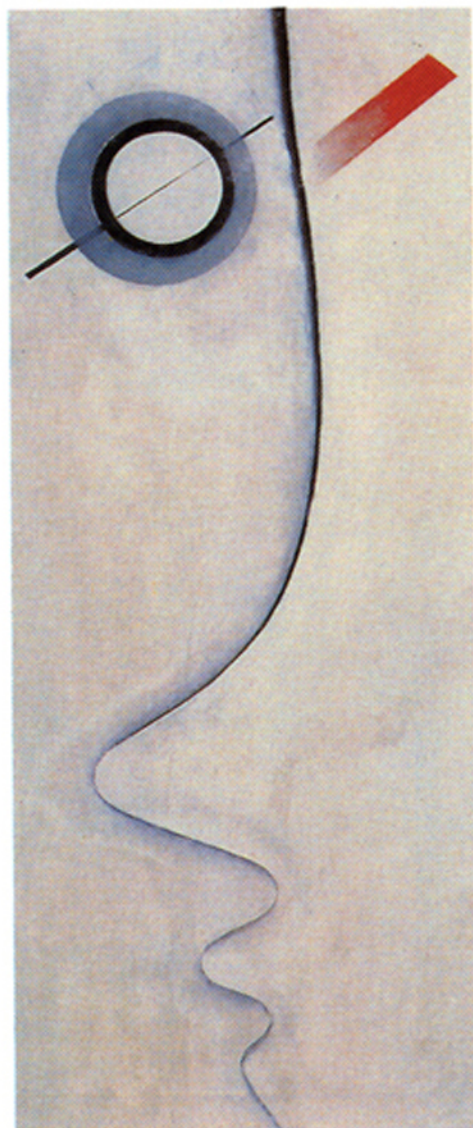


Modernity and Self-Identity

*Self and Society in
the Late Modern Age*



ANTHONY
GIDDENS

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Anthony Giddens

polity

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Anthony Giddens

Introduction

The question of modernity, its past development and current institutional forms, has reappeared as a fundamental sociological problem at the turn of the twenty-first century. The connections between sociology and the emergence of modern institutions have long been recognised. Yet in the present day, we see not only that these connections are more complex and problematic than was previously realised, but that a rethinking of the nature of modernity must go hand in hand with a reworking of basic premises of sociological analysis.

Modern institutions differ from all preceding forms of social order in respect of their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact. However, these are not only extensional transformations: modernity radically alters the nature of day-to-day social life and affects the most personal aspects of our experience. Modernity must be understood on an institutional level; yet the transmutations introduced by modern institutions interlace in a direct way with individual life and therefore with the self. One of the distinctive features of modernity, in fact, is an increasing interconnection between the two 'extremes' of extensionality and intentionality: globalising influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other. The aim of this book is to analyse the nature of these interconnections and to provide a conceptual vocabulary for thinking about them. In this introductory discussion, I shall try to provide an overview and summary version of the themes of the study as a whole. I hope the reader will tolerate the slight elements of repetition which this strategy produces.

Although its main focus is on the self, this is not primarily a

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work of psychology. The overriding stress of the book is upon the emergence of new mechanisms of self-identity which are shaped by – yet also shape – the institutions of modernity. The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications.

Sociology, and the social sciences more widely conceived, are inherent elements of the institutional reflexivity of modernity – a phenomenon fundamental to the discussion in this book. Not just academic studies, but all manner of manuals, guides, therapeutic works and self-help surveys contribute to modernity's reflexivity. On several occasions, therefore, I make fairly extensive reference to social research and practical 'guides to living', not as a means of documenting a definite subject-matter, but as symptomatic of social phenomena or trends of development I seek to identify. These are not just works 'about' social processes, but materials which in some part constitute them.

In general, the focus of this book is analytical rather than descriptive and at some key junctures relies on ideal-typical procedures in order to substantiate its points. I try to identify some structuring features at the core of modernity which interact with the reflexivity of the self: but I do not discuss in any detail how far some of the processes mentioned have proceeded in specific contexts, or what exceptions and countertrends to them exist.

The opening chapter sketches out a framework for the whole of the study. Taking as illustrative a specific piece of social research, it provides an appraisal of key aspects of modernity's development. Besides its institutional reflexivity, modern social life is characterised by profound processes of the reorganisation of time and space, coupled to the expansion of disembedding mechanisms – mechanisms which prise social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space distances. The reorganisation of time and space, plus the disembedding mechanisms, radicalise and globalise pre-established institutional traits of modernity; and they act to transform the content and nature of day-to-day social life.

Modernity is a post-traditional order, but not one in which the sureties of tradition and habit have been replaced by the certitude

of rational knowledge. Doubt, a pervasive feature of modern critical reason, permeates into everyday life as well as philosophical consciousness, and forms a general existential dimension of the contemporary social world. Modernity institutionalises the principle of radical doubt and insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypotheses: claims which may very well be true, but which are in principle always open to revision and may have at some point to be abandoned. Systems of accumulated expertise – which form important disembedding influences – represent multiple sources of authority, frequently internally contested and divergent in their implications. In the settings of what I call ‘high’ or ‘late’ modernity – our present-day world – the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities.

In circumstances of uncertainty and multiple choice, the notions of trust and risk have particular application. Trust, I argue, is a crucial generic phenomenon of personality development as well as having distinctive and specific relevance to a world of disembedding mechanisms and abstract systems. In its generic manifestations, trust is directly linked to achieving an early sense of ontological security. Trust established between an infant and its caretakers provides an ‘inoculation’ which screens off potential threats and dangers that even the most mundane activities of day-to-day life contain. Trust in this sense is basic to a ‘protective cocoon’ which stands guard over the self in its dealings with everyday reality. It ‘brackets out’ potential occurrences which, were the individual seriously to contemplate them, would produce a paralysis of the will, or feelings of engulfment. In its more specific guise, trust is a medium of interaction with the abstract systems which both empty day-to-day life of its traditional content and set up globalising influences. Trust here generates that ‘leap into faith’ which practical engagement demands.

Modernity is a risk culture. I do not mean by this that social life is inherently more risky than it used to be; for most people in the developed societies that is not the case. Rather, the concept of risk becomes fundamental to the way both lay actors and technical specialists organise the social world. Under conditions of modernity, the future is continually drawn into the present by means of the reflexive organisation of knowledge environments.

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A territory, as it were, is carved out and colonised. Yet such colonisation by its very nature cannot be complete: thinking in terms of risk is vital to assessing how far projects are likely to diverge from their anticipated outcomes. Risk assessment invites precision, and even quantification, but by its nature is imperfect. Given the mobile character of modern institutions, coupled to the mutable and frequently controversial nature of abstract systems, most forms of risk assessment, in fact, contain numerous imponderables.

Modernity reduces the overall riskiness of certain areas and modes of life, yet at the same time introduces new risk parameters largely or completely unknown to previous eras. These parameters include high-consequence risks: risks deriving from the globalised character of the social systems of modernity. The late modern world – the world of what I term high modernity – is apocalyptic, not because it is inevitably heading towards calamity, but because it introduces risks which previous generations have not had to face. However much there is progress towards international negotiation and control of armaments, so long as nuclear weapons remain, or even the knowledge necessary to build them, and so long as science and technology continue to be involved with the creation of novel weaponry, the risk of massively destructive warfare will persist. Now that nature, as a phenomenon external to social life, has in a certain sense come to an ‘end’ – as a result of its domination by human beings – the risks of ecological catastrophe form an inevitable part of our horizon of day-to-day life. Other high-consequence risks, such as the collapse of global economic mechanisms, or the rise of totalitarian superstates, are an equally unavoidable part of our contemporary experience.

In high modernity, the influence of distant happenings on proximate events, and on intimacies of the self, becomes more and more commonplace. The media, printed and electronic, obviously play a central role in this respect. Mediated experience, since the first experience of writing, has long influenced both self-identity and the basic organisation of social relations. With the development of mass communication, particularly electronic communication, the interpenetration of self-development and social systems, up to and including global systems, becomes ever more pronounced. The ‘world’ in which we now live is in some

profound respects thus quite distinct from that inhabited by human beings in previous periods of history. It is in many ways a single world, having a unitary framework of experience (for instance, in respect of basic axes of time and space), yet at the same time one which creates new forms of fragmentation and dispersal. A universe of social activity in which electronic media have a central and constitutive role, nevertheless, is not one of 'hyperreality', in Baudrillard's sense. Such an idea confuses the pervasive impact of mediated experience with the internal referentiality of the social systems of modernity – the fact that these systems become largely autonomous and determined by their own constitutive influences.

In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. Of course, there are standardising influences too – most notably, in the form of commodification, since capitalistic production and distribution form core components of modernity's institutions. Yet because of the 'openness' of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of 'authorities', lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity. Reflexively organised life-planning, which normally presumes consideration of risks as filtered through contact with expert knowledge, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity.

A possible misunderstanding about lifestyle as it interconnects with life-planning should be cleared up right at the beginning. Partly because the term has been taken up in advertising and other sources promoting commodified consumption, one might imagine that 'lifestyle' refers only to the pursuits of the more affluent groups or classes. The poor are more or less completely excluded from the possibility of making lifestyle choices. In some

substantial part this is true. Issues of class and inequality, within states and on a world-wide level, closely mesh with the arguments of this book, although I do not try to document those inequalities here. Indeed, class divisions and other fundamental lines of inequality, such as those connected with gender or ethnicity, can be partly *defined* in terms of differential access to forms of self-actualisation and empowerment discussed in what follows. Modernity, one should not forget, produces *difference, exclusion and marginalisation*. Holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualisation, of self. Yet it would be a major error to suppose that the phenomena analysed in the book are confined in their impact to those in more privileged material circumstances. 'Lifestyle' refers also to decisions taken and courses of action followed under conditions of severe material constraint; such lifestyle patterns may sometimes also involve the more or less deliberate rejection of more widely diffused forms of behaviour and consumption.

At one pole of the interaction between the local and the global stands what I call the 'transformation of intimacy'. Intimacy has its own reflexivity and its own forms of internally referential order. Of key importance here is the emergence of the 'pure relationship' as prototypical of the new spheres of personal life. A pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship as such can deliver. In the context of the pure relationship, trust can be mobilised only by a process of mutual disclosure. Trust, in other words, can by definition no longer be anchored in criteria outside the relationship itself – such as criteria of kinship, social duty or traditional obligation. Like self-identity, with which it is closely intertwined, the pure relationship has to be reflexively controlled over the long term, against the backdrop of external transitions and transformations.

Pure relationships presuppose 'commitment', which is a particular species of trust. Commitment in turn has to be understood as a phenomenon of the internally referential system: it is a commitment to the relationship as such, as well as to the other person or persons involved. The demand for intimacy is integral to the pure relationship, as a result of the mechanisms of trust which it presumes. It is hence a mistake to see the contemporary

'search for intimacy', as many social commentators have done, only as a negative reaction to a wider, more impersonal social universe. Absorption within pure relationships certainly may often be a mode of defence against an enveloping outside world: but such relationships are thoroughly permeated by mediated influences coming from large-scale social systems, and usually actively organise those influences within the sphere of such relationships. In general, whether in personal life or in broader social milieux, processes of reappropriation and empowerment intertwine with expropriation and loss.

In such processes many different connections between individual experience and abstract systems can be found. 'Reskilling' – the reacquisition of knowledge and skills – whether in respect of intimacies of personal life or wider social involvements, is a pervasive reaction to the expropriating effects of abstract systems. It is situationally variable, and also tends to respond to specific requirements of context. Individuals are likely to reskill themselves in greater depth where consequential transitions in their lives are concerned or fateful decisions are to be made. Reskilling, however, is always partial and liable to be affected by the 'revisable' nature of expert knowledge and by internal dissensions between experts. Attitudes of trust, as well as more pragmatic acceptance, scepticism, rejection and withdrawal, uneasily coexist in the social space linking individual activities and expert systems. Lay attitudes towards science, technology and other esoteric forms of expertise, in the age of high modernity, tend to express the same mixed attitudes of reverence and reserve, approval and disquiet, enthusiasm and antipathy, which philosophers and social analysts (themselves experts of sorts) express in their writings.

The reflexivity of the self, in conjunction with the influence of abstract systems, pervasively affects the body as well as psychic processes. The body is less and less an extrinsic 'given', functioning outside the internally referential systems of modernity, but becomes itself reflexively mobilized. What might appear as a wholesale movement towards the narcissistic cultivation of bodily appearance is in fact an expression of a concern lying much deeper actively to 'construct' and control the body. Here there is an integral connection between bodily development and lifestyle – manifest, for example, in the pursuit of specific bodily regimes.

Yet much more wide-ranging factors are important, too, as a reflection of the socialising of biological mechanisms and processes. In the spheres of biological reproduction, genetic engineering and medical interventions of many sorts, the body is becoming a phenomenon of choices and options. These do not affect the individual alone: there are close connections between personal aspects of bodily development and global factors. Reproductive technologies and genetic engineering, for example, are parts of more general processes of the transmutation of nature into a field of human action.

Science, technology and expertise more generally play a fundamental role in which I call the sequestration of experience. The notion that modernity is associated with an instrumental relation to nature, and the idea that a scientific outlook excludes questions of ethics or morality, are familiar enough. However, I seek to reframe these issues in terms of an institutional account of the late modern order, developed in terms of internal referentiality. The overall thrust of modern institutions is to create settings of action ordered in terms of modernity's own dynamics and severed from 'external criteria' – factors external to the social systems of modernity. Although there are numerous exceptions and countertrends, day-to-day social life tends to become separated from 'original' nature and from a variety of experiences bearing on existential questions and dilemmas. The mad, the criminal and the seriously ill are physically sequestered from the normal population, while 'eroticism' is replaced by 'sexuality' – which then moves behind the scenes to become hidden away. The sequestration of experience means that, for many people, direct contact with events and situations which link the individual lifespan to broad issues of morality and finitude are rare and fleeting.

This situation has not come about, as Freud thought, because of the increasing psychological repression of guilt demanded by the complexities of modern social life. Rather, what occurs is an institutional repression, in which – I shall claim – mechanisms of shame rather than guilt come to the fore. Shame has close affiliations with narcissism, but it is a mistake, as noted earlier, to suppose that self-identity becomes increasingly narcissistic. Narcissism is one among other types of psychological mechanism – and, in some instances, pathology – which the connections

between identity, shame and the reflexive project of the self bring into being.

Personal meaninglessness – the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer – becomes a fundamental psychic problem in circumstances of late modernity. We should understand this phenomenon in terms of a repression of moral questions which day-to-day life poses, but which are denied answers. ‘Existential isolation’ is not so much a separation of individuals from others as a separation from the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence. The reflexive project of the self generates programmes of actualisation and mastery. But as long as these possibilities are understood largely as a matter of the extension of the control systems of modernity to the self, they lack moral meaning. ‘Authenticity’ becomes both a pre-eminent value and a framework for self-actualisation, but represents a morally stunted process.

Yet the repression of existential questions is by no means complete and in high modernity, where systems of instrumental control have become more nakedly exposed than ever before and their negative consequences more apparent, many forms of counter-reaction appear. It becomes more and more apparent that lifestyle choices, within the settings of local–global interrelations, raise moral issues which cannot simply be pushed to one side. Such issues call for forms of political engagement which the new social movements both presage and serve to help initiate. ‘Life politics’ – concerned with human self-actualisation, both on the level of the individual and collectively – emerges from the shadow which ‘emancipatory politics’ has cast.

Emancipation, the general imperative of progressivist Enlightenment, is in its various guises the condition for the emergence of a life-political programme. In a world still riven by divisions and marked by forms of oppression both old and new, emancipatory politics does not decline in importance. Yet these pre-existing political endeavours become joined by novel forms of life-political concern. In the concluding sections of the book I outline the main parameters of the life-political agenda. It is an agenda which demands an encounter with specific moral dilemmas, and forces us to raise existential issues which modernity has institutionally excluded.

1

The Contours of High Modernity

Let me open my discussion by describing some of the findings of a specific sociological study, plucked rather arbitrarily from a particular area of research. *Second Chances*, by Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, is an investigation of divorce and remarriage.¹ The book describes the impact of marriage break-up, over a period of some ten years, on sixty sets of parents and children. Divorce, the authors point out, is a crisis in individuals' personal lives, which presents dangers to their security and sense of well-being, yet also offers fresh opportunities for their self-development and future happiness. Separation and divorce, and their aftermath, can cause long-lasting anxieties and psychological disturbances; but at the same time the changes brought about by the dissolution of a marriage provide possibilities, as the authors put it, to 'grow emotionally', to 'establish new competence and pride' and to 'strengthen intimate relationships far beyond earlier capacities'.

The marital separation, Wallerstein and Blakeslee say, is a marker 'that freezes certain images which frame the courses of action that ensue. Anger is often rooted in and feeds on the way in which the marriage came apart: one partner suddenly finding the other having an affair with a mutual best friend; one partner leaving a note informing the other, without warning, that the marriage is dead; one parent departing suddenly, taking the children, providing no address . . .' A marriage that has come apart tends to be mourned, no matter how unhappy or desperate the partners may have been while they were together.

The longer two people have been with one another, the more protracted tends to be the period of mourning. Mourning derives from the loss of shared pleasures and experiences, plus the necessary abandoning of the hopes once invested in the relationship. Where no process of mourning occurs, the result is often the long-term persistence of hurt feelings, leading perhaps to despair and psychological breakdown. For the majority of people, in fact, the feelings engendered by divorce seem not to disappear completely with the passing of the years; they may be brought violently alive again by subsequent events, such as the remarriage of the previous partner, financial hardship, or quarrels over how the children should be brought up. Where a partner remains quite strongly involved emotionally with the other, even in a largely negative way, the results in such situations tends to be an upsurge of bitterness.

Going through a phase of mourning, according to Wallerstein and Blakeslee, is the key to 'reclaiming oneself' after divorce. Anyone who successfully 'decouples' from his or her previous spouse faces the task of establishing a 'new sense of self', a 'new sense of identity'. In a long-term marriage, each individual's sense of self-identity becomes tied to the other person, and indeed to the marriage itself. Following a broken marriage, each person must 'reach back into his or her early experience and find other images and roots for independence, for being able to live alone, and for undertaking the second chances provided by divorce'.

A separated or divorced person needs moral courage to try new relationships and find new interests. Many people in such circumstances lose confidence in their own judgements and capabilities, and may come to feel that planning for the future is valueless. 'They sense that life gives hard knocks and is essentially unpredictable; they conclude that the best-laid plans go awry and become discouraged about setting long-range or even short-range goals, much less working towards these goals'. Overcoming such feelings demands persistence in the face of setbacks and a willingness to alter established personal traits or habits. Similar qualities are needed by the children of divorced parents, who often suffer profoundly from the dissolution of the family household. 'The children of divorce', Wallerstein and Blakeslee say, 'face a more difficult task than the children of bereavement. Death cannot be

undone, but divorce happens between living people who can change their minds. A reconciliation fantasy taps deep into children's psyches . . . they may not overcome this fantasy of reconciliation until they themselves finally separate from their parents and leave home.'²

Personal problems, personal trials and crises, personal relationships: what can these tell us, and what do they express, about the social landscape of modernity? Not much, some would be inclined to argue, for surely personal feelings and concerns are much the same at all times and in all places. The coming of modernity, it might be accepted, brings about major changes in the external social environment of the individual, affecting marriage and the family as well as other institutions; yet people carry on their personal lives much as they always did, coping as best they can with the social transformations around them. Or do they? For social circumstances are not separate from personal life, nor are they just an external environment to them. In struggling with intimate problems, individuals help actively to reconstruct the universe of social activity around them.

The world of high modernity certainly stretches out well beyond the milieu of individual activities and personal engagements. It is one replete with risks and dangers, to which the term 'crisis', not merely as an interruption, but as a more or less continuous state of affairs, has particular application. Yet it also intrudes deeply into the heart of self-identity and personal feelings. The 'new sense of identity' which Wallerstein and Blakeslee mention as required following divorce is an acute version of a process of 'finding oneself' which the social conditions of modernity enforce on all of us. This process is one of active intervention and transformation.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee summarise the results of their research in a chapter called 'Danger and Opportunity'. Trite as it is, the phrase applies not only to marriage and its perturbations, but to the world of modernity as a whole. The sphere of what we have today come to term 'personal relationships' offers opportunities for intimacy and self-expression lacking in many more traditional contexts. At the same time, such relationships have become risky and dangerous, in certain senses of these terms. Modes of behaviour and feeling associated with sexual and marital life have become mobile, unsettled and 'open'. There is much

to be gained; but there is unexplored territory to be charted, and new dangers to be courted.

Consider, as an example, a phenomenon discussed extensively by Wallerstein and Blakeslee: the changing nature of stepfamilies. Many people, adults and children, now live in stepfamilies – not usually, as in previous eras, as a consequence of the death of a spouse, but because of the re-forming of marriage ties after divorce. A child in a stepfamily may have two mothers and fathers, two sets of brothers and sisters, together with other complex kin connections resulting from the multiple marriages of parents. Even the terminology is difficult: should a stepmother be called ‘mother’ by the child, or called by her name? Negotiating such problems might be arduous and psychologically costly for all parties; yet opportunities for novel kinds of fulfilling social relations plainly also exist. One thing we can be sure of is that the changes involved here are not just external to the individual. These new forms of extended family ties have to be established by the very persons who find themselves most directly caught up in them.

Anxiety is the natural correlate of dangers of all types. It is caused by disturbing circumstances, or their threat, but also helps mobilise adaptive responses and novel initiatives. Terms such as pain, worry and mourning are repeatedly used by the authors of *Second Chances*. So are ones like courage and resolution. Life throws up personal problems in an apparently random way and, acknowledging this, some people take refuge in a sort of resigned numbness. Yet many are also able more positively to grasp the new opportunities which open up as pre-established modes of behaviour become foreclosed, and to change themselves. How new are these anxieties, dangers and opportunities? In what ways are they distinctively influenced by the institutions of modernity? These are the questions I shall try to answer in the pages that follow.

Second Chances is a work of sociology, but it will not only be read by sociologists. Therapists, family counsellors, social workers and other concerned professionals are likely to turn its pages. It is perfectly possible that members of the lay public, particularly if they have been recently divorced, will read the book and relate its ideas and conclusions to the circumstances of their own lives. The authors are clearly aware of this likelihood. Although the

book is written mainly as a research study presenting a definite set of results, numerous passages scattered through the text suggest practical responses and courses of action which the newly separated or divorced might follow. No doubt few individual books influence overall social behaviour very much. *Second Chances* is one small contribution to a vast and more or less continuous outpouring of writings, technical and more popular, on the subject of marriage and intimate relationships. Such writings are part of the *reflexivity* of modernity: they serve routinely to organise, and alter, the aspects of social life they report on or analyse. Anyone who contemplates marriage today, or who faces a situation of the break-up of a marriage or a long-term intimate relationship, knows a great deal (not always on the level of discursive awareness) about ‘what is going on’ in the social arena of marriage and divorce. Such knowledge is not incidental to what is actually going on, but constitutive of it – as is true of all contexts of social life in conditions of modernity.

Not only this: everyone is in some sense aware of the reflexive constitution of modern social activity and the implications it has for her or his life. Self-identity for us forms a *trajectory* across the different institutional settings of modernity over the *durée* of what used to be called the ‘life cycle’, a term which applies much more accurately to non-modern contexts than to modern ones. Each of us not only ‘has’, but *lives* a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, ‘How shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity.

Let us now move from the level of personal lives to a more institutional plane. To set the backdrop to this study as a whole, we have to provide a characterisation of this troubling and tumultuous phenomenon: modernity.

Modernity: some general considerations

In this book I use the term ‘modernity’ in a very general sense, to refer to the institutions and modes of behaviour established first

of all in post-feudal Europe, but which in the twentieth century increasingly have become world-historical in their impact. 'Modernity' can be understood as roughly equivalent to 'the industrialised world', so long as it be recognised that industrialism is not its only institutional dimension.³ I take industrialism to refer to the social relations implied in the widespread use of material power and machinery in production processes. As such, it is one institutional axis of modernity. A second dimension is capitalism, where this term means a system of commodity production involving both competitive product markets and the commodification of labour power. Each of these can be distinguished analytically from the institutions of surveillance, the basis of the massive increase in organisational power associated with the emergence of modern social life. Surveillance refers to the supervisory control of subject populations, whether this control takes the form of 'visible' supervision in Foucault's sense, or the use of information to coordinate social activities. This dimension can in turn be separated from control of the means of violence in the context of the 'industrialisation of war'. Modernity ushers in an era of 'total war', in which the potential destructive power of weaponry, signalled above all by the existence of nuclear armaments, becomes immense.

Modernity produces certain distinct social forms, of which the most prominent is the nation-state. A banal observation, of course, until one remembers the established tendency of sociology to concentrate on 'society' as its designated subject-matter. The sociologist's 'society', applied to the period of modernity at any rate, is a nation-state, but this is usually a covert equation rather than an explicitly theorised one. As a sociopolitical entity the nation-state contrasts in a fundamental way with most types of traditional order. It develops only as part of a wider nation-state system (which today has become global in character), has very specific forms of territoriality and surveillance capabilities, and monopolises effective control over the means of violence.⁴ In the literature of international relations, nation-states are often treated as 'actors' – as 'agents' rather than 'structures' – and there is a definite justification for this. For modern states are reflexively monitored systems which, even if they do not 'act' in the strict sense of the term, follow coordinated policies and plans on a geopolitical scale. As such, they are a prime example of a more

general feature of modernity, the rise of the *organisation*. What distinguishes modern organisations is not so much their size, or their bureaucratic character, as the concentrated reflexive monitoring they both permit and entail. Who says modernity says not just organisations, but organisation – the regularised control of social relations across indefinite time-space distances.

Modern institutions are in various key respects *discontinuous* with the gamut of pre-modern cultures and ways of life. One of the most obvious characteristics separating the modern era from any other period preceding it is modernity's extreme dynamism. The modern world is a 'runaway world': not only is the *pace* of social change much faster than in any prior system, so also is its *scope*, and the *profoundness* with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour.⁵

What explains the peculiarly dynamic character of modern social life? Three main elements, or sets of elements, are involved – and each of them is basic to the arguments deployed in this book. The first is what I call the *separation of time and space*. All cultures, of course, have possessed modes of time-reckoning of one form or another, as well as ways of situating themselves spatially. There is no society in which individuals do not have a sense of future, present and past. Every culture has some form of standardised spatial markers which designate a special awareness of place. In pre-modern settings, however, time and space were connected *through* the situatedness of place.

Larger pre-modern cultures developed more formal methods for the calculation of time and the ordering of space – such as calendars and (by modern standards) crude maps. Indeed, these were the prerequisites for the 'distancing' across time and space which the emergence of more extensive forms of social system presupposed. But in pre-modern eras, for the bulk of the population, and for most of the ordinary activities of day-to-day life, time and space remained essentially linked through place. 'When' markers were connected not just to the 'where' of social conduct, but to the substance of that conduct itself.

The separation of time from space involved above all the development of an 'empty' dimension of time, the main lever which also pulled space away from place. The invention and diffusion of the mechanical clock is usually seen – rightly – as the prime expression of this process, but it is important not to

interpret this phenomenon in too superficial a way. The widespread use of mechanical timing devices facilitated, but also presumed, deeply structured changes in the tissue of everyday life – changes which could not only be local, but were inevitably universalising. A world that has a universal dating system, and globally standardised time zones, as ours does today, is socially and experientially different from all pre-modern eras. The global map, in which there is no privileging of place (a universal projection), is the correlate symbol to the clock in the ‘emptying’ of space. It is not just a mode of portraying ‘what has always been there’ – the geography of the earth – but is constitutive of quite basic transformations in social relations.

The emptying out of time and space is in no sense a unilinear development, but proceeds dialectically. Many forms of ‘lived time’ are possible in social settings structured through the separation of time and space. Moreover, the severance of time from space does not mean that these henceforth become mutually alien aspects of human social organisation. On the contrary: it provides the very basis for their recombination in ways that coordinate social activities without necessary reference to the particularities of place. The organisations, and organisation, so characteristic of modernity are inconceivable without the reintegration of separated time and space. Modern social organisation presumes the precise coordination of the actions of many human beings physically absent from one another; the ‘when’ of these actions is directly connected to the ‘where’, but not, as in pre-modern epochs, via the mediation of place.

We can all sense how fundamental the separation of time from space is for the massive dynamism that modernity introduces into human social affairs. The phenomenon universalises that ‘use of history to make history’ so intrinsic to the processes which drive modern social life away from the hold of tradition. Such historicity becomes global in form with the creation of a standardised ‘past’ and a universally applicable ‘future’: a date such as the ‘year 2000’ becomes a recognisable marker for the whole of humanity.

The process of the emptying of time and space is crucial for the second major influence on modernity’s dynamism, the *disembedding* of social institutions. I choose the metaphor of disembedding in deliberate opposition to the concept of ‘differentiation’ some-