THE TRANSFORMATION OF
OUR CONDUCT OF LIFE
One Aspect of the Three Epochs of Western Modernity

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In this article a concept of structural transformation is worked out and applied on the history of modernity. It involves a distinction between abstract modernity and epochs of realized modernities. The general theory of a structural transformation of modernity is applied on a special case; the transformation of the modern conduct of life in the West. The Weberian concept 'conduct of life' is today almost forgotten, but the author argues that it is a very useful conceptual tool for grasping crucial aspects of everyday life. These theoretical points of departure are then related to some classical American sociological investigations, but also to recent investigations. The result is a division of the history of conduct of life in Western modernity in three different epochs: the age of asceticism, the age of organization and the age of authenticity.

Keywords: Conduct of life; epochs of modernity; modernity; structural transformation; the age of asceticism; the age of authenticity; the age of organization.

In the mid 1970s 'modernity' began to rise to its present status as a master concept within sociology (Venn and Featherstone, 2006: 457–8). It replaced 'capitalism' at approximately the same pace as the Marxist influence declined (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: ix–xii). This change is not simply terminological, but also conceptual. 'Modernity' is something more abstract and comprehensive than 'capitalism' and has the potential to include more social dimensions with explanatory power. Further, in recent years social scientists have been able to globalize and temporalize 'modernity' in a more profound and multifaceted way than 'capitalism' would have allowed. The current state in the ongoing development of the concept of modernity can be summarized as follows:

1. Modernity has become a multidimensional concept. It includes cultural, political, economical and technological dimensions and does not *a priori* give one of these dimensions more significance than the others. Each dimension has its own social logic and influences other dimensions in complicated ways. A modern society can be more or less modern in all or some of these different dimensions.[1]

2. Modernity has become conceptualized as plural in space. Thus, modernity is no longer reduced to the particular socio-cultural pattern of the West, but has the potential to overcome the conventional West-centrism of the social sciences. It allows for multiple patterns of modernity around the globe (Eisenstadt, 2002; Sachsenmaier, Eisenstadt and Riedel, 2002).

3. Modernity has become conceptualized as plural in time. The distinction between tradition and modernity, which in one way or the other has been fundamental for the social sciences (Waters, 1999: xi–xv), is on a concrete level too crude to help us understand the contemporary world. A theory of different epochs in modernity (Beck, 1986; Carleheden, 2001; Wagner, 1994) or – to use another terminology for the same general idea – a theory of 'successive patterns of modernity' (Arnason, 2005) has instead been suggested.

Such an abstract and wide-ranging concept of modernity opens up a very broad field of research. Dimensions, types and epochs of modernity can be combined in different ways and give rise to an almost infinite number of research topics. The general aim of the article is to show the usefulness of such a comprehensive concept of modernity applied on a specific topic.

The specific topic of the article is what Max Weber called '*Lebensführung*', which here will be translated into 'conduct of life'.[2] The specific aim is to grasp the transformation of the modern conduct of life since the end of the ascetic age that dominated Weber's own time and place. The investigation will however be limited to the Western type of modernity, which means that the article has little to add to the understanding of the multiple patterns of modernity.[3] The article will be more original in choice of dimension and in conception of time. Weber's concept is primarily about culture on a micro-level, but contains indications of how to understand the relations between the micro- and the macro-level. The concept is seldom used in a systematic way in contemporary social science.[4] It will be argued that 'conduct of life' has a great conceptual potential and that it should be further developed in order to better understand the cultural dimensions of modernity. The choice of conception of time is based on a theory of structural transformation within modernity. Sociological studies, for the most part conducted in the United States and partly inspired by Weber's concept 'conduct of life', will be used as empirical points of departure. These investigations are not used as means for empirical testing, but rather deliver the empirical material for the development of a theory. The ambition here is to work out a consistent theory with a heuristic value for further investigations. The article is divided into three parts. First, the meaning of structural transformation will be briefly discussed. Secondly, this concept will be related to the concept of modernity in a cultural sense. Third, these concepts will be used in the special case of '*Lebensführung*', which leads to a preliminary theory of the historical epochs of the modern conduct of life in the West.

Structural transformation

In a trivial sense everything changes constantly; it is impossible to step into the same river twice – 'panta rei'. In order to make a concept of transformation theoretically interesting a distinction must be made between 'changes *in* the system' and 'changes *of* the system' (Sztompka, 1993: 6). The latter can also be called structural transformation and refers to a change of the (symbolic or material) logic of societal reproduction. On that basis a further distinction can

be made between longer historical periods, which are mainly characterized by structural consolidation, and shorter and more intense periods of structural transformation.

Structural transformation in some sense has always been a crucial subject matter for the social sciences and history. The notion of a groundbreaking transition from tradition to modernity was fundamental for the rise of sociology.[5] Historians and social scientists have further divided the traditional society into several stages in order to grasp the whole history of mankind.[6] Classical stage theories are characterized by some form of evolutionism, that is, history is ruled by a kind of natural law. A historical logic makes stages follow more or less necessarily after one another. Usually evolutionism involves the conception that the historical development of human societies is a story of success. Stage theory is normative in the sense that a later stage always is understood as better than the earlier. On the basis of a more or less explicit philosophy of history, social scientists and historians of the West more or less implicitly proclaimed their own culture and their own society as the high and end point of historical development, that is, as a model for the rest of the world. Any deviation from this model was seen as a sign of social immaturity. Further, it became almost as impossible to imagine new stages after modernity as it is to imagine new species after mankind in Darwin's theory of evolution.[7] This West-centric conception of social change has characterized both political thinking and social scientific research up to very recently. Let us call this conception 'old modernization theory' (compare Tiryakian, 1991).

The structural transformation of modernity

Old modernization theory implies that structural transformation does not occur anymore once modernity has liberated itself from tradition. It was the postmodern intervention into social science which first shook this long-lasting and deeply rooted persuasion. However, postmodernists never managed to offer an alternative theory of social change. Most often they remained dependent on old modernization theory in the form of a negation. Postmodernists have generally been reluctant to take the step from deconstruction to construction of social theory. Further, at least the term postmodernity implies more than its advocates can argue for. It implies that the present period of social transition is as radical as the transformation from tradition to modernity. Today, postmodern social theory seems to have exhausted its energies. New theories of modernization have instead come to the fore (Lee, 2006). These theories have learnt from postmodern criticism, but do not entail the claim that we have left modernity behind us. We are rather living in 'another modernity' (Beck, 1986) or – to put the same idea in slightly different words – in a society which is 'modern in a different way' (Bauman, 2000: 27). Contemporary theories of modernity depend on two important theoretical moves: First, modernity in the singular is used in such an abstract sense that a distinction can be made between modernization and Westernization, on the one hand, and between modernity in general and different periods of modernity, on the other. Secondly, the idea of structural

transformation is neither limited to 'before modernity' (old modernization theory) nor involves an 'after modernity' (postmodern social theory), but is applied 'within modernity' (Beck, 1986: 13). These theoretical moves lead not only to a theory of multiple modernities, but also – which is the subject of this article – to a theory of successive modernities. Stzompka's distinction between 'changes *in* the system' and 'changes *of* the system' is in this context too simple. It is not modernity in an abstract sense that is undergoing structural transformation, but rather the concrete realization of abstract modernity in time and space. These theoretical moves dissolve the conception of an end point of modern history. It also becomes very difficult to judge entire epochs or types of modernity as higher or lower than others. They are first and foremost only different from one another. Furthermore, structural transformation cannot under these circumstances be understood as ruled by some kind of natural law. The historical transformation of modernity is rather to be explained by individual actors struggling together and against each other and against unexpected consequences of their actions and of institutions.

The main reason to work out a theory of the structural transformation within modernity is pragmatic. Social theory should be seen as 'a tool to understand the world' (Castells, 1997: 3). Thus, a sociology of social change, which situates the last structural transformation of society hundreds of years ago and – at best - implies that historical change since then only has been a question of realization, intensification, extension and radicalization (compare for instance Giddens, 1990), is not satisfactory. Such a theoretical tool does not help us enough to understand the contemporary world; we need finer distinctions.[8] This theoretical intention is not new. The talk about epochs within modernity is a terminology borrowed from Ulrich Beck (1986), who already in his book on *Risk Society* sought an alternative to postmodern social theory. Today he claims that a transformation from first modernity to 'second modernity' is taking place and that we have entered a period of 'modernization of modern society' or a period of 'reflexive modernization' – which is another way of expressing the same thing (Beck, Bonß and Lau, 2001). Zygmunt Bauman on his part has worked his way through and beyond the concept postmodernity. His new distinction between 'solid' and 'liquid' modernity is a theory about the transformation of modernity (Bauman, 2000). Richard Sennett focuses primarily on structural transformation in working life and economics. He seems in general to be in agreement with Bauman when he distinguishes between 'social capitalism' (or 'paternal capitalism') and 'flexible capitalism' (Sennett, 1998; 2006). However, most similar to my own approach is the history of modernity developed by Peter Wagner (1994), who has worked out both a concept of modernity in the abstract sense and a theory of different epochs of modernity. Unlike Beck's, Bauman's and Sennett's divisions of the history of modernity in two epochs, Wagner claims that Western modernity has gone through two epochs and is currently entering a third one. I will take his suggestion as a point of departure, but it needs to be further developed and also reconstructed in important aspects.

So far it might seem arbitrary if we choose two or three epochs of modernity. Why not four or five? The making of historical boundaries is always to some extent dependent on theoretical (or everyday) constructions and human inter-

ests. We have to try different concepts of modernization to see if they help us to better 'cope with reality' (Carleheden, 1999; Rorty, 1991). As a sociologist I have a primarily instrumental interest in history. To understand our contemporary world, we need to understand what it is not. Distinctions are the midwives of knowledge. Too few distinctions lift us so far up in the universal sky that we lose sight of the particular conditions of everyday life. Too many distinctions, on the other hand, leave us with our faces so close to the overwhelming complexity of everyday life that we do not see anything at all. Hence, the epochs of modernity should be understood as ideal types. Consequently, theories of epochs or types of modernity do not neglect the empirical fact of 'entangled modernities' (Therborn, 2003). To claim that we live in a certain epoch or type does not exclude the influence of other kinds of modernity or of tradition. Such a claim only says that a particular kind of modernity is more or less hegemonic at a certain time and place.

Abstract modernity
The pluralization of modernity in space and time depends on a general concept of modernity in the singular. It is contradictory to speak about different kinds of modern society if they do not have anything modern in common. If they do not, it is not a question of different kinds of modern societies, but of different kinds of societies. There has to be some family resemblances or family differences. The common features of all types and epochs of modernity can best be elucidated in contrast to tradition. Such a general concept of modernity must be abstract to be able to include different epochs and types. It is only on the abstract level that a contrast between modernity and tradition is possible. On the level of the 'empirical history of modernity' (Therborn, 2003: 296) – or rather the empirical histories of modernity – the influences of different traditional backgrounds are highly significant.

Where exactly should we draw the line between tradition and modernity? Björn Wittrock has clearly spelled out the theoretical conditions for making such a distinction. In a first step he distinguishes between a 'cultural' and an 'institutional' constitution of modernity. The former involves profound 'conceptual changes', that is, 'new assumptions about human beings, their rights and agency' (Wittrock, 2002: 36). A crucial aspect of these revolutionary conceptualizations of the world are, he claims, the 'generalized reference points' or 'promissory notes' that they contain (Wittrock, 2002: 38). Wittrock seems here to point at a central dimension of social reality, which many social scientists unfortunately tend to overlook. Habermas calls this dimension 'idealization' (Habermas, 1996: 1–27), Hartmann and Honneth call it *'Geltungsüberhang'*, that is, 'normative surplus' (Hartmann and Honneth, 2006: 43) and Boltanski and Chiapello are on the same track when they write about the social significance of 'justificatory regimes' and 'ideological configurations' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Such concepts elucidate the special role convictions play in social life. They have a great impact on social life even if they never (fully) become realized and converted into facts. Thus, social science cannot reduce social life to facts without distorting it.[9] Wittrock claims that only on this 'cultural' and 'conceptual' level is it possible to distinguish between tradition and modernity in a clear-cut way.

Wittrock mentions 'a democratic nation-state, a liberal market economy, or a research-oriented university' as candidates of modernity in the institutional sense (Wittrock, 2002: 36). However, we moderns constantly ask ourselves if we *really* live in a democratic state, in a liberal economy or work in a research-oriented university. There are certainly a lot of good arguments that imply that we do not. In this way every search for a pure institutional definition tends to end up in Bruno Latour's assertion: 'we have never been modern' (Latour, 1993). It is, in the first instance, not institutional facts in themselves, but rather the cultural source of the criticism of modern institutions that constitutes modernity. Modernity should be understood as an ongoing effort to institutionalize modern 'generalized reference points' or 'promissory notes'. Thus, modernity is a never-ending struggle about how modern idealizations should be understood and how they should be institutionalized. In that way critique becomes an important subject of research for the social sciences (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Wittrock's approach means that institutions are too concrete to define modernity in general. This does not imply that modernity first and foremost is something cultural, but rather that the common ground of different types and epochs of modernity is to be found on a cultural or conceptual level.[10] What characterizes this common ground?

Agnes Heller recently claimed that modernity has 'no foundation, since it emerged in and through the destruction and deconstruction of all foundations. In other words, modernity is founded on freedom' (Heller, 2005: 63). This definition is a good starting point. It is a variation of what has been claimed at least since Immanuel Kant gave his famous answer to the question 'What is Enlightenment?' Modernity is '*Mündigkeit*', that is, autonomy (Kant, 1995). Habermas expressed the same general idea when he wrote that: 'Modernity … has to create its normativity out of itself' (Habermas, 1987: 7) instead of fetching it from the outside or from above. However, Heller also points to another and darker side of modernity, which repeatedly has been emphasized in social theory. Freedom is a strange form of foundation, she claims: 'it is a foundation that does not found' (Heller, 2005: 64). The other side of freedom is an abyss in which we moderns always are in danger of falling down. Modernity is a void (Bauman, 1992: xi–xvii), it is '*tranzendentale Heimatlosigkeit*' (Georg Lukacs quoted by Isenberg, 1996), it is contingency (Rorty, 1989). But how is this apparently paradoxical idea of a foundation that does not found to be understood?

Durkheim once claimed that 'the cult of the individual' is a crucial trait of modern societies (Durkheim, 1974: 59), that is, modernization means 'the sacralization of the person' (Joas, 2004). Thus, even in modern times a conviction is to be found, which has the quality of divinity and absolute givenness. Not all that is solid melts to thin air. This modern cult should be understood as human self-sacralization in contrast to the cult of Gods or past epochs. The meaning of this cult can be made more specific in connection with the Kantian conception of autonomy. What we moderns worship is the human capability to judge what is true or false, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly. Autonomy is a promissory note which modernity in general seems to presuppose.[11] If we violate this conviction, we leave ourselves wide-open to modern critique. However, autonomy as foundation is a very abstract form of foundation and thus different from

traditional foundations.[12] It is precisely this abstract form that opens the door to contingency. On a concrete level modernity constantly has to reinvent itself in different ways to avoid the abyss. Accordingly, modernity cannot be reduced to freedom. Foucault once wrote that the '"Enlightenment" which discovered the liberties also invented the disciplines' (Foucault, 1979: 222). The distinction between order or discipline, on the one hand, and freedom, on the other, is not a distinction between tradition and modernity. Rather, order and discipline are necessary consequences of the other side of freedom, that is, of the abyss. Man-made order is the modern way to handle the darker side of freedom (Bauman, 1992: xi–xvii). Autonomy as promissory note means order created out of freedom. The Swedish play writer Lars Norén gave one of his earlier plays the title 'Chaos is God's neighbour'. In modern times it is true that freedom is the neighbour of man-made order. To be modern is the ability to balance on the edge of an abyss. Such a balancing act presupposes some form and degree of discipline. Thus, abstract modernity should be seen as *an inescapable tension between freedom and discipline* (Wagner, 1994). In a modern society, discipline and order can only (legitimately) be institutionalized in the name of freedom. However, freedom has – just because of its abstracted sense – been interpreted in numerous different ways and placed in numerous different contexts in the history of modernity, e.g. as the freedom of capital, of the citizen, of the people or of the nation.

Epochs of modernity
Not even we moderns are able to reinvent our societies and ourselves constantly. That would be an insurmountable task not only for every singular person or group, but also for the most powerful state. We have to discipline ourselves and stick to certain rules – at least for a while. We have to compel ourselves to obey the rules that we ourselves have made (which is the literal meaning of autonomy). We have to accept most of our habits and values as self-evidently valid to be able to conduct an everyday life. We have to build institutions which after a while have a tendency not only to generate what they were supposed to generate more or less independently of each one of us, but also – in the terminology of Luhmann – to become more or less autopoietic. Further, social change is always bound to specific times and places as points of departure. Even revolutionaries are shaped by the society they overthrow. Thus, even modern societies have their history of inertness. Marx' well-known claim that 'all that is solid melts to thin air' is only partly right. Modernity is also discipline.[13] However, if the freedom side constantly would have been defeated by the disciplinary side, modernity never would have taken place. Now and then, with more or less force and for different reasons the abyss-like quality of modernity becomes evident. If this 'return of the repressed' is powerful and broad enough an existing realization of abstract modernity runs into a crisis, the future opens wide, reflexivity and contingency prevail and we suffer a loss of meaning. That is of course a strong incentive for the creation and realization of new rules and values.

Abstract modernity has been realized in different ways. It is on this concrete level that we can talk about epochs of modernity. According to Peter Wagner, there has so far existed two epochs of modernity in the history of the West and

a third one is presently on the rise. He calls these epochs 'restricted liberal modernity', 'organized modernity' and 'extended liberal modernity' (Wagner, 1994). Between the three epochs are two crises of modernity. According to Wagner, contemporary Western societies are currently in the second crisis of modernity rather than in the third epoch, and he therefore has very little to say about the third epoch. However, there have been clear signs of a third epoch for some time now, and it is therefore possible to say much more about it than Wagner has done. Unfortunately, he also tends to fall back to the rather common view of modern social transformation as an oscillation between liberty and discipline, which already his choice of names for the three epochs indicates. In this way Wagner tends to contradict his own general definition of modernity. A new epoch of modernity is not primarily about the realization of more or less freedom or more or less discipline. Rather, it is about the realization of a new particular combination of freedom and discipline.[14]

The structural transformation of the modern conduct of life in the West

So far two things have been discussed: First, the theoretical conditions for an investigation of the structural history of modern societies and, secondly, the meaning of modernity in a general and abstract sense. Below, we will see whether these theoretical tools are capable of clarifying a certain aspect of modern history. As mentioned in the introduction, this aspect will be the history of the modern conduct of life in the West.[15]

Conduct of life is a concept most social scientists have left at the bottom of their conceptual toolboxes. However, the Swedish sociologist Carl-Göran Heidegren has recently shown its potential. From his discussions we can draw the conclusion that conduct of life actually should play a central role in micro-sociological research. Action and interaction are both very general concepts, whereas other important micro-sociological concepts such as narrative and identity are closely tied to the reflexive self-interpretation of the person. Conduct of life, on·the other hand, invites us more directly to a certain kind of investigations, which is not only based on the self-experience of persons. Conduct of life is, in contrast to narrative and identity, 'primarily a form of praxis' (Heidegren, 2006). Of course, this is not to claim that conduct of life could replace these other micro-sociological concepts,[16] but rather that the former concept catches a crucial aspect of everyday life which the latter concepts are not designed to grasp – at least not primarily. In fact, conduct of life could probably constitute the conceptual centre of micro-sociology, around which other concepts circle. However, this is not the place to spell out that argument in detail – the coming application of the concept on the history of modernity will hopefully back up that claim.

Conduct of life should be understood as a person's ongoing effort to 'actively master and shape his or her life' (Heidegren, 2004: 55) 'in all its aspects' (Heidegren, 2006) and in a specific way. Such a project is guided by a more or less orderly pattern of normative, cognitive and aesthetic convictions. It is a more or less conscious and reflexive undertaking, but can also to a high degree

be based on habits and convictions taken for granted, that is, on routinized outcomes of socialization processes. Such an effort can never come to a halt because every person must almost constantly struggle with all kinds of circumstances that resist her or his efforts.[17] Thus, a person's observed conduct of life at a specific moment in time is always a pragmatic compromise between his or her project and the circumstances. Over time, project and circumstances to some extent influence one another.

Individual projects are always situated in a particular cultural and social context, which means that persons have access only to a limited range of normative, cognitive and aesthetic convictions. Persons use this range of convictions in a more or less creative way and apply them to their individual situation. Sometimes, but rarely, their creativeness can be revolutionary. However, just because individuals are always already situated in time and space in a fundamental sense (Heidegger, 1979), it is possible to talk about a conduct of life in more general terms. There are always – except in times of cultural crisis – hegemonic convictions which constitute a certain epoch of time and consequently set the limits for individual persons' conducts of life. I will take Max Weber's writings as point of departure to grasp the transformation of the modern conduct of life in this epochal sense.

Max Weber included the conduct of life of the person in his general theory of modernity. He did that first and foremost in the context of capitalism and work rather than in the multi-dimensional sense, which was mentioned in the beginning of this article.[18] However, there are many reasons for choosing Weber as point of departure, the most obvious being that he developed the concept 'conduct of life'. Another important reason is that several later studies more or less closely follow in the footsteps of his investigation. These studies will be used to grasp the transformations of conduct of life after Weber's death. Finally, even if Weber's specific subject of research was capitalism and work, he certainly did not reduce social life to economy. The reverse is true; he emphasized the importance of culture in economic life.

Weber's claim in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* that the Protestant ethic was crucial for the genesis of capitalism is one of the best known theses of classical sociology. At the end of the book he states, however, that 'victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its [religion's, MC] support no longer' (Weber, 1976: 182–3). Weber describes a transition from religious asceticism over worldly asceticism to pure utilitarianism; from value rationality to instrumental rationality; from individualism to the bureaucratic iron cage. However, this is not a theory about the transformation of the modern conduct of life according to the theoretical conditions developed above. As we have seen, a conduct of life depends on values and convictions. The social change described by Weber is rather a dissolution of ethics and thus – in our context – the dissolution of the conduct of life of the first epoch of modernity. In this respect Weber's sociology is deeply situated in the first crisis of modernity. To grasp the further transformation of the modern conduct of life, we must look for the rise of a new strong ethic able to motivate the actions of a new generation. Modern man, trapped in the first crisis of modernity, 'needs ... something that will do for him what the Protestant ethic did once' (Whyte, 2002: 6).

Two American Weberians actually observed such a change in the modern conduct of life in two of the most discussed books in the US during the 1950s; David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* and William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (compare Heidegren, 2005). Their claims are rather similar. While Riesman talked about a change from an 'inner-directed' to an 'other-directed' 'social character', Whyte saw a change from Protestant ethic to 'social ethic'. The latter, Whyte writes, could just as well be called 'organization ethic' or 'bureaucratic ethic' (Whyte, 2002: 6). Both authors take, more or less explicitly, their point of departure in Weber's idea of a conduct of life based on a Protestant ethic, but add precisely that which Weber hardly could have seen, that is, the genesis of a second modern conduct of life. The organization men were born in the period when Weber died (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991: 1). Unfortunately, just as Wagner, Riesman and Whyte sometimes understand this social transformation as a shift from freedom to discipline rather than as a new combination of discipline and freedom. Thus, to some extent we have to reconstruct their interpretation of the change they themselves lived through. More than three decades later Paul Leinberger and Bruce Tucker traced and interviewed the children of the organization men Whyte had interviewed. They observed a third kind of ethic and a third kind of social character, that is, a third kind of the modern conduct of life (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991: 232–6). They called the new ethic 'self ethic' and the new social character 'subject-directed'. If we relate the empirical observations of these three investigations to the theoretical conclusions above, it becomes possible to develop Weber's original investigation into a theory of the structural transformation of the modern conduct of life in the West. Such an endeavour will support Wagner's division of the general history of Western modernity in three different epochs.[19] However, his theory must be reconstructed and concretized in our specific case. The claim developed below will be that three major conducts of life are to be found in the history of Western modernity. They will be named 'the age of asceticism', 'the age of organization' (Whyte, 2002: 12) and 'the age of authenticity' (Ferrara, 2002). All three ages are composed of particular combinations of discipline and freedom.

The age of asceticism

In the economic context in which the above mentioned investigations are conducted, the rise of the first epoch of the modern conduct of life is closely connected to the liberation of the market and of capital from tradition, that is, from *Gemeinschaft* and from feudal political and social power. Central in this context stands the liberation of the person as worker and as entrepreneur. The first modern man is especially well-known as an entrepreneur, not at least due to Weber's portrait of Benjamin Franklin in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. This man replaced 'tradition-direction' with 'inner-direction' (Riesman, Glazer and Denney, 2001) and could thus be understood as 'a self-made man' (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991: 232–4), that is, as autonomous.

> The tradition-directed person ... hardly thinks of himself as an individual. Still less does it occur to him that he might shape his own destiny in terms of personal, lifelong goals or that of the destiny of his children might be separate from that of the family

group. He is not sufficiently separated psychologically from himself (or, therefore, sufficiently close to himself), his family, or group to think in these terms. In the phase of transitional growth, however, people of inner-directed character do gain a feeling of control over their lives and see their children also as individuals with careers to make. (Riesman, Glazer and Denney, 2001: 17)

On the other hand, inner-direction is certainly not the same as freedom to do just anything that comes to mind. On the contrary, inner-direction involves self-discipline and hard work. The first modern man believes that he can reach his long-terms goals only through rigid self-control. Thus, he realizes his freedom through self-discipline. In this way, the 'delay of fulfilment becomes a way of life' (Sennett, 2006: 31–2). Such delay is the 'principle of self-discipline' (Sennett, 2006: 78) and thus the principle of discipline in the age of asceticism.[20] The rationality of this kind of discipline is that of instrumental reason, that is, means overshadow goals. This ascetic character was based on religious convictions and the internalization of a severe parental authority.

The age of organization
Even though Weber did not see the coming age of a second modern conduct of life, his theory of bureaucracy and legality can be understood as the beginning of a theory about the organization age on a macro level.[21] However, to talk about the second epoch of modernity only in terms of an 'iron cage' is partly misleading. Weber was wrong in claiming that the transformation of modernity does not need an ethical foundation (Weber, 1976: 182–3). The age of organization – like all ages – has its own special form of ethics. Certainly, Leinberger and Tucker agree with Weber when they claim that 'the success of the Protestant ethic had helped to destroy it' (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991: 10, 234–5). The economic success of the ascetic conduct of life led to bigger corporations and thus to an increase in social complexity. 'Increasingly, other people are the problem, not the material environment' (Riesman, Glazer and Denney, 2001: 18). The growing need for organization was solved by what Sennett calls a 'militarization of society' (Sennett, 2006: 33), that is a bureaucratization of both economy and politics. The growth of formal, hierarchical and pyramid-like organizations divided into offices with fixed functions radically changed modern society.[22] These organizations required, on the one hand, administrators rather than entrepreneurs and, on the other, increasing consumption and a generally high standard of living rather than thrift to find enough demand for the ever-increasing supply of products.[23] Asceticism could not survive as a dominating ethical principle under these new structural conditions. The bureaucratized maintenance of rules replaced self-discipline as the typical control mechanism. At the same time, work and leisure became separated in a much stricter sense than in the case of both the first and the third epoch. Bureaucratic work presupposes objectivity, impersonality, a rigid maintenance of rules and long-term planning, whereas leisure time requires the opposite.[24]

This bureaucratic conduct of life is today particularly outmoded – as things often are when they recently have become obsolete. Thus, it is easy to see the disciplinary side of the second modern conduct of life, but harder to disclose

what kind of freedom is at stake here. The disciplinary side becomes especially apparent when we go from Whyte's white-collar worker to the blue-collar worker. The factory is probably to the most obvious example of what Foucault and Bauman understand as the panoptical character of modern society (Bauman, 1988; Foucault, 1979). This second epoch of modernity is the age of 'Taylorism' and 'Fordism'. There is hardly any need to go deeper into this disciplinary side. Today, it has almost become the mainstream picture of modernity within sociology.[25] More important is it to underline that the conception of modernity as Panopticon writ large, just as the Iron Cage metaphor, neglects what the theory of the Organization Man and of the other-directed social character brings to light, that is, the genesis of a new kind of modern ethic. Instead of emphasizing a general diminishing of freedom in the sense of inner-direction, we should focus on the changing character of freedom. Whyte tries, even though he almost seems to feel disgust for the second epoch, to grasp what characterizes organization ethic: 'Its major propositions are three: a belief in the group as the source of creativity; a belief in "belongingness" as the ultimate need of the individual, and a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness' (Whyte, 2002: 7).

Belongingness forms the centre of Whyte's definition. The organization ethic is an ethic of belongingness. Organization men see no conflict between the individual and society; on the contrary, they are convinced that their autonomy depends on the relationship between the two. They not only see themselves as dependent on social units, such as corporations and nation states, but understand such social units as dependent on their loyalty. In the extreme case they are even willing to sacrifice their lives for the survival of the social unit. This is another typical sign of the militarization of modern society (Sennett, 2006: 64). Loyalty (or solidarity) rather than duty distinguishes this new kind of modern ethic. Amanda Bennett describes 'corporate loyalty' as 'the hallmark of the Organization Man' (Bennett, 1990: 16). This new ethic does not involve a step back towards a *Gemeinschaft*, because autonomy is just as important a trait of this epoch as of the first epoch. Rather, autonomy has been realized in a new way. The individual becomes free only by belonging to a group. This ethic of belongingness and loyalty plays a crucial role for the genesis and the legitimacy of the most significant institutions of the second epoch: expanded citizenship, the mass party, representative democracy, the trade union and the welfare state. However, we should not forget that belongingness and loyalty accompanied by a hierarchical type of organization often had elitist or paternalistic consequences.[26]

The age of authenticity
Just as the success of the Protestant ethic eventually transformed social structures in a way that made the entrepreneur into a rare species of modernity, the success of the bureaucratic ethic and of big corporations eventually made the conduct of life of the organization man obsolete. In light of the often harsh and insecure material conditions of the first epoch, the safe haven of the big organization was attractive to the entrepreneur's children (Bennett, 1990: 21). The next generation, however, found this haven suffocating. While certainly the first

but also the second epoch of the modern conduct of life were highly materialist in general orientation, the children of the organization men to a historically unprecedented degree could take a high standard of living for granted. Their conduct of life became primarily guided by postmaterialist values. Ronald Inglehart claims that this transformation of ethics can almost be understood as a social law:

> ... socioeconomic development tends to transform people's basic values and beliefs – and it does so in a roughly predictable fashion ... as the work force shifts from the agrarian sector to the industrial sector, people's worldviews tend to shift from an emphasis on traditional values to an emphasis on secular-rational values. Subsequently, as the work force shifts from the industrial sector to the service sector, a second major shift in values occurs, from emphasis on survival values to emphasis on self-expression. (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005: 5–6)

The investigations made by Inglehart and his colleagues can to some extent be used to explain the genesis of a third epoch of modern conduct of life, that is, of an epoch in which self-expression, rather than delay of fulfilment or belonging and loyalty, becomes a crucial guiding principle for the realization of abstract modernity. However, in the quotation above, Inglehart seems to advocate some kind of economical determinism (see however Inglehart, 1997: 216–36). Such an account must be complemented by a cultural explanation. Boltanski and Chiapello's (2002; 2005) 'sociology of critique' has done that in a promising way. They distinguish between a 'social critique' and an 'artistic critique' of capitalism, which both, but in different ways, have influenced the development of modern societies. Both forms of critique take their point of departure in the cultural source of modernity. The former is primarily directed against poverty and exploitation, which involves taking a stand for equality, redistribution of material resources and solidarity. The Labour Movement has played a most important role in changing societies in accordance with this kind of critique. Artistic critique is rather directed against oppression, reification and standardization, which primarily involves taking a stand for authenticity. There is no doubt that these forms of critique in different combinations have played important roles in the whole history of modernity, but artistic critique has had an especially significant role in the transition to the third epoch of the modern conduct of life in the West. From the standpoint of social critique alone, this presently ongoing transition only looks like a neoliberal revolution. It has led to a crisis of both representative democracy and the welfare state and thus to a general increase in social inequality. However, if we would only take the perspective of social critique, we would make a mistake similar to Weber's. Thus, we would interpret and judge the coming of a new age on the basis of the ethical standards of a previous age. The second crisis of modernity does not lead to a 'corrosion of character' in some universal sense, which Sennett (1998, 2006) seems to imply. It leads to the corrosion of a particular kind of social character, which is followed by the genesis of another.[27] Boltanski and Chiapello's account of this transformation shows that we cannot understand it from the perspective of social critique alone. Their general thesis is that radical

versions of both forms of critique were influential during the '1968 crisis', that is, in the beginning of the second crisis of modernity. But capitalism managed eventually to neutralize radical social critique by incorporating artistic critique into its own system. This incorporation saved capitalism, but in doing so it also changed it dramatically. Leinberger and Tucker's investigation supports this explication of the transformation.

Leinberger and Tucker (1991: 15) report that 'nearly all the organization offspring we interviewed harbor artistic aspirations'. Of course, very few of them actually realize these ambitions, but all the same they influence their conduct of life in all its aspects. Marginalized conducts of life of earlier epochs – that is, of the dandy and the beatnik – now suddenly became exemplary. '(E)verybody should choose to be different in exactly the same way: by laying claim to the originality and the individuality of the artist' (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991: 267). Suddenly most of us want our life to be 'as literature' (Rorty, 1989: 27). Our greatest horror is finding ourselves 'to be only a copy or replica' (Rorty, 1989: 24, quoting Harold Bloom). Such 'self-directed' men and women are not interested in self-control, but in finding and expressing their own self. Material wealth might be a part of it, but then only secondarily in order to facilitate self-expression. They will certainly not become simple cogs in a machine-like organization. Rather they suffer from 'a loss of community' (Leinberger and Tucker 1991: 15). Their conduct of life has creativity rather than productivity or loyalty as its core value, and the object of this creativity is their fragile and elusive identity. This conduct of life should not be understood as some kind of hedonism. Leinberger and Tucker (1991: 12) emphasize that 'the self ethic, like the social ethic it displaced, was based on a genuine moral imperative – the *duty* to express the authentic self'.

In an age of authenticity freedom is understood as the freedom to cultivate individual or collective identities. The romantic idea of an expressive self, which in early modernity was only known to a very small cultural elite (Taylor, 1989), becomes the crucial part of a dominating form of ethics. This cultural transformation deeply influences both politics and economics. The present age is the age of identity politics rather than the age of redistribution (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 16). The struggle for recognition of repressed cultural and sexual identities has become an issue on the daily political agenda.[28] Contemporary economic life rewards personality and emotionality rather than objectivity and instrumentality. It rewards flexibility or 'tolerance for fragmentation' (Sennett, 1998: 62), independence and networking rather than "one-company-for-life philosophy" (Bennett, 1990: 20), rigidity, loyalty and belonging. It rewards creativity, imagination and vision making rather than order, long-term planning and rationality. It rewards flat organizations and making self-realization a part of work, rather than hierarchical organizations and a strict division of work and leisure time (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Leinberger and Tucker, 1991; Sennett, 1998). Boltanski and Chiapello (2002: 21) talk in this context about an 'irresistible societal trend – which is that people not only do not want to take orders anymore, they do not even want to give them'. Under these new circumstances a successful leader is a person who can lead on the basis of visions rather than on the basis of commands. The manager has to be a 'catalyst'

and a 'coach' rather than a boss (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002: 23). In that way the ethics of authenticity can be used to motivate employees to work hard (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991: 398–401, 408–12).

So far we have mostly focused on the freedom side of this third conduct of life. However, also this age has a disciplinary side. The decreasing influence of social critique and thus increasing social inequality is a part of it. Inequality in this age should primarily be understood in terms of material resources for self-realization. However, authenticity in itself is also a kind of discipline. It has become not only a duty, but also an 'institutional demand' (Honneth, 2004: 472). It is especially obvious in some of the most innovative parts of contemporary working life, where self-realization has become a crucial component. The conception of authenticity also plays a central role in the advertising industry and thus increasingly characterizes the consumerism of contemporary Western societies.[29] Axel Honneth argues that

> the permanent compulsion to draw the material for an authentic self-realization from their own inner lives ... must sooner or later leave them empty. ... It may well be the case that with the ideal of self-realization's inversion into an external compulsion we have reached the historical threshold where the awareness of this inner emptiness has become the experience of a growing proportion of the population. (Honneth, 2004: 475)

Leinberger and Tucker's study shows that this development is not a question of the future, but has for decades been an empirical fact. To conceptualize their finding they turn back to Riesman, who related different types of emotional sanctions to his conception of different social characters. Whereas sanctions of action in the case of the inner-direction might lead to feelings of guilt, it leads to feelings of anxiety in the case of outer-direction. A sanction of subject-direction, however, most typically involves 'mourning' (Leinberger and Tucker 1991: 362–6). The age of authenticity is a 'loss culture'. The authentic self can only exist in the form of 'presence in absence'. This conceptualization might explain why depression suddenly has become one of the most common psychological problems in the contemporary Western world (Petersen, 2005). However, and not surprisingly, the closer Leinberger and Tucker's investigation comes to these authors' own time, the more unsystematic and contradictory it becomes. They restrict the third conduct of life to a highly individualist and essentialist version (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991: 407) and thus at the end of the book open for speculation about the coming of a fourth epoch. However, there is no need to presume an ahistorical and given core of the self, hidden deep inside the soul of the person, to give sense to a conception of authenticity and self-realization. An authentic self might also be understood as something historical, socially dependent and fluid, that is, as a self-constructing narrative. The age of authenticity, like every age, gives space for different versions of a dominating ethic. These versions have subject-direction in common and are forms of a self-ethic. Accordingly, mourning over an elusive self is not necessarily the fate of the subject-directed man, but rather the emotional risk typical of the third modern conduct of life in the West.

Conclusion

This article had two objectives: the development and application of a general theory of structural transformation within modernity and to use the concept 'conduct of life' to apply the general theory and to show the significance of that concept for the understanding of a specific aspect of the history of modern societies. The tentative conclusion is that such an application of the general theory both strengthens the general theory and deepens our understanding of the history of modernity. It leads to a division of the modern conduct of life in the West into three ages: an age of asceticism guided by the ethical principle of delay of fulfilment; an organization age guided by the principle of belongingness and loyalty; and an age of authenticity guided by the principle of self-realization. Of course, a theory of this kind requires an empirical investigation on its own terms. It cannot rely on secondary data, which are dependent, at least partly, on different theoretical points of departure. So far the theory developed in this article can only have a heuristic value. It indicates, however, that neither a general concept of modernity nor commonly used divisions of modernity – e.g. modernity and postmodernity, early and late, first and second, solid and liquid, industrialism and post-industrialism – can do justice to the modern history of Western societies. Without a complex theory of structural transformation, social science is in danger of using what Ulrich Beck has called 'zombie categories' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 202–13), that is, categories suitable for past epochs to understand the contemporary age.

Notes

1 Compare Giddens' distinction between four different 'institutional dimensions of modernity': capitalism, surveillance, military power and industrialism (Giddens, 1990: 55–63). His intention too is to avoid 'reductionism', but his dimensions are too concrete and cannot, for instance, include socialist economies and societies dominated by post-industrial production.

2 Weber scholars are debating how to translate *Lebensführung* into English (Swedberg and Agevall, 2005: 150–1). The literal translation would be 'leading of a life' (Kalberg, 1996: 56), but more common suggestions are 'conduct of life', 'life conduct', 'lifestyle', 'managing one's life' and 'way of life' (for arguments supporting 'conduct of life' as the most adequate translation, see Abel and Cockerham, 1993; Ghosh, 1994).

3 However, the cultural significance of the West changes within the context of a globalized conception of modernity. The Western type of modernity is then not necessarily seen as a model for modernization around the world, but rather as a particular type among others. The historical fact that modernity in an abstract sense had its genesis in the West does not change that. Further, even when the account of the transformation of modernity is limited to the West, it must be able to include – as an anonymous referee of this article emphasized – the fact that Western culture itself, due to increased migration, has become more heterogenous.

4 There is however one research group in Germany that has made '*alltägliche Lebensführung*' to its central concept (Voss, 2001).

5 I will use the terms 'tradition' and 'modernity' even though classical social scientist used other terms, e.g. '*Gemeinschaft*' and '*Gesellschaft*' (Tönnies), 'military' and 'industrial' society (Spencer) and 'mechanical' and 'organic solidarity' (Durkheim).

6 Björn Eriksson argues that social science has its origin in the Scottish Enlightenment (Eriksson, 1993). The theoretical core of that school was a stage theory that distinguished between four modes of subsistence: the age of the hunters, the age of the shepherds, the age of agriculture and the age of commerce.

7 Of course, ever since thinkers like Condorcet and Marx there has been the possibility to understand contemporary society as the second to last stage of modernity or as an 'unfinished project'. But such claims involve neither a refutation of social evolutionism nor of West-centrism. The end and high point of history has only been displaced one step into the future. Not even the cultural criticism of modernity by thinkers such as Rousseau, Nietzsche, Freud and Weber radically challenges this evolutionism. It only evaluates modernization in a negative rather than an optimistic way.

8 Concepts like 'high modernity' and 'late modernity' are, at least terminologically, mystifying. They imply that modernity soon will be over. However, it is only possible to talk about the late middle ages because we already know that the middle ages came to an end. The use of the term late modernity today implies faith in some form of clairvoyance (Bauman and Yakimova, 2002).

9 This is what Habermas means when he talks about '*die faktische Kraft des Kontrafaktischen*', that is 'the very real force of the counterfactual' (Habermas, 1985: 242; 1987: 206). It does not only concern the normative dimension of social life, but also the cognitive one. Conceptual categorizations influence profoundly the way we act. The role of aesthetic convictions in social life should also be mentioned in this context.

10 This claim can be supported by the following two examples: If we would make an institution such as capitalism or the market into something typically modern, socialist economies would be excluded from modernity. If we would make the institutionalization of representative democracy into something typically modern, totalitarian regimes would be excluded. But the socialist economies and the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century were certainly not traditional. It has, on the contrary, been shown that some of their traits are typically modern (Bauman, 1989) and that they were modern in a non-capitalist and non-democratic way (Therborn, 1995; Waters, 1999: xviii).

11 Modernity is primarily a cult of human autonomy rather than a cult of individual autonomy. Modernity allows for different degrees of individualism.

12 At least some philosophers of Enlightenment still stood with one foot in tradition when they imagined that reason and science can substitute religion and thus that humans are able to produce absolute truths. However, human judgement in its modern sense is fundamentally fallible and we should perhaps therefore in this context talk about reflexivity rather than reason (compare Giddens, 1990: 36–45).

13 This side of modernity has in modern social theory been conceptualized in two different directions. On the one hand we have what Giddens (1990) calls 'the separation of time and space' and 'the development of disembedding mechanisms', that is, the 'juggernaut' quality of modernity. On the other hand, we have the concept of power developed by Foucault and his followers. Both directions are relevant here. However, a systematic inclusion of these aspects of discipline cannot be made in this article.

14 Compare my criticism of Wagner in Carleheden (2001).

15 Inglehart's 'cultural maps' show that – in spite of everything – it is possible to treat 'the West' in a cultural sense as a delimited object of research (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005: 63).

16 The concept 'lifestyle' might be a competing concept. However, as compared to conduct of life, the use of this concept tends to overemphasize the significance of aesthetics. Lifestyle should be seen only as one aspect of conduct of life.

17 The conventional person has an easier task in this respect than the outsider, but conduct of life must also in the former case be understood as an ongoing project.

18 Elsewhere I have made a preliminary attempt to develop a theory of the structural transformation of modernity in a political sense (Carleheden, 2006).

19 This claim can also be supported by Boltanski and Chiapello's investigation (2005). Likewise investigations made by Beck, Bauman and Sennett can be used to some extent, but only when reconstructed according to our theoretical points of departure. Concerning 'the death of the organization man' also Bennett (1990) supplies empirical support.

20 Sennett occasionally indicates an epochal division of modernity into three parts. However, when he does that he reduces the first epoch to an anarchic state followed by the second epoch of 'social capitalism' (Sennett, 2006: 19). Consequently, he relates Weber's writings about an ascetic conduct of life to the second epoch rather than to the first and postpones 'the erosion of the Protestant ethic' to the 1970s (Sennett, 2006: 31–2, 77–9). In that way he cannot distinguish between the conduct of life of an entrepreneur such as Benjamin Franklin and the conduct of life inside the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy. Thus, Sennett (just like Beck and Bauman) neglects the important distinctions made by Riesman and Whyte.

21 One might even argue that the concept '*Legalitätsglaube*' (faith in legality), which Weber developed later in another context (Weber, 1972), could be used to understand the ethic of the second epoch. However, such a faith is hardly enough to conduct a life.

22 Giddens' (1990) theory of the separation of time and space (and of space and place) and of the significance of disembedding mechanisms can be used to further explicate the bureaucratization of society. However, his lack of a theory of different epochs of modern society means that it has to be reconstructed to fit the intentions of this article.

23 The significance of the latter should not be forgotten. Riesman even talks about 'a shift from an age of production to an age of consumption' (Riesman, Glazer, and Denney, 2001: 6). Compare also Daniel Bell, who claims that American culture already in the 1950s had become 'primarily hedonistic' (Bell, 1996: 70). However, hedonism is built on desires and they are too fragmentary and contingent to enable a person to conduct his or her life. A conduct of life presupposes 'second-order desires' rather than 'first-order desires' (Frankfurt, 1988) or 'strong' rather than 'weak evaluations' (compare Carleheden, 1996: 217–39; Taylor, 1985: 15–44).

24 The organization man was of course typically male. Parsons' theory of the family and his distinction between an instrumentally orientated breadwinner and an expressively orientated homemaker should be situated in this second epoch.

25 For a further account of the disciplinary side of the second epoch of modernity, see Wagner (1994: 89–103).

26 Whereas authors such as Wagner have had difficulties explicating what kind of freedom is typical of the second epoch, Hartman and Honneth (2006) almost glorify this epoch – which they call 'the social-democratic era' – and seem to forget its disciplinary side.

27 In many respects Sennett is the Weber of our time. He transfers the logic of Weber's line of arguments from the first crisis to the second crisis of modernity.

28 Thus, in becoming an age of authenticity, Western culture also gains the potential to become multicultural.

29 Also this third epoch is an 'age of consumption', but has become postmaterialist rather than materialist in orientation. Consumption is an important part of the self-realizing process.

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