

Jan Baars *Beyond Neo-Modernism, Anti-Modernism and Post-Modernism: Basic Categories for Contemporary Critical Gerontology*. pp.17-42 In: Jan Baars, Dale Dannefer, and Chris Phillipson (Eds.) *AGING, GLOBALIZATION AND INEQUALITY. THE NEW CRITICAL GERONTOLOGY* (Routledge 2006)

## Beyond Neo-Modernism, Anti-Modernism and Post-Modernism: Basic Categories for Contemporary Critical Gerontology

**Jan Baars**

University for Humanist Studies, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Macro-theorizing in studies of aging is quite rare. Although references to an "aging society" are frequent they, for the most part, are mostly not elaborated theoretically. The "aging society" is, however, not only a society composed of home care, nursing homes or gerontological laboratories. Nor is it just the abstract world of demographic figures and their extrapolations. The issues that are referred to with the metaphor "aging society" are part of and influenced by a historical reality which goes through rapid changes at an increasingly interconnected macro level. The transition to an "aging society" is at the same time a transition to a globalizing world of ICT-networks and bio-technology. Such changes may to an important degree *situate* and *qualify* what happens at a more local or communal level. Although the presence of more older people will change the societies they live in, technical, political and cultural developments in these societies are equally influential in shaping *their* lives.

References to the macro-level of society using terms such as *late modern society*, *risk-society*, *neo-modernism* (*neo-liberalism*) or *post-modernism* are used with increasing frequency in gerontological studies. Typically, this occurs without the necessary elaboration

or digestion of the debates that are taking place about these issues. Their relevance for social gerontology is therefore not fully clarified. This chapter presents a systematic effort to analyze these concepts and their implications for social gerontology. In this discussion a perspective unfolds in which these basic categories or approaches are assessed in a way that does not promise an escape from modernity, but emphasizes the need to re-address and re-interpret basic modernist ideals which have been both fought for and ideologically misused: *responsible individual fulfillment, solidarity and human dignity*. This perspective makes it possible to point to the crucial contributions of gerontological studies to macro-theorizing as these may show how important societal structures are in shaping both positive and negative life-chances; as gerontologists can show the build-up and full consequences of such structures during long lives.

In the next section, I will review in some detail these contours of contemporary society. This will be followed two sections that provide a critical analysis of modernity. Finally, I will identify how this analysis of modernity points to the need for a critical gerontology, and its implications for gerontology more generally.

### **Descriptions and Evaluations of Contemporary Society**

In trying to summarize the most important characteristics that emerge from the efforts of contemporary social theory to get a clear picture of present society, it becomes clear that we can only hope to get hold of contemporary *dynamics*. The self-destructive or self-innovative unrest which is typical for modernity has become a daily reality. Proclaiming change, innovation and new-ness has become a normal ingredient of everyday functioning of organizations of all sorts making it hardly possible to paint a static picture. A theoretical approach can only hope to be adequate if it succeeds in providing a useful characterization of the most important societal dynamics, which can guide further exploration and yet be open enough to be corrected by them or to question ambivalent findings.

Most contemporary societal self-descriptions begin with the theme of *globalization*: a society which is still dominated by the goals of economic and technological progress, but has been revolutionized by new possibilities for the movement of capital and of the means of production, and new forms of electronic communication and networking, leading to increasing global interdependencies. As Castells (1996) puts it: “a technological revolution, centered around information technologies, is reshaping, at accelerated pace, the material basis of society” (p. 1 ff.). Digitalized information, images, capital and people move around the world, faster and faster. These developments lead to many new problems and questions. Most comments focus on the major challenges facing democratic control in and by nation states. New global (e.g. ecological) risks, international crime and international mobility of capital undermine the effectiveness of legal regulation and control by nation states, questioning their sovereignty. The present situation is, however, characterized by many important ambivalences.

First, on the one hand the nation states appear indeed no longer capable of regulating many important processes that take place within their own territories. On the other hand, they often use this observation in a *pars pro toto* fashion: it is partially true, but also ideologically misused to evade or reduce responsibilities that should be assumed by the nation states, such as taking care of intergenerational solidarity (Walker & Deacon, 2003).

Second, to counteract the new weakness of the nation states several international configurations are emerging which try to get a grasp of processes which evade national sovereignty. They are as different as bilateral and multilateral connections between nation states, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO) notably. An ambivalence that arises here is that most of the dominant nation states claim to be governed democratically, but operate through the structures of the international configurations which lack democratic legitimacy, as democracy is still based on national

structures and traditions. In this undemocratic vacuum politics are developed that go much further than compensating the nation states for their weakness as a result of globalization. Not only can they undermine the potential weakness of the nation state, but they can also offer the national governments an easy excuse to legitimize certain actions or regulations which might never have been accepted, or accepted reluctantly, by their own democratic institutions (Walker, 1990, 2004).

Third, international mobility leads to multicultural societies in which people with different backgrounds learn to appreciate each other, but it also leads to a stronger appeal to nationalist sentiments. Democratic institutions are put to the test as they are committed to discursive solution of conflicts, civil rights and citizenship, regardless of ethnic origin (Habermas, 1997). Migrating workers or asylum seekers and their families will inevitably age and develop ambivalent patterns of integration and disintegration both with the new country of residence and their origins. Multicultural aging emerges as a complicated result of international migration (Gardner, 1995, 2002; Phillipson, Ahmed, & Latimer, 2003).

Fourth, there is a rapidly growing world-wide distribution of Western products and images which has many different effects but does not simply lead to a *McDonaldization* of the world (Appadurai, 1996; Featherstone, Lasch, & Robertson, 1995; Robertson, 1992). Its influences do not merely result in Westernization or Americanization but lead to dynamic innovative interactions in which local cultures redefine themselves with new language and symbols: “If a global cultural system is emerging, it is filled with ironies and resistances, sometimes camouflaged as passivity and a bottomless appetite in the Asian world for things Western” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 29). In other words, globalization produces *glocalization* (Robertson, 1992). As local cultures have never been grounded in natural (inborn) qualities, there is a continuing *historical* articulation of local cultures, taking place under intensified

confrontation with plural global influences. This continuing importance of locality is also relevant for the different directions societies may take in the globalization process.

As for the Western societies we can speak of *late modern societies* (not late modernism), to emphasize that they are gradually moving away from their national identities which developed in the context of modern Western history. They will have to establish new identities in the interfering processes of globalization and glocalization, during which a crucial question will be in what way and to what degree they will succeed in realizing some important principles which have been developed during the modernization process such as *human dignity, freedom and the struggle against gross forms of social inequality or exclusion*.

### **Contemporary Societal Self-evaluations**

Or have we already entered a universe in which these elements or principles have been transcended or have become meaningless? Can we call our world *post-modern* and what could be meant by that? Luhmann (2000) offers the following comments:

Were we to care for realities, we would not see any sharp break between a modern and a postmodern society. For centuries we have had a monetary economy and we still have it. We also had, for centuries now, a state-oriented political system, and we still have it...We have positivistic legal systems, unified by constitutions...We do scientific research as before, although now more conscious of risks and other unpleasant consequences. And we send, wherever possible our children to schools, using up the best years of their lives to prepare them for an unknown future. Our whole life depends on technologies, today more than ever, and again we see more problems, but no clear break with the past, no transition from a modern to a postmodern society (p. 35).

The discussion about modernism and post-modernism is, however, mainly a discussion about how to *evaluate* contemporary developments, especially what to expect from the further development of practical forms of reason (democracy, technology, organization and so on); the most solid ground enlightened people had learned to trust in the past centuries (Kunneman, 2002). In the last decades there have been many contributions to such evaluations at a societal level which can roughly be distinguished in three main positions.

The first could be called *neo-modernism*, which puts all its trust in innovative furthering of the productive sources of modernity: rationally guided economic and technological growth. Sometimes this position is superficially legitimized by the neo-liberal identification of “*freedom*” and a “*free world*” with a free *market*, without much doubt about the costs of this equation in terms of inequality or ecological damage.

The second position could be called *anti-modernism*, as its diagnosis aims mainly at criticizing modernity for its hopeless illusions and points the way back to a supposedly solid and unquestionable foundation which should be found in a specific tradition. This may vary from traditional Marxism, to Eastern wisdom, conservative Christianity or the Sharia. Some forms of ecological fundamentalism also belong to this category

Finally, the third position could be called (or calls itself) *post-modernism*. This could be characterized as the disillusioned counterpart of neo-modernism. It does not believe in the promises or hopes of the neo-modernists, but cannot be positioned under anti-modernism, as it refuses to believe in any unquestionable foundation.

In my opinion, a contemporary critical social theory has more in common with post-modernism than with the other two positions because of its *latent* critical potential. The heterogeneous theoretical configuration of post-modernism (including post-structuralism) gained intellectual momentum in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to reflect on the *débat* of

Marxist revolutionary thought. Most of its leading authors, such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Andre Glucksmann were active Marxists before they became disillusioned post-modernists. The post-modern reflection of the Marxist critique of society which was predominant during the 1960s, made it clear that the Marxists tried to criticize capitalist modernity, but held on to one of its most predominant ideas. This is the idea that history has an *immanent* force and direction, which humans can rationally understand and actively partake in so that they can appreciate their actions not only as a fulfillment of history's meaning but also as a personal self-realization. This basic idea gave Marxist scholars in the social sciences, philosophy and history a firm conviction about the way they should take a stand, evaluate their position and the actual historical situation. It gave them the possibilities for a solid and comprehensive "Diagnosis of our Time", to quote Karl Mannheim's great title.

The modernist idea that history shows an immanent force and direction which can be rationally understood and implemented in subjective action has been left behind in post-modernism. The fundamental opposition which negatively unites this otherwise rather heterogeneous work of philosophers like Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida is directed against the Hegelian idea that history harbors a meaningful direction or end which can be rationally and systematically understood; an idea which had been turned into a historically grounded political program by Marx. In this respect the post-modernists repeated the dramatic transition that Theodor Adorno, but especially Max Horkheimer, made towards the end of the 1930s, as they moved away from a Marxist vision of history, under the lasting impression of the Stalinist regime (Baars, 1987). In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written during the Second World War we find already the typical re-actualizing of Nietzschean motives, such as the *interdependency of reason and power* that is also characteristic of the post-modernist position. They also emphasized the loss of the unity of rationality, morality and historical

development and were consequently criticized by the more traditional Marxists for not being able to identify, let alone *mobilize* a “revolutionary subject”.

Whereas post-modernism could be seen as a re-actualization of Nietzsche, critical theorists like Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas have also discarded the Hegelian heritage of Marxism and have returned to the more formal position of Kant. According to Habermas modernity must derive all meaning from itself, without being able to rely on any authority outside it. But he tries to establish a new universal (although modestly called *quasi-transcendental*) foundation of rationality and justice through the concept of communicative action, theoretical and practical discourses. The rational foundation for this endeavor, however, is a rather formal and *procedural* discursive rationality.

The post-modernists appear to be right in the sense that we cannot rely anymore on a rational comprehensive understanding of the meaning or *telos* of history, but they have often made problematizing into an aporetic style which is explicitly intended to lead nowhere; from rightly criticizing massive utopian programs to a-topian disorientation. But we cannot leave the world and are consequently always already involved in it, which makes a certain level of responsibility inevitable. Even Derrida’s pleas to dismiss the idea that language and, therefore, rationality could offer the possibilities to understand anything clearly or communicate any understanding unequivocally presupposes that this message comes across. The postmodern emphasis on differences and heterogeneity can easily become an academic cult which does not clarify but occludes the most important issues and, consequentially, puts *aesthetic* categories in the place of *ethical* considerations; a theoretical movement which is paralleled in post-modern social theories where important differences in life-*chances* are just presented as different life-*styles*.

Postmodern thinkers may contribute to the unmasking of inadequate understandings of modernity, but offer little with regard to thinking and acting responsibly in the situations

we are living in. I suggest, therefore, to leave the pseudo-apocalyptic terminology which has emerged in the expressions post-modernity, post-history, post-structuralism, post-humanism and so on. The term *reflexive* modernization appears to be a more adequate general term to characterize our present situation in an *evaluative* sense. Interpreting post-modern criticism from the perspective of reflexive modernization allows us to understand post modernist criticism as ways of criticizing *absolutist* pretensions of *massive* modernization. Reflexive modernization is a form of modernity which is responsibly aware of and confronted with its own limitations but tries to find better ways of dealing with problems that we cannot avoid or look away from. As I am using the same concept, this leads to a discussion of Beck's theory of reflexive modernization.

### **Reflexive Modernization in Critical Perspective**

In *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity* (1992), but especially in his later work (Beck, 1997), Ulrich Beck aims at an analysis of typical changes that occur as the process of modernization enters its *reflexivity*. In order to give a critical perspective on this theory I shall present an alternative vision of the process of modernization which is differentiated in three phases: *early*, *massive* and *reflexive* modernization. The reasons behind this differentiation are two-fold. First, the distinction between *massive* and *reflexive* modernization offers a perspective in which we can appreciate the strengths and shortcomings of post-modernism. Secondly, the origin of modernity in *early* modernization puts Beck's theorem of *individualization* in a broader perspective, showing its limitations especially with regard to his perspective on social inequality.

### **Early, Massive and Reflexive Modernization.**

Modernization is defined by Beck (1993) as follows:

Modernization means surges of technological rationalization and changes in work and organization, but beyond that it includes more: the change in societal characteristics and normal biographies, changes of lifestyle and forms of love, change in the structure of power and influence, in the forms of political repression and participation, in view of reality and in norms of knowledge. In social science's understanding of modernity, the plough, the steam locomotive and the microchip are visible indicators of a much deeper process, which comprises and reshapes the entire social structure. Ultimately the *sources of certainty* on which life feeds are changed (p. 50).

Modernity in this broad sense can be characterized primarily as a process of *modernization* which does not have a specific positive goal, but must rather be regarded as a movement "away from", away from still existing, but outdated and "traditional" experienced forms of life or ideas. This movement "away from" was characterized centuries ago by an expression which can be regarded as a traditional proverb of the spirit of modernity: "The air of the city makes one free", dating back to the earliest forms of modernity, when the cities in 12th century France offered freedom from feudal authorities (e.g. Le Goff, 1980). Of course the freedom which the modern city offered was by no means unconditional, but it was freedom *from* traditional forms of domination.

This early modernity of the European cities liberated the *markets* from feudal restrictions and liberated *adult males* from larger, pre-modern family structures so that they could have their own families. They could in principle all be a classical *pater familias* on a smaller scale, dominate the other members of the modern nuclear family and be the only one to work outside the house and to really count in the world. Individualization announces itself as an important ingredient in the modernization process, although in a limited form which can be seen as a modernized version of a much older *patriarchal* tradition. The liberation and

individualization of the male head of the nuclear family, ruling over his wife and children, continued into the 1960s until it fell prey to further modernization.

Beck's characterization of present society as a *Risk Society* takes place, however, in the context of an historical perspective in which the individualization which already characterized early modernization does not play an important role. To give *reflexive* modernization its specific status in his theory, the earlier phase of modernization is constructed by Beck as its preparation: the structural overthrow of a traditional society, rooted in feudal and rural relationships, through a rationalistic debunking of traditional prejudice and dogmas. The way to the future was paved by instrumental applications of rationality in the forms of efficient organization and productive technology which promised to lead to prosperity for all. I prefer to see this as a phase which came after *early* modernization and suggest it is called *massive* modernization. This phase of the modernization process was certainly reflected upon intensely, but these reflections led to a strengthening of the rational and moral eminence of the modernization process. To demonstrate this inherent connection between rationality and morality represented Kant's highest pride and ambition, a connection which was reaffirmed and strengthened in Hegel's philosophy of history. In this historical form it was reinterpreted by Marx, who turned this proclaimed Hegelian unity of historical moral rationality against the limitations that were posed by the societal structures, in order to free the full productive potential and actually realize the rational *and* moral goal of history. Marxism represented only a specific version of massive modernization, according to which society would be organized as the best possible world on the foundation of rational knowledge and its technological application. This is basically a continuation of the program of the Enlightenment as the intellectual movement that would establish a perfect rational world, freed from the errors of tradition, at the basis of a unity of rationality and morality.

Although there have been early voices opposing this process, especially of authors such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche who are preferably reread by the late 20th century post-modernists, the intellectual mainstream that accompanied industrial modernization was a testimony of its undoubted massivity. In this sense both extremes, Marx *and* his bourgeois opponents, believed in the historical mission of progressive industrial development. This massive phase of the modernization process got stuck as it only *modernized traditional forms of domination* and resulted in life forms which resisted further change. It got stuck and subsequently overthrown, as the dynamics of modernization have not come to a standstill. Modernization enters its reflexive phase when the industrial society itself becomes critically interrogated - and subsequently changed - by a further implementation of its own modern principles and predominantly among these: individualization.

Structures change because people begin to act differently. At such moments deviating people tend to be seen by the representatives of the challenged structures as (too) *individualist*; put otherwise, the structures are suffering from *individualization*. Throughout modernity every major change was a modernization of earlier modernizations and from its earliest phases the many shifts in the modernization process have been dismissed as processes of "individualization". This puts also Beck's theorem of individualization in some perspective. MacPherson (1964) referred to a *tradition* of "possessive individualism" when he discusses the work of the 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Marx worried about the uprooting of workers by modern production forces; Durkheim, who can hardly be called a Marxist, interpreted the change of mechanical to organic solidarity as an increase of individualism; Weber was again opposed to Marx as well as to Durkheim, but he too emphasized the consequences of a process of rationalization which had thrown the individual back on itself. In a report of the research he did among late 19th century agricultural workers Max Weber (1984) concluded in 1892 that they showed a "sharp individualism", wanting to

break away from the patriarchal community into a proletariat without a *Fatherland*. Finally, Tönnies (1887) worried about the loss of solidarity in the transition of the *Gemeinschaft* to the individualistic *Gesellschaft*; and one could go on adding to this list.

Beck's individualization is nothing more than a further development of the early modern emancipation which was limited to the liberation of male heads of the family who continued to dominate Western societies into the 1960s, until the baby boom generation and especially their feminist part revolted against this pattern. Women contested the modernized patriarchal tradition, claiming the *effectuation* of universal rights which had been a legacy of modernity for a long time. At the same time, the specific articulation of these universal rights has become one of the centers of a globalized clash between cultural traditions, making clear that theories of modernization have their own ethnocentric limitations. But for Western societies this process had many implications for both men and women as they were "freed" from many coordinates that were orienting life: family, profession, religion, uncritical belief in science and rational progress. This results in a different, more radical "individualization" as each person must answer the most important questions of life for him- or herself, without being able to rely on pre-given roles, answers or respected authorities.

As a result of these changes not only patriarchal hierarchies and morals but also many less traditional institutions and organizations have lost their appeal; Catholic, Protestant, Socialist and Humanist alike. In this conflict, the representatives of the traditions which were dominant until the late 1960s tend to see only the egoism and denial of the traditional values that have guided their communities for such a long time. Throughout Europe, we hear especially the complaints of the Christian Democrats who are defending (very different interpretations of) Christianity, trying to unite their internally clashing forces to keep something of their previous dominance alive. Equally, traditional socialists complain about the loss of solidarity as they understood it and finally we hear the complaints of the

conservatives who see traditional hierarchies, traditional interpretations of decency and obedience vanish. The cause of these complaints is often, as in Beck's theory, something supposedly "new" which is called *individualization*.

### **The Individualization of the Social**

Beck's problems with the concept of individualization become obvious when he refers to individualization by *homogenization* and to a *standardization* of individualization. I propose that the basic problem Beck tries to analyze and articulate in his theory of reflexive individualization, culminating in his characterization of individuals as "architects of their own life" is a *moral uprooting*. The *loss* of a unity of rationality and morality, the loss of the conviction that what is *rational* is also *good*, is the essence of Beck's reflexive modernization.

Concerning the theory of individualization a problem arises when the *moral* condition of individualization, meaning that everybody has to make his or her own decisions, without being able to rely on outside authorities, becomes mixed up with an *empirical* interpretation, implying that every individual is actually free in making decisions. An analogous problem occurs in Giddens's work (1991, 1992) when he identifies actor and agency: the moral evaluation that every individual must decide for himself or herself, because there is no outside authority to rely on, is misunderstood in an empirical way as if each individual is in fact the agent of his or her life. Although we can learn from many studies - sociology owes its existence mainly to this situation - that individual behavior is in many ways influenced, restricted or pre-programmed by societal structures and agencies, this societal structuring cannot fully enter the diagnosis of Beck and Giddens, although it is mentioned occasionally.

The different models of the welfare states, which could be seen as projects that were far from perfect, but tried to realize systems of solidarity which could be regarded as both

favorable for productivity and morally responsible in relation to social problems, have not been updated in order to become more adequate to face the new challenges of globalization but proclaimed to be definitively lost, as an unwarranted and unfounded unity of rationality and morality. The paradox is that the pretensions of a more superior unity of rationality and morality return in the idea of a “free” market which is home to the *homo economicus*, whose rationality is unfounded but frees the way to prosperity for those who “deserve” it. The *fact* of being prosperous is, within this logic, at the same time proof of its *moral* justification and an example for all.

This historical transition to a situation in which the market serves as both a rational and moral medium of progress has been shared by people who have witnessed the gradual decay of the welfare states of Western Europe (Guillemard, 1986) as well as by those who were suddenly freed from state socialism (Ferge, 1997). Of course, the individual *homo economicus* can only function as a tiny part of an overwhelming economic system which tends to dominate all other social relations. In this sense, the individualization is only a phenomenon at the surface, serving as an ideology for those who justify their unsocial policies by referring to “the individual” with his presumably autonomous preferences and choices. This “individualization of the social”, to use Zsuzsa Ferge’s term, has many important consequences, the most predominant of which is the eclipse of social inequality.

### **The Eclipse of Social Inequality**

The individualization of the social manifests itself clearly in the eclipse of *social* inequality, which is announced in Beck’s work as the “individualization of social inequality” (Beck, 1993). Here too, the distinction between *massive* versus *reflexive* modernization can throw some light on the meaning of Beck’s diagnosis. It makes sense to criticize massive Marxist programs which made social inequality the fundamental “class” dimension of society from which not only its present situation, but also its history and future development should

be clearly understood. In its classical form of inequality between the classes (related to the means of production) it was seen as the cause of all other social problems. Consequentially, by taking away this cause social *equality* should be established, organizing society in such a way as would have been shown in the absolutized understanding of history, in which rationality and morality are pretended to be intimately unified.

Contemporary criticism of absolutized, *massive* programs for the rational creation of a perfect world, free from social inequality and other mishaps, can easily be accepted and even strongly underlined as their historical manifestations have led to social disasters. But to conclude from this, that social inequality or social exclusion would have to disappear from the list of important subjects of inquiry and policy is quite another matter. Yet this eclipse of social inequality can be observed in the work of many important social theorists, who are devoted to develop a critical analysis of contemporary society.

We can see it not only in the work of Beck, but also in the work of Habermas and with some nuance, in the work of Giddens. In Habermas's critical diagnosis of our time, which follows his exposition of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987), problems of social inequality which gave rise to the post-war welfare states are theoretically approached as problems of the *distribution of compensations* by the welfare states. As a consequence of his thesis of the colonization of the life world, this compensatory distribution is suspect and partly for good reasons. But the result is that problems of social inequality in terms of material reproduction and, especially *unequal life chances* with their many different causes, are neglected in favor of conflicts that arise in the domain of cultural reproduction: "The issue is not primarily one of compensations that the welfare state can provide, but of defending and restoring endangered ways of life. In short, the new conflicts are not ignited by distribution problems but questions having to do with the grammar of forms of life" (Habermas, 1987, p. 392).

Giddens's diagnosis of our time shows the same basic tendency. In his view, *emancipatory* politics with their primary imperatives of justice, equality, participation and a focus on *life chances* must be left behind for so called *life* politics. This is defined as follows: "Life politics concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualisation in post-traditional contexts, where globalising influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realisation influence global strategies" (Giddens, 1992 p. 214). He criticizes Habermas for clinging to an old idea of trying to develop a framework for emancipatory politics in terms of a theory of communication. However, in his further elaboration of the relation between emancipatory politics and life politics Giddens admits that this is more complex than what he suggested earlier as a consequence of his theoretical exposition in *Modernity and Self-Identity*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Late Modernity - An Immanent Critique**

In spite of many differences and ambivalences which characterize the present it remains possible and even necessary to articulate critical analyses of a more general (macro) type, to give context and orientation to more specific interpretations, although in a more modest way than approaches which assume to have the forceful truth of history on their side. Such a modest approach does not mean that the criteria or ideas which can guide a critique must be abstractly constructed, without any respect for traditions. On the contrary, the leading ideas of critical interpretations can often be taken from the traditions of the societies concerned, but not in a *traditionalist* way, assuming that all was better in the past. The proposed method is rather an immanent critique which takes principles as criteria for criticism and orientation which are *embodied*, although not adequately, in the tradition and institutions of the society which is subjected to the critical interpretation.

The Western societies which are usually referred to with the concept of late modernity, face the challenge of continuing in an adequate way the most important principles

that have been brought forward by their traditions. Even if they have been realized inadequately or only used ideologically, without taking them seriously, they form an important part of their characteristic heritage and can be used as criteria to guide critical interpretations. Of course the orienting principles are not in any way self-evident, beyond doubt or important because they are traditional. They must be reflectively selected for their significance in addressing *contemporary* problems.

To give a well argued account of this complex problematic which would do some justice to the many differences between Canada, the U.S. and the countries of Western Europe or the larger European Union is far beyond the ambitions of this chapter. It must suffice to mention briefly some principles which have, in different forms, inspired social movements in the past to address important problems with disruptive consequences but are still worth striving for.

A first idea is the liberation of the individual in the sense of a *responsible self-fulfillment*, an idea which has been cherished by the liberal tradition. The realization of the idea need not necessarily be opposed – as in complaints about “individualization” - to the second basic idea which has been characteristic of the socialist tradition: *solidarity*. The development of individuals is not opposed to, but *presupposes* solidarity and a mutual acknowledgement that citizens are in many ways dependent on each other. This basic idea and ideal of solidarity has been something many modernist movements have been fighting for and implies a criticism of social inequality or exclusion in the sense of gross differences in life chances. Finally, the modern tradition has articulated in many ways a third critical idea: *human dignity*. This seemingly abstract idea has become urgently important again. Although human beings share an existence which is fundamentally fragile and never free from the dangers of suffering and becoming dependent on others, it may seem that some forms of revolutionary genetic engineering might fundamentally change the human condition. Even if

this would be the case, the fundamental respect for human dignity must be re-interpreted and re-established.

These three principles appear to present the most important challenges for a critical reflexive gerontology and serve as points of orientation for a critical approach to late modernity, in which these ideas have to be re-interpreted and re-vitalized. (See also Alan Walker, in this volume, about the articulation of Social Quality for the E.U.). Although the critical ideas may have been developed during modern history in an absolutist or otherwise distorted form, the critique of these distortions should not lead to abandoning them completely with the false argument that contemporary globalization would make them outdated. Generally, there are *different* paths that societies may (and do) take in the globalization process, as has been shown by Scharpf & Schmidt (2000), Scharpf (1999), and Sykes, Palier, & Prior (2001). It seems inevitable that globalization takes place in the form of *glocalization* as each region or nation state will also guard, articulate and emphasize its own specific identity and not disappear in an anonymous mist of globalization.

The three critical ideas that were referred to allow a criticism of contemporary dominant models of neo-modernism or neo-liberalism which over-emphasize and exploit the limited contribution that a market economy may have in terms of a flexible satisfaction of needs and an adequate distribution of resources to enhance productivity. In the following I shall argue that one of the basic strategies of the neo-modernist project to dominate late modern society is a *flexibly marketed colonization*, which transforms and threatens individualization, social relations, organized care and human dignity in specific ways. At the same time I shall try to clarify the helpless opposition which is characteristic for *anti-modernism* (including reactionary or fundamentalist positions) and *post-modernism* and point to the possibly crucial contribution of gerontological work.

## Flexibly Marketed Colonization

The concept of a *flexibly marketed colonization* shows some affinity with Habermas's concept of a colonization of the life-world (1987). It refers to the process in which flexible marketing *exceeds* its relative meaning and functions as a strategy to exercise and extend power. As in the more classical forms of colonization, its centers are still centers of *power*, which try to dominate the domains that interest them, although they are no longer only or even primarily nation states. These former agents of the colonization process have to share their power and are typically loosing their grip on the most important global players of the new forms of colonization. The colonization of *foreign* markets has become, however, just one possibility as the colonizing energy also turns *inward*, to the rich populations of the Western world, as they possess the material riches the colonizers are after. A continuity with historical forms of colonization is, however, that it is carried forward by the forceful, productive combination of natural science, technology and profit oriented enterprise which has been developed during the modernization process.

One of the premises of this critical concept is, however, that colonization is not just a one-sided, overpowering domination: colonization allows for counter-action but tries to change the *pre-conditions* under which social life takes place, in order to put it to productive use. Theoretical and practical forms of anti-colonization, remain possible but can, paradoxically, often be seen as essential for these new forms of colonization as they try to keep the systems flexible enough to *incorporate* rebellion or deviation in their operations as innovation. An important question remains whether these counteracting processes succeed in maintaining somehow their *non-identity* or are absorbed and exploited for a further sophistication of the colonization process. Ambivalence rather than clear-cut dichotomies are typical for this flexibly marketed colonization.

## **Flexibly Marketed Social Relations**

One of the main points of the post-modern and post-structuralist criticisms of neo-Marxist theories of society was their assumption of a total societal system, which could be turned around and guarantee freedom and affluence for all. The alternatives which were proposed emphasized the flexibility, ambiguity and differentiation of structures and processes. Deleuze & Guattari (1980), for instance, developed the idea of a *rhizome*, an invisible and underground network of offshoots that, unlike the tree which reduces the multiple into one, is flexible and its parts can even continue independently if broken. Basic to such approaches is the idea that societal systems are never closed, but always leaking; there is always something that flees and escapes the system and is not yet controlled.

In the last two decades these ideas were absorbed and used to innovate the systems. Postmodern constructions emphasizing flexibility, creativity and potentials have been integrated as a mode of accelerating the dynamics of the system, resulting in a neo-modern reinterpretation of the leftist criticism of capitalism (Ray & Sayer, 1999). Instead of hierarchic bureaucratic organizations that were typical of the postwar time until the early seventies, more flexible, market-like structures were introduced into the organization, to allow more personal space for the “autonomy” and potential of the workers. Through rotation of tasks, lifelong learning, marketable self-presentation, workers become strategically operating managers of their own career and life course. Post-modern, aesthetically inspired images of social relations as open networks that are able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes became appropriate paradigms for a capitalist economy based on innovation, decentralized concentration, resulting in endless rhizomatic deconstruction and reconstruction. The danger is that more solidarity-oriented forms such as collectively negotiated wages, job security and trade union membership are becoming residual and discarded as traditional. This changes the possibilities to provide for the needs of old age:

who cannot compete effectively during the relatively few years in which the capital must be earned and partially invested for the future will encounter material hardship while aging.

The strategies of a flexibly marketed colonization operate more by exclusion than through control. As too much energy would be lost in total control, the aim of colonization is to stimulate the colonized to act in ways that are beneficial for the colonizing system, by rewarding such behavior. Besides the people who are worth stimulating there are the categories of people who are irrelevant because they cannot be put to productive use or have stopped to do so, like older people.

### **Flexibly Marketed Lifestyles**

Although there have never been watertight walls between them, there is an increasing de-differentiation of culture and material production which has led to new phenomena (Crook, Pakulsky, & Waters, 1992). The production for contemporary markets in the richer parts of the world is not primarily oriented towards satisfying material needs, such as needs for protective clothing, food, shelter or transportation. It aims, rather, at a culturalized and branded mixture aiming to satisfy many needs at the same time. That culture has lost a certain autonomy and some of its internal differentiations such as *high* versus *popular* culture, does not make it less, but more important as it pervades all domains of life in the form of typical lifestyles. The classical distinction between *use*-value and *exchange*-value has lost its hold; the consumption of material objects can no longer be separated clearly from the consumption of lifestyle related images. Moreover, the production of images as such (movie, TV, internet and so on) has increased dramatically and their consumption has become of major economic and political importance, granting large corporations like AOL Time Warner, Disney and Bertelsmann an enormous influence and power.

Consumption goods are cast as images offering a certain *identity*, be it of the Armani, Benetton, Camel or Nike type. This does not lead to a standardization which is

connected with static forms of stratification, but to a dynamic differentiation which addresses no longer the desire to keep up with the Joneses but to be *different* from them. The subtle machinery of these branded differences of lifestyles is kept going by an integration of the revolt against consumerist conformity by rebellious young talent, which is absorbed and used as a way to innovate the supply of consumption goods through talent scouting and trend watching. Baudelaire's (1964) observation - 150 years ago - of the rise of the 19th century *dandy*, who aesthetically designs and invents himself and his life, has turned out to be an early announcement of this phenomenon which has become integrated in the dynamics of the markets.

In the last decades the further development of individualization, *getting away* from traditional community and family structures, was also made possible by the growing material resources flowing since the 1950s and 1960s also to others than the male heads of the family. This emancipatory move has been partially absorbed and manipulated by the commerciality of the market which designs the lifestyles of teenagers, young dynamic career builders and other possible *clientele* and typically emphasizes the independence and successfulness of the buyers of its most advanced products.

But manipulation does not appear to cover the whole story. The involvement in the dynamic market can also be regarded as a more "authentic" impulse of freedom, as Charles Taylor (1989) has emphasized, as far as it also makes it possible to explore and shape how people want to live. Also, the market of information in a broad sense helps people to get answers to many new and changing questions that confront them, where traditional values offer no convincing answers or have to be re-interpreted to be able to point to possible answers (Giddens, 1992).

Marketed lifestyles are related to phases of life and consequently, also to aging (e.g., Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). The lifestyle of the aged, but vital, adventurous and young-at-heart

is increasingly marketed, casting the successful cosmopolite man or woman, who can appreciate and afford quality. The dynamic market responds flexibly to spending power and offers the elderly who can afford this, opportunities to break away from what they see as traditional, outdated roles and self-presentations of the elderly. To be able to participate in these privileged activities and situations, a level of material and cultural resources is needed which illustrates that life-style, consumption and life chances become systematically interconnected.

### **Flexibly Marketed Service and Care**

The present orientation in care appears to be dominated by market oriented management, which aims at a restructuring of solidarity using the dynamics of the market. As a result of this, many traditional forms of *care* are supplanted by market-regulated forms of *service*. Many organizations specializing in care for the elderly show eagerly how they also, can operate in market terms and develop models of care that are preferably presented as both more *cost-effective* and *qualitatively* better. The criteria of such new models of service are often articulated by determining more or less precise *time-budgets*, in order to achieve specific *goals* that are presented explicitly to the clients. The dynamics of the market that assert themselves as the components of this *contractual care* are ideally a clearly stated organizational service. Such service should be rendered in a precise amount of time, approximating individual needs - be it the repair of a hip fracture or putting somebody's socks on - in the managerial terms of the organization. The market-oriented individual has to articulate his or her need in the established terms of an organization, which may offer something which might satisfy this need, the client gets this service within a clearly limited time span and pays the required amount of money in return, asserting his or her autonomy. This general model, which seems to embody the ambition of many care-managers could be

called a *pitstop-model of service* that may be adequate in terms of maintenance and repair but not for care, especially *long term* care.

This is not to deny that there is a certain gain in freedom which is indeed expressed in terms of "autonomy" in much gerontological research (Baars, 2000). This reflects the experience that the individual does not want to be dependent on axiological structures such as we find typically in traditional institutions. The individual can determine what she or he wants, without being bothered by values of traditional habits that are of no interest for this individual. He or she just receives the service as required, pays the money and leaves. The combination of advanced technology and market mechanisms has resulted in a premium on the accelerating effectiveness of health services. The autonomy of the market, based on articulated needs and contractual reciprocity presupposes the ability and readiness to assert one's autonomy and opt out.

The uncritical embrace of these developments is characteristic for *neo-modernism*. What this consumption oriented service misses may become clearer when we compare it with the ethics of care as they are articulated by Berenice Fisher (e.g., Abel & Nelson), Gilligan (1997), or Tronto (1992). The presupposed market-model of two contractual parties who agree on a service to be delivered or go elsewhere is, however, a source of problems for those persons who are really *dependent* on care and cannot *afford* to roam the market for better offers. Efficiently organized *service* is not an adequate model for care, especially not for *long term* care. Moreover, market orientations do not build nor support mutual solidarity. That is often rightly put forward by the representatives of more traditional forms of solidarity. But the anti-modernists fail to acknowledge that the traditional forms of solidarity were often bought at the expense of excluding whoever did not accord with the norms or values of the particular community. These particularistic tendencies and other weaknesses have been repeatedly and typically criticized by the *post-modernists*, who however, have not been able

to point to alternative ways of living together. The *anti*-modernists, as advocates of traditional forms of solidarity rightly point their finger at this but fail to inspire those who are not attracted to their particular brand of traditional values. They welcome the freedom that the market offers and join the neo-modernists, which causes the representatives of traditional orientations to call even more loudly for a re-awakening of traditional values.

### Human Dignity and a Flexibly Marketed Colonization of Life

In the last few years time we have witnessed an accelerating increase in activities in the domains of bio-technology, cyber-technology and nano-technology. The media are filled with the sensational, excited, worried or disoriented comments about phenomena as DNA, RNA, cloning, xeno-transplantation, genomics and so on. After the bio-technological creation of Dolly, the new Eve of sheep, we have been able to see many other marketed creatures: ranging from the transgenic mouse Oncomouse, the first patented animal in the world, designed and marketed for cancer research, to more ordinary generations of genetically modified bulls and cows to produce better steaks (Best & Kellner, 2001; Haraway, 1997; Vandenberghe, 2002). And, of course, there is a more or less hidden race to produce the first cloned baby.

These developments may imply for gerontology a fundamentally new approach to aging as its technologically advanced branches will proceed from traditional *receptive* modes such as description and analysis to more *active* modes of technological *design*. This challenging and precarious gerontological situation which is characterized by unforeseeable consequences can easily be extended and exaggerated into a fundamentally new technological horizon. In these visions every living being might be characterized as a specific variation of a general DNA text, a *hypertext* of life in which every form of life is reduced to bits and digits, explored by computer programs which simulate the evolution of life opening the door to endlessly expandable informatics of life (Haraway 1991; Hayles 1999).

Consequently, in these techno-fantasies there would be no naturally occurring genome that cannot be experimentally (re-) designed, culminating in the objectification of life in complex anorganic living *cyborgs* (cybernetical organisms). (For analysis of the related issues raised by the anti-aging industry, see King & Calasanti, this volume.)

All these possible or impossible but certainly unforeseeable developments can easily lead to fantastic excursions into realms of doom or bliss. Even to statements that such qualifications are still too *anthropocentric* to be able to grasp the newness of the emerging technological world. For the most advanced techno-sectarians such as transhumanists and extropianists, the reality is that our 1400 cc brain cannot cope with the complexities of the technological world, which would imply that we must try to control our evolution by trusting ourselves to cyber-technology, loading the contents of our brain down in more complex computers which are supposedly better equipped to deal with the accelerating realities.

These projections can easily be seen as continuations of modern philosophy's preoccupation with subjective consciousness. The Cartesian search for the immutable laws of a rational consciousness which becomes, from a position of splendid isolation, confronted with an *outside* reality, has been transformed into a search for the technological structure of the human brain as the origin of an artificial intelligence which would lead far beyond imaginable horizons. This is the moment for a resurrection of massive modernist dreams, before they were in a Hegelian fashion attached to historical processes. This a-historical mode of thinking is more typical for the early Enlightenment which counted on reason to decipher the ultimate codes of nature, building on Galileo's thesis that the hidden text of nature would be written in the language of mathematics. Presently nature is supposed to be written in the text of genetic codes and its discovery has become connected with the same promises of safety from illness, decay and death through efficient control over nature which already inspired Descartes' work. Technology appears to get ready to play the role of a

supreme creator whose ways may again be a mystery to man. In combination with expanding markets this leads to exalted *neo-modernist* dreams.

The extreme positions in these debates may easily be neutralized, but there are nevertheless serious problems confronting us. What have been the major responses to these neo-modernist projections?

The *post*-modern reflection of these developments has disappointingly little to offer. In its perspective the worried questions about *human dignity* are seen as inspired by outdated modernist ideas which merely limit the possible forms identity may assume. As human beings become what they can be - thanks to technology - there can, according to Deleuze & Guattari (1980), no longer be any opposition between human and machines. The whole idea of alienation would be hopelessly old-fashioned and essentialist: when there is no clear essence of humanity, this cannot be alienated or damaged. Here, cyber-technocratic dreams praise the neo-Nietzschean death of Man, which was proclaimed by post-modernists and post-structuralists like Foucault, who concluded his well-known work *The Order of Things* by stating that Man disappears like a face playfully drawn in the sand of a beach. What can be regarded as *human*, is in other words nothing more than the result of discursive formations. Adorno & Horkheimer (1972) have grasped this process already in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, by showing that in terms of an uncritically absolutized domination over nature, “man” can only be an anthropomorphic illusion.

A flat rejection of contemporary or future technologies, such as brought forward by the *anti-modernist* position is, however, not a realistic option because technological devices have already entered human bodies. Simple external aids such as glasses, hearing devices and crutches have been followed by implantations such as pace makers, artificial (parts of) organs, artificial hips and other joints. In many situations of treatment and care the human body is connected to machines which take over many bodily functions. It is likely that in the

near future not only many more forms of transplantation and implantation will be practiced, but all kinds of artificial intelligence, bio-and gene-technology will invade our bodies. It is also likely that we will learn to know and accept many devices that may seem nowadays unacceptable, as we know from history that dissection of corpses and - much more recently - transplantation of hearts or artificial insemination have ceased to be unacceptable to most people.

One important part of a possible answer to the almost overwhelming perspectives of recent bio-technological perspectives is to point out that this technology is *socially* constituted (Baars, 1991) and should not be treated as a self-creating myth. These technological developments require enormous investments and are driven by markets which are also targeting the aging populations of the Western societies. They thrive on the pseudo-existential fears of the over-affluent part of the world who are angered by the fact that they cannot buy or considerably prolong their own existence. That this is not possible should not be interpreted as a technological imperfection, but as the dignity of the (inter)human condition (Baars, 2002).

There may be a fundamental *ambivalence* we cannot get rid of. But the aging population of the next decades will especially be confronted with these developments, either as objects of experiment, or as consumers of new forms of technology or as donors of organs. Is the gerontological “community” ready to handle or fundamentally discuss these new responsibilities or will they leave them to the investors? There are many questions that urgently need to be debated. I give some examples which can easily be elaborated:

- To the degree that the development, production and purchase of technological prosthetic devices in a broad sense will be governed by market forces, they will, consequentially, become available only to those clients who can afford them. There are inevitable effects on insurance schemes as some devices will be very expensive.

Living longer and staying mobile may become even more dependent on income and capital than before.

- Even if the personal effects for health and well-being would be unequivocally positive, the person with an implanted device such as a pace-maker becomes *bodily* connected to a market beyond his or her control. This leads to a whole complex of questions concerning the protection of personal interests regarding such dependencies.
- The medical success of technological prostheses may enforce the present preference for quick medical repair and maintenance instead of care, especially long term care.
- What are the implications for gerontological contributions to these developments? Are we losing all control as soon as knowledge becomes implemented and market forces take over; forces which are notoriously difficult to control through nationally based political regulations? How can responsibility still be possible (e.g.. Habermas, 2001)?
- What does this all imply for our ideas about human dignity? Will the human body even be more predominantly seen as a machine?

These questions with all their ambivalent implications may be difficult to answer but if we don't even take them seriously we give ourselves up to a myth of cyborg-technocracy, behind which operate mainly the market mechanisms of globalization.

### **Critical Gerontology Beyond Neo-Modernism, Anti-Modernism and Post-Modernism**

The contemporary debate about general societal developments and their desired orientation is dominated by three main positions which should be transcended by reflecting on the positive and negative elements of each of them, in the light of modern principles which are still worth considering: *responsible individual fulfillment, solidarity and human dignity*.

*Neo-modernism* (or neo-liberalism) has become a dominant orientation which emphasizes the dynamic qualities of the market which appear to function in many respects

better than bureaucratic alternatives which have been tried in the socialist experiments. This dynamic and flexible character of the market tends, however, to become idealized as the *only* societal form of integration or regulation that counts. In this form it represents a *colonization* which defies the freedom that is marketed by the mass media, culminating in the equation of a *free market* with a *free world*. The critique of colonization which I have proposed focuses on situations or social domains in which market forces and marketing models are dominant where they should *not* be. For instance, when *quality* of care is defined in market terms, when intergenerational *solidarity* is seen only in terms of capital returns, when education is seen only in terms of investing in future income, or when citizens are taken seriously insofar as they can take care of themselves.

The *anti-modernists* are clearly dissatisfied with this neo-modernist domination of the market and appeal to community values, traditional forms of solidarity and care. They rightly worry about many private vices which they cannot, like Mandeville and Adam Smith see as public virtues. But they often presuppose and absolutize specific normative or religious orientations which tend to exclude each other; consequentially they have difficulties in accepting the multicultural society and the fact that many people develop personal preferences, for instance in their sexual conduct, which is unacceptable in their world views. Politically they often end up supporting the neo-modernists in a common appeal to “*personal responsibility*” which is alternatively and ambiguously interpreted in a *moral* sense and in an *economic* sense, so that personal responsibility can suddenly mean that everybody has to take care for their own material well-being in old age, preferably through investments they cannot control.

The *post-modern* position represents the second helpless criticism of neo-modernism. Its representatives emphasize with good reasons the importance to *respect* differences. But their analysis of society has been so strongly colored by the criticism of

absolutist political programs that they contend themselves with respecting singularity or mere differences in life *styles*. In that way they lose sight of social inequality or exclusion which refer to major differences in *life chances*: differences that should not be respected but thoroughly questioned because they are likely to cause many problems in present life and in the future life course of the people concerned and in those of their offspring. The problem of social inequality or social in/exclusion refers to structurally constituted *decisive* differences in life chances, that cannot be explained away by referring to individual differences, such as talents, but have to be explained by analyzing social processes and structures without advocating collectivist models in which singularity or differences should be banished. One important contribution of gerontologically interested scholars could be to show how decisive differences in life chances are built up and produce their detrimental effects over the life course.

### **The Crucial Importance of Critical Gerontology**

To untangle these factors there should be a gerontological cooperation between several disciplines. Such a cooperation requires that structural approaches are conducted besides and in close contact with more interpretive or narrative approaches as both have their own contributions to make.

The importance of *narrative* approaches to aging is that through them we can learn more about the personal meaning of aging in certain situations, than is possible through standardized empirical surveys. The emphasis on narrative as a method, moreover, has valuable normative aspects as their subjects are *approached respectfully* as persons with “expert” single or double knowledge about their own lives and experiences (Baars, 1997). This does not legitimate a simple empiricism of story-telling but poses complex questions as implicit theories and models of narrativity shape the ways in which the experiences of the persons concerned are articulated and organized (Baars, 2003). Moreover, narrativity does

not justify ways of living or actions, nor can it serve to justify specific *circumstances*; this would potentially be a repressive use of narratives. Listening to the story of somebody who has suffered under miserable conditions but dealt with them magnificently does not justify the miserable circumstances or make them less problematic.

One of the tasks of the structurally oriented paradigms would be to analyze the structural production of problematic situations, referred to above as social inequality or social in/exclusion in a life course perspective. For instance, mechanisms that allocate different life chances to different categories of people *during* the life course, from childhood to old age. Or mechanisms which produce structural advantage or disadvantage of institutionalized *phases* of the life course, where the period after gainful activity is particularly vulnerable as it is economically residual and may be seen as only of importance in terms of spending capacity or as an expensive burden of care (Walker, 1981, 1990).

Dannefer (2003) has articulated the paradigm of cumulative advantage and disadvantage over the life course with reference to many investigations which have highlighted the phenomenon of social inequality in the sense of decisive differences in socially constituted life chances, that are built up and accumulate their negative effects over the life course (see also Burton & Whitfield and Crystal in this volume). Other examples can readily be found, such as the *feminization of poverty in old age*, which is reasonably well documented (although not given adequate attention) and cannot seriously be explained by referring to the individual talents or insufficient efforts of the women concerned. It is rather a result of the cooperation of different factors such as gender specific education, labor market dynamics and pension systems (Walker & Maltby, 1997). The German BASE-project also presents ample documentation about the effect of social inequality into very high ages (Baltes & Mayer, 1999). Finally, evidence about the effects of various forms of social inequality such as poverty, social exclusion, minorities and unemployment over the life course can be found

in research on social determinants of health (Marmot & Wilkinson, 1999; see also Leisering & Leibfried, 1999).

The structural approach cannot deduct from its analysis how specific circumstances are *experienced* by the persons living through them; here a narrative approach has a better chance. But the narrative perspective cannot clarify how the circumstances that are shown in the narratives as generating problems are produced and how they can be structurally improved. Both paradigms have their own indispensable value.

The earlier criticism of Beck's "Risk Society" and its individualization of social inequality can be followed by critical research: exploring the social distribution of risks as life chances from a life course perspective, might result in the critical reconstruction of several different life course trajectories which typically accumulate positive and negative life chances. There is still a case for social inequality and exclusion as certain societal mechanisms shows their *effects* in different life chances for categories or groups of individuals, without implying that these differences *originate* from differences between such individuals. Not all differences in the late modern society are differences of lifestyles that should be accepted and valued in their own dignity. Some differences are less easily acceptable. We can say this without claiming that everybody should be equal.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the exploration of these issues is not something in the periphery of orthodox social gerontology. If it wants to contribute to the complex issue of understanding aging, its specific task would be to slowly disentangle processes of *aging* from the *negative effects* of social factors on people over a long period of time. The understanding of the effects of major differences in life chances over the life course, as referred to in the updated concept of social inequality leads to a better understanding of the social constitution of aging (Baars, 1991; Walker, 1981) which goes beyond the old Ciceronian saying that "old age is sickness of itself".

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>"Thus far, emancipatory politics has been described as though it were merely the preparation for the emergence of life politics. The relation between emancipatory and life politics is, of course, more complicated than such a view would suggest" (Giddens, 1992, p. 228). As could be shown more extensively, Giddens mixes up two distinctly different phases in Habermas's work. He criticizes Habermas for something he was trying to develop in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), but actually abandoned by the time he wrote *The Theory of Communicative Action*" (1981).

## Acknowledgements

I want to thank my fellow editors for their intellectual solidarity and especially Alan Walker for his clarifying comments on an earlier draft of this text.

## References

- Abel, E., & Nicholson, M. (Eds.). (1990). *Circles of care: Work and identity in women's lives*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Appadurai, A. (2001). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Baudelaire, C. (1964). *The painter of modern life and other essays*. London: Phaidon.
- Baars, J. (1987). *De mythe van de totale beheersing. Adorno, Horkheimer en de dialectiek van de vooruitgang*. Amsterdam: SUA.
- Baars, J. (1991). The challenge of critical gerontology: The problem of social constitution. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 5, 219-243.
- Baars, J. (1997). Concepts of time and narrative temporality in the study of aging. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 11, 283-296.
- Baars, J. (2000). Time, age and autonomy. *European Journal of Social Quality*, 2, 9-27.
- Baars, J. (2002). *Ouder worden en de fragiliteit van de intermenselijke conditie*. Utrecht: University for Humanistics.
- Baars, J. (2003). Tell me your life. Questioning narrativity. Unpublished manuscript.
- Baltes, P., & Mayer, K.U. (1999). *The Berlin aging study: aging from 70 to 100*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U. (1997). *Reflexive modernization: Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*. Stanford University Press.
- Best, S., & Kellner, D. (2001). *The postmodern adventure: Science, technology and cultural studies at the third millenium*. London: Routledge.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Oxford: Basic Blackwell.
- Crook, S., Pakulski, J., & Waters, M. (1992). *Postmodernization: Change in advanced societies*. London: Sage.
- Dannefer, D. (2003). Cumulative advantage/disadvantage and the life course: Cross-fertilizing age and social science theory. *Journal of Gerontology*, 58B, S327-337.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1980). *Mille plateau: Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*. Paris: Minuit.
- Ferge, S. (1997). A Central European perspective on the social quality of Europe. In W. Beck, L. van der Maesen, & A. Walker (Eds.) *The social quality of Europe*. The Hague: Kluwer.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archeology of knowledge*. New York: Harper.
- Foucault, M. (1973). *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Gardner, K. (1995). *Global migrants, local lives*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gardner, K. (2002). *Age, narrative, and migration*. Oxford: Berg.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Giddens, A (1992). *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in a late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gilleard, C., & Higgs, P. (2000). *Cultures of aging: Self, citizen, and the body*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Gilligan, C. (1977). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Guillemard, A.-M. (1986). *Le déclin du social*. Paris: PUF.
- Featherstone M., Lasch, S., & R. Robertson (Eds.). (1990). *Global Modernities*. London: Sage.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communicative action (2 vols.)*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Habermas, J. (1997). *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen theorie*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, J. (2001). *Die zukunft der menschlichen natur. Auf dem weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik?* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, D. (1997). *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millenium. FemaleMan© \_Meets\_ Oncomouse™*. London: Routledge.

- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The condition of postmodernity: An inquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T.W. (1979). *Dialectics of enlightenment*. London: Verso.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. London: Verso.
- Kunneman, H. (2002). Humanistics and the future of the human sciences. In A. Halsema & D. van Houten (Eds.) *Empowering humanity* (pp. 13-36). Utrecht: De Tijdstroom.
- Le Goff, J. (1980). *Time, work and culture in the Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leisering, L., & Leibfried, S. (1999). *Time and poverty in Western welfare states*. Cambridge University Press.
- Luhmann N. (2000). Why does society describe itself as post-modern? In W. Rasch (Ed.), *Observing Complexity: Systems theory and postmodernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lyotard, J.F. (1984). *The postmodern condition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Lyotard J.F. (1998). *The differend: Phrases in dispute*. Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Lyotard J.F. (1993). *The inhuman: Reflections on time*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Marmot, M., & Wilkinson, R.G. (Eds.). (1999). *Social determinants of health*. Oxford University Press.
- Mannheim, K. (1943). *Diagnosis of our time*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Phillipson, C., Ahmed, N., & Latimer, J. (2003). *Women in transition. The experiences of Bangladeshi women living in Tower Hamlets*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ray, L., & Sayer, A. (Eds.). (1999). *Culture and economy after the cultural turn*. London: Sage.
- Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalization: Social theory and global culture*. London: Sage.
- Scharpf, F. (1999). *Welfare and work in the open economy*. Oxford University Press.
- Scharpf, F., & Schmidt, V. (Eds.). (2000). *Welfare and work in open economies*. Oxford University Press.
- Sykes, R., Palier, B., & Prior, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Globalization and the European welfare states: challenges and change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self. The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Tönnies, M. (1887). *Gemeinschaft und gesellschaft*. Darmstadt: WBG.
- Tronto, J. (1992). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. New York: Routledge.
- Vandenberghe, F. (2002). Posthumanism, or the cultural logic of global capitalism. Unpublished manuscript.
- Weber, M. (1984). *Die lage der Landarbeiter im Ostelbischen Deutschland*. Tübingen: Mohr.

**Walker, A. (2004, 21 November). Towards an international political economy of aging. Paper presented to the Gerontological Society of America.**

Walker, A. (1990). The economic “burden” of ageing and its prospect of intergenerational conflict. *Ageing and Society*, 10 (4), 377-396.

Walker, A. (1981). Towards a political economy of old age. *Ageing and Society*, 1(1), 40-55.

Walker, A., & Maltby, T. (1999). *Ageing Europe*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Walker, A., & Deacon, B. (2003). Economic globalization and policies on aging. *Journal of Societal and Social Policy*, 2, 1-18.