

The Normal Chaos of Love

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Translated by
Mark Ritter and Jane Wiebel

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AUTHORS' NOTE

We shared the writing of this book between us as follows: the Introduction was written jointly; chapters 1, 5 and 6 were written by Ulrich Beck; and chapters 2, 3 and 4 were written by Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim.

INTRODUCTION

Individualization and ways of living and loving

‘Why did you marry the man you did?’ a daughter asks her mother in Michael Cunningham’s novel *A Home at the End of the World*. ‘You never worried that you might be making some sort of extended mistake, like losing track of your real life and going off on, I don’t know, a tangent you could never return from?’ Her mother ‘waved the question away as if it were a sluggish but persistent fly. Her fingers were bright with tomato pulp. “We didn’t ask such big questions then,” she said. “Isn’t it hard on you, to think and wonder and plan so much?”’ (Cunningham 1991: 189–90).

In similar terms in his novel *The Burden of Proof* Scott Turow describes a father perplexed by his daughter’s endless doubts about what the future holds for her: ‘Listening to Sonny [his daughter], who was twisted about by impulse and emotion – beseeching, beleaguered, ironic, angry – it struck Stern that Clara [his wife] and he had had the benefit of certain good fortune. In his time, the definitions were clearer. Men and women of middle-class upbringing anywhere in the Western world desired to marry, to bear and rear children. Et cetera. Everyone traveled along the same ruts in the road. But for Sonny, marrying late in life, in the New Era, everything was a matter of choice. She got up in the morning and started from scratch, wondering about relationships, marriage, men, the erratic fellow she’s chosen – who, from her description, still seemed to be half a boy. He was reminded of Marta, who often said she would find a male companion just as soon as she figured out what she needed one for’ (Turow 1991: 349).

What is the ‘New Era’ all about? This book argues that one of its main features is a collision of interests between love, family and personal freedom. The nuclear family, built around gender status, is falling

apart on the issues of emancipation and equal rights, which no longer conveniently come to a halt outside our private lives. The result is the quite normal chaos called love.

If this diagnosis is right, what will take over from the family, that haven of domestic bliss? The family, of course! Only different, more, better: the negotiated family, the alternating family, the multiple family, new arrangements after divorce, remarriage, divorce again, new assortments from your, my, our children, our past and present families. It will be the expansion of the nuclear family and its extension in time; it will be an alliance between individuals as it always has been, and it will be glorified largely because it represents a sort of refuge in the chilly environment of our affluent, impersonal, uncertain society, stripped of its traditions and scarred by all kinds of risk. Love will become more important than ever and equally impossible.

Women and men are currently compulsively on the search for the right way to live, trying out cohabitation, divorce or contractual marriage, struggling to coordinate family and career, love and marriage, 'new' motherhood and fatherhood, friendship and acquaintance. This movement is under way, and there is no stopping it. One could call it the 'status struggle' which comes after the class struggle. In those countries where prosperity and social security have reached a high level, where peace and democratic rights are beginning to be taken for granted, the contradictions between family demands and personal freedom, or between family demands and love can no longer be concealed behind the daily struggle against misery and oppression. As traditional social identities gradually fade, the antagonisms between men and women over gender roles emerge in the very heart of the private sphere. In a whole range of trivial and important questions, ranging from who does the dishes to sex and fidelity and the attitudes which these reveal, these antagonisms are beginning to change society in obvious and less obvious ways. Weighed down by hopes, love seems to slip away because it is idolized by a society focused on the growth of the individual. And it is laden with more hopes the quicker it seems to vanish into thin air, bereft of any social ties.

Just because all this is taking place in the realm of love, it is happening secretly, in a disguised and covert manner. At first it is nothing more than a certain animosity between 'you' and 'me'. The tensions which love has always brought with it, and the great value we ascribe to it, do not make their appearance as contradictory social roles but as direct clashes between the people involved, in their characteristics, mistakes and oversights, resulting in a battleground for recriminations and attempts to escape. To put it more profanely, workers and managers also

understand their differences as personal problems, but at least they are not condemned to love one another, start a household, make a marriage work and bring up children together. In the domestic relationships between men and women, on the other hand, sharing a household makes every disagreement personal and painful. The couple's attempt to arrange everything individually, putting aside the demands of the world outside and creating their own world out of their love for one another, transforms the inherent incongruities into personal difficulties. The reason why the quarrels and arguments are so deeply hurtful is that they form part of the security system to which the couple, for want of any other firm emotional base, has entrusted itself.

Love has become inhospitable, and the ever higher hopes invested in it are meant to buttress it against the unpleasant reality of what seems like private betrayal. 'Everything will be better next time round': this consoling cliché combines both aspects: the hopelessness and the hope, elevating both and individualizing them. All this is comical, banal, tragicomic, sometimes even tragic, full of complications and confusions – and it is what the chapters of this book seek to recount. Perhaps people have simply lost track of other issues. Perhaps, however, weighed down by expectations and frustrations, 'love' is the new centre round which our detraditionalized life revolves. It may manifest itself as hope, betrayal, longing, jealousy – all addictions which afflict even such serious people as the Germans. This, then, is what we mean by the normal chaos of love.

Individualization: a new departure, a new society?

But whatever drives people to play off their freedom, their craving to be themselves and their ego trips against their families, of all things? Why this expedition into the most alien (because closest), holiest, most dangerous continent of your very own self? What *explains* this apparently highly individual but actually commonplace pattern, this zeal verging on obsession, this readiness to suffer, this widespread ruthlessness in tearing up one's own roots and ripping them apart to find out whether they are healthy?

In many people's view the answer is obvious. The individualists themselves are the problem, their wants and discontent, their thirst for excitement and diminishing willingness to fit in with others, to subordinate themselves or do without. A kind of universal *Zeitgeist* has seized hold of people, urging them to do their own thing, and its influence goes just as far as their ability to move heaven and earth, to blend their hopes with the reality around them.

The trouble with this explanation is that it raises further questions. How does one explain this simultaneous mass exodus from the family circle, the fact that so many lives are in upheaval? The millions of divorcees did not arrange this, nor do they have a trade union behind them recommending autonomy and the right to strike. As they understand it, they are defending themselves against a force which often threatens to overpower them, and they believe they are fighting on behalf of their own innermost wishes. It all looks and feels like a unique personal drama, clad in a highly individual costume, but in fact the premiere is being performed with very much the same props again and again in the most diverse languages in metropolises all over the world.

Why then are so many millions of people in so many countries deciding individually as if in a collective trance to abandon what used to be marital bliss and exchange it for a new dream, living together in an 'open marriage' beyond the safety net and the security of the law, or choosing to bring up a child single-handed? Why do they prefer to live on their own, pursuing ideas like independence, diversity, variety, continually leafing over new pages of their egos, long after the dream has started to resemble a nightmare? Is this an ego epidemic, a fever to be treated with ethics drops, poultices of 'us' and daily admonitions on the common good?

Or is it a pioneering expedition into new territory, a quest for better, if unfamiliar, solutions? Despite all their dazzling jousting with self-determination, could all these individuals be the agents of a deeper transformation? Are they the harbingers of a new age, a new relationship between individual and society? This would be a different kind of common ground, not based on a guaranteed consensus on the old precepts. It would emerge from individual biographies, from discussing and questioning each step, finding new arrangements, meeting new demands, justifying one's decisions, and would have to be protected from the centrifugal forces, the transience which threatens the order of our lives. This is the view and the theory presented in this book. Its keyword is *individualization*. Let us first explain what is meant by the term by comparing it with an example from the recent past.

Even late in the nineteenth century, when signs of crisis in the family were becoming perceptible, the fathers of the German Code of Civil Law (and it is certainly no coincidence that this child has only fathers) established marriage as an institution justified in and of itself, one which married people in particular have no business criticizing. 'Corresponding to the general Christian view of the German people,' one reads there (as if copied from a functionalist textbook, under the heading 'General value system'), 'the draft is based on the view that in marital law . . .

it is not the principle of individual freedom which should prevail, but rather that marriage is *to be viewed [as] a moral and legal order independent of the will of the spouses.*¹

Individualization intends and produces exactly the opposite principle. Biographies are removed from the traditional precepts and certainties, from external control and general moral laws, becoming open and dependent on decision-making, and are assigned as a task for each individual. The proportion of possibilities in life that do not involve decision-making is diminishing and the proportion of biography open to decision-making and individual initiative is increasing. Standard biography is transformed into 'choice biography' (Ley 1984), with all the compulsions and 'shivers of freedom' (von Wysocki 1980) that are received in exchange.

To put our theme another way, it is no longer possible to pronounce in some binding way what family, marriage, parenthood, sexuality or love mean, what they should or could be; rather, these vary in substance, exceptions, norms and morality from individual to individual and from relationship to relationship. The answers to the questions above must be worked out, negotiated, arranged and justified in all the details of how, what, why or why not, even if this might unleash the conflicts and devils that lie slumbering among the details and were assumed to be tamed. Increasingly, the individuals who want to live together are, or more precisely are becoming, the legislators of their own way of life, the judges of their own transgressions, the priests who absolve their own sins and the therapists who loosen the bonds of their own past. They are also becoming, however, the avengers who retaliate for injuries sustained. Love is becoming a blank that the lovers must fill in themselves, across the widening trenches of biography, even if they are directed by the lyrics of pop songs, advertisements, pornographic scripts, light fiction or psychoanalysis.

Thanks to the Reformation, people were released from the arms of the church and the divinely ordained feudal hierarchy and into a social, bourgeois and industrial world that seemed to offer them virtually unlimited space to cultivate their interests and subjugate nature, using the drawing-board of technology. Similarly, in the comfort of normality and prosperity today, individuals are being released from certain duties by modern technology, which however is threatening to take over their lives and leads them to doubt any assertions about prosperity and progress. They are finding themselves in a lonely place, where they have to take over responsibility for themselves, make their own decisions and imperil their own lives and loves, tasks for which they are not prepared and for which their upbringing has not equipped them.

Individualization means that men and women are released from the gender roles prescribed by industrial society for life in the nuclear family. At the same time, and this aggravates the situation, they find themselves forced, under pain of material disadvantage, to build up a *life of their own* by way of the labour market, training and mobility, and if need be to pursue this life at the cost of their commitments to family, relations and friends.²

So what appears to be an individual struggle to break free and discover one's true self turns out to be also a general move conforming to a *general imperative*. This dictates that the individual's biography is planned round the labour market; it presupposes that he/she has some qualifications and is mobile, a requirement especially prized by those who invoke the importance of a happy family without allowing for its needs. The sense of freedom, and the actual freedoms which are upsetting the old picture of family life and encouraging the search for a new one, is not an individual invention but a late child of the labour market, buffered by the welfare state. It is in fact *labour market freedom*, which implies that everyone is free to conform to certain pressures and adapt to the requirements of the job market. And it is vital that you internalize these pressures, incorporating them in your own person, daily life and planning for the future, even though they inevitably collide with the demands of your family and the division of labour within it, which by its very nature excludes such imperatives.

Seen from outside or from a historical viewpoint, what appears to be an individual failure, mostly the fault of the female partner, is actually the failure of a family model which can mesh *one* labour market biography with a lifelong housework biography, but not *two* labour market biographies, since their inner logic demands that both partners have to put themselves first. Interlinking two such centrifugal biographies is a feat, a perilous balancing act, which was never expected so widely of previous generations but will be demanded of all coming ones as more and more women strive to emancipate themselves.

This is only one aspect. But it clearly reveals that in this whole cowboys-and-Indians game between the genders an unsuspected, alien, quite unerotic and asexual contradiction is surfacing: *the contradiction between the demands of the labour market and the demands of relationships* of whatever kind (family, marriage, motherhood, fatherhood, friendship). The ideal image conveyed by the labour market is that of a completely mobile individual regarding him/herself as a functioning flexible work unit, competitive and ambitious, prepared to disregard the social commitments linked to his/her existence and identity. This perfect employee fits in with the job requirements, prepared to move on whenever necessary.

The term individualization thus covers a complex, manifold, ambiguous phenomenon, or more precisely a social transformation; the variety of meanings have to be distinguished from one another, but all of them have practical implications which cannot be ignored. Seen from one angle it means freedom to choose, and from another pressure to conform to internalized demands, on the one hand being responsible for yourself and on the other being dependent on conditions which completely elude your grasp. So the very conditions which encourage individualism produce new, unfamiliar dependencies: *you are obliged to standardize your own existence*. The individuals freed of traditional constraints discover that they are governed by the labour market and are therefore dependent on training offers, social welfare regulations and benefits, from public transport to nursery school places and opening times, student grants and retirement plans.

To put it another way, a traditional marriage and family does not represent restriction nor does a modern individual life mean freedom. It is simply that one mixture containing both restriction and freedom is being replaced by another, which seems more modern and attractive. That it is better adapted to the challenges of our times is shown by the fact that hardly anyone wants to go back to the 'good old days', however nerve-racking things may be for oneself. There are of course a fair number of men who want to turn the clocks back, but not for themselves, only *for the women*.

Time-honoured norms are fading and losing their power to determine behaviour. What used to be carried out as a matter of course now has to be discussed, justified, negotiated and agreed, and for that very reason it can always be cancelled. In search of intimacy the actors turn out to be their own critics, directors and audience, acting, watching and discussing it, unable to agree on the rules for achieving it as fast as they are needed. The rules constantly prove to be wrong, unjust and therefore merely provisional. In such circumstances it seems almost like salvation to take refuge in rigidities, in new/old black-and-white thinking, 'period, that's it, enough.'

The resulting variety is full of peculiar and contradictory truths. Prohibitions are tried out and become normality. This is infectious, stirring up doubts even when people thought themselves safe in old certainties. Diversity requires tolerance, no doubt, but from the opposite point of view it can easily appear to be anomie, licence or moral anarchy, which must be halted with an iron hand. In this sense, the longing for traditional certainties should be decoded, both as an answer to fears of losing one's livelihood and social status, and as an answer to deep cultural uncertainties of the type that nestle into every niche, corner and level of everyday life in the wake of the individualization process. This is the

overheard faith in standards speaking up, anxiously witnessing how gender roles are crumbling even in everyday life, as it appeals for the salvation of fatherland, nation and the like.

Haven't there always been individualization processes?

Now one may ask, haven't there always been individualization processes? What about the ancient Greeks (Michel Foucault), the Renaissance (Jacob Burckhardt), the courtly culture of the Middle Ages (Norbert Elias), etc.³ It is true, individualization in the general sense of the word is nothing new, nothing that is showing up for the first time now in prosperous Germany. Although it seems to be the same, however, it has a different and perhaps not yet fully disclosed significance. One of the most important aspects is its mass character, the scope and systemic character of the current surge of individualization. It occurs in the wealthy Western industrialized countries as a side-effect of modernization processes designed to be long-term. As already mentioned, this is a kind of *labour market individualism* which should not be confused with resurrecting the legendary bourgeois citizen after the latter's well-documented demise. If in the olden days it was small groups, elite minorities, which could afford the luxury of concentrating on their own interests, nowadays the 'risky opportunities' (Heiner Keupp) associated with individualization are being *democratized* or, putting it more tersely, being brought about by the way we live – in the interplay between prosperity, education, mobility and the like.

In Germany the standard of living even of the lower groups in the social scale has improved 'spectacularly, comprehensively and in terms of social history in a revolutionary way' (Mooser 1983: 286), even though there have been severe setbacks in the past decade due to high unemployment. While earlier generations often knew nothing but the daily struggle for survival, a monotonous cycle of poverty and hunger, broad sections of the population have now reached a standard of living which enables them to plan and organize their own lives (accompanied by a widening gap between the rich and the poor). It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the progress made in the education field since the 1970s, especially in its consequences for women. 'The moment a woman began to read, the woman's issue was born' (Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, in Brinker-Gabler 1979: 17). Education opens the trap door: it allows the woman to escape from the restrictions of her existence as a housewife; it deprives inequality of its legitimization; it sharpens her sense of self-confidence and willingness to take up the

battle for prizes long denied; her own earnings strengthen her position within the marriage and free her from the need to remain married for purely economic reasons. All of this has not really removed the inequalities but it sharpens our awareness of them, and makes them seem unjust, annoying, politically motivated.⁴

Quite rightly you may object that these are generalizations from a few individual examples, and accuse us of exaggerating this minority trend and the likely future it promises. Individualization processes, in the sense used here, should however not be understood as abrupt changes of direction suddenly affecting everybody. In fact they are the outcome of long-term developments which start earlier in some places and later in others, so that a description of them seems like news from a strange far-off country to some, and to others a quite familiar account of their everyday lives. In Munich, Berlin and Frankfurt (to pick out only a few German cities with pronounced tendencies towards individualization as measured by the proportion of single-person households) the situation is completely different from that in rural areas such as East Frisia, Middle Franconia or Upper Bavaria.⁵ And just as there are craftsmen and farm workers in late industrial societies, there are still class distinctions, intact marriages and nuclear families in countries, regions and cities where individualization is very advanced. In a certain sense we can talk about the contours of an individualized society just as in the nineteenth century, with feudalism and social rank still omnipresent, one could talk of an industrial society. What is important is the trend and the forces at work which link together these modern developments.

Seen in this light, 'the' present does not exist; what is perceptible is, in Ernst Bloch's words, 'the simultaneousness of the non-contemporaneous' which the observer may sometimes list under one heading and sometimes under another. In the struggle between continuity and upheaval raging around and in us, reality is arming both sides. What Daniel Yankelovich describes for the United States, however, applies equally to Germany in this respect:

Continuity and far-reaching changes coexist in American life. American culture is so diverse that an observer who wants to emphasize its continuity can easily do so. Conversely, an observer can just as well document the changing nature of American life. The decisive question is always only this: have the important things stayed the same or have they changed? If the important things have changed... then they will permeate the boundaries of the culture and flow into our economic and political life. And if they are significant enough they will disrupt the continuity of our life in a decisive way. (In Zoll et al. 1989: 12)

The picture we are drawing is deliberately not balanced. The centre is occupied more by the emerging new than by the old and familiar. Attention is also drawn more to conflicts and crises than to successes. But it is precisely the turbulences which annoy people and drive them forward to face issues. As Heinrich Mann writes, 'An utterly happy age would probably not have any literature at all' (in Wander 1979: 8). And probably no social science either.

Perhaps this book contains two books, two versions of the same 'object' (to the extent that what the book deals with is 'objective' at all). We have not attempted to iron out or unsnarl the differences in what each of us has written separately in the chapters, after many conversations and common experiences. This results in overlaps, circling flows of thought and repetitions, which we have accepted (without wishing to dismiss criticism of them), among other reasons because that way the provisional, hypothetical and risky quality of our discussions remains clearly recognizable. Furthermore, attempting to write about the chaos of love as a couple with a single hand would be rather like trying to study the language of the Eskimos in Bermuda shorts.

The danger is obvious. In quite different circumstances, Ivan Illich tellingly described what we are also expecting of our readers of both genders: 'You may imagine our procedure like six climbs up the same peak or six rides on the broomstick around the big mountain. Some of you may even believe they are descending into the Inferno, the same hole over and over again, but (each time) . . . down a different spiral staircase' (Illich 1985: 18).

LOVE OR FREEDOM

Living together, apart or at war

Freedom, equality and love

One can love all sorts of things and people: Andalusia, one's grandmother, Goethe, black fishnet stockings against white skin, cheese sandwiches, the warm smile of a bosomy woman, fresh rolls, the movement of clouds *and* legs, Erna, Eva, Paul, Heinz-Dietrich – and one can do all this simultaneously, successively, excessively, silently, with hands, teeth, words, looks and great intensity. But sexual love (whatever form it takes) is so overwhelmingly powerful, so engrossing that we often reduce the vast range of our loving potential to longing for a caress, a word, a kiss – need I go on?

The everyday battle between the sexes, noisy or muted, inside, outside, before, after and alongside marriage is perhaps the most vivid measure of the hunger for love with which we assault each other. 'Paradise now!' is the cry of the worldly whose heaven or hell is here or nowhere. The cry echoes in the rage of the frustrated and those in pursuit of freedom, knowing that freedom plus freedom does not equal love, but more likely means a threat to it or even its end.

People marry for the sake of love and get divorced for the sake of love. Relationships are lived as if they were interchangeable, not because we want to cast off our burden of love but because the law of true love demands it. The latter-day tower of Babel built on divorce decrees is a monument to disappointed, overrated love. Even cynicism sometimes fails to conceal that it is an embittered late variant of love. People raise the drawbridges of their longings because this seems the only, the best way of protecting themselves against unbearable pain.

A lot of people speak of love and family as earlier centuries spoke

of God. The longing for salvation and affection, the fuss made over them, the unrealistic pop-song truisms hidden deep in our hearts – all this smacks of religiosity, of a hope of transcendence in everyday life (see the extensive discussion on this point in chapter 6 below).

This residual and new secular religion of love leads to bitter religious controversies between two sides determined to defend their individuality, fought out in the privacy of the home or in the offices of divorce lawyers and marriage counsellors. In these modern times our addiction to love is *the* fundamentalist belief to which almost everyone has succumbed, especially those who are against fundamentalist creeds. Love is religion after religion, the ultimate belief after the end of all faith (this analogy is elucidated in chapter 6 below). It fits in with our environment about as well as the Inquisition would with an atomic power station, or a daisy with a rocket to the moon. And still love's icons blossom in us, watered by our deepest wishes.

Love is the god of privacy. 'Real socialism' may have vanished with the Iron Curtain, but we are still living in the age of real pop lyrics (see 'Romanticism now: love as a pop song' in chapter 6 below). Romanticism has won and the therapists are raking it in.

The meaning of existence has not been lost; life is not hollow, at least under the lure and pressure of daily life. Some powerful force has pushed its way in and filled up the gap where, according to previous generations, God, country, class, politics or family were supposed to hold sway. I am what matters: I, and You as my assistant; and if not You then some other You.

Love however should on no account be equated here with fulfilment. That is its glowing side, the physical thrill. Even Eros's powerful allure, its hidden promises awakening our lust, suggesting delights both novel and familiar, does not mean fulfilment, or even require it. Achieving the goal often turns the sight of the flesh which seemed so delightful a moment ago into an alien white mass shorn of any appeal with the clothes so perfunctorily stripped off it.

How easily having one's hopes fulfilled can turn into a chilly gaze! Where only a moment ago overwhelming urgency made a knotted tangle of two walking taboos, merging me and you, all boundaries gone, now we are staring at one another with critical eyes, rather like meat inspectors, or even butchers who see the sausages where others see cattle and pigs.

Anyway there is little hope for anyone who confuses storming the heights with living on the plains, surrounded by the bogs and pitfalls of love. Love is pleasure, trust, affection and equally their opposites – boredom, anger, habit, treason, loneliness, intimidation, despair and

laughter. Love elevates your lover and transforms him/her into the source of possible pleasures where others only detect layers of fat, yesterday's stubble and verbosity.

Love knows no grace, however, nor does it stick to vows or keep contracts. Whatever is said, intended or done is no more inevitably linked than the movements of mouth or hands are with other parts of the body. In what court can a spurned or misunderstood lover sue for his/her rights? Who says what is just or true or right in matters of love?

Previous generations hoped and believed that if both sexes were given a sense of freedom and equality then true love would blossom in all its radiance, heartbreak and passion; love and inequality are after all as mutually exclusive as fire and water. Now that we seem to have caught hold of at least the tip of this ideal, we find ourselves faced with the opposite problem: how can two individuals who want to be or become equals and free discover the common ground on which their love can grow? Among the ruins of outdated lifestyles freedom seems to mean breaking out and trying something new, following the beat of one's own drum, and falling out of step with the rest.

Perhaps the two parallel lines will eventually meet, in the far distant future. Perhaps not. We shall never know.

The current situation in the gender struggle

It took two thousand years for people to even begin to suspect the consequences of that mighty message, 'all men are equal.' Only a second later in historical terms, after two decades they are beginning to realize to their horror: 'and so are women.'

If only it were just a question of love and marriage. But one cannot any longer define the relationships between the sexes just in terms of what they seem to involve – sex, affection, marriage, parenthood and so on: one has to include everything else such as work, profession, inequality, politics and economics. It is this unbalanced conglomeration of so many disparate elements which makes the issue so complicated. Anyone discussing the family has to include jobs and income, and anyone talking about marriage has to look into education, opportunities and mobility, and in particular into how unevenly these are distributed, despite the fact that by now women often have the same qualifications as men.

Looking at the state of inequality between men and women from various angles, can one discern any changes over the past decade or two? The findings are ambiguous. On the one hand there have been

great upheavals, especially where sex, law and education are concerned. On the whole the changes, except the sexual ones, are discernible more as attitudes and on paper than as facts. On the other hand there is a striking *lack of change* in the way men and women behave, particularly on the job market and in their insurance and pension cover. The result is somewhat paradoxical: the more equal the sexes seem, the more we become aware of persistent and pernicious inequalities between them.

This mixture of new attitudes and old conditions is an explosive one in a double sense. Better educated and informed young women expect to be treated as partners in professional and private life but come up against the opposite tendencies in the labour market and their male colleagues. Conversely, men have glibly *preached* equality without matching their words with deeds. The ice of illusion is wearing thin on both sides; the sexes are equally well qualified and enjoy the same legal rights, yet the inequalities are on the increase, all of us realize this, and there is no longer the slightest legitimization for this state of affairs. There is a sharpening contradiction between women's ambitions to live as equals with their mates and colleagues and the actual conditions confronting them, between male slogans on mutual responsibility and their unwillingness to alter their daily routine a jot. We seem to be right at the very beginning of a breakaway from the old feudal patterns, with all the antagonisms, openings and contradictions such a move implies. Women's awareness is far ahead of the actual conditions; it is very unlikely that anyone can turn this clock back. The prognosis is that we are in for a *long and bitter battle*; in the coming years there will be a war between men and women. Here are some data from widely different fields to illustrate the current situation, and some theoretical considerations.

Sex and marriage

In almost all Western countries there are signals in the form of *high divorce figures*. Although Germany still has relatively low figures compared, say, with the USA, even here almost every third marriage ends in divorce (in large cities almost every second marriage, and in small towns and rural areas roughly every fourth). While the statistics for divorce rates show a slight drop since 1985,¹ divorces in long-standing marriages have increased considerably.² At the same time the divorce rate for second marriages is rising, as is that for couples with children. The jungle of parental relationships is growing accordingly: my children, your children, our children, with all the different rules, reactions and battlegrounds for everyone concerned.

The official divorce figures are, however, far exceeded by the *sharp rise in 'informal marriages'*. Estimates speak of 2.5 to 3 million people living 'in sin' in (then West) Germany in 1989.³ The increase in the numbers of illegitimate children points in the same direction; in 1967 they constituted 4.6% of all children; by 1988 this figure had risen to 10% (in Sweden it had reached 46%).⁴ There are however no statistics on divorce for such informal unions available. And it is not just that the proportion of people choosing to live together in this way has quadrupled over the past decade. What is astonishing is how widely accepted this 'common law marriage', so vehemently opposed right up to the 1960s, has become. The tempo of change is perhaps indicated less in the phenomenon in itself than in the fact that an unofficial, untraditional living pattern has been established.

In the 1960s family, marriage and job were still regarded as solid cornerstones for constructing a proper biography. In the meantime questions and choices have emerged at every turn. It is no longer clear whether one should get married or live together, whether one should conceive and raise a child inside or outside the family, whether the father is the man one should live with or the man one loves who is living with someone else or whether one should do any of these things before, after or while concentrating on one's career.

All such agreements can be cancelled and therefore depend on both parties legitimating them and the more or less unequal burdens they imply. This can be understood as a *decoupling and differentiation* of behaviours and attitudes which used to belong to marriage and family life. As a result it is becoming more and more difficult to relate the concepts to reality. Using uniform terms such as family, marriage, parenthood, mother, father and so on disguises the growing diversity of the lives concealed behind them (divorced fathers, fathers of only children, single fathers, fathers of illegitimate children, foreign fathers, stepfathers, house-keeping fathers, flat-sharing fathers, weekend fathers, fathers with a working wife, and so on; see Rerrich 1989, and chapter 5 below).

The direction in which society is developing is also shown by the composition of the households; *more and more people are living alone*. The proportion of single-person households in Germany already exceeds *one in three* (35%). In urban centres such as Frankfurt, Hamburg or Munich the proportion is around 50% and still rising. In 1900 there were five or more people in 44% of all private households; that group accounted for only 6% in 1986. By contrast, two-person households increased from 15% in 1900 to 30% in 1986. In the late 1980s, then, in Germany some 9 million people (roughly 15% of the population) were living alone – and the increase continues. Only slightly more than

half of these are people who fit the stereotype 'single' – young, unmarried professional. The rest are elderly surviving spouses, mainly women.⁵

It would be a mistake to interpret such tendencies along simple lines as *growing anarchy and fear of commitment* in the relationships between men and women. There is also the opposite trend. The divorce figures of one in three means that *two in three* 'normal marriages' and families still exist (whatever may be concealed behind the term). It is true that there have been astounding changes in sexual behaviour in a single generation, especially among girls and women. It used to be only the young men who were allowed to 'sleep around' and then only unofficially, and accompanied by a smirk. Today well over half of all girls (61%) think it is important for women to try out sex. Half of them see a certain attraction in having two boyfriends at the same time (Seidenspinner and Burger 1982: 30). But these figures should not deceive us; in fact the new codes of behaviour have their own strict norms. The majority of young people – even though they reject marriage and the family as a model for their own lives – *seek emotional commitment*. Even nowadays a stable partnership is their ideal and aim, 'faithfulness often seems to be taken for granted, without the official pressures of laws and religious beliefs' (Allerbeck and Hoag 1985: 105). So it is not clear where all this is leading to, and the answer to that popular question 'Is the family on its way out?' is a mixture of *yes and no*.

Education, the job market and employment

Although the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany guaranteed women full legal equality with men, some important forms of discrimination against them were removed only in 1977 when the new marriage and family laws came into force. On paper there are now no reasons whatsoever for treating men and women differently. Women are permitted to retain their maiden names; their responsibility for the family and children, previously laid down by law, has been abolished, and who runs the household is a matter of discussion between the spouses. Likewise, both are entitled to work outside the home. Care of the children is the responsibility of both father and mother, who 'must attempt to reach an agreement', as the law puts it, in the event that they differ on this matter (see Beyer, Lamott and Meyer 1983: 79).

Alongside these far-reaching reforms on behalf of women's rights probably the most striking change in post-war Germany, an almost revolutionary development, is that girls and young women have *access to all forms of education and training*. Right up to the 1960s discrimination against women in the educational field was self-evident

(surprisingly, it was more pronounced in the upper classes). By 1987 the girls had virtually caught up with the boys and were in the majority as secondary school-leavers (53.6%).

Some changes however run counter to this trend. Vocational training still shows a strong gender bias (early in the 1980s 40% of female workers but only 21% of male workers had no official qualifications). The willingness of girls leaving secondary school to go on to university has also declined over the past ten years from 80% to 63% (for young men the figures have declined from 90% to 73%).⁶ Female students continue to prefer certain disciplines (almost 70% choose the humanities, languages or pedagogy) and women entering teaching tend to qualify for 'lower' schools.⁷

Nevertheless, compared with circumstances twenty years ago it is no exaggeration to say that the field of education has become *feminized*. The trouble is that this educational revolution has not been followed by one in the labour market or the employment system. On the contrary, the doors opened by better education are 'slammed shut again... in the employment and labour market' (Seidenspinner and Burger 1982: 11). The slight rise in the numbers of women in 'male' professions contrasts with their massive displacement in all other areas. The integration of women into careers which was demanded (and encouraged) in the 1970s continues to follow the '*feudal gender pattern*' of an inverted hierarchy: the more central to a society an area is defined to be, the less women are represented in it, and conversely, the more marginal an activity is considered to be and the less influential a group is, the higher the probability that women have taken over positions within it. The relevant data show this to be true in all areas – politics, business, higher education, the mass media and so on.

It is still exceptional to find a woman in a top position in *politics*. While the representation of women in all decision-making bodies has increased since 1970, the proportion of women decreases the closer one gets to the centres of policy-making. The Social Democratic Party's rules on quotas for women aim at circumventing just this phenomenon; it remains to be seen whether it will have any effect. So far women have most easily gained access to party committees (from roughly 14% in 1970 to 20.5% in 1982). The proportion of women in parliaments has increased from top to bottom; it is highest at the municipal level (the proportion of women in provincial parliaments varies between 6% and 15%; women represent between 9.2% and 16.1% of the members of town and county councils).

In *business* there are very few women in positions of real influence, while their representation in less influential jobs (personnel offices, for

instance) is much larger. The picture in the *legal system* is quite similar, if at a slightly higher level. The proportion of women is much higher here (in 1979, for instance, 10% of the public prosecutors were women, in 1987 16% (Federal Office of Statistics 1988: 30). But in the federal courts, 'the places where the significant legal decisions are made, where society's course is charted for the next decades, women have (almost) no place' (Wiegmann 1979: 130).

In *higher education* women are still the exception at the top of the salary pyramid; in 1986 out of a total of 9956 top-ranking and highest-paid professorships only 230 were occupied by women. Further down the scale the proportion steadily increases, and is considerably higher in less well-paid teaching posts, the insecure mid-level positions and among academic assistants, especially in 'marginal fields'.⁸ The same picture can be found in the *mass media*; the higher one climbs, the less say women have. If they are active in television, then it is primarily as assistants and in light entertainment departments, and less in the important political and economic ones, and hardly ever in the upper echelons where policy is made (Federal Ministry of Youth, Family and Health 1980: 31).

The *professional qualifications* of younger women at least are not the reason for this discrepancy. They are well trained and have mostly reached higher positions than their mothers (and often their fathers!) ever attained. But the impression is misleading. In many areas of professional life *women have taken over the sinking ships*. Women's jobs are typically those with an uncertain future: secretaries, saleswomen, teachers, semi-skilled workers in industry. Precisely in those areas where large numbers of women work there is a strong tendency to reduce the number of jobs, or in proper sociologists' jargon 'considerable rationalization potential'. This applies particularly in industry. Most jobs for women – in electronics, the food, clothing and textiles industries – are difficult to mechanize, fill in gaps between mechanized processes or consist of putting the finishing touches to highly automated products, all of which will probably soon be taken over by microelectronics and fully automated. Large numbers of women have already lost their jobs in this manner, as the *unemployment figures* show. The proportion of women registered as unemployed over the past years has always been higher than that of men, and the numbers are increasing. In 1950 the unemployment rate for women was 5.1% (men 2.6%); in 1989 it had risen to 9.6% (men 6.9%). Of the roughly 2 million unemployed in the Federal Republic (West Germany) in 1988 *more than half* were women, although they represented only a third of the work-force.⁹ The number of academics out of work rose between 1980 and 1988 by 14% for

men, but by 39% for women. These figures do not include those women who left work, more or less voluntarily, to become housewives. This means that the number of people retreating into 'miscellaneous unemployment', largely housework, has multiplied over the past ten years (1970: 6000, but by 1984 already 121,000). In other words, as far as women are concerned everything is on the rise: participation in the labour market, unemployment and pseudo-unemployment.

This picture of discrimination against women in the work-force is rounded off by, generally speaking, *lower earnings*. Female industrial workers earned DM 13.69 per hour in 1987, 73% of the average wage for men (Federal Office of Statistics 1988: 480). A comparison over the period since 1960 shows that the differences in gross hourly earnings between men and women have diminished, but nevertheless despite equal training and comparable ages men generally still earn more. For instance, female white-collar workers on average managed to make only 64% of the men's gross monthly salary, and in production teams women reached only 73% of the earnings of their male colleagues.¹⁰

This state of affairs is in clear contrast to what the younger generation of women has come to expect and demand. One of the crucial findings of the study *Mädchen '82* published by Seidenspinner and Burger is 'the fact that for girls between 15 and 19 *the most important thing is reaching their occupational goals*'; this ranks higher than marriage and motherhood (1982: 9). The young women are highly motivated to get professional qualifications and find good jobs, only to be faced with the opposite tendencies in the labour market; it remains to be seen how they cope privately and politically with this rude shock in the short and long term.

Breaking away from the traditional roles for men and women of course does not just affect one side, the women. In fact it is only possible to the extent that *men* also alter their attitudes and their behaviour. This is becoming all too clear in the employment market with its newly erected barriers for women and in that other traditional area of 'women's work', keeping and running the house and looking after the children.

Women's liberation and family work from a male viewpoint

The representative study *Der Mann*, published by Sigrid Metz-Gockel and Ursula Müller in 1985, offers an ambivalent picture, which is no less clear for its contradictions. The contented male view of gender roles as

reported by Helga Pross in the mid-1970s looked like this: 'the man is stronger; he wants to have a career and support a family. The woman is weaker; she wants to keep her current role in the family and only wants to engage in a relatively modest career from time to time, and she wants to be able to look up to her husband' (Pross 1978: 173), a bundle of attitudes which has given way to a *verbal openmindedness and rigid behaviour*. 'Men's reactions are divided. They do not practise what they preach; they conceal the actual inequality behind their slogans about common ground' (Metz-Göckel and Müller 1985: 18).

Little or nothing has changed in the last twenty years, especially where responsibilities for the household and children are concerned. 'Fathers do not cook, wash or dust. They content themselves with their financial contribution to running the household and raising children' (1985: 21). Correspondingly, 'the acceptance by the majority of men of the role of househusband only applies to other men' (p. 63). It is quite cunning to stick to the old role while remaining apparently (verbally) flexible. Defending their own 'right to a housekeeper' and accepting the equality of women does not strike men as a contradiction. Ten years ago most men explained the discrimination against women as employees in terms of their poorer training. Since these arguments are no longer tenable in the wake of recent educational developments, a new defence wall is being erected – the *maternal role*.

61% of men regard the women's family duties as the main reason why they cannot climb the career ladder . . . Asked how a family with children (under 10 years old) should best divide up a job, housework and child-rearing, the great majority (80%) of German men advocates an arrangement whereby the woman stays at home and the man has a career . . . In the men's eyes this does not represent a real disadvantage for the women but just an objective fact . . . Turning the women's issue into an issue about children is the most stable bastion against equality for women.
(pp. 26–7)

It is one of history's little ironies that simultaneously a tiny but growing group of men – househusbands and single fathers – are undermining even this entrenched position.

The authors wryly sum up the contradictions in the new male image of women as follows:

Home sweet home is passé. They attribute considerable importance to the right of the woman to make her own decisions. An independent woman who knows what she wants is desirable. This new independent woman is someone who handles her affairs (and those of the rest of the family) in

a responsible and self-reliant manner, thereby helping to relieve the man of some of his burdens... Men are even capable of detecting several positive aspects in this kind of women's lib. They only have problems with emancipation when the woman's 'independence' threatens to turn against themselves, when demands are made of them, and interests asserted which collide with their own. (pp. 22-3)

Initial investigations into the tiny minority of men who have changed roles and become *new fathers* and *househusbands* complete the picture (Strümpel et al. 1988; Hoff and Scholz 1985). According to their own words, this decision was voluntary only in a strictly limited sense. They have 'fitted in with the request or demand of their *partner* to carry on their professional career. In some cases this was made a condition before conceiving a child' (1985: 17). The *househusbands* suffer from the *housewife* syndrome: invisible achievements, lack of recognition and lack of self-confidence. One of them reports:

The worst is cleaning, that's awful, really disgusting. You only get to know that when you do it every day. If you have cleaned something on, say, Friday, the same dirt will be in the same place at the same time next week. And that's really what seems almost degrading about this occupation, or at least the mind-numbing bit of it... You could almost say it's a bit like mopping up the ocean. (pp. 17-18)

Given this experience, even the men who consciously exchanged pursuing an 'alienating career' for housework alter their view and realize that work outside the home is fundamental to their self-esteem and the esteem of others; all of them are now looking for at least part-time employment (pp. 2, 43). Just how socially unacceptable this kind of role reversal still is can be seen from the fact that the men are often praised for taking on domestic tasks whereas the women take the brunt of the criticism and are accused of being 'bad mothers' (p. 16).

To sum up, the contradictions are piling up behind the façade of the ideal relationship cultivated by both sides. Depending on where one looks, one finds advances or setbacks. Certainly compared with their mothers, young women now enjoy *whole new areas of freedom*; they have more rights, more educational opportunities, more choices in their private lives and as employees (Beck-Gernsheim 1983 and in the present volume). A closer look at social developments reveals, however, that these new freedoms are *not safeguarded by society*. Tendencies on the job market and male insistence on excluding women from important positions in politics, business and so on lead one to suspect that the

disagreements faced so far were merely friendly skirmishing and that the real struggle lies ahead.

Both the starting-point and future prospects are highly ambivalent. Generally speaking, compared with the past generation, the women come off quite well: better educated and therefore qualified for good jobs. Their husbands, however, who are roughly as well educated, have already overtaken them, and they are still sentenced to a 'life of house-work'. The women's interest in being financially independent and having an absorbing job collides with their wish for a loving partnership and motherhood. This is perhaps especially true of those women who understand the implications of giving up their professional lives and being dependent on their husbands. The whole complex process of female individualization is revealed in this uneasy vacillation between 'living one's own life' and 'being there for others'. Of course this new emancipatory spirit cannot just be popped back into the bottle. From the male point of view it was extraordinarily shortsighted and naive to sharpen women's perception through education while still hoping that they would not see through the men's threadbare arguments in favour of the feudal status quo.

There has been some movement on the male side over the past ten years too. The old cliché of the 'tough guy' no longer applies. Most men want to be able to show their feelings and admit to weaknesses (Metz-Göckel and Müller 1985: 139, and chapter 5 below). They are beginning to develop a new attitude towards sex: 'it no longer appears to be an isolated drive, but a natural part of their personalities. Being considerate towards their partners is important to them' (p. 139).

Men are in a different position however. The word equality means something quite different. It does not mean more education, better opportunities, less housework, as it does for women, but the exact opposite: more competition, renouncing a career, more housework for themselves. Most men still bask in the illusion that they can have their cake and eat it. They imagine that equality is quite compatible with the old division of labour (especially in their own case). Following the old line that whenever women's rights turn into a threat one should appeal to nature, they deceive themselves about the contradictions between their own words and deeds by justifying prevailing inequalities on biological grounds. From a woman's ability to give birth they jump to the conclusion first that women are responsible for children, housework and family, and second that they therefore ought to forgo a professional life or remain in a subordinate position.

The quarrels and disagreements which are surfacing affect men in a highly sensitive area. According to the traditional sex stereotype, a

man's 'success' is bound up with his economic and occupational achievements. Only a secure income enables him to live up to the male ideal of the 'good provider' and 'caring husband and father'. In this sense, even satisfying his sexual needs within prevailing norms is in the long term dependent on his economic prowess. Conversely, the man must 'do his best' at work, internalize the constraints his job imposes on him, over-tax or even exhaust himself to fulfil these expectations.

This pattern behind 'male elbow-grease' is essential if the employers' strategies of reward and punishment to discipline the labour force are to be effective. Someone with a wife and two children to support is likely to do what he is told. On the other hand, overtaxing a man's ability to work presupposes 'a happy home', represented by the woman. The pressure on men to fit in with the job ethos makes them highly emotionally dependent. They commit themselves to a division of labour in which they delegate essential aspects of themselves and their own emotional competence to their spouses. At the same time they feel under growing compulsion to fit in with what is expected of them. Men can develop a marked ability to ignore the conflicts which are brewing, but this makes them highly vulnerable if their partners partially or wholly withdraw their emotional support. If life at home is not happy but tense and angry, they are hit doubly hard; lack of comprehension and helplessness come on top of their spouse's refusal to understand.

Theses

The issues dividing men and women are not only what they seem to be, i.e. issues dividing the sexes. They are rather private signs of the crumbling of a whole social framework. What appears to be a personal problem has a theoretical side sketched here in three theses:

- (1) The prescribed gender roles are the *basis* of industrial society, and not some traditional relic which can easily be dispensed with. Without a distinction between male and female roles there would be no nuclear family. Without the nuclear family there would be no bourgeois society with its typical pattern of life and work. The image of bourgeois industrial society is based on an incomplete, or more precisely, a *divided* commercialization of human labour. Total industrialization, total commercialization *and* families in their traditional form and roles are mutually exclusive. On the one hand a wage-earner presupposes a house-worker, and production for the market presumes the existence of the nuclear family. In that respect industrial society is dependent on the

unequal roles of men and women. On the other hand these inequalities contradict modern thinking and give rise to more and more controversy as time goes on. The more equal men and women actually become, the shakier the foundations of the family (marriage, parenthood, sexuality) seem. In other words, during the modernization phase since the Second World War industrial society has both made great advances and begun to dissolve. Market economies have failed to recognize their own no-go areas and weakened women's ties to their compulsory 'status fate' of looking after a household and a husband who in turn supports both with his wages. As a result adapting the couple's biographies to one another – reproduction and production – and dividing up the chores has become more difficult and gaps in women's social safeguards have become more evident. The problems which couples nowadays have to solve are in fact personalized versions of contradictory trends within industrial society shaken in its feudal *and* modern foundations by our craving to 'be ourselves'.

(2) The dynamics of change, making individuals out of members of social classes, do not stop short at the family's front door. With a mysterious force which they do not understand themselves, although they personify it, whatever strange form it takes, people are shaking off rigid gender roles, bourgeois maxims, set ways, or being shaken to the very depths of their being. The belief that comes over them is *I am myself* and after that *I am a woman*. *I am myself*, and after that *I am a man*. '*I*' and the *expected* woman, '*I*' and the *expected* man are worlds apart. Here the individualization process has quite contradictory consequences. While men and women are *released* from traditional norms and can search for a 'life of their own', they are *driven* into seeking happiness in a close relationship because other social bonds seem too tenuous or unreliable. The need to share your inner feelings with someone, as expressed in the ideal of marriage and bonding, is not a primary human need. It *grows* the more individual we all become and notice the losses which accompany the gains. As a consequence the direct route away from marriage and family usually leads, sooner or later, back to them again.

(3) The clashes of interest which mark the twentieth century are apparent in *all* kinds of household, mutual or single, before, during or after marriage. Here they merely show their private face. But the family is *only the setting, not the cause* of events; even if one changes the backcloth the play remains the same. It looks as if the sexes' close and intricate involvement with one another as lovers, parents, partners, wage-earners,

individuals and members of society is beginning to slacken. Quarrels start between married (and unmarried) couples when they realize there are other *options* – taking a job elsewhere, dividing up the chores differently, revising one's family planning, making love to someone else. Deciding on these matters forces us to realize how different the consequences are for men and women and that the two sexes are in *different camps*. Deciding on who looks after the children, for instance, determines whose career has priority and therefore lays down who in future will be economically dependent on whom, with all the consequences involved. There is a personal and a public side to such decisions; without public support (day care, flexible working hours, proper insurance cover) the private battles are aggravated, and conversely, adequate outside help alleviates the tensions at home. Accordingly private and public strategies for finding solutions must be seen as linked.

This seems the right place to look more closely into our three theses – the 'feudal' nature of industrial society, individualist tendencies in both men and women, and an increasing awareness of the mixed blessings of being able to choose.

Industrial society: a modern form of feudalism

One can best define the distinctive features of the sex roles by comparing them with class distinctions. While class warfare broke out because of widespread poverty and misery among the working population, and was fought out in public, the conflicts emerging nowadays mostly erupt in private relationships and are fought out in the kitchen, bedroom and playroom. Their symptoms are endless, circuitous discussions on feelings or silent disapproval, escaping into solitude and back, losing trust in a partner one suddenly no longer understands, going through the distress of divorce, idolizing children, struggling for a little corner to call one's own wrested away from one's partner but still shared with him/her, keeping a sharp eye out for signs of being pressurized among the trivia of everyday life, pressure which really stems from oneself. Call it what you will, 'trench warfare between the sexes', 'retreating into yourself', 'the age of narcissism'. This is exactly how a *social structure* – the feudal core of industrial society – implodes into private lives.

In a sense the class struggles generated by the industrial system are a modern phenomenon, a product of the way industry works. The wars between the sexes fit neither into the pattern of modern class conflicts nor are they a relic of the past. They are a third variety. Just as much

as the contrasts between labour and capital, they are both the *product* and *foundation* of our industrial world, in the sense that wage labour presupposes housework, and the production and family sectors came into existence when they were divided into separate realms in the nineteenth century. At the same time men and women are assigned a position at birth and are in that respect a strange hybrid: '*modern estates*', setting up a modern hierarchy – men above, women below – in industrial society. Strife is inevitable in view of the conflicting pulls of modern thinking and old-fashioned patterns. Correspondingly the ascribed gender-cum-status roles did not start to clash in the way class problems did in the early stages of the modernization process but only now, later on in this process, when the social classes have already lost most of their significance and new ideas can infiltrate the family, marriage, parenthood and the whole private sphere.

In the nineteenth century as industrialization gained ground it helped to form the nuclear family, which in its turn is currently losing its traditional shape. Work outside and inside the home is organized on contradictory lines (see Rerrich 1988). Market forces apply outside, while at home *unpaid* work is taken for granted. Relationships involve *contracts* between the partners, whereas family and marriage imply *communal interests*. Individual competitiveness and mobility, encouraged by the job market, run up against the opposite expectations at home where one is expected to sacrifice one's own interests for others and invest in the collective project called family. So two epochs organized on opposite lines and value systems – modernity and counter-modernity, market efficiency and family support – are welded together, complementing, conditioning and contradicting each other.

The day-to-day situation of men and women brought about by separating the work-place from the home is intrinsically different. So there is not just one kind of inequality based on market values: differences in pay and jobs and promotion etc., but also another kind of inequality running across this. Production is regulated via the labour market and the work involved carried out in exchange for money. Taking on such work makes people – no matter how dependent they are on their employer – into *self-providers*. They are the ones who are offered new jobs, new tasks, new viewpoints. Unpaid family work on the other hand is imposed as a natural dowry through marriage, and by its nature implies *dependency*. Those who take it on – and we know who they are – run a household on 'second-hand' money and remain dependent on their spouses as a link to the source of income. How these jobs are distributed – and here lies the feudal heart of industrial society – is not a matter of discussion. In principle one's fate is *decided in the cradle*

even in industrial society, lifelong housework or making a living by fitting in with the labour market. These feudal 'gender fates' are mitigated, cancelled out, aggravated or concealed by our commitment to love one another. Love is blind. Since love may seem the only escape from the distress it itself causes, we tend to deny that the inequality concealed behind it is real. But it is real, and that makes love seem stale and cold.

What seems like the threat of 'being terrorised by intimacy' (Sennett) is, in terms of social theory and history, simply the outcome of contradictions which arise when modern ideas apply to only half the population, those involved in working outside the home; the principles of individual freedom and equality are withheld from one gender and ascribed to the other at birth. Industrial society *never* was nor can it ever be solely industrial; it is always half industrial and half feudal. This feudal side is not a relic but a *precondition* and *result* of splitting up work and home life.

After the Second World War, when the welfare state was organized, two things happened. On the one hand the idea of organizing one's life according to the demands of the job market was expanded to include women. This was in itself not a new move, more an extension over gender lines of the principles governing industrial societies. The result, however, was totally new kinds of division between men and women. Enlarging the work-force to include women meant the *beginning of the end* of family ideals, gender fates, taboos on parenthood and sex, and even led to a partial reunification of home and work-place.

The social structure in our industrial society known as the pecking order relies on many disparate elements: division of labour between home and work-place, with their conflicting rules, roles assigned at birth prescribing how lives should be lived, and the whole lop-sided construction disguised under a thick (or thin) layer of love and pledges to care for and cherish one another as spouses and parents. In retrospect it becomes apparent that this structure was erected in the face of considerable opposition. Modernization is often seen too one-sidedly. In fact it is double-faced; parallel to the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, the modern feudal gender pattern was introduced, modern steps accompanied by reactionary ones. The momentous differences between productive work outside and family work inside the home were established, justified and transfigured into eternal truths. An alliance of male philosophers, churchmen and scientists wrapped up the whole package by labelling these social phenomena the 'essence' of man and the 'essence' of woman.

In other words, modernization did not just do away with agrarian

society; it created feudal rules of its own, which now in the next stage are becoming invalid. In the twentieth century the modernization process has had the opposite effect to that which it had in the nineteenth. Whereas in those days the consequences were a sharp division between wage-earning and housework, now they are a struggle to bind them together again; restrictions to keep women dependent have been superseded by incentives to take up employment, old stereotyped male and female roles have been replaced by chances for both sexes to escape from gender dictates.

But all this only indicates the direction in which we are going. The essential point is that the human problems arising in our market economies cannot be solved as long as society is split in two by contradictory living patterns and job expectations. Both men and women want to and have to be economically independent, an aim which cannot be achieved as long as the traditional nuclear family remains our guideline for employment conditions, social legislation, city planning, school curricula and the like, all of which still assume that the sexes should have different roles.

The 'battle of the century' being waged in countless homes with a mixture of disappointment and a guilty conscience also flares up because both sexes are trying to cast off their gender stereotypes in their private lives while maintaining them outside the home. As a result they just swap one injustice for another. To free women from the burdens of home and housework the men are expected to fit in with 'this modern feudal existence', and take over exactly what the women reject for themselves. Historically speaking it is like trying to turn the nobility into the peasants' serfs. Men are no more willing than women to obey the call 'back to the sink!' (women ought to know that better than anyone). But that is only one aspect. What remains crucial is that equality between the sexes cannot be achieved in institutions which presuppose their inequality. There is no hope of forcing the new round people into the old square holes required by the employment system, town planners, and so-called social security. No one should be surprised if the resulting tensions lead to couples wrangling bitterly over inadequate solutions like 'swapping roles' or 'sharing the dusting'.

Liberation from gender roles?

The point of view just sketched contrasts oddly with the empirical data. They in fact impressively document a counter-trend towards a *renewal*

of the gender hierarchy. In what sense can one legitimately talk about freedom at all? Does it apply equally to men and women? Under which conditions is it feasible, and what gets in its way?

There have been significant moves in the past decades, as the data referred to above attest, freeing women at least somewhat from traditional female tasks. Five main lines can be distinguished, not all related to one another.

First of all, because women now have a longer life expectancy, the shape of their biographies has altered. As has been shown in particular by Arthur E. Imhof in his studies of social history, this has led to a 'demographic liberation of women'. While a woman's lifespan in previous centuries was, in statistical terms, just long enough to produce and raise the socially 'desirable' number of surviving children, her 'maternal duties' nowadays come to an end at about the age of forty-five. 'Being there for the children' has become a transient phase, succeeded on average by three decades of an 'empty nest' beyond the traditional focus of women's lives. 'Today, in Germany alone, there are over five million women in their "best years" living in post-parental relationships . . . often . . . without any real meaningful activity' (Imhof 1981: 181).

Second, modern developments, especially since the Second World War, have revolutionized housework. The social isolation it now involves is not an inherent feature as such but the outcome of changed attitudes towards traditional living patterns; in the wake of the individualization process the nuclear family tends to stress its independence, turning itself into an island and restricting commitments to surrounding families, relations, neighbours and acquaintances. As a result a housewife has become an isolated worker par excellence.

On the other hand automation has taken over innumerable tasks; a variety of appliances, machines and consumer goods unburden the housewife but rob her job of meaning. It becomes an invisible and never-ending series of 'finishing-off jobs' between ready products, paid services and technically perfected gadgets. Taken together, the effect of isolation and automation is to 'de-skill' housework, so that many women seek work outside the home in search of fulfilment.

Third, though it is true that motherhood is still the strongest tie to the traditional female role, it is hard to overestimate the importance of contraception and the legal possibility of abortion in freeing women from traditional obligations.

Children and therefore motherhood (with all its consequences) are no longer 'a natural fate'; at least in principle the children are wanted and motherhood intentional. The data, of course, also show that for many women motherhood without economic dependence on one's husband/

partner or more or less total responsibility for looking after the child remains a dream. But young women, unlike their mothers, can at least co-decide whether, when and how many children they want to have. At the same time their sex lives are no longer inevitably linked with motherhood and can be self-confidently explored and developed in ways which often contravene male norms.

Fourth, the growing number of divorces shows how fragile marital support has become. Women are often just 'a husband away from' poverty, as Ehrenreich put it. Almost 70% of single mothers must make do with less than DM 1200 (roughly \$750) per month. With women pensioners they are the most frequent clients in relief agencies. In this sense too women have been freed, i.e. cut off from lifelong support by a husband. The statistically documented rush of women into the labour market shows that many of them have learned this historical lesson and drawn their own conclusions.

Fifth, equal opportunities in education have also helped to motivate young women to enter the job market.

All these factors taken together – demographic freedom, unrewarding housework, contraception, the divorce laws, professional training and opportunities – highlight women's readiness to push aside the restrictions they feel in their modern feudal roles, a move which certainly cannot be halted. It does however mean that their search for individual solutions, being flexible, qualified, mobile and career-conscious, hits the family with double or triple impact.

There are, furthermore, forces at work driving them back into their traditional positions. If our market economies were really properly established, and every man and woman responsible for his or her own living, the unemployment figures, which are already scandalously high, would multiply. As long as there is mass unemployment and job loss women may be released from direct dependence on marriage but do not gain any independence through working away from home. They remain largely dependent on economic protection even after their husband's support has been withdrawn. This intermediate status between being 'free of' their spouse's support and 'free to' take on a job is clinched by the lure of motherhood. As long as women not only bear children but care for them, feel responsible for them and see them as an essential part of their lives, children will remain welcome 'obstacles' in competition for jobs and a tempting reason for avoiding the rat race.

So the women are tossed back and forth, trying to decide between these contradictory choices. Their quandary is reflected in the way they behave. They escape from home to find a job and back again, trying somehow to reconcile the conflicting conditions and expectations they

face in different phases of their lives by making contradictory decisions. Their environment helps to increase the muddle; they have to put up with divorce courts inquiring why they have neglected their careers, and social services asking why they have not yet fulfilled their maternal duties. They are accused of spoiling their husbands' already difficult professional lives with ambitions of their own. Divorce law and the reality behind it, lack of social safeguards, closed doors in the labour market and the main burden of family chores: this is how individualization looks to young women.

For men the situation is quite different. While women are supposed to abandon the old role of 'looking after others' and search for a new social identity for economic survival, men's roles as independent earners fit in with the old pattern. According to male stereotypes, a 'career man', financial self-sufficiency and masculine behaviour are all rolled into one. Men have never been supported by spouses (wives) and they take the freedom to work for a living for granted. The accompanying background support traditionally is provided by their wives. The joys and duties of fatherhood could always be taken in small doses as a recreation. Fatherhood has not represented an obstacle to having a career; on the contrary, finding work has been mandatory. In other words, all the factors dislodging women from their traditional role are missing on the male side. In the context of men's lives, fatherhood and career, economic independence and family life are not contradictions that have to be fought for against prevailing social circumstances; in fact their compatibility with the male role is prescribed. But this also means that individualization in the sense of making a living in the job market encourages men to behave along traditional masculine lines.

If men then reject the dictates of their gender role, they do so for other reasons. Being fixated on one's career is also contradictory: sacrificing one's energy and time for something one has neither the leisure, the need nor the ability to enjoy, fighting for promotion, exhausting oneself for professional and organizational goals one cannot but must identify with, coping with 'indifference' which is nothing of the kind, and so on. Nevertheless, there is no inherent impetus to change this until the women exert pressure, and this in a double sense. If women join the labour force, men are freed of the yoke of being the *sole* supporter of the family. This reduces the pressure to subordinate oneself to others in the interests of wife and family, and opens the way to new kinds of commitment to both fields. On the other hand the mood at home is probably shifting, as the side of men's lives run by women takes on a new slant, and they get an inkling of how dependent they are in everyday matters and how emotionally reliant. Both these aspects encourage them

to identify less rigidly with the male role and try out new kinds of behaviour.

The more the couples argue, the more the different positions of the sexes become apparent. There are two central 'catalysing' elements, *children* and *economic security*, where conflicts may remain hidden during marriage but will certainly surface if the couple decides to divorce. In making the transition from one earner to two earners the responsibilities and opportunities generally are reshuffled. Putting it bluntly, after divorce the woman is left with the children and without an income, the man with an income and without children.

At first glance the two-earner model does not seem very different from the one-earner one after divorce. The woman has an income and she has the children (according to most divorce judges). But as men and women become more economically equal, either because the woman finds a well-paid job, or the court lays down support payments, or retirement insurance has to be shared out, *fathers become aware that they are at a disadvantage*, both naturally and legally. The woman takes possession of the child as the product of her womb, which we all know belongs to her, biologically and legally. Who owns the ovum and who the sperm is a matter of opinion. The father of the child always remains at the mercy of the woman and her discretion. This is also true, in fact especially true, of all questions involving abortion. As male and female roles increasingly diverge, there is a swing back, and the men who have chosen to renounce career plans to see more of their children come home to an empty nest. The rise (especially in the USA) in the number of cases where fathers have kidnapped their own children after being deprived of them by court decree is a clear sign of this phenomenon.

Individualization may drive men and women apart, but paradoxically it also pushes them back into one another's arms. *As traditions become diluted, the attractions of a close relationship grow.* Everything that one has lost is sought in the other. God went first, or we displaced him. The word 'belief', which once meant 'having experienced', has taken on the rather shabby tones of 'against our better judgement'. As God disappears, so does the chance of going to a priest, so we have nowhere to unload our burden of guilt or sort out our ideas on what is right or wrong. The class system, which at least had its own interpretations for the misery it generated, has evaporated into a fog of statistics and commentaries. Neighbourhoods which flourished on exchanged news and shared memories are dying out because the jobs are elsewhere. One can make new acquaintances, but they tend to revolve around themselves. Or perhaps one should join a club. The range of contacts seems broader and more colourful, but there are too many of them and they remain

superficial, so that our proclaimed interest in one another stops short if more is demanded. Even intimacies can be exchanged like this, fleetingly, as if they were mere handshakes.

All this may keep things moving and open up new 'possibilities', but the variety of relationships is no substitute for a stable primary bond which gives one a sense of identity. As studies have shown, both kinds are necessary: a variety of contacts and lasting intimacy. Happily married housewives often suffer from feeling insecure and isolated. Divorced men who have formed self-help groups find their own loneliness hard to bear even if they have large numbers of social contacts.

The direction in which modern developments are taking us is reflected in the way we idealize love. Glorifying it in the way we do acts as a counterbalance to the losses we feel in the way we live. If not God, or priests, or class, or neighbours, then at least there is still You. And the size of the 'You' is inversely proportional to the emotional void which otherwise seems to prevail.

The implication is that it is less material security and affection than the fear of being alone which keeps families and marriages together. Perhaps the most reliable foundation for marriage, despite all the crises and doubts, is the threat of what would face us without it – loneliness.

What can one conclude from all this? First of all that controversies about the family are relative. The bourgeois nuclear family has been sanctified or cursed, people have either focused only on the crises or preferred a vision of the perfect family arising from the ashes of disappointing alternatives. All these views are based on a false premise. Anyone labelling the family all-good or all-evil ignores the fact that it is neither more nor less than the place where long-standing differences between men and women come to the surface. Within the family or outside it the sexes are confronted with their accumulated contradictions.

In what sense can one talk about escaping from the family? Since the dynamics of the individualization process have infiltrated family life, all forms of living together have started to undergo a radical change. The links once joining biography to family are slackening. A lifelong nuclear family which blends together the biographies of a man and a woman as parents is becoming the exception, whereas alternating between various family and non-family settings, depending on what phase of biography one has reached, is becoming the rule. The family roots behind our biographies are gradually being severed as we move from one phase to the next, and are losing their influence. Everybody takes part in several family and non-family phases, and in this sense increasingly lives his/her own life. Only if one looks at biographies longitudinally, rather than statistically or temporarily, can one detect how individualized family

life has become, reversing traditional priorities. The extent to which we have shaken off family ties can therefore best be seen in the *synopsis* of biographies represented by data on divorce and remarriage and on pre-, inter- and extra-marital forms of living together. Predictably the findings are contradictory in themselves and in what they reveal about the pros and cons of married life. Faced with the alternative between family and no family, a growing number of people are 'deciding' on a third possibility: a mixture of various forms, trying out what seems to fit the current situation.

So during their whole lives most people are faced with the pain and effort involved in trying out different ways of living with one another, the end and outcome of which cannot be predicted. Despite all the 'mistakes' no one can be deterred from trying again.

Seeing discrepancies, having to decide

The differences between the sexes' situations and prospects did not come about yesterday. Nevertheless right up to the 1960s the huge majority of women accepted them as a matter of course. During the past three decades they have attracted much attention, and political efforts have been made to obtain equal rights for women. Awareness of the inequalities was heightened by the initial successes, so we must distinguish between the real inequalities plus the reasons behind them, and public awareness of them. The discrepancies between male and female roles have two sides, which can vary quite independently of one another: the actual, objective state of affairs and our awareness of and attitude towards it. What has opened our eyes to the new situation?

As modernization proceeds, the number of decisions to be made rapidly increases in all spheres of daily life. With a bit of exaggeration one can say 'anything goes'. Who does the dishes, and when, who changes the nappies, does the shopping and pushes the vacuum cleaner is becoming just as unclear as who brings home the bacon, who decides whether to move and whether nocturnal delights in bed may only be enjoyed with the companion one duly wed to share daily life with. Marriage can be separated from sex, and sex from parenthood; parenthood can be multiplied by divorce and the whole thing given further ramifications by living together or apart with several homes and the ever-present possibility of revising one's decisions. This mathematical operation yields a fairly high, if fluctuating, total on one side of the equation, which hints at the variety of more or less home-based shadowy figures concealed behind the firm and upright terms 'marriage' and 'family'.

Everywhere we look in our private lives we see new openings and find ourselves forced to make decisions. The plans and agreements which are necessary can be altered or revoked, and since they often involve a measure of unfairness, have to be justified. The discussions and quarrels, disappointments and mistakes made here reveal how different the risks and chances are for men and women. Transforming given facts into decisions is, seen from a systematic point of view, double-edged. The option to take no decision at all is vanishing; having the chance to choose puts one under pressure to do so. So there is no evading going through the mills of weighing up our feelings, our problems and the possible consequences. But decision-making in itself becomes a sort of consciousness-raiser; one suddenly sees the implications and contradictions which interfere with possible solutions.

This often begins with a quite ordinary decision to move house. The job market demands that employees are mobile irrespective of their family circumstances. Families want exactly the opposite. Thinking a market economy through to the end, people would not have any family ties. Everybody would be independent and free to fit in with company demands to ensure his/her own economic survival. An employee is ideally an individual unhindered by family bonds. Correspondingly, this would be a society without any children unless they could grow up with mobile single fathers and/or mothers.

This contradiction between the pulls of personal relationships and commercial demands could remain concealed only as long as it was taken for granted that marriage for the woman meant renouncing a career, taking over care of the children, and agreeing to move whenever her husband's work demanded it. Now that both want or have to earn a living, they are faced with this predicament. It would be perfectly feasible for the state to offer solutions or assistance, say in the form of a minimum income for all citizens, or social safeguards not linked to jobs, or removing deterrents to joint employment, or modifying the criteria for certain jobs, and so on. There is however no sign of any such official plans. Accordingly the couple has to find private solutions, which under the options available amount to distributing the risks between them. The crux is: who is prepared to give up his/her economic independence and security, the very things which are considered indispensable in modern society? Anyone who gives up a job to move house with a spouse usually has to cope with disadvantages, if not be thrown completely off course professionally.

As well as the decisive matter of professional mobility there are other vital factors to deal with: agreeing on how many children one wants and timing their arrival, deciding on who looks after them; the perennial

problem of dividing up the everyday chores; the one-sidedness of the decision on contraception; finding common ground on abortion or sexual urges; and resisting the onslaught of sexist ads even for margarine. All these issues affect how men and women live together, and in thinking about them one cannot avoid noticing how very different they look from the man's or woman's point of view. Choosing to have children for instance has the opposite repercussions for the potential mother or father. If on top of this marriage is lived as if it were a temporary arrangement – ready-made for divorce, as it were – then the split which both partners fear is simply anticipated and the unjust consequences of all the decisions and arrangements emerge into the open.

If one takes into account all the latest technological advances and the associated breakdown of taboos – subjecting children to special educational or psychological programmes, intervening during gestation, not to mention the science fiction realities of genetic engineering (see chapter 5 below) – then it becomes apparent that what used to be a united family is being divided into different camps, man against woman, mother against child, child against father. Traditional family agreement is breaking down under the pressure of the decisions which have to be taken. It is not that people themselves bear sole responsibility for overloading their families with such problems, as they often fear. Almost all these issues have an impersonal dimension (hassles with child-care for instance are a byproduct of the carefully defended official view that looking after children cannot be combined with professional commitments). This insight is of course not much help, least of all to the children. But it shows how everything affecting the family from outside – the job market, employment system or the law – is bound to invade our private lives in a distorted and foreshortened form. Within the family (and all its alternatives) the systematically produced delusion is fostered that its members are in control and can pull all the strings and levers necessary to reverse any injustices between the partners.

Even the very core of family life, parenthood, is beginning to crumble into its component parts, motherhood and fatherhood. Currently in Germany every tenth child is growing up in a single-parent family, i.e. cared for by single men or women. The number of single-parent families is rising as the number of two-parent families diminishes. Being a single mother is no longer only the result of being 'abandoned' but often a consciously chosen option. It appeals to many women in view of the quarrels they have with the fathers (who are really only needed to make babies and nothing else) as the only way of bringing up the child they so longed for.

Feelings for and commitment to the child vary depending on how far

the individualization process has gone. On the one hand a child is regarded as an impediment to one's own progress (Beck-Gernsheim 1989 and chapter 4 below; Rerrich 1988). It is expensive and exhausting, unpredictable, restricting and likely to throw any carefully drawn up plans into hopeless confusion. As soon as it arrives the child takes over its parents' lives with its needs; its biological rhythms are forced on to them by the power of its vocal cords and the warmth of its smile. And that, from another point of view, is what makes it absolutely irreplaceable.

The child becomes the last remaining, irrevocable, unique primary love object. Partners come and go, but the child stays. Everything one vainly hoped to find in the relationship with one's partner is sought in or directed at the child. If men and women have increasing difficulty in getting on with one another, the child acquires a monopoly on companionship, sharing feelings, enjoying spontaneous physical contact in a way which has otherwise become uncommon and seems risky. Here an atavistic social experience can be celebrated and cultivated which in a society of individuals is increasingly rare, although everyone craves it. Doting on children, pushing them on to the centre of the stage – the poor over-pampered creatures – and fighting for custody during and after divorce are all symptoms of this. The child becomes the final alternative to loneliness, a bastion against the vanishing chances of loving and being loved. It is a private way of 'putting the magic back' into life to make up for general disenchantment. The birth-rate may be declining but children have never been more important. Very often there is only one; the effort involved precludes having any more. But those who imagine that the (economic) costs deter people from bringing children into the world are simply the victims of their own profit-and-loss thinking.

The last vestiges of the Middle Ages, the feudal gender roles discussed above, which industrial society needed and preserved, and which seemed natural, are melting away. It is important to recognize the dimensions of this change. Psychologists and psychotherapists who attempt to understand their clients' current misery only in terms of their personal childhood are missing the point. When people are confronted with having to live in ways which are inherently contradictory, and have no precedents for their own lives, it is misleading to focus exclusively on what they went through as children in the search for the roots of their ills. When the sexes shake off their feudal roles, the problems they encounter as lovers, couples and parents have a great deal to do with the inequalities affecting every sphere of their lives. It is time the psychologists tackled this aspect and modified their approach to take account of these dimensions.

The end of the individual, or a renaissance of limitless subjectivity?

In the debate on the death of the individual, what role does the loss of feudal gender stereotypes in an industrial society play? Are our inner lives being revealed only to be taken over by the booming psycho-business, religious sects and political fanatics? Are we losing the last private corners of our selves and turning into tailor-made consumers prepared to agree to everything on offer?

At first glance, but only then, it does seem as if the social drive of the 1970s has foundered in a mire of subjectivity and narcissism:

As far and as near as one can see, there is a lot of hard labour involved in the everyday realities of relationships and commitments inside and outside marriage and the family, burdened by living in ways quite incompatible with the future. In their totality, the changes which are coming about cannot any longer be regarded as private phenomena. What is gradually piling up is a series of attempts to patch up relations between the sexes within that highly touchy area, the private sphere, irrespective of its form and despite repeated setbacks, and to find a new kind of solidarity based on *shared* and *admitted* oppression, an approach which may get to the roots of society's difficulties better than any strategies worked out by theorists with their heads stuck in the clouds. (Muschg 1976: 31)

The individual has often been pronounced dead and buried. After two hundred years of cultural appraisal and ideological analysis it still haunts our minds and writings but only as 'the subjective factor'. This is the conclusion reached by Theodor Adorno. Under the heading 'Simple Simon' he notes:

In the midst of standardised and organised human units the individual persists. He is even protected and gains monopoly value. But he is in reality no more than the function of his own uniqueness, an exhibition like the fetuses that once drew the wonderment and laughter of children. Since he no longer has an independent economic existence, his character begins to contradict his objective social role. Just because of this contradiction he is tended in nature reserves, enjoyed in idle contemplation. (Adorno 1978: 135)

This view is contradicted by what happened in the 1970s and 1980s, which has still not been thoroughly understood, the renaissance of a quite unpredictably influential subjectivity.¹¹ The various little groups

and circles which sprang up on all kinds of issues but were not able to stand for long on their shaky organizational legs were the ones which put the themes of an endangered world on the social agenda, against the resistance of the established parties and faculties and against the massive weight of billion-dollar industrial investments. It does not seem an exaggeration to say that ordinary citizens have taken over the initiative in deciding on which themes are important. The steps up the ladder to political acceptance are: persecuted, ridiculed, excluded, that's what we've always said, party programme, government policy. It has happened this way with women's issues, environmental issues and peace issues. Of course these are only words, sometimes intentions, often just friendly noises. But at least on the verbal level the victory is almost too good to be true.

Maybe a lot of this is packaging, opportunism and only occasionally genuine rethinking. Actions and facts are largely left untouched. Yet it remains true: the themes of the future now on everybody's lips did not result from the farsightedness of our rulers or debates in parliament, and certainly did not emerge from the cathedrals of power in business and science. They have been put on the agenda against the resistance of institutionalized ignorance by the efforts of often muddled, moralizing and doubt-ridden splinter groups; democratic subversion has won a very unlikely victory, and that in Germany, of all places, where a long-standing faith in the authorities has resulted in the population meekly fitting in with all kinds of mad and murderous official policies.

Just a sop to battered left-wing bourgeois intellectuals? Blithely reinterpreting a retreat as a revolt? No. After all no one is suggesting that things are getting better, that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Where is this 'new person' who writes poetry in the morning, manufactures pins in the afternoon and goes fishing in the evening? Anyone interpreting the thematic shifts and changes in public awareness over the past two decades exclusively from the boy scout/class struggle point of view is bound to remain trapped in his/her rigid premises.

Adorno explained the vanishing of the individual with the loss of his independent economic existence. This is exactly where the error lies. Within the welfare state the individual has acquired, in historical terms, a new economic status. He is not primarily an employee in a specific business but a participant in the labour market, organized and buffered by collective bargaining and social safeguards as a reward for his qualifications and mobility. The peculiar result is a social being on his/her own who nevertheless voluntarily adapts to social standards; this is certainly not the resurrection of the recently departed bourgeois individual. Nor is it the delusions of the proletariat deceiving itself about

its class role and lured on by the charms of capitalism. Putting it succinctly, and perhaps too simply, this social being is the stage-manager of its own biography condemned at all turns to free choice.

In an individualized society each of us must learn, on pain of remaining at a permanent disadvantage, to conceive of him/herself as the central pivot round which life revolves, a planning office for his/her own abilities, preferences, relationships and so on. If we write our own biographies, 'society' must be seen as a variable which we can manipulate. No doubt the shortage of university places is a problem affecting thousands of others, but how should I go about getting a place for medicine despite my low marks? The social determinants which impinge on one's own life must be processed as 'environmental variables' and ameliorated or overcome by 'creative measures'.

What is demanded is vigorous activity in everyday life, which puts oneself at its centre, selects and opens up opportunities and so enables one to plan and make meaningful decisions about one's own future. Behind the intellectual shadow-boxing we all indulge in, we must develop a self-centred attitude if we want to survive, turning relations between the world and ourselves upside down, so to speak, so that it provides us with the openings we need.

Coupled with this interest in 'the individual solution' there is however considerable pressure to conform and behave in a standardized way; the means which encourage individualism also induce sameness. This applies in every field, the market, money, law, mobility, education and so on, in its own way. The situation for the individual is deeply dependent on the job market; it is so to speak a perfected version of our dependency reaching into the deepest recesses of our lives. This is the outcome when society applies market principles to everyone, with only a few exceptions still relying on traditional support systems (for instance marriage).

The fact that we are under pressure simultaneously to become individuals and adopt standardized strategies does not adequately explain our predicament, for the requirements of the new job market are quite new. They span the separate areas of our private life and our public position. In making our own biographies we have to let the firm, the office, the business, the factory into our private homes. The situations which arise are contradictory because double-faced: individual decisions are heavily dependent on outside influences. What looks like the outside world becomes the inside of an individual biography. So decisions affecting our private existence turn out to be increasingly and obviously predetermined by circumstances and decisions outside our reach. We are confronted by risks, friction and difficulties which we cannot possibly deal with. They encompass more or less every aspect of public life the

politicians debate about: the so-called 'holes in the social safety net', wage negotiations and working conditions, fending off red tape, providing education, solving traffic problems, protecting the environment and so on.

To put it another way, our autobiography is increasingly being written by outsiders, our private decisions taken out of our hands. It is true that individual choices and actions or omissions guide people along certain paths in life and assign them the corresponding place in society; such choices could include attending a certain school, passing or failing an exam, choosing this or that career. The point is however that even these apparently free and private decisions and ways of behaving are tied up with political developments and public expectations. Look at education, where decisions at the top have a profound effect on individual lives, either because underprivileged groups are suddenly considered worth supporting and given scholarships or because this assistance is withdrawn and used to encourage elites. The same applies in family matters and the divorce law, tax legislation and pensions which encourage or discourage marriage or remarriage, depending on financial status.

The more dependent people are on such official decisions, the more their biographies become susceptible to crises. The key to making a living lies in employment. Being a suitable employee means finding the right training. Anyone denied access to one or the other faces social and material oblivion. So providing apprenticeships for young people is vital if they are to gain a place in society. At the same time economic or demographic fluctuations can cause entire generations to drift towards the margins of society. In other words, official decisions on who is to be supported or neglected, made according to the needs of the market, can result in a whole generation of individuals, a peer group, being prevented from gaining a foothold. This is also revealed in the inadequate benefits paid by the government, which is expected to compensate whole age groups for the shortage of opportunities in the employment field.

Official thinking and regulations still run along 'standard biography' lines, although this concept is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Social insurance payments for instance depend on criteria which few people can meet in these days of mass unemployment and which fail to correspond with developments within the family and between the sexes. The concept of a 'family bread-winner' has been displaced by a family in which the roles of earner and provider, care-giver and child-rearer are shared and alternated. The place of the 'intact' family has been taken over by a huge variety of 'broken homes'. A growing number of single

fathers is faced with discrimination by divorce laws committed to a maternal monopoly on raising children, and so on.

A society departing from the central axes along which industrial society runs – social classes, nuclear family, sex roles – is faced with a system of social services and administrative and political institutions which are taking over these functions as the industrial epoch nears its end. They intervene by laying down norms, dispensing approval or punishment for anyone living in a way which ‘deviates’ from the official standards, assuming certainties which now apply only to a small proportion of the population. In this way official planning contrasts more and more sharply with real life and the edifice of industrial society threatens to slip into normative legalism.

As a result a new kind of social subjectivity has grown up in which private and political issues are intermingled and augmented. In this sense individualization does not mean individuation, but is a hybrid of consumer consciousness and self-confidence. This self-confidence, which can become life’s elixir, flourishes on having to search for personal solutions, cope with uncertainties, acknowledge one’s doubts, accept inconsistencies and deal with them with cheerful cynicism. It is as if thousands of Kafkaesque characters were coming to life, quite ordinary, mundane figures prepared to swerve round the hindrances they meet like fish in an aquarium.

And yet it is no exaggeration to say that in the confusion between the sexes, and in initiatives against pollution and for peace some kind of enlightenment seems to be reviving, in a form far removed from high-brow philosophizing and well suited to everyday life. Is it too big a word for such a small shoot? If it is true that being enlightened can include carving out one’s own small corner from the mass of everyday commitments, then this little plant called self-awareness, carefully tended in one’s own private biographical garden, is like a wild or forgotten cousin of that highly bred orchid ‘enlightenment’ which is nowadays usually given the prefix ‘post-’. There is no need to deny that people are ‘dancing around the golden self’, or going astray in the jungle of personal growth offers. Nevertheless it would be foolish of us to ignore the new impulses, even if they are often tentative or incoherent, and are trying to express themselves in unsuitable and outworn clichés.

These experiences do not exist at all according to the prevailing theories, indeed cannot exist, and yet they do. We are dealing here with dimensions which for one person may be the most significant and credible experience he/she has ever had, and for another sheer nonsense. Attempting to discuss them implies standing on the boundary between two quite different areas of experience; while in one person’s view

explanations are entirely unnecessary, in another's they are absolutely ridiculous, and any attempt to convey what consciousness-raising entails would seem inexcusably abstract. What is the point in talking about something one cannot prove exists? This is where the dilemma lies: while a new chance seems to be offering itself for us to understand ourselves and our potential in this world, and is gradually gaining ground, some people think discussing it superfluous, and others find discussion impossible.

In this sense, at least, talking about the 'age of narcissism' (Lasch 1977) is justified, but it is a distorting and misleading label, as it underestimates the scope and effect of the energies which have been unleashed. Largely involuntarily and driven by social changes, individuals are entering a searching and explorative phase. They want to try out and 'experience' (in the active sense of the word) new ways of living to counteract the dominance of roles (man, woman, family, career) which are becoming increasingly irrelevant. They want to express themselves freely and give in to impulses they used to suppress. They allow themselves to enjoy life here and now and not just in the distant future, and to cultivate a conscious delight in the good things in life. They are coming to regard their needs as rights to be defended if necessary against official dictates and obligations. They are developing a feeling for freedom, are highly aware of having to protect their lives against encroachment from outside and ready to become socially and politically active whenever their private territory is endangered, often ignoring the established forms and forums for articulating and organizing political action.

Such experiences are the starting-point for a new ethic based on 'one's duty to oneself' – and not as a solipsistic misunderstanding but as an effort to integrate the individual with the social in a new way which takes account of altering, projective social identities. Casting off standard patterns in one's own life and ideas becomes a permanent habit, an unending personal learning process. Instead of the old fixed images there is a new picture of mankind which specifically includes the possibility of metamorphosis, of personal development and growth. Defining ourselves primarily in terms of our social roles is in this sense nothing but a hypothesis and hangover from the past which we have not yet quite grown out of.

The untrod tracks to be followed here in a loose crowd of fellow individuals lead in exactly the opposite direction to that in which enlightenment has pointed so far. It is no longer a matter of understanding natural laws, developing technologies, building up production, increasing material wealth, altering the economic, social and political circumstances and only after all that finally liberating men and women from

their drudgery. Instead the last in the line is brashly pushed to the front: develop your own personality, and this will have a lasting effect on your marriage, family, work colleagues, career, officialdom and the way we all treat our resources and our world. The central problem remains: how can you develop your own potential while remaining a social being, and what kind of society would enable us to take these steps towards freedom?

FROM LOVE TO LIAISON

*Changing relationships in an
individualized society*

Pop songs still sing the praises of eternal love. According to recent surveys, living with someone is still regarded as the ideal, as the place where one finds closeness, warmth and affection, an antithesis to the cold concrete wastes outside.

But at the same time there are deep cracks across the picture of the family. On stage and screen, in novels and tongue-tied autobiographies, wherever one turns there is the sound of battle. The battle between the sexes is the central drama of our times; business is flourishing for marriage counsellors, the family courts are booming, divorce figures are high and even in everyday life among very normal families one can hear someone quietly wondering, 'Why, oh why is living together so difficult?'

The way to find an answer is suggested in a remark by Norbert Elias: 'Often enough one cannot understand what is happening today if one does not know what happened yesterday' (1985: viii). So first of all we shall take a look at the past. It will show us that where people gradually cast off the commitments, dictates and taboos of premodern society they began to put new hopes in love, but equally found themselves in new predicaments. The combination of these two factors produced the explosive mixture we know as contemporary love.

Love becomes more important than ever

Severing traditional ties

Comparisons between premodern and modern society always emphasize that human lives used to be determined by a multitude of traditional

ties – from family business and village community, homeland and religion to social status and gender role. Such ties always have a double face (as discussed in chapter 3 below).

On the one hand they rigorously restrict the individual's choices, on the other they offer familiarity and protection, a stable footing and certain identity. Where they exist, a person is never alone but integrated into a larger unit. Take religion, for example:

The fact that our ancestors were bound to Christian beliefs . . . generally meant that their little world, their microcosm, was tied to another, larger world, the macrocosm . . . The result of this bond between microcosm and macrocosm, sheltering hundreds and thousands of little worlds within the unifying greater world, which in turn, according to Christian belief, rested in God's all-encompassing embrace, was not just that even the lowliest person never fought in vain or was left to fend for himself. It also must have given our ancestors an emotional stability which could not be easily thrown off-balance even by the worst ragings of pestilence, famine and war. (Imhof 1984: 23)

With the transition to modern society, changes took place on many levels and they brought about a far-reaching individualization process, cutting people off from their traditional ties, beliefs and social relationships. This process began, as Weber explained in his *Protestant Ethic* (1985), with the teachings of the Reformation, which cancelled any certainty of salvation and dismissed people into a deep inner isolation. This process has continued on many levels over the succeeding centuries; it can be seen in our complex economic system with its intricate infrastructure, and in increased secularization, urbanization, personal mobility and so on. More and more people have been affected by it, and it has reached unique dimensions in the present. As a result each of us is increasingly both expected and forced to *lead our own life* outside the bounds of any specific community or group.

For the individual this severing of traditional ties means being freed of previous constraints and obligations. At the same time, however, the support and security offered by a close-knit society begin to disappear. As secularization gains ground, as new living patterns emerge, as value systems and religions compete for people's minds, many landmarks which previously provided orientation, meaning and a personal anchoring place in a larger universe have vanished. The consequence, so often described by philosophers and historians, sociologists and psychologists, is a profound loss of inner stability. With the 'disenchantment of the world' (Weber 1985) comes a new state of 'inner homelessness', of

being all alone in the vastness of the cosmos (Berger, Berger and Kellner 1973: *passim*). C. G. Jung describes how the relationship between mankind and nature has changed:

Our world has become dehumanised to the same degree as our scientific understanding has grown. Mankind feels lost in the cosmos because it is no longer bound to nature and has lost its emotional 'subconscious identity' with natural phenomena. These have gradually lost their symbolic content. Thunder is no longer the voice of a wrathful God and lightning no longer his punishing spear . . . No longer do voices speak to people from stones, plants and animals, and people themselves no longer speak to the latter in the belief that they would be understood. Their contact with nature has been lost and with it the powerful emotional energy which this symbolic connection once produced. (Quoted in Imhof 1984: 174-5)

One can call this the initial phase in the individualization process. In the course of centuries traditional forms of interpretation and belief, in brief the socially prescribed *answers*, have gradually been worn away. The next stage starts when the individual is confronted with a range of new *questions*; this is particularly evident in the second half of the twentieth century, largely because there are so many new lifestyles and educational opportunities to choose from. The standard of living in the lower strata of the population improved in the 1950s and 1960s to a degree described as 'spectacular, comprehensive and a revolution in social history' (Mooser 1983: 286). Where earlier generations often knew nothing but the daily struggle to survive, a monotonous cycle of poverty and hunger, nowadays broad sections of the population have sufficient income to take advantage of a whole range of possibilities on how to live their lives. Another factor is the spread of educational opportunities which began in the 1960s, freeing thousands of young people from the need to earn money or wear themselves out physically and mentally from an early age. They have gained access to their youth in the psychological sense, a waiting period and moratorium (Hornstein 1985). And they are free to learn subjects beyond the demands of everyday life, opening their minds to new areas of experience, different traditions and ways of thinking.

The consequence of such structural changes in society is that for the first time large numbers of people are in a position to wonder about matters not directly connected with the daily grind of earning a living. At the very moment when life becomes somewhat easier, questions on the meaning of it all can develop a new urgency. These are the old philosophical themes which now start to enter our private lives: 'Who

am I? Where did I come from? And where am I going?' These questions challenge us to find answers, and turn into a form of stress, indeed sometimes a kind of panic. The old ways of interpreting the world have become very threadbare, and each individual finds him/herself alone with new doubts. Not everybody can find answers, and what remains are anxieties and a sense of insecurity not so much about how to survive but about what lies behind our existence, the meaning of it all.

According to the psychotherapist Viktor E. Frankl, 'leading a meaningless life' is the predominant malady of the present day. We are 'no longer, as in Freud's day, confronted with sexual, but rather with existential frustration. And today's typical patient does not suffer so much from an inferiority complex as in Adler's day as from a deep sense of meaninglessness, coupled with emptiness . . . an existential vacuum' (1984: 11).

Sources of personal stability

In the eighteenth century the prevailing living pattern was not the family in the modern sense but rather a large household covering an 'extended family' which formed an economic unit. Its first commandment was to make a living and ensure the survival of the next generation. Under such conditions there was little room for personal inclinations, feelings or motives. Choosing a spouse and getting married was primarily an economic necessity, with little attention being given to individual compatibility (or incompatibility).

[For the farmer] 'personal happiness' . . . consisted of marrying a woman with whom he worked, who bore him healthy children and protected him from debt with her dowry. One cannot dispute that this is also a kind of happiness. Love as such, however, linked to the spouse's personality and independent of this working basis, had almost no chance to develop. (Rosenbaum 1982: 76-7)

As research in social history shows, with the transition to a modern society came a far-reaching transformation. What used to be a team sharing the work has turned into a couple sharing emotions. The advent of the bourgeois family brought with it 'a sentimental occupation of the intrafamilial area', introducing privacy and intimacy, the characteristics of our modern image of the family (Weber-Kellermann 1974: 107).

It is probably no coincidence that this occurred in a phase in which traditional ties were beginning to slacken. Life within the family, where feelings and commitments are now concentrated, obviously counteracts

and compensates for the other guidelines and social certainties which gradually got lost as society moved on towards its current form. Because people felt increasingly disoriented their longings for a family grew. It became a refuge in which inner homelessness seemed more bearable, a 'haven' in a world which had become strange and inhospitable (see Lasch 1977). Historically speaking this is a new form of identity which has emerged, which one could perhaps best describe as *person-related stability*. As more old-fashioned bonds lose their meaning, those in the immediate vicinity become indispensable in helping us to find our place, subconsciously and consciously, in the world, and to maintain our physical and mental well-being.

To illustrate this empirically, here is one result from a study into the connection between social support and chronic illness. It was shown that having an intimate and trusting relationship with another person provides vital emotional protection and makes any necessary adaptation to new conditions much easier:

Even if . . . the chances of social contact for a person . . . are considerably reduced by, say, having to withdraw from the world of work, this does not necessarily mean one becomes increasingly susceptible to depression, as long as one keeps a 'confidant'. The quality of this specific relationship to a person whom one can trust completely, whose understanding one can count on and to whom one can turn with personal problems at any time, seems to be a special protective factor. (Badura 1981: 23)

Love and marriage as inner anchors

If our emotional and mental stability depends on the close support of others, then love acquires a new significance as the very heart of our lives. It is an ideal combining romantic and permanent love growing from the close emotional bond between two partners and giving their lives substance and significance. My partner means the world to me, and the sun and moon and all the stars as well. Take a classic love poem, Friedrich Rückert's *Du bist mein Mond*:¹

You are my moon and I your earth;
You say you revolve around me.
I don't know; I only know I glow
In my nights because of you [. . .]

You are my soul, you are my heart,
You are my joy, you are my pain.
You are the world in which I live,
The heaven in which I soar,

O you my grave in which
I laid my cares to rest forever!

You are calm, you are peace,
You are heaven granted to me;
Your loving makes me value mine,
Your gaze has transfigured me,
You let me transcend myself,
My good spirit, my better self!

This exemplifies what we mean by person-related stability based on romantic love. Its inner core can be described as follows. The more other reference points have slipped away, the more we direct our craving to give our lives meaning and security towards those we love. More and more we tend to pin our hopes on another person, this man or that woman. He or she is supposed to hold us upright and steady in a world whirling round faster and faster. Soberly condensed into one sentence by Pfeil, ‘“romantic marital love” is a virtual necessity in this world’ (in Preuss 1985: 37). Benard and Schlaffer put it more vividly:

Perhaps it used to be easier. People believed in the church and the state and they believed one would go to heaven if one could only be a good wife and mother. Now that God, if not dead, is at least out of town, only people are left as sources of existential meaning. For most people the work-place is . . . not a really absorbing or satisfying place. What remains is the family, relationships with people one is willing to commit oneself to. Understanding, communicating, caring have shrunk down to the small radius of close relationships. Without them one is reduced to the frosty interactions of office life. Time passes . . . for what? The question of what life means becomes more bearable if one has another person or persons as reference point to help find one’s bearings. It is then possible to set up a civilized island for oneself in an empty cosmos. (Benard and Schlaffer 1981: 279)

Against this background marriage also takes on a new meaning, precisely the one we know well. Its basic pattern has been traced by sociologists and psychologists. Marriage has become a central factor in the ‘social design of reality’ (Berger and Kellner 1965). In living together a man and a woman build up a universe of shared attitudes, opinions and expectations covering everything from trivial day-to-day matters to the great events in world politics. This develops in verbal or non-verbal dialogue, in shared habits and experiences, in a continuous interplay between one’s other half and oneself. The shared image of the world is continuously being negotiated, shifted, replaced, questioned and reaffirmed.

The fundamental theme behind marriage is not just the social structure of our lives; it is also increasingly a matter of *identity*. This is the aspect revealed particularly by psychological studies of marriage: in seeking an exchange on many levels with our partner we are also seeking ourselves. We are searching for the history of our life; we want to reconcile ourselves with hurts and disappointments, plan our goals and share our hopes. We mirror ourselves in the other, and our image of a You is also an idealized image of I: 'You are an image of my secret life' (Schellenbaum 1984: 142ff), 'my better self' (Rückert). Marriage is becoming an institution 'specialized in the development and maintenance of the individual self' (Ryder 1979: 365). Love and identity are becoming closely interwoven.

So in the initial stage, falling in love:

Being in love is the search for one's own destiny . . . a search for one's own self, to the very bottom. This is achieved through the other person, in dialogue with her, in the encounter where each person seeks recognition in the other, in accepting, in understanding, in the confrontation and liberation of what was and of what is. (Alberoni 1983)

And equally in the intimate exchanges of a couple who have been together for years:

The past with its unsolved questions and sorrows is set free. Or rather the past and the present which everyone is made up of are on the lookout for answers to the question 'Who am I and why am I here?' And what one looks for above all is someone else who wants to hear the questions, as if one can only understand oneself if someone else is listening and as if one's history can only become complete in someone else's ear . . . So the image each partner has of him/herself and the world is born and confirmed, corrected and changed in talking together . . . the question of personal identity is constantly being discussed, 'Who am I and who are you?' (Wachinger 1986: 70-1)

Marriage counsellors, and even more so the divorce figures, can confirm that this dialogue which is sought so passionately at the beginning often falters or dries up, hesitates, is blocked by silent taboos, interrupted or completely cut off. Why does this happen? That is the question to be looked into in the following sections. We shall trace how both phenomena – the growing longing and the frequent failure – have a common root. Simplified into one sentence, the disappointments inherent in our idea of love just as much as the hopes we invest in it are an outcome of our modern concern with being ourselves.

Love is more difficult than ever

The pros and cons of a life of one's own

The old loyalties within premodern society were framed by strict rules and regulations on how to behave. As these have gradually been shed, life has come to seem less confined, with more room to choose and more possibilities to choose from; in many ways it is less restricted and more flexible than before (for an exemplary study of this, see Berger, Berger and Kellner 1973). But this change also implies that each of us is confronted with having to take decisions on numerous levels, from the mundane matters of which resort and which make of car, to long-term matters like how many children and which kind of school. We are expected to be responsible citizens and critical consumers, price-conscious and good to the environment, up-to-date on nuclear energy and the right dosage of the right medicine. As analysts of modern times have noted, 'living with an oversupply of options' (Riesman 1981: 123) often overtaxes the individual.

What has so far been overlooked is the fact that when an individual does not live alone, but with someone else, the stress factors multiply; all the issues which affect the partner directly or indirectly – which television programme, which excursion, which furniture, which routine – have to be fed into the decision-making process as ideas and wishes, habits and norms of *two different* people. The results are predictable: *the more complex the decisions are, the more likely they are to lead to quarrels.*

The likelihood that the couple will disagree is further increased by the fact that on the reverse side of being free to choose one comes up against new restrictions. In one sense everyone is free to plan and decide, and in another the logic of individualism gets in the way. As the family as an economic unit is gradually breaking down, new ways of making a living are emerging which depend on the labour market and the individual. How individuals find jobs depends on the laws of the market – flexibility and mobility, for instance, or competition and career – which give very little consideration to private commitments. Those who do not obey these laws risk their jobs, incomes and social standing.

Here we can see a series of structural developments within society, the effect of which is particularly obvious in post-war Germany. Mobility in all its forms – geographical, social, daily moves between job and family, work and leisure, training, work-place and retirement – continues to force people away from their established ties (to neighbours, colleagues, local customs and so on). Similarly, many people find that their

education cuts them off from the milieu in which they grew up. Having achieved a professional qualification means one has more chances on the job market; this pattern of achievement, which of course affects whole groups of people, nonetheless forces each one to plan and decide on his/her own behalf and take personal responsibility for success or failure.

This external description covers only some of the changes involved. The logic behind individualization steers basically adaptable biographies in certain predetermined directions, and therefore has inner consequences for those involved. It leads to a battle over 'space of one's own' in the literal and figurative sense, in a search for oneself and for fulfilling one's own potential. The fact that these words crop up all the time in interviews, therapy and literature does not imply we are all suffering from an outbreak of collective egoism. In fact the talk of finding oneself and doing one's own thing precisely reflects the pressures affecting everyone in their normal lives – demands to be mobile, get educated, find a job – and reaching deep into the innermost recesses of their heart and minds. As a result these themes are now appearing *en masse* in individual biographies in the guise of private problems. When life turns into a 'do-it-yourself biography' (Berger, Berger and Kellner 1973: *passim*), discovering your own potential is 'not just a new shining star at the zenith of our value system but a cultural answer to new challenges in life' (Baden-Württemberg Provincial Government 1983: 32) or, in succinct form, a social must.

The question immediately arises: how much room is there left in a do-it-yourself biography with all its pressures and restrictions for a partner with his/her own plans and problems? How can the other person avoid becoming an additional hindrance, if not a disruptive factor? To what extent is it possible to share one's life if social circumstances compel one to concentrate on one's own interests? Situations are bound to arise in which, despite the very best intentions, two monads who instead of building up a shared universe have to defend their own separate universes end up arguing, sometimes in a civilized tone, and sometimes bitterly, with no holds barred.

From this viewpoint it is intriguing to compare the new ideas about love, marriage and intimate relationships recommended in self-help books. The trend, presented in all kinds of variations, some mild, some crass, is to give self-assertion top priority, not just in the office and the bus but at home too. The magic formula is known as authenticity. The much-quoted postulates of gestalt therapy, reproduced on countless greetings cards, coffee mugs and posters pinned over beds, put the message most clearly:

I do my thing, and you do your thing.
 I am not in this world to live up to your expectations
 And you are not in this world to live up to mine.
 You are you and I am me, and if by chance we find each other it's
 beautiful
 If not it can't be helped.

(Perls and Stevens 1969: 4)

Quite a contrast to love poems like Rückert's! Most self-help books do not go that far, admittedly, but they point in the same direction. Where they used to call for adaptation they now recommend conscious separation. What they teach is constructive disagreement: 'saying no in love' (Schellenbaum 1984). Therapy tries to encourage the view that 'it is not at all desirable for two people who love each other to be *one* heart and *one* soul' (Preuss 1985; emphasis in the original). And they recommend 'laying down as many aspects of daily life together as possible in a marriage contract', from the right to 'personal freedom' all the way to 'arrangements in case of separation' (Partner 1984).

Phrases like these reflect the basic pattern behind individualization applied to living with a partner. It is an attempt to find a way of enabling independent individuals with their own aims and rights to perform the difficult balancing act of living their own lives and yet sharing them with someone else. One cannot help suspecting, however, that this fundamental dilemma is sometimes being treated with remedies which tend to enlarge the problem rather than solve it. If we are told that 'arguing binds people together' (Bach and Wyden 1969), how often is the result the desired creative tension, and how often, to borrow the up-beat title of one such book, 'creative divorce' (Krantzler 1974)?

Should such negotiations break down, according to a different book, there can be a 'successful divorce', – by no means to be thought of as a failure – but one which 'has been pre-considered in terms of personal upward mobility, with stress laid not nearly so much on what is being left, and may therefore be lost, as on what lies ahead that may be incorporated into a new and better image'. After the successful divorce, this behaviour-modification book tells us, 'Little Affairs' may be useful . . . The person with a 'Positive Self Image' need not worry about promiscuity. All these affairs will be 'meaningful' because they will all contribute to the 'self's reservoir of experiences'. (Ehrenreich and English 1979: 276)

If love fails again, if this hope is extinguished, then what you must do is find a new one. The motto is 'How To Be Your Own Best Friend' (Ehrenreich and English: 176). Is that the only remaining hope? Does

the individualization which induced our romantic longings necessarily and always lead to a post-romantic world?

In the post-romantic world, where the old ties no longer bind, all that matters is *you*: you can be what you *want* to be; you *choose* your life, your environment, even your appearance and your emotions . . . The old hierarchies of protection and dependency no longer exist, there are only free contracts, freely terminated. The marketplace, which long ago expanded to include the relations of production, has now expanded to include *all* relationships. (Ehrenreich and English: 276)

It is not only that everyone's life has become more flexible and adaptable; one can choose to live with someone else in a wide variety of ways. Pre-industrial society laid down strict rules for couples to ensure their economic survival. Marriage was teamwork, with men and women having separate spheres and children being welcomed as helping hands and heirs. And nowadays? We have an endless series of questions to answer. Should the wife work outside the home, yes or no, full- or part-time? Should the husband aim straight up the career ladder, or share in the housework or even stay at home as a househusband? Are children a good idea, and if yes, when and how many? If yes, who is going to look after them, if no, who is responsible for contraception? It is becoming increasingly likely that sooner or later, in some respect or another, the partners are going to differ. And this will not necessarily be for personal reasons, unwillingness to compromise or sheer bloody-mindedness. It will be because their biographies as employees face them with clear limits and prevent them from structuring their lives as they might wish if they are to avoid difficulties in their work-places.

As well as all the substantial decisions to be made, there is the time aspect to consider. Every decision can be revoked in the course of a marriage. In fact decisions have to be revocable so that other outside demands can be met. The individualized biography assumes that everyone can update and optimize his/her decisions, and these in turn are affected by the new psychological approach expecting everyone to be open to new challenges, inquisitive and willing to learn. Such postulates are no doubt a great help in warding off the mute indifference which can befall couples trapped in a dreary marital routine. They do, however, have their dangers. What happens if one spouse is quite content with the way things are, while the other is not, or when both want to change but in different directions?

There are couples who both once agreed that it would be best for her to devote herself completely to the family. After a few years, however, bored by the monotony and isolation of domestic life, she wants

to go back to work. Her husband, quite happy with the familiar pattern, feels endangered by the change and insists on his customary rights. Or take the example of couples who got married in the 1960s with conventional ideas of fidelity and a few years later read about 'open marriage' as an ideal. What if one of them now wants to hold on to the security of familiar habits, while the other longs to sample the attractions of novelty? Who is in the right?

Sometimes no one is. Right and wrong turn into vague categories as soon as there is no longer a shared standard but just the standards of *two* biographies affected by different expectations and restraints, and on top of all that a rapid change of stereotypes. There is more and more space available for subjective interpretations into which people's wishes can flow, and often both spouses have them, if of different kinds. And the outcome is a huge number of married people feeling misunderstood, injured and betrayed.

Man versus woman

In classic feminist writings the hope was often expressed that the sexes would be able to discover new and better ways of getting on with one another as soon as women were no longer repressed. The assumption was: love is possible only between free and equal partners. Here is an extract from the famous *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft:

It is vain to expect virtue from women till they are in some degree independent of men; nay it is vain to expect that strength of natural affection which would make them good wives and mothers. Whilst they are absolutely dependent on their husbands they will be cunning, mean and selfish, and the men who can be gratified by the fawning fondness of spaniel-like affection have not much delicacy, for love is not to be bought . . . Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives . . . We should then love them with true affection, because we should learn to respect ourselves. (In Rossi 1974: 64 and 71)

Who could honestly say that these proud hopes have been fulfilled? The question is of course why did things turn out so differently? To find out we have to look more closely at the modernization process as it has affected men and women. The general assumption behind debates on modern changes has been that the transition from old-fashioned to

modern living has helped to free the individual from outdated duties and bonds. If one compares this idea with research findings in social history and women's studies it proves to be both right and wrong. More precisely, it covers only half the truth, for it ignores the 'other' half of humanity. At the beginning of our modern times individualization remained an exclusive privilege of the men.

This is exemplified in Johann Gottlieb Fichte's natural law (1796), where the relation of the female to the male is described as follows:

She who surrenders her personality, while maintaining her human dignity, of necessity gives her husband everything she has . . . The least important consequence is that she transfers her fortune and all her rights to him and lives with him. Only in his company, only in his eyes and his affairs does she live or play an active role. She has ceased to lead the life of an individual; her life has become a part of his (as is accurately shown by the fact that she takes on her husband's name). (in Gerhard 1978: 146)

The American historian C. N. Degler sums up as follows:

The idea of individualism in the West has a long history . . . John Locke and Adam Smith celebrated the principles of individual rights and actions, but the individuals they had in mind were men. On the whole women were not then thought of as anything but supportive assistants – necessary to be sure, but not individuals in their own right. The individual as a conception in Western thought has always assumed that behind each man – that is, each individual – was a family. But the members of that family were not individuals, except the man, who was by law and custom its head. (Degler 1980: 189)

One characteristic of the modernization process is precisely the fact that standard male and female biographies initially develop in quite different directions. During the nineteenth century the range of a woman's life was not broadened, but on the contrary restricted to the interior space offered by home. Providing emotional as well as physical support for the other members of the family became her special task – listening to her husband and his worries, mediating in family quarrels, in short doing what nowadays is called 'the emotional work' or 'caring for the relationship'.

The more the husband had to venture out into the hostile world, the more his wife was expected to remain 'whole and beautiful and pure' to preserve 'within a tranquil and peaceful setting an inner mutual serenity' (Riehl 1861: 60). In a world increasingly run on rational lines, she was supposed to step in as the emotional counterpart, offering him an oasis of calm and affection.

The charming world of women is to be a fortunate quiet oasis, a source of the poetry of life, a remnant of paradise. And we do not want that to be snatched away by any 'women's issue' or any frustrated blue-stocking or overeducated economist. We want to preserve it . . . as much as possible even for the poor and very poor 'worker', with God's help. (Natusius 1871; in Lange and Bäumer 1901: 69)

What attracts us in women is the emotional warmth, the naivety and freshness, where they are superior to precocious and prematurely over-worked men, and the attraction they exert on men because of these qualities would be irretrievably lost if their most charming aspects were destroyed by education. (Appelius, Vice-Presidential address to the Weimar Landtag, 1891; in Lange and Bäumer 1901: 94)

Woman has degenerated through independence and mannish ways; her greatest honour is simple femininity, and that means subordinating herself with an untroubled heart, being modest, wanting to be nothing more than she is meant to be . . . Man was created before woman in order to be independent; the woman was given to him for his sake. (Löhe, nineteenth century; in Ostner and Krutwa-Schott 1981: 25)

Statements like these, found in countless variations throughout the politics and philosophy, religion, science and art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, highlight the real core of the concept of 'contrasting virtues' (Habermas) which was establishing itself. The more self-assertion was demanded of the man outside the family, the more his wife inside it was trained in self-denial. This can be seen in a number of legal statutes which unambiguously establish that a wife is dependent on her husband (Langer-El Sayed 1980: 56). The woman is for instance obliged to use her husband's name, to share his citizenship, to live with him and to fit in with his wishes. The husband has the right to monitor her correspondence and lay down guidelines for housekeeping and expenses; in many cases the right to dispose of the wife's personal possessions was transferred to her husband.

The price of such regulations is high, and obviously to the woman's disadvantage. But their purpose is clear. Since by definition no divergent wishes are permitted between men and women, this arrangement achieves a certain stability, no matter how oppressive it may be for one side. Under such conditions even having a few more options need not disrupt the family harmony. What counts is what he wants. What the woman really wants is to adapt to the man: 'From youth she must be taught the habit . . . of viewing the male sex as the one designed to rule, and of making herself attractive to it by being gentle, patient and submissive'

(Basedow 1770; in Kern and Kern 1988: 51). Agatha Christie writes in her memoirs of her girlhood:

In one respect, man was paramount: he was the head of the house. A woman, when she married, accepted as her destiny *his* place in the world and *his* way of life. That seems sound sense to me and the foundation of happiness. If you can't face your man's way of life, don't take that job – in other words, don't marry that man. Here, say, is a wholesale draper; he is a Roman Catholic; he prefers to live in a suburb; he plays golf and he likes to go for holidays to the seaside. *That* is what you are marrying. Make up your mind to like it, and like it. It won't be so difficult. (Christie 1977: 122)

Since then change has been rapid. What initially was a prerogative of the men – shaking off old patterns of behaviour – has since the late nineteenth century, and especially since the 1960s, also become feasible for women. This is particularly apparent in education; although new openings became available to them at the turn of the century, the real shift took place fifty years later with offers of education to everybody in the 1960s. The disadvantages for girls, which had long been taken for granted, were now deliberately questioned, and the success of these efforts surpassed all expectations. Within only twenty years the marked differences in levels of schooling gave way to almost equal numbers of girls and boys in state education at every level, all the way up to university.²

Working away from home is another example. Although the model of housewife and mother was an ideal of the bourgeois family, women in the lower strata had always been forced to earn money because their husband's wage was rarely enough to support the family. And in the late nineteenth century even in the middle classes, where work within the family gradually lost any links with the production process, more women found themselves forced to look for a source of income; the number of women who had no private means and had to make a living rose. In middle-class society, however, such work was restricted in time, defined only to last until marriage; the woman's place was still in the home.

Really far-reaching changes took place in the 1950s. The first move in Germany, as in other industrial countries, was a marked rise in the number of married women working outside the home.³ This was followed by a tendency for married women to continue to work until their first child was born, and to return to work after the children had grown up. The second stage, again in all industrial societies, is marked by

pronounced shifts in the number of women with children working away from home – working mothers.⁴ Nowadays work for them is much more than an interim phase; ‘Not working is becoming an exceptional situation for women, increasingly limited to the phase of caring for small children’ (Willms 1983a: 111).

Demographic changes also play a role. Since the beginning of the century life expectancy has been rising and has reached an all-time high in the late twentieth century. By contrast, the number of children has drastically sunk, a tendency which began in Europe in the late nineteenth century and has accelerated since the 1960s. The combined effects of these two developments has decisively altered the standard female biography. The task which had become women’s main occupation after the extended family had broken up and been replaced by the bourgeois family – raising children – now occupies in purely temporal terms an ever-smaller portion of her life. Now there is a phase which historically speaking is quite new, the ‘empty nest’ years, where the woman is no longer tied to or needed in her mother role (Imhof 1981: 180f.).

As a result of these changes in education, professional openings, family life, legislation and the like, working women have fewer family commitments, and are coming to expect less support from their husbands; they have to be in some, often contradictory, form independent and able to support themselves. The subjective aspect is of course that women are finding out, in fact having to find out, what they expect of life and making their own plans which are not necessarily focused on the family but on their own personalities. They must plan how to take care of themselves, first of all financially, and to do without a husband if need be. They can no longer consider themselves ‘appendages’ of the family, but as individual people with corresponding rights and interests, their own futures and their own options.

Here are the classical lines from the final scene of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1878–9):

HELMER: . . . Is this the way you neglect your most sacred duties?

NORA: What do you consider is my most sacred duty?

HELMER: Do I have to tell you that? Isn’t it your duty to your husband and children?

NORA: I have another duty, just as sacred.

HELMER: You can’t have. What duty do you mean?

NORA: My duty to myself.

HELMER: Before everything else, you’re a wife and a mother.

NORA: I don’t believe that any longer. I believe that before everything else I’m a human being – just as much as you are . . . or at any rate I shall try to become one.

What is interesting here is how such changes affect relationships between the sexes. Clearly there is potential here for a new kind of bond no longer restricting man and woman to the daily grind of making a living, as in pre-industrial society, or, as in the bourgeois nineteenth-century model, to antithetical gender roles which complemented one another but presupposed the woman's subordination. Instead there is now the chance of a bond of fellow spirits, or putting it more cautiously, of a partnership between two people who are close to one another in character and attitude to life. This is the bond so longed for in the writings of the women's movement, that 'most wonderful thing' that shines out as a hope at the end of *A Doll's House*:

HELMER: Nora – can't I ever be anything more than a stranger to you?
 NORA: Oh, Torvald – there would have to be the greatest miracle of all . . .
 HELMER: What would that be – the greatest miracle of all?
 NORA: Both of us would have to be so changed that – Oh, Torvald, I don't believe in miracles any longer.
 HELMER: But I'll believe. Tell me: 'so changed that . . .'?
 NORA: That our life together could be a real marriage.

The striking thing here is of course not so much the high hopes and the possible miracles but the other side, the disappointments and failures which nowadays dog so many marriages and liaisons. Quite obviously, as standard biographies have changed, living together has become more difficult for both sexes. The ideas discussed above on the curbs we all face in choosing how to lead our lives remained imprecise in one crucial respect: they presupposed that both men and women can behave as true partners, sharing the decision-making – a state of affairs which is by no means given.

Now we can complete the picture. The new factor altering love and marriage is not that somebody – meaning the man – has become more himself, more individual in the course of modern times, as the sociologists have traced. What is new is the individual *female* biography, freeing the woman of family duties, and sending her out into the world with an impetus which has been increasing since the 1960s. To put it even more pointedly, as long as it was only the man who developed his potential and the woman was complementarily obliged to look after him and others, family cohesion remained more or less intact – at the cost of her own interests or personality. Now however this 'division of modernity' (see chapter 1 above) cannot be maintained any longer and we are witnessing a new period in the history of women, and therefore

in the history of men *and* women. Now for the first time two people falling in love find themselves both subject to the opportunities and hindrances of a biography designed by themselves.

There are already signs of this in the expectations men and women have in living together. As Jessie Bernard has said, every marriage consists of two marriages, the husband's and the wife's (Bernard 1976). This definition focuses attention on an aspect which long remained hidden but has come to the surface in the women's movement and feminist writings: in a number of significant ways the hopes men and women attach to the magic word 'love' are widely divergent. In Lilian Rubin's provocative phrase, they are and remain 'intimate strangers' (Rubin 1983). This applies to their sexual wishes (Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs 1986) and erotic dreams (Alberoni 1987) as well as to the division of labour (Metz-Göckel and Müller 1987) and topics to be talked about (Ehrenreich 1984; Fishman 1982), the priorities and modes of communication which are the backbone of everyday life.

This difference in what each expects is probably not new; what is new however is the manner of dealing with it. The more women come to regard themselves as people with wishes of their own, the less they accept the fact that these are not fulfilled. On the contrary, they are increasingly likely to demand satisfaction and if all else fails to take the ultimate consequence, divorce. Studies on the reasons for divorce show that women expect a good, emotionally fulfilling life together much more than men do (Höhn, Mammeij and Schwarz 1981; Wagnerova 1982) and are therefore more likely than men to be dissatisfied with their marriage. It was the same with Ibsen's Nora, who leaves a home which her husband thought was a happy one, and is prepared to return only if it becomes 'a marriage', that is to say a marriage according to *her* ideas. The trend hinted at here can perhaps be summed up as follows: if they were disappointed, women used to abandon their hopes; nowadays they cling to their hopes and abandon the marriage.

In a recent survey women were asked why they had left their husbands although the marriage according to all external criteria seemed a good, all-round one. The author describes their reasons as follows:

They left because they wanted more than what they were able to get from their marriages. What may have qualified as acceptable marriages for our mothers – and indeed for us when we sought to make them – was no longer acceptable. These women wanted more than a roof over their heads, a husband to support them, and children to look after. They wanted emotional intimacy, equality in partnership, and they wanted to exercise control over their own lives. (B. Rabkin, *New Woman*, September 1985: 59)

This is how the conflict potential grows and at the same time the chances of reducing the difficulties diminish. The more women learn to look after themselves, in fact *must* learn to do so in these individualistic times, the less they can swallow the solutions practised by their mothers and grandmothers – adapting to one's husband's wishes while sacrificing one's own. The adhesive which used to guarantee cohesion is vanishing: the old female role, self-denial for the sake of others, willingness to take on the endless and invisible emotional patching up which ensured an at least superficial calm. Who is now supposed to undertake this task? Many women are tired of being the pacifiers, many men are unprepared to step in, and both genders are overtaxed when they find a mountain of emotional labour waiting for them in the evening after the pressure of competition in their job.

The dilemma is exacerbated by the fact that such social upheavals and changes in the rhythm of life inevitably produce friction. Both sexes are trapped between old role models and new facts, faced with unfamiliar claims depending on which area of life or among which group of people they find themselves, and often confused by their own contradictory attitudes. The stage between 'no longer' and 'not yet' produces a volatile mixture, the consequences of which are painfully evident for men and women.

First there is the matter of what might be termed the poverty of the single woman. This applies to women with little education deprived of the traditional protection within marriage but not sufficiently armed to cope with a personally designed biography. These women are 'only a husband away from welfare' and if he is absent, as is the case for the growing group of single and divorced women, the result is known as the 'feminization of poverty' (Pearce and McAdoo 1981). At the other end of the scale, there is another problem emerging, affecting those women who pursue an independent career but must in many cases pay a high price, the loneliness of the professionally successful woman (Bock-Rosenthal, Haase and Streeck 1978; Hennig and Jardim 1977).

Developments of this kind are described by, for instance, the psychologist Jean Baker Miller. In her experience the reasons why women come to therapy have changed markedly within a few years. While in the 1970s the patients were primarily middle-aged women who had married young, raised children and finally realized how much of themselves they had given up in doing so, nowadays those seeking therapeutic help are often professionally successful women of the younger generation, hard-working, single or divorced, who find their emotional needs unsatisfied in the lives they lead. For a woman who dedicates her

life to work, there are hardly any househusbands available who are prepared to care for their neglected emotional lives. The consequences are obvious: 'Either both partners are so busy pursuing traditional definitions of success that neither has the energy to nurture the relationship, or the professional woman finds she has no partner at all' (Gordon 1985).

Isidora, the heroine of Erica Jong's novel *Parachutes and Kisses*, fits into this category. Isidora, celebrated author and divorced three times, thinks ruefully:

accomplished women . . . assume – wrongly – that what holds true for men will also hold true for them: that accomplishment will bring with it fame, fortune, and beautiful lovers . . . But alas, we often get just the reverse. All our accomplishment buys us in the love department is threatened men, soft cocks, abandonment. And we reel backward wondering why we work so hard for professional glory, when personal happiness is the forfeiture we have to pay. (Jong 1985: 113)

At the same time some groups of women are trying out a new role, seeking to escape from the old dependencies by following the motto: every woman for herself, with or without a man. The search for one's own identity means excluding the men, and as a logical reaction, attention is focused only on one's own rights. One good indicator of this trend is the market for women's literature, where relations between the sexes often degenerate into chilly confrontation. The titles, often deliberately provocative, have more than a symbolic value: 'Now It's Time for Me' (Wiggershaus 1985) could serve as a watchword. Instead of 'we' one finds 'Him or Me' (Zschocke 1983) or if in doubt 'I am Myself' (Jannberg 1982). Having been subservient, the women now find the time has come for 'Settling Scores' (Schenk 1979). When two bodies without further ado join for the next sexual encounter while the persons belonging to them remain strangers to one another, the other person is called a 'Misogynist',⁵ and the 'Death of Prince Charming' is publicly proclaimed (Merian 1983). The final stage is 'Choosing to be Alone' (Meller 1983).

The repercussions of the women's rejection of their old role for men has not been so well documented, partly perhaps because men still wield more power and have more loopholes through which to escape, but partly also because they find it much more difficult to express their feelings and formulate their frustrations. The diagnosis varies according to the viewpoint and gender of the observer. Some discern 'The Insecure Man' (Goldberg 1979), others note repressed feelings, unwillingness to

understand, refusal to give up privileges. Their verdict on men in these uneasy times is 'Worldly but not Wise' (Benard and Schlaffer 1985), the same old patriarchs in new clothes.

It is safe to say that the new signals are confusing and contradictory for men, do not tally with how they were socialized and contain a number of more or less open attacks on their self-esteem. Men from the most varied backgrounds would agree with the plea, 'What Do Women Want?' (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983). Many of them are on principle willing to concede that the women are quite right, but become reluctant and stubborn as soon as any inconveniences like washing up or looking after the children impinge on their lives. Above all one can find a certain new 'openmindedness' which however proves limited when things begin to become unpleasant for the men (Schneewind and Vaskovics 1991: 171). There is a new kind of ideal woman, someone who is both independent and willing to adapt, depending on what is in the man's interest (Metz-Göckel and Müller 1985: 22f.). As a man in another study put it:

What you want to do is marry a woman graduate who is intellectual enough to hold a conversation with you, and someone who is confident to help you in your business or help you with your decision-making processes through life, but who is also inclined to family care and household care. If you can find a woman like that, you know you've won.
(White 1984: 435)

In view of these disappointments, painful to everyone involved, the women's movement has over the past few years turned to a new theme, the difficult balancing act between being liberated and being committed. No one is yearning to return to the old pattern with all its restrictions, and hopes in a loving partnership between equals do still exist. But more often than before disillusioned people are wondering: *is it possible for equals to love each other? Can love survive liberation? Or are love and freedom irreconcilable opposites?*

On the one hand one realizes that love snatches away one's autonomy: 'the servitude you would inflict on me, making me your Sancho Panza on his nag, and robbing me of my identity, my life. It would be disastrous to accept your love, and to love you' (Fallaci 1980: 156). And on the other one loses a lover because of trying to be free: 'We knew, when we lost our innocence, that we risked the loss of love. But our certainty that enlightenment was always worth the pain was cold comfort when we discovered, more often than not, that we could not apply what we had learned to our private lives without destroying love' (O'Reilly 1980: 219).

Here seems to lie the dilemma. The old kind of relationship involved suppressing the women's initiative, but also gained its resilience from this fact. The new kind has to cater for two separate biographies, or at least the claim to them. Perhaps the resulting squabbles and misery are only the product of an unfortunate interim stage in the course of human gender history, roughly in the way Erica Jong puts it: 'They're still in love, but they can't live together – at least not right now' (Jong 1985: 12). Maybe at this stage becoming an individual is almost impossible and all one can dare is trial and error, picking out which way of life seems best; as the gist of a sociological study goes, 'such temporary measures are becoming increasingly necessary for women. And probably not just for them either' (Brose and Wohlrab-Sahr 1986: 18).

What happens though, the uneasy question remains, if the current difficulties are much more than a phase? What if they are the unavoidable outcome of that epoch-making move towards being oneself which first only involved men but recently has come to include women too? Can two biographies ever be interwoven, or does trying to do it throw so much sand into the works that the shared vehicle can only grind to a halt?

The mid-life crisis

A look into the statistics reveals a striking state of affairs. It is precisely among long-term, seemingly stable marriages that have lasted eighteen or twenty years that the divorce rate is rising sharply.⁶ Explanations can be found in psychological self-help literature (Jaeggi 1982; Jaeggi and Hollstein 1985; Wachinger 1986). There is much talk of the mid-life (marriage) crisis, when the couple has built up a solid basis and now starts to develop separate interests which they have to defend against one another. 'Freedom for me!' is the war-cry of this phase and often coupled with long-drawn-out power struggles of various kinds, starting with rejecting the other's advances, fleeing into illness, seeking an accomplice and sometimes ending in open violence. All of these strategies revolve round the question: 'Which of us is going to survive as an independent being?' They are in a sense *attempts to survive within a shared life* which now dominate the marital scene. Here are two descriptions from contrasting viewpoints, first the internal view from Erica Jong's novel *Fear of Flying*:

And what about those . . . longings which marriage stifles? Those longings to hit the open road from time to time, to discover whether you could still

live alone inside your own head, to discover whether you could manage to survive in a cabin in the woods without going mad; to discover, in short, whether you were still whole after so many years of being half of something . . . Five years of marriage had made me . . . itchy for solitude. (Jong 1974: 18)

Then the outside view, described by a marriage counsellor:

Most marriages begin with a kind of passion for togetherness and sharing; the individual is almost extinguished and everything is subordinated to life together. The years spent building up the marriage demand a lot of cohesion, a lot of effort for each other and the children, for the professional positions which are being aimed for . . . But after many years of living together . . . when much of the youthful verve has evaporated, much of the glitter fallen away, when the professional aims have been reached and new goals are hard to find – then an old question crops up again in a new and different guise and more urgently: ‘Who am I?’ Another kind of passion takes over, to assert oneself, make independent decisions, have a life of one’s own . . . The question ‘Who am I?’ then inevitably becomes a question directed at one’s spouse: ‘Do you really know who I am?’ . . . Breaking up, dissolving the marriage seems less of a threat than giving up oneself and one’s own interests. (Wachinger 1986: 80–3)

To explain these patterns one can turn to the laws of psychological development, which show that steps towards maturity always involve some form of separation. The battles and turmoil of adolescence have their analogue in the mid-life crisis with its yearning to escape from marital symbiosis:

This conflict resembles . . . in many respects the struggles of an adolescent with his parents and indeed serves the same purpose: re-creating one’s own identity, swimming away from the depths of symbiotic unity and realizing that the other person will never really be able to share one’s loneliness. (Jaeggi and Hollstein 1985: 219)

What seems like the natural course of events from the psychological angle, a predetermined pattern for marriage, shows its special features when looked at from the point of view of social history. To put it very briefly, the mid-life crisis is a *social*, not a natural event. It is first of all a result of the individualization processes we have been describing; more particularly it is the product of an advanced stage of this development, when the context of a woman’s life has been included in the process. Finally, it is the product of a demographic development, the huge increase in life expectancy, which is the only thing which enables

many couples to reach that stage. In the course of one century there has been 'almost a doubling of the average duration of a marriage (without divorce); a couple that married in 1870 lived together for an average of 23.4 years; by 1900 it was already 28.2 years, in 1930 36 years; couples who said "I do" in 1970 can count on 43 years elapsing until the death of one of them ends their marriage.'⁷

Only where these three factors coincide – individualization in general, female individualization in particular and increased life expectancy – does one find the mid-life crisis en masse. As a historical phenomenon it is a novelty, not reaching broad sections of the population until the second half of the twentieth century. The various steps can be traced as follows: in pre-industrial society there was little room for individual decisions, either in one's own life or in marriage, which essentially consisted of teamwork. It seems reasonable to suppose that at that time the need to discover one's own identity played a minor role.

This changes as soon as the individual person comes to the fore, and changes even further when circumstances force women to look after themselves. Finally, when we realize there are probably many years lying ahead after we have finished establishing a home and a career, our attitudes change. The question which seems more pressing than before is 'Was that all?' In other words a person is confronted with awkward questions, lists the disappointments and shortcomings of life so far and has a vision of a new and better alternative which will compensate for past omissions.

This is the moment when the question occurs to us, what have I given up for my spouse? People recall the grand plans they had in their youth and see the compromises of a shared life. Whether justified or not, many of the omissions get blamed on the other one, and marriage turns into a scapegoat for the life one did not live. Subconsciously people recognize that there are some things they can no longer do, and others they no longer dare to do (one is too old to become a concert pianist, and not brave enough to emigrate to South America).

Even if it is impossible to start again from scratch, one has to do something about the direct monogamous situation while there is time. At least one wants to lay claim to more space and time for oneself, and the more the other resists, because he/she is struggling to find an identity too, the more one insists. So one's partner turns into an enemy, marriage into a place (safety valve, lightning conductor or surrogate) where one struggles to preserve one's identity and self-esteem.

The course of the battles which ensue is often paradoxical, running along the lines 'it's no good with you and no good without you.' Numerous cases have been described where the partners have waged

war for many years, in new variations and escalations. At the same time, however, they have never quite managed to separate. They split up and come back again, live together but declare they are really separated, separate but cannot say goodbye, and feel trapped in a dead-end situation. Friends watching such moves over the years can only shrug their shoulders; to anyone not involved it seems incomprehensible, even absurd.

Here again are two descriptions from contrasting viewpoints. The first comes from Oriana Fallaci's novel *A Man*:

I had gone back . . . to leave you a letter explaining my refusal to continue such a relationship . . . But the leash was broken and there was nothing worse than mending it with lumps in the throat; nothing worse than disturbing my equilibrium, my detachment. There was only one chance of that happening, and it lay in the risk of hearing your voice . . . A phone call would have been enough. Still the fear lasted only one week, and the second week I had already stopped believing in it. Grave mistake. The dawn of the seventeenth day of escape was breaking when the phone rang: 'Hello! It's I! It's me' . . . And a few hours later I was sitting in the plane: I'm coming, Don Quixote, I'm coming; your Sancho Panza is still your Sancho Panza, will always be, you can always count on me, here I am! . . . My problem was insoluble, my survival impossible, and escape achieved nothing. (Fallaci 1980: 246, 362, 264, 357)

Seen from outside, here is an account from a therapist:

Of course there were constant quarrels, going on holiday separately, few points in common. Despite their endless maunding about a possible separation, however, neither of the two took any steps in that direction, although by all appearances each could easily have lived alone. When I talked to Karin by herself about this, she expressed almost absurd fantasies on the subject, fears that she would be 'all alone' after the separation, that no one would 'care' about her. (Thanks to her career she had more friends and acquaintances than Dieter!) On the other hand I heard Dieter screaming quite hysterically during one of their frequent scenes that he would 'hang himself in the attic' if Karin did not immediately unpack her suitcase. An outsider would have got the impression they were both insane. But of course in their lives outside marriage they were well-adjusted, successful and very well-liked people. This simply showed in unusually vehement form that they 'could not leave each other alone' and in any case neither wanted to be left behind by the other. In calm conversations one could hear from each of them that he or she had 'actually' been ready to separate a long time ago. (Jaeggi 1982: 26)

Such patterns obviously reveal aspects of what is known by psychologists as a symbiotic entanglement, a constellation which produces

consequences as hopeless as they seem absurd. Psychologists see the eternal struggle between autonomy and dependency here, between 'closeness and distance' (Jaeggi and Hollstein 1985: 217ff.), 'fusion and resistance' (Schellenbaum 1984: 35ff.). But *why* do such complications come about, why are they insoluble? According to the sociological viewpoint offered here, they did not come about by chance, nor are they genetically determined (or only on the most general level) nor are they part of nature's great plan since Adam and Eve. They are rather an *expression and reflection of the contradictions which came about in the course of individualization*. Behind them lie all the contradictory longings, expectations and obligations which determine our private lives. As described above, as well as becoming more important love is becoming more difficult than ever. On paper one can keep the two strands apart, but in the individual's heart they are inseparably welded together, leading into one set of paradoxes and difficulties after another, whatever labels one gives them – intimacy versus individuality, or symbiosis versus a life of one's own.

The dilemma which is formulated here in theoretical terms has also become a theme in many modern novels, especially in women's literature. Let us again compare two examples. The first is Erica Jong's heroine Isidora again, who expresses her incompatible wishes in an inner monologue:

- ME: Why is being alone so terrible?
- ME: Because if no man loves me, I have no identity . . .
- ME: But you know that you'd hate to have a man who possessed you totally and used up your breathing space . . .
- ME: I know – but I yearn for it desperately.
- ME: But if you had it, you'd feel trapped.
- ME: I know.
- ME: You want contradictory things.
- ME: I know.
- ME: You want freedom and you also want closeness.
- ME: I know.

(Jong 1974: 251)

Then Fallaci again:

As long as the beloved oppresses with demands, with bonds, we feel stolen from ourselves and it seems that to give up a job for him or a journey or a romance is unjust; openly or secretly we harbor a thousand resentments, dreams of freedom, we long for an existence without affections, in which to move like the seagulls that fly through the golden dust.

What an unheard-of torment are the chains with which the beloved one ties us, preventing us from spreading our wings. But when he is no more and that space is flung open, infinite, so we can fly in the golden dust as much as we like, without affections and without ties, we sense a frightful void. And the job or the journey or the romance we sacrificed so reluctantly now appears in all its meaninglessness, we no longer know what to do with our regained freedom, like dogs without masters, sheep without a flock, we wander around in that void weeping over lost slavery, and we would give our own soul to go back to live again in the demands of our jailer. (Fallaci 1980: 378-9)

Obviously the basic dilemma is a built-in feature of our contradictory individualized society. It impinges on all couples but can cause immense upheavals in long-standing marriages because both aspects – being yourself and being close – stand out and crave attention. Think of all the habits and irritations, the rituals and compromises endured for all those years. Who apart from my husband/wife interferes with my life so directly, so relentlessly, so close to home? Think of all the things we have been through, the memories we share, the joys and pains, reaching into the deepest fibres of my being. Who else is so much part of me? In these circumstances the old biblical phrase ‘And they became one flesh’ takes on a new meaning. It is felt both ways, as a threat and curse, and as a consolation and promise, over and over again, both at once. This explains the hesitation which may last for years, the inability to leave because there is always the other side to remain for.

An outsider merely sees battles without any victors, repetitive arguments, all seemingly to no end. The solution to the riddle lies in our modern longing to be loved tangled up with the idea ‘At last there’s time for me’, each with a logic diametrically opposed to the other. Under such conditions a couple both fears and seeks the quarrels and is prepared to employ all means to maintain them. Each loses a sense of security in the other but each gains a certain confidence from surviving:

I see now why I wanted my wife to come back.
It was because of what she had made me into...
When I thought she had left me, I began to dissolve,
To cease to exist. That was what she had done to me!
I cannot live with her – that is now intolerable;
I cannot live without her, for she has made me incapable
Of having any existence of my own.
That is what she has done to me in five years together!
She has made the world a place I cannot live in
Except on her terms. I must be alone,

But not in the same world. So I want you to put me
Into your sanatorium. I could be alone there?

(T. S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*, Act II)

A child as surrogate?

Living with an adult partner under the contradictory rules of a society of individuals often turns out to be deeply painful and insulting. It therefore seems only logical that men and women are developing strategies to protect themselves and reduce the risks of becoming emotionally exhausted. Symptoms of such a move can be found in recent developments on the family and marriage front. The repertoire of possibilities is broad, from premarital therapy (see *New Woman*, July 1985: 44ff.), to drawing up marriage contracts (there is a good example in Partner 1984), to living with someone outside marriage so that, as the pop song says, 'breaking up is not so hard to do' (Schumacher 1981).

Some people are obviously reluctant to make any commitment, reducing their hopes in advance so that they do not have to face disappointment. To put it once again in the terms of current book titles, in the stage 'Beyond Dreams' (Fischer 1983), the 'Fear of Closeness' (Schmidbauer 1985) is growing. A passage from a novel by Erica Jong illustrates this:

'You're my fit, my mate,' he said. 'Now that I've found you, I'm never going to let you go.' 'My darling', fighting back the feeling that there might be any truth whatever in his words. After tonight, I'm never going to see him again, she thought. He's a mirage, a dream . . . Passion like this cannot be clung to, cannot last, cannot keep. A man as charming as this could romance his way right into your heart, then leave you flat. She was not ready for that after the recent heartbreak with Josh. She might never be ready for it again. (Jong 1985: 332)

But this cannot solve the problem. If one represses all hope of being close to someone else, what happens to the longings which are so much a part of our age, to find oneself through another? Who can one miss and hug? Perhaps if not a man or a woman then one can love a child. Let us look more closely at this option.

The first stage in the history of individualization weakened the old ties which used to give a person a sense of stability and identity. That was the date in the not very distant past when men and women turned towards one another to find themselves and made love the centre of their existence. By now we have reached the next stage; traditional

bonds play only a minor role and the love between men and women has likewise proved vulnerable and prone to failure. What remains is the child. It promises a tie which is more elemental, profound and durable than any other in this society. The more other relationships become interchangeable and revocable, the more a child can become the focus of new hopes – it is the ultimate guarantee of permanence, providing an anchor for one's life.

Seen in this light, recent demographic changes which are rapidly gaining impetus become comprehensible. First there is a marked increase in the number of children born outside marriage.⁸ No doubt various causes are at work here but one can assume that among other things we are seeing a new type of unmarried mother. This is the woman who wants to have a child alone, without a man or a traditional kind of partnership.⁹ Reduced to a sentence: 'The couple that matters these days is woman and child' (Sichtermann, quoted in Wetterer 1983). Or as Ursula Krechel ironically puts it, 'The new political unit is called motherandchild' (Krechel 1983: 149). In a novel from the new women's literature it is formulated like this:

I want to have a child when I am thirty-eight... I want to do it completely alone. From the sperm bank or a chance lover, without even turning on the light to be able to see him, just let myself get fucked and later find out that I'm pregnant. (Ravera 1986: 138)

Hopes of this kind may gain momentum from recent advances in reproductive technology. There are already reports – from America and Australia – of women who underwent in-vitro treatment during their marriage and now despite an intervening divorce demand that the deep-frozen embryos be implanted. Their ex-husbands are suing them because they reject any paternity role after the marriage has been dissolved. In one case the court has already decided in favour of the woman and granted her the temporary custody of the embryos (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22 September and 31 October 1989). Here are the outlines of a future scenario: where love for the man has evaporated the woman at least wants to keep the embryos for herself.

Now such tendencies are certainly by no means representative of the majority of women. It is however striking that among younger women there has been a dramatic change in attitude about unmarried motherhood. Whereas in the 1960s it seemed important to almost everybody that a woman with a child should be married, by the early 1980s not even half the girls considered this relevant.¹⁰ It is also symptomatic that popular women's books and magazines are offering advice on 'a child

alone . . . how to do it.'¹¹ One title proclaims with defiant self-confidence, 'Single mums, happier without a man' (Heiliger 1985). Here is a motif that recurs again and again in recent women's writing; love for a child replaces love for a man. Here is the report of a woman who is deliberately bringing up her child alone:

By now I know what kinds of living and loving conditions I have to make for myself in order to feel comfortable with Harpo [her son]. If someone comes along and wants to spoil that for me, I beat it or send him packing . . . That's another way I've changed because of Harpo. Men have lost the importance they used to have in my life. What I've built up for myself – professionally, materially, in private, in my life with Harpo – is independent of any man; no boyfriend is going to tell me what to do or order me around. (Quoted in Häsing 1983: 83)

This is even more marked in the words of Oriana Fallaci from *Letter to a Child Never Born*:

As for your father, the more I think of it the more I'm afraid I never loved him . . . The same goes for those who came before him, disappointing ghosts in a search that always failed . . . maybe it is true, what my mother has always maintained, that love is what a mother feels for her child when she takes it in her arms and notices how alone, helpless and defenceless it is. As long as it remains helpless and defenceless, at least it doesn't insult you, doesn't disappoint you. (1976: 20–1)

One finds similar sentiments throughout Erica Jong's writing:

Our children give us more undiluted joy than romantic love ever does . . . Ever since she and Josh had separated she had longed for another baby . . . but who would be the father of her fantasy baby? . . . Well – why not just have a baby and the father be damned? She was likely to end up raising it alone anyway . . . This is the New Family, Mom and kids and lover man (or new husband). At any rate, only the mom and kids are surely linked. The men come and go. (Jong 1985: 68, 296, 107)

Erica Jong is mistaken however; we cannot take it for granted that the New Family consists of 'mom and the kids'. In an increasing number of cases men want the child for themselves after divorce, rather than giving the mother custody. 'Men Fight for their Rights' (Wiener, January 1984: 32ff.) and 'The Grief of the Divorced Father' (cover story in *Esquire*, March 1985) is becoming acute. In the words of a counsellor: 'I've seen men crying for fear of losing their children, the way only women used

to cry over their children. Young fathers in particular suffer a dramatic sense of loss when they do not get custody. Those are our most difficult cases' (*Eltern*, October 1985: 37). As mentioned above, there is a new kind of kidnapping, with more and more men who have not been granted custody taking their child by force.

But even where matters do not take such an alarming turn one can discern a certain trend, a motif common to men and women. If they feel rejected and unloved by their adult partner, surrounded by indifference and cold silence, people are glad to lavish their love on their child. Peter Handke's *Kindergeschichte* exemplifies this:

It was a friendless time; even his own wife had become an unkind stranger. This made the child even more real . . . In all this time exchanges between him and his wife were at best matter-of-fact, and in their thoughts they were often only 'he' and 'she' for each other . . . Now, with the infant, she met him almost exclusively in the confined setting of the household, where the sight of her became indifferent to him and even began to displease him as time passed – just as he probably ceased being anyone special for her, now that he had almost stopped presenting himself as 'her hero' with his outstanding work . . . It was also careless of him to transfer to the child the most friendly, intimate and secret wordless gestures and little phrases that had become standard parts of his exchanges with her, without even hesitating or thinking about it . . . It was almost as if the child was finally what was right for him and he now no longer needed a woman. (Handke 1982: 23, 34–5)

There is one significant aspect here which is never registered in the statistics; one discovers it only by working one's way through the numerous autobiographical accounts of 'new' women and mothers that have appeared in recent years. Again and again they describe that they were surprised, overcome, even overwhelmed by the intensity of their feelings for their children (for further details, see Beck-Gernsheim 1989: 31ff.). They experience a bond, so one reads, of a kind quite unknown elsewhere in their lives, so deep and all-embracing, 'a great romantic love' (Dowrick and Grundberg 1980: 74). 'I wondered whether you could get a heart attack from the emotional intensity that you feel as a mother,' writes Jean Lazarre (1977: 96). Or as another woman puts it:

For the first time in my life I'm really learning about love . . . you [the child] force me to redefine intimacy. Am I close to people with whom I discuss ideas, four times a year? Am I close to friends with whom I can most be myself: by appointment only? Am I close to strangers who thrill

me with their decency, wisdom and humour, but with whom I don't live? I am not as close to anyone as I am to you. (Chesler 1979: 191, 194)

In fact she [the child] is the great romantic love of my life. As I strongly disapprove of romantic love, I do not feel complacent about this; but I know that the feelings I have for her correspond more nearly to the women's magazines/medieval poets'/religious mystics' descriptions of love than anything else I have ever felt... Emotionally, psychologically, politically, socially my daughter has forced unwelcome changes on me. I feel bullied and victimised – intellectually, emotionally and practically – in precisely the ways I swore I would never be by any man. And I chose that oppression, and do not regret it; indeed I embrace it with love and joy. (Dowrick and Grundberg 1980: 77 and 79)

Statements like these will not astonish anyone who regards motherly love as the essence of womanhood and a natural bond. But since research has shown that in the past the ties between mothers and children were less emotionally tinged than they are today, doubts have arisen whether one can really declare such feelings to be part of our genetic heritage. One can also explain the phenomenon in other terms, more closely linked with the way our society is changing.

From this point of view entering into a bond with a child is highly attractive because the relationship is of a quite different kind than that to another adult. The attraction could be that the child really is innately related to one, not just acquired through the coincidences of biography, and the bond is all-encompassing, lasting, unbreachable, in a sense superior to other liaisons in our barter and throw-away culture. At least as long as it is young, a child permits one to invest all one's love and involvement without risk of disappointment, of being hurt and abandoned.

Searching for utopia?

So far we have been able to trace three stages in the way men and women could relate to one another as society moved from pre-industrial times to the modern day. In the first, where the family consisted of an economic unit, neither partner had an individual biography. In the second, when the 'extended family' began to break up, the men were expected to take the initiative in organizing their own lives. Family cohesion remained intact at the cost of women's rights. And roughly since the 1960s it has been clear that a new stage is with us, where both sexes are faced with the blessings and burdens of making a life of their own.

No doubt there are chances of building up real partnerships in this current situation but equally many hazards which can drive the sexes apart and leave them in opposite lonely corners. The crux of the problem is finding a balance between being yourself and being part of a lasting togetherness with someone who is equally in search of his/her own self. One wonders what is going to happen next; are the quarrels and misunderstandings going to pile up until the only faithful companions we have left are therapists? Or perhaps a pet to cuddle, as in a novel by Elisabeth Plessen: 'His son had been killed on the Eastern Front . . . His wife had run away . . . To console himself he had a cat' (1976: 15). And on the other hand we keep hoping that things will be different, that we can find rules and ways of treating one another that really do enable us to merge two self-made biographies.

But how? The marriage counsellor's insight that 'what [people in] devastated relationships need more than anything else is the chance to talk to one another' (Preuss 1985: 12) may be right but it is certainly no longer enough. What is needed from society is the rethinking of some of its priorities; at the moment there is a tendency to focus too exclusively on the individual person and take private commitments into account only when they can be exploited for market purposes (being mobile and flexible, competitive and career-conscious). Such a change demands the insight from politicians and powers-that-be, organizations and institutions, that our society has reached a critical state where it is neither constructive nor even feasible to apply the prevailing rules any longer; carrying on as before will find us reeling under the gigantic financial and emotional costs of a wholesale war between the sexes, throwing society into private and financial turmoil. On the private level men and women must practise the old female virtues of understanding, tolerance and willingness to compromise, and find the courage to start renegotiating again and again. A mere utopia? We can only try. To quote Beatrice Webb, 'We are at the end of one civilisation; the question is, are we at the beginning of another?' (in Mackenzie and MacKenzie 1984: 291).

FREE LOVE, FREE DIVORCE

The two sides of liberation

'Forever yours.' Romantic love is one of the pivots of our society, that delightful feeling of loving and being loved, taking us to the registry office, if not the altar, and helping us all through our lives, 'until death do us part', as the marriage vows put it. The statistics, however, tell another tale. Very many people live alone, and their numbers are rising; others live together without committing themselves and many couples get divorced. Torn between old ideals and attempts to find new solutions, the sexes veer back and forth in and out of togetherness. This has social as well as private consequences:

So far no one has either considered or worked out what marital problems, misery and separation have cost and continue to cost the state in terms of effort, resources and cash. But even if there are no data available one can conclude that separation has become an economic problem that swallows up a not inconsiderable portion of the gross national product. (Jaeggi and Hollstein 1985: 36)

Individualization, as we can see in this case, always has two sides to it. When marriage turns from being the highly rigid and predetermined arrangement it was in pre-industrial society to being a voluntary union between two individuals, there are bound to be new kinds of irritations and struggles to cope with, however much each loves the other. Or to phrase it more dramatically, *when love finally wins it has to face all kinds of defeat.*

Precisely this is the paradox to be considered next. We shall trace how it came about and try to decode its inner logic, looking at the dynamics forcing people into an endless cycle of hoping, regretting and

despite everything trying all over again. None of this is mere coincidence; it is inherent in our modern world and in that ambiguous idea 'freedom'. The difficulties lie in the principle of free choice, which offers us new scope but also lands us with the responsibility for the results, good or bad.

The old days: obligations and certainties

As social historians have consistently shown, marriage in pre-industrial society was not so much the union of two people as of two families or even clans (Rosenbaum 1978, 1982; Schröter 1985; Sieder 1987; Stone 1978, 1979). Accordingly there was no choosing whom one married, in today's sense, no falling in love and following one's own intuitions. The radius of choice was restricted in advance by certain criteria such as status and property, race and religion, and marriage was arranged by a network of family, relatives and the local community. People seldom married for love; the main purpose was to contribute to the family's prosperity and survival as an economic unit, and having children as helping hands and heirs. The British nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a good example:

The greatest parental pressure was necessarily exerted on the daughters, who were the more dependent and sheltered, were considered members of an inferior sex and who scarcely had any alternative to obedience since being unmarried was even less attractive than an undesirable husband . . . In the early sixteenth century, wills and marriage contracts in which small children were traded in advance like cattle were quite common in all classes and all regions . . . Freedom of choice was almost as limited for the sons as for the daughters. His wish to make use of his guardianship and the financial importance of the contract to prevent the marriage from slipping out of the family's control often prompted the father to marry off his son and heir during his own lifetime to a woman he had chosen. The son was usually under the father's sway because he was . . . financially dependent on him. (Stone 1978: 445-7)

Regulations of this kind contain of course a large element of coercion. The most obvious losers in the traditional marriage system are first of all those at an economic disadvantage – whether because of their position as sibling, their sex, or their lack of social standing. They cannot fit in with the economically determined rules of this system and are therefore excluded in advance from marrying by laws on inheritance, dowry requirements, prohibition on marriage for those without property

and the like. Others affected in a negative sense include men and women forced by the family to marry someone who seems suitable. The third group covers those who wish to marry but are forbidden to do so because their chosen partner is incompatible with the family's criteria, in other words the tragedy of 'love and intrigue' so often a theme of world literature:

Two households, both alike in dignity . . .
 From ancient grudge break to new mutiny . . .
 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
 A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
 Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
 Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
 (William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*,
 Prologue)

There can be no doubt that the traditional rules left little room for personal wishes, and forced them to be rigorously suppressed if the family's wishes differed. But there can also be no doubt that such rules gave marriage a certain stability and permanence. Where a union was arranged by the family and local community, those same persons had an interest in preserving it and could exert their influence via a whole range of social mechanisms. Where choosing a spouse depended on background and status there was a guarantee that in important respects men and women learned the customs and norms, shared the same expectations and understood the rules. Where men and women worked together on the family farm or in the family shop, they were welded together by their mutual efforts and by the setbacks and dangers they faced in their struggle against, say, a failed harvest or a cruel winter.

Imhof describes how it was for a peasant family:

It was not the particular farm owner and his individual well-being which were decisive, but the well-being and standing of the farm itself; it was not the particular family living there at this or that time, but the succession of families, the lineage. Generation after generation revolved round this centre, farm owner after farm owner, but less as an individual than as someone fulfilling a role. It was an idea, a standard that was central, not an ego. (1984: 20)

Tania Blixen words the position of an aristocratic family in a similar way:

The relationship between the spouses was no personal one, and strictly speaking they could not personally or directly bring happiness to or

disappoint each other, but must mutually provide the greatest significance to one another through the relationship they occupied and the importance they had for their mutual tasks in life. For the duc de Rohan there could never be any comparison between his wife and other women; no matter how much more beautiful and gifted and attractive they might be, she still remained the only woman in the world who could give birth to a duc de Rohan. The receptions she held were receptions for the Rohans, and the peasants she supported were the Rohan's peasants and poor people. (1986: 67-8)

Modern times: more freedom, less security

According to the social historians married couples began to behave differently towards one another as agrarian society gave way to modern industrial society. The family clan lost a great deal of its influence, and the rights of those whose lifelong union was at stake were strengthened. 'It is people who choose one another, and no longer families which unite and ally' (Rosenmayr 1984: 113). Such choices were of course not just left to luck; especially during the early years of this change, criteria such as social background, personal estate, upbringing and religious denomination still played a decisive role (e.g. Borscheid 1986; Mayer 1985). Even romantic love keeps its hidden ties to social rules. But seen from the lovers' point of view the balance shifted over the centuries from being told what to do to being free to choose.

Within the past thousand years ideas on proper match-making have passed through four successive phases. In the first phase marriage was arranged by the parents with little concern for their children's wishes; in the second the parents still prepared the ground but conceded veto power to their children; in the third the children made the choice but the parents could veto it, and in the final, fourth phase, reached only in this century, the children choose their spouses by themselves and do not much care what their parents think. (Stone 1978: 475)

So with the breakdown of the old order it looked as though something wonderful could be found: personal happiness quite untrammeled by outside duties or obligations. It was no longer a union between a man and a woman arranged by outsiders according to prescribed criteria but an intimate, deeply personal encounter between two committed individuals, triumphing over the barriers of class and status and recognizing only one authority – the language of the heart. The story was meant to turn out as beautifully as it does in fairy tales: 'and they lived happily ever after.'

The morning breaks for me! O why could not
Our fathers understand each other just

As easily as we! . . .

The fathers reconciled, I will make bold
To claim thee as my own . . .

Agnes, Agnes!

What joy awaits us! Thou shalt be my wife.
O canst thou grasp the measure of our joy?

(Heinrich von Kleist, *Die Familie Schroppenstein*, V, 1)¹

What has become of these high hopes? Many of them have been dashed. Life is very different from what fairy tales tell us. Psychologists note that 'the biggest problem people face in their private lives nowadays is how to get on with their partner' (Jaeggi and Hollstein 1985: back cover). Demographers scan the statistics and declare, 'Divorce activity is brisk' (Schmid 1989: 10). There is much talk of 'really relating', of 'talking it through', of 'throw-away loves'. The graver researchers speak of 'serial marriage' and 'monogamy in instalments'.

The situation is indeed paradoxical. Men and women no longer have to obey their families and are freer than ever before to decide for themselves whom they wish to marry (or not). One might have thought that in these circumstances sharing one's life with someone would prove easier and more satisfying, but in fact scores of people are fleeing from exactly this state.

In search of a shared world

One feature of modern life is that each of us has a huge number of often complex and contradictory options to choose from. Various factors play a role, and as time passes their effect becomes increasingly apparent: rapid social change with a whole range of new possibilities, the erosion of traditional ties, new kinds of social and geographic mobility. Someone born in the hills of rural Bavaria is quite likely to move to a city like Hamburg to study and work, spend holidays in Italy beside Lake Garda and plan to retire to Majorca.

This means that each of us has to achieve more than before to find our way through the intricacies of life and establish a sense of identity. Sociologists and psychologists confirm that our love-lives gain enormous significance from this fact; as described above, our view of reality and sense of self-esteem largely rest on how things are at home.

Not surprisingly this means a new kind of strain. If you are free to

choose your own partner and build up a world together outside the dictates of family, kinship or clan, this may look like freedom but actually demands a great deal of effort. In the new system the couple is not just expected but *has* to design its personalized life scheme. Berger and Kellner sketch the outlines of this task:

Marriage and family used to be firmly anchored within a network of relationships linking them to the larger community . . . There were few barriers between the individual family's world and that of the outside community . . . One and the same social life pulsated through house, street and town. To put it in our terms, both the family and the marital relationship were embedded in a much broader network of contacts. In present-day society, by contrast, each family constitutes a segregated sub-world of its own, with its own exclusive rules and concerns.

This fact places far more commitment on the couple's shoulders. In the past setting up a new marriage only meant adding a further variation to an already established social pattern, whereas nowadays couples have to face the often strenuous task of creating their own private world . . . The monogamous aspect of marriage makes investing in this undertaking particularly risky, for the success or failure of it depend on the idiosyncrasies of only two people and the barely predictable future development of these idiosyncrasies . . . according to Simmel the least stable of all social relationships . . . In a relationship which consists of only two people and depends on their efforts, both have to invest more and more in their own realm to counteract the lack of other relationships. This only increases the drama and risk involved. (1965: 225)

Furthermore the same centrifugal forces in society which turn marriage or a close relationship into a fixed star by which to steer one's biography make it very hard for both partners to agree on a common course. The two people who become one by signing the marriage contract (or even without doing so) tend much more than used to be the case to come from different backgrounds, even if they still often obey the laws of endogamy and choose a partner on conventional grounds (social standing, religion, nationality or race). In other words their life histories have provided them with different sets of priorities and hopes, ways of communicating and techniques for making decisions. It is hard work agreeing on a common project. Berger and Kellner comment on this:

Marriage in our society is a dramatic event in which two strangers get together and redefine one another . . . the concept 'strangers' does not of course [mean here] that the candidates stem from very different social classes – in fact the data show the opposite is the case. The strangeness is rather because, unlike marriage candidates in previous social settings,

they come from different 'face-to-face' areas. They have no past in common, even though their respective pasts were similarly structured. (1965: 223)

And one step further, if choosing one's own mate used to be primarily directed against the family's wishes, the principle of free choice acquires an updated meaning when the population becomes increasingly socially and geographically mobile. Even though the majority of couples still follow the old rules, there are many who step over local and national boundaries and choose someone quite different in social standing, religion or nationality (e.g. Mayer 1985; Schneider 1989). In Germany nowadays one marriage in twelve is of mixed nationality (Elschenbroich 1988: 364). Here it is particularly obvious that two 'strangers' are getting together. One especially important concern for them is finding how they can help each other to discover themselves, as our modern definition of love demands, although this must entail facing one's own past and roots.

Choosing a partner of a different background in these circumstances means uniting with a different culture, but it also means having to get involved with the fears and hopes, thinking patterns and horizons of an unfamiliar world. An American investigation into marriages between Jewish and non-Jewish partners came to the conclusion:

Where man and woman share a common group background, a common cultural heritage, a general sense of social similarity, the confrontation with the past can remain a purely personal affair. What each reveals to the other are the personal and family secrets, so to speak. However, when man and woman do not share a common set of ground assumptions about their collective memories, the most minute aspects of self-expression become broad statements about one's cultural history – whether one likes it or not. (Mayer 1985: 70)

The marriages which step beyond the usual radius for choosing a partner show up in sharp relief how the modern person goes about finding a mate. They are a sign that outside influences have little say and that the decision rests with the two people involved. A study of bicultural marriages in Germany noted that they were 'in terms of attitude, very modern marriages; they correspond to the ideal of romantic love and are individualistic.' Furthermore, 'the romantic basis of this relationship is both an opportunity and a problem' (Elschenbroich 1988: 366). The opportunities can be outlined as follows:

If things go well, if some of the early boldness, optimism and sense of experimenting is preserved, then bicultural marriages are particularly lively and interesting. If the problems posed by communicating across cultures can be integrated into the family, that can encourage a feeling of solidarity and give the family a wide horizon. (*Ibid.*)

There are, however, typical drawbacks. Part of the risk potential in such unions is that there are no external support systems which are binding for both partners. The job of keeping the marriage intact is left entirely to the couple, and is more difficult the further apart their two cultures are. While during the early stages differences usually recede into the background, and all that counts is being in love and agreeing with one another, in the course of the marriage the differences stemming from their separate worlds inevitably come to the surface and have to be faced; the dividing lines which seemed to have been wiped away in choosing a mate reveal their staying power as time goes on and have to be accepted and coped with by both partners. The American study on marriages between Jewish and non-Jewish people presents a theoretical picture of this predicament:

While the nascent moments of falling in love evoke a feeling of an intense and lasting present, in which the past and the future are irrelevant, the maintenance of love seems to have the opposite requirement. It seems to call for the probing of the past and charting of the future. It also brings into its discourse the selfhood of the lovers, which inevitably implicates their cultural heritages. There is simply no self that is not linked in some fashion to an ancestry, a family network and a history . . . The intermarriage conversation is inevitably a conversation also about culture, history, and the personal feeling about tradition. (Mayer 1985: 72)

The German study on bicultural marriages traces the developmental patterns using empirical data:

In . . . interviews bicultural couples described typical phases of their relationships. In the period of initial infatuation an effusive optimism prevails, a feeling of blissful openness, and . . . a certain pride in one's nonconformism. After going through internal and external strains there is often a phase of retreat and renewed identification with one's own background . . . People discover how firmly their own value systems are anchored, often for the first time. Without this confrontation their own value systems usually remain *inconspicuous*, unconscious – and for that reason appear to be very normal. (Elschenbroich 1988: 366–8; emphasis in the original)

In search of a common cause

Now that marriage has shaken off the ties and obligations it had in the days of the extended family, it seems to float along by itself, a sheltered, private place for emotional companionship and leisure. This means more freedom, but, seen in another light, less support from outside. The 'common cause' which held together generations of families has disappeared (Ostner and Pieper 1980) and instead the individuals involved have to negotiate their own common aims. 'The still "empty mould of privacy" must first . . . be filled with content' (*ibid.*: 120). No doubt this can mean a new closeness but it also harbours considerable risks.

What do you mean by love?

What is the basis of our companionship? At first sight the answer is easy: the modern definition states that we are together because we love each other, our companionship is above all an emotional one. This is of course a sweeping and vague definition, for the components of love have changed throughout history, in recent centuries and particularly over the recent past. At present there are several versions – traditional, modern and postmodern – which coexist as odd bedfellows. This 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous' means that all sorts of notions, expectations and hopes, not to mention divergent rules and modes of behaviour, are combined in the term 'love' (see for instance the glib discussions on monogamy versus multiple relationships). Satisfying demands for 'love' is therefore a complicated and delicate matter of mediation and coordination, which can lead to fundamental misunderstandings:

The common ground for a modern Western marriage, an 'identity shared by both partners', is normally continually being confirmed and renewed in conversation. Whether one verbalizes such matters, however, differs from culture to culture. The bourgeois Western manner of dealing with disagreements – talking about them and trying to understand – is by no means a universal need. If the German spouse of a foreign person insists on it, the method may prove completely futile. In some other cultures a close relationship is not considered a criterion for a 'good' marriage; what counts is rather relying on each other, sharing responsibility and providing for the family, dividing up the labour between the sexes and practical staying power. (Elschenbroich 1988: 368)

There is another factor which further complicates matters: what we mean by 'love' subtly changes as time goes by even within our own

private relationships. This is especially true where 'romantic love' is seen as the ideal, for the initial phase is full of excitement and joy fed largely on the fascinating otherness of the other and the unknown. As the years pass, however, people inevitably get to know each other and everyday life sets in. This can mean a new sense of togetherness – durable, familiar, reliable – growing out of a shared history, but many couples cannot cope with the metamorphosis. It is neither luck nor fate but an integral part of this model; the 'trap of romantic love' means that love starts out as infatuation and lingers as an expectation which in this form cannot be met, so that all that is left is disappointment.

The American author Jeffrey Ullmann collected the enraptured effusions of prominent contemporaries in his book *Singles' Almanac* – as well as what remained of them later:

- Richard Burton on Elizabeth Taylor: 'Her body is a miracle of architecture.' Afterwards: 'She's too fat and her legs are too short.'
- Elizabeth Taylor on husband no. 1, Conrad Hilton Jr: 'He understands me as a woman and an actress.' Afterwards: 'After I married him I lost my rose-coloured spectacles – I lost weight and was only able to eat baby food.'
- Rita Hayworth on her third husband, Prince Ali Khan: 'My Prince of princes.' Afterwards: 'Ali can do whatever he wants – I've had it with him.' And on her fourth husband, Dick Haymes: 'I'd follow him anywhere on earth.' Afterwards: 'I don't know where he is – and I don't care.'

What perhaps most complicates the search for common ground is the fact that men and women have diverging views on what living with someone means. Men tend to emphasize the practical aspects like keeping the household running and 'making sure that everything goes well' (*Abendzeitung*, 23 October 1987). Women by contrast focus much more on the emotional side; for them sharing feelings and being close are paramount. This is exemplified in an interview with a husband and wife:

- MRS O: I often wish I could spend more time with my husband.
 MR O: Yes, but what does that mean in practical terms, what do you want to do when you are with your husband?
 MRS O: Well, just do something together.
 MR O: Do you want more in bed or something?
 MRS O: Just more overall – perhaps more conversation – or – you've got problems after all – sitting down together or, well, talking more

or chatting.

- MR O: But about what? about what? . . . the paper, or work or what do you want to talk to me about, it's all crap, what do you want to talk about anyway?
- MRS O: We have to talk to each other, about plans, and then here you come, right, if you speak up more, say more, then –
- MR O: Well, what about plans, that's all a lot of crap, your stupid gabbing . . .
- MRS O: Often I think to myself, you could, well you could ring up and so on and so forth.
- MR O: Those days are over, because we only have one telephone, the one that's out of order . . . and besides, what is that anyway, that's all hot air; what comes of it, probably just blah, blah, blah, back and forth and how's the weather . . .
- MRS O: Well, oh dear, well but sometimes between us it's some kind of connection or something.²

The differences in what the sexes expect are probably not new, but their conflict potential only recently began to surface. As soon as women come to see themselves as autonomous people with wishes of their own they are less ready to accept the solutions offered by previous generations – adjusting to your husband, and sacrificing your own interests. Women used to be expected to dispense comfortable feelings, affection and warmth, and nowadays increasingly want to be the recipients of such feelings. They are becoming tired of being the peace-makers and soothers at home. This trend is unmistakable in best-selling women's literature, where renouncing love is recommended, or at least that sort of love which leaves women drained and exhausted: the diagnosis is 'Women who Love too Much' (Norwood 1985); that is why a new 'Emotional Compact' between the sexes is needed (Hite and Colleran 1989: 44f.). And if it isn't fulfilled? The sober conclusion is 'Don't give up everything for a man' (Hite and Colleran 1989).

Difficult decisions: too many options

Marriage in pre-industrial society was held together by the iron bands of a common cause, the family and its survival. Each spouse had a clearly outlined task and knew exactly what was expected of him/her. As soon as the family is no longer one large economic unit these rules no longer apply. The bourgeois family which succeeded it polarized the gender roles – the man was the bread-winner and the woman the heart of the family. In the waning years of the twentieth century even these

standard roles are becoming shaky. What is left is a great deal of scope for decision-making, as a glance into the German Code of Civil Law (BGB) shows (see our table).

Original version of the BGB of 1896, in force since 1 January 1900	Marital Law Reform Act of 1976, in force since 1 July 1977
§ 1354 The husband is entitled to make decisions in all matters concerning marital life; in particular, he decides on residence and housing.	nullified
§ 1355 The woman takes on the husband's name.	As married name the spouses can choose the name of the husband or the wife.
§ 1356 The wife . . . is entitled and obliged to run the shared household.	The spouses regulate the management of the household by mutual consent.

Certainly the fact that both partners are free to choose how to run their mutual home does much to counteract the notion that the woman's role is subordinate; both she and he can bring their own rights and interests to bear. But once again there are losses with the gains. What looks so simple on paper proves a bitter battlefield in ordinary life, with two people with their own ideas, plans and preferences struggling to find a common approach. There is no law of preordained marital harmony at work guaranteeing that they reach roughly the same conclusions. Put briefly, if you have more scope you may feel liberated from old restrictions but you also run the risk of differing in so many respects from your lover that life becomes one long argument. The agreement the legislators recommend is hard to achieve.

It is not rare for couples to wrangle over the choice of a family name long before they are married. (Of course, as the statistics show, it is usually the men who keep their names, but this says nothing about how many couples differ on the matter beforehand, or how many never get married for just this reason.) Deciding on where to live is a problem when a good job offer somewhere else turns up. And how to organize the daily shared routine, provided there is one, is the worst problem of all, a minefield of disappointments and frustrations which do not just affect the smooth running of the household but often stir up deep personal fears that one's role in life and self-esteem are under attack.

Men and women are currently 'exposed to a whole kaleidoscope of possible interpretations of what "man" or "woman", "love" or "relationship", "motherhood" or "fatherhood" still might or should mean' (Wehrspaun 1988: 165). The way the sexes respond to one another is a bewildering mixture of old habits and new starts, with confusion creeping into the most intimate corners. As someone daubed on a wall: 'We want to love each other, but we don't know how,' summing up the predicament.

Talking it through: love as homework

So what is to be done? If there are no external standards, we have to find internal ones. 'This new society is . . . condemned . . . to generate its own rules which make cooperating and surviving possible *and* to insist on obedience to them' (Weymann 1989: 6). It seems like a new version of old Münchhausen, pulling himself out of the swamp by his own pigtail, except that now this has to be done as a couple. In all events tuning in to each other's ideas is crucial, and there are signs of attempts to 'manage relationships via negotiation' (Swaan 1981). This is happening in a wordy world of winding paths and circular routes, where people bump into each other, sometimes stay together, often part but at least try to discuss what is happening. The results, especially in contemporary literature, fill the bookshelves; literature is no longer 'a discourse on love but at best a discourse on a discourse about love' (Hage 1987). As an illustration, here is the monologue by a man in the thick of it:

Presumably everybody gets the kind of lover he deserves. I've got Anna and the two of us have been together for five years now. In that period of time others have acquired a shared apartment or at least a child. Not us. Each of us does his own thing – to each his own: bed, telephone bill, car, washing machine – the modalities of our relationship simply aren't cleared up yet. Who worries about what, who plays which role. Is living with someone ever compatible with independence? We still have to work a lot of things out. We're not a proper couple yet, even though a lot of people think we are. But we constantly rack our brains over whether we should become one. The only thing we've really achieved over the past years is a lot of good arguments – we live with them. If I criticize Anna's desire to sit around every night in pubs, she accuses me of possessiveness. If she wants to go on holiday alone and regards my idea of spending the summer together in Tuscany as just a pseudo-romantic impulse, she says I am suffering from childish fears of losing her . . . It seems to me as if our relationship consists of nothing but arrangements – emotional clauses in

a screwing contract with an extraordinary amount of small print . . . I always tell myself, don't get upset because she again refused to spend the night with you. She always says, 'I just need time for myself. You wouldn't enjoy being with me anyway when I'm brooding like this.' But what matters to me is just being with her. She doesn't understand that. 'It stifles me,' she says. 'Why don't you two just get married?' a friend asked me the other day, 'It's crazy to burden yourselves with two households for years and years.' That might be true. But I read somewhere that the average couple spends only eight minutes a day talking to each other after twenty years. Something like that could never happen to us. (Praschl 1988)

To an outsider the interminable talk about how to treat one another may seem ridiculous, but it is not just a symptom of personal confusion or a kind of ego virus infecting more and more of the population; such an interpretation would be tempting but superficial. What is happening in so many private lives is to a large extent the consequence of modern thinking.

As long as there were strict commandments and prohibitions regulating married life and the daily routine, it was fairly obvious to everyone what was correct, pleasing to God and natural. Why bother with big words, complicated questions and long explanations? Each spouse knew the rules and also knew that the other one knew them. (Even those who chose to disobey knew what they were doing: they were violating custom and moral attitudes and rebelling against the norms.) In this respect there has been a fundamental transformation in recent decades, and especially in recent years. The fewer firm regulations there are, the more we are expected to work them out for ourselves, asking 'What's right and what's wrong?' and 'What do you want and what do I want?' and 'What should we do?'

'A modern couple – lots of words and not much loving' (Hage 1987). Couples have to get involved in a continuing dialogue so that they can invent and pursue their common cause, that is to say, they have to fill up their free private space with compatible definitions of love and marriage. This requires enormous effort, time and patience, exactly the qualities identified with 'relationship work'. And it is very hard work, and often seems almost in vain, for beyond every agreement there lies yet another argument to tackle:

If the individual is not to fail, he must do something to maintain his happiness. Family claims put high expectations on him. Being a 'good partner' means being active, attentive, and empathic. Rifts in opinions have to be recognized early, while they are still just hairline cracks. Patching them up requires sensitive perception of one's partner's needs. (Vollmer 1986: 217)

In the absence of outside authorities it is increasingly important that the couple finds ways of communicating with one another. It is therefore certainly no coincidence that there has been a boom in all branches of psychology and therapy since the 1960s, focusing particularly on the dynamics of love. The imperatives they often proclaim are called 'openness' and 'honesty'. The partners are supposed to admit their feelings, 'be themselves' and not hide behind anxieties, taboos and conventions. A self-help book published in 1970 states:

We are firmly convinced that . . . the real problems of true love can only be solved in relationships which are open, free, critical and authentic, that is, which give both partners the chance to start out from themselves and offer themselves to their partner without having to distort themselves or fit in with the other's expectations. (Quoted in Bach and Deutsch 1979: 26)

Being open, which is a byproduct of how people behave when no longer bound by old commitments, has suddenly become a watchword, signalling the advent of a new culture. Pop culture transmits it in trivialized form, the mass media dilute it, but the tendency especially among young people is to tell all. Men and women go through hours of heart-searching either to get closer to one another or to reject one another. Every feeling, every move is dredged up, scrutinized, defined and catalogued – my anxieties, your clinging, his father complex. 'The partners start out from the assumption that they have to be authentic, must not be hypocritical and must learn to get along together while being uninhibitedly frank with one another' (Hahn 1988: 179).

The results are not always particularly helpful to the relationship. Not only lying but insisting on the truth can prove destructive. And self-examination is not just a way of escaping from the sins of the fathers (and mothers) but also a dangerous weapon. 'Let there be truth between us,' says Thoas to Iphigenia in Goethe's drama *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (loosely based on Euripides), but only after they have separated forever. The relative success of traditional modes of self-examination such as religious confession or psychoanalysis has a lot to do with the fact that the priest or analyst is not living with the confessee or patient (Hahn 1988: 179).

The ethics of change: getting it all right

As we have described, one of the essential features of modern life is that we have shrugged off the traditional order. It is striking that once this process gets under way, there is little stopping it and a 'drive to expand', indeed a permanent 'ethics of change', is set in motion (J. Berger 1986:

90–1; Wehrspaun 1988). The old barriers stopping people – the laws of nature, God's word, social customs and class imperatives – are gradually wearing away and as a result there are no rules stating when we have to desist. Instead it becomes the norm to look for more: even faster, bigger, more beautiful!

This 'improving' mentality extends far beyond makes of cars and job conditions; it also intrudes into love-affairs. Research has shown that the standards set on living together today are considerably higher than they used to be. It is no longer enough to just get along with each other. People want more, they are in search of 'happiness and fulfilment', the American dream, 'the pursuit of happiness' in their own little home. Disappointments are inevitable, for the higher the expectations one brings to marriage, the more likely one's own seems drab compared with these grand ambitions. Furthermore the dream turns into a trap, arousing hopes which cannot be satisfied. In any close and lasting live-in relationship there will be angry, disillusioned or guilt-ridden moments to augment the happy ones. As a pupil wrote in an essay, 'family is war and peace' (quoted by Lüscher 1987: 23). Expecting to be happy, and only that, collides with the realities of personal relations, the conflicts, compromises and crises which crop up in all our doings with one another. An experienced therapist puts it like this:

[The countless books on marriage which recommend personal growth and promise maturity deal] not at all or too little with the other side, which is also a part of growth, the depths of distress and destructive violence and efforts to overcome them. [I] do not [see] the family as a sanctuary, a place where nothing but fun and joy prevail – which of course it can be – but as a place where the human being, the most barbaric creature of all, can learn to share time and space with others in a non-violent and non-destructive way... Revealing oneself completely to the person with whom one lives and at the same time getting to know sides of his (her) personality, history, hopes and fears which smash the image one has made into a thousand pieces... is a long-drawn-out and very painful experience... [In this sense] marriage and family life are wonderful places... to face life's cesspits.

So I have reached the conclusion after twenty-six-and-a-half years of married life that happiness is not the goal. Marriage has many wonderful sides; it is a place where one can learn to share life with people who are different in age as well as gender, values and perspectives... It is a place where one can hate as well as conquer hate, a place where one can learn to laugh and love and communicate. (Jourard 1982: 177–9)

What is one to do, however, if reality does not live up to the ideal? According to the old model people were tied to one another no matter

how incompatible their temperaments and inclinations turned out to be. Now the new belief in improving the situation points in exactly the opposite direction – it's better to end the marriage than put up with shortcomings and tone down one's expectations. Or to put it another way, without any external hindrances to the pursuit of perfect love, ordinary couples find themselves under pressure to be dissatisfied with their 'inferior' unions.

Here lies one of the reasons why the divorce figures are rocketing. 'People are getting divorced in such numbers... because their expectations of marriage are so high that they are unwilling to put up with a poor substitute' (Berger and Berger, quoted in Jaeggi and Holstein 1985: 36).

Since after six weeks her third husband no longer leaps to his feet, but becomes flabby and domestic, has had enough of the physiological side of things and is beginning to think about social life, about his job and the fact that he had better invite the de Vries family for the evening, keeps talking about being promoted and having arthritis, she suddenly realizes, flush with moral righteousness and dignity, that she has deceived herself. This feeling of having deceived oneself never fails to appear. So then she decides to speak to him, quite magnanimously, and in order to make her announcement more impressive she puts on a turban. 'Dear third Mr Spider,' says the spider, and folds her hairy little paws, 'let us treat each other in a dignified manner and separate without any sordid muck-raking. Let us not sully the memory of our past happiness with pointless foul language. I owe you the truth, and the truth, my dear, is that I no longer love you... I have deceived myself. I believed with all my soul that you would be Mr Spider forever. I'm sorry, but you should know: there's a fourth Mr Spider in my life and he means everything to me.' (Cohen 1983: 330–1)

This search for new horizons is fuelled from within; the more scope one has the more one feels driven to seek alternatives (Nunner-Winkler 1989). In this context it means the new options – separating and divorcing – have an impact even if they play a minor role in the statistics. The mere fact that they are on people's minds (and the mass media do their best to foster this interest) affects the old ways of living together. Anyone upholding the idea of marriage does so knowing there are real alternatives, and may find themselves compelled to justify what amounts to a conscious choice.

The humorist Chlodwig Plotz describes the situation like this:

Two friends meet in a pub.

A: Wow, it's nice to be back here again. How are you people getting on.
What are the Krögers up to?

- B: They split up a long time ago. He's living with another woman in Sachsenhausen and I have no idea where she is.
- A: Oh, and what about the Zierfelds?
- B: They just had a fight. He left and is living in a commune. She's living in Bornheim with Volker – he's a teacher. Don't know if you know him. And how are things with you?
- A: Well, you know, it just didn't work out any more. Susi's living somewhere else with a really nice sort, and I'm back in the old flat with Karin – she's a psychologist. And you two? How's that going?
- B: Well, we're still together, but you know we've often thought about it, really. But then there's our son, and besides that, you know, and every so often, I don't know if you understand, but sometimes we get on quite well together. It's weird, but, you know, that is how it is. Do you understand?
- A: Hey, there's no need to be ashamed, old fruit. I understand, don't worry about it.

(Quoted in Nunner-Winkler 1989)

The very fact that one has to justify living in an old-fashioned way causes the spiral of change to spin even faster. Sticking to familiar habits is easy enough as long as there are no extreme problems to cope with; optional behaviour, on the other hand, has to be justified using positive arguments. A marriage which is predetermined is accepted as long as it is not intolerable, but a freely chosen one has to be defended as the 'best' solution against all the possibilities. So justifying one's step pushes up one's standards on what constitutes happiness.

Work as the great divider

So far we have seen that present-day couples are bound together by their mutual hope of being loved – which causes problems. These private problems, however, inherent in the idea of a perfect love, are exacerbated by yet another factor. The companionship we seek from one another is not to be found in a social vacuum but in surroundings where impersonal forces are at work which often undermine our efforts. This crucial factor is the way employment is currently organized. Instead of binding the couple together as a team in pre-industrial society, the working conditions we know tend to cut men and women off from one another, to segregate them into different worlds.

There are of course still so-called traditional marriages founded on the old pattern of bread-winner/home-maker, sending one out into the stresses of the job market and leaving the other isolated at home with a monotonous routine. It is hard to find a common language for these two worlds, and where words fail there is only silence and alienation:

She doesn't notice when you are out of breath; she doesn't suspect that your arm is getting sore; of course she knows that you work hard; of course she knows that he supports the household, fits in with all requests, takes care of all the expenses; of course she knows about his troubles and his bad mood; she has her own troubles and bad moods; she also locks her worries away from him. But one day you stand there and ask yourself, how can it go on? No more verve, no more alarms, no more following or accompanying each other, no more shared discussions on the future, nothing but being taken for granted and a peaceful division of labour . . . That is what the peaceful happiness of a sixteen-year marriage turns into, and life becomes like a pot of curdled milk, sour and thick, in which you drown like a fly, quite soberly. (Wassermann 1987: 93)

Or there is the other kind of marriage favoured especially by young people where both partners work away from home and have to manage their lives accordingly. Most professional positions nowadays are designed on the tacit assumption that they will be filled by

one person backed by half another person and organized in terms of quantity and quality in ways which completely ignore private commitments; auxiliary work and services are provided by the half person, usually the wife. Women's day-to-day chores are meant to provide the husband and family with food, clothing and a comfortable home and to care for the next generation, freeing the man from everyday worries and stresses so that he can take on his taxing professional role unhindered. (Beck-Gernsheim 1980: 68-9)

Given such premises, what happens when more and more women have careers of their own? It is a matter of simple arithmetic; both spouses now lack the third person to take over the work backstage and dispense affection. This is why in thousands of homes after the exertions of the day there are short-tempered people disagreeing on who cleans the bathroom and who fetches the kids, a widespread feud on the private division of labour which has been thoroughly researched.

In fact this is only part of the problem, for in everyday life just as much as in our theorizing about it we tend to forget that it isn't just housework in the strict sense but emotional work that is needed. The human being, and certainly the working human being, does not live by bread alone; emotional support is also essential. The dictates of the market – speed and efficiency, competition and career – infiltrate into our homes and surface as irritability and tension. (It is not coincidental that the gender roles polarizing working husbands and women in charge of domestic bliss were first found in the nineteenth century.) Life at home becomes difficult if both partners are waiting in vain for emotional

support and understanding from one another. This is not pure egotism or individual weakness, but a collective event, the same drama in innumerable kitchens brought about by the person-and-a-half jobs which wear everybody out.

My business, your business: a preference for contracts

Feeling increasingly helpless and cornered, people look for advice, and the market responds with a boom in patent recipes on how to run one's life. The flood of books is almost impossible to keep track of, as broad in range as it is diverse, offering a kind of supermarket of philosophies for living and loving. From our viewpoint it is interesting to ask: what rules do they suggest for making our shared lives easier?

One soon realizes that the question is wrongly put, at least in part. Certainly there are plenty of books on offer which purport to tear down the barriers of disappointment, silence and resignation, but there are just as many self-help books which push the topic of companionship – getting on together – right to the margin, if they mention it at all. The main subject is quite different and found in all kinds of variations, sometimes formulated gently and sometimes very crassly: it is protecting 'me' against 'us'. People are recommended to 'regulate as many aspects of everyday living together as possible in a marriage contract' (Partner 1984: 85ff.).

The prime purpose here is not to organize life in ways which promote togetherness or closeness in a permanent dialogue but to protect one's own interests by means of regulations. More and more couples are taking this advice. In Germany (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 June 1985) and the USA (*International Herald Tribune*, 24 September 1986) there is a sharp rise in the number of people entering into such agreements:

The man's fiancée was slim. He liked her that way. He wanted her to stay that way. And he was determined to do everything in his power to ensure her continued slenderness . . . Before the wedding, the groom got his bride to agree to a contract to pay a fine if she gained weight, refundable upon weight loss. That was no idle promise. The couple backed it up in writing in a prenuptial agreement negotiated by a New York attorney.

Welcome to marriage, contractual style, circa 1986, a time when legal documents increasingly are spelling out everything from closet-space allocations after the wedding to who gets to keep the rent-controlled apartment after the divorce. It is not uncommon to find premarital contracts decreeing that spouses will alternate in choosing vacation spots, that the parties will share equally in disciplining children or that the partners have fully disclosed to one another the nature of their prior sexual experiences

... Lawyers say they are seeing a rising demand for all sorts of prenuptial agreements, from the strictly financial to those with unusual lifestyle clauses.
(International Herald Tribune, 24 September 1986)

And what happens if differences nevertheless arise as time goes by? Even then you can make a contract. Where there is nothing more in common the new philosophy of self-help offers civilized ways of coping with the situation, rediscovering the old principle '*do ut des*', plainly translated as 'what I don't like about you and you don't like about me will be got rid of by exchange.' There are already self-help books recommending 'agreements for mutual behaviour alteration'. A few instructions from one of them read as follows:

Each partner gets something he/she wants from the other. For instance, you contract to 'wear a nice robe in the morning instead of that torn one'. He agrees to 'come home for dinner on time instead of going drinking with the boys'. You start out with simple behaviours and progress to more complex: ('She should initiate more sex ...', 'He should kiss me more ...'). (Baer 1976)

Freed from all outer constraints and able to marry whom you like, it paradoxically turns out that you may need new kinds of mutual control. Where everything is open, everything has to be negotiated, and without a common cause each individual's personal interests have to be protected from incursions by the other. The kind of self-help books mentioned above reflect and even amplify this trend. The question of what will become of the couple's togetherness is again incorrectly put, for that is not what is at stake here, or at least not primarily so.

From the evidence collected so far the following picture emerges. In modern marriage what links the two partners is their feelings for one another; the common ground is almost exclusively emotional and if the good feelings seem to be evaporating, then that is the beginning of the end of the marriage. It is the idea of 'romantic love' which gives marriage this strong emotional bias and has helped to transform our expectations; what used to be 'a lifelong bond has turned into a commitment which is upheld only under certain conditions' (Furstenberg 1987: 30).

The strain of persevering

The ordeals in the mountains lie behind us,
 Ahead lie the ordeals in the plains.
 (Bertolt Brecht)

The main attraction people see in one another nowadays is not a common aim in life but the prospect of happiness, of finding the 'right' partner, a mixture of dream lover and best friend. But as dreams alter and friends prove less exciting than one thought, happiness turns out to be fugitive. More formally, *the space occupied by each individual in modern society makes close relationships precarious:*

The family as an open space . . . means that it is in principle open to *any* definition, provided it remains a 'private' one not immediately connected with earning a living. But that also means that it is open to *no* definition, at least no permanent one. (Ostner and Pieper 1980: 123; emphasis in the original)

In the recent past hopes were pinned on self-determination and shaking off traditional obligations. The promise was clear: once all obstacles have been overcome, in whatever form – from family resistance to class considerations to lack of money – then true love will win. And it was also absolutely certain that this love would last forever. As Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* concludes:

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth . . . I know no weariness of my Edward's society; he knows none of mine . . . We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking . . . we are precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result. (Brontë 1966: 475–6)

The modern discovery is that when love changes and what used to be a community of two helpmates has become a community of two lovers, the emotions themselves become hard work. Love under modern conditions is not an event which takes place once but is a state to be fought for anew every day, not just in good and bad times but all the time against the insecurities and upsets modern society forces on it.

To do this one needs patience and tolerance; such a relationship involves tenacious negotiations, often accompanied by skirmishing and a series of mini summit conferences, with no end in sight and the aggravating difficulty that the participants after years of practice are experts in each other's weaknesses and no-go areas. Love, having cast off its old shackles, finds itself under attack from a new quarter:

Whether walking, sitting or lying down,
they are together.

They have said their piece. They have kept silence.
That's it . . .

They speak in silence. And keep silent with words.
Their mouths run empty,
Their silence is of nineteen sorts
(if not more).

The sight of their souls and ties
Makes them angry.
They're like gramophones with three records.
They make you uneasy.

(Erich Kästner, *Gewisse Ehepaare*
(Certain married couples))

Love as a cuddly idyll? If only it were. The freedoms modern times offer are 'risky opportunities' (Keupp 1988). The more intense our feelings are, the more likely we are to suffer from them, from the mistakes, misunderstandings and complications they bring about. (If you can climb a peak you can equally fall into a crevasse, and being heartbroken is more than just a cliché phrase from the hit parade.) The distress men and women suffer in trying to live with one another is not purely their own fault, a byproduct of too much egocentricity. It also has something to do with modern definitions of love and marriage. Our feelings are supposed to be the basis, but feelings as we well know can be fickle: 'The heart is an extremely flexible muscle' (Woody Allen's film *Hannah and her Sisters*, final scene). While the classic literary theme used to be 'they can't get together,' in modern literature it is 'they can't live together.' Or as Dieter Wellershoff writes, 'In the old days lovers ran up against institutional barriers, while nowadays they are wading through a swamp of ideology called happiness' (quoted in Hage 1987).

From this one might conclude that any gain in terms of freedom and independence is quietly leaking away again. 'It rather looks as though the exigencies of the past are being replaced by the exigencies of the present' (Mayer 1985: 87). Nevertheless, if our modern ways of living harbour disappointment and conflict, earlier generations with their rigorous restrictions on personal freedom were hardly better off. There is certainly nothing to be gained from returning to the old ways; what we must find are new ways of living with one another which are both free and lasting.

One important step in this direction could be recognizing the 'double-faced' nature of liberation processes, the continuous dialectic between advantages and drawbacks. Perhaps that would make it easier to look for happiness on the other side too, amid the strain of persevering, of

fighting for what we have. As it goes in a modern version of *Romeo and Juliet*, 'The love of your life? I believe that is when two people manage to put up with each other for their whole life' (Capek 1985). In the chilly world of independence love is defined as a burden and yet missed as a permanent support. As the epochs and their problems change, love remains a utopia, a design for a better world:

Those marriages which start off with love are a bad sign. I wonder whether those great lovers in the stories one reads would continue to love their mate if she were ill, bed-ridden, and he, the man, had to take care of her the way one takes care of a baby; you understand all the unpleasantness I'm talking about here. Well, I believe he would not love her any more. True love, let me tell you, is growing old together. (Cohen 1984: 18)

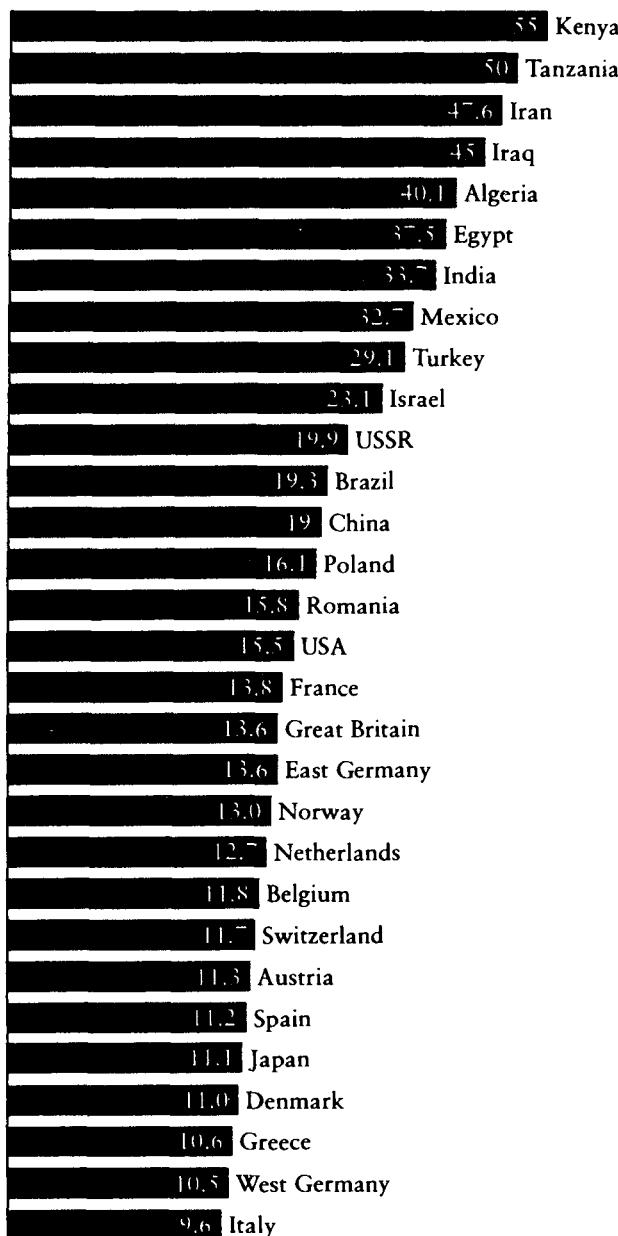
ALL FOR LOVE OF A CHILD

'Love, marriage, baby carriage': love leads you to the altar and soon after that the baby arrives . . . that is how simple the world looked in the 1950s. Much has changed since then. It is no longer taken for granted that two people in love will get married, and for those who do decide to marry having children is not taken for granted either.

Are we living in an 'anti-child' society? At least this much is clear: in the highly industrialized countries there has been a marked decline in the birth-rate since the 1960s. Compared with other countries, the former German Federal Republic was long most severely affected, but recently Italy, the traditional 'bambini' country, has shown an even lower birth-rate (see the figure).

During the nineteenth century there were songs and poems about loving children, often linking this with 'woman's nature', idealizing the feelings and giving them a romantic aura. In the late twentieth century it has turned into a subject for magazines on parenting and books on child-rearing, a topic weighed down by instructions and educational tips, ordering parents to adopt the right approach and give their offspring the very best upbringing. Affection is recommended, but only in proper doses; even here one can do the wrong thing by 'terrorizing them with affection' (Gronemeyer 1989: 27).

Love for children – an eternal and natural bond, part of the scheme behind the history of mankind, perhaps even a genetic imprint? In fact it seems rather more complicated; what we have to look into is the relationship between mother and child. What are the dreams and longings it contains, what obligations and burdens? How was parenthood some years ago, how is it now, and what is likely to become of it in the future?



International birth-rates per 1000 inhabitants, with Italy's rate the lowest (UN data, given in *Die Zeit*, 23 December 1988)

Wanting a child

In the past, marriage and parenthood were directly linked, but that does not necessarily imply that men and women used to be more fond of children than they are today. In pre-industrial society children were essential for economic reasons, for their help at home and in the fields, to look after their parents in old age and to inherit property and the family name (e.g. Rosenbaum 1982; Tilly 1978). For the wealthy classes children were financially significant factors as heirs and owners of dowries; no wonder they were generally welcome and sometimes ardently desired, especially if they were firstborns or sons. There were, however, equally situations where children were useless and even an economic burden, if for instance there were too many of them and the family became too large.

No one could afford to get too emotionally involved in his/her children, as is illustrated by this account from Bavaria dated about 1800:

The peasant is happy when his wife bears the first token of her love; he is still happy when the second and third arrive, but not so much with the fourth one . . . He regards all the subsequently born children as hostile creatures who snatch the bread out of his mouth and those of the rest of the family. Even the most tender maternal heart becomes indifferent to the fifth child and loudly wishes every sixth one dead. (Quoted in Imhof 1981: 44)

The ethnologist Karl von Leoprechting wrote in similar terms in 1855:

Incidentally only a few of these many children survive, one could expect at most four out of a dozen, the rest generally go to heaven quite early. People rarely mourn for small children who die; they are beautiful angels in heaven and we have got enough with the rest. If an older child who could soon start helping dies, then everyone is sad. (Quoted in *Bad Tölz-Wolfratshauser Neueste Nachrichten*, 11 August 1988: IV)

In the late twentieth century, marriage is no longer so inextricably and inevitably linked with parenthood. In part this has to do with economics. When the family as an economic unit broke up as a byproduct of industrialization, the financial advantages of having children gradually receded and instead costs rose. Since then there has been a drastic shift, summed up as 'from children as blessing to children as burden' (Bolte 1980: 66). Over the past two decades and even more so over the past few years this change has gained enormous momentum, largely because

the costs of raising a child have risen steeply, markedly faster than incomes, the inflation rate or the price indexes.

The child as experience of meaning and the self

The men and women who decide to have children today certainly do not do so because they expect any material advantages. Other motives closely linked with the emotional needs of the parents play a significant role; our children mainly have 'a psychological utility' (Fend 1988: 160). The data from other studies confirm this:

Children do not bring any economic advantages – the exact opposite is the case. Nor can parents today expect practical support and help with difficult problems from their children – our society is too strongly oriented towards individualizing our life styles for that. The real remaining reward is the emotional value children have: the important feeling of being responsible, in charge and emotionally indispensable, and above all seeing oneself embodied in the next generation and represented again in human form. (Hurrelmann 1989: 11–12)

How does this 'psychological utility' express itself? There is a series of well-known motives, perhaps that the child could glue the parents together or fulfil their frustrated hopes of upward mobility. Having children, a demographic study reports, is increasingly connected with hopes of being rooted, of life becoming meaningful, and with a 'claim to happiness', based on the close relationship with the child (Münz 1983: 39):

the desire for children (is) ego-related and connected with the present: parents want to . . . get something for themselves from giving birth, nursing, raising and providing for the children . . . Hope of discovering oneself through one's children is more widespread . . . it is [typical] of a large number of parents that having children is no longer primarily understood as a service, a kind of devotion or social obligation. Instead it is admitted to be a way of life in which one pursues one's own interests.

Here one can see signs of a parallel in the basic pattern behind a historical transition. The sort of change evident in the marital relationship as society moved from pre-industrial to modern times is also apparent in the relationship between parents and child. In both, the common cause – the survival of the family unit – has disappeared; in both, the relationship between the persons involved is less economic and more

personal and private, with all the hopes and interests this involves; in both, the relationship depends largely on the growing, not to say hypertrophic emotional needs of all parties in an individualized world (including all the rewards and horrors inherent in intense feelings). As Jürgen Zinnecker noted in his research into socialization, the more the objective foundation of life crumbles, the more prominent the 'imaginary' becomes in the relationship between the generations. The adults use childhood and youth as 'a projection screen for unrealized and utopian dreams' (1988: 129). This tendency can be seen in the way parents and children interact and also long before that in the hopes linked with parenthood (see Beck-Gernsheim 1988a: 128ff.).

In highly industrialized societies people are always trained to behave rationally, to be efficient, fast, disciplined and successful. A child represents the opposite, the 'natural' side of life, and that is exactly what is so appealing. The child holds out a promise which especially young women, and a few young men, have described vividly in interviews and accounts of their own lives. Being with a child will help them to rediscover some of their gifts and express some of their needs which they sorely miss in high-tech life: being patient or calm, solicitous and sensitive, affectionate, open and close. Motherhood seems to offer the women an alternative refuge from the working world, where it is imperative to behave responsibly and soberly, and emotions are generally considered a nuisance. Committing yourself to a child means contradicting the cognitive side of life, and finding a living counterweight to all that soul-destroying routine. As one woman remarks: 'Where else can you find so much vital energy and joy as in a child?' (Boston Women's Health Collective 1971: II, 644).

'The naturalness of (small) children in a milieu that has become rather "unnatural"' is a theme beginning to appear in surveys (Höpflinger 1984: 104). It is this naturalness which obviously has so much appeal for the 'new women' (and men) who have grown up with the psychological ideas and educational aims introduced into the German school system in the 1970s and are highly sensitized to the price one may have to pay for getting along in our stressful society, the hardened hearts and pent-up feelings which ultimately result in 'an all-round reduced personality'. A child then seems to promise contact with 'genuine people, authentic relationships' (quoted in Häsing and Brandes 1983: 208). An alternative seems to present itself, a way of seeing people and how they grow through nostalgic eyes: 'Children come into the world intact and alive, while our hearts have turned into rubble and dust' (quoted in *ibid.*). An observer of this generation of 'new parents' writes:

Mothers and fathers do not pretend to be selfless; they too expect a great deal back from their children. Bringing up a child is a matter of barter . . . They want to be brought up by their children. Sons and daughters are supposed to help the parents achieve their goal of being spontaneous, sensual, uninhibited and creative personalities. It is not the parents raising their children but conversely the children raising their parents. In the truest sense of the word, sons and daughters embody their parents' ego-ideal. (Bopp 1984: 66 and 70)

Another factor here is that, as we have seen, being a free individual has its alarming sides: 'A modern European is condemned to freedom. He is homeless' (Weymann 1989: 2). Having a child, looking after it and providing for it can give life new meaning and significance, can in fact become the very core of one's private existence. Where other aims seem arbitrary and interchangeable, belief in the afterlife vanishes and hopes in this world prove evanescent, a child provides one with a chance to find a firm footing and a home.

Such motives are often directly expressed by people low down on the social scale. A Swiss study on family planning has discovered that the notion of children as the most important thing and main purpose in life is particularly widespread among people with little education (Höpflinger 1984: 146-7). A German study on lower-class families points in the same direction (Wahl et al. 1980: 34-8). In response to the question 'What does having a family and children mean to you?' the answers were:

'So that life has some point to it.'

'You know where you are, what you're working for.'

'I want to know where I belong.'

'Life is much nicer if you know someone needs you. If you live alone, day in day out, you have nothing to show for it. With a family you know what you have accomplished. You know what you lived for.'

It is, however, not only the groups at a social disadvantage for whom children are becoming the essence of life. If one goes through the relevant interviews one soon discovers that the 'new women' and men make quite similar statements. One woman writer for instance notes: 'I wanted a child, a family of my own, someone to need and want me' (in Dowrick and Grundberg 1980: 80). Authors describing the new social tendencies remark – sometimes ironically, sometimes caustically – on

the vehement search for the meaning of life in the shape of a small child. The new parents are looking for somewhere to anchor, and have children so that 'they have relatives,' to have the feeling of 'belonging somewhere while the world map keeps constantly changing' (Dische 1983: 32). There are cartoons showing 'a weird desire to have children' turning the child into the parent's vehicle in search of faith (Roos and Hassauer 1982: 70).

A woman retrospectively describes her own state when she decided to have a child:

I had my baby... at a time when I was extremely uncertain of myself. My studies at the university were almost over; I had the prospect of being unemployed. The atmosphere in my political circles, the non-dogmatic left, varied between dismal and hopeless. The people I was sharing a house with were going their own ways, my boyfriend was very interested in some blonde, and the no-future mood that flourished later on, in the 'eighties, was already beginning to take hold in the streets and pubs of Frankfurt's Bockenheim district. Losing more and more of my commitments and points of reference made me both happy/light-hearted and dizzy/frightened. I saw that being free was not just beautiful and attractive. On the contrary, it is confusingly two-sided... I also had my baby... from fear of the void... that was opening up in front of me, and of my own uncertain future... By starting my family I wanted to create an alternative world for myself. That was it. I had escaped from the freedom which frightened me. (In Häsing and Brandes 1983: 180-1)

Childless for love of children?

Of course there are also strong barriers against having children nowadays. For one thing most people want 'a life of one's own', an aspect of an individualized society which used to affect only men and is now spreading to women as well. It soon becomes all too obvious there is no one in the background, there is no one unconditionally prepared to look after the child. One more telling reason however is that the demands made on parents have risen sharply, a matter which so far has been neglected by researchers and the public authorities. Parenthood has become an increasingly responsible task (see below, under 'Only the best will do', p. 128) and this makes deciding to have a child even more difficult (see Beck-Gernsheim 1988a: 149ff.).

The more one is expected to provide the child with 'optimal conditions' the longer prospective parents wait, even in the planning stage. This

applies in all social classes, and no longer just in the middle classes interested in climbing the social ladder. 'The cost of having children and educating them is beginning to be seen from the angle of getting on in life and being successful, particularly in the lower classes' (Fuchs 1983: 348). The list of requirements is long, from pocket money and a room of its own for the child to holidays, toys and sports, and, not to be underestimated, the incidental expenses incurred during the ever-longer period while the child is at school or undergoing training for a job. These standards, transmitted by the mass media, take hold of the minds of broad sections of the population. The phrase 'we can't afford a child' reveals something about the couple's own standard of living but it says just as much about the standard of living they want to offer their child, indeed feel compelled to offer it if they follow the experts' advice. The new rule is 'modern people have only as many children as they can afford financially. They are well aware of their responsibility' (Häussler 1983: 65).

One suspects that the material side is only one aspect, and not the most important. The experts' advice covers much more, and reaches almost everyone, first the education-conscious middle-class women and then more generally via television and magazines. According to these authorities a child needs the right environment, ranging from proper housing and neighbourhood to a stable and affectionate home. And, most important of all, rearing a child is, as the self-help books emphasize, a 'great and responsible assignment' (Boston Women's Health Collective 1971: II, 644).

With so much responsibility around the consequences are obvious. As observers report, the potential mothers and fathers do their best to attain 'a maximum of security . . . in the interest of the children' (Roos and Hassauer 1982: 189). They carry around a list of requirements in their heads, and this list is longer than ever before – safe work-places, good housing, progressive schools and proper nursery care. Even the ecology issue comes in here: many ask themselves whether it is justifiable to have children at all any more, beneath the thinning ozone layer and surrounded by dying forests.

The young women who are up-to-date on (popular) science and highly conscious of their responsibility often subject their love-lives to a rigorous test. Is it good enough to take the strain and provide a child with the stability it needs? More than ever before they cross-examine themselves: if the personality of my child depends on how well I care for it, am I emotionally mature enough to treat it right? This is a new question of conscience, widely found among men and women who are aware of current psychological thinking: am I up to the personal demands

of child-rearing? Do I have the inner qualities the child needs to develop properly?

If the answer is no – whether they want children or not – then the consequence must be: no child, or at least not yet. Here are the results of an empirical study on cohabitation:

Many of them have the feeling there should be a child 'only later' . . . only when the problems in the relationship have been dealt with, or when one personally feels more stable . . . People would like to feel mature enough, for 'if I can't cope with myself, how am I supposed to cope with a child?' . . . For the women this is often linked to feeling anxious about motherhood, which is felt to be a crucial and exceptional test of one's own character. (*Nichteheliche Lebensgemeinschaften* 1985: 77)¹

As standards for having and bringing up children rise one can discern a new pattern of decision-making. It is known as 'A Responsible Choice: No Children' (Ayck and Stolten 1978), for love of them, as it were. A peculiar spiralling effect gets under way: the fewer the children the more precious each one becomes and the more rights it is given. The more important and expensive a child is, the more people recoil from this huge task and decide to do without. Ayck and Stolten state in their introduction to *Kinderlos aus Verantwortung*:

This book is not aimed against life with children but against what is done to children nowadays. They need more than care, food and drink. Their psychological needs are often neglected . . . Conscious childlessness is a challenge. Not having children can be an expression of a new moral attitude and a new form of social responsibility. (1978: 12, 18, 25)

Planned children

The decision to have or not to have children is currently affected by a whole series of factors, from the pleasures and deprivations of a life of one's own to the obligations and delights of parenthood. There is always some argument for and another against whatever is decided, keeping hopes and fears alive – 'Wanting a Child: Pros and Cons', as the title of a book by Roos and Hassauer (1982) puts it. Research confirms this: 'In weighing up the pros and cons, typical kinds of insecurity, ambivalence and contradictions become apparent' (Urdze and Rerrich 1981: 94).

So what is thought of as a situation requiring a decision often turns

into a long-drawn-out process. This applies particularly to the new women (and sometimes men) who are well informed, aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and anxious to take the right decisions for the right reasons. This again is a characteristic of a society where traditional ideas about class, status and sexual identity no longer direct people down firmly preset paths. We are finding ourselves forced to construct our own biographies, planning the short-term and long-term strategies from what type of schooling we want, what training we undergo, to where we choose to live and who we choose to live with. As the relevant women's literature shows, this need to plan ahead intervenes increasingly in women's lives and their attitudes to motherhood. A handbook for women lays down the correct procedure: a would-be mother should first of all 'think everything through carefully' and then 'make a really certain decision' (Boston Women's Health Collective 1971: II, 640).

A glance into the autobiographies and studies on this topic reveals that the advice is being followed. An empirical survey reports: 'Many of the women interviewed complained of a lack of spontaneity. They have the impression that having children used to be quite natural, whereas nowadays they have to make a conscious decision' (*Nichteheliche Lebensgemeinschaften* 1985: 78). In reflections on their real feelings, in diaries, in conversations with women friends and more than ever with their partners, the new women are trying to track down good reasons for motherhood, and want to 'get informed', to be able to 'prevent' or if necessary 'arm themselves', even 'defend themselves'; they want 'to know all about it' (Sichtermann 1982: 7-11).

This is certainly one reason why they write down their experiences, seeking a way out of the ambivalences and helping each other on the long road to making a decision:

It was essential for us to do this book. It arose out of a sense of satiation. We talked about having a child for three or four years. The two of us discussed it, and we talked it over with friends, colleagues and other people our age . . . Now the book is done. With it one stage of our biography has come to an end. The child issue has been objectified for us.
(A university lecturer, quoted in Bach and Deutsch 1979: 26)

My boyfriend always said I should write down my reasons for wanting a baby. I did that for three years, but I never came up with a really good reason for it. Just a lot of trivialities. (A graphic designer, quoted in Hahn 1988: 179)

What used to be the most natural thing in the world has now for some groups of the population become highly complicated. Nothing happens spontaneously any more; everything has become cerebral, for the new woman feels compelled to question and problematize what she does. The children, if there are any, are supposed to be welcome, but wishing for them is no longer just a wish but a whole bundle of pros and cons; the children are the result of a plan, 'masterminded births' or 'headbirths', as Günter Grass puts it.

Even the keywords which pop up in interviews and autobiographical accounts are symptomatic. There is talk of 'observing yourself and diagnosing your wants' (Kerner 1984: 153), of 'finding out where you are deceiving yourself' (Dowrick and Grundberg 1980: 100) or 'thinking it through to the very end' (Kerner 1984: 153). Parents expecting twins recall 'immediately of course that there is said to be a higher rate of schizophrenia among twins' (Häsing and Brandes 1983: 152). Perhaps this is an extreme, but let us look further: a dialogue between a blue-collar worker and his saleswoman wife goes into the 'arguments' against having an only child (Urdze and Rerrich 1981: 84). Another saleswoman reports that during the first months of pregnancy she 'had read almost everything' she could find on it, and especially 'the various methods of giving birth' (Reim 1984: 172). A whole network of theories and arguments is woven round the subject of children; as Günter Grass describes:

A couple to be proud of. A beautiful couple. Out of a modern fairy tale. They have a cat, and no child. Not because they can't or because something does not work, but because when she 'really does' want a child he says 'not yet'. On the other hand when he says, 'theoretically I can imagine it,' she replies as if prompted, 'I can't. Not any longer. Being responsible means looking at things soberly. What kind of future do you want to offer it? There's no future for it. Besides there are already enough of them, there are too many children. In India, Mexico, Egypt, China. Just have a look at the statistics.' (Grass 1980: 12)

Preparing for the baby

How do those fare who – often after lengthy planning – finally decide to have a baby? The pleasure of looking forward is often tinged with other feelings; the 'job of thinking ahead' continues. Even at the first thought of the coming child the couples, and above all the women, are faced with a barrage of popularized scientific information which has taken over a large section of the magazine market in the past few years.

Here are some extracts from a small selection of these guides on how to run one's life as a parent in the late twentieth century.

What she (and sometimes he too) should do before pregnancy

Thanks to the medical scientists a hundred years ago we know that adequate nutrition is important for children's growth. This idea has been perfected in the past century, so that one now knows that proper nutrition begins much earlier, with the prospective mothers, years before they conceive a child. A self-help book from 1969 advises: 'Great stress used to be put on what women ate during pregnancy. Today we go even further and advise women to consider conception only if they . . . are in the best of health' (Schönfeldt 1969: 8). In the advisory manual ÖKO-TEST: *Ratgeber Kleinkinder* (first printed in May 1988, 63,000 copies by April 1989), we read:

How the mother lives . . . has a decisive effect on the quality of her milk . . . Women on vegetarian diets and organically grown produce have better values. It is not enough to briefly alter one's eating habits during pregnancy . . . because the pollutants accumulate in one's body over many years. (pp. 25-6)

Nor is it enough just to eat properly if you want to do your best for your future baby's health. As medicine strides on towards new horizons, there are new factors to take into account. A health guide suggests: 'It is better if you plan a thorough health check-up before getting pregnant, to make sure you are in the best of health right from the beginning' (Beck 1970: 238). Or even earlier: 'it would be better if you had genetic counselling before even planning your pregnancy' (*Junge Familie: Das Baby-Journal*, 1988/5: 38). To organize a pregnancy in the best possible way it is advisable to take expert advice.

Here are more examples: in a widely read women's magazine there is a detailed programme entitled 'Countdown to Conception'; the motto runs 'Protect your unborn child,' and the first steps are supposed to be taken months before conception, with visits to the dentist and the gynaecologist, including special tests for cat owners because of the risk of toxoplasmosis and for Asian and African-American women, for Jewish women and those from Mediterranean countries because of special genetic susceptibilities (McCall's, January 1986: 42). A similar programme, entitled 'Better Babies by Design', recommends 'Pre-pregnancy care'

which should ideally start six months before conception. This includes a check-up for both partners, various blood and blood-pressure tests, information on a balanced diet, abstaining from smoking, alcohol and drugs, and avoiding stress. The goal of such efforts is described as follows:

Why have an ordinary baby – when you could have a better one? Better babies are well-proportioned from head to toe. They have excellent posture – no knock-knees, flat feet or sway backs. They're alert, bright, calm – perfect in every way. They have proper jaws so their teeth grow straight. They have good-shaped skulls with room for their brains to grow properly. (*Observer*, 26 April 1987)

The unborn child: a vulnerable creature

What applies to preparing for pregnancy applies even more when the 'great event' is in the offing: all kinds of precautions and safeguards are required. Here the main driving force is medical advance, in particular in the field of antenatal research. While women in the nineteenth century had very imprecise notions on how and when human life begins, over the last decade the nine months between conception and birth have been explored in ever greater detail. What was once a vague primeval state is now available on colour photos: the image of the unborn child from the very first cell division onwards. One can trace how the embryo grows, how nutrition and metabolism function and which external factors affect events in the mother's body. This is the point: to be able to keep such influences under control the woman carrying the embryo is given a series of instructions. 'Caution! Hazard for pregnant women!' (*Ratgeber aus der Apotheke*, 15 March 1989: 14).

A close look soon reveals, however, that it is not the woman's health that is at stake but that of the baby. Numerous foods are described as harmful for the embryo and therefore end up on the blacklist of forbidden foods for the mother:

As a matter of course the mother should abstain from alcohol, coffee, black tea and nicotine during the pregnancy. (Bruker and Gutjahr 1986: 54)

Frequent consumption of meat and sausages has a bad effect. (*ÖKO-TEST: Ratgeber Kleinkinder*: 25)

Pregnant women should avoid soft cheese, semi-soft sliced cheese and unpasteurised cheese; they should remove the rind from all types of cheese and switch to hard, sliced and processed cheese. Raw meat and pork

sausage should likewise be avoided . . . and rare meat too. (*Ratgeber aus der Apotheke*, 15 March 1989: 14)

The recommendations do not end when the child is born, for the mother's milk must have all the right nutrients. She is urged to eat fish:

The metabolites of fish oil contained in the mother's milk . . . are needed for the rapid brain development of the baby in the first months of life. Professor Weber warns: 'A lack of omega-3 fatty acids leads to disorders in the central nervous system and the eyes' (*Eltern*, 1988/4: 15).

A pregnant woman who does not conform willingly is put under pressure and the risks are presented in detail:

The baby is totally defenceless . . . Pregnant women are harbouring a particularly delicate life within them. Germs which are not dangerous to the mother can bring about severe disorders in the unborn child . . . If an expectant mother is infected by *listeria* she normally only has some flu symptoms . . . the otherwise harmless germs can have disastrous consequences for the unborn child however; nodules may develop in the liver, the spleen, the adrenal gland, the lungs or the stomach, and circulatory or respiratory disorders may occur. *Listeria* can also attack the brain and result in fits, meningitis, premature birth or congenital defects. Roughly 40% of the affected babies die after birth and many have lasting mental retardation . . . [Toxoplasmosis] also generally remains imperceptible for the mother . . . but can harm the baby. The risks run from seizures and retarded growth in mild cases to severe mental retardation, eye problems and even blindness. (*Ratgeber aus der Apotheke*, 15 March 1989: 14)

The ideal mother-to-be orients herself completely on her growing child, and is recommended to alter her own life accordingly. Even watching soaps on television may prove detrimental to the child in future years and is therefore best avoided:

Babies pick up *Dallas* and *Dynasty* even in their mother's wombs. In later years they cannot do without such series. Even before birth they have been manipulated and programmed for certain films, getting addicted to them. So better avoid TV series if you're going to have a baby. (*Junge Familie: Das Baby-Journal*, 1988/5: 38)

Everyone – community colleges and adult education programmes, churches and ecological groups, regional and national institutions, recognized and self-appointed experts – is offering lectures and courses

with tips for expectant mothers and sometimes for the expectant father as well. The themes have proliferated: as a popular magazine mentions: 'Most pregnancy courses are more than just exercises, breathing techniques and medical hints on the course of pregnancy and delivery. Now the unborn child is included, and mother and father become aware of what it needs and how it can be protected.' In the report following these remarks 'three new methods for expectant parents to get in touch with their unborn child' are presented, including 'antenatal foot massage', 'psycho-tactile contact' and the 'antenatal university' (*Eltern*, 1985/9: 15).

If the 'why' of birth has become a special issue, so has the 'how'. In the nineteenth century most children were born at home as a matter of course. Hospital delivery became the norm for our society during the twentieth century, but now at the end of it nothing at all can be taken for granted; experts fervently discuss on television and in the media where the best place is to be born. State hospitals, private gynaecological clinics, practising midwives who will assist at a home delivery or come to the hospital – the range of offers is as broad as it is bewildering, and, as ever, really responsible parents are supposed to know what is best.

What luck that the book market has responded. Sheila Kitzinger, a world-renowned author in the field of birth planning, provides help in 'setting up a birth plan of your own' (1980: 156ff.), taking into account all the relevant details and possible complications, from giving one's consent to electronic heart monitoring (whether and how) and a Syntocinon jab (when and under what conditions) to choosing between epidural and full anaesthesia. (Perhaps one should first study medicine before daring parenthood.) Even a daily newspaper offers a 'comprehensive checklist' to help you 'prepare optimally' (*Starnberger Neueste Nachrichten/Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 February 1989: IV). Then there is the suggestion that you 'get your own impression of the atmosphere and services of a clinic'. To do this one can 'arrange an individual tour of the clinic, in which you can visit the maternity ward and the delivery room and interview the doctor or midwife'. Questions you might want to ask are 'what sort of technical equipment for monitoring the delivery do they have (ultrasound, phonocardiogram, scalp electrode) and is it routinely employed?'

Pregnancy may be a natural event, but in the waning years of the twentieth century nature no longer exists in the sense we mean it; nature is usually in the hands of experts. Empirical knowledge tends to be devalued and a woman is not encouraged to listen to experienced friends and neighbours. Rather she should 'immediately ask her doctor for advice and do all the things he suggests and nothing else'; there is

no doubt about it, 'the doctor is more important for the expectant mother than the father or the husband' (Schönfeldt 1985: 31).

A digression: entwined in love, responsibility and uncertainty

All these offers represent merely a selection from the repertoire of hints and rules which accompany the arrival of a new child. The fact that they are available does not necessarily mean that they are followed, and so far we do not have any reliable data on actual behaviour. The evidence suggests however that modern parents – especially mothers – orient themselves far more on expert advice than their parents and grandparents did (Rolff and Zimmermann 1985; Schütze 1981; Zinnecker 1988). All the guides and handbooks, lectures and courses make an impact too (see Bullinger 1986; Reim 1984), and there is much caustic comment describing parents nowadays as people smitten with a new virus called 'parenting mania' (e.g. *Kursbuch*, 1983/72 and 1984/76).

This is not to say that everyone catches it. The profile of the target group is roughly as follows: highly susceptible are middle-class women who are well-educated city-dwellers, expecting their first child at a fairly advanced age; other groups of women are also affected, the differences lying in the experts relied on, depending on social class and educational level, from psychological textbooks via feminist writings to evening classes, church pamphlets and magazines for every taste.

So 'new parenting' is not restricted to a small minority, and if one traces the typical features, they seem to be spreading. The better educated our society becomes – more than a quarter of German secondary school pupils qualify to go to university – and the more women there are among them, the stronger this trend becomes. More and more people – especially young people – live in or near a city; fewer than ever before live in small isolated villages or towns. There are also fewer families with large numbers of children, and much preference for the single-child family. And finally many women are delaying motherhood until they too become 'late mothers'.

Though the picture of a widespread 'parenting mania' may seem plausible, it only describes the phenomenon without looking into the reasons behind it. Assuming there is an inner logic to it, we can try to trace why loving and living with a child under modern conditions leads one into a thicket of contradictions. Here are some of the factors which have to be contended with.

A sense of insecurity The certainties which once regulated the relationship between parent and child, defining what each expected from and owed the other, have gradually got lost. Modern people find themselves expelled from that comfortable nest and its safe laws which used to be considered natural and right. The main thrust pushing them along new roads comes from technological advances; the sheer speed with which innovations appear robs the parents of their traditional superior knowledge. Whether the issue is antenatal diagnosis or the toxins in mother's milk, great-grandma's lore (even if it still existed) would not help, nor can one fall back on one's feelings or the voice of nature or even common sense.

The principle of responsibility Emancipation applied to parenthood means being handed the task called parental initiative; one is expected as it were to create the child's life, improving on everything one can. Being a parent comes to be understood as a compensatory form of making the world a better place, or to put it the other way round, the worse the world is, the more parents are expected to protect their children against its hazards (looking for uncontaminated instant milk after Chernobyl, for instance). Dangers to the environment, produced on an international scale, find their way into the family's private kitchens and bedrooms as yet more duties and activities to cram into the day.

Contradictory advice Since people have to bear their feelings of insecurity, their ideals, their responsibility and their endangered environment all at the same time, they turn to whoever seems certain of knowing the right answers and offers convincing explanations to replace the fading traditional ones. This is where scientific research and guidebooks come in. The effect they have, however, is often to increase the reader's insecurity rather than banish it, since opinions boom and die as the experts, the self-appointed authorities and the gurus compete with one another (is mother's milk healthy or not, should one feed on demand or schedule?). This in turn is no accident but a condition of the system, for science as its first principle pleads fallibility, and almost all prior knowledge proves erroneous some time.

Attempts to escape What looks like a way out – reverting to doing as one chooses, going back to nature, rediscovering how to be spontaneous and authentic (another popular recommendation in the handbooks) – tends to lead back to the same dilemma: modern living is characterized by a great deal of uncertainty, so that any attempt to do without knowledge is both understandable and in vain.

Love as an amplifier The very act of bringing up a child is emotionally highly charged. Loving it, the frail little creature, means protecting it, parents are consistently told. This injunction hits them at their weakest spot, the hopes and longings they invest in their progeny. It makes shutting one's ears to what the experts advise very difficult, for they paint lurid pictures of what might happen unless . . . What if something did happen? Could we ever forgive ourselves? It seems safer to follow the instructions.

If one pieces all these components together one gets an idea, at least in outline, of how the feelings of a parent for its child, borne along on love and its handmaidens hope and fear, produce their own paradoxes. Modern thinking says parents are responsible for their children and leaves them no margin for mistakes or revisions. Loving an adult partner usually leaves room for manoeuvre (or if all else fails, for divorce), whereas loving a child is an asymmetrical arrangement with all the decisions one-sidedly on the parents' shoulders and every mistake likely to interfere with the child's chances in life (or so the educationalists tell us). What looks, especially to the childless, like parenting gone mad is the logical outcome when one interlocks loving a child with feeling responsible for its welfare and being uncertain on how to achieve this – a plight rich in poignancy and disasters all its own.

Obligatory antenatal diagnosis

This is a technological age, and pregnancy is no longer considered a natural event; it is a problematic condition requiring precautionary measures and medical monitoring. If the pregnancy is affected by so-called risk factors – there are lots of these, as the books inform us – then antenatal diagnosis is recommended. The cover story in a popular magazine, which flourishes on translating into simple language what the scientists have worked out, earnestly inquires: 'Early tests during pregnancy? Will your baby be born healthy? What kind of test? and when is it necessary? Are there any risks involved?' (*Eltern*, 1989/6: cover story). If some kind of handicap is revealed the parents are faced with a difficult decision: 'In these hard-headed times even slight disorders and handicaps can play a big role in one's development, integration, progress in life and self-esteem' (Roth 1987: 100–1). This sentence was uttered at a conference of human geneticists and specialists in preventive medicine.

So the question becomes: can responsible parents saddle their child

with the possibility of a handicap? Is it permissible for them to send their child out into the world starting at a disadvantage? The answer might then be abortion, out of a sense of responsibility, even out of love. Wolfgang van den Daele, a former member of the Commission on Genetic Engineering in the German Federal Parliament describes current reasoning:

The reactions of the woman (or parents) to antenatal findings are often along 'all or nothing' lines. As a rule they choose abortion even if there is only a risk of a disease, or just the danger of getting one, or if it is not clear whether damage might be severe or minor, so that the probability of a healthy foetus being killed is quite high... Even discovering chromosomal abnormalities (XYY for instance), which is almost certainly insignificant, can be taken as a reason for aborting the affected foetus 'as a precaution'. (1985: 145-6)

Antenatal diagnosis induces a new way of thinking about safety. It no doubt takes into account the parents' own interests, their wish to protect themselves from the stresses they would undergo with a disabled child, but it is equally often too 'in the child's interest'. As long as the genetic secrets of the unborn child were kept (and one must remember this was so until only a few years ago) they were beyond human intervention, in short, a matter of fate. Now that genetic technology can discover many of these secrets, they turn into matters to be decided upon and possibly avoided by the parents-to-be.

The more diagnostic measures become available, the more responsibility the parents have to bear. What is discovered in the laboratories redefines (and subtly dictates) how they should behave. Here is an account by a woman who found out after amniocentesis that she was expecting a child with Down's syndrome:

even if we *did* totally transform our lives to bring up a Down syndrome child, other stark realities confronted us... As we ourselves age, to whom could we leave the person [the child] would become? In a society where the state provides virtually no decent, humane services for the mentally retarded, how could we take responsibility for the future of our dependent Down syndrome child? In good conscience we couldn't choose to raise a child who would become a ward of the state. (Rapp 1984: 319)

pregnancy now is very different from what it was only a decade ago, when once we decided to become pregnant or accept an accidental pregnancy, we did not confront further decisions about whether to carry that particular pregnancy to term. (Hubbard 1984: 334)

The change comes about with antenatal diagnosis; there is now 'a tentative pregnancy' (Rothman). The mother-to-be maintains a certain inner reserve about her pregnancy. Until the laboratory tests have been completed and produced results – for an amniocentesis this means the twentieth week – many women hold back any hopes and keep their feelings in check, 'because no one knows how it will turn out'. Under such conditions pleasurable anticipation can only develop after the lab has signalled 'everything okay, no reason for concern'. From a field study into the effects of antenatal diagnosis:

Under the conditions imposed by amniocentesis a woman's attitude towards her pregnancy can only be tentative. She cannot ignore it, but nor can she wholeheartedly accept it . . . Most women manage to keep their anxieties at bay, but there is a price to this. The price is gradually forming a bond with the foetus. The woman has to maintain her distance . . . How can she begin to build up a loving relationship to the baby inside her, begin to plan on behalf of it, begin to feel like its mother, if it may not turn out to be a baby at all but just a genetic accident, and ultimately an aborted foetus? (Rothman 1988: 101-3)

Meanwhile genetic research moves on, and new ways of intervening become available. At the moment this is happening before birth, but soon it may be happening before conception. In all likelihood future prospects are roughly as follows (Beck-Gernsheim 1988b). It will be feasible to select, reject or deliberately mix one's offspring's genetic makeup – a kind of building set with genetic bricks in a test tube guaranteeing high-class results. Perhaps one will no longer have to fall back on the old natural ways of conceiving children, and instead just use sperm and eggs which have satisfied stringent criteria for an optimal genetic product. The range of possibilities will be immense, and love will be ready to try them out. Long ago John Locke remarked 'The negation of nature is the path to happiness' (quoted by Rifkin, 1987: 30). What this can mean for parenthood in the age of reproductive technology has been described by Yvonne Schütze in these terms: 'Then love for a child may well be measured by how much parents are willing to do for its genetic endowment' (1986: 127).

Yearning for a child: would-be parents as patients

What happens if you are longing to have a child and no child materializes? According to current research the number of people unsuccessfully and desperately trying to conceive and bear a child is on the rise.

Roughly 10 to 15% of all couples, it is estimated, have fertility problems; it just doesn't work (Michelmann and Mettler 1987: 44). Modern medicine offers them a variety of possible so-called services, ranging from hormone treatment, already a routine part of gynaecology, to in-vitro fertilization or artificial insemination making use of deep-frozen eggs and a sperm bank.² Whether the methods are conventional or spectacular they all have a common goal: to produce the child the couple yearns for.

How likely is it that the efforts will be successful? What hindrances and perhaps burdens have to be coped with when medical experts assist in producing pregnancies? Let us consider the prospects and possible side effects more closely.

First of all there are the procedures which are part of the standard repertoire of infertility treatment, measuring your temperature and receiving hormone treatment. Even here your sex life is largely – and in the 'ideal' case completely – under medical control. It turns into a competitive sport and compulsory exercise, to be performed in accordance with instructions (when, or when not, and how, in which position). This reduces sexuality to a merely biological act, and its 'surplus' aspects, the erotic, spontaneous, emotional sides go into hiding. It kills the thrill; your feelings about yourself suffer just as much as your feelings for your partner. Here are two accounts of the problem:

The main problem of going through infertility is making love to order. It takes all the spontaneity out of it. I went through a stage of only wanting him in the fertile time; it seemed pointless on the other days.

It got to the stage that sex seemed a chore; it really didn't mean anything. It was a bit sticky and not particularly exciting; a bit uptight. I had it all organised. (Pfeffer and Woollett 1983: 28)

Moving on to the more complicated methods of treatment there are other factors to be contended with as well as regulated sex. The procedures are often lengthy and time-consuming, expensive and restricting, not to mention the health risks and emotional strain involved. Here is a vivid account of the various stages of in-vitro fertilization:

The same routine every day until the seventh day of the cycle, which at least allows one a normal everyday life: take tablets in the morning, venous blood sample to determine oestrogen level and hormone injections in the bottom. Ring the clinic from 3 p.m. on and find out the evening hormone ration. My husband gives me the injections; he's a dermatologist. The IVF team discusses the patients' hormone levels as reported by

the laboratory, and then decides on their fate: stopping treatment or more stimulation . . .

The further treatment progresses, the more of a torture the blood sampling becomes; every jab of the needle seems like a violation of my body . . . But hope gets injected with the hormones. Both my husband and I become more thin-skinned and nervous. From day 10 on we are not allowed to have any more intercourse . . .

A great deal is decided between days 8 and 13 of the cycle. At home we sit and talk about the diameter of the follicle and hormone values and work out the probable date for centesis, the day when the embryo is implanted, and the birth date of our dream child . . . Hope grips us and grows daily in the gloom of the ultrasound cabin. We are completely at its mercy.

Then comes an extremely isolated and tense phase; the IVF treatment completely takes over our lives. We are constantly afraid that all the effort may be for nothing. Before I lie down for my scan in the morning I am always afraid the follicles will have vanished or shrunk. It is a relief each time to see the bubbles show up as black spots on the screen. At last comes the deliverance: 'We will give you the injection to induce ovulation at 11 this evening.' I become calmer but my husband gets more and more nervous. In 36 hours the eggs will be removed, and then it's up to him. He absolutely has to function. In clinical jargon, 'the partner provides a fresh sample of semen.'

In the course of the next two days the removal of the eggs, semen production and embryo transfer all take place, all in the clinic of course, and under continual medical monitoring. Then the patient is sent back home, but not without instructions. She is supposed to live quite normally; only sport, sauna and lifting heavy things are not allowed, and 'please for the next two weeks again no intercourse.' (Fischer 1989: 48–56)

This is an account of quite typical experiences. Whether or not the treatment is successful in the end, first of all it induces a state of permanent tension and permanent apprehension. Whether ovulation will take place, whether fertilizable eggs will be found during centesis, whether there will be any cell division in the fertilized egg, whether the embryo transplantation will go well, whether the hormone levels will remain high enough, whether nidation is successful . . . a series of whethers. What normally happens unseen and unnoticed, inside the woman's body, is broken down into separate visible steps. As studies on how women feel under this treatment show (Hölzle 1989; Klein 1987; Lorber and Greenfield 1987; Williams 1987), this has a very powerful emotional effect; it results in an emotional attachment. As each new step is completed, the couple comes closer to their goal, having a child. From an interview:

Ever since they allowed John and me to have a look at our embryos in the glass dish through the microscope I really believed it. Yes, we could have our own children, there they were... mind you, I don't actually think of them as a baby but these cells have the potential to become a baby... our own baby... for the first time that abstract hope 'child' becomes real. (Klein 1987: 8)

For the first time hope takes a visible form. This is neither a coincidence nor some irrational reaction on the part of the women affected; on the contrary, it is inherent in the technical procedure itself. It is not easy to forget what one has seen, even if the treatment was not quite successful. Then one thinks, 'We nearly made it, the first stages went well, perhaps next time we'll get further. We can't give up now.' And the next round of treatment begins. The technological possibilities exert a secret seductive power. As one can read in a study on the subject: 'The intensity of the emotions that are part of the inner character of in-vitro fertilisation and of the experience of it... directly strengthens the willingness of women to undergo additional attempts at treatment' (Williams 1987: 2). This is illustrated in the interview quoted above. After looking at the contents of the glass dish, which had already aroused such powerful feelings, 'then all you get is this phone call: "Sorry, Mrs M., see you next time." And you ache and ache but then sign on again because it seems you were so close, as close as never before in your life... so you *had* to give it another try' (Klein 1987: 8).

An emotional roller coaster

In such circumstances many women go through a dizzying jumble of emotions. This too is not incidental but a product of the treatment offered them. Since it consists of distinct steps, the risks and chances of each one have to be weighed up; sober laboratory findings become magic messages. Here is a woman describing what happened to her during ZIFT treatment (ZIFT is a method related to in-vitro fertilization in which zygotes, pre-embryos before the dividing stage, are introduced into the Fallopian tubes):

[I was] pregnant with optimism throughout the two weeks of fertility drugs before the procedure, and the two weeks after when you hold your breath for fear of dislodging any embryos that might have nestled within... There are incredible highs. The process is akin to being in a demonic love affair, when the pull and punishment of the flesh are irresistible. On Day 1 of my ZIFT, when I found they had retrieved 11 eggs

from my ovaries, I was elated. How could I miss? But by nightfall I was in despair: what if none of the eggs fertilised; what if on the most basic level my husband and I were hopelessly incompatible, our sperm and eggs unwilling to conduct their extra-corporeal courtship; what if by morning we had no zygotes?

The nurse called early to say we indeed had zygotes. Four eggs had fertilised. 'Come get them,' she said, and my heart leaped at the invitation. I dressed carefully and washed my hair, as if I were about to meet somebody special.

Would I be able to hold onto any one of them; would they continue to divide and grow inside me? Knowing the ZIFT odds, I was hopeful. No, that's not strong enough: I was crazed with hope as they put me to sleep, made a tiny split in my navel and through a catheter dropped three of the embryos (the fourth was frozen for a future attempt) into my one good Fallopian tube. All that those embryos had to do was migrate down to my waiting womb. What could stop them now?

Something did, some something. My embryos didn't take hold; they vanished. When that was confirmed, two weeks to the day after the procedure had been performed, I myself vanished for a while into a fetal curl of grief. This was hardly a death, not even a miscarriage, just a non-carriage. But I mourned my embryos as if I'd known them. (Fleming 1989)

Her reaction is neither idiosyncratic nor extreme. Confronted with what seems like the omnipotence of technology women find themselves swinging between euphoria and misery; they feel themselves to be helplessly at the mercy of the doctors if their innermost wish is to be fulfilled. Even the pioneers in the field are beginning to realize that there are certain dangers in this. The less appealing side of advances in treatment is 'the hope and disappointment, the physical and emotional pain of thousands of women and men who had felt they had almost reached their goal when they were accepted as patients for the reproduction programme' (Bräutigam and Mettler 1985: 64).

Still a temptation

The question remains, how successful are all these efforts? The statistics are sobering; a high proportion of the couples treated do not end up with a child. This applies particularly to in-vitro fertilization, the focus of so many desperate hopes. The success rate here is quite low; according to official estimates it amounts to between 10 and 15% – and critics suggest that this figure may be optimistic (summarized in Fuchs 1988). Even the experts in the field admit that, considering current prospects of high failure rates, the rapid spread of laboratories offering such

treatment can 'prove fatal for couples affected by childlessness' (Bräutigam and Mettler 1985: 65).

Even where treatment remains unsuccessful, it is not without consequences. The medical intervention does not alleviate the sufferings of the men and women who remain infertile – and they are the majority; on the contrary, if anything these seem to increase. They suffer from what is known as an iatrogenic illness, the strain caused by the medical procedures they have undergone and by always being defined as deficient or in need of treatment. Their self-esteem and self-confidence is often shaken, life with their partner changes for the worse, contacts with friends and acquaintances are reduced, hardly surprisingly, since the elaborate medical routines leave little time for outside interests or other spheres of life. (Pfeffer and Woollett 1983). The child becomes all they think and care about – and does not arrive.

That's all very well, one might object; why don't they just drop out of the cycle of treatments? If, however, one looks at the social as well as the biological implications, this is much more difficult than it appears. Medical advances are presented to the public, and a side-effect of research is that infertility is redefined and extended in time. If there are so many methods of treatment available, why not try out the next one? As the sociologist Barbara Katz Rothman remarks:

All of the new treatments for infertility have also created a new burden for the infertile – the burden of not trying hard enough. Just how many dangerous experimental drugs, just how many surgical procedures, just how many months – or is it years – of compulsive temperature-taking and obsessive sex does it take before one can now give in gracefully? When has a couple 'tried everything' and can then finally stop? (1988: 28)

While infertility used to be a matter of fate, it is nowadays turning into a deliberate decision, at least in a certain sense. Those who give up without having tried the very latest methods (an endless series) have to take the blame. After all, they could have kept trying. Rothman again:

At what point is it simply not their fault, out of their control, inevitable, inexorable fate? At what point can they get on with their lives? If there is always one more doctor to try, one more treatment around, then the social role of infertility will always be seen in some sense as chosen. (1988: 29)

The pattern one can see here is a familiar one: technological advances have always offered new chances, new solutions to new problems; at

the same time they put people under emotional, mental and sometimes social pressure to make use of the chances they offered.

It is only against this background that one can understand what the interviews often convey: couples for whom the treatment remained unsuccessful nevertheless declare that they do not regret having undergone it. This seems paradoxical when one realizes what a strain such treatment entails. But this very effort justifies their decision and even relieves them a little. They have done what society expected of them, and this is also important to them. They have not backed out of loving a child:

If I had not gone through all of this I would have had the feeling it was my mistake because I wasn't willing to dare to make an attempt. No one, not even myself, can look me in the eye today and say, 'If you'd really wanted a biological child of your own, you could've had one.' (Interview in *MS.*, January–February 1989: 156)

Parents and children: a whole new realm

Complications of the kind just described are of course the exception. Most couples who want children actually have them. What happens next? What comes after a successful pregnancy and a smooth birth, when yearning to have a child results in having one?

First of all the child turns out to be a source of great joy, opening up new prospects, awakening intense feelings, enhancing the parents' lives with purpose and meaning, providing them with an emotional anchor: all these are not just hoped for but achieved in living with a real child, as many studies have confirmed (see Beck-Gernsheim 1989: 25ff.). Compared with having a family in the old days, an economic community, modern parenthood represents an enormous gain in emotional satisfaction.

This is, however, only one side of the picture. A great deal more is expected of parents than used to be the case, and their tasks have become much more demanding. In everyday life in agrarian societies children simply shared the daily routine and were not given any particular attention or care; they were thought of as unfinished, not quite complete people who scarcely had any needs of their own, and childhood was accordingly an unimportant transitional phase, which did not merit much interest. This is how it was in the Middle Ages:

Of all the characteristics in which the medieval age differs from the modern, none is so striking as the comparative absence of interest in children . . . On

the whole babies and young children appear to have been left to survive or die without great concern in the first five or six years. (Tuchmann 1978: 49, 52)

In large sections of the population all the way into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

children just grew up as a matter of course... As a rule one could not talk of rearing them in any deliberate way... Parents were particularly harsh when inducing the children to work... Once the children had done their work, parents generally lacked both the time and the inclination to supervise and instruct them; children were largely left to themselves. (Schlumbohm 1983: 67-72)

Parents in pre-industrial society paid little attention to this role because there were few options open to them; according to the prevailing view of the world, what happened to the child lay largely in God's hands. This attitude changed only when children gradually came to be seen as people in their own right during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, however, religious beliefs and traditional attitudes remained unshaken so that child-rearing for many people was just a matter of course, following the rules laid down and passed on from one generation to the next. It was only in the course of the twentieth century that religion lost its hold and tradition was pushed aside, breaking up patterns of communal life based on class and status and turning away from something termed the common good. Modern people are meant to take their fates into their own hands – including the fate of their offspring. What is now expected, and recommended by all the experts, is that the child should be given the best possible start.

Only the best will do: modern imperatives

The idea that children need special attention and care to grow up into responsible citizens began its career in the nineteenth century but gained enormous impetus in the 1950s and 1960s. New advances in the fields of psychology, medicine and education showed how a child's future could be shaped. Physical handicaps which once had to be endured as strokes of fate have turned out to be treatable; psychological research in the 1960s focused on the significance of the first years of life, and equated poor care with lost developmental chances. At the same time a large number of people were better off, so that they too could afford

to offer their children the special support previously restricted to a very few. And the politicians competed with one another in offering education to those sections of the population which once had to do without it.

All these factors contribute to putting pressure on the parents to do their bit. It is no longer enough to accept the child just as it is, with its physical and mental peculiarities or even deficiencies. The child itself has become the focus of parental effort. It is important to correct as many defects as possible (no more squints, stammering or bed-wetting) and to encourage skills (a boom for piano lessons, learning languages on holiday, tennis schools in the summer and ski schools in the winter). There is a whole new market with enticing offers to increase your child's competence, and soon enough the options begin to look like new obligations. If you can straighten her teeth or lengthen his leg, let them master more than the snow plough and learn some French, you probably will feel obliged to do this.

One can object that these are no more than guidelines for parents and do not represent the reality of bringing up a child. The question then is whether the new standards actually show up in the everyday work of living with children. The available data do not present anything like a coherent picture but they do suggest that parents are converting these models into action in a number of ways. Here are a few details. It is astonishing how much parents know about scientific advances – and not just educated middle-class ones. In a study of lower-class families one reads: 'The parents' knowledge of toilet training, nutritional matters and the various phases of development were generally speaking on a par with scientific discussions' (Wahl et al. 1980: 150). It is particularly important to lower-class families that 'their children should be better off than they were and they work hard to make that a reality' (1980: 41), at considerable material and personal sacrifice. A survey of working-class women sums it up:

All this – attitudes on early childhood, punishment, empathy with childhood anxieties and wishes – indicates that something has changed in the child-rearing climate of worker families; attitudes and practices have become more child-centred. (Becker-Schmidt and Knapp 1985: 52)

All this may benefit the child – or perhaps not; when does too much attention become a nuisance? It is certainly clear that the parents, and especially the mother, must make a constant effort to meet the new demands. Her first task is to get hold of the latest information; the gap between what one knows about children and what one is supposed to

know is always threatening to widen. On the one hand today's young adults generally know very little about raising children, far less than their equivalents did in previous generations. There simply are not so many children around as used to be the norm, and one is less likely to grow up in a large group of siblings; the first encounter with a small baby could well be with one's own firstborn. On the other hand young parents are expected to be mini-experts on their children; with all the knowledge accumulated over the past twenty years on how human beings develop, disseminated in popular form via the media, 'good' parents are considered to be those who make use of these advances for the benefit of their child. This trend, known in pedagogical circles as 'turning child-rearing into a science' implies exactly that: the parents' work involves increasing demands and increasing effort.

Because child-rearing is always a two-way relationship, 'science's conquest of the child' (Gstettner 1981) is also a conquest of the mother (and less often of the father). A net of theories is thrown over the children, and the mothers get caught in it:

Whether it is a doubt about upbringing or school or what the child should wear or with whom it should go on holiday, when and where, or what it should eat or whether it is too small, too big, too loud, too quiet, too stooped, too straight, or any problem whatsoever, the advice is always the same: better consult your doctor. There is no magazine without a medical page, and periodicals like *Eltern* or *Unser Kind* have huge circulations. Experience becomes unimportant and hints from one's parents or grandparents are no longer up to the level of modern theorists; bringing up a child has been declared a science and can therefore be studied, learned and above all taught. (Sichrovsky 1984: 38-9)

Why don't mothers just go on strike, just stop bothering about what the experts advise? The trouble is they are hedged in, faced by a barrage of imperatives which invade their homes via television, the local newspaper and school reports. The message has a refrain: if you ignore your child's needs you risk damaging it, maybe even ruining its chances of getting on in life. 'Failing to get on in life' is something everyone understands, as getting on is absolutely vital in our mobile society.

A child that is not properly cared for will not be able to cope – this message running through guidebooks and magazines cannot fail to reach the parents. Refusing to take on the load would result in harsh sanctions; only under threat of punishment can they leave all the theories aside. And what makes it even harder, the sanctions would hit what is closest to their hearts, their beloved child. Working on behalf of a

child is not just any kind of work but special; work and love are inextricably bound together, and the greater the love the more work seems acceptable. As the paediatrician Sanford Matthews put it: 'Any suggestion that her child will not reach his full potential – emotionally, athletically or intellectually – absolutely sears a woman's soul. And as a consequence her antennae are always up to improve her own performance' (quoted in *McCall's*, November 1983: 196).

In such circumstances only 'heartless' mothers, those 'unfit' to have children, could refuse to conform to the new rules. Culturally prescribed standards are hard to withstand and most mothers would rather do too much than too little, often suffering from the feeling that they could have tried harder. Educational theories suggest one is slacking and this drives the parents back to consult the experts. And so the circle is completed.

Of course it is not only information which is needed; more important is how it is applied. The implication is that the growing child's mother does her 'nurturing work' in several different ways, for the very reason that she believes a child can as it were be 'made'. Let us look more closely at this idea. Who does the making? Far more than ever before specialists are being called in to correct or prevent what nature has offered. These experts do their professional duty, from immunization to prescribing therapeutic exercises. But they can't actually be called in; the patient has to go to them. Can the infant go alone? Who carries out the preparation and follow-up work? Who takes the child to the dentist and physiotherapy, sits in the waiting-room with the child, drives it from one practice to the next, guards over its progress at school by checking on its homework and admonishing its spelling mistakes? In most cases it is the mother.

In fact she does much more, for even during the normal hours of everyday life where no direct intervention by specialists is required, the improving mood prevails – more subtly, but just as pervasively. Under its influence the mother acts as assistant for the child. In the words of an American women's magazine: 'Unstimulated time is a waste of baby time' (Lois Davitz in *McCall's*, July 1984: 126). For the sake of all-round stimulation mothers (less often fathers) trail round zoos and go to the circus, take the baby swimming, organize parties and outings with friends.

In many respects natural childhood is over and is being replaced by 'staged' childhood. Here too it is difficult to resist work because the staging is not just the parents' personal whim. It is an essential part of 'working to preserve status' (Papanek 1979). Where people feel compelled to protect their place in society by their own exertions, this drive

is bound to reach the nursery. Having a child is not enough; it has to be brought up, and the parents find themselves contending with fears of sliding down the social scale as well as aspirations to climb up it. In his book entitled *America and Americans* John Steinbeck described this poignantly:

No longer was it even acceptable that the child should be like his parents and live as they did; he must be better, live better, know more, dress more richly, and if possible change from father's trade to a profession. This dream became touchingly national. Since it was demanded of the child that he or she be better than his parents, he must be gaited, guided, pushed, admired, disciplined, flattered and forced. (1966: 94)

To sum up, one can conclude that life in a highly industrialized society makes the physical job of looking after a child somewhat easier (household gadgets, prepared foods, disposable nappies). But in return new topics keep cropping up which have to be tackled: 'Our times are obsessed with the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood' (Ariès 1962: 560). These are on a different plane: 'The family today finds itself under *child-care pressure* quite unrivalled in history' (Kaufmann et al. 1982: 530). A child used to be a gift from God or occasionally an unwanted burden, but now it is above all 'somebody difficult to care for' (Hentig 1978: 34).

Love's curriculum

The imperative to give your child the best you can has considerable impact on everyday life together. Bathing and feeding, caressing and cuddling and playing all have an ulterior motive. Instead of just being what it is, each action is defined as a learning event and is meant to stimulate creativity, aid emotional development and encourage the child to learn. As long ago as 1783 a book on bringing up children advised:

People like to play with infants. But this play could be made more useful than it is . . . Why is the child's attention directed to whatever the mother cares to show and not gradually to one thing or the other with some order? Why do people not lead a child by the hand and teach it in an orderly way to touch something, push it away, draw it closer, grip it, hold it and let it go, etc? Is this not the natural way to help them early to a certain physical dexterity? . . . In short, every game, every joke with infants or children who are not much older must deliberately and knowledgeably be directed to exercises of the speech organs and other parts of the body. (Basedow, quoted in Ostner and Pieper 1980: 112)

Over the past thirty years instructions like these have found their way into every home, thanks to the mass media, which are highly efficient conveyors of parental rules. No one gets left out, even in the most isolated mountain village; the advice columns and advertisements reach all levels of society. The result is a 'widespread tendency to turn childhood into an educational project within the family'. 'A child-centred culture taken for granted in educated and cultivated middle-class families is being recommended to lower- and working-class mothers in a teachable form' (Zinnecker 1988: 124). A favourite magazine for parents declares:

A variety of sensations foster intelligence and initiative . . . Find ways of letting your child learn. If you offer it all kinds of impressions and chances to move freely you will help it to become an independent and active person. (*Eltern*, July 1988: 150)

It is not only daily life which is being instrumentalized. Even the most spontaneous signs of affection and pleasure get included in the programme:

The unborn child especially can . . . absorb moods, stimuli, touching at a very early stage . . . Deliberate contact with its parents and their *loving care* act as a *motor to its development* . . . Lay your hands very lightly on your stomach and imagine you are embracing your baby with great *affection*. (*Eltern*, 1985/9: 17; my emphasis)

Maternal love is being changed into something offered by an expert, and in scientific writings just as much as in popular magazines the feeling is declared to be essential. In other words, loving your child is your duty. Here is an extract from a guidebook for young parents:

[The aim has been] to show how dependent the child is on loving care and attention as the foundation of its intellectual and emotional development . . . To thrive the infant needs . . . the reliable care and love of a person with whom it can form a close bond, preferably its mother. (*Das Baby* 1980: 3, 23)

So maternal love is absolutely necessary but should not be regarded as work, at best a labour of love. It would also be wrong to follow the instructions too strenuously. Here is the paediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott speaking to mothers in 1969:

Well, enjoy yourself! Enjoy being thought important. Enjoy letting other people look after the world while you are producing a new one of its

members. Enjoy being turned on and almost in love with yourself, the baby is so nearly part of you . . . Enjoy all of this for your own sake, but the pleasure which you can get out of the messy business of infant care happens to be vitally important from the child's point of view . . . *the mother's pleasure has to be there or else the whole procedure is dead, useless and mechanical.* (Quoted in Schütze 1986: 91; my emphasis)

Because mother love is important but obviously difficult too there is a maze of rules attached to it. There are warnings about mothers loving in a harmful way – 'possessive, sacrificial, hostile, domineering, submissive, hungry for affection and half-hearted' (Schmidt-Rogge 1969, quoted in Schütze 1986: 123). An 'affection index' is being drawn up to enable one to measure the right level and keep its explosive potential under control (Grossmann and Grossmann 1980, quoted in Schütze 1986: 116–17). This means that even the subconscious is being included and prescriptions given for one's deepest feelings. It is a difficult undertaking requiring much preparation. Spontaneous reactions come to seem like archaic relics compared with the complicated task of having the right feelings at the right time in the right dosage. As the title of a book by W. E. Homan (1980) succinctly puts it: 'Children Need Love – Parents Need Advice'.

Rival loves

The expectations are high, and the parents find they do not have unlimited resources of money, patience, time or energy. If their child's needs are to be met, then the adults must scale down their own demands, rights and interests, often making considerable sacrifices. The effect of this is first of all felt by the person in charge of the daily routine, in most cases the mother:

Our heightened awareness of the requirements children place on their immediate surroundings . . . increasingly leads to exclusive demands being made on at least one parent in the interest of the child, a process by which the interests of the parents, especially the mothers, is postponed for later phases in life, if not suppressed for ever. (Kaufmann et al. 1982: 531)

Since both parents feel the pressure, their relationship changes. 'Children weld a marriage together.' 'Children are a token and pledge of our love for one another.' These are notions commonly associated with wanting to have children. But what really happens? For one thing being a parent has become a complicated task and for another marriage has become a

balancing act and a test of resilience. The dilemma is obvious: the more you pour your energy into your child, the less there is left for your partner. The effects of living in a child-centred family have been traced:

intensive emotional involvement and time spent with the child leads to a cutback in the couple's relationship.

Ideally it looks like this: if both parent have careers, they devote their available free time to the child . . . For working couples, that implies that little leeway is left for the partners to talk to one another. If one of them is detailed to take care of the child, the other one can keep up outside contacts and the like during this time. While this may satisfy one's needs to do something not connected with the child, one's interest in sharing time together which played a role before the child's birth has to be neglected. If only one parent is employed – as a rule the father – then the situation is not very different. Since the woman spends all day with the children, she would like to do something other than concern herself with them in the evening, but her conversation with her husband is more or less reduced to reporting how things went with the children. (Schütze 1988: 107–8)

Among all the books on child-rearing one can now come across a few which look into the dangers of exaggerated parenting. This is how it turns out:

After the child is born the parents are often so bound up in taking care of it that they have no strength left for looking after one another . . . All expectations have to be reduced for the sake of the child. Quite often there is neither time nor energy left for the partners to talk to each other. Everything has to be subordinated to the needs of the child. All that remains for the parents are the child's leftovers. Over long stretches managing everyday life can be so demanding that the parents do nothing but keep going and drop into bed quite exhausted in the evening . . . Not only the man and woman but their relationship drowns in the daily routine and becomes in a sense just a matter of routine itself. There are no longer any highs. Nothing, or at least very little that is exciting or pleasant happens between them. The intense feelings in the first days after the birth give way to a state of monotony. Some couples cannot even tell whether they still love each other or not. They are together, to be sure, but they have little to do with each other apart from their shared concern for the child. (Bullinger 1986: 57, 39, 56)

From interviews and accounts one can see how the couple's relationship takes a back seat wherever the high-flown ideals of child-rearing experts take over. The refrain is the same: it is enormously enriching to have

a child and provides both parents with a new shared role. Then comes the 'but':

In the first months we were euphoric, everything was stimulating and exciting. We were always so tired that we never got round to talking about ourselves. We thought, though, that things would change. But nothing or hardly anything changed. Having a child is so exacting, we're always so tired and worn out that our relationship is the last thing to get attention. (Quoted in Reim 1984: 101)

So it is not surprising that the strain increases and both become irritable, that tensions rise with the lack of time to talk things over:

While our child thrived and my husband and I became increasingly certain of ourselves in our roles as parents, our feelings for one another got temporarily left behind . . . We only began to think out loud together when our child was eleven months old, about how we could focus on ourselves and were responsible for what happened to us as well as what happened to the child. (Quoted in Reim 1984: 19)

'If marriage changes its meaning and turns into a place for socializing children . . . conflicts between the partners are inevitable' (Nave-Herz 1987: 26). The good sides – having time, being patient, finding the energy, sharing feelings – tend to be directed at the child. Under the new conditions it is no longer true that children tie people together, or at least only in part (Chester 1982).

When love hits out

What about the children? What do they get out of the hopes and expectations so fervently directed at them? The answer is disputed or, to put it more elegantly, the topic is still a matter of controversy between the researchers. Most authors acknowledge that the move from pre-modern to modern society has opened up new opportunities for children – individual potential can be discovered and furthered, class, gender and status are no longer such handicaps, wholesale neglect and brutal indifference are things of the past. If one reads descriptions of how childhood used to be in the less developed parts of Europe – monotonous, harsh, repressive, arduous, exhausting – one can hardly regret that these very unidyllic times are over (Ledda 1978; Wimschneider 1987). Nonetheless there has been a growing suspicion that being cosseted also has its disadvantages. The line of thinking runs as follows.

Theories on child-care have tended to make childhood into a programme requiring careful surveillance and monitoring of the various steps and possible deficits. The child is seen as a dependent creature always in need of an adult to define, care for and administer its physical, emotional, current and future needs. Under the cloak of love the parents can hide their delight in wielding so much power: 'Equipped with the appropriate magazines and books, parents plague their children with an effusion of emotion that turns the nursery into a didactic hothouse' (Gronemeyer 1989: 27). Earlier in this century Ellen Key described this effect:

The child is always supposed to stop doing one thing or do something different, to find something different or want something different from what he is doing or finding or wanting; he is always dragged in a different direction than his own inclinations lead him. And all this is done out of love, attentiveness, delight in judging and helping and advising, to carve and polish the little chunk of human material into a perfect example in the series 'model children'. (Quoted in Liegle 1987: 29)

The current situation is paradoxical; while popular scientific literature on parenting still pours from the presses, bringing new suggestions with each book, the experts are already retreating slowly from positions they used to defend. Some authors admit that they are 'renouncing the pedagogic side' (Honig 1988). Once upon a time it looked as though proper parenting would result in confident and autonomous children. Now the doubts are getting louder: what looked like 'selfless love on the part of the child-rearer today seems remorseless, and partisanship for the child like a perfected form of control and discipline: like training' (*ibid.*: 71).

This critical viewpoint is backed by the results of empirical research as well as experience with family therapy (e.g. Lempp 1986; Richter 1969). It is by no means always in the children's interest if adults – especially mothers – continually practise self-denial. As psychologists know, a need which has been suppressed does not just vanish but surfaces elsewhere, turning against child and partner in more or less covert resentment. It is very easy to project all one's own expectations on to the child, and bully it with encouragement. Often children are 'pressed into a role in which they are supposed to bolster up the mother's self-esteem' (Neidhardt 1975: 214). All this can mean a stifling climate in the small nuclear family in which hostility as well as love prosper.

If a modern family lavishes a great deal of attention on a child it is not for unselfish reasons; such behaviour shows more than a hint of

'possessiveness' (Ariès 1962: 562). With the future lying ahead the child confronts its parents with their own biographies and ambitions, disappointments and fears, including old dreams of being a huge success and making it to the top. Anyone suggesting that 'my child should have it better than I did' is not just thinking of the child, but mostly of him/herself.

And what if the great expectations prove unfulfillable? Many parents no doubt back down gracefully and continue to love their child. But sometimes this does not happen. There is another side to today's families, one which is often overlooked, forgotten or repressed: attacks on children from members of the family are on the rise. An increasing number of children and young people are being physically maltreated, sexually abused and emotionally rejected. On the basis of recent research on this phenomenon it is estimated that at least 300,000 to 400,000 children and adolescents are affected – that is roughly 3% of the 11 million children and young people under eighteen years of age in Germany.

There are certainly several reasons behind this development. It is, however, clear that it is often the parents' good intentions which end up producing exactly the opposite; disappointed hopes turn into frustration and aggression. Here are the conclusions drawn from one such investigation:

Parents want 'the best for my child' and often do not notice that for this very reason they fail to recognize what the child really wants or needs. The trend to one-child families . . . hastens this development . . . A large proportion of parents nowadays are pushing their children either openly or (usually) covertly to get high marks at school and start up the professional ladder. In families where the adolescents fail to live up to their parents' expectations, a long battle results over future plans and there is an increased likelihood of tension and strain . . . Parents who fear that low marks or rebellious behaviour could cost their child its chances of finding a foothold in a very tight job market become nervous and irritable, which can quickly lead to aggressive behaviour in both generations. (Hurrelmann 1989: 12)

The same studies look into the special motives behind having children in our society. Let us recall: children are no longer needed as helping hands or as heirs, and the reward for having them lies almost exclusively in their emotional value. As the experts see it, this is an

intense but equally very uncertain and crisis-ridden kind of reward . . . Compared with pre- and early industrial society today's relationships between parents and children are highly charged and intense. For both

sides, for parents and children, it is however becoming more and more difficult to deal with this precious asset. (*Ibid.*)

One could conclude from such findings that the nuclear family is becoming excessively emotional, and the atmosphere in the small family circle dangerously over-heated. There is a similar greenhouse effect in many adult partnerships, but in that case if pressure rises too high there is a safety valve: one can at least consider separation. There is no divorce from a child, and that is the decisive difference; no legitimate escape route offers itself, and society categorically states that 'parents love their children.'

If one thinks this through, it becomes comprehensible that where there is love there is often hostility, an idea that at first seems strange, incongruous and irritating. The two have become linked, not by coincidence but as an outcome of social change: love in conjunction with anxiously high hopes is volatile and can quickly deteriorate into bitter disappointment and cruelty. We mostly prefer to repress such insights. Even family research has long turned a blind eye, but we must be prepared to come to terms with what the police records say. Love is one of our great achievements, the foundation of our relationships between men and women, parents and children – but we cannot have it without its darker sides, which sometimes emerge for a second and sometimes linger for years: disappointment, bitterness, rejection and hatred. The road from heaven to hell is much shorter than most people think.

EVE'S LATE APPLE

Or the future of love

Let us now find our way to those private corners where modern fundamentalists worship – euphemized, concealed and sanctified as love, marriage and family. How much easier it would be if we could just escape to other continents and cultures, just turn our backs on the whole issue. But there is no escaping, no shrugging our shoulders and leaving; research into love is like investigating our own secret gods. We are heading for the swirling mists of inwardness, the Platonic caves of the emotions, the furnished rooms of affection and the sacrificial altars of hate and despair. We are aiming for the place where every man and woman assumes he or she can find him/herself – in the palaces and hovels of love designed and built by the welfare state and the job market.

This time it is the future which interests us, as it will probably help us to understand the present as well as offering us a peek round the corner into the next century. What will become of people and the contradictory visions of love which they so ardently project on to one another?

One view claims that seeking happiness in marriage and family life is about as sensible as propping your ladder against a raincloud. The wishes out of which people today and in the future can cobble together their daily lives lead in the opposite direction to what a technological society preaches and expects: an efficient, mobile and market-oriented work-force. Men and women would have to become revolutionarily selfless in a society built from top to bottom on getting on, abiding by contracts, earning money and fitting in with what others expect. They would have to believe in fairy tales, in this case related to a particular person – please insert the name! The stork bringing the babies and Santa Claus bringing the parcels are the guarantors of this family bliss;

happy families are those who spend a large part of the day building castles in the air.

Perhaps it is true that love and family are the place for all the nons – non-commercial, non-calculating, non-exploiting and so forth. Perhaps this non-ness is not an anachronism or a superfluous ornament but a crucial and fundamental statement, a refusal which becomes a form of orientation now that we have lost other signposts like the class system and political utopias. If all this has a core of truth, then the modern nuclear family, seen in historical terms, is an extremely fragile construction likely to disintegrate under the pressure which made it and seemed to give it stability: industrialization, market economies and technological advance (see chapter 1 above, 'Industrial society: a modern feudal society', p. 25).

Of course one can assert that the family is indispensable or possibly even functionally essential. But even this highest accolade awarded by sociologists, perpetuating a male dream of how things should be, is not likely to help much. One does not need second sight to see what will happen to this frail 'essential' weighed down by so many hopes. Just draw a line into the future and take modern developments a step further. What happens if nothing changes and – this is the leading question – the chaos of love is tidied up and properly organized along modern lines: equality, carefully worded contracts, the right approach and the right theories?

Looking at it from the most promising vantage point and peering into the future, it looks as though there would be no great difference between loving and, say, growing apples or book-keeping. The idea behind this scenario is as follows: the secular religion known as love is suffering the fate of other religions; it is losing its mythology and turning into a rational system. The most probable outcome is that (genetic) engineers and legal documents win. What we shall have is a social hybrid of market forces and personal impulses, an ideal of love (or marriage or parenthood) which is safe, calculable and medically optimized. One can already see signs that this is going to happen.

Awakening false hopes: back to the nuclear family

When discussing the future of 'the' family, people often start out from false premises. They compare the familiar pattern father–mother–child with a vague notion of 'no family', or assume that another kind of family is replacing the nuclear one. It is much more likely – assuming the analysis presented here is right – that instead of one kind replacing the other there will be a huge variety of ways of living together or apart

which will continue to exist side by side. It will be characteristic that individuals experience several forms in the course of their lives – being single, living together before and during marriage, living with others, various parenthoods after one or two divorces and so on.

One trend, however, which is not difficult to predict is the illusion of returning to the nuclear family, making yesterday into the model for tomorrow. For many people, fleeing from marriage and family is a sign of excessive egotism which has to be fought with targeted regulations to bring especially the women back into the fold. Since it is the women who want to gain ‘a life of their own’ outside their given roles as house-workers and husband supporters, their private and political efforts naturally meet with scepticism and resistance. The measures to save ‘the’ family are oriented on the standard domestic norms, with the husband as bread-winner, the wife as home-maker and two or three children – a norm which has existed only since the early nineteenth century. Despite the women’s efforts to become liberated and independent there are powerful factors at work backing demands that they go back to the kitchen.

The huge majority of women are a long way from being economically independent and professionally secure. It is true that the sum total of women in work, including married women, has risen continually, so that in 1988 almost every second married woman (in Germany) was employed compared with 57.6% of unmarried women. Among the men more than four in five were employed.¹ Put another way this means that at least half of all women remain dependent on their husband’s financial support. Rising unemployment and the shrinking labour market are tending to conserve and restabilize the sexes’ traditional roles. Women are being released from wage labour to return to marital support, a move backed by many of them when they want to have children. Both factors stabilizing the traditional female role – being unemployed and wanting to have children – could prove very effective in polarizing biographical patterns, and if the young women are not as well qualified as the men they will again find themselves at the bottom end of the educational and vocational hierarchy.

This political confusion of past and future is aided by successfully dramatizing the mother’s role, especially in institutional circles, which stirs up social disapproval for the working mum and gives her a bad conscience. Failing to set up day-care services or arranging nursery school hours so that no mother can coordinate looking after her child with a job have the same result. The battles waged for women’s rights in private and in public are really about something else; a man who with male cunning sings the praises of motherhood is not forced to decide

between his career and his children or plead to be allowed to accept promotion. Nursery school hours making a career difficult or impossible are an effective little lever in helping to restore the old order even against the mother's will; they become a tool in 'lowering the level of unemployment' by preventing women from looking for work.

But anyone who imagines that the family can be saved by closing the doors to the job market has overlooked what sort of people are involved. It remains completely unclear how young women will respond when they realize that their vociferous interest in having a good job is disappointed and find themselves having to rely on their partners for financial support. It is equally unclear whether a correspondingly large number of young men are willing (or even able, given their own professional problems) to take on the yoke of being the bread-winner. In any case the discrepancies between the women's expectations, systematically awakened by equal educational opportunities, and the cool facts facing them infiltrate into their private worlds and erupt as arguments and frustration. It is not difficult to predict that couples will have to bear a private load of strife and bitterness which modern society has shoved on to their shoulders. At first sight the barriers in the job market seem to shore up the nuclear family, but in fact they fill the corridors of the divorce courts and the waiting rooms of marriage counsellors.

At the same time women are again destined to be poor. Anyone seeking to force women out of jobs and back to the kitchen sink ought to acknowledge that in the face of the rising number of divorces this means reserving the gaps in the social security system for women.

This fact highlights the fundamental error of trying to restore the old status quo for the sexes in private and public life. For one thing this contravenes legal positions in modern democratic society which offer equal rights irrespective of gender and make success dependent on personal achievement. For another the upheavals in family life are misleadingly labelled private problems and all links with social changes ignored or denied.

Look at some common suggestions on how to stick the disintegrating marriages together again: take part in a 'family training' or get professional help in choosing your spouse; all we lack is enough marriage counsellors and the difficulties would vanish; the real threat to married life lies in pornography, or legal abortion or feminism, we must do something to stop them. And so on. Social contexts and historical developments are simply passed over.

To borrow an image from Max Weber, modernization is not a carriage you can climb out of at the next corner if you don't like it. Any-one really meaning to restore family conditions as they were in the 1950s

would have to turn the clock back. This would entail not just indirectly keeping women away from jobs by subsidizing motherhood or polishing up the image of housework, but openly denying them opportunities and education. The wage differential would have to be increased, legal rights reversed. Perhaps the real trouble began with universal suffrage; at all events the women would have to be prevented from acquiring information – perhaps a lock on the television, and censored newspapers. In short all the modern achievements shared equally by men and women would have to be redefined as exclusively male property, for ever.

Being equal means being on your own: contradictions between work and family

The other possibility would be for women to be genuine equals in all areas of society. The universal modern principle of equal rights would be vindicated, patriarchal divisions in housework, parliaments, factories and management overcome. In the women's movement discussions often link demands for equal treatment with claims to alter 'the male working world'. The struggle is to become economically secure, to wield power, to share decision-making but also to introduce more 'feminine' attitudes and values into public life. What exactly equality means is not defined. If equality is pursued in the sense that everyone is a mobile member of the labour force, then this implies a society of singles.

The logic behind modern life presupposes a single person (Gravenhorst 1983: 17), for market economies ignore the needs of family, parenthood and partnership. Anyone expecting employees to be flexible and mobile without paying any regard to their lives as private individuals is aiding the break-up of family life by putting the market first. The fact that work and family are incompatible remained concealed as long as marriage was synonymous with woman at home and man at work; it has surfaced with great turbulence now that each couple has to work out its own division of labour. Demanding equality along market lines has the effect of turning the partners into rivals and individuals, competing with one another for the good things in modern life. This is no mere speculation; in Germany and elsewhere the number of single-person households and single parents is rising sharply. It also becomes clear from the sort of life people are expected to lead in such circumstances.

Running one's life alone has several built-in hazards against which one must take precautions. It is important to find and maintain contacts for all kinds of occasions; a web of friendships has to be made and guarded, even if this is one of the pleasures of life alone and the charm of brief encounters is not to be underestimated. But all this presupposes

one has a good job as a source of income, self-esteem and social supports, and this too has to be tended and defended. A private cosmos can be created round one's own ego with its idiosyncrasies, strengths and weaknesses.

The more successful this effort proves, the greater the danger that it will prove an insurmountable obstacle to any close partnership, however much one longs for one. Life as a single person generates a deep longing to love and be loved by somebody but at the same time makes it difficult or impossible to integrate this somebody into a life which is really 'one's own'. This life is only possible in the absence of the other; there is no space left for him (or her). Everything is planned round avoiding feeling lonely: all kinds of contacts making different demands on one's time, daily habits, a well-filled calendar and carefully planned moments to recover from social life, all designed to alleviate any fear of being left out which hovers behind the dynamic façade. This delicate balance is imperilled by a real relationship however much one longs for one. Every effort to achieve independence turns out to sabotage intimacy and the prison gates close on a loner, who in wanting to defend 'a life of his/her own' puts another row of bricks on to the surrounding walls.

The kind of existence led by single people is not a peculiar side-effect of social change; it is the archetypal existence behind a full market economy. According to the logic of the market we do not have any social ties, and the more we accept this the less we can maintain close friendships. So here there is a case of paradoxical social behaviour in which a high level of social contacts prevents the formation of deep relationships.

Such reflections are at the moment more speculation than description. There is, however, no denying that the picture applies to a growing section of the population, and is what we have to look forward to if both sexes demand equal rights. Everybody – including parts of the women's movement – has the right to expect that offers once made to men should now be extended to women, and assert that women are as useful as members of the job world as men are. They should however realize that this road does not lead to a happy world of co-operative equals but to separateness and diverging interests.

Post-marital marriage: extended and serial families after divorce

Someone from, say, the twenty-second century looking back at the industrial middle ages we live in as the twentieth century turns to the

twenty-first will probably smile and be puzzled: there were so many political pressure groups, and people voted, made suggestions, coalitions and plots. Everything was looked into and chewed over in the major media. What got left out, simply ignored, were the significant changes which heralded a whole new age. They took place surreptitiously, in the normal course of the day, almost unnoticed by politicians hastening busily from committee to constituents' meeting, but had a radical and profound effect. How extraordinary that the population continued to stare at their governments and politicians while the decisive factors slipped in by the back door and turned their world upside down.

Why this happened is difficult to explain, and to find the reasons one would have to put aside some certainties which industrial society has dictated. To use a comparison, people arguing about rearranging the seating in a moving train should not be surprised if they fail to notice how fast it is going and where it is headed.

As products of an industrial and capitalist society we have come to think of change as normal. It is therefore no wonder that in concentrating on what is politically feasible – moving the seats – we tend to forget the larger dimensions; the curious thing, however, is that in reorganizing the seating people assume they are helping to decide the train's route, whom it mows down and where they would like it to halt.

What are the back doors which permit revolutionary ideas to infiltrate normality? One of them was mentioned in the previous section: equality in the labour market, meaning that everybody can participate irrespective of the gender limits imposed by classical industrial society. In the following sections we shall come across some other back-door factors, and here is divorce, seen as a revolving door between an old and a new age.

Divorce as such is nothing new; on the contrary, it typifies modern thinking in that something given and lasting is conceived as being revocable and subject to change like everything else on our horizon. One can go further and say that the contradictory nature of marriage as recommended by the church, a free choice which can never be revoked, has been revealed and marital commitment returned to the partners as a matter of agreement, the way it started. So what?

On the other hand, as divorce becomes normal, the doors are opened to long-drawn-out and painful adjustments which shift and rearrange how the sexes and generations live with one another. During the initial phase this fact remains concealed, with good reason. Establishing the new principle depends first of all on describing it as fairly insignificant, before it can become the most normal thing in the world, one of our

modern watchwords disguising the often spectacular consequences of supposedly normal actions. Also, the change takes place in private, as part of an individual fate affecting this and that person and their marriage and families, under a magnifying glass, as it were, and in slow motion. The macroscopic structural changes cannot be seen or experienced directly; one can find them only through the spectacles of statistics and realize they have been hatched out of normal social eggs a few decades later.

According to social myth and shortsighted therapists the marital relationship ends with divorce (after an appropriate period for dealing with the pain involved). This view falsely equates legal (sexual and spatial) separation with the social and emotional realities of marriage breakdown. Family research² is only gradually waking up from its drowsy fixation on the nucleus of the family and discovering to its astonishment the other phenomenon of 'post-marital marriage', while still ignoring its opposite, 'intra-familial divorce'.³ Like someone who has lost an arm but still tries to use it, divorced people live their marriages long after they have separated, with the ex-spouse still occupying as much mental space as missing and mourning over the loss of him/her leaves behind.

Only someone equating marriage with sex, loving and living together can make the mistake that divorce means the end of marriage. If one concentrates on problems of material support, on the children and on a long common biography, divorce is quite obviously not even the legal end of marriage but transforms itself into a new phase of post-marital 'separation marriage'.

In this phase the divorced couple encounters dimensions which prove impervious to separation. These divorce-resistant sides of marriage, on which the spouses rub their souls raw and bloody, include the indissoluble commonality of the children and a remembered identity as a couple. Such themes and forms of negative cohabitation can occupy people's minds when living apart just as much as when they were together:

When I saw you last time, you said something that would fit my open wound as well as a manhole cover . . . 'I hope that our relationship will become normal again someday' . . . Good God, the way you talk to me?! I want to reply now, because I couldn't do it when I was sitting opposite you; it was as if I was paralysed. Listen, I don't share your hope. I won't see you again in a cold, extinguished present. It may seem desirable and comfortable to you for us to become serene people who will meet someday like two veterans of a great love battle, the kind that award each other the medal of honour for bravery and forgiveness. Two lucky escapees who once chased each other through heaven and hell, and now sit peacefully in a garden; the lawn-sprinkler revolves like a dragonfly stuck

in place and I play with your children while you chat a bit about your professional problems and I'm ashamed to add anything about the problems of my loneliness and my poverty. Your wife brings us tea and discreetly disappears . . . You've got to know: this vision horrifies me! I detest the idea that time will conquer us too, just as it overruns everything else. Why does no one stand up against it anyway? It is not as omnipotent as people always think and then do nothing and just leave the battlefield on time without a fight. No grass should ever grow over anywhere I am, was or will be. And if I have to keep on writing like this forever in order to keep you, I wouldn't hesitate for a moment, because I am so close to you; that way I can preserve us and speak to you and enjoy the good life I used to have. (Strauss 1987)

Anyone assuming that the legal act of divorce is a criterion to distinguish between an old and a new marriage fails to realize that marriages overlap and intersect outside family boundaries. Divorced people remained linked to one another on numerous levels, including support payments, children and a shared biography.

Who pays whom: at the latest when one leaves one marriage and enters into another the notion of a bread-winner collapses. What may have been good enough for one marriage is never good enough for two or more, so that – given the same amount of work and same amount of income – after remarrying all one can do is share the shortages (Lucke 1990).

Parenthood is divisible but cannot be terminated. Father and mother live separately after a divorce but they remain parents and have to renegotiate what this means in daily life. Family is thus divided into a marriage, which can break up, and post-marital parenthood which divides into motherhood and fatherhood. Post-marital parenthood (usually) requires help by the courts because otherwise antagonisms seem irreconcilable. Formally shunting child or children between their separated parents presents mother and father with the residue of 'common ground', offering them an attenuated and cryptic kind of family life which cannot be brought to an end. This may mean all sorts of things depending on the individuals involved, but the real impact of being separated parents will make itself felt as soon as one of them decides to move, forcing both to renegotiate.

If one cannot equate social with legal separation for the adults concerned, one can do it even less for the children. Perhaps the divorced parents are at least starting a new life, spatially and legally, but the children begin a double life in which they have to split themselves emotionally and physically between two families now negatively related to one another, with all the ambiguities, forced secrecy and divided

loyalties this implies, and their parents' jealousy of one another as a weapon which they can use for their own ends.

However one defines the multi-dimensional commitment of children of divorced parents to different families, and no matter how great the effects on them in the short and long term may be, children symbolize the continuity, the indivisibility of marriage, even if the family no longer has an address. The children after all cannot get divorced from their parents; all they can do is choose with whom they want to spend most of their time, which means rejecting the other parent in this respect, and try to work out a way of living with two interlinked but unfriendly families.

Divorce then is only possible to a limited extent and in certain ways. It is designed for the adults, not the children, and hence not the family as a whole. Seen from below, through the children's eyes, their parents remain the core of their family, although they have nowhere to live out family life. Being parents has to happen somehow outside the range of their new nuclear families or remains of families – sitting for hours in the park or a café (incidentally rather like two-career couples who are both fully mobile and have to arrange where to be together).

This shows that equating divorce with the break-up of the family is a partisan view describing the adults' wishes. Having recognized this bias, one can see that divorce drives a wedge between marriage and parenthood just as it splits up marriage and family. Divorce shatters the combination of marriage and family but does not destroy the family; it remains a reality for the children, if only in the compulsion they feel somehow to stay close to their biological parents despite the antagonisms they may face in their new nuclear families.

While marriages can be cancelled and remade, families cannot; they live on in the persons of the children who move quietly across the boundaries of new partnerships and families. Correspondingly, the image of the family after parents have separated is fundamentally ambiguous for children who find themselves living with one parent or another in a new nuclear family; or at least the child's image of the family does not tally with what other members perceive. Such children belong simultaneously to two different families; as well as almost insoluble emotional tangles, having overlapping families can also mean social and material advantages and support in planning their own lives.

This gaping difference between the realities surrounding marriage and family life becomes even clearer if one looks at the grandparents. If the divorce settlement goes badly, the parents' parents may be robbed of their grandchildren through no fault of their own. This applies particularly to the kind of social contact usually taken for granted. At the same

time, however, like the children, they personify the remains of the family which divorce divided up.

Finally, as divorce has become normal, the relations between the members of the small nuclear family have undergone a metamorphosis. This is obvious where the biological and social parents are different people, and it is hard for the onlooker to discern who originally belonged to whom. As the number of divorces rises, children actually growing up with their biological parents become the exception (see Gross and Honer 1990). It is far more common that they grow up in mixed families in which children from different marriages form a new, temporary, no-longer-nuclear family, with 'brothers' and 'sisters' who may well come from other social circles or nationalities. Divorce, then, in the long term systematically loosens the links between biology and society which used to be fused in the archetypal small family. One could even say that just as reproductive medicine with its sophisticated methods for automating non-marital insemination severs the links between social, legal and biological parenthood, widespread divorce automatically does the same.

There are a number of points worth noting where relationships between the sexes and the generations are split up and remixed by multiple divorce. For one thing they make whole networks of interrelated extended families, whose structure is difficult to see through from the outside. In a certain sense divorce can run counter to aspirations of individualism and making it alone. But it is certainly not true, whatever the prevailing view has been up to now, that divorce just means moving from one family to the next and that it therefore has no impact on what happens in private life. Such a view is plausible only if one ignores the various overlapping dimensions inside and between families and insists on peering exclusively at the so-called nucleus of the so-called nuclear family.

It takes quite a lot of empirically fortified wishful thinking to overlook the upheavals in social and family structures being brought about by millions of divorces. Family research which continues to think in terms of nuclear families and suggests by amassing data on them that they are not subject to change will someday find itself on the shelf beside the other curious products of a blind empiricism.

Eve's late apple: the enforced liberation of the male

Whereas women's liberation is on everyone's lips – and, even more than that, is in individual cases capable of erupting into the calmest family circles overnight, one only rarely hears of a man breaking out of his accustomed role. All right, there is the obligatory mid-life crisis and

there are the long-haired, the sensitive men, the single fathers' groups and homosexual clubs. The father changing nappies by now plays a prominent role in bank ads. It has also become clear that there is no natural connection between a penis, a career and a rocket. Arguing all this out again would mean duplicating the literature on the subject (Simmel 1985; Ehrenreich 1984; Goldberg 1979; Pilgrim 1986; Theweleit 1987; Brod 1987; Hollstein 1988).

What remains unclear is whether and how this deeply cracked male shell is to be removed and what a man, having thought about himself and his role in life, would be like, apart from either compulsively masculine or the prescribed opposite, an unsuccessful version of a misunderstood female wish. Worse still, little attempt has been made to discuss this, which may be no accident. Perhaps imitating women's liberation or retreating into categorical rejection of its peculiarities and excesses are really signs that men have not yet clarified their positions for themselves.

The male images that fire the women's movement oscillate between patriarchal oppressor, sex machine and scientifically blinkered threat to the environment, on the one side, and on the other, hen-pecked husband, emotional cripple, semen donor and childish family appendage. In order to clarify these idealized negations a little it makes sense to stress one point: the theory of master and servant, which Hegel developed and Marx refined, and which the women's movement now applies to men and women, is not correct and never has been, for a number of reasons.

According to the traditional gender divisions, the male is only a master in the sense of not having to do work in the house, but he has to become a servant to bring home his wages. In other words, his phantom position in the family presumes he puts up with being a dependent wage-earner. Repressing his own interests and doubts, adapting in advance to the demands of a higher power, was and still is in many cases the bitter price paid by the legendary patriarch, endured tacitly or with a lot of grumbling.

The man's subservience to the organization employing him, his professional egotism, his concern with competition and career represent the other side of his concern for his family. His 'family feeling' does not in traditional terms show in his commitment to the household, but paradoxically in subordinating himself to a career which takes material form in the household budget. His fate is a kind of altruistic self-repression. He swallows hard time after time not for his own benefit but because he has those hungry mouths to feed at home.

The façades of male power and male desires originated in the competitive rat race of the work world. In traditional social structures a

man is not permitted to take the direct path to lasting sexual satisfaction; only in the matrimonial bed is he allowed to enjoy in a legal manner the encounters which his none too secret impulses urge upon him. The way to the matrimonial bed used to lead, however, through the factory gate and to the physical and symbolic burdens men had to bear. The ideal male's behaviour consists of resisting and sublimating sexual drives, acquiring skills with which to conquer the world and finding a place in the machinery of an organization which is tailored to faceless, indistinguishable employees; only then can he explore and develop his own alien personality, tenderness, love and sexual needs. Male culture is a repressing and repressed culture, for its prerequisite is abstract, success at work, quite the opposite of male and female interest in one another and the spontaneity of love and loving. In the end there is nothing left except the daily grind. A man is a man. Work is work. That's it.

Just how irrelevant the master-servant idea is in the relations between the sexes is shown by the fact that a master needs a servant, whereas in the age of women's lib a man is no longer dependent on a woman, or more precisely no longer dependent on a wife. In the power struggle which has broken out between the sexes, the men's cards are quite good; sex and love are no longer tied to marriage and material support. If a man wants he can say 'love and/or sex, yes, marriage, no', and in doing so he furthers the women's cause. Someone who has no interest in feeding an unemployed female for the rest of his life must count on his partner having a job, and so advances two things at the same time: the financial and social independence of his girlfriend and his own liberation from the age-old yoke of being used by others to preserve his family.

At this point it becomes clear that men's liberation is a passive affair, and therefore tends to remain silent. It consists of enjoying the renunciation forced on him. A man does not have actively to escape – as women escape from their roles as housekeepers and mothers – to try out another world, of work and science and politics. He has all that behind him; for him it is conformity. But under the auspices of their struggle for sexual freedom and professional acknowledgement the women have freed the men of earlier duties. One probably unintentional result of women's lib is men's lib. They were robbed of the role of being sole earner? Fine, that means the women are no longer entitled to expect financial support. Women discover their sexual side? Fine, that means the protectrix of the marital monopoly on sex abandons her efforts; there are more willing women around. Companionship, sex, love and affection are no longer in bondage to a wedding ring – in the interests of the women themselves.

Seen in this light it could well be that men – often of course quite unaware of their objective cleverness – are encouraging the women to liberate themselves not in an arbitrary manner but as proxies for male liberation. Men seem to engage in self-liberation as spectators, stunned and well-meaning, by encouraging the women's rebellion against their traditional roles. Their own liberation – not having to be the sole earner – falls like a ripe apple into their laps. Eve's late apple. Let it be said that the old 'king of the castle' role is being revived in this version of letting the women do the chores. And let it also be said that narrow-minded men who declare their outrage at women's liberation apparently have little insight into their own situation.

This gift to men, who still do not realize what luck they have with their misfortune, of course has the drawback that women's lib is not only happening without the men, as it were, but is also directed against them. It is a hollow kind of freedom, grafted on to something else, not really freedom at all. The men find themselves sitting in the middle of a world which no longer exists. Smoke from the feminists' gunpowder is swirling round their heads. The beams are cracking. The concrete monuments to their masculinity are crumbling away. Their first duty, they think, is to notice nothing and pretend life is as nice as it always used to be. If necessary with force. Hidden force. Perhaps there is still time to adopt countermeasures and pay the women back for treating them so badly.

The fact that their burden as bread-winner has disappeared with the women's revolt does not matter. The women chose to do it themselves. That their obsession with getting on, getting as much as possible, 'let's get on with it', ruins any real pleasure, including their own, also does not matter. That's just the way men are.

Certainly there used to be a point where everything came together – career, put up with it, here's the next step, keep going – and suddenly it has turned into a big empty nothingness. The person you know best and least, that artificially produced numbskull in his office armour, his casual uniform, would have to be stripped bare, discovered, felt. Use your eyes, for instance, for a transcontinental holiday through your own life and your own body.

This might mean of course that men would run wild or get out of hand, upsetting the mechanisms at home and at work. They could turn things upside down, question routines, inquire, interrogate, not give in, become rebellious and insist on running against the grain. Or they might just begin to mould, go bad, become the parasite they always were, among other things. Family work does not mean taking on exaggerated ideas about cleanliness. Should a man go so far as to dust under the bed? Maybe a bit of dirt is nice. Maybe the hole in my sock is

becoming. Maybe the misplaced pair of shorts enriched by the remains of a cheese sandwich and a dirty fork has something to do with art, an idea the artist Joseph Beuys would have envied. Maybe his 'Greasy Corner' is merely a weak version of male ideas on beauty and house-keeping. Get started, try it out, let the dirty sheets pile up, fight, laugh, get stuck in the chaos lurking a few inches away from order. But live, simply start living, and never stop again. Wishful thinking in view of the real world which men believe they inhabit, without noticing that it hardly exists any longer.

This much is true: so-called 'young adult males' are increasingly unwilling to enter into marriage with women who have no professional training. It is also true that most men have altered their attitudes and strategies towards women's liberation. Men pretend to be open and broad-minded. If 'Home sweet home' is passé, the new focal point for the old order has already been spotted and fixed: the child, and with it the 'indispensable' mother. By transforming the women's issue into a mother-and-child issue – with the active participation of women – many men believe they can lean back and make themselves comfortable on the sofa again.

The pay-off comes, at the latest, before, during and after divorce when parenthood is split up and motherhood turns against fatherhood. That is when men, who suddenly rediscover their fatherly feelings, are hit by their legally backed absence from the family, which during the marriage seemed perfectly normal. The father becomes the victim of the inverted inequality with which he has hitherto lived quite cheerfully. Now the mother has the say in everything, legally and actually, and the father has to make do with what she grants him, usually as little as the law allows.

Becoming a father is not difficult, but being a divorced father certainly is. At the moment when it is too late, the family personified by the child becomes the centre of all hope and concrete effort; the child is offered time and attention in a manner which during the marriage was allegedly out of the question, 'although I really would like to spend more time with him/her'. Divorce confronts the man with his own feelings as a father; he is the one to mourn for, having realized too late what liberation means, just as its objective slips away.

Now everything turns against him. Step by step he is faced with the costs of a life lived away from his family: enforced loneliness, learned helplessness, legally rationed time with his kids, all bars behind which his newly discovered fatherhood seems unjustly imprisoned. His outrage, pain and bitterness are occasionally shock-waves which herald his own efforts to shake off outdated patterns of thinking and being.

Strictly speaking old Adam has become superfluous in almost every respect. A relic of the old idea of manliness, he could almost be put on display in a museum. The trouble is he is still trying to make himself heard: women should be pushed out of jobs so that men can claim work as the main pillar of their existence. In making babies husbands have to fear being pushed out of the race by a coalition of semen donors, doctors and test tubes. Female interest in his penis-fixated bang-bang sexual repertoire has flown away like a butterfly. A man can continue to live with the fictions, but the collapse of them, their forced and suffered loss, could free him to seek new ways of being. The fact that he has not noticed this or seized the chance offered does not make Eve's late apple more succulent.

Divorce as a wedding guest: marriage contracts

The problems overrunning the nuclear family feel like individual ones but they are also of a general nature. Much has been said about how choosy the population has become, but the opposite applies just as much; nuclear families already exposed to severe strain are also expected to take on a large burden of official obligations. It may seem drastic, but it is quite correct to say that they are misused as the nation's rubbish dump. One could mention, for instance, the fact that they are expected to tutor their children at home to make up for teacher shortages. Or that polluted air and water and toxins in foods greatly increase the parents', or specifically the mother's, job in feeding the family, since she is meant to remove from the menu everything that a legalized conspiracy of authorities, experts and industries have poured, dumped and pumped into her kitchen. Children have to be planned and timed to fit in with career and social insurance regulations. It goes without saying that the family is expected to step in if unemployment benefits run out. And if the members of the family who are willing and able to work are not as mobile as the market demands and refuse to accept jobs far from home, they are officially suspected of shirking and lose some of their rights.

There is something in the modern medicine cupboard to treat these 'minor ailments', treat this 'cold' in the family by having a dose of agreements, contracts, provisions and counselling sessions. The trouble is that uncertainty on this scale just where one hoped to find domestic peace makes planning, stipulations and arguments unavoidable. The medicine turns out to be part of the disease it claims to heal; family is no longer

an emotional haven, a place to air one's other qualities, but just as regimented as the world outside. Contracts between lovers devalue their love.

An antenuptial agreement is not a new invention; among the nobility it was the custom to work out complicated treaties on distributing wealth and rights. This was, however, not the partners' concern, as it is nowadays, but was the responsibility of their families, with the bride's father liable for the dowry, and the groom and his family expected to provide property to support the marriage. The meaning and point of those marriage agreements was only distantly related to what is intended in the modern ones. What is now at stake is regulating the consequences of divorce and establishing norms for daily life.

There is currently a boom in premarital contracts, reflecting how uneasy people feel about getting married. The more provisions such a document makes, the greater its signatories' fear of falling into an abyss which the agreement is meant to bridge. Divorce is no longer the exception but has become the rule, and everyone is confronted with the possibility that it could affect them, or their nearest and dearest. Anyone who has lived through it will, like the survivor of a sunken liner, put on a life-jacket next time he/she embarks on a voyage. This life-jacket is the antenuptial agreement, signed by both parties; it does not prevent the ship from sinking but makes its loss at least prospectively less disastrous.

Is it surprising that people who have already gone through the misery of divorce as adults or have survived it as children start negotiations with a new partner just like politicians form coalitions? The likely end is the sponsor of the beginning. Predictable problems are anticipated; all the tricky issues in, during and after marriage are supposed to be included and arranged before the couple even goes to the registry office. Who gets what and who pays whom are the main questions, but even battling over (often as yet non-existent) children in advance is meant to take place painlessly, laying down in advance what rights each partner has if there is a divorce, and agreeing on child-rearing methods to defuse any squabbles in this field. Arrangements are made on sharing hobbies or not, on going on holiday, and, particularly thorny, on developing one's potential. It is not uncommon for the loving contractual partners to agree to back up each other's ambitions along the lines: if I help you with your career you must let me off the housework to get a proper training.

Some go into the greatest detail: how the house is run, from polishing shoes to making breakfast; mores of sexual behaviour about what is acceptable or out of the question; who is prepared to move house; when the children should arrive; who will look after them and who wants to

combine doing both. All of this and much more can be laid down in the form of a binding agreement formulated by a notary. In the mind's eye one sees the couple in the midst of a domestic quarrel poring over the document, hoping it can solve their misunderstandings.

It is both poignant and ironic when love soberly regulates how it may end; both partners agree that they will consent to divorce each other, and have insight, and promise not to dramatize the divorce either to themselves or to others, and especially not in front of the children; they want to see it as 'one of life's natural offshoots' and not contest it (Partner 1984: 128). Some even pledge to celebrate their divorce with a party even bigger than the marriage itself. One wonders what feelings are really concealed behind this pseudo-civilized idea of an 'amicable divorce'.

No doubt contractual marriage – 'an emotional contract' – is one answer to the problem, but it also contains elements which speed up its own dissolution. Interests which one never used to be able to barter are now openly offered in exchange for others, providing the partners with weapons against each other which they are likely to use as soon as their disagreements prove hard to solve. As far as I know, there has not yet been any research into the course and duration of marriages which started out under voluntary contracts of this kind, but one can presume that ending such a marriage is easier, and this very fact encourages the participants to consider ending it earlier. Marriage turns into a tenancy for temporarily satisfying mutual needs.

The assortment of means available for 'curing' and 'saving' the family also includes the other offerings with which modern society tries to patch up its self-inflicted wounds. Offer the housewives a glittering wage to compensate for their low-status job. Being married is one of the very few positions in Germany which one can hold without being trained for it; perhaps we should offer training courses, ending with a certificate (this would provide work for unemployed teachers and give quarrels a new quality, in which both quasi-therapists could elegantly hurt one another with psychological half-truths). Anyone who nevertheless really does fall through one of the holes over which family life is constructed can count on the sympathy and bills of a marriage counsellor.

The pattern is always the same: family, the place which was meant to be the opposite of the chilly, hard world outside, gets converted into a predictable and manageable part of it. This has not happened in the course of any political reform of family life but very slowly, step by step, as the security risks in being married have been met by insurances against them. This is quite logical. Neither political commitment nor waiting for utopia clears away the dirty dishes or helps one achieve one's aims despite the protests of one's partner. The more divorces there

are, the more contracts, and as a result even more divorces. In the end love turns against the place where it once sought a home and refuge, and is fickle, absorbed only in itself.

Parenthood as a building set: genetic engineering and designing offspring

Until recently one's family was a natural product, a blood relationship determining social and material heredity, establishing kinships and so on. Attention is now turning to this because the natural basis for human nature can be technically altered – through reproductive medicine, organ transplantation and cracking the genetic code. Paradoxically much more attention has been paid to our withering and endangered environment, known as nature, so that the incredible triumph of the biosciences, producing an unnatural world, has gone almost unnoticed. What is happening is that the ancient link between nature and family is being severed and the consequences cannot yet be measured but only guessed at in the form of questions. Taking an overall view, there are two main lines of thinking.

The first is that there is nothing new in the principle of interfering with motherhood and fatherhood. Ever since the Enlightenment people have tried to tame nature; using technology to pursue the same aim is not essentially different, even though we can now influence how human beings are made. Technical advances always contain a risk element which has to be respected but equally opens new possibilities for human development. For its advocates the chances lie mainly in pre-embryonic treatment of congenital disorders and in enabling the increasing number of infertile couples to have children of their own. Furthermore natural parenthood has long been joined by social and legal parenthood, with the probability of a child growing up with its biological parents becoming smaller and smaller.

The other view, which I share, is that fleeing into generalizations, contending that things have always been like this, is just a cloak under which to smuggle in new techniques without having to answer embarrassing questions. It may be that the new dimension remains invisible in a laboratory where substances look indistinguishable, and it makes no difference whether they come from humans or from animals, where one can alter a person's character without anaesthetics and is not forced to explain what one is doing with pre-embryonal cells. But from the socio logical angle the new dimension with its social implications is all too

apparent. The double helix, genome analysis, genetic corrective measures or heterologous and homologous fertilization suddenly present a whole new range of possibilities of abolishing the anthropological constants of motherhood and fatherhood which have prevailed in all previous societies.

This epoch-making change is perhaps not so visible in the biology and chemistry of the cell and its nucleus, but certainly is in the consequences which these new techniques have or will have for family and kinship systems. Social and biological parenthood, once identical, is breaking up into a series of steps which start out from the natural processes and combine various components like a building set. The essential difference from, say, adoption or divorce, which cancel the link between biological and social parenthood in other ways, lies in the deliberate technical manipulation involved, multiplying and selecting human potential until now firmly enclosed within family units.

For the sociology of the family this development is two-edged. Social parenthood is freed of its biological moorings and can float freely; being a parent and having a child become two separate phenomena which can be organized independently of one another. The biological side is concerned with combining and selecting sperm and ovum, while being a parent exists on its own and has to redefine itself. Technically it would be possible to uncouple reproduction from the family, either by organizing this in the clinics or by delegating delivery to a group of women chosen according to criteria of whatever kind. This may sound like science fiction but it shows the direction in which we are going.

On the other hand parenthood no longer limited to one's own genetic makeup opens up possibilities which make one's imagination seem a dreary hanger-on while reality gallops off into the distance. Soon it will be taken for granted that one can determine the sex of a child or predict its appearance and probable diseases in advance. Embryo transfer, babies in test tubes, swallowing a pill to make twins or triplets, purchasing deep-frozen embryos from a highly specialized store run by experts under governmental supervision – some of these things are already normal and others just a matter of time.

Once babies can be bred in test tubes, what does motherhood mean? What effect will it have on women who have always seen motherhood as part of their existence? Who is really the father, brother, sister, uncle of this newborn? One can already have one's own embryos deep-frozen, so that one can give birth to them later, after the job situation has been settled, or, as has already happened in the USA, implant one in one's own mother and hand the pregnancy and birth over to her, making her mother and grandmother in one and the child its mother's sibling. And

why not? Who is going to be able to stop such initiatives (in the long run), if they apparently promise two advantages: women can concentrate on their professions and babies be born to keep up the population figures, satisfy the markets and make sure that there will be enough wage-earners to pay for the pensioners. The mind reels.

This is where matters are beginning to get out of control. The doctors in reproductive medicine cry: 'You're free to choose! It's your decision . . . All we want to do is ease the suffering . . . You don't have to take part . . . There is no coercion . . . Even this technique, in itself, is quite neutral, all that matters is doing things carefully. Abuse must be prevented at all costs; our legal system and responsible scientists will see to that.'

Let us assume for a moment that this highly improbable prediction is true. Let us suppose that there are laws for damming up the technological spring tides (in fact there are none); let us assume that all of a sudden both sides discuss the pros and cons in an unusual atmosphere of mutual goodwill and respect, nobody attempting to browbeat the other. All that this completely unrealistic approach would mean is that the new outline of a post-family society is sketched out, under the pretext of giving the patients the right to choose; the new design for family life would be fuelled by remarkable and unstoppable medical advances and given its blessing by a new set of regulations on genetics. The result would be an age in which parenthood has lost its links with natural processes, and biology would take off on its own, making it increasingly difficult to decide where the line should be drawn and when society should make efforts to protect itself.

In fact this revolution is taking place without any governmental intervention, without any draft laws, without any debates or votes in parliament, simply as a tacit part of medical advance. It is being financed by our public health insurance system which pays for the patient's consultation with the doctor. This much is clear: genetic engineers and researchers are not responsible for the results. It is up to society alone to decide whether it should make use of the broad range of offers becoming available.

It [society] will want to do this. First those who actually suffer from a congenital illness, then those who have recessive illnesses, then those who might be susceptible, then those who are considered impaired. Finally potentially almost everyone. This corresponds to optimal coverage in all other services and products. Once it gets on the market, enters the minds of the masses and awakens individual wishes and needs, it becomes a product to demand and use. Ethics has no staying power against consumer wishes. First comes the fear of one's own disease or disability and

then perhaps fear of eugenics. First comes food, and after that moral considerations.

The great feat, modernization at all levels, will be available only to the next generation – but then unavoidable. The responsibility of one generation for the next cannot be restricted to offering optimal conditions under which to grow up. The parents' duty will start when the fertilized egg settles in the uterus. Because every haemophiliac represents a burden to the community of insurance payers, every incipient baby will undergo genetic screening in the 32 cell stage. If any undesirable tendencies are diagnosed, one can choose between abortion or amelioration, that is embryo therapy. But why stop at congenital illnesses? After all, the parents' wishes can be taken into account and transferred to the embryo. Will the child be blond or brunette, will it be a little podgy or short? All that can be arranged in advance. Whatever happens, a single person who briefly gets together with someone else to go through the traditional reproductive motions can equally well make use of these technical services. (Gabbert 1988: 87, 89–90)⁴

In genetic paradise it is not only the 'crooked sticks', as the elderly Kant once described humanity, which would be straightened out according to people's ideas, beliefs and fears. It might seem more tempting to split up love and reproduction, parenthood and affection, and perhaps even assign each to its own sphere and institution. This is likely to appeal particularly to societies which are unable to solve the 'problem' of a dwindling population by the old take-your-luck method of getting married and having children.

Vanishing points and tentative identities: beyond the male and female roles

Let us assume that both of us, you and I, have one free wish. We could do what we wanted. How can we get out of this embarrassing situation?

Our 'sorrow beyond dreams', our loss of utopia shows up quite clearly in our lack of imagination: we have forgotten how to wish. We have cast off traditions and the hopes they represented, and now even the memories of them, memories of another path, some transcendental aim for the sake of which others set whole caravans and nations in motion. Inquiring about utopias, even positive ones, has become awkward. First, they have faded, second, they have become dystopias, and third, the enlightened average European is much too enlightened to wish for one. So what is there to lose, where the loss that really threatens us overshadows all else?

Why does that pervasive sense of hopelessness and being too late which paralyses so many attempts at thinking nowadays not encourage us to use our imagination? Feeling hopeless presupposes you secretly believe that everything should be useful. For a different, questing kind of thinking hopelessness can have a liberating effect. Just as one can count on people to loot when under martial law, in a state of acknowledged defeatism one can count on the imagination responding with visions of other worlds, uninhibited by stern calls to stick to the facts. But people continue to think small, which is often the death knell for creative ideas.

What would have to happen – and let's answer quite freely, without any reservations about what is feasible – to enable you to share your life with someone else in a way that is good for both of you?

Even wishful thinking has to be organized. Two aspects are worth distinguishing, first of all in this section the external factors which upset our attempts to love each other – being unequal, on the move, in search of ourselves, and then in the next the turbulences which are inherent in post-traditional love (which is the subject of chapter 6, on the secular religion called love).

Let us start out with a simple matter: how to organize two individual biographies which are supposed to run along the same rails. Putting it the other way round, modern society is nomadic, we are on the move in everyday life, on holiday, in our professional lives, and brakes would have to be found to bring us back to a more settled rhythm. One would have to limit mobility parallel to limiting growth in the economy. Rediscovering how to be less hasty and more self-sufficient might be a big step in improving our social lives.

That, however, puts something quite social democratic and quite unrevolutionary at the top of the agenda (alongside throttling the amount of traffic and the like): we should uncouple work from income. A society which has become rich can at least dream of abandoning this imperative from all previous societies and eras, releasing people from having to work to survive. First hints in this direction can be found in the debates on citizens' pensions, benefit payments, uncoupling social security from wage-packets, and allowing people at least sometimes to decide whether to work or not. This would slow down the roundabout forcing people to decide in favour of their jobs and against their families. At least there would be a place to try out living together.

In the private sphere, where both partners often lack any sense of direction, it is often overlooked that gender inequalities are not just a superficial issue which can be ironed out by the people involved. These fundamental inequalities are in fact a built-in feature of industrial

society, reflecting its attitude to work inside and outside the family. In fact our society is founded on the contradictions between modern changes and reactionary structures, and they cannot be abolished just by letting people choose between family and career. The sexes will never become equals as long as they are subject to pressures which perpetuate the current hierarchy. The only way out is to rethink the entire structure of industrial society and reorganize it to take account of our need for a satisfying private life, to find a new balance freed of gender barriers. Instead of the pseudo-alternatives 'back to the nuclear family' or 'let everyone have a job' one ought to look into a third possibility, limiting and buffering market requirements so that our needs as social animals are recognized and satisfied.

This principle can be understood as the exact opposite of the interpretation sketched in chapter 1 above. As the family becomes a community of individuals, in what amounts to a second historical step, production and private needs are divided up within the family. The difficulties which are bound to crop up can be solved only if arrangements are made enabling both functions to be combined throughout the couple's life together.

For instance being prepared to move house: first it is conceivable that one could alleviate some of the detrimental effects of moving on. So far it has always been taken for granted that it is the individual (usually male) who moves, and the family, including the wife, trails after him. The only alternative for the couple involved seems to be giving up the wife's career, with all its long-term consequences, or a split family, often a first step towards divorce, and society suggests this is a personal problem. A helpful alternative would be cooperative mobility, on the lines, if you want him/her, you must make his/her spouse a good offer too. The employment offices would have to organize job counselling and referral for whole families. Firms, and the government, would be required not just to keep talking about family values but actually to contribute to them by offering cooperative employment models perhaps encompassing several organizations. At the same time one could investigate whether existing expectations (for instance in the part-time academic job market) cannot be reduced, allowing people to continue living at home. There could be legal clauses recognizing unwillingness to move for family and relationship reasons. In assessing the acceptability of a job, one should also take the risk factors for the family into account.

Of course in view of current mass unemployment, suggesting people should move around less seems even more unrealistic than it already is. Similar effects can perhaps be achieved in other ways, for instance by

taking away the pressure to work; this would mean increasing social assistance to provide a minimum income for everyone, and decouple caring for the elderly and those in poor health from the employment market. Loosening the thumb-screws like this has a long tradition (welfare state guarantees, reducing the working week). Since mass unemployment forces women in millions to join the search for jobs, while lean organizations have increased productivity with fewer employees, this topic is bound to be on the government's agenda sooner or later.

But cutting back the dynamism of the market in favour of the family is only one side of the solution. People will have to work out how to live with one another again. There are no rules any more, no guidelines from the past, so that everything has to be agreed by the persons concerned if it has any chance of working. This would include weighing up the relationships one automatically acquires with the ones one personally wants, and discovering what potential they hold as a support system to aid one's search for oneself without the barriers and snares built into traditional family relationships.

Such unexciting notions as friendship must be revived, friendship as a deliberately sought trusting partnership between two people involved in an honest exchange of ideas, not as fascinating and risky as love, and therefore often longer lasting. As Henry Miller said, 'A friend equips you with a thousand eyes, like the goddess Indra. You live countless lives through your friends' (quoted in Schmiele 1987: 162).

Friendship does not just fall into your lap, nor does it come easy if you are young; it has to be carefully protected against the centrifugal forces which threaten all market biographies (and is rather like a two-career marriage in that respect). It has to be renewed again and again by backing one another in difficult moments and being open to constructive criticism, acting as a shared lifeline to take the weight of each other's confusions and weaknesses. Acquaintanceship is the looser form, and interweaving both helps to form a safety net for individual biographies revolving round their own limitations and doubts. In other words, one would have to form and try out what kind of close relationship fits in with living as an individual and can ward off some of its miseries and madnesses. One special feature deserves to be named: being simultaneously close and yet on one's own, allowing for the fact that individuals need their own company more than that of others.

With a society of individuals there is no going back to old forms of communal living. Instead we need new forms allowing us to live separately together, tested by both partners and accepted by town planners, architects and landlords, so that each partner can retreat into his/

her separate corner or seek the other's company in equal measure, doing away with group pressures and standard living patterns.

Perhaps these are the first signs of a certain post-industrial enlightenment, getting rid of some of industrialism's destructive features. The new focus is on values such as self-awareness, sharing, loving people, bodies, nature and other creatures, finding the same wavelength, discovering oneself, spending time alone, arguing, and doing the chores; looking out for friends to accompany, support and criticize one's journey through life. None of these ideas is particularly new, but they do challenge the firmly fixed patterns of family life which industrialization has landed us with. How can one combine the quest for oneself, a projected, tentative identity, with the rigid prescriptions in the old family roles: good husband-and-father, good wife-and-mother, nice child?

On the one hand, forced to be mobile and often up to the eyes in work, we make the family, rather than the neighbourhood, or clan, or community into the centre of our private lives. On the other, however, it is hard to escape from the fixed roles which make family life a stabilizing force and a place where needs can be anticipated and qualities appreciated. In this respect it is hindering our search for who we are, as opposed to where we came from, a search which depends on experimenting and persistence. The family is not a gang of Boy Scouts exploring its new terrain, wandering through the undiscovered continents of the self, searching out the different selves which reside in all of us.

Exchanging one's own family for marriage therefore looks like escaping from one trap only to step into the next, as long as families stop adults from reverting to being like children, shedding their snakeskins, until family life becomes a programme of discovery for all its members. 'We want children's rights! Down with discrimination against stuffy old grown-ups!' are demands pointing in this direction. Opening up the family to let its members live their dreams of being alone and at the same time cultivating a network of friendships that can outlast identity crises and marital upheavals would be two ways of relieving marriage of overblown expectations and toning down the panic and confusion of divorce.

The nuclear family was and is a programme which seems insidiously easy to adopt. It looks like the answer to all the questions, and they wreak their vengeance only later because they have not been posed or properly answered. Society will find a way out of this tangle of possibilities only if it can come up with a new viable model for living together which serves as a good example and is publicly acknowledged.

It would certainly be a mistake to imagine that the bourgeois family could be replaced by a post-bourgeois one. What we already have is a

variety of post-bourgeois family, no longer – or only just – families, coming into being as men and women quarrel and reorganize themselves and develop their own dynamics, credos – and sometimes blinkers – over generation lines. This searching phase does not, however, seem to have led to any crystallization; inventing new ways of living suitable for the future still seems to be hampered by the dogged defence of only slightly modified old ways (a bit of shared housekeeping, a little back-pedalling in one's career, with mutual encouragement). Recognizing that if one looks carefully none of the advances people enthuse about have really taken place is the first hard step to maybe someday taking one's life into one's own hands.

We have got caught up in the details of everyday life instead of facing the real questions: wallowing in freedom, jingling tarnished reminders of past joys and trivial triumphs, an orgy of dressing up and dancing and amazement, arguing and fighting over the minor liberated zones and peaks inside and outside oneself. These horizons, these dreams of better ways of living together have nothing to do with any reality that ever existed before industrial society; they are a product of it, and of its insistence that private lives, marital difficulties, parenthood, family, sexuality and gender identity are all just personal matters. Our dreams, ideologies and designs for another world are never just projections or visions suggested by the powers-that-be to motivate us to carry on. It is rather that the mistakes which we individually stage and suffer from always reflect the actual situation in which we live, with our deepest longings and the daily conflicts we simply cannot avoid by any of the escape routes discovered so far. In this sense at least the mistakes are right; glorifying in a nostalgic manner the charms of private life proves useless in the face of so many individuals setting off to write their own biographies.

Love always starts out from the private side of life, is set alight by small details and yet seems to transcend mundanity. Seen from above, or outside, love always remains tied to the trivialities of daily life, habits that have become man and wife, with pictures of me and you and the general attitudes they conceal. Love is bound to an inherited role personified in the beloved, and beyond him/her the forces of history and politics which reappear anew in every one of us.

It starts out by wandering, getting lost, trying out, flirting, making it, waking up in a snakepit of hissing jealousy, being amazed that the flames one walked through left no marks, discovering that solitude provides company, memories, strange worlds in books and the cosy, twinkling reflection of the lake which seems external only as it refracts and reflects the heavens. Such experiences are quite private, individual

and hard to share, suggesting a dimension which alters one's perception, sensitivities and the colours of the world. It could at least encourage us to ask what really matters: does this way of seeing things, the uncertainty and significance of maybe loving and being loved help us to find out how to word the vital questions for our time: what to do about technology run wild and nature dying all around us?

LOVE, OUR SECULAR RELIGION

What comes after tradition? Nothing?

Nobody should be rash enough to claim they know all about love. To conclude this book it seems worth examining some ideas on what love means in our detraditionalized, non-religious and individualized world:

Only two things
Underwent so many guises,
Through Me and Us and You,
But everything was suffered
For the question: why?
...

Whether roses or snow or oceans
Whatever bloomed faded away,
There are only two things: a void
And a stigmatized self.

(Gottfried Benn)¹

Let us assume that is the situation: there are only two things, a void and a stigmatized self. What does this void, this emptiness mean? Does lacking traditions imply that we are really in a vacuum stretching from now into the future and likely to last for ever? That there is a whole assortment of 'essentials' and 'gods'? Or just do-it-yourself beliefs? Maybe taking refuge in consumerism: platters of paté and holidays on distant shores? Or perhaps all these things plus some signs of a post-tradition which we have not grasped, regulating how the stigmatized individuals live with and without one another?

To put the question another way, let us assume for a moment that the churches have become empty shells which it would be unchristian to abolish; does talking about 'emptiness' there not mean simply negating what used to be? Is it a reflection of our lack of imagination when we insist on thinking comparatively in terms of then and now? Or do we really mean there is nothing to replace what has vanished – it's over, that was it, curtains. And then?

Perhaps beneath the nothingness, between the cracks across the emptiness one can glimpse a new kind of small-scale paradise quite unconnected with the old realms and their rules which gave life its meaning, a little utopia which does not depend on tradition and therefore cannot be codified or institutionalized and need not justify itself; it is simply tailored to fit individual needs. In this last chapter we are immodestly and tentatively looking for the meaning of life in a post-Christian modern society, and our discovery is, quite simply and unsociologically, love. Looking into the future one can safely guess that love in all its glory, its loftiest and deepest values, its hells and heavens, in all its human and animal entirety will turn out to be one main source of satisfaction and meaning in life.

A suggestion and a question: perhaps now that the class system, pitting men against women and predetermining family structures, is on the way out, both sexes could begin to long for and expect new ways of friendly coexistence to be the norm? Just as the class struggle paradoxically gave birth to ideas of equality and solidarity, could it be that the battle between the sexes is allowing us to think up new possibilities, to redefine paradise, and awake political and social impulses towards living in a liberated and liberal way together? Are new realities emerging, and with them new neuroses? What effect does it have that our personal lives no longer centre on religious beliefs, social class, filling hungry stomachs, or being the pillars of the nuclear family, but rather on discovering who we are and where we are going, trying out different ways of living and loving. Is it just Sodom and Gomorrah in modern dress? Does its influence reach beyond our private lives and affect other realms, science, politics, the labour market and business? Or does paying so much attention to our own interests and potential prove a dead end, resulting in pseudo-intimacy, in alienated lovers, frustrated because although we find it impossible to live with each other, we still cannot do without one another?

Max Weber (1985) noted how the 'spirit of capitalism' was an unintentional byproduct of Protestant asceticism. Let us suppose that now that the Protestant/professional ethic of doing one's duty is fading away and the accustomed pattern of family life is collapsing, there is a good

chance that the next battles will be for love itself, for its own sake. What would be the side-effects, the unwanted genie which could escape from the bottle crammed with love and romantic ideas and therapeutic efforts? Are there any repercussions here for political thinking or action? These questions will be discussed rather than answered, in three steps.

(1) Why is love being elevated to the rank of a latter-day religion? What can be clarified or explained by comparing love and religion? Where is such a comparison apt and where is it irrelevant? To find out we must define some terms which tend to be used in several senses, sometimes apparently describing the disintegration and at others the idolization of family, marriage and loving relationships. Our thesis is that the structure of industrial society which laid down gender, family and occupational roles is crumbling away, and a modern form of archaic anarchy is breaking out, with love on its banner, and a thousand delights and obstacles in its path. It is this quest for personal freedom and satisfaction here and now, which can so quickly revert into hatred, desperation and loneliness, that is leaving its mark on the divorce and remarriage figures, on overlapping and serial families, as millions of people go in search of happiness.

(2) The retort, the antithesis, would be that 'it has always been like that,' a deep conviction that love in this form has always existed even if historians cannot trace it. We intend to show that investing such hopes in love is a modern phenomenon, something specific to our times. It is true that romantic love was invented long before the second half of the twentieth century; loving one another as an ultimate form of self revelation, for instance, was celebrated in a mixture of realism and fantasy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, spelled out in anguish and ecstasy. The novel aspect of the past few decades is that this poetically heightened love-hate romanticism has been transformed into a popular mass movement adorned with all the accoutrements of modern life and finding its way into all corners of cultural life, therapists' text books, divorce laws and people's hearts. Marrying someone for love no longer means setting up a family, material security, parenthood and so on, but discovering and being oneself in all one's facets, having the best of both worlds by venturing ever further along one's personal path but still trusting in the constant support and companionship of one's partner.

(3) For individuals who have to invent or find their own social settings, love becomes the central pivot giving meaning to their lives. In this

world where no one demands obedience or respect for old habits, love is exclusively in the first person singular, and so are truth, morality, salvation, transcendence and authenticity. In accordance with its inner logic, this modern type of love is rooted in itself, in the individuals who live it. Growing out of itself and its own subjective views, it easily turns totalitarian: rejecting any outside authority, and agreeing to take over responsibility, to compromise and be fair only for emotional, spontaneous reasons. The only obligation is to be honest. It is not a crime, not breaking the rules, if one does not love, even if one's behaviour inflicts deeper wounds on others than robbing or assaulting them might. So love is not just a way of finding affection and closeness; it also provides an excuse for attacking one's lover with the sharp knives of intimacy. It is our conjecture, and this will have to be fleshed out and discussed, that love has become a blueprint for hopes and actions untrammeled by old ties and constraints previously enforced by the state, the law and the church, and developing its own inner logic, conflicts and paradoxes. While psychologists usually claim they can best explain all the turbulent relationships by looking at the individuals and how they grew up, and sociologists tend to seek the reasons in external factors like job opportunities and women's rights, we believe the roots lie somewhere else. One fundamental cause of so much emotional upheaval is the inherent contradictoriness of a form of living erected on rapidly changing feelings and the hopes of both partners that they can 'become themselves'.

The disintegration and idolization of marriage, family and close relationships

Women and men reading this book will have been left with a contradiction, more hidden in some chapters and more open in others, which must now be clarified. They will have noticed that convincing illustrations of the disintegration of marriage and family life are countered by equally convincing illustrations of how extremely important these two institutions remain. Rising divorce figures which apparently show the end of marriages are answered by high remarriage rates, proving how attractive marriage still is. Anyone concluding from the declining birth-rate that having children and being parents have lost their priority has to think again on seeing the effort made by thousands of women (and men) to escape infertility. Does the collective decision in favour of 'common law marriage' mean people are fundamentally sceptical about family conventions? No, the family researchers reply (they even have to defend their profession): couples living together before or outside marriage do

not tend to live wild or unorthodox lives, and there is little to distinguish them from married couples.

Never before has marriage been built on such ephemeral and immaterial foundations (see chapter 3 above). Men and women with good jobs are economically independent of family support. Their union no longer serves any political ends or the maintenance of dynasties or owning property as it did in the feudal hierarchy. Inherited ties, which used to be taken for granted, have slackened, and the couple working as a team becomes the exception; in short everything which used to be firm and preordained is vanishing. Instead one is supposed to seek and find in the macro-microcosm of life with the beloved everything that society previously assigned to various professions and often different parts of town: romantic love, keeping a mistress, comfortable affection, liberation from the shackles of adulthood and a humdrum life, being forgiven one's sins, refuge in family history and future plans, parental pride and pleasure and whatever other incompatibilities – with their enigmatic dragon's features – there may be.

Seen historically, in an era when men and women have lost their old political and economic certainties and moral guidelines one wonders why they are seeking their own private bliss in such a uniform way, marrying for love, of all things, while society in general suggests that differentiating is the answer. Marrying for love has existed only since the beginning of the industrial revolution and was its invention. It is regarded as the most desirable goal although the social realities suggest exactly the opposite. Marriage has lost its stability but none of its attractiveness as a result of its metamorphosis from a means of passing on wealth and power into the airy version we know, nourished only on emotional involvement and the desire to find oneself. Despite and contrary to the 'bad' reality, the family and loving relationships continue to be idealized on every level of society (with slight behavioural differences), irrespective of income, education and age. Here is some evidence from research into working-class attitudes:

Interviewer: 'What does having a family and children mean to you?'

Mr Schiller: 'That there is some sense in life.'

Mrs Schiller: 'You know why you're there, you know what you're working for.'

Mr Xeller: 'To me, family means everything. I'd give up everything but that.'

Mrs Taler: 'Family and children are the main thing and the most important thing.'

There is scarcely anything else in the parents' lives which they describe so

emphatically as the core of their lives. Only having a family and children gives existence a subjective 'purpose'. (Wahl et al. 1980: 34-5)

This finding is both paradoxical and mysterious: the family is simultaneously disintegrating and being put on a pedestal. If one can draw conclusions about beliefs from how people behave, seventh heaven and mental torment seem to be very close neighbours in our ideal image of a loving couple. Perhaps they just live in different storeys - tower room and torture chamber - in the same castle. Above all some explanation must be found for the fact that so many people are yearning to have children, often to the exclusion of all other interests, while at the same time the birth-rate is declining. Equally, why does family life hold out so much appeal, promising personal salvation in a domestic paradise of companionship, parenthood and love, while there is also a sharp rise in the divorce rate? What induces the sexes to tear at each other's throats and still keep their high hopes of finding true love and personal fulfilment with this partner, or the next, setting standards which are so high that disappointment is almost inevitable?

These two poles, idealizing life as a couple and divorcing in thousands, represent two sides of a new faith quickly finding followers in a society of uprooted loners. Their hope rests in love, a powerful force obeying rules of its own and inscribing its messages into people's expectations, anxieties and behaviour patterns, leading them through marriage and divorce to remarriage.

It is as if love occupies its own different world separate from real life in the family and separate from the person whom it is supposed to help to greater happiness. According to its tenets someone who for the sake of true love sacrifices a marriage, family ties, parenthood, perhaps ultimately even the well-being of those dependent on him/her, is not committing a sin but merely obeying the rules, answering the call of the heart and seeking fulfilment for him/herself and others. He or she is not to blame; it would be wrong to cling to an order which does not value love highly enough:

Many people believe that one crisis in life is rather like any other. In fact, however, a divorce in a family with children is a disruption which cannot be compared with any other life crisis... When else do we have this overpowering urge to kill someone? When else are children used as weapons against their parents? In contrast to other crises, a divorce brings the most elementary human passions to the surface - love, hatred and jealousy... In most critical situations - earthquakes, floods, fire - parents instinctively get their children to safety before anything else. In the critical situation of a divorce, however, the children take second place for both

mother and father; their own problems take priority. While divorce proceedings are under way parents neglect their children in almost every respect; domestic order breaks down and the children are left to themselves. Parents living apart spend less time with their children and have less empathy for their needs. In the panic of the upheaval naked egotism wins. (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989: 28-9)

The religious nature of our faith in love is clear in this striking parallel to Calvinism. The congregation was encouraged, in fact urged to make the world subservient to their own desire to please God, a message which implied breaking with tradition. Worshipping love in the modern way takes up this idea again, allowing or forcing us to break with family ties in order not to betray our personal search for genuineness, for true love. Abandoning one's own children for someone else is not a breach of love but a proof of it; idealizing love means pledging to break with all false forms of it. This illustrates the extraordinary power love already exerts over us as well as the contradictions of trying to live up to this ideal while coping with the mundane routine of ordinary life.

Such attitudes, wishing and hoping for the ultimate in love, constitute a belief, a religious state of mind, which must be clearly distinguished from behaviour, or what people actually do. In love as in Christianity there are pharisees, converts, atheists and heretics. And cynics often turn out to be disappointed and embittered adherents of an exaggerated faith in love. Because there are many contradictions between belief and action, it is vital to keep the two levels clearly separate. The assertions made here refer to our knowledge, our belief in love and hardly at all to behaviour which shows the opposite, or no matter how perversely results from it.

In addition there is a phenomenon which one could term the law of the inverse significance of faith and certainty. Anyone who feels comfortable in everyday life with a loving companion forgets how important this belief is to him/herself. Attention always focuses on uncertainties, and only when these crop up and certainty is banished does it become painfully obvious what a role love plays in designing our individual lives, even if we try to deny this.

How does this quasi-religious belief in love as the ultimate answer express itself if not in the ways people behave? Some would say: there are several priorities for me, love included, and then again love comes in so many shapes and sizes from passionate to maternal and companionable after seventeen years of marriage, homo- or heterosexual. One gauge of the intensity and power of love's claims on us, as we have said, lies in the divorce figures which unequivocally reveal what deep

commitments are given up (see chapter 1 above). At the same time, however, research unanimously reveals an unshaken hankering for family and marriage, even though the 'Home Sweet Home' sign has been hanging rather crooked for some time. The number of remarriages after (early) divorce is also high (Federal Office of Statistics 1988: 71 and table 3.23). Children of divorced parents strive particularly hard to make a happy family, a goal which they sadly often fail to achieve (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989: 38–9).

None of this reflects what actually happens in everyday life, highlighting the differences between how one would like life to be and how living at close quarters with other individuals actually is.² While Weber (1985) investigated documents of the Calvinist faith for signs of inner asceticism, nowadays we would have to consult self-help books, therapeutic principles and transcripts of divorce proceedings to find signs of faith in true love.

Love as a latter-day religion

The essence of our faith in love can best be shown by comparing it with religion. Both hold out the promise of perfect happiness, to be achieved along similar lines. Each offers itself as a way of escaping from the daily grind, giving normality a new aura; stale old attitudes are tossed aside and the world seems suffused with new significance. In the case of religion all energy is directed towards another infinite reality, understood as the only true one and encompassing all finite life. In love this opening up of normal boundaries takes place both sensually, personally, in sexual passion and also in new perceptions of oneself and the world. Lovers see differently and therefore are and become different, opening up new realities for one another. In revealing their histories they re-create themselves and give their future a new shape. Love is 'a revolution for two' (Alberoni 1983); in overcoming antagonisms and moral laws which stand in their way they really prove their love. Inspired by their feelings, lovers find themselves in a new world, an earthly one but a realm of its own.

Love 'as an archetypal act of defiance' (Alberoni): that is what modern love seems to promise, a chance of being authentic in a world which otherwise runs on pragmatic solutions and convenient lies. Love is a search for oneself, a craving to really get in contact with me and you, sharing bodies, sharing thoughts, encountering one another with nothing held back, making confessions and being forgiven, understanding, confirming and supporting what was and what is, longing for a home and trust to counteract the doubts and anxieties modern life generates.

If nothing seems certain or safe, if even breathing is risky in a polluted world, then people chase after the misleading dreams of love until they suddenly turn into nightmares.

We are always vaulting over the apparently firm boundaries of everyday reality. Memory takes me back to myself when I was young. I wonder about the clouds and imagine a story behind them. I read a book and find myself in a different epoch; my head is full of scenes from someone's life who is now dead and I have never met; voices I have never heard are conversing in my inner ear. Among the extraordinary experiences in life love has a special status. Unlike illness and death it is sought for and not repressed, at least at this moment in our culture; it is immune to conscious or practical manipulation and cannot be produced on order. Those who hope to find it are looking for salvation here and now, and the 'hereafter' is in this world, with a voice, a body and a will of its own. Religion tells us there is a life after death; love says there is a life before death.

Few authors have described the extreme aspects of love so perceptively as Robert Musil, as P. L. Berger pointed out:

Sexual longings violently disrupt the smooth routine of life by suddenly ripping off the social masks men and women wear, revealing a frightening animal side beneath their decorous behaviour. As Ulrich (the protagonist in Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities*) observes after one of his wild encounters with Bonadea, love transforms people into 'raving fools', and with this ability sexual experience 'thrusts' itself into normal reality like an 'isle on which another level of consciousness prevails'. It is interesting in this connection that in the same passage Ulrich compares sexuality with other disruptive factors in real life, especially with the theatre, music and religion. (Berger 1983: 235–6)

Love is communism within capitalism; misers give their all and this makes them blissful:

Falling in love means opening oneself to a new form of existence without any guarantee of achieving it. It is a rhapsody to happiness without any certainty that there will be a response... And if the answer does come from the person we love, then it seems something undeserved, a miraculous gift one never counted on getting... Theologians have their own term for this gift: grace. And if the other person, our beloved, says he or she loves us too and each is engrossed in the other, this is a blissful moment in which time stands still. (Alberoni 1983: 39–40)

Love is a utopia which is not ordained or even planned from above, from cultural traditions or sermons, but grows from below, from the power and persistence of sexual drives and from deep personal wishes.

In this sense love is a religion unhampered by external meanings and traditions, its values lying in the depth of the lovers' attraction to one another and their subjective mutual commitment. No one has to become a member, and no one needs to be converted.

So our faith in love is linked to its lack of tradition; it comes after all the disappointing credos, and needs neither organizing committees nor party membership to be an effective subjective and cultural force. It is the outcome of sex being partially freed of taboos and wide disillusionment with other prescribed beliefs passed down to us. As befits modern social structures, there is no external moral agency responsible for love, but just the way the lovers feel for one another.

While a religion which lacks firm teaching usually vanishes, love is a religion without churches and without priests, and its continued existence is as certain as the tremendous force of sexual needs now freed of social disapproval. It cannot be organized, which also means it is independent, and its only place, despite all its cultural offshoots, is in the hearts of those involved; this makes it a non-traditional, post-traditional religion which we are hardly aware of because we ourselves are its temples and our wishes are its prayers.

Now that the old law-givers, the church, the state and traditional morality are on the retreat, even love can shed its old standard patterns and established codes. The result is a kind of positivism making norms out of individual preferences and values. This does not however reduce love's status as a force giving life purpose and meaning; on the contrary it confirms it. Here church and bible, parliament and government are merged into one – a matter of conscience guiding each person how to shape and structure his/her life. This is at least the ideal we share, this is how we would like it to be, even though in practical terms the solutions are often standard ones.

Because lovers can only rely on their own intuitions to guide them in matters of love, the whole process is a circular one, and so is any discussion of it. Therapists try to clarify these intertwined personal sufferings and experiences on general lines, but the very basic formula – I am myself – which is supposed to justify and explain everything else is, as Milan Kundera ironically notes in his *Laughable Loves* (1974: 92), a peculiar attempt to define something in terms of itself. In his analysis of the language of love Roland Barthes reveals this circularity:

adorable/adorable

Not managing to name the specialty of his desire for the loved being, the amorous subject falls back on this rather stupid word: *adorable*, . . . herein a great enigma, to which I shall never possess the key: Why

is it that I desire So-and-so? Why is it that I desire So-and-so lastingly, longingly? Is it the whole of So-and-so I desire (a silhouette, a shape, a mood)? And, in that case, what is it in this loved body which has the vocation of a fetish for me? What perhaps incredibly tenuous portion – what accident? The way a nail is cut, a tooth broken slightly aslant, a lock of hair, a way of spreading the fingers while talking, while smoking? About all these *folds* of the body I want to say that they are *adorable*. *Adorable* means: this is my desire, insofar as it is unique; ‘That’s it! That’s it exactly (which I love)!’ Yet the more I experience the specialty of my desire, the less I can give it a name; to the precision of the target corresponds a wavering of the name; what is characteristic of desire, proper to desire, can produce only an impropriety of the utterance. Of this failure of language there remains only one trace: the word ‘adorable’.

... *Adorable* is the futile vestige of a fatigue, a fatigue of language itself. From word to word, I struggle to put ‘into other words’ the ipseity of my Image, to express improperly the propriety of my desire: a journey at whose end my final philosophy can only be to recognize – and to practice – tautology. *The adorable is what is adorable*. Or again, I adore you because you are adorable, I love you because I love you. (Barthes 1978: 18, 20–1)

In fact those precious, holy sides of love are not just the outcome of our being besotted with ourselves. One has to look further into quite different fields, like education, scientific advances, world markets and technical risks if one wants to grasp why so many people plunge into a frenzy of love as if they were slightly insane. The outside world confronts us with a barrage of abstractions: statistics, figures, formulas, all indicating how imperilled we are, and almost all of them elude our comprehension. Loving is a kind of rebellion, a way of getting in touch with forces to counteract the intangible and unintelligible existence we find ourselves in.

Its value lies in the special, intense experiences it offers – specific, emotional, engrossing, unavoidable. Where other kinds of social contact are losing their hold, politics seem irrelevant, classes have faded into statistics, and even colleagues at work rarely find time for one another because their shifts and flexible working hours forbid it. Love, and especially the clashes it induces – from the ‘eternal issue of the dishes’ to ‘what kind of sex’, from parenting to tormenting each other with self-revelations – has a monopoly: it is the only place where you can really get in touch with yourself and someone else. The more impersonal life around you seems, the more attractive love becomes. Love can be a divine immersion in all kinds of sensations. It offers the same relief to a number-cruncher as jogging through the woods does to an office worker – it makes you feel alive again.

A society short on traditions has produced a whole range of idols: television, beer, football, motorcycles, cordon bleu meals – something for every phase in life. You can join clubs or peace initiatives or keep up long-distance friendships to guarantee you still share some common ground with someone. You can hark back to old gods, or discover new ones, polish relics or read the stars. You can even insist on continuing the class struggle and sing about being free, although you know that such golden days, if they ever existed, are over.

What distinguishes love from these other escape routes is that it is tangible and specific, personal and now; the emotional upheavals cannot be postponed or handed on, and both sexes find themselves forced to react whether they want to or not. No one can decide to fall into or out of love, but might at any moment find themselves falling through the trap door into a new dimension.

Love is therefore not a substitute or a lightning conductor, nor is it a politically desirable export article or just a television advertisement. The boom in love reflects current living conditions and the anonymous, prefabricated pattern forced on people by the market relegating their private needs right to the end of the list.³

Taking over from old categories like class and poverty, religion, family and patriotism there is a new theme, sometimes disguised as uncertainty, anxiety, unfulfilled and unfulfillable longings, sometimes sharply outlined and standardized in pornography, feminism and therapy, but gradually developing its own radiance, its own rhythms, opening up prospects much more alluring than the ups and downs of being promoted, having the latest computer or feeling underpaid.

‘Being loved means being told “you do not have to die”’ (Gabriel Marcel).⁴ This glowing hope seems more delightful and irresistible the more we realize how finite, lonely and fragile our existence is. Illness and death, personal disasters and crises are the moments when the vows prove true or merely lies, and in this respect the secular religion of love can claim like other religions to give life sense and meaning. Or put the other way round, the idea of dying shatters normal life, making it seem highly suspect; in moments of pain and fear love acquires a new dimension. The brittle, carefully constructed shell cracks open – at least momentarily – and lets in questions like Why? and What for?, fed on memories of desperately missed togetherness.

As religion loses its hold, people seek solace in private sanctuaries. Loving is bound up with a hope which goes beyond basking in intimacy and sex. Making love in bed is one way, caring for one another in a sick bed is another. Love’s power is proven in its ability to cope with weakness, age, mistakes, oversights and even crime. Whether the promises

'for better, for worse' are actually kept is another question which applies just as much to other religions. Illness can result in a new kind of devotion; hidden behind the hope that we can compensate for our mistakes and shortcomings by lavishing love on the beloved is the belief that love is an act of confession, and often a gesture against a heartless society.

The analogy between love and religion giving our life a purpose comes to an end when love itself dies. The end of a loving relationship remains meaningless in this latter-day religion, or can acquire some meaning only if the lovers part 'for the sake of love', by mutual understanding. Perhaps for future generations changing lovers will be like changing jobs, and love mobility a version of social mobility, but at the moment the wrangling in the divorce courts points in the opposite direction.

Believing in love means being under the sway of the present, here and now, you and me, our mutual commitment, and how we live it. Delay is out of the question and so is asking for God's help or postponing happiness until the next life. There is no merciful heaven waiting where our disagreements and exaggerated expectations of one another are bound to be fulfilled, even if we fail in this world. Love is unrelenting and demands cash down.

Faith in love means you love your lover but not your neighbour, and your loving feelings are always in danger of turning into hate. Ex-lovers lose their home and even their residence permits; they have no right to asylum. Not being loved necessarily implies being rejected, a topic on which psychotherapists, acting as intensive care units for those ravaged by divorce, can write volumes. Faith in love produces two groups which fluctuate considerably; on the one hand there are the current lovers, quantitatively stable but varying in identity. On the other there is a group of ex-lovers which increases as the current lovers swap and change. People find themselves interwoven into networks of insiders and outsiders, the blessed and the no-longer-blessed, once closely related, now tenuously linked, all in search of a final satisfying love.

For all the similarities between love and religion, there are also enormous differences; love is a private cosmos, whereas religion is in alliance with the powers-that-be. Lovers are their own church, their own priests, their own holy scriptures, even if they sometimes resort to therapists to decipher these. They have to create their own rules and taboos; there is an infinite number of private systems of love, and they lose their magic power and disintegrate as soon as the couple ceases to act as priests worshipping their belief in each other.

Love builds its nest out of the symbols lovers use to overcome their

unfamiliarity with one another and to provide their relationship with a past. The nest is decorated as the focus of their togetherness, and turns into a flying carpet bearing their shared dreams. In this way the fetishes, the sacrifices, the ceremonies, the incense and the daily rites constitute the visible context within which we love. Instead of being officially sanctified and administered, this private faith is individually styled, invented and adorned: snuggling in Mickey Mouse and teddy symbols, agreeing everything yellow means love, inventing nicknames to use in our secret world, all these are efforts to counteract the nagging fear that it might end and all could be lost and forgotten.

Religion's horizon takes in this world and the next, the beginning and the end, time and eternity, the living and the dead, and is therefore often celebrated as immutable, untouched by time. Love's horizon, by contrast, is narrow and specific, consisting of a small world of you and me and nothing more, exclusive, apparently selfish, somewhere between unjust and cruel in its logic, arbitrary and outside the range of the law. Its imperatives cut across other wishes and its principles withstand any attempt to standardize them.

For these very reasons, however, love is the best ideology to counteract the perils of individualization. It lays stress on being different, yet promises togetherness to all those lone individuals; it does not rely on outdated status symbols or money or legal considerations, but solely on true and immediate feelings, on faith in their validity and on the person they are directed towards. The law-givers are the lovers themselves, phrasing their statutes with their delight in each other.

The history of love: democratized romanticism

The opposite view to this line of thinking is of course that 'things have always been like that', and that love in all its finery and confusion – procreation, sexual desire, repression, passion, intimacy, hate and violence – has been the same human drama since history began. It looks easy to prove. The fact that we exist and are continuing to exist permits one to conclude that the matter of the birds and the bees has been consistently popular throughout the ages. Whether black, yellow, white, eleventh-century Moslem, fifteenth-century Christian or a slave in ancient Greece, under tyranny or democracy, nothing has essentially changed in the way people make other people. Varied witnesses such as biologists, psychologists and dramatists (Plautus, Shakespeare, Kleist, Beckett and Harold Pinter) all speak, for once, the same language: either love was always the secret core of life or it never was. Which implies that our theory is false either way.

This forces us to be more precise. Our focus of interest is not the biological effects of sexual behaviour, nor the mass of social institutions which have grown up round it. Our topic is love as a symbolic world in our culture, and its relation to other symbolic worlds like poverty, careerism, technological hazards and environmental awareness. If in medieval warrior societies or in the class system love played a role but not the leading one, nowadays in our view the opposite applies and will do so even more in the future. In other words, as society becomes more prosperous people's lives are less restricted by class considerations or established authorities and their attention centres on a hectic search for emotional satisfaction.

In sharp contrast to prevalent ideas among sociologists it seems to us that the conviction that love alone gives life purpose and meaning is the logical outcome of modern changes in society. Put rather crudely, which makes this thesis vulnerable and easier to refute, there is a historical succession – religion, class, love – not in any order of rank or suggesting anything like progress but in the sense of shifting principles and horizons, each with its own scope. When life seems to be falling apart individuals do not seek the protection of the church or God or their classes but someone they can trust who shares their world and promises support and understanding. Of course there are numerous asynchronicities and overlapping areas, but the focal point has changed position. There is a corresponding change, in Max Weber's term, in 'the guiding values', the 'light' that picks out or blacks out culturally important or irrelevant elements.

This means that industrial capitalism does not just feed parasitically on traditional values and beliefs⁵ but that new attitudes and new goals are establishing themselves as industrialism begins to fade. There is a move against individualism: believing in love.

Here one can link up with competing attitudes, with the way psychologists and psychiatrists interpret the world. Asking what love means is not limited to personal responses and experiences undergone in early childhood but includes the social structures which frame our lives such as working and living conditions, family ideals, gender role stereotypes and values within which people's personal needs and wishes are organized and oriented.

The ideas in this book support the theory that love has undergone a change of meaning in the course of history; they are on the side of Eros. In our culture sex is to erotic love as reality is to potential. The blessing or curse of real life weighs down our longings, and passion seems little more than packaging, the tempting description on the menu rather than the tough bird on the platter. In science's 'realistic' view passionate love

has always been assigned a place somewhere close to perversion or just beside extravagance. Both socialists and capitalists easily suspect it of shirking its duty, which may well be true if one insists on this viewpoint; lovers more than anyone else adapt their behaviour to their view of the world, thereby altering reality. It is, however, striking that other centuries and cultures, lacking our scientific wisdom, left such reservations to the rabble and refined the art of loving in ways we can barely imagine.

Even a quick survey proves what diverse forms love can take. Cultural and social history distinguishes between hundreds of forms of passionate love alone (leaving out other loves like roast duck and a really good back-hand). In early India, China and Arabia love was an art form, there was platonic love, the sins of the flesh cultivated by Christian monks, stylized and refined courtly love directed at a usually unreachable noblewoman, the all-consuming passion of the Italian Renaissance, tolerating neither restrictions nor authorities and ultimately becoming a passion for a mistress, accepted at court and imitated in literary circles by the European ruling classes so that its style coloured the erotic fantasies of an entire age and beyond.

All of this took place of course under the watchful and disapproving eye of the church, whose fathers, close to God in age and education, devoted themselves to the difficult task of classifying what happened in the marriage bed on the strength of what they learned from hearsay and the Bible. The evidence we have stems largely from them, so that social reports on the fine points of love, procreation, decency, propriety, forbidden sexual positions and so on in the Middle Ages are tinged with clerical displeasure. One wonders what really happened before and after everyone cleared their consciences through confession.

This cultural name-dropping at least highlights the range of possibilities which once were reality (for literature considered them worth reporting). Perhaps we are closer now to being witnesses of something beautiful, as Plato recommended, than being the uprooted plastic people we often fear. Perhaps Michel Foucault was right when in 1984, just before his death (having completed his book *The History of Sexuality*), he remarked: 'The idea of morals as something obeying a code of rules is already disappearing. And this lack of any moral code must and will be answered by the search for an aesthetic code of existence.' In place of law, moral precepts, rigidity and a hierarchy of needs Foucault proposed the ancient concept 'the art of life', 'stylizing existence' and 'developing personal qualities enabling one to make one's own life beautiful' (quoted in Schmid 1986: 680). What Olympian plans; our future neighbours will be the ancient Greeks! Or perhaps the Arabs, the Renaissance

lovers, the troubadours, or some fourth, fifth or sixth group of which we as yet know nothing.

Even at the risk of distorting the wealth of evidence we have from the past, I should like to distinguish three main periods in the relationship between love and marriage (incidentally tailored to the emergence of love as a religion). The first is a long phase, covering the whole of antiquity and the Middle Ages and coming to an end in the eighteenth century. The underlying assumption was that love and passion are a sin against marriage. 'Nothing is more shameful than loving one's wife like a mistress' (Seneca, quoted by St Jerome, in Flandrin 1984: 155). At least for the nobility and ruling classes this meant that love could be refined with a mistress, unhindered by marital duties and rights.

The second period started in England in the late eighteenth century; the new middle class, prospering on the fruits of industrialism, imposed its puritanical attitudes on society, disapproving of the nobility's 'loose morals'. As a result desires went underground and variations were pushed into the category 'deviant sexual behaviour' to be treated by psychologists and physicians.

The third phase is the one discussed here. Rigid middle-class morals have awakened a surreptitious interest in forbidden and bizarre behaviour, and the most exotic fantasies have become widespread. In such a setting love seems highly tempting because as well as whetting the sexual appetite it offers a new kind of freedom. The bold ideas on which Romanticism was founded, each person seeking his or her own destiny and facing the joys and sorrows of life in defiance of middle-class norms, once the domain of the eccentric and rash, have become common property. Love as an encounter of egos, as a re-creation of reality in terms of you-me, as a trivialized Romanticism without any prohibitions attached, is becoming a mass phenomenon: a secular religion of love.

Love, monks and the pre-industrial order

'In almost all societies and almost all ages other than ours,' as Philippe Ariès and Jean-Louis Flandrin have shown in their stimulating studies, 'there was a great difference between love within marriage and love outside it' (Ariès 1984: 165; Flandrin 1984).

Someone showing excessive love for his own wife is . . . acting shamefully. Excessive love is the unbridled passion which lovers feel outside marriage. A reasonable man should love his wife in a level-headed way, not passionately; he should restrain his desires and not allow himself to be carried away to have intercourse with her. (Seneca, quoted in Ariès 1984: 169)

Reading the reasons given for such strictly run marriages of convenience has a charm of its own. Even the wise Montaigne notes in his essays that 'matrimony is a pious and holy union' in which sexual desire is unseemly unless it is 'a serious and considered pleasure tempered by a certain strictness' or 'a so to speak careful and conscientious sensuality' (quoted in Flandrin 1984: 161). Even he was apparently under the influence of theologians who considered procreation the main purpose of marriage and in doing so supported the power structure which depended entirely on kinship and the frail male line, making heirs mandatory. The married couple, faced with such an important task, was only allegedly alone; as well as the looming figure of the father confessor they had the state to contend with, which needed male children if success in battle and statesmanship were to be assured. For fear of having to relinquish his power, court and property to his enemies, everyone had to make his contribution in this field too.

Considering that failure was tantamount to losing a war, it was merciful of the church to turn marital intercourse into a moral act with a single aim; if the social order had depended on people's feelings – love and desire – it would have abdicated its authority to uncontrollable impulses and would have mixed love with war.

In view of these attitudes the church's commitment to marriage as an institution for having and bringing up children was quite reasonable, or at least in keeping with the times. If some aspects seem mysterious to us nowadays it is worth remembering that since then the state has delegated protecting the social order to constitutionally elected bodies and a differentiated legal system, so that the ruling system is much more independent of the consequences of intercourse.

One does wonder, however, how monks and theologians carried out their delicate task:

A man who lets himself be carried away by too much desire and to satisfy his lust attacks his wife as passionately as if she were not his wife at all and he still wanted to have intercourse with her, is committing a sin. St. Jerome seems to confirm this when he agrees with Sextus the Pythagorean, who stated that a man who is over-attracted to his wife is committing adultery . . . This is why a man should not use his wife like a harlot and the wife should not approach her husband like a mistress, because it is fitting to make use of this holy sacrament of matrimony with all propriety and respect. (Benedicti 1584, quoted in Flandrin 1984: 155)

The justifications are also intriguing. Monks of all people knew well that passions which flared up did not necessarily stay at home but could light up several delightful small purgatories elsewhere:

Furthermore these husbands teach their wives thousands of lascivious ruses, thousands of lewd tricks, new positions, twists and turns and teach them those horrible figures by Aretino; from one fire in their bodies they light a hundred others and so they become like whores. Once they have been drilled in this way, they cannot help running away from their husbands and looking for other cavaliers. This makes their husbands desperate and induces them to kill their wives; in doing so they are very wrong.
(Brantôme, quoted in Flandrin 1984: 161)

There is a mixture of moralizing and lewdness like this in many texts. The authors know what they are talking about and what they disapprove of, and do not restrain themselves. This suggests that the church parallel to its official anti-sex attitudes cultivated and preserved an underground eroticism all the more attractive for being forbidden.

Maintaining the status quo by insisting on marriage as a reproductive union had, however, another side to it: passion outside marriage, which one could find if one were wealthy or powerful enough even if the church frowned on it. A distinction was made between moral behaviour and worldly behaviour, which no doubt was sometimes awkward and could be embarrassing but did enable people to cultivate their love-lives independently of their marital duties (though selectively and often at the expense of the woman). Love was not the same thing inside and outside marriage, a fact which tended to stabilize both arrangements. Wedlock was not constantly under threat from volatile emotions, and love was protected from having to think in terms of permanence and parenthood. Over the centuries both erotic art and the art of the erotic have flourished in places where man and woman are not forced to stay together.

Even nowadays this law applies in a slightly different form: the assumption that we marry for love means we cannot resolve any contradictions between marriage and love by simply letting them exist alongside each other; our only solution is to have one after the other. Our age makes much of distinguishing functions but it lumps private life and sex life together, idealizing the belief that they are one, and turning the law of distinct functions upside down. The old monks would no doubt smile and shake their heads.

The business ethic, breaching conventions, adultery

There has been much criticism of the contrast between erotic love and the puritan ideal of marriage in early capitalist society. The pathos in the idea of freedom is not, however, just a contradiction of bourgeois society; marital fidelity is equally a contradiction to revolutionary cries

of liberty and equality which the bourgeois raised against their rulers. To be successful a businessman has to break with feudal norms and restrictions and to pursue his own interests against the needs of his competitors. As soon as he gets home, however, moral order is supposed to prevail. Rational behaviour is recommended by modern philosophers as a guiding principle, ignoring both metaphysics and religion. But being rational means shrugging off restrictions, pursuing your own ends, serving no master, relying on your own intuition and experience, admittedly a freedom which depends on connections but still a categorical imperative which has to be defended against a whole range of subjective (other people's) interests.

We no longer live in a preordained world; our existence is the result of our activities and subject to them. Here Kant meets the entrepreneur, conquering the world with his financial skills. This attitude presupposes and suggests that the subject, each of us, is personally able and liable to decide on our own rights, but not where sex and love are concerned. On what grounds and with what backing?

If freedom for the businessman means ignoring the norms of an outdated feudal society, what about the right of lovers to break with prudish bourgeois conventions? These ideas are closely related, getting your way in business and getting your way in love, showing up the inherent hypocrisy in repressive middle-class morals, making them highly susceptible to furtive and outlawed kinds of love; encouraged by taboos, sex simply becomes steamier.

Love's escape from bourgeois convention is not just an escape; it also turns the conventions on themselves. The fascination love holds lies in the freedoms it seems to offer from old moral restrictions. Romanticism – understood here as unlimited subjectivity, a capacity to love and suffer – is the second possibility offered by the rise of capitalism; look at all the rapidly changing subcultures and exuberant consumerism. From this viewpoint it becomes clear that it was not a historical coincidence that the nineteenth century came up with a strict moral code for marriage, industrialization, subjectivity, the legacy of the Marquis de Sade, Romantic poetry and biographical escapades in literature and real life.

Romanticism now: love as a pop song

In line with its Romantic origins love is a conspiracy against 'society'. It knows no barriers, no classes, no laws except its own. Its subversive ideology has always had a touch of hysteria – neatly traced by Hans

Magnus Enzensberger in his 'documentary' novel (1988) on the Romantic poet Clemens Brentano:

Auguste Bussmann to Clemens Brentano (Landshut, autumn 1808)

Friday morning

Oh you dreadful nasty mean hateful and beloved Clemens Clemens why do you torment me like this? Tonight you get no kiss; I'll hit you, I'll bite you, I'll scratch you, I'll crush you to death if you come and see me . . .

Three years later, having been 'crushed to death' by her love, the poet shakes off his hatred in this unique farewell poem:

Well now, I'm finally rid of you,
You insolent slut!
A curse on your sinful lap
A curse on your cheap lewd body,
A curse on your sluttish breasts,
Devoid of decency and truth,
So full of shame and lies,
A dirty pillow for each wretched lust.
A curse on every wasted hour
I spent with disgusting kisses
On your lying mouth

...

Farewell, you liar, fare badly, there's the door,
Where my rueful heart finally leaves, you witch,
May every foot wither that enters your bed!
I never knew you, I never saw you,
It was a bad dream that must pass over . . .

Dear unhappy Auguste [writes Enzensberger], you can hardly imagine what you and a handful of contemporaries of both sexes have done. I am not exaggerating when I say that you (a handful of people between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) invented 'love' – or let us say, what people up to the present day still understand as love. After all, what was there before? People got married, made a good or bad match, looked for helping hands, had children and brought them up, and accepted happiness or unhappiness, just as it came, for life. Only in your day, relatively late, did people come up with the idea that there must be something else to it, something beyond childbirth, work and possessions, as if one could take one's life into one's own hands in this respect too. What an extremely risky and momentous idea! My Self in all its glory, and its counterpart, You. Body and soul, supposed to become a small eternity. A

stress, a set of hopes, expecting happiness which earlier generations never even dreamed of, and at the same time expecting too much of one another and opening up entirely new kinds of unhappiness. Disappointment was the reverse side of your paradise, and your new postulates gave the war between the sexes a new radical twist.

I could write pages tracing the consequences, yet I fear you would not believe me. The fact that your novel set an example, in fact was the prototype for a vast literature, and that your love story still fills theatres in a thousand variations is the least of these. What you would find even more difficult to believe, Auguste, is this: your story has become ordinary, flat, trivial, it has been ruined by being repeated a million times and has been the reason for million-fold sufferings. Entire sciences are dealing with it; an army of experts, counsellors and charlatans busies itself with this endless story and the red tape attached to it, and every day it appears in court to be tried yet again. For it cannot be a coincidence that it was your day that invented divorce, in the same breath as it were as it discovered pure feelings. (Enzensberger 1988: 92, 190–1, 228–9)

Auguste Bussmann and Clemens Brentano experimented and suffered their way through this obsession with themselves and each other quite ruthlessly, pioneers of the thorny odyssey of love, but not, as Enzensberger suggests, its inventors. There is a great deal of late fragmentary Plato in the excesses and piles of rubble they left behind (the bookshops are full of popular guides to living together with a platonic tinge to them); there are also echoes from troubadour and romance literature; the wisdom of ancient India is being revived (and not surprisingly sells well); behaviour once reserved for courtly circles is being tried out in millions of flats. In other words, the allegedly individualistic goings-on stem from old traditions and norms which have been rediscovered.

Viewed in that way, love is applied reading of novels, lived-out pop songs, experimenting with the words of the ego-preachers. Personal impulses are mixed with or even dominated by fantasies invented long ago and often far away, an exoticism which is perhaps the romantic core of love.⁶ The conglomeration of impressions read, heard or actually experienced means it is also love using other people's words, feelings helped by the lyrics of pop songs. Auguste Bussmann and Clemens Brentano presumably did not know whether they were writing letters or living them out. The expression of love in writing letters, looking forward to and reflecting on real encounters, picking up clues and inventing new goals has probably died out. It has been replaced, however, by *seen* and *heard* love (in fairly standardized form on television and in therapy), canned love, with a script written for thousands of home viewers.

Once love could burst family bonds and taboos. As barriers have fallen, it increasingly finds no one to shock. With no resistance, no rules to break, it no longer seems immoral or even amoral. It can only concern itself with itself.⁷

So there are endless droning exchanges on relationships, and love lies smothered beneath layers of advice and therapy, pornographic do-it-yourself hints and so much preoccupation with being in love that the person involved gets forgotten. Just like science, which no longer fights untruth with truth, but merely rubs different kinds of truth against each other, romantic love is just one kind among many, with confusion and misunderstanding as the result. Its status as a protective shield is getting lost again, for there are too many kinds around, nothing specifically ours, and often they seem interchangeable.

Because real love has become a scarce and precious commodity, it holds enormous fascination for our individualized society, and finding it has become an existential matter – for everyone, not just nineteenth-century eccentrics and heroes. Or to put it more pointedly: with the death of love, while it seems to dissolve around us into lesser loves – parental love, sex on the side, flirting, companionship and family commitment – there is a mass search under way for a holistic ‘grand love’.

Shorn of class connections with their comfortable social certainties and places to meet, the isolated modern citizen has to think up his/her own kind of company. One thing idealistic Romanticism and therapeutic romanticism have in common is the notion of keeping one’s distance. ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder,’ and lovers tend to love the idea of loving more than confronting the banal facts about the person they have chosen to adore. Idealizing someone is easier at a distance: ‘When in love I keep deluding myself about reality . . . Is illusion a prerequisite for desire?’⁸

This kind of love, as Lou Andreas-Salomé remarks, is loneliness multiplied thousand-fold, overcoming the feeling of being all alone in the world by listening to an echo. Only seeing through one’s own idealizations and coming to terms with one’s lover’s shortcomings puts an end to it; the individuals are still alone but at least they have a kind of closeness. When normality dawns on one, keeping a distance is the only remedy to delay returning to loneliness. Or if the disappointing beloved is nearby, perhaps some self-irony and laughing about the unrealistic expectations we have of each other can soften the situation. Love like this, near and yet far, can survive; this is its romantic and realistic core, indeed its invention.

Love is loneliness for two:

Although we foster the illusion of being completely filled with the other, we are really only filled with our own condition, which on the contrary makes us quite incapable, intoxicated as we are, of really concerning ourselves with the nature of anything. From the very beginning the passion of love is incapable of objectively seeing another person or having any real empathy with that person. It is rather our deepest penetration into ourselves, a thousandfold loneliness, but of a kind which seems to broaden out and arch over our own loneliness into an all-encompassing world, as if surrounded by a thousand sparkling mirrors. (Andreas-Salomé 1986: 59)

Love as a subjective law-giver: programmed battles and paradoxes

Now that the church has little say and the law merely reflects social change, loving seems to be a purely personal affair or at least is meant to be. The irritating aspect, and the least comprehensible one, of course, is that the rules are delegated to individuals, who find themselves caught in a certain scheme with its own logic and paradoxes invading their private lives; they are at once themselves and actors in a common play. Just like capitalism love as pure relationship has its own preordained range of behaviour and crises, affecting everybody but apparently being a matter of personal choice (see also Weitman 1994).

- (1) Love is simultaneously the essential factor which provides us with a sense of personal validity and worth, and a way of avoiding being quite alone in the world. It is an alternative to loneliness, and therefore contra-individual, or more precisely a dream of being at once very close to someone else and yet quite separate and autonomous. Conversely, individualization encourages people to idealize living as partners; even realists can turn into idealists under current circumstances, for a fragmented and uncertain world drives them to invest all hope of finding safety and comfort in their private love-lives.
- (2) Love's social scheme depends on an active agent, who takes on responsibility, in contrast to anonymous or mechanical models. (Its mechanics are, however, quite obvious, as we shall see.) In the realm of love, as opposed to the outside world, people seem to be free agents, personally accountable, taking decisions which are intentional and their own. It takes hold of them and they are compelled to join in; there is

no escaping. Hurled about by mighty feelings, one finds oneself playing unfamiliar and prescribed roles just at that moment when one rejoiced in the conviction 'this is how I really am, this is absolutely me.' The only way to get in touch with one's deepest and most exhilarating feelings is via such banal vehicles as sex role, labour market and economy, making one simultaneously king and slave, or legislator, judge and prison guard in one. Miracles have to be accomplished all the time to keep the most ordinary things in balance, even if one has long ago abandoned all faith in miracles or salvation.

(3) Instead of justifying love along traditional or formal lines, we do so along emotional and individual ones. It originates in what we experience, in our personal hopes and fears rather than in any superior power. The lovers, and only they, are in charge of what is true and right about their love, which means they are their own judges but equally the law-givers who can rewrite the rules. This implies, however, that there is no such thing as injustice, even if one partner is discovered *in flagrante delicto*, and no right of appeal. Love and justice seem to belong to two mutually unintelligible languages.

(4) Love is founded in itself: its basis is always and only an emotional one. In operational terms this means that no one except the lovers can decide whether they are in love – a radical form of democracy for two, personal responsibility in its purest form. In fact it is so extreme that it includes being irresponsible, for only the lovers can decide on ending their love, i.e. one voting against the other, for the sole reason that feelings have changed.

(5) Love is our alternative to doubt: it is the place we hope to find security. In the nineteenth century love was something irrational, the opposite to bourgeois norms, uncertain and exotic, symbolized by a temptress with snake-like charms. The present situation is exactly the reverse; in view of the dissolution of so many supports, love ranks as the ultimate refuge. While love used to break up (or ignite) under the pressure of social conventions, nowadays people seek a loving relationship as a place in which to hide from an inimical world.

(6) Love is a blank form which the lovers have to fill in: how they actually organize their love-lives and what love means are decisions they must agree on, and these can vary to include different taboos, expectation, and infidelities, all left to their own choice. Loving means setting oneself norms not on how one behaves but on how one reaches decisions on

how to behave, a matter of conscience. The actual content of the love package is a subjective mutual invention, and all around it are pitfalls and potential disaster. This also applies even where the couple fills up the holes in their arrangement with ready-made answers, such as moral precepts, the Kama Sutra or therapeutic know-how, to reinforce what they claim to have invented together.

(7) Love which does not have any traditional backing does not tolerate any form of deviation, or at least only individual ones. Society expects and approves only of two people consenting with one another; any disagreement or use of force is regarded as breaking the rules and officially punished.

(8) The meaning of love, of togetherness, is always at risk, another proof of its secular nature. One main threat in this system lies in who decides whether togetherness should continue, and if so in what form. The lovers have two levers to two trap-doors; the end can come very suddenly, on the decision of the other, and there is no appeal. The criteria are ultimately subjective feelings, and how each perceives the relationship in terms of his/her dreams (or competing offers which are waiting in the wings). Behind the interminable discussions on current misunderstandings looms the guillotine of unilateral decision-making, forcing the participants to scurry nervously round their mutual emotional territory like rats in a cage.

(9) Love is dogmatism for two, in delightful agreement if things are going well and in a bitter clash of faiths if they are going badly. The dogmatic side remains hidden in the harmony and exuberance of emotions but surfaces as soon as the long-term fundamental conflict breaks out between two people struggling to be 'authentic', because this alone guarantees the validity and rightness of their feelings. Being authentic turns out to include being different, and conflicting truths emerge. 'Being quite honest', 'standing up for one's feelings' suddenly implies the end of the affair, getting out, because I want it that way. The process is in itself dogmatic and not subject to individual choice, for it is inherent in the modern definition of love. Ironically lovers can decide on everything about their relationship but not the mode in which they decide, for they themselves personify this mode, their feelings decide for them. This however implies that as well as soaring to great heights of bliss they can just as easily crash on to hard and icy ground, when togetherness splits up into two rival dogmas rigidly repelling any search for compromise.

(10) Love is the opposite of instrumental rational behaviour. It is not a goal that can be aimed at, or worked for, or technically perfected. It is not even a side-effect which regularly results from another form of activity. Marriage is also no recipe or construction set for capturing or domesticating love. Love is unequally and unjustly distributed, and cannot be used to form pressure groups or parties; any political party putting love on its banner is pursuing an illusion.

(11) Love in our day is post- and a-traditional, and makes its own rules out of sexual desire now unhampered by moral or legal obligations. Love cannot be institutionalized or codified, or justified in any general sense as long as free will and mutual consent are its guiding stars. To put it another way, while a religion which is no longer preached soon loses any influence on our thinking, love as a religion without priests prospers on the force of sexual attraction. This is at least true where external standards have lost any validity and a flourishing market – from pop songs to pornography to psychotherapy – has opened the floodgates of personal yearning.

But how are heaven and hell intermeshed in this scheme? Briefly, lacking any traditional restrictions, love as pure relationship becomes a radical from of personal responsibility, a framework for hoping and acting in which issues, laws, behaviour and legal proceedings – everything in fact – are exclusively in the hands of the lovers. Its underlying patterns governing how and why decisions are made are therefore absolutely in line with modern thinking on progress and enlightenment, which converts everything which used to be preordained into a decision entrusted to individuals. This enticing notion, however, conceals a trap which one does not discover until the question of lodging appeals against decisions or judgements made against one comes up. The answer remains the same: individuals have the right to judge each other. Love is thus also a radical form of self-government, divested of checks and balances, acknowledging neither referees, norms nor legal procedures which might otherwise help to prise its dilemmas out of the sordid swamp of accusations and disagreements and take them to a neutral court. Combatants who have fallen out of love sit and declare final verdicts on one another and do their best to enforce them. So love's democracy comes full circle and turns out to be exactly the opposite: no one is there to stop the unrestrained outbursts of hatred which two people, unwillingly shackled together and subjected to the cruelty of intimacy without affection, hurl at one another, well knowing each other's weak spots. It then looks as if love has turned into a medieval religious war before the state was capable of intervention.

According to its social design, love is a fair-weather ship on a long voyage. A storm or two can be sailed through with little difficulty. Since the captain, the sails, the mast and the hull are all of a piece, however, chaos breaks out during a long storm. Leaks are plugged with ripped-out planks, if it ever gets that far, for there are suddenly two captains fighting over the charts and hitting each other with the broken rigging. As the attraction of being in love lies in the feeling of freedom, consensus and satisfaction it offers, we prefer to ignore the fact that this state of affairs is bound to result in its opposite. Something founded only on agreement and free choice cannot be modified into a conditional freedom with escape clauses when the adventurers find their treasure stolen and turn on one another in desperation and disappointment.

The trap love sets us is the downside of the security it tempts us with: we rely on subjectivity, and only that, which quickly becomes arbitrary and cruel when unrestrained by outside obligations. In creating their own laws, lovers open the door to a form of lawlessness as soon as the magic of being in love has flown away and their own interests take centre stage. Love requires that both are unreservedly open with one another, thereby handing each the evil tools of familiarity to be used against one another. As (market-trained) individuals we have recast love as its own legislator, fitting in with our own opinions and interests. That is why we experience not only the understanding and merciful God of the New Testament but also the jealous and enigmatic one of the Old Testament.

Love's inevitable battles: conditions

The mechanics of love follow a law: the law of the lawlessness of subjectivity and intimacy oriented towards personal needs, which has divested itself of all external controls and been left to its own devices.

This is of course a sketch of the 'idea' behind the changes we can observe, and hints at likely developments behind our reality, anticipating what love might well become. The factors influencing such changes are:

- men and women are becoming equals in the professional field in terms of income and status, so that economic restraints are reduced or even vanish, making love the main bond between the partners;
- *there is an increase in the number of couples from different backgrounds*, so that finding and keeping common ground to halt the centrifugal force of two very different biographies lies exclusively in the hands of the men and women involved;

- couples rarely know or understand each other's work situations so that there is little shared experience to bind them together;
- the state and the church are retreating from their roles as law-givers for marriage and close relationships, so that love has more scope to develop its inherent conflict potential as a radical, self-administered search for intimacy;
- individualization – that is to say being dependent on one's training, mobility, commitment to the labour market and impersonal regulations – makes love seem the best answer to loneliness, holding out the promise of a meaningful and satisfying physical and emotional experience.

There are important indicators and long-term trends (presented in various ways in this book) which suggest that such changes are under way. The divorce laws for instance internationally attest to the retreat of the state and the law, having replaced the principle of the guilty party with that of 'irretrievable marital breakdown'. This means that the guilt question is excluded and only the results have to be regulated, such as the financial side of divorce and child-rearing issues (Lucke 1990).

The same goes for the decriminalization of so-called deviant forms of love, as long as no violence is involved. This implies that the question of what is legal has been delegated to the parties involved. Certainly the church, and especially the Catholic Church, is deeply concerned about marriage and the family, as its public admonitions show, but even in strictly Catholic regions there is a striking gap between moral claims and actual behaviour. This does not just apply to birth control but equally to abortion figures, for instance in Catholic Poland, where they are among the highest in Europe.

Nowhere is the inherent logic of love so clear as in the paradoxes people wander or stumble into in their seemingly idiosyncratic way when ever this sort of behaviour is left to flourish without interference.

The paradox of freedom

If freedom is everything, restricting someone else's freedom must be the goal even if love keeps enthusing about doing quite the opposite. What is desired is someone else's voluntary renunciation of their freedom for yours. How should this be achieved? As Jean-Paul Sartre asks:

Why should I want to appropriate the Other if it were not precisely that the Other makes me be? But this implies precisely a certain mode of appropriation; it is the Other's freedom as such that we want to get hold

of. Not because of a desire for power. The tyrant scorns love, he is content with fear. If he seeks to win the love of his subjects, it is for political reasons; and if he finds a more economical way to enslave them, he adopts it immediately. On the other hand, the man who wants to be loved does not desire the enslavement of the beloved. He is not bent on becoming the object of passion which flows forth mechanically. He does not want to possess an automaton, and if we want to humiliate him, we need only try to persuade him that the beloved's passion is the result of a psychological determinism. The lover will then feel that both his love and his being are cheapened. If Tristan and Isolde fall madly in love because of a love potion, they are less interesting. The total enslavement of the beloved kills the love of the lover . . . Thus the lover does not desire to possess the beloved as one possesses a thing; he demands a special type of appropriation. He wants to possess a freedom as freedom.

On the other hand, the lover cannot be satisfied with that superior form of freedom which is a free and voluntary engagement. Who would be content with a love given as pure loyalty to a sworn oath? Who would be satisfied with the words, 'I love you because I have freely engaged myself to love you and because I do not choose to go back on my word.' Thus the lover demands a pledge, yet is irritated by a pledge. He wants to be loved by a freedom but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free. He wishes that the Other's freedom should determine itself to become love – and this not only at the beginning of the affair but at each instant – and at the same time he wants this freedom to be captured by itself, to turn back upon itself, as in madness, as in a dream, so as to will its own captivity. This captivity must be a resignation that is both free and yet chained in our hands. (Sartre 1956: 342–3)

The paradox of authenticity

Love is the first person singular for everything: my experience, my truth, my transcendence, my salvation. This presupposes authenticity, both in principle and in fact. What does honesty mean, what is it based on? How does it halt the free fall it plunges into if subjected to further questioning? Must my attitude towards a feeling be as certain as the feeling itself? How do I react when put under pressure by someone else's emotional truth, which as well as being hard for me to grasp denies my own vital interests and claims on my beloved with its own unswerving conviction. This is the paradox of authenticity. According to Niklas Luhmann what is required is

a simple and prescribable principle which can push aside three hundred years of insight into the indissoluble connection between honesty and dishonesty in the course of human existence and love. Quite apart from

the question whether the person one loves will allow one to say everything one wants to, should one be honest, even in moods which are constantly fluctuating? Should the other person be linked to my own temperature like a thermometer? And above all, how is one supposed to be honest towards someone who is not honest with himself? Is not every existence ultimately an unfounded projection, a plan needing supports and protective zones of dishonesty? Can one communicate one's own honesty at all without being dishonest by doing so?

It is difficult to gauge the influence of therapists on morals (and of morals on therapists) but they are certainly something to fear. Instead of love they substitute the individual's shaky health, his need for support, and the only notion of love they can develop is a permanent mutual therapy based on a dishonest understanding of honesty. (Luhmann 1984: 210–11)

The paradox of action

Perhaps poverty can be eliminated, and inequalities reduced; perhaps military and technical risks too. Love, in contrast, cannot be aimed at, invoked or coerced into existence nor can any institution restrict it. It simply happens, strikes like lightning or dies out according to laws which are not open to individual or social control. The same applies to its opposite, indifference, which happens just like love or can be shattered by an attack of love. But how do we attain, preserve and survive love, if not along rational means–ends lines, the only ones available to us? What happens when everyone chases after a goal which is unattainable, at least in the way they are attempting it? What if resisting the goal turns out to be the shortest route to it? Or when reached it undergoes metamorphosis into exactly the opposite of what we hoped for?

The new era which has fallen in love with love, so to speak, at the peak of its technical and rational prowess, is abandoning itself to perhaps the last kind of happiness that resists rational powers, evades the grasp of modern thinking and draws its immense appeal for its believers and imitators from exactly this fact. Similar to anxiety, which incidentally is merely the other side of worshipping love in a society acclimatized to risk, love cannot be explained or refuted and in fact is indescribable; despite all the inflationary talk about relationships, or perhaps because of it, no one can really convey what he/she feels.

Competing viewpoints

In terms of the history of ideas, the more the theory of de-tabooed love with its own value system and behavioural logic gains ground in real

life, the less convincing (at least) two currently dominant sets of ideas will seem.

First of all there is the view adopted by psychologists and psychoanalysts that the reasons for all the emotional turmoil lie almost exclusively in the personalities of the individuals and their childhood experiences.

One conclusion one can draw from the situation we have sketched is that the upsets and battles do not necessarily stem from personal neuroses or traumatic experiences. They may just as well be brought about by the inherent contradictions of love itself and its bewildering dynamics. Insisting on tracing the crashes and jolts in the system back to psychological problems and personal pasts is just as misleading as blaming mountaineering accidents on 'anal difficulties' or an inflationary economy on 'repressed libido'.

The second false conclusion is the broadly backed consensus of various social theories which assume that society needs a tradition to give it meaning, which has to be documented, transmitted, criticized and legitimated, and must be instilled into the hearts and minds of the coming generation from lecterns and pulpits to prevent it evaporating and losing its validity.

Love takes another path: having cast off traditional values and codes it has opened the gate to our sensual and emotional side. Under its influence people believe in and rely on their senses to make their lives worth living, trusting their innermost feelings and longings, doing without any of the old methods of transmitting ideas and reacting to their own conscious and subconscious drives and needs. This is an individual religion in two senses – it has its source in each individual and it promises to do away with loneliness; it is a non-tradition, or a post-tradition based on individual hopes and fears, providing its believers with a sense of purpose and a delight in discovering their own desires and strengths on love's battlefield.

A retrospective glance from the future, or the last St Valentine's Day

Let us leap into the twenty-first century and close with a report drawn from the *International Herald Tribune* which appeared while this book was being written:

Boston – Our history books tell us now that 1990 was the year our forebears celebrated the last Valentine's Day. By then, the very idea of a national holiday for the celebration of love had become an anachronism, a holdout from the days of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll.

Certain members of Congress had never approved of V-Day and there was talk through the late '80s of withholding funds from any museum that harbored images of naked children under the pseudonym Cupid. At the very least, parents' groups believed stores should mark Valentine cards with parental warnings.

But the final blow was the commission report completed that year on love. Not surprisingly, the commission concluded that love caused what the experts labeled 'an altered state of consciousness'. That phrase had a clear and ominous meaning for the stay-straight Nineties. Love was a substance and Americans were abusers.

The symptoms were common, nationwide and alarming. People who fell in love, the commission determined, had trouble concentrating. They were often distracted, found daydreaming, or staring in space, exhibiting a condition known as 'blind love'. Many experienced loss of appetite, elevated heart rates, a certain high color to the face, an effect that was easily identifiable to the naked eye.

The health implications of what the commission dubbed love abuse were worrisome, but so were the financial ones. Lovers, it estimated, cost the gross national product millions of dollars a year in lost productivity since this unchecked emotion took precedence over, say, strategizing hostile takeovers. In contrast, the commission pointed to the Japanese, who did not officially celebrate love with a national holiday. Need the commission say more?

There had long been concerns about love in America. Half a century earlier, a generation had questioned the subliminal messages, even in the old standards such as 'Love is sweeping the country,' and 'I can't give you anything but love, baby.'

But this time the Woodstock generation, which had outgrown, worn out or given up all sorts of substances as they entered middle age, were the ones who turned their attention toward love. They searched for its telltale signs among their vulnerable children. Who could not worry about something that made people high, that produced ecstasy?

Before the Nineties, as students of history know, love had been a noun, or a verb. But by this time, love was increasingly used as an adjective, as in 'love addict' and 'love junkie'. People in love described themselves as hooked on each other. Indeed, love created dependency or, worse yet, co-dependency. This was the subject of many best-sellers during the pivotal winter of 1989-90.

By the 21st century, it would become routine for Americans to introduce themselves by their name, their gender and their 12-step support program: 'Hi, My Name is Alice and I'm in Love.' But even in 1990, millions had already formed associations based on their addictions the way their ancestors had come together by ethnic origin. No less an authority than Erica Jong, a former pusher of love potions, had turned to writing about recovery. Abstinence was going around.

All of this laid the groundwork for acceptance of the commission's recommendations in 1990. The scientific evidence of a love epidemic required action.

The Supreme Court approved random love testing for the workplace. Funding was set up for programs for people who wanted to free themselves of others. Educators were instructed to teach the young the risks of love. 'Romeo and Juliet' was banned. And in that atmosphere, Valentine's Day could no longer be tolerated.

Today Americans now date their long climb back from falling into love to that last Valentine's Day. The final and most debilitating excess, the most widespread high, was brought down to earth. Love came under control.

Occasionally, to this day, there is a report of some couple found together, faces flushed, but it is almost always after aerobics. Indeed, although recovery is never complete, it can be said that at last in the post-Valentine era we have nearly accomplished that wonderful goal of moderation in all things except misery. Thanks to our ancestors of 1990, we live in a Love Free America. (Ellen Goodman, 'The Last Valentine's Day')

NOTES

Extracts with German sources have been translated from the German for this edition, unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 'Motive zum BGB' (motives for the Code of Civil Law), *circa* 1880, p. 562; our emphasis.
- 2 Individualization as concept, conjecture, explanation, remedy and damnation is on everyone's lips today. It is being discussed in connection with the so-called 'democracy of mood', the unpredictable movements of formerly regular voters, the difficulties of trade unions, who are clearly unable to maintain their membership with the old slogans and organizational forms, the stubbornness of youth ('Generation X'), and with issues of socio-structural inequalities that can only be put back together into classes with great effort in grey mass statistics. It should almost go without saying that this also applies to the very normal puzzles raised by statistics on marriage and family, on which no one is ever a completely neutral observer. For a summary of the disputes on 'individualization' see Beck 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1994 and 1995. On the *theory* of social individualization see, among others: Elias 1991; Habermas 1988: 223ff.; Honneth 1988a and b; Luhmann 1989; Kohli 1988; Keupp 1988; Keupp and Bilden 1989; P. A. Berger 1987; Berger and Hradil 1990: Introduction; Dörre 1987: 43ff.; J. Ritsert 1987; Brose and Hildenbrand 1988; Lau 1988; Rosenmayr 1985; Hennig 1989; Esser 1989; Hornstein 1988; Flitner 1987; Weymann 1989; Klages 1988; Heitmeyer and Möller 1988; Wahl 1989; Neckel 1989; Zoll et al. 1989.
- 3 Foucault 1978; Burckhardt 1958; Elias 1991: vol. II. In the inward asceticism of Calvinism, Max Weber (1985) saw a release from the traditional

certainty of salvation; for him it also represented the compulsion to subdue Nature by asserting oneself, leading a careful life and accumulating wealth. For Georg Simmel (1978), the central motor of individualization lay in the finance economy; the latter opens up social circles and remixes them. Thus the theme of individualization can be traced through the epochs and social theories into the present.

- 4 Juridification, welfare-state protection, the break-up of traditional households, the shortening of the working week and other factors continue to play a part here (see Beck 1986: 121-30). The ambiguity of the individualization concept and its breathtaking public career stand for the insecurity of an entire society with regard to its social structure. Individualization is the code word for the fading of an old form of social inequalities and the vague emergence of a new one. On this point see *Soziale Welt*, 3/1983 as well as the special issues of *Soziale Welt* edited by Kreckel (1983) and Berger and Hradil (1990).
- 5 'The individualization process runs with differing speed in different milieus, and not necessarily in the same direction,' as Burkart, Fietze and Kohli show in detail (1989: 256; also pp. 11-12, 61, 195, 259); see also Bertram and Dannenbeck 1990.

CHAPTER 1 LOVE OR FREEDOM

- 1 The highest level was found in 1984 at 87 divorces per 10,000 existing marriages, and since then a decline has been observable: 86 in 1985, 83 in 1986; see Federal Office of Statistics (ed.) 1988: 78.

Divorces in Germany

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>per 10,000 inhabitants</i>	<i>per 10,000 marriages</i>
1900	7,928	1.4	8.1
1913	17,825	2.7	15.2
1920	36,542	5.9	32.1
1930	40,722	6.3	29.5
1938	49,487	7.2	31.1
1950	84,740	16.9	67.5
1960	48,878	8.8	35.0
1970	76,520	12.6	50.9
1980	96,222	15.6	61.3
1984	130,744	21.3	87.1
1988	128,729	21.0	—

Sources: Federal Minister of Youth, Family and Health 1985: 57, 137; *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1983-1985*: Tables 3.32-3.34; *Wirtschaft und Statistik*, no. 8, 1989: 508.

- 2 Differentiated according to years of marriage, the number of divorces is by far the largest (at 360 per 10,000 marriages) among couples who have been married sixteen to twenty years and have raised children together, while divorce varies between 146 and 230 per 10,000 for couples married two, three or four years; Federal Minister of Youth, Family and Health 1985: 78. It is natural to suspect that children hold many couples together only so long as they remain at home.
- 3 The German Institute for Youth Research has calculated 2.5 million (1988: 156). The Allensbach Institute for Demographics, as quoted in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (10–11 June 1989), estimates 3 million. The frequently heard interpretation that non-marital unions are quasi-marriages or some new form of betrothal is contradicted by the composition of such unions: with or without children; before and after divorce; between material and physical victims of divorce, or so-called 'retiree concubinage' (Bertram and Borrmann-Müller 1988: 18).
- 4 Burkhart, Fietze and Kohli 1989: 30, 34; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (8–9 October 1989).
- 5 The group of never-married singles, divorced people and married people living separately make up roughly 58% here, while widows (and widowers) together amount to 41.5%; see Federal Office of Statistics (ed.) 1989: Table 3.16 and 64ff.
- 6 Federal Minister of Education and Science 1988–9: 70. Among school-leavers at the top of the school, a slight decrease in the proportion of women has been observed; it was 45.7% in 1987; Federal Office of Statistics (ed.) 1988: 345f.
- 7 The discrepancy was even larger in universities: in the autumn term of 1987–8, 62% of the students enrolled in German universities were men and only 38% women; see Federal Office of Statistics (ed.) 1988: 359.
- 8 More precisely, 61% of the students in the humanities were female, 38% of those in law and economics and 31% in mathematics and natural sciences; Federal Office of Statistics (ed.) 1988: 361.
- 9 Federal Minister of Education and Science 1988–9: 206–8; Federal Office of Statistics 1989: 367. The proportion of women overall was 15%, with 5% of the professorial posts (not broken down by salary grade), 13% of the assistantships and 19% of the lectureships occupied by women.
- 10 Federal Office of Statistics (ed.) 1987: 79; this includes data on the individual productivity groups, which are sometimes quite close together. See also *Quintessenzen aus der Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung* 1984: 33f.
- 11 This is also reflected in the meteoric career of the individualization concept in the public sphere and scholarship. For a synopsis of the dispute and the basic arguments see Beck 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1994 and 1995. For the area of *adolescent sociology* in this respect see Fuchs 1983; Hornstein 1985; Rosenmayr 1985; Baethge 1985; Michal 1988: 143ff.; Heitmeyer and Möller 1988. For the *working class and labour movement*: Mooser 1983; Dörre 1987. For *women's studies*: Beck-Gernsheim 1983; Bilden 1989. For *social inequality*: Berger and Hradil 1990; Neckel 1989; Mayer 1989.

For family sociology: Bertram and Borrmann-Müller 1988; Hoffmann-Nowotny 1988; Burkart, Fietze and Kohli 1989.

CHAPTER 2 FROM LOVE TO LIAISON

1 Rückert, reprinted in Behrens 1982: 205.

2 Proportion of girls/women:

	<i>In grammar schools (senior level)</i>	<i>Starting university</i>	<i>University students (overall)</i>
1960	36.5%	27.0%	23.9%
1970	41.4%	28.8%	25.6%
1980	49.4%	40.1%	36.7%
1980	49.8%	40.2%	38.0%

Source: Federal Minister of Education and Science 1989–90: 46 and 154–5.

- 3 In 1907 26% of the married women in Germany over fifteen years old were employed outside the home. The rate in West Germany was 33.7% in 1965, and 44.5% in 1988 (Federal Office of Statistics 1983a: 63; 1989, as reported in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 24–5 June 1989).
- 4 The percentage of working women with children over eighteen years old rose from 33.2% in 1961 to 44% in 1982 (Federal Minister of Youth, Family and Health 1984: 21).
- 5 See the cover art for Merian 1983.
- 6 Wingen 1985: 348; *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1988 für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*: 78.
- 7 Lutz 1985: 3; the figures refer to Austria, but the development is running very similarly in Germany.
- 8 The ratio of illegitimate births to all newborn children rose from 4.6% in 1967, the lowest level of the past few decades, to 10.2% in the last quarter of 1987 (Permien 1988: 20; Burkart, Fietze and Kohli 1989: 30).
- 9 ‘An illegitimate child is less and less the unwanted teenage pregnancy of earlier years, and ever more frequently the planned pregnancy of women over 25. Extramarital fertility, then, is less and less a “misfortune” of young women and rather an obviously planned or at least a consciously accepted decision of older women’ (Berkart, Fietze and Kohli 1989: 34).
- 10 Surveys conducted in 1962 and 1983 on whether a woman should be married when she bears a child reveal that 89.4% of the girls asked in 1962 considered this to be important, but only 40% agreed in 1983 (Allerbeck and Hoag 1985: 97–8).
- 11 Merrit and Steiner 1984; Fabe and Wikler 1979: 122–3; ‘Ledige Mütter mit Wunschkind: Geht es wirklich ohne Mann’, *Für Sie*, 1985/11; ‘When

'Baby Makes Two: Choosing Single Motherhood', *Ms.* (November 1984); 'Having Babies without Husbands', *New Woman* (May 1995).

CHAPTER 3 FREE LOVE, FREE DIVORCE

- 1 Translated by Mary J. Price and Laurence M. Price as *The Feud of the Schroffensteins*, in *Poet Lore*, 1916/25/5: 518, 563.
- 2 This interview excerpt originates from the unpublished material in a study that was conducted within the project 'Child-rearing in the Lower Class' at the German Youth Institute, Munich. On this, see Wahl et al. 1980.

CHAPTER 4 ALL FOR LOVE OF A CHILD

- 1 See also *Einstellungen zu Ehe und Familie* 1985: 177.
- 2 For a scientific account of the stages of in-vitro fertilization see Bräutigam and Mettler 1985: 54–68.

CHAPTER 5 EVE'S LATE APPLE

- 1 [German] Federal Office of Statistics, as reported in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (24–5 June 1989).
- 2 Particularly Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) as well as Furstenberg (1987), who speaks of 'serial marriages' and 'separated parenthood' and predicts a 'matrilineal reversal' as a consequence of high divorce rates, through which the paternal commitment to the kinship system is loosened overall.
- 3 I owe this pointer to Ronald Hitzler; indicators for it are those who are still married but living separately or with new partners because they shy away from the cost or the emotional expense of a divorce, or because they simply want to preserve appearances. Here it becomes clear at the same time that, while the words, administrative acts and statistical depiction of marriage and divorce have remained constant, their meaning has become more formalistic and provisional. If marriage figures are once again rising, then this is also owing to the fact that marriage has shed its eternal glamour and now recommends itself as an attempt subject to cancellation, which must be tried out just like a South Seas holiday, the Octoberfest and psychoanalysis.
- 4 For documentable developmental lines of parents' ideas of an ideal child, see Beck-Gernsheim 1988b and 1995 and Beck 1988 (English trans. 1995; chapter 1, on the social consequences of reproductive medicine and human genetics).

CHAPTER 6 LOVE, OUR SECULAR RELIGION

- 1 Verses translated by Jane Wiebel, from Gottfried Benn, *Sämtliche Werke*, in an edition with Ilse Benn, ed. Gerhard Schuster, vol. 1: *Gedichte 1* (Klett Cotta, Stuttgart, 1986), by kind permission of the publisher.

- 2 'It is characteristically *images* and *fantasies* of family and children which promise a meaning for life and much less the concrete experiences of a family life in the biography to date and as it appears in ordinary reality' (Wahl et al. 1980: 35).
- 3 This assessment, which seeks to ground love in the conflict situations of individualized lifeworlds, thus also disputes the idea that traditional milieus are exclusively broken up into 'small social lifeworlds' (Hitzler 1988: 136ff.). Love becomes an almost compulsory theme in detraditionalized lifeworlds; this also shows how important it is to connect inquiries into individualization tendencies with the inquiry into the newly emerging social patterns and understandings.
- 4 I am indebted to Christoph Lau for this quotation.
- 5 The classical formulation by Jürgen Habermas is 'Meaning cannot be administratively produced' (1973: 99). Summarizing a long line of argument (extending back to Adam Smith, Hegel and de Tocqueville), Helmut Dubiel writes: 'Just as industry consumes fossil resources, without being able to replace them, the stability of free-market liberal societies consumes the substances of a social morality which these societies cannot renew within their own political, economic and cultural institutions' (1987: 1039ff.). If the arguments presented here were to prove tenable, this assessment would have to be rethought in the following sense: can one conceive detraditionalized, conflict-laden love as an ever-modern source of social meaning? My answer: that is a good question. If it is true that love is one of the sources of acrimonious conflict which moves men and women in the deepest part of their being, chafing them, wounding them, and, at the same time, forcing them to rethink their course, their future, their personality, their characteristics, their will as well as their beliefs and scepticism, then it could be that this is precisely its meaning. Not some positive, pre-given, authoritarian unambiguous meaning, but rather a conflict that springs forth from the substance of life, targets it and destroys it. This would be precisely the form of the post-traditional meaning of love. The questions which well up threaten to undermine the edifice of normality from the inside, from its very foundations. This is the source of many things: retreat, bitterness and cynicism, but also, and contradictorily enough, a new horizon, a new world view, a new life style, or at least the desire for those things, even as repressed desires, in the citadel of the celebrated ego. This does not take the form of certainties or values one could simply harvest. Instead it appears as a cultural soreness, an awakened sensitivity which arouses perception and shifts priorities.

One must, of course, agree with Thomas Luckmann (1983: esp. 188) that love as post-religion can have an effect that creates meaning only in the *private* sphere and only 'to the extent the latter is really left alone by the large institutions'; on this point see the subsection 'Love's inevitable battles: conditions' later in this chapter.

- 6 The concepts of Romanticism and Romantic love are doubtless vague and

ambiguous, as the debates that flared up on 'The Modernity of Romanticism' (see Bohrer 1988) have generally shown. Niklas Luhmann suspects the real core meaning, rather like we do, in that peculiar relationship between idealization and distance. Romantic love is 'ideal and paradoxical, insofar as it claims to be the unity of a duality. The point is to retain and elevate the self while giving it up, to engage in love fully and at the same time ironically. In all of that, a novel and typically Romantic paradox prevails: the experience of the intensification of seeing, experiencing and enjoying *through distance*' (Luhmann 1984: 210–11; emphasis in original); on the historical origins, see also Campbell 1987 and Honneth 1988b.

- 7 I owe this thought to Christoph Lau. The thesis is not identical in meaning to the 'reflexivity of life' of which Niklas Luhmann speaks (1984). The latter does not aim at a historically new state of affairs; instead it is 'when seen abstractly, a possibility for all talents and situations'.
- 8 Kristeva 1989: 16: 'All philosophers of thought, from Plato to Descartes, Hegel and Kant who have attempted to ensure an access to reality for the love experience, have expunged the upsetting aspects from it and reduced it to an initiatory journey attracted by the highest good or the pure spirit. Only theology . . . allows itself . . . to be lured into the trap of the holy madness of love.'
- 9 Ellen Goodman, 'The Last Valentine's Day', *International Herald Tribune*, 14 February 1990. Copyright © Washington Post Writers Group, by permission of Editors Press Service, Inc. on behalf of the Washington Post Writers Group.

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