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CONCEPTUALIZING GLOBAL MODERNITY.
A TENTATIVE SKETCH

Volker H. Schmidt

Department of Sociology
National University of Singapore
11 Arts Link
Singapore 117570

Tel: 65-65163176
E-mail: socvhs@nus.edu.sg

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Conceptualizing Global Modernity. A Tentative Sketch[1]

Volker H. Schmidt

1. Introduction

The concept of modernity is used with a variety of meanings. In classical sociology it stands for an "evolutionary jump" (Hall 2001: 491), for the second great transformation of human affairs that propelled the species to a higher stage of development. When the word "modern" came into usage in the European Middle Ages, it signaled a discontinuity with the past, a sense of departure from the known world toward an uncertain future that, while still too fuzzy to be spelled out in its own terms, clearly differed from the present (Gumbrecht 1992). The modern signified the new in the present (Lemert et al. 2010: 61), and in everyday language it still does so today – regardless of whether the new is celebrated as a harbinger of progress or viewed with apprehension. In fact, change, the ceaseless production of novelty, seems to be one of the few constants of the modern condition, which continuously renders obsolete not only the residues of earlier, premodern times but also the manifestations of its own workings. The pace at which the present "ages" has accelerated since the early days of modernity; the logic of a dynamic that constantly outmodes it is the same.

This observation suggests a conceptualization of modernity that is both relatively general and abstract. Modernity, on this reading, is not a state of affairs that can be reached once and for all, but always "work in progress", a "moving target" that opens up the present for a future anticipated to be different and in need of active shaping, molding, preparation.[2] Reaching a given target does not end the process but only raises the bar for the next round, creates the springboard for new, often more demanding tasks that need to be accomplished in subsequent attempts at modernization, and so on ad infinitum. This conceptualization rules out a teleological understanding of modernity. It does not, however, preclude the possibility that processes of modernization follow discernible trajectories, making some future states more likely than others. Nor does it imply the same level of penetration in

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[1] The author wishes to thank Tiffany Jordan Chuang May, Maribeth Erb and Misha Petrovic for helpful criticism and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. I am also grateful to Thomas Gutmann for providing me with the "stage" at which I first tried out the (still quite preliminary) ideas presented here.

[2] Amongst European intellectuals, "the expected otherness of the future" becomes normalized by around 1800 (Koselleck 1985: 251). Gradually, this disposition diffuses to other social milieus, eventually manifesting itself in what Habermas (1996) has called the unfinished (and arguably never to be finished) "*project*" of modernity, with the notion of a project suggesting modernity is something to be strived for. Today, a sheer endless number of individual and collective actors is engaged in practices doing precisely that.

all locations that have been touched by aspects of the modern.[3] What it does imply is a division of the social world into forerunners and followers. For any innovation that gives some actors or systems a competitive edge over others alters the latter's environment (Bendix 1977) and pressures them to adapt – "on pain of extinction", as Marx and Engels (1967) put it with only slight exaggeration. The division itself is a permanent feature of modernity, a particular system's placement in one or the other category is not. Current laggards can catch up with, even leapfrog, present leaders and then become leaders themselves. At the same time, past success is no guarantee of future performance; history is replete with examples of rises and falls of players that suddenly emerge on the scene and later fall behind others that unexpectedly surpass them.

The adjective *global* modernity suggests modernity is a world-encompassing phenomenon. It also suggests modernity's reach has not always been global, for if it had, its globality would be self-evident and hence in no need of mentioning. To mention this globality is thus to point to its novelty. In line with other scholars writing on the subject (see e.g. Dirlik 2003), the present paper argues that modernity has indeed just recently broken through on a global scale, and that this breakthrough is an event of seismic proportions whose significance the world has barely begun to understand. The concept of global modernity aims to shed light on the new world-historical constellation that this breakthrough brings about, as well as on some of the challenges it presents.

In what follows, the focus will be on challenges that are specific to the social sciences. The paper starts out with a periodization of phases of modernity (section 2). Periodizations are ex post facto constructs whose rationale is a function of the research question under which a subject matter is analyzed. Their primary purpose is not to give a complete account of the "facts" in question but to highlight certain aspects of historical processes that seem particularly noteworthy from the perspective under which these processes are examined. Alternative periodizations are possible and legitimate from other perspectives. The periodization proposed here was chosen with a view to the above world-historical changes and their attendant intellectual challenges. Two such challenges will be looked at: (1) epistemological and/or methodological challenges, and (2) social theoretic challenges. While the former are discussed only briefly (section 3), the latter are given more attention, occupying the bulk of space available in the paper. The core problem dealt with is laying out the contours of a conceptualization of modernity that is up to the task of arresting its contemporary structure (section 4).

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[3] Differential degrees of modernity exhibited by different social systems can be thought of as points on a continuum of change that has a beginning but (as yet) no known endpoint. To say modernity is a continuum is to treat it as an ongoing reality. This goes against concepts like post or late modernity which, when taken literally, suggest modernity has either come to an end already or will soon be over – and that we actually *know* what its "endpoint" looks like. Lacking such "clairvoyance" (Carleheden 2007, citing Bauman), the author of the present paper has to resort to greater modesty.

This is followed by reflections on the status of the proposed conceptualization and a few contextualizing notes (section 5). The conclusion is devoted to speculations about some of the likely cultural consequences of the breakthrough of global modernity (section 6).

2. Phases of Modernity

Three phases of modernity are distinguished here: eurocentric, westcentric and polycentric modernity.

Eurocentric modernity marks the first phase (or substage) of modernity. Despite recent tendencies to downplay the uniqueness of European modernity, the pertinent literature leaves little room for doubt that the breakthrough to modernity occurred in certain parts of mostly northwestern Europe, from where it gradually spread to other locations. No agreement exists as to the exact timing of modernity's beginnings. One position traces them back to the late 15th/early 16th century, with the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the so-called exploration voyages of the Portuguese and Spaniards representing important turning points in the transition toward the modern epoch. The next three centuries, often said to comprise the early modern period, lay the foundations for several revolutions (the scientific revolution, the economic revolution, the political revolution, the educational revolution, etc.) that, according to the second position, usher in "true" modernity which transforms all aspects of human life in a short space of time. Regardless of which of the two – different but not incompatible – positions is preferred, what their proponents regard as specifically modern arrangements are predominantly European phenomena, phenomena that either originate from Europe or are given their peculiarly modern shape in Europe, the impact of various non-European forces and influences on their evolution notwithstanding. Through processes of trade and commerce, colonization and settlement, other continents come in contact with aspects of the modern too, but Europe is the unchallenged center of modernity (Tiryakian 1985): is the agent of modernization processes that for a long time remain largely confined to its own territory, is the force that generates the semantics of modernity's self-description, is the place that pioneers many of its first institutional and organizational forms – in short, is basically modernity itself (Mignolo 2000: 207), because whatever may be associated with the modern exists at best in embryonic form outside the European hemisphere.[4] At the

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[4] This is not to deny the existence of pockets of modernity in other parts of the world, which emerged under the influence of encounters with European actors. Some such pockets may even have surged ahead of Europe in some dimensions of modernization – certainly of many European *locations* that remained largely untouched by modern arrangements until far into the 20th century. For instance, the Shanghai of 1900 was in many ways more modern than much of rural/provincial Europe, and the same holds true for other non-European locations. Still, to the extent that modernizing agents around the world sought inspiration for their pursuits, they almost invariably treated "Europe" as the "vanguard" of modernity, with its major offshoots (especially the former

end of this phase, roughly around 1900, Europe dominates the entire globe. Britain has established the biggest empire of all times, and the rest of the world has been transformed into one global periphery: politically, militarily, economically, culturally (Darwin 2007).

In the second phase, the phase of *westcentric* modernity, Europe loses its monopoly on modernity, and European modernity is absorbed into a larger Western modernity, whose center, however, shifts across the Atlantic to North America. By the end of the 19th century, the economy of the United States has surpassed that of Britain, and around the turn to the 20th century, the country has the largest population of European descent except for Russia. Living standards are higher than in Europe, and for the first time in history the masses begin to experience a modicum of prosperity, epitomized by Fordism and the emergence of consumer culture. Parallel to the rapid growth of its industrial economy, the United States begins to assert its status as a global political player, with the entry into the First World War marking a critical turn and the outcome of the Second World War sealing its rise to the preeminent power of the West. The institutions of the world order established in the aftermath of that war are largely of its making, and even though this remains overshadowed by the Cold War and the competition for global leadership with the Soviet Union, for a short while, perhaps from the 1950s through the 1970s, the country successfully projects itself as "the" model of modernity par excellence. The global economy is strongly centered on the United States; its navy cruises the oceans of the world; its businesses, universities, research institutes, technologies set global standards; its cultural industry propagates the "American way of life" for global emulation; and its intellectual elites postulate the universal validity of its (Western-derived) values and institutions. Symbolically, westcentric modernity reaches its peak after the collapse of the Soviet empire, culminating in proclamations of the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1989) and of American hegemony, which, however, is already in decline by the time of its ostensible triumph, as wary observers are quick to announce (cf. Huntington 1997).

Polycentric modernity, the phase that succeeds westcentric modernity, begins roughly around the millennium. Its origins date back to the era of decolonization; arguably as far as the 1870s when Japan embarks on a sustained modernization process that protects it against the colonial destiny of its neighbors, prepares it for its own role as colonizer, but most importantly demonstrates that modernity is no preserve of the West: that others can make the transition to modernity, can become modern, too. The true shift toward polycentricity nonetheless sets in later, coinciding with the downfall of Europe's colonial empires after World War II. The change that gets underway following this downfall has long escaped notice. In hindsight, it appears to eclipse virtually everything that went before. Thus, historian Eric Hobsbawm (1994: 288) speaks of "the greatest and most dramatic, rapid and universal social

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colonies of North America) regarded as little more than extensions, variations and adaptations of European models.

transformation in history", and others (e.g. Easterlin 2000) use similarly powerful metaphors to describe it. What they are referring to are the fast transition from an agrarian economy to an industrial and service-dominated economy, urbanization processes, expansion of mass education at all levels, the revolutionizing and spread of advanced communication and transport technologies, women's emancipation and widespread democratization of social relations, the rise of youth culture, and many other variously interlinked phenomena that operate on a global scale and that catapult large parts of the world population into modernity with unprecedented velocity. As a result, modern arrangements for the first time reach genuinely global proportions (Schmidt 2007). The term polycentric modernity signals that the age of global modernity that we are now entering changes not only the newly modernized, but also (the environment of) everyone else. Henceforth, the world no longer has one territorially or culturally defined center of modernity, but a plurality of centers that are proliferating around the globe, generating innovations of potentially worldwide significance, and/or serving as reference models for emulation anywhere in the world.

What does this new, post-Western constellation mean for the social sciences, especially for sociology? To this question I shall now turn. As mentioned in the introduction, I begin with some of the epistemological and methodological challenges it poses.

3. Epistemological and Methodological Challenges

Sociology arose as an attempt to make sense of (the emergence of) modernity. The first practitioners of the new discipline found their objects of study where they resided, namely in Western Europe and North America. It is therefore not surprising that their concepts, hypotheses and theories reflect primarily Western realities and experiences, that they are mostly derived from the observation of European and American cases. Induced by the mode of thought cultivated in the sciences, these findings were then generalized into patterns of modernity as such. The subject of much contemporary debate, viewing the modern world through the prism of the West had some justification insofar as modernity itself was primarily a Western phenomenon at the time. In other words, while it is true that classical sociology of modernity *was* a sociology of the West, it could hardly have been otherwise because the rest of the world did not offer much illustration of what it meant to be modern yet – in terms of things modern, the West simply was the leading world region. So if one wanted to know what characterized modernity and where the modern world was headed, focusing on the West made perfect sense. And extrapolating one's findings to later modernizers also had some plausibility, as evidenced

by the experience of European latecomers which showed that successful catching up made them quite similar to the leaders in important, theoretically meaningful respects.[5]

Today the situation is different. With modernity extended to all parts of the globe, studying any number of Western locations no longer suffices to generate robust knowledge about the modern condition because this extension renders obsolete the equation of modernity with the West. Analysts who *continue* to generalize what now may very well turn out to be just one of several forms that modernity can assume are liable to charges of parochialism and false universalism. That is the justified core of the critique of euro- or westcentrism leveled at parts of the pertinent literature: we cannot treat Europe and North America as *synonymous* with modernity anymore. Instead, to understand the reality of modernity we have to broaden our geographic horizons considerably. As modernity goes global, so must the sociology of modernity.

Adopting a global perspective is no small task for a discipline shaped by the premises of methodological nationalism which, following the equation of nation states with "societies", directs the analytic gaze to "domestic" problems and construes social science as introspection. That nine out of 10 social science publications are produced in Western locations (Drori et al. 2003: 199) does not make things easier.[6] All creation of new knowledge builds on existing knowledge. "Normal science" proceeds from taken-for-granted assumptions that are continuously reaffirmed by its everyday pursuits (Kuhn 1970). For reasons stated above, one assumption that has long been axiomatic in Western social science is that what happens in the West matters not only locally but also globally. At the same time, the effects of developments in the periphery are likely to stay local. Thus, to understand the West, one

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[5] A well-known case is Germany, whose elites initially modernized very reluctantly but eventually found themselves unable to resist the sea-change propelled by the Industrial Revolution. This was famously predicted by Karl Marx (2007: 13) who wrote in *Capital*: "The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future". And to justify the spatial focus of his study, Marx had this to say: "The physicist observes physical phenomena in their most typical form (...). In this work I have to examine the capitalist mode of production (...). Up to the present time [its] classic ground is England. That is the reason England is used as the chief illustration in the development of my theoretical argument." Applying this consideration to the modern condition as a whole, one arrives at the above conclusion about the special salience of the European/Western case – up to the breakthrough of global modernity.

[6] Since the early 1980s, to which this finding refers, considerable shifts have occurred in the relative weights of contributions that different world regions are making to the stock of scientific knowledge, thus gradually reducing the dominance of the West. This includes the social sciences and humanities (see Science-Metrix 2010: 9f.). Still, for the time being, research capacities in the social sciences remain very unevenly distributed (on this aspect, see Unesco 2010a, chapter 3).

need only study the West,[7] whereas to understand the "rest" requires familiarity with the West as well. The institutionalized expectation that knowledge workers connect with the state of the art in their field reinforces this assumption, because, given the concentration of social science capacities in the West, most existing knowledge is Western-derived self-knowledge. Norms of connectivity thus perpetuate, however unwittingly, the attribution of special significance to the West, which in turn engenders further self-referentiality of knowledge production in the West. And so the West remains the center of attention even as it ceases to be the center of modernity.

Polycentric modernity shatters the assumptions guiding a social science that was developed under conditions of euro- and westcentric modernity. As long as the West was the center of modernity, most impulses for transformative social change emanated from the West. The emergence of multiple centers without a clear rank order greatly increases the number of actors and locations that impact on the social world globally. Consequently, ignorance of distant realities becomes untenable even for Western scholars who are primarily concerned with local affairs. For these affairs are ever more enmeshed in global flows and networks of activities that influence them. To understand local affairs thus increasingly requires actors anywhere in the world to adopt a global perspective.

Social scientifically, this involves shedding the legacies of methodological nationalism and replacing it by what might best be called *methodological globalism*. Ulrich Beck and others, sharing the critique of methodological nationalism, prefer the term methodological cosmopolitanism (Beck 2007). That alternative, however, is fraught with difficulties. The main problem is its inbuilt normativism. For methodological globalism is indispensable even for those who are unmoved by, if not outright hostile to, the moral values celebrated by the language of cosmopolitanism. And one cannot reasonably expect social scientists to commit, qua scientists, to particular *axiological* premises.[8] But one can expect them to commit to *methodological* premises whose time has come and which cannot be reasonably rejected from an epistemological point of view. In today's world, the tenet of a globally oriented social science cannot be reasonably rejected anymore.

Methodological globalism, as it is conceived here, is not directed against analyses with spatially more delimited research foci. However, to the extent that adopting a global perspective

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[7] A growing body of literature suggests that at least this part of the assumption is wrong, for instance because it obscures the effects that the West's "entanglement" (Therborn 2003) with other parts of the world during colonial times had on *itself* (e.g. on its "own" modernity), rather than just on the colonized. But whatever the merits of this critique, the assumption powerfully shaped the construal of social science in the West.

[8] It is also not clear whether such commitment would be an unambiguous boon, for the conflation of normative and empirical perspectives can result in conceptual confusion, as shown by Calhoun (2010) using Beck's own work as an example.

becomes routine, the local will be increasingly embedded in global contexts. In a sense, this reverses currently dominant modes of research: rather than beginning to explore the social world from a frogs-eye view and gradually ascending to higher levels (from the "local" to the "national" to the "transnational"), one starts with a birds-eye view right away, putting the local "in perspective", as it were. This should also help decenter our worldviews and thus to move closer toward a social science unplagued by perspectival centrisms – eurocentrism, westcentrism, etc. – that have become the rightful targets of much criticism.

I now proceed to discuss some of the social theoretic challenges presented by global modernity. The focus of this discussion will be on conceptual issues.

4. A Four-dimensional Scheme of Modernization

One of the main challenges facing a sociology grappling with contemporary global modernity is to devise a conception of modernity that is at once globally applicable, i.e. able to identify its common core, and sensitive to diversity, i.e. able to capture plural forms of modernity that reflect contextually specific expressions of (the same level of) modernity rather than differential degrees of modernization.

This challenge can be met in different ways. One possibility is to pluralize the concept of modernity itself, as suggested by the multiple modernities school.[9] There are, however, several problems with this proposal which, since they have been discussed at greater length elsewhere (Schmidt 2006; 2010), need not be reiterated here. The alternative I wish to suggest begins with a distinction of *levels of abstraction*. The conceptualization of modernity cited in the introduction to this paper, which treats modernity as one of several evolutionary stages, reserves the concept for a relatively high level of abstraction, using other concepts for the analysis of phenomena pitched at lower levels of abstraction and reflecting temporally, spatially and socially more specific conditions. Following this suggestion implies that there can only be *one* modernity, just as there was only one neolithicum.[10] That does not mean modernity has to take on the same shape everywhere; like earlier formations, it can manifest itself differently in different contexts. What it *does* mean is that there must be "regularities underlying the variety" (Lerner 1958: 78), for if no such regularities existed, then the concept of modernity itself would be useless. To call something "modern" makes sense only if the

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[9] For a programmatic statement, see Eisenstadt 2000; see also Silva and Vieira 2009 for a related proposal.

[10] Camilleri and Falk 2010 represents a recent example of this line of thought which, however, also differs substantially from the position taken here. The main point of disagreement with these authors' view is their assessment that modernity is over, whereas I argue it is just entering a new phase.
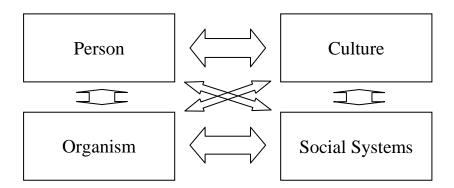
concept possesses a "distinction value" that sets certain realities analytically apart from others. And the realities deemed modern must have something in common that they do not share with these others.

Are there regularities, structural patterns of development that are uniquely modern and distinctive enough to warrant conceptualization as separate categories while at the same time emerging wherever a transition to modernity takes place? A promising point of departure for identifying such structures is Talcott Parsons' (1977) distinction of *society*, *culture*, *person* and (behavioral) *organism*. Society as conceptualized by Parsons is a subsystem of the social system which, alongside the other three "systems", constitutes a core component of what he called the general action system. Both the deductive mode of system-derivation and the substantive ways in which Parsons designates his systems must be viewed as outmoded. What makes the scheme nonetheless useful for the present purpose is its *heuristic* value: its ability to guide the search process in a way that sensitizes analysts to modernity's complexity. In this capacity it is arguably unmatched in the social science literature.

Drawing on Parsons' scheme for mapping the field yields a four-dimensional concept of change, with modernization processes involving fundamental transformations in each dimension and all of them being interrelated.[11] Graphically, this can be depicted as follows:

Figure 1: Dimensions of modernization (adapted from Parsons)

In a first approximation, the following structural developments, believed to be general trends accompanying and/or reflecting the breakthrough of modernity and its ongoing self-transformation, are discernible:

(1) Modernization of *society* (= one of several social systems): functional differentiation

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[11] The term modernization is used here to reflect the processual and dynamic side of modernity, the underlying assumption being that usage of the concept of modernity implies (a) the existence of premodern formations and (b) processes of modernization understood as both transitions *to* the modern age and change *within* modernity (or what some have called the "modernization of modernity").

(2) Modernization of *culture*: rationalization; growth of reflexivity/understanding of the malleability of human affairs and environments; value generalization

(3) Modernization of the *person*: emergence of activist, multiple and reflexive selves; increasing individuation; enhanced cognitive capacities

(4) Modernization of the *organism*: disciplining and perfecting of the human body

The next four subsections will discuss each of these processes in turn. I begin with the modernization of society.

4.1. Modernization of Society

Society is not the only social system. The social science literature calls so many entities social systems that it is easy to lose sight of their commonalities. A good starting point for bringing some order into the variety is Niklas Luhmann's (1982a; 1995) distinction of *society*, *organization* and *interaction* as the most basic types of social systems. For reasons that will become clear below, I add a fourth type, namely *community*. This once again renders a fourfold typology and hence another allusion to Parsons' theory design, but follows Parsons only insofar as the idea to include a system of community is indeed inspired by his work. In contrast to Parsons, though, I do not treat community as a part (or subsystem) of society, but rather as a social system *sui generis* which, moreover, can take on different forms in different contexts and operate at all levels of social aggregation. Figure 2 gives an overview of the typology of social systems thus obtained.

Figure 2: Types of social systems (integrating Luhmann and Parsons)

Society	Organizations
Communities	Interaction Systems

From the perspective of sociological theory, the modernization of *society* represents the most important case of change associated with the transition to modernity. The differentiation theoretical

tradition, whose leading exponents in the 20th century were Parsons and Luhmann, views the *structure* of society as being determined by the mode of differentiation that predominates at a particular evolutionary stage. The primary mode of differentiation characterizing the structure of *modern* society, according to this tradition, is that of *functional differentiation*. Functional differentiation in Luhmann's conceptualization, on which I draw here, means the emergence of a multitude of subsystems in charge of separate functions – such as making collectively binding decisions, securing want for material satisfaction, the peaceful and rule-bound resolution of conflicts, the production of true knowledge, etc. – all of which are necessary for society's reproduction, but not easily prioritized in terms of their relative importance. Processes of functional differentiation are protracted and can take hundreds, sometimes thousands of years (Luhmann 1982b). As functional differentiation becomes the chief mechanism for the structuring of society, other, historically prior modes of differentiation, such as segmentation and stratification, do not disappear, but are relegated to secondary roles. Henceforth, while continuing to do substantial ordering work, they cease to reflect the order of society itself, as they do at earlier stages of societal evolution.

Examples of function systems highlighted by Luhmann's theory are the political system, the economic system, the legal system, the religious system, the educational system, the scientific system, the arts system, the system of mass media, the system of intimate relations, etc. An important difference to Parsons' theory is that Luhmann does not limit the number of societal systems to just four (because he believes one cannot derive them deductively); another that he does not treat them as mere analytical constructs but as empirical entities which perceive themselves, and relate to the world, as real systems (Luhmann 1995: 13; 245).[12]

Function systems are structurally autonomous at the level of their operational rules, yet mutually dependent on each other's performance. Being self-referential entities, they follow their own rationalities or function logics, which render them indifferent to any externalities they may produce for other systems. A characteristic of function systems that is of special interest in the present context is their expansionism. Function systems are expansonist in at least three senses:

(1) They put a premium on continuous growth and self-improvement. Possessing no stop-rules that could serve as internal breaks to dynamism, they are incessantly driven to innovate, modify, upgrade their performance and reinvent themselves, a tendency that is further reinforced by the often fierce competition among organizations operating within a given field or institutional realm (in politics, in law, in science, in the economy, etc.).

(2) They are totalizing in the sense of continually widening their reach into hitherto untouched realms of human activity, resulting in the politicization, economization, juridification,

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[12] His "concept of system refers to something that is in reality a system", says Luhmann (1995: 13).

scientization, pedagogization, aestheticization, medicalization, etc., of potentially all aspects of life.[13]

(3) They are inherently globalizing forces, disregarding territorial borders which, from the viewpoint of their distinct rationalities, impose arbitrary limitations on the range of their operations.

Figure 3 offers a simplified depiction of the structure of modern society as conceived by Luhmann.

Figure 3: Modern, functionally differentiated society

Politics	Economy	Law
Science	Education	Religion
Mass Media	X	Y…

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[13] This observation stands, of course, behind Habermas' diagnosis of a "colonization of the lifeworld" (see Habermas 1987: 356ff.), even though Habermas' original focus was somewhat narrower. Note, however, that Habermas' account presupposes the existence of clearly demarcated "life orders" (Weber 2004) whose boundaries are being transgressed and whose operations are "tainted" as a result of the invasion of forces that do not belong there (e.g. through the commercialization of services that were formerly shielded from the market; see Beach 2010). Luhmann's conceptualization of systems, by contrast, implies the very impossibility of one system encroaching upon (the domain of) another. Totalizing means that all systems have the tendency to draw everything social into their purview by treating it from the vantage point of their, and only their, peculiar rationality. In a sense, this simply extends a claim that Gary Becker (1993) has made about economic rationality – all human behavior can be subjected to "the economic way" – to those of other systems: to political, legal, medical, educational, scientific, etc. rationality. But while Becker openly embraces such "imperialism", his choice of language suggests that he is fully aware of the uneasiness it provokes in other circles. The notion of colonization is a variation of this uneasiness.

According to the premises of this theory, the globalization of systemic operations leads to the emergence of a *world society* which Luhmann (1975; 1997) and his followers (see, e.g. Stichweh 2000), in line with various other schools of social thought, say has been firmly rooted in the real world since about the last third of the 20th century. The concept of world society remains contested, but is slowly gaining ground in the social sciences. It both aligns and overlaps with the concept of global modernity which, like the former, assumes that modern social arrangements are indeed world-encompassing now. And if functional differentiation puts society on a globalizing trajectory, then it is safe to assume a close link exists between the breakthrough of global modernity and the surfacing of world society.

Once the concept of world society is accepted, the equation of society with the nation state, i.e. the notion of a *plurality* of societ*ies* residing within the territorial boundaries of *political* units such as the Kingdom of Denmark or the Republic of India, becomes untenable. If society is (to be conceived as) a world society, then it follows that it can exist only once, in one single exemplar.[14] And if there is only *one society*, then it also follows that the nation state can no longer qualify as a society, for clearly more than one state exists. Instead, it must be something else.

The flip side of postulating the existence of a world society is thus the need to reconceptualize both society and the nation state. Beginning with the former, one thing that becomes unsustainable upon adopting this perspective is the "container model" of society, which construes the social world "as a system of enclosures" (Aneesh 2006: 27) and societ*ies* as more or less self-sufficient populations whose affairs they comprehensively regulate. Another is the fusion of society and politics (Luhmann 2000: 14), which leads researchers to see "states and their governments as the cornerstones of social-scientific analysis" (Beck 2007: 162). There is more to societal reality than can be gleaned from examination of society's political (sub-)system, and to ignore this is to engage in political reductionism. Such reductionism, just like any other form of reductionism, must be rejected.[15]

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[14] "[T]here cannot be any doubt", says Luhmann (2004: 479), "that under current conditions there is only one single society: global society". For a fuller elaboration, see Luhmann 2007: 145ff. Note: the above quotation is a translation. In his own English language writings, Luhmann preferred the term world society.

[15] The "beauty" of Luhmann's version of differentiation theory is that it allows us to do just that. For instance, it allows us to say everything that we believe distinguishes modern capitalism from earlier modes of economic organization without having to conceptualize modern society *as a capitalist society*, because while modern capitalism is clearly a very powerful force, it is not the only force shaping modern society. By rejecting economic or political or legal or scientific or whichever reductionism, and by arguing that such reductionism is itself a function of looking at the same reality from the (inevitably limiting, biased, self-aggrandizing) angle of a *particular* subsystem, the theory enables us to derive a more adequate understanding of modern society's complexity.

Luhmann's theory offers important building blocks for the requisite concept of society. It is, however, not without problems. One problem becomes apparent when trying to bring his typology of social systems to bear on the very nation state that he seeks to "dethrone" but cannot, of course, think or wish away. For this typology is incapable of accommodating aspects of the reality of nation states that were always covered by the concept of national societies, but which the concept of *society* cannot capture anymore once it is decoupled from references to collective subjects, as indeed it is in Luhmann's theory.[16] This is a problem for a theory that claims to be a "universal sociological theory", a theory which can "encompass all sociology's potential topics" (Luhmann 1995: 15) – for whatever else may be said about the nation state, it is undoubtedly an object amenable to sociological analysis.

The collective subject projected by the nation state, which also serves as the focal point of reference for the concept of a national society, is the national *community*, the typical assumption being that each contemporary human being belongs to one such community. This community is what the term "nation" stands for. The term "state", by contrast, refers to the administrative and power apparatuses of a territorially bounded political association as which the nation appears *when* considered from the vantage point of methodological nationalism. If this vantage point is to be abandoned, then the nation state must be disaggregated into its core components, states and nations. Addressing the *state component* poses no problem for Luhmann's typology of social systems – its organization systems seem tailor-made for the purpose. But the *nation component* does. For the nation is neither simply an aggregation of interaction systems nor a (special case of) society. Hence it cannot be fitted into any of Luhmann's social systems.

At this juncture, it may prove helpful to revisit Parsons, whose concept of *societal* community provides exactly what Luhmann lacks: a social system capable of conceptualizing the nation. But Parsons' community is conceived as a subsystem of society. This it obviously cannot be any longer once we opt for a Luhmannian conceptualization of society. It could, however, be viewed as a system *in its own right*, a social system that, while *different* from interaction, organization and society, is of *equal* analytic weight. Then it would make sense to add a community system to Luhmann's typology, thus expanding its conceptual capacity and "rectifying" its inability to come to terms with the nation state. But rather than choosing the *national* community, it would make more sense to use the term

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[16] Luhmann conceives human beings not as part of society's function systems, but of their environment(s). Society, on his understanding, is a recursive network of specialized communications (see, e.g. Luhmann 1992). Such a conceptualization, which radically departs from that of mainstream sociology (in whose bluntest version society simply figures as "a group of people"; cf. Bauchspies et al. 2006: 6) does not admit of the possibility that society has members.

"community" in a *generic sense,* i.e. as a placeholder for a special type of social relations, of which the nation is but one example. That is the idea underlying the above proposal (see figure 2).

A concept of community that serves this purpose can be derived from Max Weber's distinction of two modes in the formation of social relations which, drawing on Tönnies, he calls communalization and societalization, respectively (Weber 1972: 21ff.).[17] *Communalization* refers to relations that involve a sense of togetherness and belongingness. *Societalization*, on the other hand, stands for systemic relations whose establishment rests on mutual interests and/or instrumental concerns. Building on this distinction and adapting it to Luhmann's theory, one gets a free-standing, society-*independent* concept of community that, at its most general level, denotes systems *of shared meaning and group solidarity*. This move, in turn, "liberates" the concept of society from communal undertones that are often smuggled into it, to the point where the terms become virtually interchangeable.[18] If we "strip" society of such associations, then it also becomes easier to visualize forms of societalization that use coded communications à la Luhmann as their vehicles of operation and that militate against containment within territorial borders[19] – in short, to make sense of the concept of world society.[20] At the same time, a delocalized and deessentialized concept of community

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[17] The reference here is to the German original because the English translation is faulty and avoids using either term (*Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung* in the German language).

[18] They are in fact frequently used as synonyms in the social science literature. This is especially true of texts whose subject matter revolves around issues of citizenship and collective identity (see e.g. Alexander 1992 and Kymlicka 1995).

[19] A well-known and widely discussed case is the differentiation of the economy out of "embeddedness" in communal norms (Polanyi 1957), i.e. the demise of the moral economy (of Medieval Europe) and its substitution by an economic system that, in its purest form, reduces the relations between economic agents to the "cash-nexus" (cf. Karl Marx; financial and stock market exchanges, credit card transactions, etc. conducted via the internet probably come closest to epitomizing this type of nexus in the contemporary world). This, in turn, facilitates its globalization. Similar processes of disembedding are observed in other subsystems of society such as science, education, religion and politics. Today, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, a globalizing trajectory is discernible even in the law (on the latter, see e.g. Fischer-Lescano and Teubner 2004).

[20] Both Luhmann and John Meyer's world polity (or neo-institutionalist) school of thought posit the statelessness of world society. The non-existence of a world state is therefore no counter-evidence to the existence of a world society. But while Meyer only treats world society as stateless while continuing to refer to nation state entities as "societies", Luhmann is more consistent and reserves the concept of society strictly for communication systems. State formation, in his conceptualization, is a special case of segmentary differentiation, namely segmentation of the world political system into more localized organization systems.

expands the imaginary space for communal relations, thus paving the way for the gradual emergence of a *world community*, whose evolution seems to be running parallel to that of world society.

So much for a brief conceptualization of modern social systems. Lacking sufficient space, organizations and interactions cannot be adequately dealt with here. As for *interaction systems*, all I wish to say in the present paper is that their modernization seems to tilt toward a globally discernible trajectory of egalitarianism, following the relative decline of stratificatory differentiation and the attendant demise of semantic traditions which treat hierarchy as the natural order of things (Schmidt 2012). And on the organizational plane, the most important trend seems to be the rapid spread of the type of formal, functionally specified organization – in the economic realm, in the political realm, in the scientific realm, in the educational realm, in the religious realm, etc.[21] Both developments owe considerably to the diffusion of world models (Meyer et al. 1997) that are an important constituent of world culture.
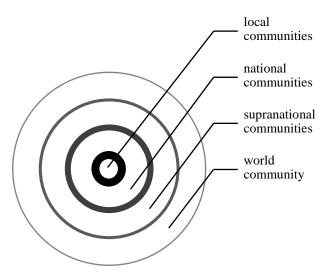
4.2. Modernization of Culture

Culture is reflective of and refers to communal associations of differential density and reach. Communities have boundaries that exclude whoever/whatever is deemed as not belonging. Normatively, this expresses itself in a differentiation between ingroup and outgroup morality, with degrees of solidarity, loyalty and respect owed to others depending on their membership status. In the age of global modernity, the outermost boundary shifts toward a maximally inclusive understanding of membership, encompassing the whole of humankind and construing each person as a "global citizen" of an imagined world community. Negatively, this delegitimizes the distinction between members of one's "own" community and "barbarians" who are not entitled to treatment according to (at least minimal) standards of civilized, humane behavior (Offe 1996); positively, it articulates itself in the idea of basic human rights which all species members hold qua human beings, an idea that is gradually extended to the distribution of material benefits and burdens as well.[22] Figure 4 illustrates the logic of

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[21] See especially Drori et al. 2006 and, confined to the case of non-governmental organizations, Boli and Thomas 1997. An illuminating account of religious organization can be found in Bayly 2004.

[22] On the idea that human rights constitute the core of the morals of modernity, rather than simply of the modern West, see Donnelly 2003. This idea, while contested in some locations, enjoys widespread support in all world regions. Its extension to the notion of global distributive or *social* justice (prominently advocated by, e.g., Pogge 2008; see also Sen 2009) is of more recent origin and hence, unsurprisingly, still more controversial (for a critique, see e.g. Nagel 2005). However, even this idea appears far less extravagant and utopian today than it would have just a few decades ago, and at least weak versions of it are increasingly institutionalized, for instance in the millennium goals of the United Nations, in developmental aid and disaster relief programs, etc. Likewise, emergent "postnational" forms of citizenship (Soysal 1994), which confer

this development using concentric circles that become thinner from the inner to the outer circles. Each added circle symbolizes a new layer of expected commitment, with levels of obligation decreasing as one's spatial, cultural and emotional distance to the implied destinaries increases.[23] The number of circles is limited to four for pragmatic reasons and does not exhaust the actual possibilities of community formation; below the layer of world community numerous other types of community exist or are conceivable (see e.g. Sahlins 1989: 111). Nor are all communities territorially bounded or "nested". Indeed, many communities (such as religious, linguistic or ethnic communities) cut across political borders and/or are completely deterritorialized.[24] Moreover, many subglobal communities intersect and overlap each other rather than being mutually exclusive "clubs". Loyalties between communities sometimes conflict and even clash but in most cases are principally compatible with each other, hence to be negotiated by the members themselves.

Figure 4: Layers of community. From primary groups and relatively isolated small communities to the world community: expanding horizons, decreasing obligations

local
communities

national
communities

supranational
communities

world
community

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rights and entitlements on the basis of personhood and residence rather than nationality, can be viewed as nascent institutionalizations and possibly antecedents of global citizenship, even if organizationally they (still) rely on the nation-state.

[23] For a related distinction between minimal and maximal moral standards whose resonance varies with the thickness or thinness of communal bonds existing amongst the members of the respective collectives, see Walzer 1994.

[24] Examples of deterritorialized communities are epistemic communities, the rapidly proliferating internet communities, and others.

The emergence of the world community follows a trajectory of human development that starts with small, relatively isolated and tightly integrated, interaction-intensive communities whose boundaries it gradually transcends, thus progressively expanding the reach of social contacts and solidaristic bonds. This development does not render older, more localized forms of communalization obsolete, but divests them of some of their quasi-natural primacy by making allegiance partly a matter of choice. Processes of nation-building utilize this optionality on a grand scale by actively engineering shifts in loyalties from village, town, local region and/or dynasty to the much more abstract entity of an "imagined" (Anderson 1983) nation, most of whose members will never meet in person and remain strangers for one another throughout their lives.[25] The creation of supranational blocks such as the European Union or Asean further extends the boundaries of solidarity formation, thus requiring a yet higher level of abstraction and invoking ties of communion with yet more distant strangers. Projections of a world community can be seen as the logical culmination of the process.[26] Here, sharing the same humanity is viewed as sufficient grounds for postulating reciprocal ties, rights and obligations, with the establishment of the United Nations marking a first step toward formal institutionalization.

The changes in communities' normative vocabularies are paralleled by analogous developments in other spheres of culture, supporting the notion of a *world culture*, which, in the term's present understanding, designates the totality of globally observed forms of cultural expression. World culture means there now exists a layer of collective meaning production that overarches all particular, geographically or demographically circumscribed cultures and that, while its constituent parts may well carry local indexes (in the sense of being traceable to specific places of origin), is inherently delocalizing by spanning a global horizon for the projection and reception of meaning offers. It provincializes all subglobal cultures which, when viewed through global lenses, are reduced to subcultures of the *one* cultural heritage of humankind (Hannerz 1992).[27] At the same time, it makes the boundaries of once secluded, mutually exclusive social milieus more permeable (Tomlinson 1999), raising awareness of alternatives to "received" meaning systems and creating space for experimenting with a much wider array of cultural resources and influences.
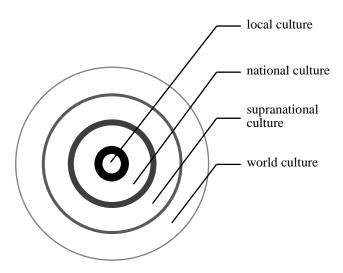
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[25] The litmus test for the success of such engineering is the emergence of nationalism, which treats nationality as a category inscribed in nature rather than a social construct, thus rendering its contingency invisible.

[26] Or maybe not. The assertion of animal rights arguably extends the boundaries of rights-bearing communities even further by including non-human species as well.

[27] From a world cultural perspective the notion of a cultural heritage rightfully belonging to *particular* communities is therefore meaningless.

Despite the overall trend of cultural globalization, some (diluted, enriched, extended, "hybridized") version of local culture probably continues to serve as the main source of orientation for most people around the globe.[28] At the same time, a growing share of the world population is exposed to, and influenced by, cultural forms of genuinely global reach. Figure 5, once again using the image of concentric circles that become thinner as one moves from the interior to the exterior, illustrates the logic of this development.

Figure 5: Layers of culture. Expansion of projection and reception horizons from the local to the global level (emergence of world norms, world literature, world music, etc.)

local culture

national culture

supranational culture

world culture

The *structure* of modern culture is characterized by a number of features, the most important of which are widely believed to be (1) the rationalization of world views and meaning systems, (2) reflexivity and awareness of the contingency/malleability of social order, and (3) a shift toward postconventional modes of legitimation.

Reflexivity, understood as critical self-observation, is a general attribute of human existence and hence not unique to the modern age. The differentia specifica of modern reflexivity is that it renders permanent the liquefaction of established modes of thought, conventions, beliefs, assumptions, expectations. In contrast to premodern reflexivity, modern reflexivity does not content itself with the

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[28] This observation, emphasized in some of the literature on globalization, is unsurprising. The emergence of a global layer standing *above* the local seems much more noteworthy, because that could hardly have been expected just a few centuries ago (the earliest genuine anticipations of a world community probably date back to 18th century Enlightenment thought). And once it had become reality, it changed the status of the local forever.

clarification and reinterpretation of tradition, with which the former identifies and in whose continuity it places itself, but makes its "stance" toward it contingent upon reasons whose acceptability rests solely on themselves and is always provisional (Giddens 1990) – "until further notice", as it were. It is precisely this stabilization of never ending doubt and uncertainty that accounts for both the *contingency* of social order and the shift toward *postconventional* modes of justification. To defend a practice or viewpoint simply by appealing to a cherished past will no longer do. Instead, any "givens" or proposed alterations thereof must be defended in a principled manner, probed according to generalizable criteria of validity (Habermas 1990a).

The *rationalization of world views and meaning systems* fosters such reflexivity. It can be separated into at least four analytically distinct dimensions. The first is secularization. Secularization does not necessarily mean the vanishing of religion. Its main aspects are the substitution of social constructs for "metasocial guarantors" (Touraine 1981) of human orders and conduct on the one hand, and the "disenchantment of the world" (Weber), which threatens to subvert the integrity of all belief systems, including those that have thus far been shielded from the corrosive forces of rationalization, on the other. A second element consists in the differentiation of the value spheres of truth, goodness and beauty, as conceptualized by Habermas (1984: 163f.), with each value representing a distinct sphere of action and claiming its own validation criteria. This differentiation leads, thirdly, to the splitting up of rationality and the systematization of action logics by realm-specific "reflection theories" (Luhmann), which attach themselves to society's function systems and rationalize the semantics of their self-description.[29] And fourth, self-interest and aspirations of social mobility, which are abhorred by many, if not all premodern traditions, are elevated to respectable motivators of human behavior (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 22).

Following the above trends, the values patterns (or precepts) of activism, rationalism, universalism, individualism, and consumerism, rightly or wrongly believed to have made their first appearances in the Occident, are now firmly entrenched in world cultural norms and expectations, resonating with people all over the globe. *Activism* refers to a disposition that stimulates efforts to mold, improve and control one's natural and social environments based on ideas of progress (Inkeles and Smith 1974). To this corresponds the invention of the "rational actor" (Meyer et al. 1997) as

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[29] By reflection theories Luhmann means realm-specific theories that "reflect" upon the unity, rationality/logic and performance of societal subsystems (examples are economic theory, political theory, legal theory, the theory of science/epistemology, etc.). Luhmann argues that societal structures and semantic traditions evolve in tandem, such that the relationship between the structure of society and the structures of cultural meaning systems cannot be completely random (see e.g. Luhmann 1980: 17). The reflection theories of modern function systems are no exception. Providing the semantics of system-specific self-observation, they tend to share the positive image that the systems fashion of themselves (Luhmann 1997: 973).

model and "telos" of successful personal development. *Rationalism* involves a reorientation of action, founded on cognitive knowledge, "correct" norms, identity-affording expressions and consistent meanings (Münch 1986). *Universalism* is closely linked to ideas and processes of value generalization, whereby the same norms are (to be) applied, first, to all members of a national community, then, to all of humankind. *Individualism* refers to a set of ideas that places the individual at the center of social purpose (subjective rights trump group rights/concerns) and of his/her own conduct of life (self-determination and self-responsibility; life course as a "project" or "career"). And *consumerism* means that mass prosperity and access to non-essential goods have become criteria for the determination of what counts as a "good life" (Worldwatch Institute 2010).[30]

The semantics of culture are infused with valuational hierarchy. There exists thus a "pecking order" within the realm of culture. To get a handle on this pecking order, I draw on two widely used distinctions, that between "high" and "everyday" culture, and that between "elite" and "mass" culture.

High culture is the preserve of an initiated few. Its creation, reception and enjoyment requires esoteric skills and tastes whose acquisition can be a matter of years, sometimes decades of training. Its exclusiveness, "embodied" in subtle habitual practices and tacit knowledge, distinguishes its bearers from the incompetent, who typically come from the lower social rungs (Bourdieu 1984). Substantively, high culture refers to sophisticated artifacts in literature, music, the arts, architecture, etc., all held in high esteem by the official and unofficial "administrators" of the cultural heritage and their addressees.

Everyday culture, by contrast, stands for the ensemble of norms, values, mores, manners, beliefs, attitudes, styles, rituals, symbols, etc., which shapes people's daily conduct and self-understanding, and on which the ethnological or anthropological concept of culture focuses. This ensemble varies among social groups – both within particular communities, for instance according to class membership, and across different, e.g. national communities, whose members are believed to share certain traits and sentiments that set them apart from others and that lie at the heart of their

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[30] The observation that these values often provoke resistance or consternation only corroborates their significance because it shows that they are hard both to contain and to ignore. Individualism is no exception. The objection that, given the purported primacy of group norms in many parts of the world, it is a uniquely "Western" phenomenon does not hold water. Communitarian rejection reflexes against individualism are no specialty of African, Asian, Latin American cultures, but have accompanied its rise in the West as well (see e.g.. Bendix 1977: 369ff.). Nor did they ever slip into irrelevance there (for a discussion of the latest wave of communitarianism in the West, see Phillips 1993). If, on the other hand, the assessment that the functional differentiation of society "reduces" a person's existence to the form of a "private individual" (Luhmann 1980: 9) is correct, then individualism is built into the very structure of modern society – and hence very hard to defeat indeed.

collective identity.[31] Constructions of collective identity typically comprise a mixture of high and everyday cultural elements, with the relative weight of the former increasing during modern times.

The term *elite culture* has, strictly speaking, two meanings. The first alludes to the culture of socially elevated groups of intellectuals ("mandarins"), the second to the (everyday) culture of socio-economically leading groups, i.e. to upper class in a narrow(er) sense. High and elite culture overlap to a significant extent, but are not identical with each other. Under modern conditions, there is also greater social differentiation within the sphere of elite culture, such that it cannot be taken for granted that the cultural avant-garde necessarily recruits itself from the upper class or must be considered part of it in terms of its income situation, social status and prestige.

The term *mass culture* signifies both culture of the masses and culture for the masses (popular culture, trivial culture, boulevard, cultural industry, "kitsch", etc.). Its meaning and usage reflect deep-rooted asymmetries in ascribed valence: "the" masses do not commonly call themselves "masses", and they are also not aware of the "lowliness" of the cultural goods they make, consume, enjoy, embrace, identify with. Mass culture is thus a pejorative term reserved by the self-styled custodians of high culture for those who do not really "have" culture and/or lack the capacity to tell the valuable from the worthless.

In an effort to conceptualize the relationship between the different spheres of culture, Edward Shils (1982) has brought the distinction between center and periphery to bear upon it. Building on this proposal, the above observation can be reformulated as follows: High culture portrays itself as representing the center of a community's collective identity. Viewed from the perspective of the center, everything else appears as, indeed becomes, peripheral, marginal, inferior. Hence the prerogative of the center to define not only the meaning of (legitimate) "culture" but, given its authority qua center, also the rules and norms that should be binding on the community as a whole. Neither center nor periphery can exist without each other. But while the center describes itself in terms of its own making, the periphery, even in acts of subversion, resistance and distanciation, must

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[31] Needless to say, such beliefs are to a significant extent mythical, thus requiring considerable social engineering to gain a real foothold in people's minds, as forcefully shown in Anderson's (1983) classic study cited above. A good example is the Confucian legacy allegedly pervading everyday life in Korea (see Kwon 2007) or Japan (Suzuki et al. 2010) and other parts of East Asia, e.g. in China, most of whose inhabitants during premodern times probably did not even know they lived in an empire that had adopted Confucianism as a state ideology.

constantly pay homage to the center's dominance by expressing itself in the latter's idiom, lest its concerns be unnoticed and condemned to inconsequence.[32]

Shils made his observations in the context of a conception of national societies. Applying them to the global level, the vertical differentiation of national cultures is replicated in the hegemony of Western culture vis-à-vis the cultures of other civilizations. The West controls the semantics of modernity, the language wherein modernity makes sense of, and critically reflects upon, itself, and this hegemony affects all other world regions which are forced to position themselves in relation to it – one way or the other.

Historically, this asymmetry emerged in conjunction with the projection of superior Western military, political and economic power in processes of colonization and subjugation during the pre-global (eurocentric and westcentric) phases of modernity (Darwin 2007: 339ff.).[33] Western elites believe the dominant status of Western culture is due at least partly to intrinsic qualities as well, making it attractive independent of the factors that drove its initial ascent. The breakthrough of global modernity for the first time puts this conviction to a serious reality test. Not everyone thinks it will survive the test; some already proclaim the end of Western cultural hegemony which they say is an inevitable consequence/corollary of the ongoing shift of the world's economic and political epicenters from West to East (see e.g. Jacques 2009). Since both the breakthrough of global modernity and the rise of Asia and other world regions that it fuels are still in their early stages, a definitive answer to this question is not yet possible. But one can make a few informed guesses. I will return to the issue at the end of the paper.

4.3. Modernization of the Person

Processes of modernization are not limited to social or cultural systems; they affect the personality system, people's selves and the way they relate to their environments, as well. According to Daniel Lerner (1958), the modal personality of the modern age is characterized by empathy, achievement motivation, and the aspiration of (upward social) mobility. Others have emphasized traits like autonomy, openness to change, intellectual flexibility, trust in the ability to shape one's living conditions, the capacity for critical judgment – in contrast to fatalism, unquestioning acceptance of "destiny" and authority, subservience mentality, etc. (Inkeles and Smith 1974). And still others highlight the emergence of multiple selves juggling conflicting demands from a host of diversified

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[32] The mass media and especially the more recently mushrooming "social media" arguably dilute this dominance to a certain extent by giving "voice" to groups that could be more easily ignored in the past.

[33] The postcolonial literature speaks to the indignation that the structural subalternity of the non-West caused and continues to cause amongst some of its intellectual elites (see e.g. Chakrabarty 2000).

"role-sets" (Merton 1957) that stem from participation in, and selective engagement by, society's functionally differentiated subsystems.

Here, the focus will be set on increased levels of cognitive competence. The processes bringing about this increase and the factors fostering or inhibiting it are examined by Piagetian-inspired developmental psychology. One aspect of cognitive development that is of particular interest in the present context is what Piaget calls the "decentering of worldviews". Jürgen Habermas (1979) has suggested that people's capacities for such decentering might be mirrored by alterations in collective interpretive schemes, indicating analogous developmental logics underlying ontogenetic processes of identity formation and phylogenetic processes of socio-cultural evolution. This idea of a developmental trajectory generating homologous structures of individual and collective consciousness provides the backdrop for what follows.

My point of departure is the pertinent work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. One problem with Kohlberg's analyses is that they are imbued with normative premises which have no scientific grounding, thus conflating the author's ethical preferences with cognitive structures allegedly discernible through psychological study. This conflation has been criticized even by otherwise sympathetic observers (e.g. Habermas 1986; 1990b). If we discount the respective assumptions, then Kohlberg's and Piaget's work can be used as a heuristic guide for modeling processes of *reflexive identity* formation, with reflexive selves understood as the intrapsychic counterparts of a reflexive culture.

Cognitivist developmental psychology concerns itself with the ontogenesis of cognitive structures that generate/motivate increasingly rational judgment, independent problem solving behavior, and empathy. The requisite competencies are acquired in cognitive (logical dimension) and socio-cognitive (ethical dimension) learning processes, referring, in Habermas' (1990b) words, to the objective world of facts on the one hand, and the social world of interpersonal relations/symbolic world of cultural representations on the other. Piaget and Kohlberg claim to be reconstructing universal, species-typical competencies and capacities. Both theories are stage theories, positing sequentially ordered stages of development. Individuals have to pass through all stages one step at a time if they are to progress from the lowest to the highest level. Those reaching this stage represent the rational, autonomous type of person that contemporary world models (Meyer et al. 1997) stylize as the ideal of successful development.

Piaget distinguishes four stages of cognitive development. Each stage is associated with a typical age range. They are the *sensorimotor* stage 0 (from birth to approximately age 2), the *preoperational* stage 1 (ages 2 to 7), the *concrete operational* stage 2 (ages 8 to 12), and the *formal operational* stage 3 (ages 11/12, fully developed at ages 16/17). During the first two stages, prelogical

forms of reasoning predominate. At stage 1, the child is able to represent images, words and drawings, to form stable concepts and engage in mental reasoning. The concrete operational stage is characterized by the ability to make logical inferences, classify concrete objects and handle quantitative relations between them. This concretism is overcome at the formal operational stage. Now the child can think abstractly, reason logically, and consider the relations between elements in a system on the basis of verbal claims. This, in turn is a prerequisite of the ability to adopt a hypothetical attitude toward, and "subsume under the realm of possibilities" (Piaget 1984: 49), the real world.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development (1984) likewise distinguishes four phases: the *premoral egocentrism* of phase (or stage) 0 (from birth to about age 6), the *preconventional* morality of phase 1 (ages 6 to 10), the *conventional* morality of phase 2 (ages 10 to 16), and the *postconventional* morality of phase 3 (15 to 19 years, stabilized at 25 to 30 years). The stages 1 through 3 are divided into two substages each. These substages are ignored here because they have no relevance for the reference problem under consideration. During the premoral phase the child is largely lust-driven and does not understand the moral implications of its behavior. At the preconventional stage such understanding does emerge, but compliance with rules and norms remains instrumental, guided by avoidance of punishment and the child's own interests. This is followed by the explicit acceptance of established codes of right and wrong during the conventional phase. The adolescent or adult at this stage views upholding a given order as a value in its own right. Adherence tends to be somewhat rigid and inflexible. It becomes more flexible and contingent at the postconventional stage. Individuals at this stage are able to distinguish between empirical and normative validity, between legality and legitimacy, between existing norms that are to be treated as social facts and possible norms that deserve to be recognized because they can be justified from an impartial perspective (the "moral point of view").

Advanced forms of logical and moral reasoning thus converge in counterfactual modes of thinking, enabling people to imagine, mentally experiment with and critically evaluate, alternatives to reality. Developmental psychology believes the acquisition of formal operations is a necessary, yet insufficient step toward the capacity for postconventional moral reasoning. For children to gain any genuine understanding of morality at all, however, they must first overcome the egocentrism of early childhood, permitting them to empathize, to view things from the perspective of others, and thence to coordinate their newly decentered perspective with that of the others.
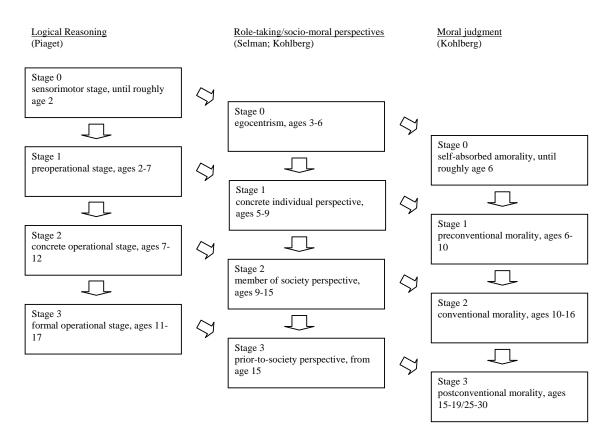
Kohlberg argues that next after the stages of logical development, but prior to their moral counterparts, comes another, intermediate sequence of stages of social perspective and role-taking that enables the child to do precisely this. A theory of role-taking that traces the development of social awareness and interpersonal understanding in children has been suggested by Robert Selman (1980). Kohlberg uses this theory as a bridge between Piaget's theory and his own. For this purpose, he

proposes the concept of socio-moral perspective, referring to the viewpoint that an individual takes in defining both facts and oughts. He then proposes three levels of social perspective corresponding to his stages of moral development and gradually increasing the child's moral sensibility, its ability to understand the legitimate interests of others and hence to overcome its egocentrism. Kohlberg's proposal diverges from Selman's theory insofar as the highest stage of role-taking identified by Selman ("member of society perspective") reaches no further than what would count as a prerequisite of conventional moral reasoning in Kohlberg's typology. However, since the crux of Kohlberg's theory is to designate postconventionalism as the inherent telos of socio-cognitive learning processes,[34] he postulates, and claims to have clinically proven the existence of, a further stage of role-taking ("prior-to-society perspective")[35] that prepares the child for understanding the demands of a postconventional morality. Combining this revised theory of social perspective and role-taking with Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories, a simplified depiction of the developmental process leading to postconventionalism looks as follows:

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[34] The notion of telos is used to signify a developmental *potential*. Postconventionalism is the highest stage of socio-cognitive reasoning *so far* identified in humans. In this sense it can be said to mark the logical endpoint of learning processes because ascending to a *structurally* higher stage is, to the best of our current knowledge, not possible. That does not rule out the possibility that current limitations (both of developmental capacities *and* our ability to recognize them) may be overcome in the future.

[35] In keeping with the Luhmannian conceptualization of society undertaken in section 4.1., it would be more accurate to speak of "member of community" and "prior-to-community" perspectives, respectively. Note, however, that the above account reiterates other authors' work and hence is subject to some constraints in the usage of terminology.

Figure 6: Modernization of the person

Logical Reasoning (Piaget)	Role-taking/socio-moral perspectives (Selman; Kohlberg)	Moral judgment (Kohlberg)
Stage 0 — sensorimotor stage, until roughly age 2	Stage 0 — egocentrism, ages 3-6	Stage 0 — self-absorbed amorality, until roughly age 6
Stage 1 — preoperational stage, ages 2-7	Stage 1 — concrete individual perspective, ages 5-9	Stage 1 — preconventional morality, ages 6-10
Stage 2 — concrete operational stage, ages 7-12	Stage 2 — member of society perspective, ages 9-15	Stage 2 — conventional morality, ages 10-16
Stage 3 — formal operational stage, ages 11-17	Stage 3 — prior-to-society perspective, from age 15	Stage 3 — postconventional morality, ages 15-19/25-30

Postconventionalism is an important element of a reflexive self or identity. It would, however, be wrong to equate the latter with the former. Nor should it be taken for granted that a person with a reflexive identity will necessarily adopt the *substantive* moral positions that Kohlberg associates with postconventionalism.[36] What really typifies the *structure* of both postconventional moral reasoning and a reflexive identity is a heightened awareness of the constructedness and contingency of the socio-cultural presuppositions shaping the person's understanding of self and environment. Kohlberg's finding that postconventionalism, if people pass to this highest level of moral judgment at all, never emerges before the adolescent phase of growth and is rarely stabilized as a durable intrapsychic

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[36] In Kohlberg's theory the highest stage of moral development is basically synonymous with adopting a Kantian-style deontological morality. Kohlberg is probably right to assume that postconventionalism forecloses going back to the traditionalist *structure* of moral reasoning that predominates at the conventional stage. But that does not preclude identification with moral *content* that Kohlberg finds disagreeable, e.g. with utilitarian positions which he claims are *cognitively* inferior to Kantian deontology (or with an ethics of caring which according to Carol Gilligan he also deems inferior to it; cf. Gilligan 1982). As indicated above, his *psychological* privileging of a particular *philosophical* stance has been a subject of much controversy and criticism. Since it has no bearing on the present reference problem – designating the *logic* of reflexive identity formation – it is bracketed out here.

structure before early adulthood, indicates that the formation of a reflexive identity is a difficult and risky process. This assessment is corroborated by the observation that putting in abeyance and ultimately destroying the unquestioned stock of interpretative knowledge that had heretofore provided the adolescent with an existential sense of security can be accompanied by severe identity crises (Döbert and Nunner-Winkler 1975). For unless the reflexively devalued orientation systems of the past are replaced by new, subjectively more appealing and convincing alternatives that are solid enough to withstand critical scrutiny, the result can be utter confusion and desperation.[37]

Kohlberg is aware of these difficulties. To tackle them at the theoretical level, he introduces a transitory "no man's-land" (1984: 188) stage between rejection of conventional morality and the postconventional stage of principled ethical reasoning.[38] Combining this proposal with the tenets of a theory of reflection stages developed by Hans-Joachim Giegel (1988) and tailoring both to the reference problem pursued here yields a model for processes of reflexive identity formation that, in a nutshell, looks as follows:

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[37] However, Döbert and Nunner-Winkler (1975) also found that growing up in a family characterized by postconventional modes of thought can ease the transition substantially, making it much smoother. Extending this idea to the broader cultural context suggests the possibility that the normalization of reflexivity might spare adolescents (severe) identity crises *as far as the formation of reflexive selves* is concerned. For this normalization in a sense conventionalizes postconventionalism.

[38] In Kohlberg's own conceptualization of three major developmental stages divided into two substages each, this is stage 4½. If, as has been done in the foregoing, the substages are ignored and only the major stages are considered, then it becomes stage 2½.

Figure 7: Stages of reflexive self-formation

Stage 1
Modernity's modal personality. Largely conventional with select contingency awareness; goal-directed pursuit of institutionalized career paths

Stage 2
Emergence of a sense of social/personal insufficiency. Search for alternatives with potentially two different outcomes

Persistent crisis and/or regression
Alienated/anomic self/identity. Sense of disorientation; self-destructive; susceptible to learning pathologies; regression to conventional stage

Stage 3
Reflexive self. Successful transition to stable postconventionalism; self-distance and openness to change through ongoing learning processes

Giegel's point of departure is the modal personality of 20th century modernity (stage 1) as described in the works of Lerner, Inkeles and others cited above. The key aspect of its identity is a single-mindedly pursued career orientation to which other needs and interests are subordinated. Reflexivity is clearly present. For considerable effort is extended on weighting available job options, upgrading and enlarging one's skill base in light of anticipated requirements and/or benefits, progressing to higher status positions, etc. At the same time, other aspects of life are largely exempted from reflection and proceed along established paths sanctioned by local customs, conventions, expectations.

This changes when, upon inspection of a person's existing cognitive inventory due to suddenly erupting or creeping doubts about its cogency, painstaking search processes are set in motion that subject the whole range of identity-affording meaning patterns to critical scrutiny. Such phases of biographical soul searching, which can be deeply unsettling and last several years (stage 2), must however be broken off at some point. If successful, they result in the formation of a stable reflexive self. An important step in this direction is a further reflection process, a reflection of the self's reflections as it were, whereby the risk of total confusion, perplexity, disorientation caused by unbounded reflexivity, is averted. People who move to this stage of reflexivity (stage 3) learn to accommodate the contingency experience, to deal with it in a sober-minded fashion and to "freeze" its most destructive potentialities, yet retain their capacity for critical judgment. They view themselves with a sense of irony, can tolerate some of their own weaknesses and self-contradictions whilst

continuing to aim for improvement, and they are, precisely for this reason, able to lead relatively independent, self-directed and reflective lives.[39]

Failure to curb the intransigent force of critical (self-)reflection, on the other hand, can lead to persistent identity crises and regressions to lower levels of consciousness, i.e. to developmental stages that precede the structure of the modal personality. Kohlberg's scheme precludes this possibility; its design implies that people's development will always progress upward. This does not seem realistic. For this reason the present scheme explicitly includes the possibility of failure, breakdown, etc., as well.

4.4. Modernization of the Organism

The sociological observation of modernity has produced a literature that concerns itself with changes of the human body. This has resulted in the establishment of a new subdiscipline, the sociology of the body. The social theoretic impact of this research remains limited though. Theories of modernity either hardly take note of the respective phenomena or form a separate, niche program of theorizing that focuses more or less exclusively upon them. Consequently, little intellectual exchange takes place between the competing schools – to the detriment of all. To overcome this problem, the present paper proposes to treat the modernization of the body as a distinct category, neither less important than, nor reducible to, any of the other dimensions of modernization covered here. In a first approximation, I distinguish between disciplining the body on the one hand, and optimizing/perfecting the body on the other.

Amongst the most important aspects of *disciplining* processes are the transformation of affect, drive and control structures, the refinement of manners, the lowering of thresholds of embarrassment, shame and repugnance, etc., that Norbert Elias has noted in his studies of the civilizing process. As Elias (2000: 59) shows, the emergence of the new standards corresponds to an evolving social structure which alters the possibility space for what passes as appropriate human conduct. The transition from a predominantly agrarian life in knightly households to that of, first, members of the courts of princely rulers, then, urban dwellers in the rapidly expanding cities, leads to far reaching

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[39] Richard Rorty's philosophy nicely exemplifies this mindset at the level of theoretical reflection. See especially the collection of essays assembled in Rorty 1989. Some caution seems to be in order though. For to say that individuals possess the cognitive *capacity* required of a reflexive self does not mean they will necessarily (be able to) exercise this capacity in most aspects of the conduct of their lives. In fact, the enhanced autonomy that this capacity makes possible is subverted by powerful counter trends that substantially diminute people's agency (for an insightful analysis of one such trend which operates directly on the self, see Lau 2012). Still, their critical analysis is itself a manifestation of reflexivity and, indeed, a precondition for the reclamation of our "beleaguered" autonomy.

changes in the affect structures, sentiments, dispositions and manners of the upper class. Gradually, the standards cultivated by the aristocracy begin to diffuse to the middle class of trade and industrial capitalists, professionals, etc., until eventually they reach, via the spread of mass schooling und after repeated metamorphoses, the whole population, thus coming to epitomize "the" model of civilized behavior for all. The publication of detailed manner books that are proliferating since the 16th century and the rigid prescriptions they contain testify to the educational effort, discipline and, indeed, compulsion it takes to instill the new norms of bodily restraint and to overcome widespread defiance, "ignorance" or indifference. After several centuries of bodily transformation they have, however, become people's "second nature".

Parallels to what Elias investigates in the context of European transitions from feudalism to modernity have been noted in other parts of the world, e.g. in China where, like in Europe, the refinement of manners and other behavioral features initially remained confined to the upper class.[40] Today, the trend is both general, affecting all social groups, and global, some local variations in etiquette notwithstanding. The same is true of a second type of disciplining phenomena, the imposition of industrial-bureaucratic control and time regimes accentuated by Max Weber (1984) and Edward Thompson (1967). These processes force the body into the proverbial "iron cage" of an administered world and inexorably subordinate its biological impulses and rhythms to the imperatives of formal organization: in education, in business, in government, everywhere. Related to this are the surveillance mechanisms and the biopolitical powers deployed by the "disciplines" to create docile, well-functioning bodies ready for fitting into the "system of modern society" (Parsons). As Michel Foucault (1975; 1980) shows, the decline of violence and public penalty for deviance that occurred in Europe under the influence of the Enlightenment movement[41] is not to be confused with a decline of domination per se. Rather, domination becomes more subtle and is increasingly exercised via the internalization of externally imposed standards of normality whose potential for repressiveness is no less than that of earlier manifestations of power.

One common thread running through this literature is the assumption of a close link between the changes of bodily practices/interventions and the structure of society. The most fundamental change identified is the emergence of a capitalist economy. And while modern capitalism is doubtless an important catalyst of change, tracing everything that can be categorized as modernization of the organism to the transformation of the economic system does not come close to the complexity exhibited by the process. Other, equally far-reaching changes – in politics, in law, in science, in

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[40] See Burke 2009; see also Featherstone 2007 on proto-modern civility in Japan.

[41] The phenomenon is not confined to Europe though but, indeed, globally observable. For a recent comprehensive treatment, see Pinker 2011.

education, in medicine, etc. – likewise impact on it. The concept of functional differentiation is better suited to understanding the full range of factors and forces operating on the body.

This becomes particularly apparent when looking at the second group of activities placed under this rubric, those aimed at *optimizing* and *perfecting* the body. The underlying rationale is the self-perception of humankind as a deficient being. Once the body is fully developed, it slowly begins to degenerate, to age, to lose in physical attractiveness, energy, and functionality. The skin become(s) slack, the bones fragile, the sensory organs weary and dull, the teeth fall out, and finally the whole rest dies away. The body is sensitive to pain and can thus be a shell of (not just physical) suffering. Its vulnerability threatens our – inescapably corporeal – existence at any moment. It secretes unpleasant odor. It is unreliable. Its sexual performance declines. It is, in short, anything but perfect – especially when viewed in light of the boundless imagination, phantasies, and hopes enabled and engendered by the brain.

But whatever its deficiencies, they can be fixed – or so, at least, we believe. The body can be improved, "transformed" (Clarke et al. 2003), and the very brain that makes us aware of the inevitability of our mortality also allows us to envision alterations that restore impaired function, repair damage or deformities, reduce pain, transcend limits. We can set up programs for the breeding of socially and biologically superior bodies; for the elimination of hereditary traits that predispose us to disease, disability or decay; for taking the species' evolution into our own hands: eugenics, pre-implantation diagnostics, gene technology, etc.[42] We can substitute spare parts for ailing, failing or severed limbs and organs; alleviate the sources of perceived unhappiness; transform the structure of our genitals; remove (or temporarily keep at bay) the most unwelcome signs of aging; mold the body into shape and adapt our outer selves to prevailing fashions or beauty ideals: plastic surgery; transplantation; body building. We can increase our effectiveness, efficiency, well-being – through sports and fitness training, but also through intake of pharmacological products: doping, neuro-enhancement, pain killers, antidepressants. We can dream of a virtual, bodiless existence in the world wide web – "leaving the body behind" (Eerikänen 1999: 230) – and, inspired by such dreams, explore new horizons of being in the real world. We can upgrade the body technologically or alter its chemical

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[42] "Homo sapiens", says a report on the achievements of the life sciences published in 1968 by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences that advocates more funding for gene technological research and that openly embraces the tradition of eugenics, "has overcome the limitations of his origins. (...) Now he can guide his own evolution" (quoted in Keller 1992: 288). Our biological constitution is no longer "destiny", but is becoming a matter of "choice". As the possibilities enabling choice become more widely available, choosing ceases to be a *personal* option though. Instead it is increasingly normalized, and the burden of proof henceforth falls on those who decline the "offer" und who may well be charged with committing an "immorality of omission" if they do so (Keller 1992: 281).

composition (reading glasses, vaccinations, heart pacemakers), thus improving its functionality, reducing its susceptibility, lengthening its life span; ultimately aiming for immortality: "creating cyborgs" (Gray 1995), regenerative medicine (Lafontaine 2009).

The list goes on. Some of these developments date back centuries or even millennia (on plastic surgery, see e.g. Gilman 1999; on eugenics Kelves 1992), others are of more recent origin. During modern times, owing to historically unprecedented technological advances, they have come to shape and fundamentally remake the bodily experience of, first, millions, then, billions of people around the globe, changing the human condition forever. Like the modernization of social systems, cultural systems and personal systems, the modernization of "organismic systems" (Parsons) is an ongoing process that will likely continue in the foreseeable future. Given its profound impact, the age of (global) modernity cannot thus be adequately understood without paying systematic attention to this process. This assessment is the reason I suggest a conceptualization of modernity which affords them sufficient space from the outset. The four-dimensional scheme of modernization processes presented earlier in the paper (see figure 1) is an attempt to do just that.

5. Global Modernization in Context: Conceptual and Historical Issues

The purpose of the foregoing was to sketch an analytic framework that demarcates the range of phenomena which must be minimally taken into account if we are to arrive at a meaningful conceptualization of modernity. Any alternative scheme that ignores or blocks out one or more dimensions of the modernization process thus construed must be deemed incomplete. Since scientific observation is always selective, such incompleteness need not devalue it. But it relativizes the claim of some paradigms to be addressing modernity in its entirety.[43]

In its present form, the proposed framework is little more than a "search engine" that directs the gaze toward relevant phenomena and lays out some of the theoretical and conceptual tools needed for scanning the modern world. Its usefulness must ultimately prove itself through empirical research. Should empirical analysis bring to light aspects of reality that must be considered essential elements of the modern but cannot be incorporated into it, then the scheme must be revised or discarded.

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[43] The multiple modernities paradigm, for instance, is far less comprehensive by focusing almost exclusively on the *political* system of *societal* modernity and the ways in which (*elite* and *high*) cultural continuities are displayed in the *collective identities,* to some extent also in specific policies, adopted by or imposed upon *particular* (imagined national and/or civilizational) *communities*. It has little to say about other subsystems of society, other forms of cultural expression, other types of community, the personality system, and the transformation of bodily practices/ideals. Compared to the scheme proposed here, it targets thus a much smaller fraction of modern reality.

The scheme is not designed for painting an all-embracing picture of the modern age. Its focus is on what may reasonably qualify as *modern*. The succession of historical epochs or evolutionary stages does not mean the manifestations of earlier formations simply disappear. Rather they are overlaid, like the rock layers of geological formations, by later ones.[44] The thinner the uppermost layer, the more of the past "shines through", as it were. Modernity, which represents the latest of the currently known stages, adds a new layer. Its breakthrough is rightly understood as a watershed in human history. But it does not come about as one "big bang" transformation, as an abrupt and total discontinuity with the past, much of which in fact lives on in the present.[45] Any social configuration observed in modern times will therefore typically combine both modern and non-modern elements.

The task of a conceptualization of modernity is to isolate the modern from the non-modern, with which it is empirically often deeply interwoven. Comprehensiveness, thus understood, means the ability to cover the whole range of phenomena identifiable as modern. That includes what some call the "dark side(s) of modernity". It does not include, however, phenomena which, while contemporaneous with the modern, must be viewed, logically speaking, as non-modern. In this sense, my framework claims comprehensiveness. It also claims universal applicability. That means the structural patterns associated with the modern are not confined to any particular location. Instead, they reflect *general* trends, *universal* developments that materialize wherever modern arrangements take root. They can do that to different degrees in different dimensions, in different forms and in different combinations of the various, by no means always harmonizing elements.[46] But total absence of any of these elements would refute the scheme's underlying assumptions.

The non-modern can principally come in two forms: either as the premodern or as the postmodern. Whether genuinely postmodern phenomena (already) exist, is contentious in the social

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[44] I owe the idea for this metaphor to Camilleri and Falk (2010: 2) who, however, use the image of an onion rather than a geological formation.

[45] Classical sociology treats modernity and "tradition" as starkly contrasting opposites. Analytically speaking that makes sense. Empirically, however, it has proven unfruitful in subsequent research (see Gusfield 1967). For a recent study exposing some of the theoretic difficulties to which such juxtaposition gives rise and using the Brazilian case for illustration, see Tavolaro 2008.

[46] Here then is an entry point for the consideration and analysis of modern variety/diversity touched upon in the opening paragraph of section 4. Not all empirically observable phenomena are suitable for analysis within the framework of a theory of modernity. For an example of a study that compares different world regions using indicators that would seem to matter to a theory of modernity, see Schmidt 2011; for another study looking at the same regions but pursuing a reference problem that falls at best within the purview of a middle range theory, see Schmidt 2008. Ultimately, the epistemological status of one's findings depends on the research questions they seek to answer.

sciences; as indicated in the introduction to this paper, I am skeptical. A concept whereby sociological evolutionism would allow us to make sense of it is that of "preadaptive advances" (Luhmann 1997: 512). Preadaptive advances are structural innovations that, while emerging in one epoch, "anticipate" another that will eventually succeed it. It is only during this later stage that they unfold their full evolutionary potential. But that can only be known in hindsight: when they have actually proven this potential.[47]

Preadaptive advances emerging during *premodern* times but "pointing" toward the modern age are discernible in all dimensions of the modernization process distinguished here. I begin with functional differentiation.

(1) Functional differentiation at the level of roles, e.g. for performing political and administrative functions, predates modernity by several millennia (Luhmann 1982b: 140). But the rearrangement of social structure that is necessary for functional differentiation to morph into the dominant principle of societal order sets in much later. Luhmann (1980: 27) traces the earliest signs of society-wide transformation in the direction of functional differentiation to the late Middle Ages and argues the process becomes irreversible only in the late 18th century – and even then in just a few European places. Since then, its impact has grown exponentially though, and it continues to increase on a global scale.

(2) Precursors to the reflexivity of modern culture are also widely noted in the literature. The earliest forms of reflexivity are believed to have emerged in the so-called Axial Age some 2,500 years ago, when ideas of transcendence ripped open a chasm between the worldly and the extra-worldly (the "divine" or "godly"), stimulating systematic reflection on the human condition, on the legitimation of social order, etc. (cf. Joas and Knöbl 2009: 324ff.). But for the next two millennia such reflection remained the privilege of a tiny intellectual elite, and even the much greater reflexivity exhibited by Enlightenment social thought appears strikingly limited when judged against contemporary standards (Dux 2008: 41ff.). Today, reflexive knowledge reaches into the remotest corners of the world.

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[47] This, in turn, depends on their being selected and retained in the first place – which in any *given* case of variation is highly improbable (see Luhmann 1997, chapter 3). There is thus nothing *inevitable* about their ultimate breakthrough *if* and *when* it occurs. It only *appears* inevitable to later generations who, in their attempts to reconstruct the genesis of their own age, are prone to project a teleology into the past, as though things *could not have evolved differently* and as though the flow of events had to materialize in the conditions they are experiencing. History is inevitably written from the viewpoints of those who already "know" the outcomes of what to the participants in past events cannot but have been *open* futures. This knowledge, in conjunction with the narrative style of historiography and the coherence expected of scientific accounts, leaves little room for contingency which, even when formally acknowledged, is easily overwhelmed by the pull to tell the story from the end.

Produced and/or disseminated by globally operating mass media, it is conserved in huge storage devices (libraries, museums, the internet, etc.) that are readily accessible to growing fractions of the population. At the same time, world models treat familiarity with, and mastery of, reflexivity as a normal expectation, demanding that every world citizen be provided with the requisite skills and opportunities.

(3) If postconventional morality is taken as an indicator for the spread of reflexive selves, then one finds that such selves were quite rare as late as the 1970s (Döbert and Nunner-Winkler 1975); if one is slightly less demanding and contents oneself with cognitive capacities at the level of Piaget's formal operational stage (roughly equivalent to my stage 1 reflexivity; see figure 7), then their share grows considerably, but still begins to exceed the majority of people even in socio-economically advanced locations only after World War II (Oesterdiekhoff 2000). Just as there were individuals "in archaic societies" who "mastered formal operations of thought" despite being immersed in mythological worldviews that "corresponded to a lower stage" of socio-cultural development (Habermas 1979: 102), not all people living today reach levels of competence matching advanced stages of development. Cognitive competence is largely a function of educational training, with higher education a crucial determinant of the capacity to reason logically and counterfactually. Both upper secondary and tertiary education became mass phenomena only after the Second World War – first in the West, then everywhere.[48] It is therefore no wonder that it took so long for modernity's modal personality to become more generalized. And given the enormous expansion that both secondary and tertiary education have recently undergone in the less developed world (Unesco 2009), it is safe to predict that the prevalence of reflexive selves will increase much further in the phase of global modernity.

(4) Techniques for disciplining the body existed long before the onset of the modern age. During premodern times, though, they were used much more sporadically – in wars and for (other) projects that required coordinated action by large groups of people (the construction of irrigation systems, canals, pyramids, etc.). Moreover, they remained focused on particular aspects of behavior – other than (slave) servants, "ordinary people", especially peasants, were certainly not expected to display refined manners – and their impact was quite limited by the rather low control intensity of prevailing communication, enforcement and surveillance technologies. In the West, disciplining became more widespread during the industrializing phase of modernity, which coincided with the emergence of rigidly applied authoritarian morals claiming authority for all social classes. This authority weakened substantially in the aftermath of the 1960s and 70s cultural revolution and the

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[48] To be more accurate, North America surged ahead with the expansion of secondary and tertiary education in the early decades of the 20th century. Europe followed suit in secondary education during the 1950s and in tertiary education by around the middle of the 1960s (see Goldin and Katz 2008).

concomitant shift toward self-expression values (Ingehart and Welzel 2005). Open disciplinary practices and semantics have since receded somewhat into the background – both in the West and elsewhere. At the same time, the massive urbanization of the world's population, in conjunction with the unprecedented proliferation of formal organizations (Drori et al. 2006) that took place simultaneously, have boosted disciplinary regimes of the "civilizing" and bureaucratic type to a new level, for the first time reaching genuinely global proportions. The same is true of optimizing and perfecting techniques which, while not unknown in earlier times, became global mass phenomena only during this phase.

What has been said about the differences *between* premodern and modern conditions is truer still of the phases *within* modernity. With each new phase, the intensity and extensity of modernization processes increases dramatically, touching ever more people and transforming their lives ever more profoundly at ever-growing speed.[49] Even on the small "islands of modernity" that began to emerge in Europe amidst a "sea of tradition", everyday life for the majority of the population remained largely unchanged until the mid-19th, on the rural margins until far into the 20th century (Hobsbawm 1994, chapter 10; Luhmann 1997: 712; Bayly 2004, chapter 11), if not, in some instances, until *today* (Schifirnet 2012). And if this finding holds for what has long been regarded as the *pinnacle* of modernity, it applies even more strongly to the non-European/non-Western world. For several centuries, the modern did not penetrate the bulk of humanity very deeply.[50]

This began to change only after World War II. Taking a global perspective and using customary indicators of progression toward modernity as a benchmark, it would therefore seem only a slight exaggeration to say the transition to modernity might still be in its infancy, as modern arrangements are only *now* taking root on a broad basis in large parts of the world.[51] What

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[49] The constant acceleration of change is an oft-noted feature of the modern age. Some consider it so important that they treat it as the very key to understanding modernity (see Rosa 2007). Others, focusing primarily on the acceleration of modernization processes in regions where these processes set in "later", use the notion of "compressed modernity" to highlight the comparatively much higher velocity with which whole-scale social transformations take place in such locations (see Chang 2010).

[50] The "experiential engagement with modernity" is therefore "a relatively recent fact" for most people around the world, as Appadurai (1996: 10) put it in the context of a similar observation.

[51] Reacting to talk of postmodernity coming up in the 1960s, Parsons (1977: 241), who found this "premature", argued the "trend of the next" (viz., 21st) century would more likely be "toward completion" of modernity rather than its demise. Some reservations about the (teleological connotations of the) term "completion" notwithstanding, I broadly share this assessment. Given that it took the predominantly agrarian civilizations of the Neolithic Age several thousand years to work themselves out, the less than 250 years that have passed by

understandably overwhelmed 19th century observers pales in comparison to the changes witnessed by the 20th century, and if past developments suggest anything for the future of modernity, then the changes to come may be even bigger yet. For the transformation *potential* of global modernity is far greater than that of earlier phases of modernity, if not of that of all preceding stages of human development *combined* (see e.g. Morris 2010: 582ff.).[52]

One aspect of change associated with global modernity that is *already* underway will be discussed in the following, concluding section of this paper.

6. Polycentric Modernity: the End of Western Hegemony

Global modernity leaves no area of life unaffected. Some of its consequences can simply be expressed in quantitative terms: more wealth, more knowledge, more control, more education, more innovation, more intervention, more world awareness, more consumption, more specialization, more competition, more mobility, more urbanism, more longevity, more stress, more risk, more environmental degradation, more resource depletion. Or negatively: less subsistence production, less rural life, less poverty (relative to the total population), etc.

These are well known developments. Another change has only recently begun to attract wider attention: the shifting of modern society's power centers from West to East, resulting from successful modernization of much of Asia, especially East Asia, which is rapidly becoming the world's center of economic gravity and which could, if current trends continue, eventually also become its new center of political, scientific, perhaps cultural gravity. However, since other world regions have also advanced considerably in recent decades, the global diffusion of modern arrangements, rather than producing *one* new center located in the East, is more likely to give rise to a *multiplicity* of centers spread across the globe. The phrase *polycentric* modernity stands for this expectation.

Either way, global modernity brings to a close the age of Western dominance and supremacy. Its breakthrough represents thus a *world-historical turning point*: the transition to a post-Western order in which the West ceases to be the single most important driver and model of modernization and is reduced to one among several players, no longer able to determine the rules of the game and the parameters of change for all, but increasingly subject to forces that it cannot control but has to react to (Schmidt 2009).

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since the early days of the Industrial Revolution are not a very long time span. From an evolutionary point of view, the suggestion that the modern revolution might not have progressed very far yet would therefore seem less strange than many contemporary observers think.

[52] For projections focusing more specifically on trends of urban living, see also Taylor 2009: 810ff.

As modernity becomes a truly global phenomenon, societal evolution will probably experiment with new forms, and much of the input will come from non-Western locations. Not all of the emerging centers will be states. Or more accurately, rather than follow the impulse to automatically identify everything that appears on the radar screens of social scientists with state entities, it might be fruitful to "rescue" (Duara 1995) these centers from the nation state and to consider them in their own right. One promising alternative to viewing them through state-centric lenses would be to construe them as "global assemblages" (Sassen 2008): attractors and collections of private, semi-private and public organizations whose activities, experiments, ventures, etc., resonate globally. Such assemblages, while physically residing in state-controlled territories, enjoy considerable autonomy. Like the subsystems of modern society, they are self-referential units, revolving around themselves, hence not easily managed by central political authorities. Examples are multifunctional formations such as world cities and their interlinkages, but also highly specialized networks of individual and collective actors that cluster around particular interests and activities, e.g. the finance or film industries (on the latter, see Cohen 2002) which branch out in all directions.

It is in assemblages such as these that innovation capacities tend to be concentrated. And once we free our minds from the legacies of methodological nationalism, it becomes clear that this is true not only of the present, but also of the past. For instance, drawing upon the language used in this paper, one realizes that terms like eurocentric or westcentric modernity ought "really" to be understood only in a figurative sense. For neither *Europe* nor any European *country* ever defined "the" contours of (European) modernity. Development within countries tends to be uneven and can differ enormously across sectoral boundaries, spatially and socially (according to class, gender, race, religious affiliation, etc.). European countries are no exception. To say 19th century "Britain" was "ahead" of 19th century "France", "Germany", or "Italy", is not therefore to imply *all* parts of Britain were ahead of *all* others in *all* dimensions and for *all* segments of the population.[53] Rather, what one finds, both for Britain vis-à-vis Europe and for (northwestern) Europe vis-à-vis the world, are *particular* assemblages – groups of cities or urban agglomerations,[54] networks of organizations, e.g. businesses or universities, some of

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[53] Another qualification one would have to make is that in some dimensions of change, "Europe", especially continental Europe, already lagged behind the emerging North American center long before it reached its world-historical zenith. An example, famously reflected in Toqueville's (2003) observations on *Democracy in America*, is the democratization of social relations. Although this could not have been known for sure in the 1830s, Toqueville had no doubt that what he saw in the New England states constituted the future – not just for America but also for Europe, which appeared rather "backward" in comparison.

[54] See for instance Allen et al. 2011 on economic development in China and Europe, showing that while much of Europe was on a par with China until the turn of the 18th century, a number of mostly British cities began to make considerable leaps ahead around that time.

whose affiliation with the state was quite weak – which temporarily assumed leading positions in certain areas. Their leadership, while "spilling over" and "trickling down" to the nearer and farther environments, was always limited. Still, it is in these *decentralized* centers that the meanings of modernity came to be worked out: through mutual observation, reception, fertilization, imitation of the relevant actors and systems. The same is true of the United States. If we say "America" was the leader of 20th century, westcentric modernity, then we do not of course think of Alabama, Iowa, or North Dakota. Rather, we mean New York City (or Manhattan, the Wall Street, the Metropolitan Opera, the Museum of Modern Art), Washington, D.C. (or the White House, Capitol Hill, the Pentagon), the Boston Area (Harvard University, MIT), Chicago, Silicon Valley, Hollywood, etc.

So in addition to "provincializing" (Chakrabarty 2000) "Europe", "America" and/or "the" West, we might also consider *deessentializing* them. But as illuminating as such an exercise could be in some respects, one should not take it to extremes. For there *is* meaning in speaking of a eurocentric or westcentric modernity; not just figuratively but in a very literal sense. What these terms allude to is the *combined* force of the many decentralized, yet multiply linked local centers of modernity. This force cannot be adequately grasped by the concept of assemblages. And because its reach extended (in fact, continues to extend) globally, it is also significant that modernity's past centers were located almost exclusively in (northwestern) Europe and North America.

No less significant, by implication, is the observation that many of the newly emerging centers are located in (East) Asia. Their rise signals more than just more of the same. It signals the end of an era. What this means for the world *economy* (Webber 2010), for world *politics* (National Intelligence Council 2008), for world *science* (Unesco 2010b) and for world *education* (Unesco 2009) is gradually becoming clearer. But how does it affect world *culture,* the semantics of modernity's self-description?

Nobody can answer this question with certainty today. One can, however, venture some speculations. As John Meyer (Meyer et al. 1997: 167) emphasizes, the economic, political, scientific and technological dominance of the West has impacted the shape and content of currently leading world models as well – in "a world with a hegemonic China", they would have evolved differently than against the background of "a half century of dominance by the United States".

World models are globally binding ideas of adequate development. They are intricately intertwined with ideas of modernity. Because the concept of modernity is laden with normative content – "the" modern invariably describes itself as superior to, and ahead of, its "other" (the past, the traditional, the pre- or not yet modern) – it is also an essentially contested concept. For whoever gains the upper hand in the politics of interpreting modernity enjoys the privilege of delineating preferred paths of (social, cultural, personal, bodily) change. Prevailing definitions in turn provide the yardsticks against which practical performance is judged.

Historically, the definitional prerogative has been claimed and enjoyed by the West. Polycentricity means, the West loses it. It endows actors that were (or would have been) powerless or silenced before progressing to advanced levels of modernity with some capacity to reject unwanted offers or perceived impositions. The structures of modernity admit of a multiplicity of interpretations, translations into concrete precepts, paths of development, institutions. This opens up space for creative adaptations of known forms and norms.[55] It is also a source of constant variation. Moreover, as more parties and voices are brought to the "negotiation table", the experiential, axiological and interest base for modernity's discursive self-transformation is broadened. At the same time, the selection and retention chances of "unorthodox" interpretations increase because their originators are empowered to withstand possible pressures to jettison them. Against this backdrop, it is safe to predict that the world's future understandings of modernity will differ from today's, and that they will draw a lot more on non-Western sources.

Which elements of contemporary world models will be viewed as peculiarly Western and which as the inevitable outcomes of modernization processes wherever they occur, remains to be seen. What seems unlikely though is that only minor changes will occur. For even while the discourse of modernity was primarily an intra-Western affair, its semantics were always in flux, challenged, renegotiated. The 1850s' understanding of modernity was markedly different from that of the 1900s, 1950s, or 2000s. Part of the change resulted from the addition of new discourse participants (workers, Jews, women, blacks, homosexuals, etc.) whose voices had previously been marginalized or excluded. And as the participant basis continues to expand further, so does the scope for future variation.

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[55] An example are the changes that the nation-state model underwent following its global diffusion and ongoing evolution. In some instances, the local adaptations are so profound that they arguably transmuted into a distinct model of state formation, the "state-nation" model, as Stepan et al. (2011) have called it, using India as their main illustration case. The model itself is not new, but has "existed"/been experimented with for decades. What is new is that it is now openly advocated, that it is gaining recognition beyond India and other countries practicing it, rather than being portrayed as a deviation from the norm.

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