remain numb or stay inaudible to the partner in communication. The postmodern sociologist operates at the interface between "language games" or "forms of life".

His mediating activity is hoped to enrich *both* sides of the interface. The popularity of Clifford Geertz's strategic injunction of the "thick description" (one which sums up anthropological practices distinguished by constituting their objects as culturally alien and thus in need of decoding and translation) among contemporary sociologists is to a large extent due to its resonance with the postmodern world-view and the corresponding strategy of the postmodern sociology. A typical exposition of such strategy, like that of Susan Heckman,⁴ promotes Karl Mannheim's style of sociology of knowledge to the paradigm of total sociology (with, of course, the replacement of Mannheim's negative concept of ideology, as a distorting force and an enemy of truth, with the positive concept of ideology, or—better still—with the concept of *communal tradition* or *linguistic community*, as the sole framework, propagator and condition of truth).

SOCIOLOGY AGAINST POSTMODERNITY

Not all responses to the postmodern condition demand an equally radical revision of the orthodox model of sociological inquiry. Some of the most serious theoretical works of our time *deny the novelty of the present situation*; they deny, at least, that the novelty is radical enough to justify, let alone to necessitate abandoning of the model of modern (capitalist, industrial) society as the essential paradigm of social analysis.

Such works are *traditional* in a double sense: first, they deny the

existential autonomy of postmodernity as a separate type of society, preferring to treat it as a variety, a stage, or a temporary aberration of a basically *continuous* modernity; second, they also deny the need and legitimacy of the search for a *postmodern* sociology, as well as of the re-thinking of the role and the strategy of sociological theory and research.

What other sociologists tend to totalise as "postmodernity", the traditional social theory of our time articulates as a manifestation of "society in crisis". The idea of crisis suggests that while society requires certain resources for its unhampered self-reproduction (and for retaining its identity over time), it is not, for one reason or another, capable of producing such resources, or of producing them in sufficient quantity. A more acute form of crisis would even imply that the society in question tends to produce *anti-resources* of a kind: phenomena which actively counteract its reproduction and threaten its identity. Description of a society as in crisis implies therefore that the society so described retains its identity and struggles to perpetuate it. By the same token, the appearance of phenomena resisting accommodation within known regularity can be only perceived as a case of "malfunctioning": of a society diseased and in danger.

Such *doubly traditional* theories seek the roots of the crisis of modernity; in their most profound and sophisticated versions, they attempt to locate *endemic* sources of crisis, i.e., such structural features of modern society which bar it from behaving in a way necessary for its survival. By and large, they follow the time-honoured lines of theorizing the disruptive consequences of side-effects of societal reproduction in terms of *inner contradictions of capitalism, limits to rationalization, or civilization and its discontents*.

One category of crisis theories link the present change to the fading and eventual demise of the *Puritan personality* (and of the educational setting conducive to the upbringing of the Puritan, self-controlled, achievement-oriented personality, trained to delay gratification in the name of distant goals), believed to be an indispensable condition, as well as the major operating factor, of *modern* society. This theme had appeared relatively early in the period of post-war affluence and particular uncertainties brought forth by the cold war experience, and was approached simultaneously from a number of sides. There was David McClelland's suggestion of the cyclical rise and demise of *n-Achievement*

(in itself an operationalized rendition of an older Pitirim Sorokin's idea of the alternating *sensate* and *ideational* cultures). Riesman's discussion of a similar theme was conducted in terms of the rise of an other-directed man coming to replace the formerly dominant inner-directed personality—the one armed with an in-built “gyroscope” which helped it resist cross-waves and keep it on course. Then came William W. Whyte Jr.'s well rounded organization man, which triggered off an intense, though short-lived fashion to explore the anti-Puritan impact of the rapidly expanding “white-collar” setting.

The “demise of the Puritan personality” theme found its, arguably, fullest expression in the work of Richard Sennett,⁵ John Carroll,⁶ and Christopher Lasch.⁷ Whatever the differences between the three analyses, they converge on an imagery of the “softening” civilization, where a sort of a *comfort principle* (if one is still allowed to talk about principles) has come to replace the *reality principle*, once promoted by the Puritan-inspired educational setting. Sennett lays the blame for the disastrously wrong turn at the door of the Puritan ethic itself: it contained, so he avers, seeds of its own destruction, as it made its adherents painfully and interminably preoccupied with minute behavioural appearances serving as the only clue to individual fate and value, and thus warded off the very possibility of satisfying the lust for certainty. In Carroll, the passage from the Puritan to the present mixture of “remissive” and paranoid personalities is abrupt and discontinuous, yet the outcome is similar: life reduced to an unceasing chase of ever elusive and never securely attainable pleasures. Other people become stepping stones for the unending climb to authenticity, happiness, or whatever other names are given to the inachievable dream of restful self-confidence. All three authors stress the impact made by the personality change on the nature of human bonds. Interaction ceased to sediment *lasting* relations; inter-human networks and the institutions which once served to solidify them into structures turn brittle, fragile, lacking in all foundation except the intentions of the actors to continue. Human bonds are tentative, protean, and “until further notice”.

The theories discussed so far present pictures of a *diseased society*; one in which “the centre does not hold”, one which has lost its determination and sense of direction; a “softening” society, one which increasingly fails to harden its members and imbue them with a sense of purpose. Unlike in the case of postmodern sociology, the image of a society in the state of a constant Brownian movement, a society construed

ever anew out of the flexible stuff of personal interaction, a society without tough structure or firm developmental tendency—is here set firmly in historical times. The existential condition seen by the postmodern sociology as the extemporal and universal truth of social reality, is perceived here as an eloquent testimony to the crisis of society. If asked, the discussed authors would probably say that the postmodern sociology is itself a symptom of the same disease; or, at least, the fact that it seems to many to be well geared to the present-day society—is such a symptom.

The theorists discussed so far conceive of postmodernity (which, let us repeat, they theorise as the state of crisis of modernity “as we know it”, rather than a societal type in its own right), as essentially an event in culture; and they theorize it using the strategy of the once powerful culture-and-personality school. They locate their theory at the same level at which they have diagnosed the phenomena to be analyzed. What is absent in these theories is an attempt to consider cultural manifestations of postmodernity as aspects of a wider, systemic, transformation, be it an emergence of a new type of the social system, or a “crisis” of the old one. It is the last possibility which has been explored by another, broad and influential, category of crisis theorists, of whom Jürgen Habermas,⁸ Claus Offe,⁹ James O'Connor,¹⁰ and André Gorz¹¹ may be named as the most sophisticated representatives. What unites their theories (otherwise disparate in many important respects), is the assumption that the distinctiveness of contemporary society, elsewhere (but not in these theories) diagnosed as the advent of postmodernity, can be best understood as a deviation from the orthodox model of modern society; a deviation brought about by the present inability of the social system to *secure its own reproduction* in its old, “classical” form.

For instance, in Habermas’ view, the capitalist society at its present stage finds it increasingly difficult to legitimize itself substantively (i.e., as a system which *secures* rationalization of economic activity, and *sustains* best allocation of resources and generation of constant economic growth). This remains the case, as the system-supportive function of the state (keeping the capital-labour relation alive and dominant) requires such transfers of resources as are bound to radically alter the setting of individual life-processes, and hence to undermine the *reproduction of motivations* indispensable for the smooth functioning of capitalist economy. Among motivations most painfully affected, are profit motive, work ethic, familial privatism. In a truly dialectical way, attempts to

sustain viability of the capitalist system cannot but erode the very conditions of its survival. Hence the *crisis of legitimation*; moral-political support for the system is not forthcoming in required volume, and once monolithic ideological domination gives way to heterogeneity of culture. Habermas' *Legitimation Crisis* was written virtually on the eve of the radical shift in the management philosophy of the capitalist system; a shift which revealed the orthodox method of servicing the capitalist economy as an, arguably, belated effort to respond to new economic realities with concerns generated by an earlier stage in capitalist history. It has been perhaps for this unfortunate timing that Habermas failed to consider the possibility that the evident weakening of systemic legitimation could be a symptom of *falling significance of legitimation* in integrating the system, rather than a manifestation of crisis. It could be for the same reason that Habermas theorized the decline of work ethic as motivational crisis, rather than an outcome of a relative marginalization of the capital-labour relation inside the capitalist system in its present stage.

Such a marginalization did move into the focus of Offe's crisis theory. There, the *de-centring* of the labour-capital conflict, and indeed of the hired labour itself, is the main object of attention; the crisis of the present-day capitalist society is ultimately traced back to the consistent and continuous dislodging of potential labour from the productive process. The rate of increase of labour productivity, Offe observes, exceeds that of the production, which means that further technological advances (and further capital investment) result in growing redundancy of labour power.

Eviction of productive activities to a fast shrinking segment of society rebounds on the structure of the life-world. *Orientation to work* rapidly loses its conduct-rationalizing capacity, as the traditional socio-cultural "proletarian" life-setting has all but dissipated, the perspective of "life vocation" has lost its plausibility and, in general, the share of work-time in the whole of the life-process has drastically fallen.

Having diagnosed in effect the diminishing significance of exactly those social facts which formed the "hard core" of the classical capitalist system and thus of the classical sociological theory, Offe moves further than any crisis theorist towards the inevitable conclusion: the extant sociological model of modern society is in an urgent need of re-thinking, and possibly replacing.

If we consider the answers given between the late eighteenth century and the end of the First World War to questions relating to the organising principles of the dynamics of social structures, we can safely conclude that labour has been ascribed a key position in sociological theorizing ... Can we still pursue this materialist preoccupation of the sociological classics? ...

It is precisely this comprehensive determining power of the social fact of (wage) labour and its contradictions which today has become sociologically questionable ...

(L)abour and the position of workers in the production process is not treated as the chief organising principle of social structures; the dynamic of social development is not conceived as arising from conflicts over who controls the industrial enterprise; and ... the optimization of the relations of technical-organisational or economic means and ends through industrial capitalist rationality is not understood in the form of rationality which heralds further social development.¹²

And yet, to Offe like to the rest of crisis theorists, the identity of the present-day society is fully negative; one describable in terms of absences, failures, declines, erosions—with the classical capitalist society, that archetype of modernity, serving as the benchmark and the point of departure for all theorizing. Ours is a disorganized society; and disorganized capitalism. It is, in other words, capitalism, or the capitalist form of modernity, in crisis. Being in crisis means that things that society needs, it does not have; institutions and processes which served its needs do not work anymore or fail to maintain the required level of output. But being in crisis also means that the needs themselves have remained by and large unchanged; it is this circumstance, above all, which renders the failure of servicing mechanisms so critical. What makes the de-centring of wage-labour look so dangerous and threatening to the administration of society, is the tacitly maintained perspective of the system organized first and foremost around its *productive* function, and hence engaging the society members in their role of the *producers*. With this role becoming scarce and marginal, the system turns—well-nigh by definition—*disorganized*. It has lost its integrative principle,

which once guarded the coordination between systemic reproduction, societal integration and the organization of life-world.

As Offe does not believe in the possibility of healing the new wounds with old (and by now outdated) medicines, he feels obliged to suggest an unorthodox and truly revolutionary cure; a fully different "logic of utilizing and maintaining labour power"—abandoning the "fiscal linking of social security to revenues of employment", and replacing it with "an egalitarian basic insurance scheme".¹³ Offe admits that no social forces likely to promote the new principle of distribution are in sight, and thus acknowledges the theoretical and analytical, rather than empirical and processual, grounding of the suggested cure. Obliquely, the recourse to a solution of an *utopian* status re-confirms and re-states the initial assumption of Offe's theory: that the needs of the present day society are still the needs of a society organized around the *productive* function. It is this assumption which prevents one from focusing on already present new integrative principles (which cannot be recognized as such within the "productive" perspective). And it is this assumption which inclines one to see various phenomena collectively named "post-modernity" as symptoms of disease, rather than manifestations of new normality.

SOCIOLOGY OF POSTMODERNITY

Both basic types of crisis theories have been found wanting. The culture-and-personality type of crisis theory collapses manifestations of postmodernity with allegedly autonomous (i.e. subjected to its own logic, unrelated to that of the system as a whole) cultural dynamics; it leaves the central question of the validity of the orthodox sociological model, historically geared to "classical" modernity, out of discussion. The system-in-crisis type of theory avoids such limitation and faces the central issue of sociological theory point-blank. And yet, having given priority to the theoretical redemption of the orthodox model, it finds itself bound to reduce the significance of the manifestations of postmodernity to that of the clinical symptoms, and "postmodernity" itself—to that of a pathological aberration.

In this section, I propose to consider the possibility that the so-called postmodern phenomena combine into a cohesive aggregate of aspects of a new type of society, which differs from the orthodox model sufficiently to require a model of its own. In other words, I propose to consider whether postmodernity is a fully-fledged, comprehensive and

viable type of social system; and whether—in consequence—the treatment of postmodern phenomena as dysfunctional, degenerative or otherwise threatening to the survival of society, is justified by anything but the pressure of historical memory, or an unwillingness to part with a theoretical model which served its purpose so well in the past.

The suggestion I propose to consider is the following: in the present-day society, consumer conduct (consumer freedom geared to the consumer market) moves steadily into the position of, simultaneously, the cognitive and moral focus of life, integrative bond of the society, and the focus of systemic management. In other words, it moves into the selfsame position which in the past—during the “modern” phase of capitalist society—was occupied by work in the form of wage labour. This means that in our time the individuals are engaged (morally by society, functionally by the social system) first and foremost as consumers rather than as producers.

Throughout the first (modern) part of its history, capitalism was characterized by the central position occupied by *work* simultaneously on the *individual*, *social* and *systematic* levels. Indeed, work served as the link holding together individual motivation, social integration and systemic reproduction; as the major institution responsible for their mutual congruence and coordination. It is from this central place that work is being gradually, though with an increasing speed, dislodged—as Claus Offe aptly demonstrated. And yet the room from which work is evicted has not remained vacant. Consumer freedom has moved in—first perhaps as a squatter, but more and more as a legitimate resident. It now takes over the crucial role of the link which fastens together the life-worlds of the individual agents and purposeful rationality of the system. The assumption of such a role by consumer freedom seems to be the final outcome of the long process of displacement of the early-capitalist conflict focused on the issue of control, right to management and to self-manage, from the productive to the distributive sphere; that displacement generated those “ever rising expectations” which have become the basis for both the feasibility and inevitability of the selfsamerizing consumerism which came to be identified with capitalist economy.¹⁴ It was this process which lay at the foundation of the decentring of work inside the life-world of the individual. The substitution of consumer freedom for work as the hub around which the life-world rotates may well change the heretofore antagonistic relation between pleasure and reality principles (assumed by Freud to be extemporal). Indeed, the very opposition

between the two may be all but neutralized.

In its present consumer phase, the capitalist system deploys the *pleasure principle* for its own perpetuation. *Producers* moved by the pleasure principle would spell disaster to a profit-guided economy. Equally, if not more disastrous, would be *consumers* who are not moved by the same principle.

Having won the struggle for control over production, and made its ascendancy in that sphere secure, capitalism can now afford the free reign of the pleasure principle in the realm of consumption—and it needs it more than anything else. As a matter of fact, the conquest of production remains secure precisely because a safe (and beneficial) outlet has been found for the potentially troublesome drive to pleasure.

For the consumer, reality is not the enemy of pleasure. The tragic moment has been removed from the insatiable drive to enjoyment. Reality, as the consumer experiences it, is a pursuit of pleasure. Freedom is about the choice between greater and lesser satisfactions, and rationality is about choosing the first over the second. For the *consumer system*, a spending-happy consumer is a necessity; for the *individual consumer*, spending is a duty—perhaps the most important of duties. There is a pressure to spend: on the *social level*, the pressure of symbolic rivalry, for the needs of self-construction through acquisition (mostly in commodity form) of distinction and difference,¹⁵ of the search for social approval through life-style and symbolic membership; on the *systemic level*, the pressure of merchandizing companies, big and small, who between themselves monopolize the definition of good life, of the needs whose satisfaction good life requires, and of the ways of satisfying them. These pressures, however—unlike the social and systemic pressures generated by the production-oriented system—are not entering life-experience as oppression. The surrender they demand promises mostly joy; not just the joy of surrendering to “something greater than myself” (the quality which Emile Durkheim, somewhat prematurely, imputed to social conformity in his own, still largely pre-consumer, society, and postulated as a universal attribute of all conformity, in any type of society)—but a straightforward sensual joy of tasty eating, pleasant smelling, soothing or enticing drinking, relaxing driving, or the joy of being surrounded with smart, glittering, eye-caressing objects. With such duties, one hardly needs rights. Seduction, as Pierre Bourdieu intimated, may now take place of repression as the paramount vehicle of systemic control and social integration.

From this re-arrangement, capitalism emerges strengthened. Excessive strain generated by the power contest has been channelled away from the central power structure and onto a safer ground, where tensions can be unloaded without adversely affecting the administration of power resources; if anything, the tensions contribute now to its greater effectivity. Deployment of energy released by free individuals engaged in symbolic rivalry lifts demand for the products of capitalist industry to ever higher levels, and effectively emancipates consumption from all natural limits set by the confined capacity of material or basic needs—those which require goods solely as utility values.

Last but not least, with consumption firmly established as the focus, and the playground, for individual freedom, *the future of capitalism looks more secure than ever*. Social control becomes easier and considerably less costly. Expensive *panoptical* methods of control, pregnant as they are with dissent, may be disposed of, or replaced by less ambivalent and more efficient method of seduction (or, rather, the deployment of panoptical methods may be limited to a minority of population; to those categories which for whatever reason *cannot be integrated through the consumer market*). The crucial task of soliciting behaviour functionally indispensable for the capitalist economic system, and at the same time harmless to the capitalist political system, may be now entrusted to the *consumer market* and its unquestionable attractions. Reproduction of the capitalist system is therefore achieved through individual freedom (in the form of consumer freedom, to be precise), and *not* through its suppression. Instead of being counted on the side of systemic overheads, the whole operation “social control” may now be entered on the side of systemic assets.¹⁶

The consequence, most important for the emergence of the postmodern condition, has been the reestablishment of the essential mechanisms of systemic reproduction and social integration on entirely new grounds. Simultaneously, the old mechanisms have been either abandoned or devalued. To secure its reproduction, the capitalist system in its consumer phase does not need (or needs only marginally) such traditional mechanisms as *consensus-aimed political legitimation, ideological domination, uniformity of norms promoted by cultural hegemony*. Culture in general lost its relevance to the survival and perpetuation of the system. Or, rather, it contributes now to such survival through its *heterogeneity and fissiparousness*, rather than the levelling impact of civilizing crusades. Once the consumer choice has been entrenched as the point in which

systemic reproduction, social integration and individual life-world are co-ordinated and harmonized—cultural variety, heterogeneity of styles and differentiation of belief-systems have become conditions of its success.

Contrary to the anguished forebodings of the “mass culture” critics of the 50s, the market proved to be the arch-enemy of uniformity. Market thrives on variety; so does consumer freedom, and with it—security of the system. The market has nothing to gain from those things the rigid and repressive social system of “classical” capitalism promoted: strict and universal *rules*, unambiguous criteria of *truth*, *morality and beauty*, indivisible *authority of judgement*. But if the market does not need these things, neither does the system. The powers-to-be lost, so to speak, all interest in universally binding standards; in the result, the standards lost the selfsame power-basis which used to give them credibility and sustained their never-ending pursuit as a worthwhile and attractive enterprise. To the authority of judgement disavowed by political powers, market forces offer the only alternative support. Cultural authorities turn themselves into market forces, become commodities, compete with other commodities, legitimize their value through the selling capacity they attain. Their habitual appeals to ex-territorial standards of judgement sound increasingly shallow and lose their cogency and attraction.

I suggest, in other words, that the phenomena described collectively as “postmodernity” are not symptoms of systemic deficiency or disease; neither are they a temporary aberration with a life-span limited by the time required to re-build the structures of cultural authority. I suggest instead that postmodernity (or whatever other name will be eventually chosen to take hold of the phenomena it denotes) is an aspect of a fully-fledged, viable social system which has come to replace the “classical” modern, capitalist society and thus needs to be theorized according to its own logic.

Like all attempts to reveal the inner logic in the already-accomplished-reality, the above analysis emphasized the *systemness* of postmodern society: the *accuracy* with which individual life-world, social cohesiveness and systemic capacity for reproduction fit and assist each other. Consumption emerged from the analysis as the “last frontier” of our society, its dynamic, constantly changing part; indeed, as the very aspect of the system which generates its own criteria of *forward movement* and

thus can be viewed as *in progress*. It also appeared to play the role of an effective lightning-rod, easily absorbing excessive energy which could otherwise burn the more delicate connections of the system, and of an expedient safety-valve which re-directs disaffections, tensions and conflicts, continually turned out by the political and the social subsystems, into the sphere where they can be symbolically played out—and defused. All in all, the system appeared to be in good health, rather than in crisis. At any rate, it seemed to be capable of solving its problems and reproducing itself no less than other known systems could, and systems in general are theoretically expected to.

Let me add that the particular way of problem-solving, conflict-resolution and social integration characteristic of the postmodern system tends to be further strengthened by the downright unattractiveness of what seems to be, from the perspective determined by the system itself, its only alternative. The system has successfully squeezed out all alternatives to itself but one: repression, verging on disenfranchisement, emerged as the *only realistic possibility* other than consumer freedom. The only choice not discredited by the system as *utopian* or otherwise unworkable, is one between consumer freedom, and unfreedom; between consumer freedom, and the dictatorship over needs (Feher, Heller, and Markus' memorable phrase)—the latter practised on a limited scale towards the residue of *flawed consumers* inside a society organized around the commodity market, or on a global scale by a society unwilling, or incapable of providing allurements of fully developed consumerism.

SOCIOLOGY AT THE AGE OF POSTMODERNITY

Constructing a new model of contemporary society, necessitated by profound changes in its organization and functioning, is but one task with which sociology has been confronted by the advent of postmodernity. Another, no less complex task, is that of rethinking major sociological categories shaped, as it were, under conditions now fast receding into the past.

From its birth, sociology was an adjunct of modernity. It took the accomplishment of modernity—the construction of the free individual through cutting him loose from visible, tangible “pinpointable” bonds—for granted, and hence defined its task as the study and the service of unfreedom—all those processes of *socialization, cultural hegemony, control, power, culture, civilization*, which could account for the mystery

of “de-randomizing” the voluntary actions of free agents. It translated the “rationalization spurt”, the disciplinary practices, the uniforming ambitions of modernity from a normative project into the analytical framework for making sense of reality, and thus made the “structure” those pre-individual forces which bring order into otherwise chaotic and potentially damaging drives of the free agents—the pivot of its discourse. It drew its cognitive horizons with the leg of the compass placed firmly in the very spot from which the levelling, uniforming, proselytizing tendencies of modern times emanated—and thus identified “society”, the largest analytical totality meant to incorporate and accommodate all analysis—with the nation-state.

Not only did sociology develop as a theory and a service discipline of modernity. Its underlying world-view, its conceptual apparatus, its strategy, were all geared to the latter’s practices and declared ambitions. It seems therefore unlikely that with those practices and ambitions undergoing profound change, the business of sociology can go on “as usual”. There seems to be little in the orthodox lore of sociology which can *a priori* claim exemption from re-thinking.

The first to have come under scrutiny is the very imagery of the social world as a *cohesive totality with a degree of stiffness and resilience against change, with a neatly arranged hierarchy of power and value prior to the interaction between individual and group agents*. Such an imagery was most conspicuously epitomized in the concept of structure, characterized first and foremost by the attributes of relative inflexibility and autonomy in relation to the level of interaction. No wonder it is the concept of structure which has been treated with most suspicion by the theorists seeking the “new paradigm” for sociology—one better geared to the time of systemic indifference to cultural plurality and, indeed, to the waywardness of constitutive agencies. Previous emphasis on structurally determined constraints to interaction gives way to a new concern with the process in which ostensibly “solid” realities are construed and re-construed in the course of interaction; simultaneously, the ascribed potency of agency is considerably expanded, the limits of its freedom and of its reality-generating potential pushed much further than the orthodox imagery would ever allow. The overall outcome of such revisions is a vision of fluid, changeable social setting, kept in motion by the interaction of the plurality of autonomous and un-coordinated agents.

And so Alain Touraine promoted for more than a decade the sub-

stitution of the idea of social movement for that of the social class as the basic unit of societal analysis. The latter concept is most intimately related to the imagery of structure and structural constraints and determination. The first, in Touraine's rendering, implies a vision of pliable, under-determined, unfinished reality amenable to ideational and practical remoulding by motivated social actors. In a recent expression of this vision, Touraine rejects the idea of "class in itself"; workers' action, he insists, "is not a reaction to an economic and social situation; it is itself a blueprint which determines the state of social relations ... It follows from this that the working class cannot be defined 'objectively', and therefore that the concept governing the analysis is no longer one of class position, but of social movement".¹⁷ The most crucial attribute ascribed to a social movement is its *self-constituting* capacity: social movement is not an emanation, epiphenomenon, reflection of anything else; it is fully its own creation; it generates its own subject; it constitutes itself into a social agent.

Anthony Giddens directs his attention to the revisions which the teaching of the "founding fathers" of sociology, and the concepts and visions they bequeathed, require in order to be of use in the analysis of contemporary society (though it is not entirely clear in Giddens' writings whether that "contemporaneity" which makes revisions necessary, is one of *social theory*, or of the *social world* it theorizes). In the successive rewritings of his new theoretical synthesis, Giddens redefines structure as a process which incorporates motivated agents and their interaction as its, simultaneously, building material and operating force. Indeed, Giddens substitutes the concept of structuration for that of structure, rightly assuming that in this new, "action-oriented" and "action-expressive" form, the pivotal concept of social analysis is better geared to the task of theorizing an un-predetermined, flexible social reality which preempts none of its options, which is open to the influence of a plurality of only loosely coordinated power centres, and which emerges from an interaction between only partly translatable, communally grounded meanings.

A most important point has been promoted for some time by S.M. Eisenstadt in his seminal comparative study of civilizations. Eisenstadt insists that the very idea of the *social system* is in need of a radical reconsideration. He suggests that no human population is confined within a single system, "but rather in a multiplicity of only partly coalescing organizations, collectivities and systems".

Unlike the view found in many sociological and anthropological studies—namely that social systems are natural or given, and that they change through internal processes of differentiation—we stress that these systems are constructed through continuous process and that this construction is always both there and very fragile . . . These systems never develop as entirely self-enclosed ones . . . (D)ifferent structures evince differences in organization, continuity and change and, together with their patterns may change to different degrees or in different constellations within the “same” society.¹⁸

Thus the current sociological theory (at least in its most advanced versions) takes cognisance of the increasingly apparent plurality and heterogeneity of the socio-cultural world, and on the whole abandons the orthodox imagery of a coordinated, hierarchized, deviance-fighting social system in favour of a much more fluid, processual social setting with no clear-cut distinction between order and abnormality, consensus and conflict. There is, however, another large group of theoretical issues posited by the advent of modernity, which have not attracted as yet sufficient attention. These are issues related to the adequacy of the concept of “society” as the horizon and the most inclusive category of social analysis.

For reasons which can be both understood and justified, the concept of “society” has been historically cut to the measure of the nation-state; however defined, this concept invariably carried ideas intimately associated with a situation which only a nation-state (in its reality or in its promise) could bring about and sustain: a degree of normative—legal and moral—unity, an all-embracing system of classification which entailed and located every unit, a relatively unambiguous distribution of power and influence, and a setting for action sufficiently uniform for *similar actions* to be expected to bring *similar consequences* for the whole and thus to be interpreted in a similar way. Moreover, the nation-state prototype for the concept of society endowed the latter with a visibility of a *developmental tendency*; a self-sustained and self-propelled tendency, with all its relevant explanatory factors to be found *inside* the society in question—so that all *outside* factors could be theoretically reduced to the role of environment and accounted for, if at all, by the *caeteris paribus* formula.

Sociologists were always aware that the theoretical concept of society as a compact, sealed totality merely approximates the reality of any nation-state, however large and justified in its ecumenical ambitions. In reality, the nation-states, those prototypes of theoretical "societies", were porous, and porous in a double sense; much of what went on inside could not be fully explained without a reference to factors uncontrolled by the inside authorities—and factors which had to be interpreted in terms of motives and agencies, not just in terms of the passive resistance of an environment treated solely as an *object* of action; and much of what was going on inside the nation-states revealed its true significance only when traced through its consequences outside the boundaries of its home society—consequences which could look very different when seen in such a wider perspective. One could indeed find in sociological literature frequent warnings and rejoinders to this effect; yet few, if any, conclusions were drawn from them in sociological practice. It seems that most sociologists of the era of modern orthodoxy believed that—all being said—the nation-state is close enough to its own postulate of sovereignty to validate the use of its theoretical expression—the "society" concept—as an adequate framework for sociological analysis.

In the post-modern world, this belief carries less conviction than ever before. With the sovereignty of nation-states vividly displaying its limitations in the "input" as much as in the "output" sense, the traditional model of society loses its credence as a reliable frame of reference, while the consequences of its persistent use in sociological analysis gain in gravity. Given the centrality of the notion of society in sociological analysis (indeed, its tacit presence in *all* sociological analysis, if only as the condition for the given space being an appropriate object of sociological treatment), this new situation confronts sociological theory with tasks whose total dimension it is too early to ascertain. Let us mention briefly, as illustration only, two among these tasks.

One is the issue of the *rationalizing tendency*. Its reliability as the frame of reference for processual analysis has come under suspicion even in application to inner-societal processes. The question is, however, to what extent one can retain the idea of rationality in its sociologically accepted form in view of the evident *porousness* of the state-based society. Can one ascertain the degree of rationality of action if the consequences of the action are traced *only as far as the boundaries of such a society*? More and more often we hear the opinion (though on the whole not from the professional sociologists) that it is precisely the enhanced ra-

tionality of arms production and strategic planning inside the state units of international conflicts which must be held responsible for constantly growing *irrationality* governing the *inter-state space*. Thus *rational* logic is deployed in order to create a situation in which credibility of a threat will be guaranteed by the sheer irrationality of putting it in practice. In Philip Green's words, "(i)n deterrence theory, the general 'assumption of rationality' takes the concrete form of the assumption that if policy-makers will only make correct choices (i.e., be 'rational'), all-out nuclear war will be averted . . ." Yet in order to make this assumption realistic, to wit credible, belief must be impressed upon the prospective enemy that the policy-makers will not try to avert it, i.e., that they will behave irrationally: "It is . . . simply impossible to imagine circumstances in which an annihilatory counter-strike makes any sense at all, by any standards of 'rationality' ".¹⁹ Rational theorists of nuclear deterrence think therefore that an indispensable condition of rendering the deterrent force *rational*, that means goal-effective, is the deployment of "no-retreat" devices, which will assure that once the war process has been triggered off, no last-moment rationality of political readers would intervene to halt it.²⁰ Given that a "highly motivated, technically competent and adequately funded team of research scientists will inevitably produce an endless series of brand new (or refined) weapon ideas",²¹ and that "armament firms are interested in fostering a state of affairs which will increase the demand for armaments",²² it seems that at the far end of the long string of rational actions there is a world which (to quote, for a change, Woody Allen) "is on a crossroads. One road leads to utter hopelessness and despair, the other road leads to utter destruction and extinction. God grant us the wisdom to use the right road". It is high time for the sociologists to consider to what extent it is legitimate to go on testing Weber's "rationalization hypothesis" against processes and trends confined to the inner-state space.

Another issue relates to the overall tendency of modernity (i.e. the adequacy of the "modernization" hypothesis, and—in view of considerations spelled out in the preceding section—of the idea of postmodernity as the destination of modernization logic). Recent reverses of the supposedly universal modernizing tendencies have been well noted, though their true significance (including their finality) is yet to be ascertained. What is, however, much less attended to, is the significance (and finality) of post-modern developments in view of the fact that they occur in a rather confined section of the globe, which cannot claim an ecumeni-

cal future with anything like the certainty and self-confidence typical of the past—modern—state of its history. If our suggestion of a close relation between the advent of postmodernity and advanced consumerism deserves credibility, it is necessary to ask to what extent postmodernity ought to be seen as a local event, a parochial phenomenon fully dependent on a temporary, and possibly transient, privilege of one group of states in the world-wide distribution of power and resources. Most of the current analyses of postmodernity do not admit the urgency of this question. Postmodernity is treated as the tendency of *contemporary culture* (without qualifications); if its causes are scrutinized at all, they are on the whole sought *inside* the society (or group of societies) in which post-modern phenomena are situated, with no reference to the unique position of such societies in global arrangements. There is, however, a distinct possibility that the advent of postmodernity in one part of the world is precisely the effect of such an unique position; both of the erosion of the universalistic ambitions that part of the world entertained in the past, and of the still considerable privilege this part enjoys in the world-wide distribution of resources. There is, in other words, a possibility that the phenomenon of postmodernity can be only sociologically interpreted as a Thelemic phenomenon (in Francois Rabelais *Gargantua*, the imaginary Abbey of *Theleme* offers its inmates all the amenities of the “good life”—strikingly similar to those offered today by the postmodern culture; this is achieved by locking out the impoverished providers of the insiders’ luxury, outside thick and tall monastery walls. The inside and the outside determine and condition each other’s existence).

The problem is, however, that sociology so far is poorly equipped to treat the social space beyond the confines of the nation-state as anything else but the analytically compressed “environment”.

It is only now that we begin to understand to what extent all major categories of sociology are dependent for their meaning and practical usefulness on their relatedness to the typically inner-societal space, different from all other imaginable social spaces by being *held together by a universally (i.e., within that space) binding authority*. The society of which sociology has something to say is a “principally coordinated” social space, with a unified, power-supported “value-cluster” or a code of moral and behavioural norms, with a “dominant” or “hegemonic” culture, with a mechanism of tough or tender (depending on the emphasis of given theory) *control* which exerts a steady pressure towards

one selected type of social relationship, simultaneously suppressing *alternative* types. The "society" of sociologists is, by and large, a unified and organised space, a "structured" space (i.e. a space within which probabilities are manipulated, so that some choices are more likely to occur than others). It is this theoretical selection which enables sociologists to speak of social laws of regularities, of the *normative regulation* of social reality, of *trends* and *developmental* sequences.

The fact that the social reality extending on the other side of the nation-state boundaries is not such a space and hence should not be analytically treated as if it was rarely noticed; when it was noticed, it was, explicitly or *de facto*, treated as a minor irritant. A minor irritant indeed it was, as long as sociologists spoke from *inside* such societies as legitimately considered themselves the avant-garde of the rest of the world, the civilizing or modernizing force of universal significance, the "Yenan republic" of sorts, about to colonize the remaining part of mankind in order to remould it in its own likeness. At that time, sociologists spoke in unison with the *realities of power* in the world; that perspective from which other portions of mankind looked much as an environment, as a territory for action but not a source of action, was not of the sociologists' making or invention.

This is, however, not the case anymore. And so the irritant must seem anything but minor. There is hardly a power left in the world which can blithely entertain an ecumenically universalistic ambition. In our world, not just the "Great Powers" set hard and fast limits to each other's dreams; there is more than ample evidence that the degree to which the more advanced societies can impose their versions of *Pax Romana* on the lesser (and thus "retarded") units of mankind is much smaller today than it was (or was hoped to be) when the "white man" still carried his "mission". Societies whose "agency" must be willy-nilly admitted, display in what seems to be a lasting plurality such an astounding variety of "principal coordinations", of "value-clusters" or "dominant" cultures, that the *universality* of categories born out of experience of one, however privileged, "modern" part of the world, cannot be anymore assumed as true either on synchronic or an diachronic level.

We face therefore a social space populated by relatively autonomous agents who are entangled in mutual dependencies and hence prompted to interact. These agents, however, are not operating in anything like the "principally coordinated" space, similar to that inside which all traditional sociological categories have been once securely allocated. It is

becoming therefore increasingly apparent that even in such cases when the sociologists confine their research interests to the space safely enclosed by one well structured nation-state, their findings may claim no more than partial and provisional status—if the impact of a once comfortably inert, but now suddenly active “environment” is left out of sight in the grey area of the *ceteris paribus* . . . I suggest that the elaboration of categories appropriate to the analysis of dependencies and interactions in the “non-societal” social space, a space without “principal coordination”, “dominant culture”, “legitimate authority” etc., is now a most urgent task faced by sociology.

That this is a task at all, much less an urgent one, has not been generally recognized. The study of *international relations* (it is under this name that the interest in the “inter-societal space” has been academically institutionalized) is a thriving discipline which has generated over the years an immense quantity of empirical findings and a rather large volume of theory. And yet, most of the conceptual apparatus deployed in the theorizing is vulnerable to Wittgenstein’s critique of “similarity” (the famous “5 pm on the Sun”); with concepts repeatedly used and tested in *one* context, their dependence on the peculiarities of this context is forgotten and their applicability is believed to be context-free. And so we read in a reputable study of international conflict that “(t)he definition of conflict can be extended from single people to groups (such as nations), and more than two parties can be involved in the conflict. The principles remain the same”.²³ The cognitive optimism notwithstanding, the fact that in the inter-societal space conflicts neither emerge, nor are resolved in a way “similar” to that of inner-societal space, and that the very expectation of such similarity is responsible for their incomprehensibility, cannot be glossed over for long. And thus we read in the same study that the “simple act of negotiation does not necessarily solve matters. It depends on how far each party to the negotiation believes that the other will carry out his promises”.²⁴ With such discovery comes realization that in the area of international relations, unlike in the inner-societal interactions, such certainty can be secured only by the superior force of one of the adversaries. As the alien context resists the analytical tool, response is radical and desperate; adversaries in the conflict abstain from cheating solely for the fear of force (and not for other reasons, like for instance the need for peace).

I believe that it was the conceptual bankruptcy, related to the frustrated expectation of similarity and the uncritical acceptance of the logic

of "5 pm on the Sun" style of reasoning, which led to the resounding defeat of the "international law and order" approach (dominant in political theory in the period immediately following the World War II), by the "Power Politics" school, best represented by Hans J. Morgenthau and George Schwarzenberg. In John W. Burton's description, that new school "gave up any hope that an international system could be built in the image of a national community and settled for a system of anarchy in which relations would be determined by the relative power of states".²⁵ This was, in Arnold Wolfers expression, a "billiard ball model" of social reality, long ago denigrated and rejected in sociological discourse; the ironic result of a false expectation of similarity was an emphatic denial of *any connection* between international relations and domestic politics.

In the last twenty years or so the "Power Politics" approach lost much of its original purity and self-confidence, and a slow and tortuous reverse movement started. Experts in international relations pay now attention to the fact that staving off the "enemy attack" is not the only motive of "state behaviour"; that actors of international stage pursue other benefits as well.

And yet the fateful discovery of the absence of shared normative organization in the field of interaction continues to haunt the analysis. Whatever the declared or imputed motives of action, their mutual impact is perceived as not too different from that elaborated upon by the game theory: one which assumes that players do not behave randomly, but that they can behave rationally only in as far as they assume that their adversaries do behave at random and if they succeed in impressing upon the adversaries that they themselves are also capable of random conduct.

The regularity, the "patterned character" of interaction, which made possible sociological theorizing and supplied the semantic field for sociological concepts—was an outcome of a historical process which occurred within certain parts of the world (and, as we suspect now, stopped short from embracing the totality of mankind). As Norbert Elias pointed out, the factor which stood behind this development of pattern and regularity (wherever they did develop) was that of power monopoly; more precisely, of the twin monopolies of violence (forcing people to behave in a specific way by acting upon their bodies) and taxation (forcing people to part with their products or possessions). With such monopolies, physical violence and its threat "is no longer a perpetual insecurity that

it brings into the life of the individual, but a peculiar form of security . . . (A) continuous, uniform pressure is exerted on individual life by the physical violence stored behind the scenes of everyday life, a pressure totally familiar and hardly perceived, conduct and drive economy having been adjusted from earliest youth to this social structure".²⁶ The rationality as sociologists came to define it, the very habit of connecting events in terms of cause and effect without which rational conduct is unthinkable—depend on that regularity of setting which only monopoly of power can bring about and made into a natural attribute of reality. The question is, to what extent the patterns of rational behaviour which have developed in such circumstances may turn into their opposite in a reality in which such natural attributes fail to appear; and to what extent analysis based on the expectation of rationality can becloud, rather than enlighten, the peculiarity of conditions radically different from the orderly inner-societal space.

Elias' monopoly of violence and taxation had been in his view a product of the long process of competition between roughly equal units; in the long run, such competition leads (through an *elimination contest*), to the concentration of power in ever fewer hands, up to the subordination of the whole space to one centre of power, and the monopolization of the use of power and of the access to other people's surplus. This process, which has taken place in all societies passing from the state of feudal fragmentation to its modern, centralized form—*remains unfinished on the global scale*. Hence on the inter-state level "the physically—or militarily—strongest group can impose their will on those who are weaker. In that respect not much has changed since humanity's earlier days".²⁷ There is no immediate (and not much of the longer-term) hope of further elimination, and none of the units can realistically entertain ambitions to exclusivity. The long process of actual and projected universalization (the selfsame process which supplied epistemological ground for the modern world-view) has come abruptly to a halt. The post-modern acceptance of irreducible plurality followed. With it, however, came the necessity to revise the imagery of social reality which sustained the "naturalness" of orthodox sociological categories. Hardly ever before did sociologists seriously confront the task of analyzing conflicts, however violent, which took place in a setting other than the institutionalized, legally or morally unified context—existing, as it were, in a shadow of a superior, sanction-armed power. They must confront it now—as the enclaves answering the orthodox description become ev-

idently too narrow and incomplete to accommodate a reliable analysis of the dynamics of the postmodern world.

FINAL REMARKS

This paper has been intended as an inventory of topics to be researched and theoretical tasks to be undertaken; the topics and the tasks which the socio-cultural transformations loosely aggregated in the emerging model of postmodernity put in front of sociology—that scholarly discipline which originated, and developed until recently, as an attempt to grasp the logic of modernity. The paper lists questions and problems, while offering few solutions. It is not even a career report. Much more modestly, it intends to be an invitation to a debate.

The few positive ideas this paper does offer can be summed up in the following way:

1. Postmodern phenomena, most commonly confined in their description to the cultural, or even merely the artistic level, can be viewed in fact as surface symptoms of a much deeper transformation of the social world—brought about by the logic of modern development, yet in a number of vital respects discontinuous with it.
2. These deeper transformations ought to be sought in the spheres of systemic reproduction, social integration, and the structure of the life-world, as well as in the novel way in which these three spheres are linked and coordinated.
3. Proper analysis of the postmodern condition brings us, therefore, back into the orthodox area of sociological investigation (though an area now structured in an un-orthodox way). This means that rather than seeking a new form of a postmodern sociology (a sociology attuned in its style, as “an intellectual genre”, to the cultural climate of postmodernity), sociologists should be engaged in developing a sociology of postmodernity (i.e. deploying the strategy of systemic, rational discourse to the task of constructing a theoretical model of postmodern society as a system in its own right, rather than a distorted form, or an aberration from another system).
4. This latter task differs from the past practice of sociology (that of constructing models of modern society) in one crucial respect, which renders the called-for operation not fully continuous with the orthodoxy: the model of postmodernity, unlike the models of modernity, cannot be

grounded in the realities of the nation-state, by now clearly not a framework large enough to accommodate the factors decisive in the conduct of interaction and the dynamics of social life. This circumstance makes the task particularly complex; the reality to be modelled is, both in its present shape and in its plausible prospects, much more fluid, heterogeneous and "under-patterned" than anything the sociologists tried to grasp intellectually in the past.

NOTES

1. Cf. Rosalind G. Kraus, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press, 1985), pp. 52-4. The concept has been suggested by G.M. Lugnet.
2. Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Postmodernity and Intellectuals* (Polity Press, 1987), pp. 1-7, 143-145, 196-197.
3. Susan Heckman, *Hermeneutics and the Sociology of Knowledge* (Polity Press, 1986).
4. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man* (Vintage Books, 1978).
5. John Carroll, *Puritan, Paranoid, Remissive: A Sociology of Modern Culture* (Routledge, 1977).
6. Christopher Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism* (Random Books, 1977).
7. Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Heinemann, 1976).
8. Claus Offe, *Disorganised Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*, edited by John Keane (Polity Press, 1985).
9. James O'Connor, *Accumulation Crisis* (Blackwell, 1984).
10. Andre Gorz, *Path to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work* (Pluto Press, 1985).
11. Claus Offe, op. cit., pp. 129-132.
12. ibid., pp. 63, 96-97.
13. This process has been discussed at length in Zygmunt Bauman, *Memoires of Class: Essays in Pre-history and After-Life of Class* (Routledge, 1982), Chapters 3 and 4.
14. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Routledge, 1984).
15. More about deployment of market freedom in the service of social control—in Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom* (Open University Press, 1988), Chapters 3 and 4.
16. Alain Touraine, Michel Wieviorka, Francois Dubet, *The Workers' Movement*, trans. by Ian Patterson (Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 20, 21.

17. S.N. Eisenstadt, *A Sociological Approach to Comparative Civilisation: The Development and Directions of a Research Program* (Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, 1986), pp. 29–30.
18. Philip Green, *Deadly Logic, The Theory of Nuclear Deterrence* (Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 158–237.
19. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Yale University Press, 1976), p. 239.
20. Colin Gray, *The Soviet-American Arms Race* (Lexington, Saxon House, 1976), p. 40.
21. Salvador de Madariaga, *Disarmament* (New York, Coward-McLean, 1929), p. 11.
22. Michael Nicholson, *The Conflict Analysis* (The English University Press, 1970), p. 2.
23. *ibid.*, p. 68.
24. John W. Burton, *Global Conflicts: The Domestic Sources of International Crisis* (Wheatsheaf Books, 1986), p. 4.
25. Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: State Formation and Civilisation*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Blackwell, 1982), pp. 238–239.
26. Norbert Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Blackwell, 1987), p. 104.
27. *ibid.*, p. 90.