



## Journal of Consumer Culture

### Interview with Ulrich Beck

In the following interview the noted German social theorist Ulrich Beck reflects on his thinking on modernity in light of postmodern social theory and the idea of postmodernity. This leads to a reassessment of the importance of work and to a discussion of the significance of consumption in what Beck calls 'second modernity'. In the process, Beck elaborates on some of the central concepts associated with his thinking – 'zombie categories', risk society, global risk society, reflexivity, manufactured uncertainties, cosmopolitanism and individualization. The result is not only interesting insights into consumption, but also into Beck's theories of the social world. (JCC stands for the editors of *Journal of Consumer Culture* and UB for Ulrich Beck.)

#### POSTMODERNISM OR SECOND MODERNITY?

**JCC:** You have often criticized the postmodernists and the idea of a post-modern society. Could you summarize your views on this?

**UB:** Well, there are as many postmodernisms as there are postmodernists, and indeed I did learn quite a lot from some of them, such as Zygmunt Bauman and even from the French philosophers of postmodernism like Lyotard. There could not have been a theory of reflexive modernity without having first engaged with ideas of postmodern society. But post-modernist theory only tells us what is *not* the case, it doesn't say what *is* the case. I am sick of the 'post-ism', 'beyond-ism', 'de-ism' of our time.

I talk of the 'reflexive' modernization of modern societies, which means

that we are facing a fundamental societal transformation within modernity. A new kind of capitalism, a new kind of labour, a new kind of everyday life, and a new kind of state are in the making. And it is now the central task of social science to investigate this 'meta-change', which is happening not within social structures and categories, but to them. Empirical investigation and hard conceptual work are needed in order to produce a reasonable picture of this new world that people and institutions can use to orient themselves. So it is not enough to argue we are all postmodern nowadays. More has to be done, and for two main reasons.

First, Europe invented modernity, modern society (although it undeniably drew crucial elements from other cultures). Europe therefore has a special responsibility for its shortcomings. When a manufacturer puts a faulty product on the market and it causes trouble for the customers, the manufacturer announces a recall and offers to fix it. In a certain sense Europe needs to 'recall' modern society. It needs to be fundamentally critiqued and reformed on a global level. What we need is a basic self-critique, a redefinition – we might even say a reformation – of modernity and modern society. But not a postmodern denial of critique, politics and political theory. It is this a-political, a-critical, end-of-everything attitude and perspective, which I feel makes postmodern ideas look a bit old and uninspiring.

**JCC:** So the 'consumers' of modernity – third world countries – need to have this European product recalled?

**UB:** Yes, indeed. There is a multiplication and pluralization of modernities in the making. And this is my second point: postmodernism denies that there is something new in the air. What seems to be an 'end', a 'breakdown', a 'post' is – looked at from the other side – a beginning, a restructuring, and sociology needs a new language to find out what is going on. I just want to point to one main consequence: I think we are living in a society, in a world, where our basic sociological concepts are becoming what I call 'zombie categories'. Zombie categories are 'living dead' categories which govern our thinking but are not really able to capture the contemporary milieu. In this situation I don't think it's very helpful only to criticize normal sociology, and to deconstruct it. What we really need is to redefine, reconstruct, restructure our concepts and our view of society. This is exactly what we are doing in the research institute in Munich that I'm involved in. We are trying to redefine all the basic concepts of social science. In the process, we are drawing a distinction between what we call 'first modernity' and 'second modernity', or 'nation-state centred' and 'non-nation-state

centred' modernity. The challenge of theorizing second modernity is that the system of coordinates is changing. If the fundamental distinction and criteria that we have always identified with modern society no longer apply, where can one begin? What can 'modern society' mean if *not* the nation-state? What can modernization mean if it is not equated with Westernization and Europeanization? If first modernity comprises predominantly a logic of structures, second modernity involves a logic of flows. But how can one research such a 'liquid modernity' (Bauman)? How can one make reasonable decisions about the future under such conditions of uncertainty? What kind of rules and what kind of categories do fit such a world? And how can reflexive social institutions develop and grow in a world that is, in some respects, literally fluid and boundless?

What is our research about? We are building up a picture, a new 'imaginative social science' on the one side and, let's say, a 'cosmopolitan social science' on the other side. And we're trying to do these things with concepts such as class, social inequality, households and, of course, technology, science and risk, firms, states, all through the different subjects of sociology.

**JCC:** So, your main criticism of postmodernists is that they are mainly interested in deconstruction without reconstruction. Are you saying that we need to construct new concepts out of the existing conceptual arsenal of sociology?

**UB:** Yes, out of the existing conceptual arsenal, but in relation to the empirical world. Let me give you an example. One of those basic concepts is the household. The 'household' is the basic social unit needed to construct classes, to talk about families, and so on. But what is a 'household' nowadays? If you consider that it is normal for people to be mobile, to live apart-together, to divorce and remarry, my children, your children, our children, even grandparents are multiplied without human engineering by this process. From the point of view of the grandchildren, the meaning of grandparents has to be determined by individual decisions and choices. Individuals must choose who is to be regarded as their main father, their main mother and who is their grandmother and grandfather. We are getting into optional relationships inside families, which are very difficult to identify in an objective, empirical way because they are a matter of subjective perspectives and decisions. And these can change between life phases.

The same is true with households. If you look into the details, you'll find that the old concept of the household combines a geographic unit, an

economic unit, and a social unit. This is falling apart and, of course, the different aspects and data may contradict each other. So it is quite difficult to figure out how to define the contemporary household. The project I have in mind will try to find out how people themselves define households. The starting point would be with the concept of couples. What is a couple? I find it quite interesting, for example, that the French sociologist, Jean Claude Kaufmann, said that a couple is not defined by two people

being married, or living together, but rather when they buy *one* washing machine. It is then that everyday travails, the reorganization of everyday life, and the different standards and value judgements about everyday life come up.

There is also the dramatic increase in 'single households' in the last 20 years. In cities like London and Munich, more than 50 percent of all households are single households and this tendency is increasing. But this category is not homogenous; it includes older widows, divorced men who might remarry, 'singles' households comprising people living in quite close relations with others. All of this is very confusing and it exemplifies our conceptual problems because class analyses presuppose normal households, normal families. So producing data about consumption or voting behaviour on the basis of 'households' is part of a zombie sociology. They just don't exist anymore.

We are living with a rhetoric about the crisis of family life, but the family is not the cause of the turbulences and historical conflict between men and women. It is the surface upon which this conflict becomes visible. Everything that strikes the family from outside – for example the contradiction between the demands of the labour market and the needs of relationships, the employment system, the law – is distorted in the personal sphere. Our type of 'individualized society', as I call it, tells us to seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions. The tension in family life today is the fact that equality between men and women cannot be created in an institutional family structure, which presupposes their inequality. In personal relationships conflicts are also initiated when possibilities of choice are opened up: in conflicting needs over careers, in the division of housework and childcare. In making decisions people become aware of the different conditions of men and women. Lacking institutional solutions, people are having to learn how to negotiate relationships on the basis of equality. So the entire structure of family ties has come under pressure from individualization and a new negotiated provisional family composed of multiple relationships – a 'post-family' (post-ism again!) – is emerging.

**JCC:** Are there examples of zombie categories related to consumption?

**UB:** Yes, maybe consumption itself. As you know I am not a specialist in this field, but to my knowledge the discourse of consumerism and consumer society is nearly identical with a *critique* of consumerism and consumer society. At least, this is true for Germany within the Frankfurt School tradition. I think this negative image of consumption is becoming a zombie category, which has to be redefined. In this regard I follow my friend Natan Sznaider, a young Israeli sociologist.

It was Simmel who, in his *Philosophy of Money*, elaborated the deep connection between money and religion. Both are to reconcile differences through abstraction, by separating themselves from every particular time and place. It was also Simmel who made the heretical assertion that consumerism is a worthy replacement for religion. Many have lamented that people seem more concerned with commerce than God but Simmel points out that although consumerism is something you can get lost in this is because, like religion, it enacts a dreamworld with material objects. The cultivation of tastes expresses both our identity and our place in society – our status – just as the practice of religion used to. And it does it – this is my main point – on a cosmopolitan level. So consumer society has to be redefined as an everyday image of cosmopolitan society, as it is experienced and practised, which people care about. And a consumer sociology could be one of the first sociologies to adopt a cosmopolitan perspective and break with ‘methodological nationalism’. By this, I mean the deep and often unconscious marriage between nation state and social science.

Who today can still feed himself locally or nationally? The product labels may still try to make us believe it, but from yoghurt to meat and fruit, to say nothing of the globalized hotchpotch of sausage meat, as consumers we are irredeemably locked into globalized cycles of production and consumption. Food and drink of all countries unite – that has long ago become trite reality. Anyone who still wants to raise the national flag, when it comes to consumption, founders on the ever more hollow myths of national products, dishes, etc. So a banal cosmopolitanism of consumption appears to be displacing what Michael Billig calls *Banal Nationalism* – involuntarily and unseen, and throughout the world.

**JCC:** Are there ideas within postmodern theory that can be of use in thinking about what you call ‘second modernity’?

**UB:** Yes, there are quite a few ideas that you can use. Let me give you an example of an idea that is very close to the thinking of at least some

postmodernists: the multiplicity of boundaries or of attempts to draw boundaries. One definition of second modernity is that the boundaries between social spheres are multiplied. This is equally true for the boundaries between society and nature, between knowledge and superstition, between life and death and between Us and the Others. Each of these boundaries becomes pluralized. And this entails three things. First, boundaries cease to be givens and instead become choices. Drawing boundaries becomes optional. Second, and simultaneously with that, there is a multiplication of the plausible ways in which boundaries can be drawn, as well as the ways in which they can be brought into doubt. Finally, the existence of multiple boundaries changes not only the collectivity defined by them but the nature of boundaries themselves. They become not boundaries so much as a variety of attempts to draw boundaries. In a similar manner, border conflicts are transformed into conflicts over the drawing of borders. To sum that all up in another way: the more boundaries increase, the easier it becomes to draw new ones.

This sounds pretty much like the good old narrative of postmodernism but there is a big difference. While postmodernism celebrates this multiplication and opening up of boundaries, second modernity posits that every individual and institutional decision presupposes the existence of boundaries that have somehow been drawn on a practical basis. Things have been included or excluded and a line drawn between them. In second modern society, however, no such limited array of already available options exists. Instead, the boundaries have to be created along with the decisions. For example, it is not simply that the border between life and death is becoming fluid, or that it has to be redefined. There are multiple boundary options – for example, the brain is dead but the heart is still beating. The more options there are, the more boundaries take on an ‘as-if’ character – the more they become boundaries that are understood as fictive but which are handled as if they were true under the circumstances at hand.

A postmodern thinker such as Donna Haraway celebrates cyborgs and thereby implies the celebration of the fact that there are *no* borders anymore. Everything is combined with everything else. I think this is a challenging view, and on a cultural level I do accept it in some respects, but institutions don’t work this way. They have to construct and legitimate borders in the age of flows and this gets them into a lot of trouble. To find out about those troubles is to find out about the emergence of second modern society.

**JCC:** Let’s move beyond the issue of postmodern theory to that of postmodern society. What is your view of contemporary society and how does it differ from depictions of postmodern society?

**UB:** Modernity has not vanished, but it is becoming increasingly problematic. While radical social change has always been part of modernity, the transition to a reflexive second modernity revolutionizes the very coordinates, categories and conceptions of change itself. This 'meta-change' of modern society results from a critical mass of unintended side-effects. By unintended side-effects – or more precisely, effects that were originally intended to be more narrow in their scope than they turned out to be – I mean the loss or consequences resulting from the boundary shattering forces of market expansion, legal universalism and technical revolution – in short, the process that Marx once celebrated in the phase, 'all that is solid melts into air'. The continued technical, economic, political and cultural development of global capitalism has gradually revolutionized its own social foundation. In the transformation from a *first modernity* that was largely synonymous with the nation-state to a *second modernity*, the shape of which is still being negotiated, modernization ends up stripping away the nation-state and the welfare state, which at one time supported it but later restrained it. In so doing, modernization is calling into question its own basic premises.

This is also the central meaning of the word 'reflexive', which is an easy word to misunderstand. 'Reflexive' does *not* mean that people today lead a more conscious life. On the contrary, reflexive signifies *not* an increase of mastery and consciousness, but a heightened awareness that mastery is *impossible*. Simple modernization becomes reflexive modernization to the extent that it disenchants and then dissolves its own taken-for-granted premises. Eventually this leads to the undermining of every aspect of the nation-state: the welfare state; the power of the legal system; the national economy; the corporatist systems that connected one with the other; and the parliamentary democracy that governed the whole. A parallel process undermines the social institutions that buttressed this state and were supported by it in turn. The normal family, the normal career and the normal life history are all suddenly called into question and have to be renegotiated. It is this new and complex reality that we have to figure out on a theoretical and on an empirical level. But this new reality is not beyond modernity. Notice: the distinction between first and second modernity presupposes a combination of continuities and discontinuities and opens up a space for redefining modernity as a global conflict.

This kind of periodization is, of course, only a heuristic device. The goal of it is *not* to introduce a problematic new evolutionary periodization according to which one era comes abruptly to an end and a new one begins. It is *not* as if, at one point in time, all the old social relationships disappear

and are replaced by brand new ones. The purpose of distinguishing between first and second modern society is methodological and pragmatic. In the first place, it enables us to pose the question of new categories of thought and a new frame of reference in the clearest possible terms. This approach will bear empirical fruit to the extent that its new concepts can successfully serve as keys to understanding second modernity.

## WORK

**JCC:** Is there something about the modern perspective that leads you away from the study of consumption and in the direction of the study of work? You've devoted a lot of attention to work, and clearly the notion of work is central to the modern world. Is there something about adopting a modernist perspective that leads you to emphasize work and to de-emphasize consumption?

**UB:** I started as a sociologist of work and was always fascinated by the issue of what really makes work such a big problem or concern on all levels of society. If you look at the history of the notion of work, it has been negatively valued in earlier times and then becomes the main centre of identity in the building of modern society. Today, work seems to be diminishing in importance to some extent, or it is getting fragile and insecure. In some sectors, for example, the enormously growing 'culture sector' that Angela McRobbie writes about, the border between work and life, work and leisure, work and art is disappearing. So is the idea of the labour market. It is replaced by the idea of 'self-employment': Set up your own business! Your business is your talent! Live and work like an artist! Be a 'net-worker'!

**JCC:** When you talk in your books and essays about the need for different notions of work, could we include consumption as part of that different notion of work?

**UB:** Well I'm not sure about this. The concept of work is being used in an increasingly inflationary way. It's no longer just paid work, everything's coming to be included under the heading of work. For something to be acknowledged in this society, you have to say it is work. So, of course, skiing is work. Love is work, at least to do it right. To parents, parenting is work. So, everything is work. But if you mean that the border between consumption and work is, like so many others, becoming fluid, mixed and pluralized from within, then, of course, I totally agree.



## RISK SOCIETY

**JCC:** What about the impact of risk society on the consumer?

**UB:** The concept of risk society is intimately connected to the concept of consumption. On the one hand, the more risk (perception), the less consumption. On the other hand, anxieties constitute new demands, new markets – even a special kind of market, those which enforce consumption, not free markets, but obligatory markets, in which the producer can dictate high prices. So, the reflexivity of risk and risk society is getting powerful through the politicization of the consumer and the political consumer is a central figure of subpolitics in risk society.

Risk society does *not* mean a catastrophic version of society in which the distribution of 'bads' will have replaced the distribution of 'goods'. It signifies simply this small and radical change that everyone can read about in the newspapers: science and technology add their uncertainties to the older ones, they do not subtract any. This creates an immense problem. In the times of first modernity simplification was the order of the day; products could be produced which had no unexpected consequences. The more science and the more technology were thrown in, the fewer disputes, it was believed, would ensue. There was one best way, one economic optimum, one most efficient solution, one means to a given end. In risk society we are entering a completely different playing field, because whatever we do, we expect to encounter unexpected consequences. These risks feed back into the very definition of the objects. There is one main consequence for consumption: the other side of the risk-sensitive public are the *unpredictable consumers*, amongst whom a chain reaction can be triggered by the merest hint of plausible evidence. Since uncontested scientific evidence is increasingly rare, public perception, which can be calculated, becomes the determining element in such scenarios. And because of its political weight, it is public perception that ultimately defines the likelihood of product bans or the success of liability claims.

Risk conflicts are power conflicts and since risks are social constructions, the central question of power is a question of definition. It is the question of who, with what legal and intellectual resources, gets to decide what counts as a 'cost'. The question of determining who is responsible, and who has to bear the burden of paying for damages, has been transmuted into a battle over the rules of evidence and the laws of responsibility.

**JCC:** Is it the consumer who suffers the negative consequences?

**UB:** Yes. The consumer consumes the risks others produce, don't want to pay attention to and don't want to pay for. He or she is often unable to

decide what to buy. Is this product risky or not risky? She or he doesn't have adequate information; she or he is culturally blind. She or he depends on contradictory experts and information. And as we know now, for years the Germans have been led to believe that all the beef they ate was BSE-free: it is the consumer's problem now. Consumers are faced with the changing 'risk of the week'. Next week it's the next crisis of the week. Consumers must change their behaviour each time. They have no choice if they care about themselves and their children. What else can they do? Here we are, living in very rich countries that have been completely over-productive in many respects, but people still don't know what to eat. In fact, the more risks they perceive, the less they are able to consume and to know what to do.

The world has not grown unconditionally more risky. Rather it is the systemic lack of trust that makes consumers so quick to see risks everywhere. The less trust, the more risk. The more risk consciousness, the more unstable the markets. The more unstable the markets are, the greater is the risk of an accident amplifying into a crisis. And this risk of social crisis affects both corporations and governments. It is a kind of boomerang effect. Long-term technical risks are denied and removed from the political decision making process. But their suppression creates a widespread distrust. And this is precisely what lays the groundwork for them to be transformed into economic and political risks, and to return with a vengeance and wreak havoc on the economic and political institutions that suppressed them. The corporations that wanted to shift the incalculability of risks onto others find themselves caught in the whirlwind of incalculable consumer markets that can destroy billions of dollars in investment overnight. If you look at what's happening in consumer society from the point of view of the consumer, it's a 'lottery of misfortune'. It's like Russian roulette. We are living in a free country, a free world, everything seems to be free, but we are always involved in this consumption lottery of misfortune.

**JCC:** In the United States we have had a profusion of ads for new drugs. The ads naturally talk about all the good things they can do but we are also being forced to listen to some of the terrible side effects associated with these drugs. Within the same ad they are telling us that the drug will provide security by solving this problem, but it's going to produce these other problems and insecurities. Taking these drugs comes to seem like Russian roulette.

**UB:** This is what risk society is about. It is, to some extent, self-critical. People no longer believe in the simple narrative of progress and security.

They mistrust the experts, expect the unexpected. They are being criticized from within and this has become a very normal process. For example, companies and their experts tell us everything is secure. But if you ask insurance companies they say, 'we don't insure'. The insurance companies say they don't know how well corporations are handling the sources of those insecurities. So, two different rationalities, the technological rationality of corporations and the economic rationality of insurance companies, collide and contradict each other. These contradictions go on and on because in different ways science and expert knowledge are *adding* their uncertainties rather than subtracting any.

Those are paradoxes of risk society. Risks always involve what you should *not* do. But they don't say what you *should* do. It's a negative concept. You want to avoid risks, but you don't know how to. In any alternative you choose, you're always confronted with unexpected side effects and with risks. Society is somehow blocking itself. Nobody really knows what to do. Nobody knows how to legitimate any course of action. But, of course, this does have very interesting secondary political side effects: decelerating modernization and opening the black boxes of production and products to public and consumer concerns.

Let me explain this in terms of risk society theory. Power, money and truth are all media of communication. Risk might be understood as an unintentional medium of communication. Risks abolish barriers to communication, and put people into communication who don't want anything to do with each other. It forces obligations and liabilities onto those who have done everything they can to avoid them (and who often have the law on their side). Costs are re-assigned and redistributed in ways that stand existing rules on their head. Another way to put it is that risks overthrow the autonomy, or self-referentiality, of social subsystems, including economy, polity and science. It establishes dialogue and negotiations between subsystems that are ignorant if not hostile to each other before they are forced together. In this way, risk overthrows the existing order of priorities that governs everyday life and business. One might even say that risk publics produce a quasi-revolutionary situation: an inverted picture of the social order made real (at least while the mass media attention lasts).

## GLOBALIZATION

**JCC:** Let's now talk about the 'global risk society' and how you would distinguish that from the notion of 'risk society'.

**UB:** Well, it is the same on the global level and therefore not the same. Let

me develop my argument by referring to John Dewey's *The Public and its Consequences* (1927). Where Dewey intersects with the theory of global risks is in his insight that a public is something that stands between causes and their consequences, and gives them a symbolic meaning they wouldn't otherwise have. That meaning is what makes politics and society possible. And therefore it is not actions but *consequences* that are the soul of politics. And it is by giving consequences meaning that the public plays its key role in the formation of a global society.

Dewey wasn't thinking of global warming, GM (genetically modified) food, nanotechnology, or BSE, of course. But his theory is perfectly applicable to the global risk society. Dewey asked how society could constitute its unity on a new, larger scale for which there were no pre-existing traditions. His answer was that, theoretically at least, real public discourse could accomplish this task by spanning divisions and borders. And real public discourse grows not out of consensus over decisions but from dissensus over the consequences of decisions. Modern risk crises are constituted by just such controversies over consequences. So where technical thinkers see an over-reaction to risk, Dewey sees a reason for hope. He thinks that such conflicts serve an *enlightenment* function. They attempt to bridge the all-important gap between experts and citizens. And this is what gives them the political explosiveness that the technical diagnosis of the problem seeks to cover up. Global risks, fully grasped, have an inherent reflexivity that goes against the grain of the actor's original intentions. They have the capacity to knit together publics, politics and society on a global level.

There is evidence for this. The Rio de Janeiro conference in 1992 accepted the environmental problem as a global problem. From then on it has been globally constructed and accepted as a global problem. Those who don't believe that it is a global problem have to justify themselves; not the other way around. However, as I see it, in the United States – and especially with the Bush administration up to now – a lot of people doubt that it is a global problem but they have to justify themselves in front of a global public. The social construction of the global risk society could be dated to events like the Rio de Janeiro conference and the reactions to it. And of course if you take, for example, the celebration of the human cloning project, it's a global celebration. In Britain, Tony Blair says 'we want to go ahead; let's not block this development'. However, they say at the same time, 'we must have institutions that make the unforeseen consequences ethical consequences'. But, of course, we don't have those institutions. Nobody has them. So the global risk society is a construction, a society that is perceived

or believed in but lacking institutions for action. Roland Robertson uses the term globality in the same sense. It's an everyday conception, but the global risk society has no institutions.

Another important aspect: the new virtuality of global risks may cause new kinds of global turbulences. In the context of 'manufactured uncertainties' (as Anthony Giddens and myself call the new non-quantitative risks) the subjunctive has replaced the indicative. Possibility is accorded the same significance as existence. This is in large part because the past has been so thoroughly re-written. Many things that were once considered universally certain and safe, and vouched for by every conceivable authority, turned out to be deadly (atomic energy, asbestos, beef). Applying that knowledge to the present and the future devalues the certainties of today. This is the soil that nurtures the fear of conceivable threats. 'Virtual risks' no longer need to exist in order to be perceived as fact. You might criticize them as 'phantom risks', but this does not matter economically. Perceived as risks, they cause enormous losses and disasters. Thus the distinction between 'real' risks and 'hysterical' perception no longer holds. Economically this makes no difference.

Of course, there are important implications for international regulatory standards. The loss of dispute settlement mechanisms that are scientific in character, and the dominance of cultural perceptions have two main implications. They increase and enforce the cross-national diversity of regulatory standards. And this diversity can cause enormous tensions not only domestically, but also in global, regional and bilateral trading systems. Even existing supranational democratic institutions have difficulties in reaching decisions. For example in the EU, which has probably made the greatest progress in establishing transnational decision-making bodies, member states still accepted or rejected the clearance certificates for British beef according to their own lights.

Thus the inability to manage manufactured uncertainties both nationally and globally could become one of the main counter-forces to neo-liberalism. It could end up bitterly disappointing those who have put their hopes in market solutions to consumer safety problems. Recent consumer protection and product liability legislation has shown a clear tendency towards anticipating potential losses rather than being geared to losses actually sustained. Furthermore, the burden of proof seems to be shifting from the consumer to the producer in a number of fields, including genetic engineering. This opens up the field for coalitions of international law firms and consumer NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to try and raid the treasure chests of multinational corporations.

**JCC:** Is this what you mean by 'inner globalization' and 'globalization from within'?

**UB:** Yes. The dualism of the national and the international is being dissolved too and it is very difficult to redefine it in terms of nation-state politics. We are still accustomed to believing that everything that happens inside of a nation-state is being produced in the nation-state. We tend not to see it as being caused by transnational corporations, financial flows, cultural flows, and so on. But, as I said before, the consumption society has to be understood as a cosmopolitan society and could be a good example for what I mean by globalization from within. You know, going into a supermarket is like taking a drive around the world. Nowadays, you've got all kinds of products in one place. They might not be the indigenous product of a particular region, and they might be industrial products, but you've got great diversity. The same is true not only in relation to consumption but in relation to education as well. People shop internationally, marry internationally, work internationally, grow up and are educated internationally and multilingually, live and think internationally, that is, combine multiple loyalties and identities in their lives. The paradigm of society as something defined within the framework of nation-state inevitably loses contact with reality.

**JCC:** This is close to the ideas of hybridization and glocalization. Interestingly, you critique the idea of McDonaldization in your book, *What Is Globalization*, and yet these two kinds of developments can co-exist.

**UB:** Could you think about McDonaldization of, let's say, multicultural product design as well? This would be an interesting concept which combines, let's say, McDonaldization and diversity – the 'McDonaldization of diversity'.

**JCC:** Absolutely. For whatever is available on a widespread basis, there will be forces that will seek to McDonaldize, to rationalize, them. Much of the multiculturalism that is available comprises McDonaldized versions of originals from various cultures (e.g. Mexican food at Taco Bell, Italian food at Pizza Hut). So, it is easy to think of a world marketplace that is characterized by McDonaldized multicultural products.

#### COSMOPOLITANISM

**UB:** I am using this term in the sense of *rooted cosmopolitanism*, having wings and roots at the same time. There's no globalization without localization,

and there's no cosmopolitanism without localism. This is a very important concept for me. I'm interested in a 'cosmopolitan sociology', a 'methodological cosmopolitanism', overcoming methodological nationalism by redefining basic sociological terms in relation to cosmopolitan localism.

Cosmopolitanism has to be contrasted with globalism, a global capitalism, and neo-liberal ideology. The big difference is that cosmopolitanism for me is about the recognition of the 'otherness of the other'. It is not about equalizing and universalizing, but it is about acknowledging diversity and mutual respect. And cosmopolitanism is not defined in opposition to the national; it has to be integrated in the national. The term 'cosmopolitanism' is often related to intellectuals, to global players, to middle-class people, but I think it is very important to see that there is a cosmopolitanism *from below, as well*. I'm thinking, for example, of migrants, people living on the edge of society who are building transnational networks and living in transnational life forms. They are doing so even with very limited resources compared to those on the top, the global players.

As I said, we have to build borders, but those borders can be either exclusive or inclusive. Cosmopolitanism is the art of inclusive distinctions and borders. It raises the issue of how to include or how to give those who are excluded rights in building norms and institutions. I think this is very important because if you look at the development of society over a very long period of time, you will find that multi-ethnicity is really the norm. And there has only been a very short period of history in which the nation-state which celebrates homogeneity – national homogeneity – has reigned. But even the nation-state was only possible through imperialism and colonialism, which enforce poly-ethnicity. Now we have a world with pluralized borders characterized by globalization. America is one of the examples of a country where multi-ethnicity is becoming, once again, the norm. We have to build institutions capable of dealing with the problems created by such diversity. Cosmopolitanism could be a resource, a tradition (it is a very old tradition), to be used for dealing with some of the problems produced in second modernity.

**JCC:** A cosmopolitan producer would be one who included the consumer, more generally the 'other', in organizational deliberations rather than treating the consumer as somebody to be controlled or to be manipulated.

**UB:** Exactly. This could actually be very functional. I don't understand why those industries that believe that they incorporate innovation and creativity are sticking to old, basic assumptions and institutions. They really need to come up with new ideas (like including the consumer in internal

deliberations) and new institutions. And again: global risk society could produce forms of labour appropriate for such social innovations.

#### INDIVIDUALIZATION AND THE SELF

**JCC:** Can we talk about your views on individualization: the concept provides a backdrop for many theorizations of consumption.

**UB:** The idea of individualization has been part of my agenda for 15 years now. There has been a very heated debate in the German-speaking world since then. Of course, there is a lot of misunderstanding about this concept as well. Individualization does *not* mean individualism (as an ideology). It does not mean individuation – a term used by depth psychologists to describe the process of becoming an autonomous individual. And it has nothing to do with the market egoism of Thatcherism or Bushism. That is always a potential misunderstanding in Britain and the US. Nor, lastly, does it mean emancipation as Jürgen Habermas describes it.

Individualization is a concept which describes a structural, sociological transformation of social institutions and the relationship of the individual to society. You could write a history of sociology showing how Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Marx, Foucault, Elias, Giddens and Bauman used and interpreted the idea of individualization (as a young German sociologist, Markus Schroer, just did). So it is not simply a phenomenon of the second half of the 20th century. Earlier historical phases of individualization occurred in the Renaissance, in the courtly culture of the Middle Ages, in the inward asceticism of Protestantism, in the emancipation of the peasants from feudal bondage and in the loosening of intergenerational family ties in the 19th and early 20th century. European modernity has freed people from historically inscribed roles. It has undermined traditional securities such as religious faith, and simultaneously it has created new forms of social commitment. I use the concept of individualization to explore not just how people deal with these transformations in terms of their identity and consciousness, but also how their life situations and biological patterns are changed.

**JCC:** But what is specific about individualization and second modernity?

**UB:** This is the main question. It is the question – as Scott Lash (in an introduction to Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim's and my new book *Individualization*) puts it – what can individualization and individualism mean in an age of flows? First of all, in this constellation individualization means dis-embedding without re-embedding. In second modernity the individual is for the first time in history the basic unit of social reproduction.



Durkheim, for example, was concerned with *anomic* individualism. He had in mind a normative idea of *re*-embedding individualism after the dissolution of feudal structures in market economies. My point is that after the transition to reflexive second modernity, individualism is *not* routinized but radicalized.

And my second point is: there is *no* determinacy of structure *after* individualization. We have to think second modernity individualism in terms of paradoxical 'individualizing structures' or 'institutionalized individualism'. This means that basic institutions such as civil, political and social rights are addressed to the individual, for example the demands for flexibility and mobility – they are all, so to speak, 'machines of individualization', enforcing individualism and biographies full of risk and precarious freedom.

One important implication is that you can no longer talk of individualization as a mere subjective process of, for example, ego-centredness and specific lifestyles which sociologically have to be confronted with objective class analysis. In second modernity individualization is *not* the *Überbau* – ideology, false consciousness – which has to be seen and judged in relation to the economic *Unterbau* of 'real classes'. Individualization *is* the paradoxical social structure itself. And it is a 'non-linear mode', an open ended, highly ambivalent ongoing process. It relates to a decline in narratives of given sociability.

My ideas of cosmopolitanism integrate individualization into the context of glocalization. In my view cosmopolitanism is in fact as much a property of the individual as it is of the global system. It is a new narrative of sociability in an age of individualization *and* globalization.

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