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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**School of Social Sciences**

**Rethinking the Social: From Society to Zones of Social Making**

by

**Jeffrey Matthew Vass**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2010

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ABSTRACT

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RETHINKING THE SOCIAL: FROM SOCIETY TO ZONES OF SOCIAL MAKING

by Jeffrey Matthew Vass

‘Apocalyptic’ theories of the social, from different theoretical schools of thought, declare that diverse social, cultural, economic or technological changes have impacted negatively on contemporary social life to the extent that the social is reduced, minimised or is even ended. In particular, macro-historical changes have had consequences for the regions in which actors communicate, interact and socially construct. These pronouncements are concurrent with some lack of confidence in social theory itself. While accepting that the characteristics of modernity have substantially altered since the nineteenth century, this thesis argues that inadequate attention has been given to the way in which its consequences for ‘sociation’ have been conceptualised. Three schools of apocalyptic thought are identified and discussed: ‘dislocation’ theorists (Habermas, Giddens and Bauman); social constructionists (Berger, Berger and Kellner) and cultural absorptionists (Baudrillard, Lash and Urry). In each case the consequences of change have been registered to effects and experiences in the ‘ground of social activity’: i.e. reciprocity, mutuality and situated exchange show more ironic distance, insincerity, moral expropriation, ambivalence, alienation, simulation and dissimulation. This thesis argues that our understanding of this ground of social activity, based on a simplistic model of reflexivity and skill, is not at a detailed enough level of analytic resolution to warrant these claims. However, in identifying flaws in the development of apocalyptic claims, a more sustainable account is produced, ‘the zone of social making’. Based on a return to the work of Weber and Schutz, the new account suggests that the symptoms of late modern life are better viewed as chronic features of sociation, constitutive of constructive activity itself. An alternative, more detailed model of activity is proposed.

## Acknowledgements

**Pozzo:** We give birth astride the grave. The light gleams for an instant and all is darkness once more (*Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett)

I have spent some time returning to the same spot, marked by the same props, in the expectation that something shall arrive. Time will tell if it has. Words cannot express what is owed to those listed here in what, here, amounts merely to an acknowledgement of their tarrying with me at the spot through some years of part-time study.

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## Abbreviations Used

'Chapter x' always refers to chapters in this thesis

The following are used occasionally and references are given in the text

CP refers to Collected Papers vols 1,2 and 3(Schutz)

TCA refers to Theory of Communicative Action vols. 1 and 2 (Habermas)

CES refers to Communication and Evolution of Society (Habermas)

CPST refers to Central Problems in Social Theory (Giddens)

CHM refers to Critique of Historical Materialism (Giddens)

CS refers to The Constitution of Society (Giddens)

SCR refers to Social Construction of Reality (Berger and Luckmann)

ZSM refers to the zone of social making

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

“Sociological interpreters lack the concepts that would enable them to capture descriptively a specific experience of modernity, one that is present to them intuitively.” (Habermas, 1998: 150)

### **1.1 Rationale**

The argument of this thesis can be described simply. It takes issue with contemporary social theories that too freely identify a selection of human experiences as symptomatic of our, apparently, radically novel contemporary social life. It engages, in particular, with a number of ‘apocalyptic’ theoretical positions that argue that ‘the social’ is in crisis, that it has been reduced, minimised, liquified or has ended. These theories are found to be grounded in the observation that contemporary social experience is now, variously, replete with: ontological insecurity, ironic distance, insincerity, uncertainty about social rules of engagement, lack of trust, social parody, inauthenticity etc. It has been claimed that the social is compromised because the ‘ground’ of social life, underpinning social bonds, has been breached and damaged by the properties of late or post modernity. These observations about human experience are generally correlated with what has happened to societies in the middle to late twentieth century such that deep seated, radical change, brought about by transformations in capitalism, consumption and globalisation are held responsible for the changing character of life at the level of human interaction and situated engagement with the world.

The issue taken with these positions is, firstly, that they have too poorly defined the character of this ‘ground’ of experience where indicators of social change are manifested. As they stand the same indicators, it is argued, could apply to any time period in the development of western societies. Secondly, key flaws in the development of these theoretical positions are identified showing where and how inadequate thought has been given to crucial moves in the establishment of the correlation of this ground with the experience of social structure and action. The flaws identified, forming the focus of discussion, are key to any revisions to our understanding of ‘the social’. The social is conceived as ‘sociation’: the form and character of human action at the level of practice as well as ‘sociality’ the form and nature of the social bonds implicated in practice. The

focus of the thesis, progressively, is the domain of social engagement: *sociation* (cf. Outhwaite, 2006). This domain, to date, is more the site of sociological *concern* rather than *analysis*. Analysis, of late modern change, tends to be reserved for global and societal change. This thesis provides some balance to this tendency within the discipline. Critical revelation of the ‘ground’ of *sociation* in apocalyptic theories is the platform constructed in the first half of the thesis, Part One: *Apocalyptic of the Social*.

The critique of Part One is not to undermine, but to establish a revised basis to proceed in understanding the social. In Part Two I do two things. Firstly, taking the critique of established theoretical positions I construct a theoretical schema of ‘activity’ with greater structural focus on the ground of *sociation* and *sociality*. I argue that this provides in outline an approach to rethinking how features of human experience might be better related to historical changes and to the quality of social action. This revised approach is able to examine better any differences that might pertain between, say, instances of ironic distance in different kinds of social and historical context. Secondly, and principally, it argues that far from indicating the end, or irreversible reduction, of ‘the social’, what are often identified as ‘experiential symptoms’ of late or post modern life should be thought of as endemic to, occasionally constitutive of, the ground of the social. This is the main task: to provide greater resolution to the ground which is alleged to have been compromised. In the development of the latter case a new theoretical position is provided in outline form that takes as its primary focus human activity in its sense-making, coherence-making striving: i.e. its ‘constructive’ modality. Within this outline of human action, experience and the ‘feel’ of social life is built in from the start. We need to move beyond the Weberian inauguration of our understanding of social action towards a different kind of approach, but one adumbrated in Weber’s own work. The basis of that approach is set out here in the description of ‘zones of social making’.

Finally, the position reached in the thesis on the fate of the social does not deny that far reaching, radical changes have taken place globally over the last 75 years, nor does it deny that these changes have penetrated the fabric of social being in ways that should inspire concern. But the sociological account of this now requires more detailed analytic concepts that have greater sensitivity and higher degrees of ‘resolution’ with regard to the character of social communication and action.

## 1.2 Apocalyptic of the Social

‘Apocalypse’ refers to views that find the reduction, minimisation, end or other compromise of the social giving rise to experiential ‘symptoms’ as above. Radical changes are said to have occasioned the compromise of the ground of social life: it is the site of ‘structural violence’ (Habermas, 1984). But theoretical exploration of this feels increasingly inadequate as more attention is given to the ‘lack of vocabulary’ in sociology for present purposes (Habermas, 1998; Gane, 2004). Indices of societal change tend to be quantitative but very vague, for example: *more* digitalised relationships; *greater* penetration by the state of individual existence; *greater* time-space *compression*. To these we can add the measurable parameters of globalisation according to Held et al (2002): the levels of *intensity* and *extensity* of processes present within capitalism from the end of the fifteenth century. The *quality*, as opposed to the *quantity*, of change, however, is always more obtuse, contingent, localised and ‘refracted’ i.e. caught in occasional experiences, literary genres and rhetorical struggles around identity. Where a focus on solidarity becomes a matter of identity work (Crow, 2002) the feeling is that it operates in the shadow of larger processes now inhospitable to it.

The available conceptualisations of the ‘compromised ground’ of social action, the traditional notions of mutuality, reciprocity, co-presence and co-operation, rapidly become limited. New theoretical attempts at understanding *activity* and our experience of it are called for. We lack generalisable, high resolution concepts to engage with the quality of sociological bivalencies: experience and discourse or social system and the lifeworld. There are three reasons to look at this. Firstly, since Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel we have striven to develop a sociological understanding of human action as embedded or contextualised in some way by the social world however the latter is conceived. For Marx the form human activity takes had to be understood within a context of primordial human co-operation, forming the basis of his understanding of the social. For Durkheim human activity has its origin, form and end-point in the social. Weber conceived of activity as a kind of *techne* that subordinates its form to the social (e.g. by becoming oriented to values). And Simmel thinks of activity as a form of exchange within a context of more

generalised human ‘association’. “Now every interaction is thought of as a kind of exchange” (Simmel, [1907] 1971:43).

The relation between activity, experience and the social was secondary to the concern to understand ‘sociality’ in its uniquely ‘modern’ guise. Any attention paid by these writers, and those that followed, to the *form* human activity takes arises from different kinds of problems in their work to that of a theoretical discourse for grasping ‘society’. Marx’s (1970) anthropology of human labour as a form of co-operation seems like a footnote to historical materialism. Weber looked at social action mostly in the context of problems of developing methodology. While we may be well-equipped to understand what has happened to modernity, our grasp of the ‘ground’ of sociation and experience seems much woollier and fraught with contradictions. Looking anew at human activity, with a view to understanding its changing character and quality, is timely if modernity has become ‘post-social’ (e.g. Knorr Cetina, 2003). Indeed, Bauman (2002), Outhwaite (2006), and Gane (2004) for example, refer to the fragility of the concepts of the social and of society. Whatever else these observations portend there are implications for our understanding of human activity, its form and its connection to sociality (whatever form that too now takes).

Secondly, re-thinking our approach to human activity and its experience in everyday life should enable a revision of the place of experience. Recent sociological explorations of emotions, for example, (Williams, 2001; Milton and Svasek, 2005) have sought to re-prioritize this aspect of the social. It seems recidivist to think of experience as merely a ‘refracted screen’ on which changes to modernity ‘flicker’.

Thirdly, re-thinking human activity is occasioned by the crisis engendered in social theory itself by the loss of faith in its legitimising object: the social. Gane (2004) questions if there can be a future for social theory if we cannot grasp anything connected to human activity that can be sensibly called its ‘envelope’, whether that is ‘society’ or even social ‘context’. Others, for example Dowling (1998; 2009) and Lopez (2003), refer to the use of terms such as social and society as mythologizing strategies and metaphors respectively and advise that we should remain sceptical and cautious about attempts to assert the existence of ‘underlying objects, relations or forces’ about which any generalised discourse can be intelligibly constructed (Seidman, 1995). At the British Sociological Association

annual conference in 2007 an attempt was made to reconvene a theory group. It was discussed whether there was now any need for such a group given that grand theoretical projects have ended and that theory is developed better perhaps in proximity to whatever diverse phenomena sociologists happen to be studying. Lack of faith in theory, or at least the caution that surrounds it, has implications for research methodologies. If social research methods can be defined as ‘the ordered search for orders’ then without theoretical legitimacy they would appear to be at best administrative activities for rhetorical purposes and at worst accomplices to sophistry. It is remarkable that empirical sociology grows at a time when theory dices with self-abnegation.

It is difficult to continue as a sociologist without having a go at resolving aspects of the problem of the social and its theorisation. A famous joke that, it having been finally proven beyond all doubt that God does not, after all, exist, the Pope declares nothing changes, the important thing is that, as always, Catholics will continue to attend mass. If total faith is impossible then at least there should be something to doubt. My colleagues in a division of Sociology and Social Policy continue to report for duty (or make their presence felt) despite the number of claims that the normative object of their work, the social, is no more. If not disingenuous then is this explained by ironic sentimentality or perhaps specious credulity? If my faith is in, say, ‘actor-networks’ then can these be investigated just as well by ergonomists or marketing strategists?

### **1.3 Methodological scepticism and the counterfactual posed**

The social is threatened by the multiplication of arenas in which identity has to be laboriously constructed (Bauman, 2002). Authenticity is compromised by a split in selfhood between ‘actor-managers’ and the impressions they manage. But might a Goffman say ‘it was ever thus’? The ‘everyday’ of Goffman’s presentation of self (Goffman, 1969) is an always-everyday account where Seneca wakes up and faces (generic) problems of social engagement similar to those of Bauman. The props may change but the structure of social life in its ‘idealized’ form is universal (cf. Jenkins, 1996). Or, possibly we detect, along with Baudrillard, a historical shift such that I manage so many impressions of myself I have lost a sense of any original. Does the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) alter the props so much that the

‘flows’ they facilitate (Urry, 2000; Lash, 2002) change the fundamental character of identity and its management?

My starting point is sceptical because, aligned with Habermas’ (1998) observation, it is only my *intuitions* that suggest the quality of experience has changed. Perhaps this is better captured in the works of novelists and critics, Beckett, Pinter, Amis and Steiner, rather than in sociology. These writers express palpable differences in the character of social encounters now to those witnessed in, say, Jane Austen. By contrast, social exchanges in the eighteenth century for Goffman (op.cit.) may be compared directly to today’s in their similarities. So, where do essential differences register sociologically? If ‘postmodern life’ is, say, more parodic (Jameson, 1988; Butler, 1997) we should understand what parody means in social action. Hutzcheon (1989:102) argues that in late modernity we “have witnessed a proliferation of parody as one of the modes of ...self-reference as well as of conservative mockery.” But she speculates that this is a consequence of ideological instability contextualized by the questioning of norms: *but* something that late modernity shares with the sixteenth century when there was a similar rise in parodic exchange. Morson and Emerson (1990) discuss transformations in the character of parody itself between these periods, arguing that an ‘all-round’, indiscriminate parody has given way to narrower forms that today minimise rather than extend the possibilities of communication. These arguments at least give more detail on the transformation of everyday social exchanges and their conditions. They strongly hint that parody is less a novel symptom of late modern life than a changing constituent of it.

‘Times have changed’ is an expression applicable in any age. Hegel was motivated by feelings of ‘estrangement’ owing to the “deep problems of division and fragmentation in modern [i.e. eighteenth century] life” (Plant, 1997:11). Changing times generally refers to people’s sense of the everyday and its mooded quality. It is nothing new to suggest that mood and feeling, the emotional backdrop of everyday life, is somehow linked to the nature of social, material, economic, political and agonistic conditions. While Athens celebrated an artistic and political flowering in the fifth century B.C.E, social achievement was shot through with nostalgic regret at the passing of a ‘heroic age’ (Walbank, 1986). The rise of Rome as an imperial power in the first century C.E. was accompanied by the development of an intellectual class that concerned itself with the loss of republican values

and civic virtues (Ogilvie, 1988). Fifteenth century Rabelaisian satire and, ironicisation of church and aristocracy stand, chronologically, within the ‘enchantment’ of feudalism and not after its demise (Appendix 1). These remarks express my suspicion of any new discovery of late or postmodern symptoms of experience where there is no sustained attempt to look in more detail at their structure, character and context. So, it is to more detailed examination of sociation and the ground of activity I want to turn.

#### **1.4 Turning attention towards sociation: Delanty, Bauman, Outhwaite**

Delanty (1999) argues that the theoretical malaise of postmodern theory, oversensitive to people needing to voice all kinds of experiences in the late twentieth century, may be regarded as a ‘course correction’ in social theory rather than an indication of change so fundamental that social theory is redundant because the social has ended. He suggests that recent and emerging theory can be resituated in a framework along with the canonical founders. Modernity can be grasped sociologically by reference to a fundamental relation between autonomy, a cultural-political process with traceable roots in the historical events and strivings of people, and fragmentation, a socio-economic process progressively recontextualising and changing the *quality* of their autonomy. I discuss the work of Bauman, Giddens and Habermas as societal theorists of ‘dislocation’ (chapter 2) who subscribe to a modernity that persists, but in radically different way to the modernity of the nineteenth century (Lee, 2004; Smith, 2009). They focus on the impetus for fragmentation at the societal level but see the regions in which our autonomy is engaged (or disengaged) as sites where fragmentation is felt. Dislocation theorists register the effect of fragmentation on the (cultural) means by which we understand, elaborate, articulate and experience our local circumstances. The problem for sociology has always been couched in terms of integration and order in the face of the forces and phenomena of differentiation and division.

“It was always Marx’s contention that the problem with bourgeois political and cultural modernity was that its normative content was not realised in social relations. Today, this tension in the two faces of modernity – the cultural impulse and its social project – is more pronounced than ever before. There is the suggestion that the social may be at an end, destroyed by endless fragmentations.” (Delanty, 1999:2)

Delanty identifies an original concern with a split between where sociality was going and the direction of feeling and expression. There are two reasons for taking this formulation as a starting point. Firstly, Delanty has delineated the inauguration of modernity using terms that relate to theorists of dislocation and the region where the dislocation is felt in the *quality* of cultural experience: the local deployment of knowledgeability, creativity, reflexivity. In developing the notion of general aspiration toward autonomy as a relationship between agency and cultural knowledge realisable by reflexivity and creative work ‘mood’ appears. As he says,

“Modernity, then, above all, refers to *the encounter* between the cultural model of society – the way in which society reflects and cognitively interprets itself – and the institutional order of social economic and political structures.” (ibid.:11 my emphasis).

Secondly, Delanty, proposes that the denouement of the end of the social turns optimistically today into a debate about creative ‘cognitive’ labour and how it is deployed in ‘the encounter’. Newly important in this model are the hermeneutical features of action, its ‘interpretative capacities’. Others (e.g. Bauman, 2002) see new forms of ‘cognitive labour’, imposed by the ‘liquid’ character of late modern life on our hermeneutical capacities as a symptom of the problem rather than a platform for a new sociality. In Part Two I examine what is entailed in the focus on people’s hermeneutical *engagements* and whether a ‘cognitive’ approach is entirely sufficient. I question the historicity, form and character of this engagement and its implications for our understanding of human practice. The cognitive turn within sociology, and through it the return to centre stage of agency, provides me with the platform on which to focus and develop my own theoretical position. In alignment with Delanty, though with different conclusions, both my theoretical criticism and the development of my own position narrows discussion from broader societal context to the communicative and constructive arenas in which the issues of the coherence of human actors and their activities, problems with the formation and maintenance of social bonds and the experience of modernity are, for me, most poignantly highlighted. Here I align with Bauman and suggest things may be grim, but they were ever so. In discussing the first three horsemen of the apocalypse, Bauman, Giddens and Habermas, I narrow the scope of my thesis to the region of the communicative, constructive arena: *sociation*.

The problem of the social returns us to the ‘scene of (as)sociation’. Current reviews of the fate of the social and of society share some family resemblances in approach. For example, both Outhwaite (2006) in *The Future of Society* and Bauman (2002) in *Society Under Siege* return to ancient Greek sources in order to identify key categories, concepts and words that were originally coined to grasp the essential characteristics of what it is like to both experience individual, or local, interests and needs and to engage these with what it is like to be involved in a larger civic space containing others to whom one is not intimately linked by kinship or household<sup>1</sup>. It is attractive to consider these early civic spaces because they give us a sense of how a vocabulary develops which has to deal with the experience of trying to situate local and individual interests together with a social world where others are bound to each other by a sense of orientation to the ‘public thing’ that occupies a civic space. A return to such sources promises less cluttered insights into the mysterious space of social relations as individual, household and political or religious institutions interact in the marketplace. Bauman and Outhwaite, by feeling the need to invoke etymologies in this way, actually make a radical move with regard to the condition of modern social theory. The move suggests that approaches to contemporary social life need to pick up the threads again of discourse about the grounding conditions of the social in the context of any new uncertainty about the concepts now available to us to think about human association and the activities it predicates. Human activities are conceived as ‘grounded’ in forms of association. As such activities are sensitive to this ground and the forms that association take, or fail to take, in it. Durkheim and Weber and now Bauman and Outhwaite are attracted to thinking through how early experiences of this awareness, that one’s activities straddle more than one sphere, impacts on the character of social life. I call further on this return to sources in Part Two.

Taking an historical view of the evolution of discourses of the social now foregrounds for Bauman (2002: 41) the role of sociology in producing ‘metaphors’ like ‘society’ in any case. The Greek marketplace that constituted the concrete immediacy of private and civic spaces is already a distant legend at the start of the nineteenth century and sociology. The societal stage of modernity developed a vocabulary of social experience in different ways. Reflecting on this new language Bauman asks if the social is merely a function of

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<sup>1</sup> Households could contain, for example, in addition to immediate kin, debentured workers.

discourse, a fiction? In posing the question one might ask ‘what is real for Bauman?’ The answer is *experience* itself. This can be the experience of solidarity marshalled from within the political discourses of the nineteenth century or the experience of ‘the thinking elite of the early modern era’ for whom the metaphor ‘society’ “...chimed well with what they knew and felt; the kind of ‘sociological imagination’ it triggered stayed close to their daily experience.” (Bauman, 2002:42, my emphasis).

For Outhwaite too this is important. At a time when the loss of faith in the object of sociology sends us back to defining moments in ancient sources, he structures his argument around the question of the ‘reality’ of the social. This inevitably leads him into a philosophical, particularly metaphysical, line of questioning. He draws on Bhaskar’s (1975) distinction between three kinds of realism in order to locate the one most appropriate to the sociological idea that supra-individual entities and processes explain pattern (and its loss) in human affairs. Empirical realism (direct correspondence between sense and reality), transcendental idealism (indirect correspondence through the medium of models of reality) and transcendental realism (this posits real underlying structures giving rise to events and empirical observations) these are all competing stances with respect to the reality of the social. Ultimately, Outhwaite sides with something closer to this third, critical realist, position. He suggests that our experience of ‘social events’ can be mapped onto some kind of underlying reality rather than that our experience of ‘society’ subsists only in our ‘perceptions’ of the world (idealism).

Outhwaite’s line of exploration is very much in the tradition of Weber, Simmel and others for whom the philosophical foundations of a social science are important starting points. His arguments for the recovery of a sense of society pass through many of the positions discussed in Part One, but ultimately exclude the possibility of identifying this ‘real social’ with social ‘system’. If we can sensibly refer to a real thing called society or what Outhwaite refers to as ‘a realist ontology of the social’ (Outhwaite, 2006: 91) then it must be about understanding human *activity* as reproductive of its own conditions. In other words, Outhwaite locates the social, as I do, very much in the transformative capacities of human activity. The starting point of the recovery of the social, at the culmination of his attempt to set out a new synthesis, is within the vicinity of something he refers to as ‘sociation’: “Society is the product of sociation, the actions of individuals in structured

contexts.” (Outhwaite, 2006: 95). I agree with the outcome of Outhwaite’s discussion but I believe there is little further to be gained in re-thinking social theory at this stage by arguments centred around philosophical realism. I later discuss the idea of the ‘ground’ of the social and develop this in quite a different way. My construction avoids metaphysics. If we look again at the philosophical possibilities Outhwaite provides for we see that there is a logical *fourth* possibility that Bhaskar fails to identify and one which is much closer to the position that I am aiming for. Table 1.1 shows the dimensions that Bhaskar operates with and also shows a space left for a fourth possibility which proves instructive here. It provides for a conceptual space of what sounds at first like a contradiction in terms: *empirical idealism*. It cannot be a contradictory position, leastways as a consequence of the dimensions Bhaskar brings into relationship with one another, or his metaphysical edifice collapses.

Ontological Status of the Social		
Mode of Revelation (presence) of the Social	Realism	Idealism
Empirical	<i>Sense/Reality correspondence (Positivism)</i>	<i>Material Virtualism (the fourth possibility)</i>
Transcendental	<i>Underlying structures generating empirical events (Critical Realism)</i>	<i>Sense/Reality Indirect Correspondence (Kantianism)</i>

**Table 1.1 Table showing ontological status of the social against mode of revelation of the social**

The fourth position here is attractive to develop because I argue for the centrality of experience as well as its material inscription in the world. ‘Perception’, for example, in my account has to be a material, embodied practice following the critiques of Habermas in chapter 2. I retain some important features of Habermas’s idealism in the framework I develop later in Part Two. The challenge is to generate an account of sociation and action that shows their ‘virtual’ qualities (chapter 8) as *materially present* and not arising from some realm elsewhere. In addition, and with a view to the ‘social apocalypse hypothesis’ I argue that what we regard as ‘symptoms’ of the demise of the social are simply new

relationships to constituent ‘virtual’ properties always chronically available in sociation and activity and not products of, and peculiar to, late modernity. Indeed, my position is that virtuality is an endemic feature of social practice rather than something new to have to deal with as a consequence of the development of ICT communication forms.

Agreed that the recovery of the social starts in understanding ‘sociation’ as Outhwaite proposes. However, Outhwaite himself does not go on to explain what this entails, nor how a new account might engage with the historicity of his approach. I agree with Bauman’s and Outhwaite’s direction that the answer to the question lies in the vicinity of ‘in what sociation consists’ and what our experiences of this are like, and their instincts in returning to ancient sources. Indeed, Part One proposes that whichever way we come at it all the arguments for the end or reduction of the social take us back to the ‘scene of sociation’. Sociation, whether conceived as Giddens’ co-presence, or Bauman’s sociality, or Habermas’s lifeworld, is the primary site identified by all for the performance or detection of the end of the social. So, while I agree with all the writers reviewed who highlight the scene of sociation in this way I do not think that any further philosophical analysis of a metaphysical kind will help elaborate anything useful about it. Producing a new account of sociation will not arise from any metaphysical analysis deciding whether or not the social is ‘real’ or whether there are, or are not, real underlying ‘forces’ (see Shotter, 1993 and Vass, 1998 for discussions contra Bhaskar’s “realist” position) . However, it is useful to position oneself philosophically relative to others as in table 1.1.

While a philosophical discussion would be interesting as a philosophical pursuit, it is a more important first step, as Parsons advocated (1949), to clarify the conceptual space of the social in the wake of the revisions to positions that have been found wanting from an analytical or empirical viewpoint. Indeed, following Parsons’ (1949) and Foucault’s (1972) examples, the aim of Part Two is to set out the key terms of a revised conceptual space that focuses on sociation and yields key chronic features of the social. The re-working of this conceptual space involves taking into account the critiques of the arguments concerning the end of the social presented in Part One. The arguments reviewed there identify *the region* from which we might recover the basis of the social: the rather elusive and mysterious ‘ground’ of social life. The positions discussed in Part One suffer from a series of biases that need addressing in any revised account. In brief, these

biases include: an overly ‘cognitive’ view of human activity which systematically marginalises the non-rational aspects of human action; theoretical dependence on non-rational processes which fail to appear in the description of the development or practice of those processes; an understanding of process exclusively based on rationally clear phenomena like ‘goals’, ‘motivations’ and ‘purposes’ but where these terms and expressions become interchangeable between ‘subjects’ constituted by processes, and ‘individuals’ constituted by civic discourses resulting in a theoretical mess.

### **1.5 Question of the thesis and scope**

The zone of social making approach is elaborated in Part Two to the extent required to address the issues raised in Part One. That is to say it answers the question ‘what kind of account of the ‘ground’ of social life is needed in order to understand how the ‘symptoms’ associated with social apocalypse, the compromising experiences of the ground, are related to it? Are they outcomes, symptoms or constituents endemic to it?’ The account offered answers the question by arguing that in most cases the symptoms of apocalypse are not only endemic to everyday social life but also actually constitutive of its formal properties.

To elaborate this argument means moving from the societal level of analysis to features at and below reciprocity and mutuality. In his discussion of ‘globalisation and the social’ Ray (2007) connects discourse about changes at the societal level to the situated, locales in which actors sustain their solidarities arguing that the global is not just local but,

“*only* local in that it is always an abstraction from the experiencing self attempting to make sense of myriad relations of information, imagery, culture, networks and effects within which lives are enmeshed.” (Ray, 2007: 64 emphasis original)

Similarly, Knorr Cetina’s (2003) discussion of ‘post-social’ relations constructs a path from a consideration of the panoply of societal pressures impacting on the regions in which subjectivities are problematically assembled. My thesis takes a similar path and scope, searching for how we can nail ‘the elusive ground of the social’ from firstly the societal viewpoints that prophesy its demise to those like Garfinkel (1990) who probe its, arguably, fragile properties.

There have been numerous recent attempts to develop a range of theoretical work in the wake of the declaration of ‘the end of the social’. Toews (2003) directs our attention to the work of Tarde, accepting that the social should be recaptured, if anywhere, in the minutiae of activity; Freitag (2002) in a monumental historical task details the ‘dissolution of society within the social’ through the decline of the normative dimension in postmodern societies. Others turn to the body or technology (e.g. Turnball, 2006) as a site to recover what remains of the social in ‘virtual life’. Although of fundamental importance, much contemporary work fails to define what is supposed to have been eroded that in some sense grounded the social at root. This thesis further clarifies the root of the problem before proceeding to test its presumed demise.

## **1.6 The Organization of the Argument**

Part One looks at three versions of the apocalypse of the social and pursues the ‘ground of the social’. Chapter 2 examines the works of ‘societal theorists’ Giddens, Bauman and Habermas whose take on the ‘ground’ arises from a Parsonian framework. It is from a sensitivity to what Parsons took as the social glue that initiates their concerns with what are seen as contemporary threats to it and the symptoms of inauthenticity, ironic distance, extra hermeneutical work to which they give rise. Chapter 3 examines the work of social constructionists (Berger, Luckmann, Kellner and Schutz). Here I identify a sense of the origin of the ground of the social to which many of the theorists considered here defer. I examine Berger et al’s own theorization of modernisation as the threat to the ground of the social and point out that this vintage work already adumbrated the concerns that sociology now finds itself once again in thrall to. Chapter 4 takes the work of the ‘cultural absorptionists’ (Baudrillard, Lash, Urry) who claim that the social has been absorbed into culture and flows. In each chapter the purpose is to make explicit what the ‘ground of the social’ is and how it is, said to be, compromised. I look in some detail at the constitution of this ground and provide new critiques of their conceptualizations of it. In all cases the arguments come down to a problem of ‘sociation’: what has happened to the character of social performance in the sense of how people ‘make’: speak, interact, produce, labour etc. It is the quality of these engagements that all ultimately comment on and by which they detect fundamental shifts in the quality of the character of social life.

Part Two is a theoretical reconstruction of the ‘ground’ of social life. Chapter 5 draws together the critical problems established in Part One and identifies that some cherished social theoretical terms need to be fundamentally revised. Mutuality and reciprocity, for example, simply do not give us any detailed sense of what is happening in sociation, there is nothing, for example, by reference to them that could help us determine whether or not anything was peculiarly modern or simply a chronic condition of human practices. Other cherished concepts such as social ‘action’ and ‘rule’ are identified as requiring revision along with the unrefined way in which social theory employs the temporal dimension in understanding activity and skill. The concepts of ‘activity’ and ‘skill’ are disassembled. In sociology skill seems more an assumption than a problem. It needs opening up. These revisions are initiated by a return to Weber and taking another path from within his formulations of social action and rule towards the ‘zone of social making’ position.

Crucially, chapter 5 identifies the generally accepted model of activity, based on a dialectic of ‘reflexivity and skill’, is at the centre of all the theoretical approaches that make claims about the apocalypse of the social. The model is embedded in social thought generally albeit used in different ways. Giddens’ structuration theory and Bourdieu’s habitus both make use of versions of it. However, I argue that the basic separation of skill and reflexivity is not refined enough analytically for theorists to make claims about how body, experience, thought and reflection may, or may not, change as a consequence of social, cultural and technological changes.

The new position is a theoretical and analytical project working in the tradition of relational sociology and with reference to canonical texts. It is spurious to take what are first thought of as new ‘postmodern’ experiences like “feeling[s] of anxiety, out-of-placeness, loss of direction” (Bauman, 1995:194) and construct a sociology around them as if such feelings were entirely new. Indeed, sociology is in danger of continuously re-inventing the wheel (Scott, 2006). Part of my purpose in returning to Berger et al’s (1974) account of *The Homeless Mind* in chapter 3 is to suggest we may have been here before many times. “We are never at home: we are always outside ourselves” writes Montaigne (1991:11) in the sixteenth century. So, rather than throw out baby, bathwater and bath I advocate retaining canonical sociological anchor points. My method is to return to Weber and Schutz, for example, and identify, in some of the marginalia of their works, alternative

paths. The advantage is surer footing for otherwise freakish ideas, and greater freedom to explore them, because ‘one knows how to get back and find one’s way about the problem’. Wittgenstein (1951) said that philosophical problems had the form of ‘not knowing how to find one’s way around’. If the sociology of contemporary experience is of this order then it is a foolhardy theorist of experience who abandons all guidebooks in exploring it.

Chapter 6 does two things. Firstly, it presents a series of empirical case studies that make claims and counter-claims about the erosion of the social as a consequence (in these particular cases) of new technologies or geographical mobility impacting on everyday activity and experience of the social. At stake in these examples of mobile phone users, migrants to new neighbourhoods and a ‘virtual’ medical examination, are changes to aspects of identity, role, institution, professionalism, bodily experiences, insecurity etc. Secondly, I argue that these cases, interpreted through three different versions of the reflexivity-skill model, are *undecideable*. The reason for this is that this ‘two-layer’ model, being somewhat opaque and inscrutable, cannot demonstrate how *orientations within aspects of activity* could develop and change.

Chapter 7, based on the cases considered in chapter 6, provides an alternative way of talking about activity by creating concepts that have higher degrees of resolution than ‘activity’ and ‘skill’. The latter concepts are dismantled into sub-regions of activity. A ‘four-layer model’ of the flow of activity is developed. Through elaborating the latter we begin to see how the features of social life identified as symptoms of social change in Part One are better accommodated as orientations within activity always chronically available to it. Chapter 8 deals with the problem of how activity, as defined in chapter 7, coheres and defines its essentially social character. The zone of social making consists of highly heterogeneous, often conflicting, modalities of activity that require to be made coherent by form-giving practices. The essentially social character of these ‘strategies of coherence’ completes the present description of the zone of social making by going below the level of reciprocity, mutuality and co-operation and looking again at form-giving structures like rules and intersubjectivity in a different way. Chapters 7 and 8 constitute a ‘splitting of the sociological atom’, i.e. of concepts notionally taken to be the atomic units of social life: skill, reciprocity etc.

## 1.7 Argument Strategy

The division into Parts One and Two is for ease of reference in the text. Part One offers detailed, original critique of established work. Part Two uses this and other work either in corroboration of, or to distinguish it from, the new position developed. No attempt is made in Part Two to critically engage with the entirety of works recruited to develop the zone of social making (ZSM) idea. The position is based on the proposition that it is unwise to develop a new sociology around new phenomena unless it can be determined that existing formulations are exhausted by them. In order to reduce the contingent nature of theoretical development ZSM works firstly from the ‘canon’. If we get the impression that late or post-modern life generates a sense of social interaction replete with feelings of ironic distance or a rise in parody, the recommendation is to first see if this is accommodated by the canon, or elsewhere in the historical record.

The *methods* used to develop the ZSM analytical framework is based on relational social theory in the tradition that connects Durkheim (1976), Parsons (1949), Bernstein (1971, 1994), Douglas (1971, 1975) and latterly Dowling (1998, 2009). The description developed of the ZSM here does not draw on the same content, but similar methods insofar as it works by developing a series of analytical dimensions of sub-regions of social action and shows, by relating them to each other, how they might constitute pattern and experience in social action and communication. The major difference between my work and theirs is that I am not using the methods to look at the social above the ‘social plimsoll line’. Douglas (1971), for example, looks at how the dimensioning continuum of perceptual classification can be related to a continuum of social group type (grid/group). Bernstein looks at a continuum of family type against communication style in the home. My ‘dimensions’ are below the visible line of groups and institutions. The late modern concern with parody, irony etc. emerges not from an inability to identify the empirical facts of social life above the plimsoll line, but their constitution, emergence and application. Thus, I may be Catholic and stick to eating fish on Fridays, and more so if I am an Irish émigré, according to Douglas. We can investigate strength of identity and adherence to rules empirically. The problem now however, according to Bauman and others, is not *that* I stick more rigidly to the rule in elaborating my ‘irishness’ in exile, but *with what irony or ambivalence I relate to the rule itself*. It is not just joining a group, but

also the feel of my alignment with it. Similarly, with Bernstein's (1971) take on working class, positional families where rules for who washes up are established by family position, and middle class 'open' families where who does the washing up may depend on negotiation. The issue below the institution/group 'plimsoll line' is the degree of irony and ambivalence with which one aligns with the rules. The challenge here is in extending the analytical method down into the grounding conceptual material of rule, mutuality, reciprocity etc. The second aim in using my method is to generate a *sociological* description for all phenomena under review. With other theorists discussed (e.g. Giddens, Habermas) there is a tendency to eclectically draw on psychology inappropriately (chapter 2). The terms of reference for a theoretical thesis adopted are to achieve at least one of the following:

1. A new critique of the current limits of debate
2. The specification of new limits.
3. Outline of the parameters of a new theoretical position

The first, is the aim of Part One; the second, the aim of Part Two where chapters 5 and 6 attempt to examine new limits and show how they apply in practice. Chapters 7 and 8 outline the parameters of a new position.

## **PART ONE: APOCALYPTICS OF THE SOCIAL**

## **Chapter 2: Human action at the end of the social: the dislocation thesis**

“The social theory of modernity presupposed the unity and coherence of the social whereas today the social is increasingly being seen as in crisis, if not at an end.” (Delanty, 1999: 3)

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter does three things. Firstly, it sets out the background to the arguments of key theorists who tell us that the social, as defined broadly within the Parsonian framework has diminished or is ending through the ‘dislocation’ of the zones of everyday human activity from the larger contexts that define and penetrate them. Secondly, I discuss how these arguments boil down to fears about ‘sociation’: the everyday regions of human interactivity and experience where ‘irony’, ‘inauthenticity’ and ‘insincerity’ affect the ‘pores of communication’. Sociation, I argue, is the analytical region where the problem of the apocalypse of the social precipitates. The theorists in this chapter identify macro events and forces that are responsible for the diminishment of the social, and generally view the issues from a societal point of view. They treat the problem in different ways, but I propose that there is a sufficient ‘family resemblance’ between each position in that each sees contemporary life as a falling away from the kind of integration Parsons thought necessary for social order in both its societal sense and within human action (cf. Smith, 2009). Thirdly, I examine where and why sociation figures so much in the arguments of Habermas and Giddens in some detail. A critical engagement with Habermas and Giddens shows inadequate theorisation of key moves in their work that have not previously been addressed: shifting between different analytic registers; blurring hermeneutical and embodied aspects of action; and, the use of flawed psychological socialisation theories. The purpose is not to disprove their version of ‘the apocalyptic hypothesis’ by exposing these inadequacies, but to elicit what needs to be done to produce a more coherent position.

In seeking to understand the consequences of apocalypse for the moral scope of social activity and the ethical contours of action we start with Parsons’ system, where lifeworld, experience and discourse are analytically coterminous. So, I shall set the background for those coming after him who theorize in relation to his integrationist framework. The aim is

to extract from the debates about integration those issues that impact on our understanding of the quality of action and experience in, what they term, the lifeworld.

## **2.2. Dislocation, sociality and the Parsonian paradigm**

Parsons et al (1951) sought to establish an analytic framework through which the disparate and localised events that comprise the human world achieve and reproduce stability and integration. The social ‘arena’ of interactions is where actors move with institutionally regulated deployment of resources (e.g. natural and cultural). Social institutions draw on the same cultural and normative ‘orientations’ that actors have been ‘socialised’ with and characterise their own involvements in the social arena. The quality of interactive styles, however argumentative with interlocutors, is grounded in the same “standards” by which argument is legitimately resolved. Parsons never abandoned the basic conceptual schema of ‘society’ (qua social system), ‘culture’ (qua cultural system) and ‘personality’. Here the Weberian approach to the ‘cognitive’ aspects of the performative social arena of thought-inspired action became subordinated to the Durkheimian problem of integration.

‘Dislocation’ refers to the Parsonian image of integration.

All three concepts of the basic schema have suffered different fates in theoretical work. Culture has been promoted to a principal feature of the analysis of modernity. Indeed some believe that society has been ‘absorbed’ by it (chapter 4). Personality, from starting off in the wake of Durkheim and Freud, and constructed as a contingency for the system to resolve, has been relativised and deconstructed (Burkitt, 1992). It is the silent, passive or redundant partner in theoretical analysis. However, society has been the most resilient concept until relatively recently. The ‘social system’, in Parsons’ definition is a performative domain where we find the staging of sociation. It approximates to other theorists’ use of ‘lifeworld’. For Parsons’ ‘social system’ is an *analytic* component devised for the task of relating social interactions, and the institutions in which they are embedded, to human ‘needs’ and the culturally enshrined ‘standards’ that the idea of integration suggests. But this *palpable* field of active expression, conflict, testing of standards, politics, the pursuit of ends that meet needs and the experiences to which all this gives rise takes the form of a communicatively active social arena. As Habermas suggests

(1987) the lifeworld is Durkheim's conscience collective as seen from the inside. Therefore, 'social system' is an analytic convention Parsons deploys in the context of understanding a '*societal* system'. But the *referent* of social system is clearly a performative arena where the social constructivist issues I examine are found.

### **2.3.1 Reducing the social through dislocation**

The dislocation thesis is predicated on the following: (i) an account of the historical transformations that have led up to our current circumstances, the heightening tensions of modernity. This account, shared by Giddens, Habermas and Bauman among others (Appendix 2), traces the process by which the lifeworld and its socially integrative work becomes 'uncoupled' or 'disembedded' from the social system. (ii) A desire to resolve tensions within social theoretical problems arising from the conventional problem of order. (iii) An exposition of the performative and social constructivist difficulties facing the actor as a consequence of dislocation, but, allied to this, is (iv) a concern to generate a 'deep' understanding of the consequences of modernity with regard to the 'ground' of human action and what it is to construct, make, do *at all*. This is much more developed in Bauman, but this issue forms part of the texture of others' arguments and is the aspect that tends to herald discussion of the 'experience' of modernity.

For example, Giddens (1992) describes a shrinkage of the social such that the resources of integration become part of (what is now) the additional work of shared lives in the marginal spaces of the system. Where that 'work' fails to achieve reflexive attention to the needs of the other with whom one shares intimacy then the default position of shared routines oriented to life's necessities forms unattractive dependencies e.g. co-dependent relations like the two Old Gits (Enfield and Whitehouse, 1998) whose acerbic interactions are as unpleasant as they are essential. Here, order and coherence in everyday life is delivered by the contingent and iterative responses to the other's 'addiction' to grumpiness. Mutuality is tiresome in proportion to the always uncertain striving toward something hopeful.

Shrinkage of the ethical and moral space down to interpersonal communication and creativity is given in Giddens (1992) as predicated on social and ideological changes

connected particularly with the rise of expertise and the ‘sequestration’ of experience in modernity. However, the ‘transformation of intimacy’ was a phrase first used in his critique of historical materialism the defining text of structuration theory (Giddens, 1981). Here, the minimisation of the social arena, and the transformation of intimacy, begins in the historical product of the pervasiveness of ‘capitalist-industrial urbanism’. In this context routinisation (in traditional societies the key to ontological security because it is strongly embedded in the normative frameworks of tradition),

“embodies residual traditions, as all social life must do; but the moral bindingness of traditionally established practices is replaced by one geared extensively to habit against a background of economic constraint.”

And,

“Large areas of the time-space organisation of day-to-day social life tend to be stripped of both a *moral* and a *rational* content for those who participate in it. ...[The consequences are] potentially severe and important to the experience of authority...In the everyday life of capitalist society ontological security is relatively fragile...” (Giddens, 1981: 154).

Although Giddens’ later works address popular audiences about the condition of modern social life, his ideas are grounded in an extensive critique of the implications of capitalist transformations. His account is based on a theory of action where socio-historical change is indexed against cumulative changes to the ‘transformative capacity’ of human action over the archaeological and historical record as well as the cumulative consequences mapped out in the forms of labour, city, countryside and so on. The reduction of the social is linked to the expropriative effects on the normative conditions of action in the development of capitalism and its socio-spatial forms. For Habermas likewise the problems that beset the social begin in an early historical analysis in which he too considers the changing context of intimacy (Habermas, 1989). Focussing on the ‘structural transformation of the public sphere’, he considers the expropriation of the normative and pedagogic function of the family during the course of the development of modernity. His historical analysis of the separation of state and society resulting in the development of the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ leads to the claim that,

“The economic demands placed upon the patriarchal family from without corresponded to the institutional strength to shape a domain devoted to the development of the inner life. In

our day this domain, abandoned under the direct onslaught of extrafamilial authorities upon the individual, has started to dissolve into a sphere of pseudo-privacy. [] This surreptitious hollowing out of the family's intimate sphere received its architectural expression in the layout of homes and cities." (Habermas, 1989, [1962]:157).

In Habermas's later work are realised the full implications of the processes producing this cleavage. The cleavage impacts on the social, conceived latterly as communicative action. Emerging twenty years later, the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984; 1987) was grounded in a similar historical framework to that of Giddens (1981). Ultimately, Habermas renders integration as communicative activity in the performative social arena, the lifeworld. The condition of modernity is where the lifeworld is 'uncoupled' from the social system. In order to appreciate what are, today, the special conditions, dangers and difficulties pertaining to this 'uncoupling', we need to understand how Habermas construes 'the social'. For him the 'ground' of the social is accessed through the object of Mead's attention. Moral commitments and the ethical contours of social life are rooted in the norms that situated actors communicate in their expressed expectations and obligations. In turn, such capacities are embedded in the mutuality that enables socialisation and communication in activity and performance. The 'ground' of social life lies in the reciprocal interpersonal bonds that have a rational basis in the communicative practices of the actors involved. Mead is usually invoked in the context of connecting social 'role' to norm. But a close reading of Habermas's discussion (TCA II), and also his earlier work (CES), show that Mead, like Habermas, is concerned with the *character and quality* of the 'social bond' in, for example, what constitutes 'sincerity of engagement'.

The 'ground of the social' and the problem of sincerity is pursued further, here and chapter 3 and Part Two. For now, I want to focus on what brings about the reduction of the social for Habermas in a way that problematizes this 'ground'. After establishing the communicative basis of the social from Mead, Habermas gestures toward the shift from the 'sacred' character of the bond to the 'contractual' one based in legitimacy. The Durkheimian argument is familiar. The obligatory character of the contract is based on legitimacy of the legal regulations underlying it, as Durkheim understood because they *are seen to express* the 'general interest'. Habermas emphasises that those so obliged need access to a publically maintained 'story' through which the parties to social exchange can 'sense' their statuses and the nature of the contract (ibid.:p.80 ff.). He does not say exactly

in what this ‘sensing’ consists, He simply invokes it. I explore this further in Part Two. His next major move after establishing the normative conditions of social life in the post-sacred social arena is to establish what he calls the ‘linguistification’ of the sacred. Thus,

“ To the extent language becomes established as the principle of sociation, the conditions of socialisation converge with the conditions of communicatively produced intersubjectivity. At the same time, the authority of the sacred is converted over to the binding force of normative validity claims that can be redeemed only in discourse.” (ibid. p.93).

So, through Mead he develops the basic assumptions of a ‘communicative ethics’ based on the ‘ground’ of intersubjectivity. Where social and system integration coincide social bonds conform to the Durkheimian model. But structural differentiation implies a ‘penetrative’ change to the conditions of the performative social arena. A ‘communicative ethics’ becomes the ground of solidarity where the idea of arriving at a rationally motivated mutual understanding is now found *in the very structure of language*.

The uncoupling of system and lifeworld, Habermas’s version of the dislocation thesis, begins at the point where social ‘evolution’ (understood as irreversible differentiation in and from the social structures through which integration takes place) is measured by two things: the level of complexity of the system but also the increased rationality of the lifeworld. Ironically, complexity ultimately implies ‘delinguistified’ media at system level (administrative mechanisms, money etc.) which steer intercourse in the social performance but which is now *disconnected* from norms and values. Steering media create their own system mechanisms and their own ‘norm-free, social structures’. Activity in the lifeworld is marginalised and remaindered in relation to these ‘monolithic projections’. While Habermas now moves into Weberian territory he continues to insist on the Parsonian insight that the system, for all its reduction of the capacity of the lifeworld, still needs to be ‘anchored’ in it. In this consists the reduction of the lifeworld as a consequence of uncoupling. The lifeworld must sustain these norm-free monoliths in addition to staging the concerns of actors searching for a co-ordinated sense of their own lives. These interfering mediatized system mechanisms ‘attach to the effects’ of action and ‘parasitically’ exploit it leaving it structurally unaltered but hosting a virus ‘hiding in the pores of communicative action’. This a profound penetration of the ground that both founds and sustains social life.

To sum up the implications of this in Habermas's thought, the consequence of uncoupling and mediatisation is a 'structural violence that takes hold of the very forms of intersubjectivity of possible understanding'. This violence is exercised through systemic restrictions on communication and so distortion becomes part of the *quality* of communicative action. Criticism of Habermas (e.g. Layder, 1997:204) suggesting he bases his model of the social communication on situation-free 'ideal or undistorted speech acts' is incorrect. Habermas' point is subtle, claiming there is something in the grounding conditions of social life such that its members have an eye to these 'as if' conditions in situated practice. Ordinarily the grounding and legitimating moves of activity are not called into question, but in the process of acting we *assume* the ideal horizon against which validity claims can be made.

For Habermas the social has not quite 'ended' perhaps but the forces of entropy are attacking the roots and we hang on via the two threads constituted by the horizon of discourse: performative searches for the grounds of validity and legitimization. I now compare this formulation of uncoupling with the concept of disembedding favoured by both Bauman and Giddens.

### **2.3.2 Transforming the experience of the social**

Habermas's account shares a reading of history with that of Bauman and Giddens, and therefore a view of the impact of societal complexity and dislocation on the performative social arena. Habermas focuses on the analytic consequences of modernity for the principle activity of communication, the sine qua non of the social. Giddens and Bauman, however, in the development of the narrative of 'disembedding' formally recruit into the discussion the dimension of experience. Indeed, Giddens (1990: 138) refers to part of his analysis of the consequences of modernity as its 'phenomenology'. Bauman draws on that tradition eclectically, but surely his concerns with modernity are located in its experience. For Bauman (1993) the moral impulse is now at war with the conditions that situate it within the performative arena. Referring to Giddens' structural principles in which knowledgeable, creative agents engage reflexively and discursively with the circumstances of modernity, Bauman reconfigures the tension of modernity thus,

“[S]ocialisation and sociality...we can think of the difference between the two processes as one between ‘management’ and ‘spontaneity’. In another way yet, we may express the opposition as that between replacing morality with *discursive rules*, and replacing morality with *aesthetics*. Socialisation...aims at creating an environment of action made of choices amenable to be redeemed discursively, which boils down to the rational calculation of gains and losses. Sociality puts uniqueness above regularity and the sublime above the rational, being therefore generally *inhospitable* [my emphasis] to the rules, rendering the discursive redemption of rules problematic, and cancelling the instrumental meaning of action.” (Bauman, 1993: 119).

Caught in the midst of this ‘war’ whereby the structured arrangements of the *societal* take the moral impulses of the lifeworld as subversive, Bauman paints a picture of the expropriation by the former of the latter’s moral capacity. Sociality is ‘counter-structural’, an ‘aesthetic’ phenomenon: “disinterested, purposeless and autotelic (that is, its own end)” (ibid:130). In modernity social performance becomes the site of ambivalent, uncertain confrontations with ‘the other’. Bauman makes clear that the concept of morality always implies ambivalence, I take it that under present conditions the moral impulse directs us more violently to the facticity of this ambivalence. The use of ‘rules’ has changed in *quality*. In modern conditions of intimacy where discretion rather than rules should reign, Bauman suggests “[t]hose who can no longer rely on discretion need rules badly” (ibid.:p.116). This is a symptom of life in the social performative arena and appears to be more penetrative within the fabric of the social than implied by, say, Simmel’s analysis (1950). Simmel contemplated the urban ‘many’ and the encounter with the stranger, Bauman confronts us with the idea of the other *dissolving* into the many. The result is that the “hopeful confidence of the moral drive has been replaced by the never quelled anxiety of uncertainty...I have to live with this anxiety. Whether I like it or not I must *trust* the masks.” (ibid.:115). Furthermore, the difficulties facing us compound. We are as afraid of trusting as we are of the dangers emanating from the Other.

I grab whatever ‘rules’ I can, but there is only one place they can come from, of course, and in this consists the expropriation of my spontaneous, moral existence. In a single movement Bauman captures both the problem of coherence, in the context of his own concerns, and also the experiences to which it gives rise. Before continuing to look at the further problems posed us by ‘liquid modernity’, I return to Giddens. A closer examination of the argument presented in the latter’s ‘phenomenology’ (Giddens, 1990)

allows me to crystallise further the role that *social constructive capacities* play in both Bauman's and Giddens' accounts of modernity and its experience. In developing a platform to re-establish the bases of social constructive capacities in Part Two, the problem of coherence needs further examination as a characteristic of the first parameter of modernity, hermeneutical reflexivity and autonomy, that Delanty (1999) and Smith (2009) identify. Bauman and Giddens lead us to a 'cognitive' resolution to the modern problems besetting our capacity for coherence, such as ambivalence. That resolution proves inadequate.

Pursuing the theme of trust and anxiety in Bauman's account, we can add hope to Giddens' picture. The all-consuming, morally expropriating and fragmenting forces of Delanty's second parameter of modernity, societal-economic processes, are not enough to entirely swallow up the grounds of autonomy. For Giddens the grounds of autonomy are realised and performed in the social constructive and transformative capacities available to agency. Central to such a conception are his arguments (Giddens, 1976) concerning actors' knowledgeability and reflexive use of rules. As a dislocation thesis, Giddens' (1981) critique of historical materialism established modernity as a further development of the process by which social integration becomes separated from system integration. Rampant capitalism had temporal and spatial consequences for the 'locales' in which actors sustain the social world. The system, an increasingly 'administered' order, combined with 'lower presence availability' in those locales than where social and system integration coincide, results in ontological insecurity and problems of trust:

"Modernity 'dis-places'...place becomes phantasmorgoric. Yet this is a double-layered or ambivalent experience rather than simply a loss of community...What happens is not simply that localised influences drain away into the more impersonalised relations of abstract systems. Instead, the very tissue of spatial experience alters, conjoining proximity and distance in ways that have few close parallels in prior ages." (Giddens, 1990:140).

However, autonomous constructive capacity is not relinquished in the face of this ambivalence. In the latter work Giddens points out that the system's administrative arrangements are not as engulfing and as subject to 'bureaucratic fixity' as Weber had supposed despite the proliferation of institutionalised expertise. Empirical observation shows that "even in the core settings of its application...organisations produce autonomy and spontaneity" (ibid.:142). This spontaneity is easier to achieve there than in smaller

groups signalling to us special problems of coherence for the actors in social performative arenas. Giddens even suggests that the grounds of autonomy, and therefore the constructive capacities to which they give rise, could arrest the final expropriation of humanity by the socio-economic fragmentation envisioned by Marx.

Giddens establishes ‘four dialectically related frameworks of experience’. These frameworks situate my current theme of dislocation within four experiential ‘intersections’. We can read these intersections as (i) constituting the tension of modernity, (ii) linking performative arena and experience and (iii) signalling the types of difficulties for our striving towards coherence suggested by this model. They are schematised as follows.

Tension of Modernity		Experiential Intersection
Fragmentation	Autonomy	
Displacement	Reembedding	Estrangement and familiarity
Impersonality	Intimacy	Impersonal ties and personal trust
Expertise	Reappropriation	Abstract systems and day-to-day knowledeability
Privatism	Engagement	Pragmatic acceptance and activism

**Table 2.1 The effects of the transformation of the social after Giddens (1991)**

Table 2.1 shows how the tensions arising from the two parameters of modernity formatively constitute experiential intersections in the lifeworld. There are resonances here with Bauman, but with more optimism connected to the spontaneities around these intersections. Bauman would question the quality of the capacity to deploy rules for re-embedding or re-appropriation. I detect in Bauman a sense that we have a tendency to make life difficult for ourselves. Rather than simply lie back and let the logic of the situation prevail we insist on yoking together heterogeneous conditions that require continuous work to make coherent. Giddens’ notion of the ‘pure relationship’ which serves its purpose and then vanishes into the night strikes me as an attempt to reconcile needs with the essentially ‘fluid bonds’ that modernity entails according to Bauman (2000). Relationships, like the houses we live in, are ‘projects’ rather than contexts. My

neighbours in the house next door now live in a permanent workshop-cum-studio where decoration and improvement is a way of life. This has been going on each week for eight years. They have put up the ‘for sale’ sign; there is nothing further to ‘do on the house’. The additional work we create for ourselves may be desirable, perhaps as a gloss for voids elsewhere. “Society, in Durkheim’s view is that body ‘under whose protection’ to shelter from the horror of one’s own transience” (Bauman, 2000:183). Among Bauman’s many examples is cohabitation,

“The present-day ‘liquified’, ‘flowing’, dispersed, scattered and deregulated version of modernity may not portend divorce and the final break of communication, but it does augur the advent of light, free-flowing capitalism, marked by the disengagement and loosening of ties linked to capital and labour. One may say that this fateful departure replicates the passage from marriage to ‘living together’ with all its corollary attitudes and strategic consequences, including the assumption of temporariness of cohabitation...If staying together was a matter of *reciprocal* agreement and *mutual* dependency, disengagement is *unilateral*.” (Bauman, *ibid.*:149).

While this grim picture indicates something instantly recognisable, it underplays the deep consequences of liquid modernity for the ‘ground’ of social life. Co-habitation, if qualitatively thus, has more ‘penetrative’ uncertainties than simply not knowing for how long the relationship is sustainable. Indeed, the ‘strategic’ orientation of interactivity would form a permanent feature of the manner in which couples struggled to co-ordinate ‘validity claims’ in Habermas’s sense. Where this struggle is explicit, the grounding of social ties is in jeopardy, and with it social identity. Burkitt (2005) questioned this hypothesis based on empirical data from Yorkshire. Redundancy and separation from friends and family became threats to identity, in his data, but led to the reinvigoration of kinship ties and patterns of contact with kin as *projects*. But using one’s kinship network in creative ways to sustain identity in Bauman’s sense precisely is additional work emanating from the ‘liquification’ of modernity.

### **2.3.3 Summary of the positions of dislocation theorists**

This chapter’s account of modernity has taken a group of thinkers who view the social in societal ‘system’ terms and see the demise (end or minimisation) of the former in forces of dislocation operative in the mechanisms of integration. The forces of dislocation are based on historical changes across the panoply of social, political and economic activities that

sustain societal forms. The view held of these changes originates in Durkheim's understanding of the division of labour. But within late modernity each theorist of dislocation asserts that qualitative changes arising from the degree and complexity of differentiation impact on both the mechanisms and situated activities in the lifeworld of the experiencing social being. The language of fragmentation refers to the experiences of actors from the point of view of their coherence in social performances, but is theorised as forms of 'uncoupling' of the system and lifeworld; or the disembedding of practices from locales across the larger regions in which societal processes operate. Looking closer at the activities of social actors, these changes have had deep, penetrative consequences that have altered the very ground and fabric of social life. These penetrative consequences are found in: the ambivalences within reciprocities, ethical horizons and moral contexts where communication becomes uncertain or gridlocked (Habermas and Bauman); and, the experiential tensions between aspects of fragmentation (e.g. 'displacement) and moves to autonomy (Giddens)

The mechanisms on which this 'penetration' is achieved is at the level of the discursive, reflexive, communicative and knowledge *skills* of actors. The answers to the problems that all these consequences pose us in late modernity lie in these embodied resources. Knowledgeably and creatively deployed skills can re-invigorate the search for authentic autonomy, currently located moribund in a post-modern cultural malaise: a 'cognitive' solution emerging from the revival of interest in agency (cf. Delanty, 1999). I sympathise, but in Part Two I outline an *endemic* fragmentary 'underside' to human activity. Here, I examine further the 'skills' at the root of the theoretical positions discussed above.

## **2.4 Critique of the dislocation thesis: the core problem of the scene of sociation**

The dislocation thesis is derived in principle from the work of Parsons. In particular, concerns about the reduction of the 'social' derive from a vision of the social world that relates two things, firstly, what I called in section 2.2, the 'performative arena' in which socially constituted individuals occupy, exchange and communicate through 'roles' and, secondly, the macro-social system extending beyond the moments of interaction.

Commenting on Parsons' voluntaristic, meaning-centred theory and its analytical attempts

to draw together ‘social reality, social action and social structure Bortolini correctly reflects that for Parsons,

“The problem of social order arises precisely where the *continuous flux* of actions and interactions meets the constitutive interconnectedness of ‘almost everything’. We may call it the ‘situation of double contingency’: a hypothetical interaction in which the attainment of my goals depends on your compliance to my requests and vice versa.” (Bortolini, 2007: 156, my emphasis).

Here sociation is where the contingencies of the spaces in which actors engage with one another belong to two domains experienced as one. Your response to me draws on a sensitivity to adequate compliance. Here the very judgement of adequacy suggests access to values common to us both. In other words, to understand the importance attached by Parsons to the idea of a common value system and the part it plays in maintaining the stability of the social world, we must understand how a common value system is resourcefully deployed in the spaces where people interact, where they engage with the contingencies swimming in the *flux* of everyday life. As Bortolini (2007) points out Parsons attempted to understand the connection between the continuous flux characterising this space and its contingencies and that which ‘lay beyond’ such spaces in the analytical sense. Drawing on Fararo (2006 cited in Bortolini, 2007) Bortolini reminds us that Parsons’ work is *already* about flux and process drawing extensively on the philosophy of Whitehead. Parsons’ view of the social world and indeed action systems was primarily one of an ever-changing flow rather than of stability. This Whiteheadian outlook heavily resonates with the works of Giddens, Bauman and Habermas. Bauman’s notion of ‘liquidity’ in many ways describes the state of Parsons’ continuous flux in the context of *the disappearance of the common value system*. Indeed, late modern uncertainty revolves around the application of moral rules and the stances taken towards values in the ‘scene of sociation’. Giddens too has consistently argued that contexts of interaction are compromised by the transformation of the conditions of trust (Giddens, 1990: 83) and the way in which actors engage with otherness in ‘abstract’, disembedded, circumstances. Dealing with the contingencies of the flux, spread now over extended time-space, means altering the generalised practices that sustain trust. It is the *new manner* that marks the ontological shift in sociation of late modernity. When Giddens writes,

“Mastery...substitutes for morality, to be able to control one’s life circumstances, colonise the future with some degree of success and live within the parameters of internally referential systems” (Giddens 1991: 202)

he invokes Parsons’ project and refers to two things. Firstly, that the common value system has given way to heterogeneous referential systems; and secondly, that, as a consequence, the contingencies in the flux of social interaction no longer warrant the reciprocity of viewpoints on those contingencies governed by a common value system. It is now a struggle for mastery of those contingencies and the reference systems in which they appear that become primary objectives. The knowledge now valued by knowledgeable actors is that which is reflexive precisely on the relation between referential systems and the way that these keep in play social contingencies as *undecidables*.

Reflexivity is a human capacity key to transformative powers (Giddens, 1981). This capacity has become ‘colonised’ by narrow, individualistic concerns, but also a new type of cognitive labour. Practices of reflexivity oriented to mastery of contingencies/undecidables and the future has consequences for the way one engages with others and otherness in general. It is the *character of this engagement* that must be picked up by any reconstruction of the social based on a development of an understanding of sociation and its coherence (the task of Part Two).

For Habermas it is the cleavage between the scene of sociation and the distal institutions that root themselves within sociation that damages the conditions under which actors trust, commit, plan and so on. Like Giddens and Bauman he is concerned with the fate of the moral ‘bindingness’ of sociation. Habermas takes the question of the social as communicative activity in the lifeworld. In modernity, the lifeworld is ‘uncoupled’ from the social system. But to appreciate what are now the special conditions, dangers and difficulties pertaining to this ‘uncoupling’, we need to understand how Habermas construes ‘the social’. For him the foundations of it are the forms of sociation expressed by Mead (1934). I contend that Habermas is over-attentive to Mead’s conclusions where Mead himself shifts vocabulary from interaction to social structural concerns. Mead suggests that the moral commitments, and the ethical contours of social life, are rooted in the norms that situated actors communicate in their expressed expectations and obligations, in other

words the *mutuality* that enables socialisation and co-present communication in interaction processes.

A closer reading of Habermas's discussion (1987) shows that interaction processes (a Whiteheadian flux in Mead) attract Habermas where he becomes concerned with the *character and quality* of the 'social bond' in, for example, what constitutes *sincerity of engagement in conditions of bodily responsivity*. Structural vocabulary becomes important later. Neither Mead nor Habermas provide a narrative which takes us from the flux, what it is like to act in it, to the structural conclusion. I think this seemingly subtle tension extremely important. The human bond and the flux of contingencies in which it is immersed is social insofar as actors engage in cognitive acts predicated on competent language use where common values can be accessed. Yet the basis of this usage is a matter of *bodily responsivity*. This is emphatic if we consider the following. The basis of social life lies, according to Mead (1934), in reciprocal interpersonal bonds that *come to have* a rational basis in the communicative practices of the actors involved. This sounds like it should be developed as a 'cognitive' project leading to a structural account, but not *only* a cognitive project. The *coming to have* a rational basis refers to the nature of sosciation, its developmental, unfinished indeterminate quality, so important to Mead, is elided in Habermas. He treats the pre-rational basis of interactivity as logically continuous with its rational basis. This cannot be right.

The tension between cognitivism and embodiment in Habermas is compounded further. After jumping from embodied responsivity to a *second*, linguistic basis of the social, he invokes a shifting from the 'sacred' character of the bond to the contractual one that depends on an *already established* language game. The Durkheimian problem here is familiar: what kind of contract establishes what contracts bind? Habermas reverts to his Meadian principles and emphasises that people bound in a contractual arrangement have a *sensuous* relation to it. Their understanding is of a *sensorial* and not a *cognitive* form. People need a publicly maintained 'story' *through which the parties can 'sense' their statuses and the nature of the contract* (Habermas, 1987:80 ff. my emphasis). He does not say what this 'sensing' is. But I note that the 'story' might be thought of as a sensuous instrument *before* it has a cognitive, publicly scrutable and accountable, status open to rational exploration in discourse, or the communication of a set of core values.

Discourse pulls itself up by its own bootstraps,

“ To the extent language becomes established as the principle of *sociation*, the conditions of socialisation converge with the conditions of communicatively produced intersubjectivity. At the same time, the authority of the sacred is converted over to the binding force of normative validity claims that can be redeemed only in discourse.” (Habermas, 1987 Vol 2: 93).

From Mead he develops the basic assumptions of a ‘communicative ethics’ based on the ‘ground’ of intersubjectivity, but with a significant jump from the *sensory and embodied qualities* of intersubjectivity and *sociation* to a communicative ethics which construes language not as a sensory instrument anymore but as a servant of rationality. Note the simple ‘convergence’ between the pre-rational, pre-discursive aspects of social interaction and those that typify it in competent members of a social order.

Ironically, it is rationality that ultimately implies ‘delinguified’ media at system level (administrative mechanism, money etc.) penetrating co-presence but now *disconnected* from norms and values. Activity in the lifeworld is *marginalised and remaindered* in relation to these mediatized ‘monolithic projections’. Administrative mechanisms, repertoires of bodily procedures and money, as objects in the body-activity field are not further considered in their sensory qualities.

Next, I direct critique of dislocation theories at key features that, in revised form, should be part of a reconstruction: i) terms and registers; ii) embodiment and cognitivism and iii) socialisation. The outcomes of this critique are taken forward in the reconstruction in chapter 5.

#### **2.4.1 Registers and Terms**

Giddens’ work, oriented to the fate of the social, uses two registers: a Parsonian-type analytical register which enables analysis of institutions and their practices, consistent with structuration theory in its more abstract form; and a phenomenological register for the experience of late modernity. The second register, highlighting ontological insecurity, problems of trust etc. is a *refracted* register. That is, Giddens writes in his later works (e.g.

1990) as if experience were an outcome of structural arrangements available to the formal analytic register.

Experience is a passive consequence of modernity. From the point of view of sociology struggling to find lasting symptoms of social change, or to establish the case along with Urry and others that things are now fundamentally different there is a temptation to point to experience as a symptomatic, refracted, site of change. The historical record suggests otherwise than that problems of trust and ontological security are peculiar to late modernity (1.3).

The scene of sociation needs to be re-thought in a single register. Moral bindingness, different stances, and the awareness of these differences, taken by actors with respect to norms and values, understanding the limits and grey areas of moral life, as Bauman articulates, are clearly at stake in the experience of social life. Giddens did better in earlier work thinking about the social extending beyond the immediate confines of co-presence but nevertheless somehow integral to it *and* the experiences it subtends,

“[T]he most appropriate way of attempting to develop such concepts is by concentrating upon aspects and modalities of presence and absence in human social relations. Presence is a time-space notion, just as absence can refer to ‘distances’ in both time and space from a particular set of experiences or events. ‘Presence’ as both Heidegger, and following him Derrida, have made clear, should be understood neither as ‘given object’ nor as ‘given experience’. [...] All social interaction, like any other type of event, occurs across time and space. All social interaction intermingles presence and absence. Such intermingling is always both complicated and subtle, and can be taken to express modes in which structures are drawn upon to incorporate the long-term *duree* of institutions within the contingent act.” (Giddens, 1981: 38)

Here is a sense of sociation not developed analytically in subsequent work. Here experience is fundamental to the conception of social activity and they ground one another. Habermas also switches between (i) politically already-constituted individuals *inter*-acting to a view of sociation predicated on (ii) inter-subjectivity. Whether we follow a critical realist line of argument or an analytic one this poses problems.

## 2.4.2 Responsivity, Embodiment and Cognitivism

Dislocation theorists over-emphasise the cognitive conditions of social action. Indeed, in reconstructing the position Delanty (1999) promotes the re-prioritisation of agency and the forms of knowledgeability and creativity on which the social depends. This is important particularly when allied to political projects of reconstruction after or during social change. However, from the vantage point of sociation we find limitations to the organisation of the arguments in this group. Habermas insists on the conditions for *sincere engagement* with the other. He draws on a pre-linguistic view of intersubjective exchange, dependent on bodily responsivity, to get there. His move to a linguistic and cognitive frame of reference involves first seeing language as a sensing instrument before any use of language is in a position to enable already socially constituted subjects to undertake judgements about norms and values as applied to the contingencies they meet within the Parsonian flux. However, no explanation is provided on how we move from embodied sociation to linguistic sociation in TCA. Socialisation is invoked (Habermas, 1984, CES) to plug this gap. But his version has serious problems discussed below (2.4.3).

Originally, Giddens balanced his cognitivist insight that actors reflexively and knowledgeably attend to the conditions and form of their practices (Giddens, 1976) with a clear rejection of the *cogito* as a basic constituent of agency in everyday practices. He suggested

“We must actually repudiate the *cogito* in a more thoroughgoing way...while acknowledging the vital importance of the theme that being precedes the subject-object relation in consciousness. The route to understanding this is not to be found through a sort of reconstituted *cogito* but through the connection of *being and action*.” (Giddens, 1979: 39)

Giddens’ critique of the subject put constraints on cognitivism and productively connected with the theme of *being* from which he later derived his account of the experience of late modernity (Giddens, 1981, 1990 and 1991). Giddens argues (1979) that forms of practical engagement and involvement with the world and others (here *being*) have to grasp the *pre-discursive* conditions of action. “Whitehead says somewhere (sic) ‘what we perceive as the present is the vivid fringe of memory tinged with anticipation’.” (Giddens, 1979: 55).

There is lack of any further development of ‘pre-discursive theory’ in Giddens.

Sometimes Giddens emphasises embodiment above the *cogito*,

“We may define action...as involving a ‘stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world.’” (Giddens, 1979: 55)

Such remarks highlight the difficulty that the conceptual spaces so far developed to understand activity have with the relation between the reflexive, knowledge-based and discursive events in practice and the embodied or corporeal events. Any reconstruction must attempt to show the connection between embodied action and what I shall refer to as ‘hermeneutic’ action (to cover reflexivity, knowledge etc.).

#### **2.4.3 Internalisation and Socialisation**

A key process involved in obtaining order from flux, running through dislocation theories is the internalisation of values: critical for Parsons. Indeed, internalisation of values is key to both understanding the relation of individual to society and defining what a norm is. However, there has been little investigation of this as ‘internalisation’. For Parsons, internalising rules, as a struggle between impulse and morality, is a consequence of the

“historically specific structure of the system of action. [...] [E]mpirical social orders will obviously be prone to incomplete internalisation, scarce or distorted institutionalisation, conflicts between norms and expectations, fragile equilibriums.” (Bortolini, 2007: 157).

The Parsonian system, and its legacy within dislocation theories, clearly contains the immediate resources to develop an account of the demise of the social, and to connect this to the conditions of actions and the individual. But much depends on what can be made of the process of internalisation and its connection to the scene of sociation. Socialisation has to take place in real social contexts.

Next I examine Giddens’ questionable account relating sociation and socialisation. Both Giddens’ and Habermas’ solutions are flawed for the same reasons. This discussion picks

up the thread of the criticisms levelled at Habermas earlier. He used the wrong solution to the problem of internalisation as a means of connecting embodiment to discourse.

Giddens (1979) develops a series of discussions on subjectivity, agency, practice and socialisation. These form a critical backdrop to the establishment of structuration theory and establish the basis of how to approach *activity* as a form that emerges from the ‘flux’ that Parsons had started with. Central to this was the question of ‘skill’ and the kind of practical activity not available for discursive formulation. Giddens stresses the temporal, indeed ‘time-space’ structure of activity within flux. From Heidegger and Mead he takes a view of ‘being’ in time that privileges ‘becoming’ rather than ‘stasis’. Parsons too had prioritised time: “The first important implication is that an act is always a process in time” (Parsons, 1949: 45). However, for Parsons the time of action is the time between moments of stasis. This view of time is woven into Parsons’ use of the concepts of ‘attainment’, ‘realisation’, ‘achievement’ and ‘goal’. These static temporal ‘milestones’ of activity became the givens of his analytical framework. When Parsons and Habermas develop accounts of social interaction and the production of intersubjective understanding it consists necessarily of these milestones. In order to co-ordinate our activities in relation to a common value system it is stasis terms like ‘goal’ that are used. Giddens began by rejecting this. Instead, he privileged ‘becoming’ and the ‘always not yet’ quality of activity within flux. Later he aligns this with the Marxian viewpoint that pre-discursive activity is the basis of sociation and accounts for its ‘plasticity’, its ability to be shaped by forces hostile to the interests of actors.

This ‘plastic’ view of activity works in conjunction with the hermeneutic, reflexive practices of the subject to form the dynamic of the ‘duality of structure’. Giddens (1979) deals with internalisation under the banner of ‘socialisation’ when discussing institutions and social reproduction. He correctly exploits the pre-discursive, plastic, becoming view of activity here in pointing out that we have, for example, misunderstood the nature of the child and of childhood if we think of a mono-logical infant internalising simply what is available around it. This incorrect viewpoint, he claims, is predicated on the rather hegemonic psychological position of Piaget,

“Socialisation only sounds a rather special, distinctive, term emphasising process and time, if employed in the way I have previously disclaimed, where society is treated as a static form, into which the individual is progressively incorporated. *The unfolding of childhood is not time elapsing just for the child*: it is time elapsing for its parental figures...the socialisation involved is not simply that of the child, but of the parents and others with whom the child is in contact, and whose conduct is influenced by the child...in the continuity of interaction.” (Giddens, 1979: 130)

Internalisation here is construed as part of the activity within flux and parallels the account of social reproduction. The importance of the pre-discursive is expressed in his remarks about the dialectic of socialisation. It is not just the child that is socialised. In dealing with the contingencies of the scene of sociation in which parent-child interactivity happens *both* are socialised. This is really difficult for Parsons' viewpoint recalling that internalisation is the linchpin to social order. The possibility that children socialise their parents may become a new cultural commonplace regarding words, fashions, attitude change etc. Even at earlier periods in the child's life the interactions are capable re-subjectivising the parent (cf. Miller, 1997).

So far, so good. Giddens initiates a view where action, socialisation, time, sociation are framed consistently with one another. However, in the project of outlining the apocalypse of the social, Habermas and Giddens develop flaws in their views of socialisation.

Giddens later (1984) employs the same theoretical device that Habermas uses to plug the gaps concerning this key Parsonian issue. They both revert to ego psychologies. Habermas employs Piaget directly: a theoretical ‘outsourcing’ with unsuccessful results. Likewise Giddens turns to Erikson's work which critically addresses the Freudian paradigm. Giddens needs to solve the problem of internalisation at the same time as declare how late modernity impacts on individual experience with dire consequences: the increase of ontological insecurity leading to problems of trust in the field of sociation. Habermas employs Piagetian and Kohlbergian psychology to indicate how, through exposure to the Parsonian continuous flux, the infant, by being actively engaged within it, assimilates the flux's more regular and recurrent features. When s/he is communicatively and cognitively competent, s/he is *then* able to exercise judgements about norms and validity claims and so on: the crucial outcome of socialisation for sociation. Without the internalisation of these ‘competences’ the field of sociation, the *Lebenswelt*, has no limits

or ‘horizon’ against which the actors can communicate and make judgements. For Giddens the substance is different but the logic is similar. Giddens speaks less of horizons and limits to the field of sociation and more about regions of activity and their routinization. Bodily co-presence involves human encounters that “are sequenced phenomena, interpolated within, yet giving form to, the seriality of day-to-day life” (Giddens, 1984: 73). Seriality is the basis of social order in answer to the Hobbesian and Parsonian question. But it is the *grounding* of seriality that needs to be established. Giddens’ interest in routinization and practical consciousness stems from the fact that he considers these aspects of human action key to two things: (i) the grounding of seriality itself and (ii) the ability to ‘interpolate’ the discursive and reflexive aspects of human encounters. The flawed recourse to ego psychology<sup>2</sup> enables Giddens to link the grounding of social order to the hermeneutical and embodied activities of co-present actors at the same time as linking this ground to the ways in which merely acting can give rise to anxiety.

I focus on Erikson’s key point necessary for this critique of Giddens’ position. Erikson (1963, 1967) provides a paradigm for thinking about the transformations of the body into an organism with ability to ‘act-in-the-world’. The body of the infant is viewed as a ‘bundle of needs and impulses’ anticipating events. There is a crude seriality here then and the attempt to establish the basis of practical consciousness. Trust is part of a basic polarity at this stage, between trust and mistrust, and is contingent on the ‘presencing’ and ‘absencing’ of the mother. Trust takes its place, according to Giddens (1984: 53) in the ‘binding of time-space’, initially by the infant coming to the realisation that absence does not mean desertion. However, and as Giddens points out, although this crucial basic issue of trust is linked to the intersection of presence/absence in the flux of the infant’s early experience, the point of origin of this intersection is “in the body, bodily needs [and] their modes of satiation and control” (ibid:53). The body in its needful state becomes, in Giddens’ work at this point, the incipient mode of practical consciousness and activity. This forms the *ground* on which later there arises hermeneutical action giving rise to discursivity, reflexivity and of course duality of structure.

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<sup>2</sup> Giddens indeed repudiates Erikson’s approach to identity through ego psychology saying this is the least interesting aspect of his work, but he preserves the logical implications of Erikson’s ideas insofar as the subject is immersed and socialised within a continuous flux of activity.

This move is a fundamental error. Firstly, perhaps trivially, it brings us to a methodologically individualist position. It poses the problem of the social as one of already-individuals (one of which is a bundle of impulses). Giddens does not seem to acknowledge that the mother-infant bond is already a ‘field of sociation’ surely already a partly discursive and reflexive space available to the same analytical moves as any other. As viewed here, the bodily condition of the infant is a retrogression to the concept of ‘internalisation’, that is, back, even if momentarily, to a pre-Parsons position of homo duplex.

Secondly, the account compromises the principles of reciprocity and mutuality (Giddens, 1979) established earlier. There the form of the infant’s activity had socialising consequences on the mother/caretaker. This is simply not available in Erikson’s theory; its use undermines Giddens’ earlier position.

Thirdly, the road to the internalisation of discursive skills, via Erikson, leads Giddens to the same problem of the body/culture hiatus that I have shown above turns Habermas’s account into paradox. How do we move from a conception of the social bond founded in bodily responsivity, and the trust (or distrust) that grounds it, to the field of sociation organised by discourse?

Fourthly, we must ask what is now to be made of Giddens’ conception of seriality and the Heideggerian slant he previously put onto the organisation of practice (Giddens 1979; 1981). Giddens had attached importance to moving from *being*, and its connection with ‘stasis’ accounts of action, to *becoming* and the privileging of time in the analysis of social action. The use of Erikson brings back the ‘stasis’ terms compromised Parsons’ conceptualisation. For example, when Giddens states, ‘dialectic of engagement and disengagement’ between mother and child becomes the scene in which “the anxiety of absence is defused through the *rewards* of co-presence” (Giddens, 1984: 54). Here we are back to the concepts of goal and adaptation that form part of the Parsonian analysis of action relying on ‘stasis milestones’ within the flux. Indeed, Giddens begins to speak of infants developing ‘anxiety reduction strategies’.

Turning now to Habermas I claim that the use of Kohlberg and Piaget presents similar problems in the development of his position that language becomes the principal form that sociation takes in the establishment of a social bond. It is in the violence perpetrated by institutions rooted in the field of sosciation that propels the demise of the social for Habermas (1984b; 1984b). Habermas (1984b) establishes a framework for ‘general structures of communicative action’ and their internalisation using a Piagetian framework (e.g. Habermas, 1984a: pp.82 ff.). Habermas’ aim is to develop an understanding of moral consciousness and normative structures through a model of internalisation. He raises the themes in this chapter in the following way:

“The goal of coming to an understanding [/] is to bring about an agreement [/] that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. Agreement is based on recognition of the corresponding validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness. We can see that the word *understanding* is ambiguous. In its minimal meaning it indicates that two subjects understand a linguistic expression in the same way; its maximal meaning is that between the two there exists an accord concerning the rightness of an utterance in relation to a mutually recognised normative background.” (Habermas, 1984a: 3) (German originals deleted [/])

I have already indicated the tension between the minimal and maximal meaning of ‘understanding’ in Habermas particularly when we are looking for the nature of transformation from a pre-discursive to a discursive form of sosciation. Habermas’s principal sense of wonder with the social is that normativity and consensus is at least striven for if not achieved. Coming to, or striving for, such a state presupposes forms of sociality that in some sense already enable the social exchange. Habermas resolves this regress in CES by invoking Piaget’s theory of socialisation. I now argue this approach fails.

Habermas fails to respect the ambitions of an analytic scheme when it touches upon pre-discursivity and socialisation. Parsons argued that his own scheme was an analytic of social action and the appearance in it of terms such as ‘personality’, ‘culture’ and so on should not be casually mapped onto the same notional features in the vernacular. Habermas promotes this analytical stance. If he did not then all his discussion about ‘institutions’ and their relationship with the *Lebenswelt*, in which the former are ‘rooted’ simply would not make any sense. I contend that Habermas imports the

Kohlbergian/Piagetian model believing that it conforms to the analytical parameters of his framework of communicative action in the same way as Parsons' does to his. However, it does not conform.

Essentially Kohlberg and Piaget construct an account of moral and intellectual development based on the child's interaction with 'the world' and all that it contains. At first sight the account is attractive because it appears to conform to an analytic frame of reference – and Piaget certainly argues this (Piaget, 1972a, 1972b). Thus, as for Parsons, Piaget focuses on activity in a state of fluid interaction in the world, deriving a series of isolable concepts from the standpoint of activity such as 'memory', 'intelligence', 'percept' etc. Indeed, the concept 'individual' is no more than a 'methodological tool': merely the most convenient container to organise a series of empirical studies about the transformation of, say, 'memory' while immersed in activities in flux (Piaget and Inhelder, 1973). For Piaget and Kohlberg the givens are active bodies and object-containing worlds. All further things are derivable from this. As the infant engages in activity with things in the world so their competences develop as shaped by the contingencies of their engagement. These competences, restructured through exposure to 'the world', form the basis of more sophisticated actions and so on. For this idea to make sense the world must contain the possibility of 'invariant patterns' (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969). Indeed, the concept of invariance is doubly important because without it there could not be contingency. The cognitive model developed in this way by Piaget of the development of *thought* lies at the basis of both his own and Kohlberg's understanding of the development of morality. Moral reasoning, as well as practical and intellectual competences, develops by a restructuring of the conceptual schema by which one orients one's percepts to types of events in the world. Ultimately, the ethical realisation that it is naughtier to break one cup in anger than ten by accident is an outcome of the structural transformations of the cognitive modelling 'competence' through, or by means of which, one is able to determine how parts of an event relate to each other. Other people attending such an event are important, to the account of morality, only insofar as they provide a perceptual vantage point from which ego can make a judgement. How does the other *view* the fate of the cup(s)? Moral judgement, while having 'affectual' consequences, nevertheless is essentially an *intellectual* achievement.

But, what is the difference between humans and any other object? Do children have to be socialised into understanding the difference, is there an essential difference? Habermas recognises this problem (although cannot quite detach himself from the idea that ego discovers itself ultimately as a kind of object in the world),

“The growing child works out for himself, equiprimordially, the concepts of external and internal worlds in dealing practically with objects and with himself. Piaget also draws attention between dealing with physical objects and dealing with social objects, that is ‘reciprocal action between a subject and other subjects’ [...] Correspondingly the external universe is differentiated into the world of perceptible and manipulable objects on the one hand and the world of normatively regulated interpersonal relations on the other. [...] Cognitive development signifies in general the *decentration of an egocentric understanding of the world.*” (Habermas, 1984: 68-69).

Habermas here swallows Piaget’s own understanding of what constitutes sociality according to the latter’s framework. Piaget declares,

“If reciprocal actions between subject and object modify both, it is *a fortiori* evident that every reciprocal action between individual subjects mutually modifies them. Every social relation is thus a totality in itself which creates new properties while transforming the individual in his mental structure” (Piaget, cited by Habermas, 1984b: 69).

Indeed Piaget’s position, but there is nothing here which enables us to distinguish physical from social object. Habermas buys the idea that a social object is constituted by an intellectual move based on a cognitive event. Elsewhere Piaget makes this quite explicit,

“[S]ocial exchanges, which include all the preceding reactions, since they are both personal and interpersonal at the same time, give rise to a process of gradual structuration or socialisation which leads from a state of relative lack of coordination or differentiation between the child’s own point of view and cooperation in action and communication.” (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969: 129)

Defining sociality as the ‘coordination of viewpoints’ is attractive to Habermas. But it implies strongly that the social is derived from a natural base point: the body-action-world system with which Kohlbergian and Piagetian models start.

To ask again why all this matters from Habermas’s viewpoint with respect to the overall issue of this thesis: the demise of the social. He fears the damage to the *Lebenswelt* by mediatised institutions and the nature of this damage appears in communicative events

between subjects. The kinds of problems faced here are such things as the *sincerity of engagement* with the other. As Giddens too also suggested (this chapter) the question of sincerity is important for diagnosing the condition of the social in late modernity. We feign morality in devotion to strategy. In ego psychologies however we face a rather peculiar paradox in relation to this. Part of the process of developing sophisticated cognitive competences allowing a view of the world from another's viewpoint is the development of orientations to pretence. For Piaget the appearance of the 'semiotic function' (meaning making and interpretation of meaning) in communication is marked in infancy by a move away from coordination through imitation to symbolic play. Pretending to be asleep is a familiar game in which children engage their parents and caretakers. Importantly, incipient moral action has to have pretence embedded in it as a socialised orientation, or sincerity would be rather less sincere.

This is make or break in Habermas's thought. I now argue why it is break. Habermas derives the sincerity of engagement in communication principle from Searle's work on language. Searle is primarily interested in the relation between language and meaning in *already-competent* language users. Viewed as 'a system' the requirement is to provide an analytical framework within which all the phenomena described fit together and are not dependent on anything outside, and certainly not anything pre-language or pre-discursive. For Habermas the importance of understanding cannot be underestimated. The 'illocutionary force' of a 'speech act' is tantamount to a 'social bond'. On this view speaking to another person amounts to 'making an offer' that can be accepted or rejected. We know of the illocutionary force of an utterance when it results "in bringing about an interpersonal relation" (Habermas, 1984a: 59). The social bond is itself constituted by the utterance and its fate in the hands of the other. Habermas' interest in Searle rests in the latter's form of analysis of the "conventional presuppositions of speech acts which must be fulfilled if their illocutionary force is to be comprehensible and acceptable." (Habermas, 1984a: 60). The idea of context becomes important analytically here, but for Habermas comprehensibility is primarily about the kinds of social bonds that can be established in any setting. Indeed, this idea can be traced back to Hegel. Reason, as evidenced in language use, is historically determined. If history impacts on Reason then we can look to variations in language to distinguish which are the crucial rules. Thus the search for the generalised rules and conditions of speaking becomes important as opposed to those rules

and conditions that are attributable to specific institutional contexts. Illocutionary force is particularly important on the occasions of speaking in ‘relatively institutionally unbound situations’,

“The essential presupposition for the success of an illocutionary act consists in the speaker’s entering into a specific engagement, so that the hearer can rely on him. An utterance can count as a promise, assertion, request, question or avowal, if and only if the speaker makes an offer that he is ready to make good insofar as it is accepted by the hearer. The speaker must engage himself, that is, indicate that in certain situations he will draw certain consequences for action. The *content* of the engagement is to be distinguished from the *sincerity* of the engagement. This condition, introduced by Searle as the ‘sincerity rule’, must *always* be fulfilled in the case of communicative action that is oriented to reaching understanding.” (Habermas, 1984a: 61).

Speech act theory admits that a certain kind of striving takes place in social encounters. Actors *reach for* understanding. What Searle provides is an account of the kind of competence involved in this ‘reaching for’. Competent language users, i.e. actors already skilled in human interaction within a particular culture master and deploy a ‘sincerity rule’. However, this gives rise to the question of the evaluation of sincerity which Habermas feels is lacking from speech act theory. We have to move toward the very limits of reason itself to grasp what is involved in evaluating sincerity. Habermas deals with this by arguing that the role of illocutionary force in achieving sincerity has to do with *moving* hearers to rely on typical expressions indicating the *commitments* of the speaker. That is, moving the hearer to base their actions on the seriousness with which the speaker undertakes a position. From here we move to Habermas’ central maxim. We can only understand that actors reach for understanding, and prior to having established it, they must have a pre-bond bond based in a kind of reciprocal recognition. And what is reciprocally recognised are validity claims.

“In the final analysis, the speaker can illocutionarily influence the hearer and vice versa, because...commitments are connected with cognitively testable validity claims – that is, because the reciprocal bonds have a rational basis. [...] requests, orders, admonitions, promises, agreements, excuses, admissions, and the like have different specific meanings; but the claim put forward in these different interpersonal relationships is...the rightness of norms or to the ability of the subject to assume responsibility. [...] In the cognitive use of language, the speaker proffers a speech-act-immanent *obligation to provide grounds*.” (Habermas, 1984a: 63).

The obligation to provide ‘grounds’ here is a problem for Habermas ultimately because he recognises that, unlike the philosopher who can assume simply that the world consists of always-already competent users of language and its rule-filled grounds, Habermas respects the ontogenetic difference between infants and adults. In other words he recognises that somehow these grounds cannot be assumed and must be constructed, or internalised in some way. Hence, the interest in Piaget, Kohlberg and Mead. Furthermore, since he finds that the social bond, sociality itself, rests in an act of cognition the kind of framework he needs is one that provides for the kind of cognitive development in humans that will permit the form of ‘testing process’ he finds so important in the reaching for social agreement. This is, of course, what the ego psychologies provide. It is trivial to refer again to their methodological individualism except to say that we have already seen that ego psychologies must presuppose the conditions of individuality they, at the same time, claim must be produced as a consequence of social interaction. For Piaget and Kohlberg it is on first (re)cognising oneself as an object among others, and respecting the differences that obtain with this status and make sense to others in reference to it, that constitutes the conscious ground leading to accountability and responsibility in a moral sense. But this is an act of cognition, of thought, which cannot ultimately distinguish social from non-social objects. Social action, like the sense of social objects and like the sense of moral obligation, is not given in acts of contemplation, but somehow in the *flow* of activity as Parsons recognised.

For the Piagetian model an ‘individual’ is really an ‘invariance’ experienced as part of the flow. The fact that the ‘self’ comes to grasp itself as an invariance in the eyes of others is not described by him as a ‘social moment’ at all. It is a kind of *calculation*, a de-centred perception, which comes about as a consequence of becoming competent by understanding the relationships between things in the space in which activity occurs. Here is the real underlying assumption of cognitively oriented ego psychologies. They subscribe to the principle of ‘ergodicity’. Ergodic relations are pre-existent relations between things-in-the-world. If we admit that things in the world can be related to one other by logical connectors (above, below, behind, within, before, heavier than, brighter than, caused by etc.) then, following Piaget we come to find that the growth in the sophistication of the kinds of competences we require to create a social bond, to *connect* socially, ultimately depends on those competences *internalising the logic* of ergodic relations among things.

And this leads us straight (back) into the Kantian problematic. Kant however recognised that moral judgement could not be reduced to ‘pure reason’, yet this appeal to ego psychologies by Habermas (and Giddens) is precisely that, a reduction of moral judgement to pure reason. However much Habermas and Giddens declare the inadequacies of ego psychology and that they are using those aspects of it that permit a social theoretical development they have retained too much of the bathwater with the baby. In so doing, and in that part of their work that seeks an answer to the question of the ontogenetic origins of the ground of sociation, they contravene the principles Weber established (Weber, 1978: pp.7-32), and to which they have both subscribed, that define the ‘nature of social action’. All Weber’s principles have been subjected to critique, but that the object of analysis should be primarily social is not usually questioned.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Societal perspectives gesture towards experiential benchmarks taken to indicate that social changes, dislocating the societal from regions of mundane activities, impact on the *quality* of action and sociation. To establish the ‘dislocation’ thesis the theorists discussed aver towards ‘penetrative’ changes to the ‘ground’ of human activity and sociation where the concern is the *effects* of processes at societal level that make penetrative changes to the ‘fundamentals’ of social existence. The ‘dislocation’ of system and lifeworld was discussed in some detail in the context of apocalyptic theory. However, the effects of apocalypse are heavily refracted. Their implications surface in quite different registers: e.g. trust as a feature of experience; reciprocity and mutuality as conditions of the lifeworld. Examining these more closely we are referred to the skilful practices of reflecting and knowledgeable agents responding to the contingencies of everyday life. The different registers of individual experience and social structure obscure the arguments. There is confusion about how communication, constituting social engagement, grounds itself and establishes mutuality through undefined embodied and sensuous means. Likewise, the transition to sociation from socialisation is problematic. We cannot properly distinguish the apocalypse of the social from the defining features of its ontogenesis in processes of socialisation. Lack of trust, ambivalence, insincerity, pretence, parody are qualities of contemporary practice, but it is not clear from dislocation theorists that they have not

always been so. Further investigation of the ‘ground’ of the social needs to be undertaken. This is pursued in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Social Constructionism and Experience in Peril

### 3.1 Introduction

Bauman, Giddens and Habermas each draw upon social theoretical traditions concerned with human agency in order to (i) find experiential corroboration for their apocalyptic claims (ii) express the magnitude of their concerns, and (iii) find some political resonance for descriptions of, otherwise, abstract and global processes of social/societal change. This involves problematic shifts of analytical register. In this chapter there is a return to the agency tradition formative in their work. Each seeks to grasp the ‘ground’ of social life and invariably approaches it in the work of social constructionists. Constructionism is employed in its broadest definition e.g. Giddens (1984) draws on symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy among other things to understand the nature of practice. Yet each of the above thinks through the ‘ground’ of social life by reference to the phenomenological tradition (e.g. Giddens, 1976; Bauman, 1978; Habermas, 1984). It is this ground that is under threat from social change.

Ironically, the social constructionist tradition as a whole is relatively unencumbered by consideration of history. This is particularly poignant in view of the observation that agency theories developed during the period when human agency and experience were most systematically brutalised or disturbed by historical events (from the Great War to the political upheavals of the 1960s). Indeed, the teaching of agency theories (judging by standard texts on the subject) dwells on their contribution to understanding ‘social normalcy’. We think of Mead, Schutz, Goffman, Berger, Luckmann and Garfinkel as showing us some of the unchanging substrata of social activity in a vibrant series of studies I call ‘first wave’ social constructionism. It is not generally acknowledged that the kinds of account for which this tradition is famous has ‘universalist’ tendencies. In other words, the concept of action or agency deriving from the work of Weber, and extant in the list of writers above, is not analytically confined to any specific time and place. The ‘unit act’ or ‘good social repair’ or ‘dramaturgical co-operation’ are not concepts which have historical or even cultural specificity. These are concepts about the *flow* of action in social life itself, rather than the culturally specific ‘direction’, outcomes or effects of such flows. Historical and cultural variation was of major interest to many of these theorists. But such variation

was available only in the outcomes of action e.g. the particular ‘stocks of knowledge’, say, transmitted within a particular culture; the specific rituals of ethnomethodological good repair in any situation; the specific content of dramaturgical performances etc.. When, therefore, societal theorists speak of apocalyptic changes to the ‘ground’ of social life, are they talking about the freely variable outcomes of agency or something about the nature of the flow of agency itself?

There is some confusion here. The claims about the end of the social warrant and imply the latter. The rhetorical force of the claims made by Habermas, Giddens and Bauman indicate radical changes to some ‘substratum’ of agency and experience. However, too often these claims are found in the context of corroborative remarks that take freely variable outcomes as indices. For example, over the course of my lifetime my social experience of shopping has changed. During my first twenty years local shops were the contexts for highly familiar transactions involving money, news, the elaboration of minor aspirations (do I have enough money yet for that jigsaw puzzle Mr. shopkeeper? No, but I’ll keep it for you a while longer, even though a rival is after it...). During the following ten years my local shopping transactions were with people with whom I lacked any common language and which often passed in silence, perhaps punctuated by slight nods as acknowledgments of change of ownership of goods and money. There are now 126 languages spoken in the London Borough of Newham where I lived. In this situation Schutz and Berger and Luckmann do not despair. While *indexical* shifts that could be described as ‘fundamental’ have taken place and radically altered the contents of agency in such things as ‘stocks of knowledge’, ‘typifications’ or the significant resources available for actors’ ‘performances’, nevertheless *constructive capacity* prevails. Indeed, constructive capacity must have been available to, say, Roman merchants in Spain and North Africa in the same way 2000 years ago. There is nothing in the canonical texts of agency theory that declares otherwise that I can find. Indeed, recent discussions on the conditions of trade (as one example of the exercise of constructive capacities across cultural domains) at times of radical economic or social shifts (e.g. Hedeager (1992) in *Iron-Age Societies*; Perring (1991) on ‘spatial organisation and social change in Roman towns’), or at the trading boundaries of colonial empires e.g. at Hadrian’s wall in the second century (Bowman, 2004; Huntley, 2003) now indicate that constructive capacities

to establish and routinize social exchanges with weakly shared stocks of knowledge and typifications may occur peaceably without recourse to the exercise of one-sided power.

So, we are left with a somewhat finer problem. If *societal* theorists displace the site of key changes to the social that they refer to towards ‘agency’ what do they really want us to attend to? After all it is not immediately clear what aspects of agency can show up as unique symptoms of social change. Perhaps, as in Gane’s (2004) description of the problem, we should simply be referring to the *quantity* and extent of such indexical changes as I have indicated above. That is to say, I find ‘my ground penetrated’ as a result of the sheer quantity of the kinds of changes, as indicated above, to the contingencies of everyday life that I experience, and must somehow respond to, across all fields of experience. Quantity and quality have been used interchangeably here. Why? The association of social constructionism with relativism in the social sciences has muddled the waters. By focussing on the effects of social construction we have merged our understanding of social change, and its impact on us, with the fact of socio-cultural relativity. It is more difficult to see the nature of the ‘penetrative changes’ that Giddens et al refer to. Habermas, for example, attempts to trace a line between those writers that, for him, elaborate a view of the ‘ground’ of social life, e.g. Schutz and Mead, and ultimately those societal ‘forces’ (e.g. mediatisation) that impact negatively, but *qualitatively*, on this ground situated somehow in the ‘lifeworld’. Yet, there is no line traced back the other way. In other words, while I understand from Habermas that the ‘sacred’ bases of communication have become, via irreversible social changes, ‘linguified’ and that, further to this change, media-political institutions have impacted on these bases, I am left guessing as to what kinds of distortions or damage this is supposed to have had on the ground of social existence with which he began.

In order to explore the idea of the demise of the social directly from the vantage point of agency we need to make a somewhat elliptical manoeuvre. This manoeuvre will hopefully let us define better in what ‘qualitative changes to the social’ consists. This chapter pursues this. Firstly, I want to suggest that, prior to its foundering, social constructionism in its ‘first fervour’, or earlier form, had, in fact, already made a summary statement about the ‘demise of the social’. Secondly, I want to examine if the social constructionism drawn on by recent societal theorists arguing the demise of the social, founded. Thirdly, while

the first summary statement of social entropy is demonstrably flawed in many respects nevertheless it draws upon a profound insight ever-present in this tradition: social action is always perilous and uncertain. This insight, surely, is based primarily on a sensitivity to the very de-socialising conditions of the twentieth century within which agency theories happened to have been developed. However, the medium in which these theories took hold promoted, ironically, an image of social *normalcy* later much attacked in theories of social change. Garfinkel (1990) was most seriously misunderstood here. If Garfinkel's 'experiments' can be read in a revised light I suggest that they are more disturbing than any experiments Stanley Milgram devised to examine the phenomena of obedience to authority in the wake of what we learned about custodial behaviour in concentration camps (cf. Pleasants, 1999). Fourthly, I want to establish here some of the key terms of reference about the 'ground of the social' that all writers aver to but avoid elaborating.

### **3.2 Social Constructionism's loss of the social**

#### **3.2.1 *The Homeless Mind***

1973 saw the publication of Berger, Berger and Kellner's (1974) *The Homeless Mind* and Bensman and Lillienfeld's (1973) *Craft and Consciousness*. The first, from the constructionist perspective, which by this time was in retreat in the wake of post-May 1968 concerns, posed itself the question: What have modernisation and its institutions done to consciousness? The second, from a marxian perspective, pre-empted the answer by arguing that practice, in particular work, begets particular forms of consciousness. Both books look at constructive activity and warn about institutional forms that will in some way dehumanise and minimise the social. Berger et al were quick to acknowledge the experiential *Zeitgeist* evidenced in the countercultures of modernization that sought simpler lives, human scale environments, solidarities, craft technologies, ecological validity and authenticity. This was a time when countercultures were seen as potentially disruptive to production, particularly where they became part of the agenda of trades unions (Willis, 1976). Berger et al contrast this to the desire for modernisation in the Third World. Here they fear the process of social fragmentation that the forces of modernisation bring: i.e. "splintering traditional ways of life, ways of thought and kinship patterns" (Berger et al, 1974: 234). In this last fling of first wave social constructionism the issues

of change and politics had begun to be addressed. Also something of the basis of social constructionism is revealed. Between the publication of Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967) and *The Homeless Mind* came a realisation that to socially construct has an 'unwitting' aspect somehow amplified under conditions of modernisation. This observation was clarified for one of the authors<sup>3</sup> (not named in the book) in the context of a visit to Latin America in 1969. Socio-political development problems and their solutions were revealed to lead inescapably to the corrosive problems of the first world. The pursuit of modernisation here has an unintended and unnoticed consequence for the conditions under which further social life can develop. Unwittingly then constructive capacity in conditions of modernisation has 'experiential' consequences of corrosive modernisation: *We become 'homeless' within the midst of our own constructions*. This homelessness becomes increasingly attached to consciousness, their first image is of man (sic) 'homeless in a world he has unwittingly created'. The sense here, though, is not only of a feeling of homelessness as a consequence of modernisation (as is often read) but homelessness as a chronic experience of the context of practice within modernity.

Pausing to consider this image in the context of social constructionism, we could say the authors were appealing to the Zeitgeist and answering their critics on issues of politics, social conflict and change glaringly missing from *The Social Construction of Reality*. I suggest, however, that what had been developed theoretically between 1930 and 1970 within the otherwise somewhat abstract phenomenological tradition could not have been 're-spun' all of a sudden at the turn of theoretical fashion. The concept of the corrosion of sociality were surely present within that tradition in significant and developed ways. Yet, the contrast between the works of 1967 and 1973 could not be greater from an experiential point of view. *The Social Construction of Reality* paints a picture of the 'entirely located ego' who is in fact quite 'at home'. This work is about the secure location of ego in a socially mappable universe. Ego is at the centre of various concentric circles (e.g. primary and secondary socialisation) which form one of several sets of concentric locative 'nests' for ego. The actor is located and at home within fields of associates, consociates and ancestors. S/he uses a panoply of readily available stocks of knowledge and usefully shared 'typifications' to move about this world. Given that this earlier, 1967, statement

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<sup>3</sup> It was Peter Berger (personal communication, 2007)

was formulated from a phenomenological tradition, proximally the work of Alfred Schutz, with a history of drawing reflective examples from everyday life going back to at least Husserl, and given that these reflections occurred during times of disturbing historical transformation in the modernised world (1914-1967), should we really believe that social constructionism had to wait for a trip to Latin America in 1969 to discover experiential homelessness in the processes of modernisation?

A third text, thematically continuous with SCR and *The Homeless Mind*, is Berger's (1990 [1967]) *The Sacred Canopy*. It offers an alternative account of experiential homelessness that has little to do with modernisation per se. In *The Sacred Canopy* Berger explores society as the means by which, and as Bauman (2000: 183) following Durkheim graphically puts it, individuals may "escape the horror of their transience". One is never far from a kind of terminal instability it seems. Human social constructive capacity is society here. But it is "established in the face of chaos" (Berger, 1990: 89); religious legitimation, for example, provides only a 'semblance of stability' in what turns out to be a social order of always 'tenuous formation' (ibid.). Society is constituted by three movements that are entirely realized within human co-operative activity: the externalization of selves; the objectivation of meaning arising from this, available to others, and the internalisation of the same (Berger, 1990: 81). Berger suggests that humans are 'compelled' into engaging in co-operative social life because they need to externalize themselves. He admits here the possibility that this description allows that one may be *reluctant* to engage. Reluctance here seems to be related to 'authenticity'. Berger imagines a 'cognitive event' during the process of internalization/socialisation that enables individuals to separate out their actual circumstances from their fantasies such that one may become "real to oneself". Note that this is a matter of consciousness. Indeed, alienation, in this formulation becomes a 'forgetting' that one has constructed the world in a particular way. To escape alienation we must *recover a sense of the fact that we have constructed* our world. The contrast here with, say, the Marx of *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Marx, 1977) is that alienation there is brought about through the loss of an object, objective, indeed goal, from the agent's constructive capacity. It is a price paid by the worker within Capitalism. In Berger et al it is a price paid by the agent for social engagement per se. For current purposes it is important to establish that Berger already has, then, a theory of alienation prior to embarking on, albeit with others, the study

of modernization and that the two approaches are not entirely compatible. In the latter study modernity ‘erodes’ the ground of social life. The ‘ground’ here means human constructive capacities as realised within the social interactive circumstances provided by modernity (explored further shortly). However, in *The Sacred Canopy* Berger points out that,

“...[M]an (sic) produces ‘otherness’ both outside and inside himself as a result of his life in society. Man’s own works...become part of a reality other than himself. They ‘escape’ him...As a result, it becomes a possibility not only that the social world seems strange to the individual, but that he becomes strange to himself...” (Berger, 1990: 85)

He elaborates, “It is important to emphasise that this estrangement *is given* in the sociality of man, in other words, it is anthropologically necessary” (ibid. my emphasis). If we examine modernization’s features producing corrosion and alienation in the grounding conditions of social life they ought to be carefully distinguished from what is ‘anthropologically necessary’ in sociality per se. Before embarking on an examination of *The Homeless Mind* I state at the outset that this distinction, crucial to the success of Berger et al’s thesis, is not made in the literature on social constructionism.

The paradox here is that theoretical awareness of modernity has given rise to two different social constructionist accounts. In *The Homeless Mind* the distinctiveness of modernity is proffered as part of a social context recognisable to sociology that locates social *being*. As suggested above, and argued in more detail later, when that context is thought through it is already found to be part and parcel of the fabric of social constructionism from the beginning. In fact, ‘homelessness in the midst of our activities’ is a central feature of the tradition and a primary stimulus for the development of phenomenological sociology since the 1930s. This is a prime example of how sociological discourse can mistake a symptom of modernity for something that, in the end, turns out to be a given of human existence within the same social theory. We are lucky, in this case, that Berger et al’s material is worked out to a high level of scholarship over several domains of sociological concern such that we may identify the problem.

### 3.2.2 The Arguments of *The Homeless Mind*

The vocabulary and orientation of this work is taken almost entirely from Schutz's life's work and the latter's synthesis in Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (SCR). I should say immediately what I think SCR does in relation to Schutz. On the one hand SCR is a concise statement of the relationship between experience, the lifeworld and the palpable, collective world constituted as a consequence of on-going constructive activities. Implied in this is the development of always further social resources for the reproduction and transformation of everyday life. On the other hand, as a synthesis of the Schutzian corpus, SCR crystallises that corpus, primarily for the purposes in hand, as essentially a 'cognitive project' within the sociology of knowledge. This means that the human subject that is socialised into the constructed worlds of others and into a constructive practice of his/her own is essentially conceived as an 'epistemic' subject in the Kantian tradition. I cannot argue that Schutz was not himself immersed in this discredited tradition. However, I can say (and explore in more detail in the final sections of this chapter) that the full corpus of his work was informed by theoretical moves and arguments that take us beyond the cognitivist project. Additionally, Berger was not only aware of Schutz's non-cognitivist ideas and issues and their importance, but himself developed some of these ideas prior to the publication of *The Homeless Mind* (cf. Berger, 1970).

*The Homeless Mind* utilises the notion of the lifeworld and comments on the kinds of practices to be found within it under conditions of modernisation. SCR had crystallised an understanding of the structure of the lifeworld (and its experience) based on the concept of 'projects'. Time, as well as space, requires a social 'shape' accessible, stable and meaningful to us in communicational exchanges. The exchanges require shared categories, 'typified' knowledge etc., which are somehow 'grounded' in the habits and shared routines of those who engage with one another. SCR, as suggested previously, presents a somewhat over-idealised picture of a 'meaning-saturated' social world inconsistent perhaps with the more fraught experiences of daily living in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, SCR is confident in its description of social processes and the mode of their construction because it sees the processes involved as anthropologically universal and therefore relevant

to all human conditions no matter how diverse or impacted upon by the forces of history<sup>4</sup>. The idea that the joint activities of knowledgeable agents produce yet newer social resources, or ‘sediment’, in the context of responding to the contingencies of everyday living is relevant to all human cultures.

*The Homeless Mind* sees modernisation as a set of forces, impacting on cognitive and constructive capacities in such a way that *new difficulties* emerge in organising our lives, responding to contingencies, relating to others and relating to ourselves. These new difficulties emerge as problems to be solved through ‘conscious reflection’. Suppressed, but also present, are the emotional correlates of modernisation and the difficulties of the social. If the world is stabilised through activities of knowing, the logic runs, then anything that impacts on the certainties that such knowledge (and knowledge production and reproduction) achieves will threaten the stability of selfhood and identity. The consequence of modernisation for Berger, Berger and Kellner in respect of the diminution of the social is that it leads, as demonstrated below, to the ‘over-individualised’ self. However, the role of knowledge and identity in this need further discussion. We need to assess what modernity actually impacts on.

The three major forces of modernisation identified by Berger et al are (i) technological production, (ii) the impact of bureaucracy on consciousness and (iii) the pluralisation of social lifeworlds. The way the impact of these three forces is handled shows a desire to indicate how the empirical facts of technological production and its pervasive logic take hold of human constructive capacities. *This colonisation extends to all the activities through which Schutz and SCR had previously claimed the social world coheres, and it alters them.* Constructive capacity is my phrase, but I think it more faithfully reflects Berger et al’s point. Their bias towards ‘consciousness’ often obscures this. Berger et al’s revised position narrates the consciousness of a factory worker. The worker’s activities, they suggest, fall within local and distal frames of management, expertise and processes the extent of which he (sic) can only dimly imagine. His deployment of specific skills and

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<sup>4</sup> I acknowledge the debate concerning the Holocaust here and its impact on moral and social existence. The idea that concentration camps produced de-socialised, autistic-like people (Bettelheim (1948), *The Empty Fortress*, is contrasted at the other extreme by Todorov’s (2000) *Facing the Extreme: moral life in concentration camps* and Nader’s (2007) book on the literature produced in the camps.

knowledge in the context of focussed tasks (both in the factory and in domestic life) begins to take on a form shaped by the process of technological production. The latter demands the simultaneous management of large numbers of different sequences of work and social relationships. This commonplace aspect of modernity implicates people in swathes of activities where they are anonymous to one another at least some of the time. Berger et al argue that this leads to the constitution of new forms of consciousness typified by a ‘cognitive style’ reminiscent of the technological production process itself. Anonymity, they propose, becomes necessary for the production process itself because communication between functional roles takes primacy over the persons that fill the roles for the successful elaboration of tasks. However, by the same token it also allows workers to identify with political positions and social movements outside of the concerns of the immediate locale and its personalities. Ironically, the necessity of anonymity in a modern economy for facilitating the role-based relationships modern production requires, is also required for the ‘identity’ formation process itself.

Anonymity, like many other characteristics of modernisation in the work in question, is contrasted with the features of non- or pre-modern styles of social life. In the latter, just as in SCR, stability is linked to the production of familiarity in kinds of human action guided by the form given by *mutually* known and understood ‘projects’. Berger et al argued that technological production substitutes itself, or puts itself in the place of these ‘mutual, lifeworld-shaping, projects’. It extends itself to the ‘social engineering’ of human relationships when required. The result is a ‘componentalising’ of all aspects of work and social interaction. Modern people focus on the immediate and need to develop strategies and forms of knowledge (cognitive styles) for reconnecting, in however loose or temporary a way, the components of the tasks of work and life. These components can be linked only through problem-solving work, by people themselves or by others (the concerns of the 1990s are anticipated: e.g. the rise of experts to help make these re-connections). So, like Bauman’s view (2.3.2) additional *work* is required to maintain any individual or local stability. However, we begin to see where modernisation impacts on some of the ‘fundamental’ *sine quas non* of Schutz’s schema and that of SCR. Mutuality and reciprocity, the grounding conditions of social life, are severely affected. Modern production invites me to develop multiple consciousnesses for dealing with anonymised

relationships and with people in more familiar circumstances. But this ‘cognitive change’ also impacts on self-experience:

“Through the reciprocity of perspectives endemic to human social life, all these features of experience also apply to the experience of self. More than that the very anonymity of...social experience carries over more easily to the experience of self than to highly concretized relations with others. For example, I can become a worker in my own consciousness much more easily than I can identify with individuals who have, say, a very peculiar sense of humour. There then occurs a process of self-anonymization to a high degree. The self is now experienced in a partial and segmented way. Indeed, it becomes a componential self. [...] This dichotomization in the subjective experience of identity makes it possible for the individual to establish subjective distance vis-à-vis certain features of identity...For example, the individual will now experience that portion of his identity that contains his anonymization as a ‘worker’ as being ‘less real’ than his identity as a private person or family man. Since each portion of identity relates to specific roles, it now becomes possible for the individual to perform some of these roles ‘tongue in cheek’.” (Berger et al, 1974: 37-38).

Thus even in this ‘cognitive/consciousness dominant’ view (NB ‘reciprocity of *perspectives*’), we can see how the eroding nature of irony or ‘ironic distance’ (cf. Giddens, 1981; 1990) begins to impact on social activities and processes where joint ‘projects’, and the social ‘worlds’ that are supposed to be structured and stabilised by them, require mutuality and trust. Berger et al suggest that aspects of the self experienced as somehow ‘truer’ than other aspects need to protect themselves against the fates awaiting the less true. When considered against the ideal world of SCR then, it is no wonder they proclaim that,

“a psychological management of considerable complexity is necessary in order to perform actions ‘tongue in cheek’. This is a precarious business – effort-consuming, requiring a lot of thought and intrinsically unstable” (Berger et al, 1974: 38).

*Intrinsically unstable?* I can grasp this only relative to how social stability is achieved in Schutz and SCR. Here an unelaborated distinction between what is universal and what particular to modernisation echoes through contemporary work. Bauman (2000) refers to the extra work now required to manage one’s life, its precariousness and its irony. So, we need to unravel this and discover what is missing from the account. Berger et al narrate modernisation in the general context of anthropological variation (suggesting in one breath that it is simply one of numerous possible forms social life can take) they also appear to be

claiming that its characteristics erode the anthropologically *universal* conditions of social life. These I take to be mutuality and reciprocity as these are key to stability in the preceding works and are raised in the present argument with respect to anonymization, which is to some extent their antithesis. Mutuality and reciprocity in the (ideal) pre-modern situation refers to what we might term, following SCR, a ‘profound’ pre-reflective form of co-operation. Activities and tasks that ‘unfold’ in such circumstances abound in jointly felt ‘structures of anticipation’ among participants engaged in activity undertaken *in concert* (Schutz, 1964). Structures of anticipation emerge from the ‘time-shaping’ quality of action concerted under the form of a ‘project’. Schutz did not see this as any kind of submerging of identities. On the contrary, precisely what this form of mutuality entails is an ‘idealisation of the interchangeability of standpoints among autonomous actors. This enables jointly held goals to give organisational form to, and make relevant to participants, some differences between people and social positions and make other differences irrelevant (Schutz and Luckmann, 1985: p.59-60). Under conditions of modernisation, however, ‘jointly felt structures of anticipation’ arising from projects undertaken in concert disappears, or erodes radically. Distally managed tasks orchestrated over large tracts of space and time remove the worker’s engagement and direct relation to patterns of relevance and the ‘horizons’ of meaning subtended by them. The important differences between people now become those identified within the frames of reference supplied by management and imposed from outside the social constructive space of participants rather than differences as part of the ‘deposits’ and ‘sediment’ of local activities. In this context any personal quirks and idiosyncrasies that are relevant to workers for any reason but not necessarily anything to do with their part in the production process may become highlighted.

Componentiality, within the general thematic of social constructionism, then, refers to sequences of activity removed from the immediate forms of engagement that are implied by concerted action and the jointly felt anticipations and consequences that accompany concerted activity in human communities. This description forms the makings of, and is parallel to, what Habermas and Beck (chapter 2) see as ‘mediatisation’. At root Habermas argued it is the lifeworld that stages its uncoupling from the social system, at the same time as sustaining those anonymous forms of social relationship that constitute uncoupled institutions.

But we need to note carefully here that it is not anonymization per se that *leads* to the erosion of the grounding conditions of the social. Rather, if we press the text, it is the development of ‘ironic distance’ that marks out the new form of one’s engagement with others *inter alia*. We should be reminded also that central to Habermas’ understanding of the quality of the social ‘bond’ is precisely the ‘sincerity of engagement’ that it predicates (2.4.3) and which we see in Berger et al’s account to be already seriously undermined.

Similarly, reading on, it is not the sociological commonplace that technological production leads to componentiality and our having to deal with ‘bits’ or ‘units’ in processes we ‘cannot see the ends of’ that is primarily important. Rather, (and, for me regrettably, almost in passing) they say that ascribing meaning is more difficult in this context unless we can grasp processes as a whole in a ‘self-disturbing’ way. Significantly they add to their discussion of componentiality,

“At the same time because [the worker] has been socialised into the reality of the production process, he has some sense, however vague, that he *ought* to have a view of the whole. Thus his own experience is apprehended by him as incomplete, as somehow defective...Therefore there is a constant threat in the situation of meaninglessness, disidentification and experiences of anomie.” Berger et al (1974: 40-1).

This idea of a *sense* of ‘lack of grasp’ of the whole combined with a sense of obligation that there should be such a grasp seems to me central to their thesis of the experience of the end of the social, or the reduction of its ‘ground’. But it is precisely this that is not explored either here, or in any works that subsequently depend on these ideas with the exception of Bauman. Bauman (1978), however, proceeds on the assumption that, with one or two modifications and updates, Berger et al’s thesis can be taken as foundational. It is important, for example to Bauman, that belief that a grasp of the whole is possible is available to social beings.

Elsewhere in their argument Berger et al claim that it is important for us to all at least believe, presumably in a cognitive way, that a *view* of the whole is possible. Unfortunately, they do not carry back the implications of their arguments to the anthropological, pre-modern, circumstances that warrant the contrasts they make vis-à-vis

modernisation. If they did they would soon find situations where meaninglessness was actually predicated on precisely an inability to *view*, cognise or have knowledge of whole processes (e.g. cases of misfortune or sickness, cf. Turner, 1969). In Turner's ethnography meaninglessness forms part of the reciprocal grounding conditions of participants. The anthropological literature has a tendency to say that social and cultural resources are brought to bear in such circumstances, and in such a way, that for all concerned the problem of meaninglessness is substituted by procedures for answering the afflicted person's recurrent question, "why me?" In other words, 'seeing the whole' is not so much a case of saturating with meaning that which appears as puzzling. Rather, it is the social world answering an individual who has just been constituted uniquely, identified, as such by some contingency such as illness. This is not a 'problem of meaning' but rather a 'problem of specification' (what comprises the instantiation of a possibility?) much more central to our understanding of acting, sensing and grasping *per se* than the somewhat over laboured idea of 'meaning'. It seems to me that, in an incipient way, the problem of specification is sensed but not examined in *The Homeless Mind* and not explored further as a feature of modernised production. Instead, they look for the changes wrought to our 'moral ground' by modernisation in the development of bureaucracy.

### 3.2.3 Bureaucracy

The themes of anonymity and the lifeworld colonised by procedures recur in the arguments connected with bureaucracy. The latter exploits another anthropologically universal feature of the standard description of the lifeworld: its apparent 'orderliness'. A cognitivist, knowledge-based approach to social order depends on the cultural transmission, and reproduction within communication exchange, of semantic material. Both Schutz in his first major work (1980) and Berger and Luckmann (1967) look to the properties of language to understand how the concepts of grammar can be applied to the organisation of projects and the structures of anticipation and co-ordination implied by them that lend shape and orderliness to time itself. The orderliness of the lifeworld is dependent, in other words, on grammatical and semantic ordering principles. And the latter is provided by the regularity of exchange which confers stable themes for orderly communication across the social world. Far too much is made of semantics in the ordering

of social life and not enough of the grammatical ideas first discussed by Schutz (1980) in 1934. I will take that up later, but now pursue the theme of bureaucracy.

That bureaucracy develops under conditions of modernisation as an almost autonomous mode of social organisation implies a working disjunction between the constructional capacities to organise the lifeworld and its roles and the sequences of tasks that comprise production and living. Berger et al claim,

“Thus, bureaucracy leads to a type of problem-solving different from that of technological production. It is less conducive to creative fantasy, and it is fixating rather than innovating.” (Berger et al, 1974: 51)

In other words it requires and fashions yet another ‘cognitive style’. I interpret this as follows. In a pre-modern context orderliness is linked to production because roles, categories and projects are oriented towards the variation in daily life produced by contingency. Thus, ‘procedures’, and rituals that deal with contingency (onset of illness, crop failure for example) are drawn from the same substantive fields as knowledge and production. Where a separation has occurred between these substantive fields the application of rules of procedure must appear arbitrary. Again in my reading, a curious inversion takes place.

In a pre-modern context, contingencies that result in procedures and ritual responses further enrich the traditional unity across the substantive fields of the social world (see, for example, Heilman’s dramaturgical accounts of different traditions of talmudic study among Jews who evolved different hermeneutical strategies to render *adequate* interpretations of contingencies arising from the changes brought about by, say, the diaspora, and then the re-settlement in Palestine after the formation of the new state; Heilman, 1980). In the modern autonomised bureaucracy, by contrast, procedures are always *inadequate* to the ever new contingencies that arise and therefore more procedures have to be produced along with new roles for their administration. Table 3.1 shows the strategies available within the terms of reference of Berger et al’s description of social forms. (I add strategies of low modernisation and high bureaucratisation missing in their discussion).

**Table 3.1 Styles of hermeneutical activity dealing with contingencies**

		Modernisation	
		High	Low
Bureaucratisation			
High		<i>Proceduralising and foreclosing</i>	<i>Reformulating tradition</i>
Low		<i>Innovating</i>	<i>creative fantasizing</i>

Bureaucracy has to furnish itself with a growing taxonomic knowledge and competence to deal with these contingencies. Taxonomy helps stabilise and restore orderliness of a particular kind. The otherwise arbitrariness of bureaucracy has to come under political control of some kind. That the passport office shuts at 3PM is a matter of political control, this makes bureaucracy predictable as does the debate about the fixing of meanings via a taxonomy of contingent circumstances argue Berger et al. It can be argued that our contemporary experience of our control of our contingencies is based now essentially on ever-growing taxonomies and procedures to capture what eludes us between taxonomies and procedures. More parliamentary statutes have appeared in the UK since 1980 than accumulated in the 760 years between 1215 to 1980. Justice secretary Jack Straw, in his speech to the judiciary in 2009 (Straw, 2009) attempted to explain why there had been, for example more than 3000 new criminal offences added to the statute books since the new Labour government first came to office in 1997.

At the level of co-present social engagement in this context a curious new complicity emerges. In order that procedures are applied predictably, and with the fairness implied by their political control, the social relation between client and bureaucrat assumes the role of the bureaucrat is undertaken *sine ira et studio*. That is, impersonally with total affective neutrality; although I would translate this phrase as ‘without passion or zeal’. While one can understand the place of *sine ira* in the execution of politically ratified procedures, the *sine studio* is more telling! (How far from Sartre’s ‘bad faith’ is *sine studio*?). Impersonality invests the bureaucratic process with a *moral* quality,

“not just as a limiting factor...but as an intrinsic part of its own structure of consciousness. // What emerges...might be described as moralised anonymity[...it]

is intrinsically defined and morally legitimated as a principle of social relations" (Berger et al, 1974: 53).

"The client's problem is to get his passport; the bureaucrat's problem is to get rid of the client" (ibid: 59). From this it may well be seen that the routines of social institutions in their stances toward clients render them as passive within the production of orderliness. The payoff is that the bureaucracy will, by aiming to get rid of you, assist you in the process by which you, under conditions of modernisation, employ less true selves to protect truer ones. There are clear parallels in this description with the fate of morality as determined by Giddens, Bauman and Habermas (chapter 2; see also Shilling and Mellor, 2001: 196 and Bauman, 2002).

### 3.2.4 Pluralisation of Social Lifeworlds

The subject operates, famously, across 'multiple realities', each of which may have different implications for the form subjectivity takes. *The Homeless Mind* takes us away from *The Social Construction of Reality* insofar as it clarifies the relation between subject and social reality. The 1967 work stands accused of proposing a multiply competent epistemic agent that deploys appropriate to-the-occasion competences in whatever reality he/she finds themselves in. The 1973 work is much clearer on the subjectivising consequences of movement from one kind of reality to another. But it is in this third part of the argument that the 'diminution of the social' is formally stated.

The lifeworld is structured by projects organised by knowledge and *anticipations* that give shape to time, particularly the future. This is the true source of identity for Berger et al. But in modernity a biography can be constituted, and more conveniently so, simply by *movement between* different realities. Again, in ideal or pre-modern circumstances, identity is embedded in shared projects with a 'thematic' unity among the projects that give shape to time and biography. The modern equivalent where primarily work and home constitute different 'project regions' as well as the panoply of other consumer regions in which time-shaping projects evolve, leads to a condition of 'open identity'. This 'open identity' leaves us open also to the shifting definitions of others.

“Modern identity is *peculiarly differentiated*. Because of the plurality of social worlds in modern society the structures of each particular world are experienced as relatively unstable and unreliable [...] Consequently the institutional order undergoes a certain loss of reality. The accent of reality shifts from the objective order of institutions to the realm of subjectivity... Therefore the individual seeks to find his ‘foothold’ in reality in himself rather than outside himself”. Berger et al (1974: 75).

While this may engender new subjective ‘depths’, it also generates angst and a ‘permanent identity crisis’. Here the subject is ‘no longer at home’. Rather we are confronted by ‘kaleidoscopes of experience and meaning’ forcing us into decisions, plans and more ‘reflection’. “The self becomes an object of deliberate attention and sometimes anguished scrutiny” (Berger et al, 1974: 75).

It is perhaps in the discussion of the fate of religious faith under pluralisation that illustrates most decisively for Berger et al the minimisation of the social in this work. It is here where the condition of ‘homelessness’ resides, or is most clearly expressed. Under conditions of pre-modernisation faith is socially given. Where it is now a matter of choice faith has to be ‘achieved’ as a job of work. In this definition ‘home’ appears to be understood simply in opposition to homelessness. And again much later in the work,

“In their private lives individuals keep on constructing and reconstructing refuges that they experience as ‘home’. But over and over again the cold winds of homelessness threaten these fragile constructions. It would be an overstatement to say that the ‘solution’ of the private sphere is a failure; there are too many individual successes. But it is always very precarious.” (Berger et al, 1974; 168).

There is no doubt that homelessness is constituted by shifting sands and changing definitions of truth in different realities. Social mobility and changeability and shifting of one milieu to another becomes as stable as it gets. Again, we have a definition of homelessness, but no definition of ‘home’. References to the ‘pre-modern’ order fail here. While there is less reference to homelessness, there is a reluctance to say that the order of tradition constitutes a home.

If we carefully review the nature of the arguments in the broader context that I have proposed passing from Schutz, through Berger and Luckmann to *The Homeless Mind*, we may conclude that both ‘the minimisation of the social’ and experiential homelessness is

correlated with the over-individualised and institutionally over-individuated self. But to pin down the nature of ‘home’ we need to look more broadly across these works, because the answer, according to the logic they present, must lie in what it is that constitutes *constructive capacity* itself. If I am ‘not at home’ then I am homeless within my own activities and their struggle to make things cohere. This is a seriously important point and its context must be grasped. Berger et al’s references to anomie and meaninglessness as well as a ‘lack of integration’ across ‘divisions’ in social life reveal the extent to which *The Homeless Mind* seeks to accommodate, or align itself with, the Durkheimian paradigm. This is a wrong move. Not because Durkheim is wrong, but because the theoretical language Schutz, and subsequently Berger et al develop to pursue their object can accommodate Durkheim only as a ‘plug-in’. Durkheim’s paradigm rediscovers the power of the social, as opposed to its reduction, in situations where the self has become over-individuated. After all, the maintenance of the over-individuated self must point to a strong integrative move in relation to the ‘category’ of the ‘individual’ and the social world produces forms in relation to it. A solution would have been to exploit some of the marginal writings of Schutz where, I argue later, better material to have developed, consistent with the project in hand would have been found.

Berger et al leave themselves open to this by focussing on homelessness as a correlate of practices undergoing institutional change. They paint a picture of the ‘tortured’, reflective self, but it is ultimately an ‘epistemic’ self who has become subject to an epistemic disruption. The epistemic motif here becomes adapted in such a way as to gloss over its glaring sutures with what Durkheim conceived as the social constitution of knowledge. On the other hand if there had been more development of the focus on what in *The Homeless Mind* ‘being at home’ means there would have been an opportunity to develop further what is clearly thought of as the ‘ontological’ conditions, the ‘ground’ of the social, of what it is to socially construct and ‘to be at home’ in the exercise of constructive capacities.

In a nutshell: Berger et al argue the ‘ontic’ conditions for the minimisation of the social and the *homelessness* it engenders. But the basis from which they conceptualise the problem, it seems, for what it is to be *at home*, are the ‘ontological’ conditions of ‘the social’ and the ground it provides for the social construction of reality. They start from a profound, but unelaborated, *sense* of what it is to be at home. They realise this has been

fundamentally eroded in some way, but constitute homelessness from a series of ontic after-effects which are seen in the examples used in *The Homeless Mind*. We should note also, incidentally, that there is no attempt made to theorise what kinds of constructive capacity are required or are available for the ‘boundary-crossing’ kind of identity formation, i.e. across ‘multiple realities’, referred to as characteristic of modernity. I have pulled out those aspects of the general headline ideas which point to serious *qualitative* changes to the experience and conduct of social life. Thus, beneath the more obvious outcomes of modernisation, namely: componentiality in the wake of technological production; inadequate knowledge; over-individualised selves and anonymous social relationships, is a set of more serious issues to consider from the point of view of the quality of experience of self and otherness.

These issues begin with almost hidden statements about the *quality of engagement* in active and palpable social life. This is something often lost in the general noise of discussion about the forces of modernisation and which leads us into misleading debates about causation. The suggestion was made that the active forms of interaction that sustain the social world and are shaped by its time-constituting projects are somehow ‘infected’ with something. We might recall here Habermas’s notion that the very ‘pores of communication’ have been affected (chapter 2). ‘Infected by what?’ is here answered in similar vein to Habermas, that is, in the realm of ironic distance and sincerity of engagement in social interaction.

A critical engagement with Berger et al’s thesis puts us in a much better position to begin to understand what Giddens, Bauman and Habermas mean beyond the pointers they give to the consequences of modernity. The latter also point to the ontological conditions of the social but assume the social constructionist case rather than argue it in the way Berger et al do. There has been no proper argument made yet as to why irony and sincerity are important to the ontological conditions or ground of social life. Chapter 2 followed Habermas’s arguments and his are the closest in form to what is required. We may surmise that, at least, irony and sincerity figure strongly because, like Durkheim, Habermas seeks to understand the pre-contractual conditions that bind social contracts. However, it was noted there that even Habermas fails to trace back the implications of the uncoupling of social engagements to their grounding conditions in the lifeworld. In order to get into the

position to do this I want to further discuss the critical case and fate of ‘first wave’ social constructionism, before returning to some of its characteristics and arguments that will help further with the present quest.

### 3.2.5 Pursuing the ground

Arguably, the over-alignment of social constructionism with the sociology of knowledge led to the abandonment of further discussion along the interesting lines adumbrated in *The Homeless Mind*. The rise of interest in subjectivity and the development of the relationship between marxian thought and structuralism (e.g. Coward and Ellis, 1977) ended lines of inquiry that privileged (or appeared to) the epistemic-who, or the knowledge centred agent. Giddens (1979) own reformulation of the problem, promoting the knowledgeability of the agent contra Marx, is careful to distinguish this from the epistemic subject. One blind alley was avoided as a consequence, but also thrown out with the bathwater was one of the richest veins of thought in the understanding of the ground of sociality: the work of Schutz. Whatever faults the concept of ‘ground’ here doubtless possesses it nevertheless, as I have argued up until now, is a central theoretical *topos* which all theorists discussed seem to patrol without elucidating its ‘geography’. I already claimed that the only adequate formulation of the ‘ground’ of social life that reveals diminishment in the way set out by Berger et al is Schutz’s. A critical engagement with Schutzian ideas by Giddens and Bauman independently in the mid 1970s proved formative, in my view, to the development of their own influential revisions in social theory from the 1980s and on. In addition to that the manifold re-distribution of Schutz’s ideas re-appear within socialisation studies starting in the 1970s giving close empirical attention to the forms which developing joint social activities take (e.g. Richards, 1974; Richards and Light, 1986). Later, this took a more ‘discursive’ and critical turn (Shotter, 1984; Gergen and Shotter, 1989; Henriques et al, 1984).

### 3.4 Schutz and his critics

The argument for the ‘end or diminishment’ of the social within the so-called ‘interaction order’ appears to depend on subtle but profound alterations to the ground of social life. This ‘ground’ is now perceived as a ‘form of life between people’ which can somehow

become infected with irony and insincerity brought on, supposedly, by the unique conditions of modernisation. I resist for now the mis-leading term ‘intersubjectivity’. This form of life between people Schutz took as his primary focus and definition of the social. While the standard criticisms (see, for example, Lemert, 1978, Waters, 1994; Layder, 1995) focus on the apparent individualism of his narrative and the imposing edifices of knowledge and their organisation that preoccupied him, Schutz had as his objective the ‘form shaping tendencies’ that such things have for social activity. In other words, the ground of social life could be ‘felt’ only through the extant, cumbersome instruments and objects through which we navigate through the lifeworld in the company of others. It is easier to think and write about knowledge than what knowledge ‘has tendencies for’. I cannot claim that Schutz did not think the acquisition and deployment of epistemic knowledge is central to understanding social action. However, I argue, and shall make a case, from which I develop my own position (chapter 5) that Schutz, in many of his marginal writings took knowledge as a more *sensuous device*, that did not primarily imbue the world with ‘social meaning’. Rather, knowledge as a sensuous device provided that world with time-shaping properties and the wherewithal *to make that world coherent for now* in the face of an intrinsic meaninglessness. This aspect of Schutz’s work, I believe, had a profound impact on Garfinkel, although the latter showed no interest in developing Schutz’s theoretical language. One may characterise Garfinkel’s ‘experiments’ (1990) by focussing on how the extant meanings made between people appear to lean on yet other slightly less extant ‘indexical’ meanings potentially available to them:

Graham: Sorry, I’m late, I had a flat tyre.

Wendy: What do you mean *flat* tyre?

Graham: The tyre had a puncture and went flat.

Wendy: *How* flat did the tyre go?

It is easy within this kind of ‘experimental’ exchange, designed to breach the ‘reciprocity of perspectives’ of participants, to begin to refer to tacit *knowledge* or pragmatic *understandings* as if these things in some way keep the social world ‘in good repair’ and reciprocity somehow ‘calibrated’. Indeed, the development of our social theoretical understanding of situated action began to be elaborated as a site of interaction consisting of layers of knowledge (e.g. Brenner, 1980) where each layer is imagined to have structuring

properties for the one below it. I argued elsewhere however (Merttens and Vass, 1988) that the so-called different ‘knowledge’ layers of the interactive process seem to demand the contingent production of social skills in such a way that any model that focuses on the mere knowledge competences of the individual are doomed to failure. But Garfinkel appears to be motivated by, though not committed to, the discussion of aspects of situations other than their epistemic ‘meaningfulness’. He provides a disturbing sense of the tenuous grip we have in situations.

Quite another way of looking at this exchange is to sense the disturbance to the grounding of the exchange. It forces us not to sense ‘a ground’ so much as to sense its slipping away. What precisely comes into focus here is the time-shaping qualities of grounding conditions. These are constituted by the participants’ anticipatory feelings about where the conversation can go next. While, of course, the movement of a conversation must remain ‘accountable’ to participants and to others this refers to a reflexive glance in the course of action. On the other hand, participants also have a prospective (for Schutz ‘protensional’) ‘sense’ of ‘where they are going’. The exchange above has peculiar qualities which illustrate what it is like not to know or sense where one is going. It does not help to look at the exchange as a problem of retrospective meaning (i.e. pragmatic knowledge of situational circumstances, where studies of normative convention tend to have their focus). Drawing on Wittgenstein, Shotter (1993) suggests that such exchanges generally have the form of ‘I do not know my way about’. That is to say, in my terminology it is a problem of *coherence*. For Garfinkel the ordered properties of meaning, knowledge and rational accounts order *for* something and *on* something. They are simply instrumentalities in “ongoing achievements of [] concerted activities.” (Garfinkel, 1990:11). The point is to focus on the ongoing rather than the achievement. The *achievement* (which sociology tends to focus on analytically) for participants is a technique. It merely senses the further grounds through which social life can elaborate further.

Garfinkel generates surprise by disruptions to the ‘protensional quality’ (Schutz, 1980) of situated activity. This is, as it were, the game social life, in a serious way, plays. He eschews Schutz’s interest in sociality and the founding conditions of protensional activity and, sociologically focuses on outcomes, what is achieved in a practice, in its grammatical past tense. Yet the (ethno) methodologies employed delight in exposing the tenuous

character of social order. My question here is: what is social life tenuous in respect of? Answer: mere order, the need to go on. Fine, but more serious is the feeling of not knowing. Not knowing, as produced by Garfinkel's experiments, suggest here that 'going on' is the ground Schutz is referring to. Schutz's work may, from the Garfinkel perspective, contain what seem metaphysical things (mutuality, reciprocity of perspectives, intersubjectivity etc.) as part of the ground described. But what are these things for Schutz if not aimed at trying to understand how social life is shaped in its 'going on'? Oddly, then Schutz keeps his eye firmly on the ball of the protensional, ongoing character of social action with his metaphysical baggage in contrast to Garfinkel who disrupts the ongoing in order to highlight, ultimately, the retrospective glance (accountability) and what is found there as accomplishments. What Garfinkel cannot then engage with without difficulty is *the manner* in which ongoing action in good repair is undertaken. Does it matter if actors are sincere? Here the ethnomethodological language of accomplishment and accountability does not help. The analytic of situated *accomplishments* tells us nothing about the reciprocity and mutuality, which, by disruption, has occasioned them.

These different ways of looking at Garfinkel are dependent on focus. If one is interested in how the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Centre (*ibid.*) develops procedures in the course of its practices that are designed to foreclose ongoing discussion of undecidable suicide cases, then the reflexive role of accounting becomes prominent in the understanding of 'accomplishments'. However, if one is searching for a sense of the *quality of the social within the interactants' development and application* of the procedures themselves then this lies in the sensing of the 'ground' qua ongoing opportunities for the further elaboration of social life. The latter is the Schutzian quest. Garfinkel may argue that people may be called to account for insincerity and then need to show in their responses how sincerely they deal with this. But he has trouble here between the noun (sincerity, an accomplishment) and the adverb (sincerely). Schutz likewise can be looked at in different ways, but only in the way that enables us to grasp what is at stake in the grounding conditions of social activity do we get an understanding of the impact of modernity.

Both Giddens (1976) and Bauman (1978) reviewed Schutz at a critical stage in the development of their own projects. Their critiques reflect the two types of reading given to Garfinkel above. Giddens, pursuing what Schutz takes as the 'the social' captures the core

material but privileges the reflexive outcomes rather than the more ‘sensuous’ processes implied, thus,

“Life process, Schutz says, involves constantly shifting systems of relevance according to the interweaving or overlapping of *the agent’s* heirarchy of projects: the flow of lived through experiences *can be analysed* in terms of overlapping themes and horizons.” (Giddens, 1976: 29, my emphases showing the individualistic and reflexive orientation of the reading).

Also,

“The understanding of the conduct of others, according to Schutz, can be examined phenomenologically as a process of *typification*, whereby the actor applies learned interpretative schemes to grasp the meanings of what they do. The core social relation is that of the directly-experienced other, the We-relationship, and all other notions of social forms that are applied by actors in their everyday social life are derived from this.” (ibid: 29, Giddens’ italics; my underlining).

Giddens does not explore the distinctive character of the We-relation in Schutz’s work and its pre-individual qualities typified by reciprocity and mutuality. He does point out the fact that in the course of action stocks of knowledge, and other taken for granted previous accomplishments, are “set into relief at any given time by a background of indeterminacy” (p.30). Though clearly, through our examination of Garfinkel here, one can also say that this whole description should be inverted. That is, through the *quality of deployment* by actors of stocks of knowledge as ‘instruments’ the ‘background of indeterminacy’ itself can also be set into relief.

What has come through the discussion here is precisely the role of contingency and, now, *indeterminacy*, in our understanding of how the *quality* of the social ground is revealed. Bauman (1978) privileges more the ‘ongoing’ as distinct from the ‘accomplished’ in his reading of Schutz than Giddens. He points out that for Schutz ‘understanding is not a philosopher’s feat as in Husserl’ rather the “necessity of understanding is organically contained in the very structure of the life-world. Indeed, it is the very condition of its existence [.]

“ The fact that the life-world exists shows that men (sic) somehow cope, in their common-sense, routine way, with the need to understand each other. If we only

penetrate the way in which they do it, we will be able to reveal the mystery of understanding.” (Bauman, 1978: 176).

The routine world remaining a ‘mystery’, despite having access to the analytic and reflective accomplishments of action, should signal that what we seek shall not be found in any *post hoc* account of the uses of knowledge, typifications, sediments etc. by others. Drawing, like Shotter, on Wittgenstein Bauman also says, “Understanding the meaning is to know how to go on in the presence of a word, an act or other object...” (ibid.: 179).

Clear we need to understand more about this ‘ground’ which has ‘shown up’ in tantalising ways in this chapter after its multiple references in the last chapter. It is clear also that it is difficult to keep in view and can very easily be mistaken for something available to *post hoc* analysis. I believe this is the source of the error that Heritage makes in his critique of Schutz in the role played there in Garfinkel’s project,

“...most troublesomely, Schutzian sociology is overwhelmingly a sociology of co-operation in which the actors, in their efforts to sustain a common world suspend their differences of perspective and interest. The tough-minded response to this portrayal runs to the effect that, while co-operation may indeed motivate such suspensions, conflicts of interest may constitute the crucial impetus to undercut common understandings and to undermine the ‘small print’ of the non-contractual elements of contract. And indeed a network of common typifications *per se* cannot guarantee a social order.” (Heritage, 1984: 73).

I agree with the last sentence, but this is an entirely wrong characterisation of Schutz. The concept of ‘the social’ Schutz’s work seeks, and which is over-typified perhaps in *The Social Construction of Reality* (which Schutz, merely ‘informed’), is not ‘co-operation’ at all. Subtleties are lost here grossly, for example, a sense of the jointly acted and orchestrated elaboration of projects, and the time-structuring of anticipations, elaborated in a ‘field’ of indeterminacy and contingency. The danger of modernisation impacting on this, seen in Berger et al (1974), is the development of subtle changes in the quality of our responses to each other characterised by ironic distance and insincerity of engagement. There is no claim from Schutz, or even from Berger et al’s work, that ‘a network of typifications’ is required to stabilise social order. Still less, is there any idea that the non-contractual elements of interaction have any ‘small print’. While this may be somewhat tongue-in-cheek, nevertheless it reveals *post hocism* in the reading of Schutz. Heritage’s

gloss of Schutz's understanding of 'the social' as 'co-operation' makes no room for some of the essential motivations of his work and what can be lost or corrupted in social life.

We need to examine and critically engage with Schutz in quite different ways than hitherto in order to get at the elusive notion of the 'ground' of social life and its shaping of the lifeworld. But firstly, where we have got to.

### 3.5 Summary

This chapter has pointed out that contemporary reports of social apocalypse were adumbrated thirty years ago drawing on the, apparently, least 'history sensitive' sociologies. A review of *The Homeless Mind* and its principal sources elaborates further in what the 'ground' of the social consists, that is, as 'penetrated' by change at societal level identified by the works discussed in chapter 2. Bauman, Giddens and Habermas indicated their sources of understanding for the 'phenomenological' consequences of modernity in the debates and concepts reviewed so far in this chapter.

Plausible accounts from the phenomenological approach to 'the ground of social life' show it to be compromised by modernity in the ways previously outlined by dislocation theorists, nevertheless the 'ground' itself remains elusive. They fall back on a Schutzian inheritance which is insufficiently elaborated and adapted for their purposes. However, there have been some good indications of the kinds of issues that any solution to this question faces. To examine the implications of modern social arrangements on the *quality* of the social, then my review suggests that we must look in quite subtle places connected with the character of engagements people have in the deployment of their 'constructive capacities'. This chapter argues that while we can record all kinds of post hoc effects of modernisation on the conditions of communication exchange, we get closer to the concerns and sensibilities of the dislocation theorists by focussing on the quality of engagement of people within time-shaped constructive 'moments' (cf Shotter, 1996). In particular, orientations to oneself and others need to be considered along with the kinds of things emerging as indicative of the *quality* of the elaboration of social activity: its irony and sincerity. The issue of irony and sincerity have become key in this discussion since we

noted that these apparent subtleties are revealed through a grasp of how people are situated with respect to the contingencies, or ‘field of indeterminacy’, that their activities engender.

The main critical points covered in the review, and to which attempts at reconstruction should attend are:

1. The claim by Berger et al (op. cit.) that sociality and experience are fundamentally penetrated by modernity, resulting in anonymity, inauthenticity and ironicism is insufficiently distinguished from what they claim is already anthropologically given in human action.
2. Contrary to other critical reviews of this material that find that Schutz and Berger et al’s work is merely a cognitivist project about the contents of consciousness, I have pulled out what remains central to contemporary theorising about the fate of the social but which also and nevertheless remains obscure about the points this earlier work is obscure about. Thus, the followers Habermas, Giddens and Bauman as well as the theoretical ancestors Schutz and Berger et al have not produced an account that links contemporary reflective, knowledge-applying or hermeneutical activity together with an account of the embodied and experiential issues clearly associated with the former by all these thinkers. It is only through a link between these that we can grasp how the issues cited in (1) above may be addressed. For example, it is clear that Schutz et al claim that action and its social co-ordination is based on a ground where being able to go rely on jointly felt structures of anticipation. While their elaboration of this permits a robust retort to cognitivism the link between hermeneutics and embodiment needs to be established. Chapter 5 returns to this.
3. We have a problem, as elsewhere in sociology, about the description of the pre-modern from which modernisation departs. In Berger et al’s work as in Schutz, the lack of any useful distinctions (any account of the pre-modern as detailed as the modern for a start) hinder the ability to address the problem at (1) above. It is much more difficult to determine what is a product of modernisation and what is anthropological given.
4. Being ‘at home’ is constituted by a ‘thematic unity’ in one’s horizons of action. But this sits uneasily with statements about how a ‘primordial strangeness’

constitutes entry to social life. Further compelling, but just as contradictory, ideas that are at once central to the problem at hand and yet do nothing to clarify it are ubiquitous in this writing. For example, in the discussion of workers who are socialised into the production process “feel” that there is a “whole” beyond the bits of their modern fragmented experiences they might access and ought to access, two things are crucially not developed. Firstly, the place of ‘an experienced lack’ within human activity; and secondly, its comparison with anthropologically *given* experience and at least some attempt to engage with the anthropological literature on this.

Schutz is central to any reconstruction within the logic social constructionist discourse permits. A constructive critical reassessment of Schutz will form part of the development of my position starting in Chapter 5. This is justified on grounds given so far that all roads (in works so far discussed) lead back to some central Schutzian problematics. This also turns out to be the case, as unlikely as one might predict, in those that are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: The Absorption of the Social and Indifference

‘Where is the sociality in Los Angeles?’ Baudrillard (1983: 83)

### 4.1 Introduction to the absorption thesis

The two preceding chapters critically assessed arguments that report the demise of the social by spotlighting the effects of penetrative social, global, economic and technological changes in the domain of sociation. The arguments of those chapters are connected. In the case of ‘dislocation theorists’ (chapter 2) change penetrates the lifeworld, the arena of social action and experience where human action strives to cohere on a ‘ground’ that is compromised by change. The ‘ground’ was shown to have been inadequately conceptualised (2.4). The concept of the ground was pursued further in the work of social constructionists (chapter 3). This genealogical pursuit of the idea of ground is important because the social constructionist conception of it is a commonplace account (or *topos*) within sociology. As such the perceived qualities and characteristics of this ground render it a principal benchmark of social life and experience against which the effects of social change are routinely calibrated. At the root of this sociological *topos* are, it was argued, some further unresolved paradoxes which stand in need of resolution (chapter 3).

The quality of social activity and a striving for coherence in social life are the objects of this chapter. The ‘end of the social’ was initially a proclamation of Baudrillard’s and, following him, Lash and Urry. Their arguments are less amenable to an easy separation of anything approximating to society and lifeworld. Rather, we are presented with the idea that the social has been *absorbed* and dissipated into something called culture conceived as ‘semiotic practices’.

Baudrillard (1983) offers three possibilities about the social: it never existed (qua Tarde), it has existed and there is more and more of it (qua Donzelot, 1979), or the social ‘well and truly’ existed but does not exist anymore (qua apocalypse). Baudrillard does not decide between German and French traditions of ‘the social’ (Appendix 4). He leaves the three possibilities undecided. His training was in German studies. Ultimately, I claim, his work parallels Habermas’ concerns. His sociology focuses on a progressive catastrophe of the

social (i.e. the third possibility) where the latter is conceived as a ground of co-present exchange that becomes overtaken by degrees of ‘simulation’ in communicative practices. In the company of colonial expansion, urbanisation and markets in the sixteenth century, communicative forms become saturated with dissimulation (parody, irony etc.). Under the auspices of industrial capitalism and its facility for reproducing exact copies communication fundamentally distorts or obscures by hiding distinctions between real and original and for introducing the dissimulating language of advertising. Today third order simulation turns all events, absorbs everything, into ‘information’ managed by media institutions; any connection between original and copy is lost. Baudrillard provides some compelling images of the fate of social life under the conditions of the latter ‘third order simulation’. He describes an ‘inertness’ in human interactivity and a zombie-like proclivity to consume. Active social relations have become fundamentally ‘tactical’. People ‘combine’ but without solidarity. Combination is simply relative distancing.

Lash and Urry develop an ‘absorption thesis’. This elaborates the idea that the social ‘well and truly’ existed but is no longer. Part of their strategy is to adopt and develop Baudrillard’s explanations of how the media-influenced *mechanics* of human communication have fundamentally altered the character of experience and the grounding conditions of communication. It is this aspect of the absorption thesis that I pursue. Through the mechanics of communication as conceived by Baudrillard we can explore and extend the discussion of chapters 2 and 3 concerning the character of co-presence and sociation in late modernity.

My view is that much in these accounts compels. But there are flaws. Firstly, there are serious problems with the way absorptionists theorise historical change with regard to technology and experience. I pursue this through an examination of Urry’s use of the concepts of ‘actant’ and networks. Secondly, the view of ‘absorption’ offered is one whereby communication and semiotic practice, originally grounded in a co-present form of sociality, gets absorbed into a flow of semiosis subject to historically altered conditions of exchange. This fails to grasp that socialisation (theoretically missing entirely in the accounts of absorptionists) *is already an absorption process*. Becoming socialised into language use always means not only acquiring something, but also being acquired by something. Following the Saussurean logic of the absorptionists, it can be asserted that

acquiring communication skills means becoming absorbed into a flow anyway. Later in Part Two I shall extend the argument proposing that dissimulation is already built into that flow. Thirdly, the notion that flows present problems of coherence for social relationships is transformed, in the informational model, to problems of ‘navigation’. There is a tension here between how individuals and subjects are conceptualised. Again we get shifts of analytical register that need to be addressed.

#### **4.1.1 Structure of the argument**

We need to identify what the absorption of the social means and why, continuing the theme established in previous chapters, this has permanent, serious consequences for the ‘performative domain’ in which the communicative struggle for coherence in social life unfolds. The work of Lash and Urry, drawing on numerous sources, is clearly predicated on Baudrillard’s work. The idea that sociology should now be about the investigation of ‘flows’ and global networks (Lash and Urry, 1994; Lash, 2002; Urry, 2000, 2002) is predicated on a view of human activity as a kind of generalized ‘semiosis’. Absorption theorists propose that semiotic activity is somehow amplified and transformed by the technological conditions of late modernity. It reduces the traditionally conceived ground of sociation to the movement of ciphers in a network of flows of humans and machines. The theoretical background to this is Baudrillard’s theories of consumption (Baudrillard, 1998) and the production of people and objects as parts of a semiotic system (Baudrillard, 1993).

The rest of this chapter is devoted to outlining and calling into question two things. Firstly, Urry argues that conditions prevail such that the concept of society as an analytical term is irrelevant and that mobility and flow are key to our radically changed circumstances. I show a paradox in that position which has analytical consequences for any subsequent attempts at conceptualising flow in the context of social change. In addition, I demonstrate that Urry’s use of Actor Network Theory (ANT) is flawed and contradictory. I am not opposed to his concepts, on the contrary some version of them is desirable. But in their current formulation their limitations have been exceeded.

Secondly, I examine the origin of flow and mobility in Baudrillard's theory of social change. The latter is, essentially an account of an irreversible historical move from human life *grounded* in symbolic exchange to one *absorbed* into semiosis. Baudrillard's account is developed in a number of works I am summarising at the same time as suggesting why these arguments inaugurate his announcement of the end of the social. Ultimately, it is from Baudrillard's argument of the demise of the social through the rise of dissimulating 'semiosis' that the sociologies of fluidity, developed by Lash and Urry, took shape.

#### **4.2 Network, mobility and flow: scoping the concepts**

The sociologies of mobility and flow (e.g. Lash, 2002; Urry, 2002) have arisen against the background of some lack of confidence that the idea of 'the social' has a future (Gane, 2004). Baudrillard (1983) pronounced that we have now arrived at the 'end of the social' in any case. These perceptions of the fading of the social world, as traditionally conceived, appear to be corroborated by the ways in which information and communication technologies (ICTs) have emerged and have transformed global networks and domestic, leisure and work spaces. These networks were once imaginable, even ten years ago, as having a 'social' origin and objective, for example, in the form of network imagined by Castells (1996). For Castells the 'spin' on the loss of traditional social connectivity is positive. ICTs *assist* a 'new world order' enabling us to imagine lives no longer as multi-layered 'life-courses' constrained by lack of spatial and social mobility but as mobile, orchestrated and intersecting work, leisure, learning and life *sequences* (Vass, 2002). The consequence of imagining our activities and bodily involvement with the world as globally extended and diversified *sequences* enables us to imagine global redistributions of resources and skills, even at the price of some loss of coherence of the 'self'. In the network regime the self becomes a busy project in its own right.

For Baudrillard, however, the end of the social carries a negative 'spin'. The 'end' is inaugurated by our coming to inhabit a 'hellish mediascape'. For him the same media-extended bodily involvements lead to the absorption of anything that was once *socially grounded* into something with the peculiar character of a nightmarish 'hyper-reality'.

While ICTs, such as the Internet, may be seen as fostering flow and the creation of new networks in the form imagined by, say, Maffesoli (1996), for example, where new groups are created through mutual concerns (single issue politics; online friendship and dating groups; consumer interest groups etc.) the benefits seem to come at the loss, or in the wake of the loss, of traditional sociality and what we take to be the grounding conditions of social and personal stability. In short, the internet and mobile telephony (including its mobile internet, imaging, data-storing and time-organisational capacities) *appear* to set up for us entirely new ‘portals’ through which the dynamics of sociality, integration, the coherence of action, anomie and alienation, or their replacements, need to be rediscovered again. The notion of ‘portal’ here is somewhat misleading. In the language of Euclidean space it suggests *already* embodied subjects moving across an *already* constituted territory. This is less certain in the topology of the Internet. Interface and boundary need rethinking. Part of what needs to be addressed is not an *ergonomic* relation between bodies and ICTs but a sense of a subject-body-ICT field along the lines imagined by Donna Haraway (1989). However, I am interested not only in how this field reconfigures our understanding of co-presence and sociation rendering one “a tourist in one’s own transactions” (Vass, 1996), but how it might rewrite traditional human concerns about the coherence of social action as well as a sense of belonging and ‘homelessness’ (chapter 3; Vass, 2008). ICTs seem to belong to a category of media forms that impact on the nature of co-present subjects with the consequences explored in earlier chapters.

### **4.3. Sociology beyond societies: Urry’s elaboration of the absorption thesis**

Following Baudrillard, Lash and Urry (1994) to some extent, and Lash (2002) and Urry (2002) to a large extent, argue, in effect, that the social has become *absorbed* into culture. Modernity had struggled with the tensions of an ‘emergent social’ in the context of industrialisation. Post-industrialism involved forms of exchange embedded, now, exclusively in *cultural* media. For example, Lash in a clear statement of the position declares,

“The social is displaced by the cultural. This follows from the erosion of the national ‘society’ by the logic of flows. Nearly all of these flows are comprised of symbolic or *cultural* goods – from images to money to ideas to communications to the ‘travelling cultures’ that travel with immigrants (sic). The ‘disintegration’ or decline of the social comprises, on the one hand, a decline in social institutions and, on the other, a progressive demise of social structure. [...] It involves a decline in the prominence of social norms and a rise in the importance of cultural values. The social has always been a matter of *Gesellschaft*, while the cultural bears important traces of the *Gemeinschaft*.” (Lash, 2002: 26-27).

This declaration has immediate affinities with the idea of the social as inaugurated by Saint-Simon (Gane, 2001). It is further embellished and compounded by the unanticipated consequences of the strategic development of the social in the twentieth century in alignment with capitalist expansion. However, an engagement with Marx’s understanding of exchange provides the main engine which drives Baudrillard’s, as well as Lash and Urry’s (1993), ideas for the demise of the social in the sense of what grounds human communication in the traditional sense.

Urry (2000, 2002) expresses surprise to find sociology and the articulation of its theoretical problems to be still grounded in a view of the social, and its institutions, as predicated on the idea of the nation state for which the cipher ‘society’ stands as a kind of metaphor. He draws attention to the fact that this stubborn metaphor is responsible for chronically locating the problem as one of structure, function and integration. He looks to the ideas of flows and networks to examine what now appear in the empirical domain as ‘mobile objects’ (information, goods, people, labour etc.) across the vicissitudes of global space. There is an appeal to ‘experience’ in Urry’s formulations. Standing in the middle of these flows and networks, one feels, is the bemused traveller trying to work out how to get from A to B. One must ask though what is there in the idea of ‘flow’ and ‘mobility’ that belongs specifically to late modernity? I pursue this in my critical remarks in the next section (4.4).

A lot depends in these approaches on understanding the implications of the quantities and speeds at which ‘cultural goods’ circulate. The contemporary move to abandon the concept of the social occurs, or at least starts, in the context of observations of upward *quantitative* shifts in such things as speed of movement, exchange and communication (cf. chapter 2). Such observations are common-place in the discourses established by e.g. Giddens, Lash

and Urry. However, this has to be seen in tension with the discourses that focus on the *qualitative* shifts in the idea of the social that appear in these works in rather irregular ways. The idea of qualitative shifts is not straightforward.

Urry (2000) finds that the metaphors of flows and mobilities are more applicable to the condition of the social and physical nexus than those metaphors in more conventional sociologies that mark out very clear boundaries between a socially constructed social world and the natural world somehow set apart from it. At the start of sociology a boundary is a necessary territorial strategy. Conventionally it is an exclusively human sociality to which we ascribe intentionality, reflexivity and agency. These features or qualities are conventionally seen as immersed in a ‘species-specific’ social ordering dependent on language and other forms of representation which account for, express and organise socially generated forms that somehow interact with an ontologically distinct non-social environment. Conventionally social theory finds ways of examining the *essentially social* ordering. Urry finds this set of conventions inadequate. His image of a globalized, heterogeneous world clearly occasions his new agenda for sociology that regards the separation (of social and natural worlds as ontologically distinct) redundant in the wake of the human immersion in a global technosphere. The agenda is based on two parallel lines of argument. Firstly, global interconnectedness, however heterogeneous with regard to practices, inequalities, asymmetry of networks and polity, has rendered redundant the idea of the nation state. This had been always closely associated with the development of the idea of the social as the societal, and originally set the agenda through which the social was to be construed as analytically distinct from the natural world. Secondly, the immersion of human beings in a rapidly evolving techniverse (traced back to the sixteenth century) shows the degree to which the basis of human constructive powers has been transformed by technical innovation. On examining the character of these latter transformations Urry declares that we can no longer employ analytical conventions that are based on analytical separations of a species-specific sociality on the one hand and a physical world that, through technology, can become ever more precisely contingent on, and undifferentiated from, the human one.

It is the second line of argument that interests me here. It is within Urry’s conception of what exactly is being transformed in the human-technology relation that gives rise to the

notion that the social is absorbed into the cultural. In other words, if we ask where we should look to get a sense of how humans and a species-specific sociality become absorbed into flows and mobilities then the ‘scene of the crime’ is located at the human-technology ‘interface’.

Urry suggests that within conventional understanding to be human at all *meant* to be a member of a nation state with its ‘clear territorial and citizenship boundaries’ (Urry, 2000:9). States were thought of as ‘endogenous social structures’ exercising ‘collective powers’ of transformation over nature. That is, societies were conceived as collectivities harnessing collective human powers to transform the conditions of their existence. Now that the very endogeneity of social structures is questioned the task must be reformulated to look at “global processes which appear to be redrawing the contours of contemporary experience” (Urry, 2000: 12). His preferred method is to look at ‘scapes and flows’:

“People, money, capital, information, ideas and images are seen to ‘flow’ along various ‘scapes’ which are organised through complex interlocking networks located both within and across different societies (such as monetary scapes and flows between London, New York and Tokyo)” (Urry, 2000:12)

Once we have established human relations to be constituted and transformed by these technologically supported scapes and flows then we are in the business of claiming that,

“it is inhuman objects that reconstitute social relations. Such relations are made and remade through machines, technologies, objects, texts, images, physical environments and so on. Human powers increasingly derive from the complex *interconnections* of humans with material objects [...] People possess few powers which are uniquely human, while most can only be realised because of their connections with these inhuman components” (Urry, 2000:14)

He continues that humans are now ‘plugged into’ electronic technologies and that this situation is novel in its ‘ontological depth’. Urry claims that a fundamental shift in nature, number and type of interconnection has had ontological consequences for whatever now passes as human. He abandons conceptions of human agency in the conventional sense of analyses that involve understanding how humans attribute meaning or follow social rules etc. in favour of one capable of understanding ‘inhuman hybrids’. Rather than understanding humans and objects in terms of a subject-object distinction (which provides

for a unique realm of subject-subject relations now increasingly suspect analytically), it is now important to understand the embodied and sensuous character of agency as articulated with the physical. This move justifies his later ‘analysis’ of human senses as articulated with technology in hybrid forms e.g. the photographer suggests a hybrid human-camera ‘actant’ that has consequences for what is experienced and what is practised with regard to the process of seeing. The productivity of the photographer is interconnected with image flows and also derives from flows with multiple possibilities of interconnection (Internet, advertising, family memories etc.). He also defines instantaneous time as a hybrid (ibid.:16) which warps established global time-space patterns of connection and this presages ‘the end of society’.

Having described a fundamental shift that ‘increases the intimacy’ of human and inhuman he also says (ibid:15) that ‘societies are necessarily hybrids’, that a realm of ‘pure social interactions’ as, he alleges, imagined by Berger and Luckmann is wrong.

To interrogate this we need to look carefully at the ideas of flow and hybrid. Then, before embarking on an examination of the cultural fate of communicative flows in the Urry and Lash thesis, Baudrillard’s case that lay behind them needs outlining.

#### **4.4 Urry: a failure of theoretical synthesis and a paradox of temporal comparison**

Firstly, I identify a weakness of elaboration. Urry uses a series of examples to demonstrate the absorption of the social. At the same time, and through the same examples, we are meant to understand that actor-object separations are inadequate. These demonstrations are variously based on actor network theory (Latour), Thrift’s sensorium, Miller’s theory of material culture and mass consumption, Silverstone and Morley’s examination of TVs in domestic spaces, Foucault’s power/knowledge axis (all cited in Urry, 2000). Urry hedges in his first introductory chapter (ibid) and then in his work on ‘senses’ (2000: chapter 4). He fails to clarify whether traditional isolable actor-object descriptions are no longer tenable because new historical conditions prevail *or because* the descriptions he supports are better. Indeed, he may be subscribing to both reasons, it is not clear. Urry never clarifies how we are to read his history. Is the sociology of flow is required because the world has changed ontologically; or is it the case that theory of flow is always

applicable? Thus Latour and Foucault, for example, are recruited to support a move that legitimates a theoretical description of reality through all historical time at the same moment as being offered as a symptom of social change which the theoretical move must account for.

The panoply of theoretical material cited at the start of the account nowhere achieves a theoretical synthesis. The answer to the question ‘*what flows?*’ in each chapter of *Sociology Beyond Societies* has no consistency of reference. There is no theoretical language of flow that represents each case considered within a theory of flow. Rather, as in the case of ‘senses’, for example, in which Urry explores the evolution of visual experience as an actor-object field, there is a reversion to a Simmelian analysis; the case of ‘travellings’ reverts to the work of de Certeau etc.. Theoretical recidivism of this kind in the elaboration of a new case about the new circumstances that, it is claimed, embed us calls into question the entire framing of the otherwise exciting ‘more new rules of sociological method’ that Urry (2000: 18) establishes at the beginning of his work. For example, if the task of sociology is now,

‘to investigate the respective and uneven reach of diverse networks and flows as they move within and across societal borders and of how they spatially and temporally interconnect’ (Urry, 2000: 18)

then we have to ask in which of the theoretical languages available are we required to exercise judgments about what ‘unevenness’ and ‘diverse’ and indeed ‘network’ mean in this context.

The temporal paradox we are left with in the case of the examination of the transformation of ‘senses’, for example, takes the following form. Urry relies heavily on a historical narrative of technical evolution, let us say in the invention of the camera and photography *correlated* with apparent changes to human conceptions and experiences of themselves and their environment much in the manner of Elias on the one hand. But, on the other hand, the technology that occasions the start of the historical shift towards absorption is also an actor-object field *already*, according to Urry. As such it is, in the ANT model, *already a flow*. It does not become one at the point of invention of a new technology. What is lacking here is an analysis based on a view of history that Urry strongly implies. This

history is one where temporal succession would be marked by the substitution of one kind of actor-object field (citizen-crossbow, say) for another actor-object field (citizen-gun) to use Urry's own example (Urry, 2000: 77ff). Instead, what we get is precisely what we have been advised to become wary of: an analysis of the effect *on an isolable experiencing actor* as though s/he had *now* entered into a flow via the use of *an isolable technological object*. As a sociologist focusing on social change and who is interested, therefore in historical analysis Urry has a dilemma in the use of ANT with which I sympathise. If ANT has rules of methodological engagement then, in my view, they would look with suspicion on what Urry is attempting here. In *Reassembling the Social* Latour (2005) outlines something of a rulebook for ANT methodology. My interpretation of the thrust here is that even if Urry provided us with an analysis of human visual experiences based on the succession of two or more actor-object *fields* from different points in time (his own example being the transformation from sixteenth century to nineteenth century experience: citizen-landscape and photographer-landscape) then even the account of their successive substitution would be suspect in the ANT paradigm. The reason for this is two-fold. Firstly, on what basis can one compare one network with another? What kind of theoretical account, and indeed in what network is the basis for this comparison founded? Secondly, the notion of succession itself here and our awareness of it in an ANT approach is itself an act of making in a network that has to be externalised and available in the description. In more usual language Urry would need to have a theory of history and his role as historian located in it.

In like fashion, but as another project to the present thesis, we would need to look separately at each of the frameworks Urry recruits into his narrative in order to see how the 'actant' is historicised. It might be argued that Latour's recent manifesto was not available to Urry. However, he does appeal to the work of Law and Hassard et al (1999). Here many of the examples of ANT analysis are in fact network models of *pre-modern* objects. Law (2004) undertakes a detailed account of sixteenth century mercantilism through the medium of a merchant ship which is a focal point for a field of networked components, social relations and capital. It is clear in Law's example that the field is the actant, there is not a sense that one component is having 'an effect' on another. One could use the flow metaphor as conceived in the fashion implied by Law's analysis to examine, say, colonial expansion in sixteenth century Europe or the collapse of the Roman Empire and

Mediterranean migration in the fifth century of the common era. But the analysis would be a historically hermetic and not available to me to understand any process of change.

What Urry wants to achieve is compelling, but he uses history misleadingly to establish the benchmarks of the development of a form, the hybrid. At the same time he employs an analysis which can take phenomena only as hybrids at whatever point in time they come from. His gesture towards the senses and the relationship he draws between flow and experience is interesting and is something I shall want to make constructive use of in Part Two of this thesis.

#### **4.5. Baudrillard and the social**

Baudrillard's earlier analytical work combines Durkheim, Saussure, Mauss, Bataille and Marx in often unexpected ways. The concept of reality transformed into a 'coded information' is important but unlike Levi-Strauss and Althusser, Baudrillard's use of the concepts 'code' and 'structure' is not based on a 'generative' principle. We do not have underlying structures generating surface ones, or deep codes transformed into surface ones. This conception of code, in its detached quality is principally what inspires the notions of flow and absorption in accounts such as Lash and Urry's (1993). The semiotic medium provides us with a 'hyperreality' where we live saturated by signs generated by communication media. This has come about in a series of historical stages. There are two key moves in Baudrillard's development of this position: firstly, his development of the concept of *simulacra* (*simulacra* is the form of cultural content that circulates via semiotic codification), and secondly, his critique of Marx's understanding of the fate of 'value' in capitalism. Both these moves culminate with apocalyptic images of the 'end of the social' (Baudrillard, 1983). The concept of exchange in its semiotic, post-Marxist sense and arises from this. This is a major contributor to the idea of 'flow' as developed by Lash and Urry (1994) and, with further modifications, Lash (2002). The idea of 'flow' as a sociological replacement for structure and relations is not a powerful one if confined simply to the new speeds at which human and technological entities move.

For present concerns we need take note of only two major points arising from Baudrillard's work and one consequence for human experience. Firstly, Baudrillard (1993;

1994) argues that historical change has brought developed societies from human groups based on exchange rooted in co-presence to the contemporary situation in which individuals can never be co-present because a ‘sign system’ has inserted itself where communication used to be. People deal only with information, not what that information is about. Secondly, this sign system is made up of elements in *commutative* relations with one another. Effectively, the system of signs, made up of media information, human language, consumer objects etc. forms one vast commutative network of elements: a ‘simulated’ reality. The value of any element depends on the relations it forms with the rest of the network. Whatever elements are in my grasp, as an actor, are determined by events elsewhere in the network. Baudrillard’s approach to this sign system follows the logic of Marx’s theory of exchange value in effect. To connect with other people is to enter this system of *semiotic exchange*. Thirdly, the contemporary consequences of the individual’s absorption into this system is to turn the individual into a consumer who is inert and unresponsiveness to human otherness.

For Baudrillard the central question of ‘the social’ is the *socius*. The Latin word indicates a living engagement with otherness and a co-present concern for how one’s alliance with another is faring. Baudrillard imagines an original co-present state of sociality which is grounded in what Durkheim imagined to be the emotional, effervescent “enabling powers of collective life” (Friedland, 2005: 243). Life in such groups is typified by *symbolic exchange* (Mauss, 1990). Unlike semiotic exchange, symbolic exchange is not commutative. Pre-semiotic cultures give ‘gifts’ as a mark of human obligation and alliance. The meaning of the gift is grounded in the immediacy of the encounter and is not subject to the vicissitudes of a system of commutative signs. Symbolic order and exchange is a place where the question of ‘reality’ does not arise. It provides for the fixed interconnection of kinship ties, obligations, religion, status and rank. There is little space for a critical distance to open up between discourse and what we might call its grounding social conditions.

Merrin (2005: 17) provides a reference to an example I have been unable to obtain in English. Baudrillard suggests that Mauss’s notion of ‘the gift’, and the forms of reciprocity and mutuality that typify it, is a form of exchange surviving today only in the wedding ring. The ring is ‘unique and irreplaceable’ once it has been exchanged. The

exchange here has a ‘ground’ with a kind of emotional investment we recognise from Durkheim’s and Habermas’s (chapter 2) discussion of the sacred character of the social bond.

The social ends for Baudrillard because the symbolic order is transformed, firstly via capitalism and then consumerism, into a semiotic order (Baudrillard, 1993; Pawlett, 2007). As Lash and Urry put it,

“In the symbolic exchange, the Maussian gift relation, of traditional societies the object of exchange was ‘peopled’, so to speak, with gods and demons, with the social and political relations of society.” (Lash and Urry 1994: 14)

Under the rule of a simulated reality this ancient sociality of ‘contract’ is transformed into one of ‘contact’,

“rational sociality of contract, dialectical sociality...gives way to the sociality of contact...thousands of tactical combinations. But is this still a question of the *socius*?” (Baudrillard, 1983: 83)

The question of the ‘socius’ is key. He refers to a transformation ending in the ‘dereliction of the social’, and, as a consequence, the human ‘indifference’ that is generated. When we meet otherness in semiotic exchange the result is ‘contact’ rather than ‘contract’. There is no profound engagement with the other, and so interaction becomes ‘tactical’ and strategic. (Please note that this is a different kind of argument than that presented by Toennies (2004). Toennies charts the transition from co-presence based on close kin and blood ties, to one based on anonymous social contract. While Baudrillard is interested in the same historical events, his concern, like that of Lash and Habermas, is directed toward how historical transition is perpetrated and sustained by communication mechanisms.)

I have highlighted some key moments in Baudrillard’s thought in which a historical process brings ‘the social to an end’. This occurs through the transformation of the activities of human groups typified by co-present symbolic exchange, to large scale societies whose inhabitants are *absorbed* into forms of communication that are not grounded in anything other than the relationship of signs to each other. Communication

becomes a semiotic process. The sociology of flows and mobilities is predicated on this logic. Next I shall examine this logic further and finally raise serious issues with it.

#### **4.6. The Baudrillardian Logic behind Flows and Mobilities**

Lash (2004) suggests that if *The End of Organised Capitalism* (Lash and Urry, 1987) had been about fragmentation then *Economies of Signs and Space* (Lash and Urry, 1994) had been about de-differentiation and the need within sociology to understand the contemporary world in the form of mobile objects, mobile subjects and flows. Drawing intriguingly on Simmel and Baudrillard, they describe the ‘fleeting, intense and diverse’ character of social interactions in the modern metropolis. Modernity provides for the fleeting, highly mobile and speeded up circulation of ‘capital, labour commodities, information and images’ (Lash and Urry, 1994: 12). This circulation can be thought of in terms of ‘flows’. The viewpoint is clearly developed from the precedents in urban geography and history set by Mumford on the one hand and on the other the geographical-inspired features of Giddens’ (1979, 1981) structuration theory, namely time-space distanciation. The latter is key to Giddens’ project in establishing the features of social interaction within modernity, their relationship to the technologies that colonise them, and the experiential issue of the ‘emptying-out of the present through the ‘disembedding’ of co-present aspects of the social which occupies Giddens (1981; 1984). For Lash and Urry these theoretical advances enable moving beyond those sociologies of the twentieth century, e.g. Parsons’, that posed the analysis in terms of structural differentiation and functional integration. In arguments echoing Baudrillard’s contra Marx, Lash and Urry return to the theme of ‘disembedding’ already prefigured in Durkheim and Mauss where the categories of classification were thought to be emptied out through modernisation. The example referred to: the category of traditional time and its disembedding in the process by which calculable clock time is established (cf. Giddens, 1981). Lash and Urry point out, a la Baudrillard, that precisely what modernisation consists in is the development of the *functional utility* in objects at the *expense* of the symbolic ‘co-presence’. What Marx did not appreciate was that meaning had already become ‘disembedded’ from objects with *the domination of use value* and not through the ubiquity of exchange value. The argument

compels, establishing the idea that exchange value works as a simulacrum, a copy, of use value. Lash and Urry exploit, what I call, the principle of *commutation* in Baudrillard's understanding of the cultural and physical world,

"What is increasingly being produced are not material objects, but signs. These signs are primarily of two types. Either they have a primary cognitive content and thus are post-industrial or informational goods. Or they primarily have an aesthetic...content and they are primarily postmodern goods [...] This is occurring not just in the proliferation of non-material objects which comprise a substantial aesthetic component (such as pop music, cinema, magazines, video etc.) but also in the increasing component of sign value or image in *material* objects. This aestheticisation of material objects can take place either in the production or in the circulation and consumption of such goods." (Lash and Urry, 1994:15)

Signs, like money in the traditional Marxian analysis, become the medium of social transformation by virtue of their capacity as a medium of exchange within a technosphere increasingly designed to handle them and promote their 'liquidity'. Signs are also central to our own experience of ourselves and the means by which we constitute self-understanding. The emptying out of meaning, first witnessed in the context of the objects of modernity, becomes true also of the subject of modernity by extension of the logic of circulation and commutation. Lash and Urry claim that "[i]n modern societies cultural domination has been effected through the already emptied out or abstract ideologies of liberalism, equality, progress, science and so on" (Lash and Urry, 1994:15). The foundation is laid for the development of the idea of 'flow' through the liquidity of the sign which is exploited heavily in their work. Lash (2002) developed this position in *Critique of Information*, preferring to think in terms of the 'information society' rather than postmodernist or risk society: the concept of information is key to the central issue of understanding the 'order' of human world. Urry developed the notion of the social away from the idea of society to that of mobility (Gane, 2004; Urry, 2000, 2004, 2007).

The commutative facility of the sign, together with its implications for the subject, such as the disappearance of meaning and consequences of this on emotional experience, culminate in social *indifference*. There are some serious omissions in this account. Just as in Giddens, there is not any developed sense of what 'presence' entails in its original association with the symbolic order. In other words, while sociology seems highly skilful in tracing the moment of change and its *posterior consequences* in some detail, it seems always less adept at understanding in any developed sense *what it is actually departing*

from. Left like this Lash and Urry permit themselves a theoretical currency of wide-ranging explanatory latitude: the account over-extends. If the consequence of the ‘liberation of the sign’ is the eradication of ‘presence’, we should understand what presence is. We should also understand its implications fully within the original symbolic paradigm.

## 4.7. Problems with the Absorption Position

### 4.7.1 Baudrillard and presence

The idea of ‘erosion of presence’ is not clear in the theoretical language of the semiosis and the code. No real definition of ‘presence’ is given from the first in the context of *pre*-societal symbolic exchange. Baudrillard grounds his discussion by relating ‘social condition’ and ‘experience’ in *pre-semiotic* kinds of exchange: forms of exchange where there is inter-subjectivity, symbolic action and emotional experience all attached in a kind of ‘mystical union’ of the present moment. The account of semiosis and semiotic exchange, that come to dissolve this mystical union, given by Baudrillard in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and *The Consumer Society*, have had a deserved impact on sociological discourse. What is compelling is the application of the idea of simulacra and their circulation in, firstly, early modern and then late modern societies. The whole idea of ‘flows’ in the work of Urry and Lash depends on this. However, Baudrillard, and his followers, have not successfully shown how the relations between action, experience and intersubjectivity become re-configured in any way that has analytical continuity with what was said about co-presence and symbolic exchange. The effect is to over-equate symbolic activity with experience and the rise of semiosis with the disappearance of emotionality and the development of indifference. Only the grounded and ‘present’ *socius* (human-in-society) is capable of experiencing the immediate sociality of activity and communication. In *The Consumer Society* the argument unfolds through a series of accounts about the *scenes* of consumption (the bookshop, the drugstore) where the massification and ever more sophisticated semiotic circulation of products like TVs, magazines, washing machines etc. impact on the sensibilities of the consumer in a deadening way. The consumer becomes, as Merrin (2005: 24) notes commenting on this idea in Baudrillard, a ‘zombie’. We are required to understand that the sensibility of the consumer is altered,

deadened, changed by the substitution of ‘the shadowy presence of the symbolic’ by the meanings of the goods given in the playful flows of simulacra. My problem here is firstly that the late modern, ‘flow-infected’, deadening of human sensibilities seems to rely on the consumer’s recollection of what has been lost as a consequence of social change. The ‘hollowing out of present experience’ by our immersion in semiotic flows, i.e. signs detached from the moorings of co-presence, requires a simultaneous grasp of the sense of attachment that has been lost. How can this grasp be available to social beings socialised in a contemporary flow? Secondly, what is the character of present, embodied and located experience? While the idea of flows avers to questions of embodiment it is avoided. Emotional, situated experience is part of the description of symbolic exchange and co-presence, but is inconsistently mapped into our understanding of communication flows. For me, then, the idea of flows, as developed by Urry and Lash has a mythological origin in symbolic co-presence. Social change and the institution of flows as detached, circulating signs is predicated on some kind of rupture with this. But their explanation of contemporary experience has to constitute itself by some kind of *link* with this origin i.e. our ‘hollowness’ as consumers is a differentiation from this mythological origin, we lose something but still ‘have it’ by negation.

#### **4.7.2. From Symbolic to Semiotic: a significant movement?**

The movement of simulacra, detached from any grounded co-present exchanges, constitutes absorption into flows: the modern condition. How are we to understand the difference between attachment and detachment in signs? Criticism (Gane, 2002; Pawlett, 2007; Merrin, 2005) has been levelled at Baudrillard’s historical work in identifying the moments of detachment in the sixteenth century. However, my concerns about the historical problem of detachment relates to the logic of semiosis itself. In much of what Baudrillard writes the concept of a ‘sign’ is discussed as a ‘component’ of semiosis conceived as a practice (of exchange). However, Eco (1984) in a major philosophical analysis of semiotics points to the ancient problem of the relationship between sign and semiosis. The sign is a relationship of specification (signifier and signified). To express at all implies socialisation into language. The price is the detachment of the signifier from the signified and the subsequent free movement, flow if you like, of signifiers (cf. Volosinov, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). The assumption here is that in co-presence (Durkheim’s symbolic

order), signifier and signified are united in the symbol. After they are detached from each other in semiosis, signifiers get their meaning, of course, from other free-flowing signifiers. A grounded, co-present context is not required except in indexical communication. This means that signs have meaning by virtue of the closed-set of other possible denotations which *might otherwise* have been specified in semiosis. The ‘might otherwise’ here is a virtuality *always* present in language. Baudrillard takes no account of this, nor contrasts pre-semiotic virtuality with simulacra. What I am saying is that semiosis as a practice is modelled on what *the sign already does* in any of the modes (symbolic or semiotic) that Baudrillard suggests. What is more serious is that studies of socialisation and language development (e.g. Vygotsky, 1986) show that the process of signifier detachment is not a one off historical event in cultural evolution that Baudrillard takes it to be. This happens every time children acquire any language. Indeed, the idea that signs may achieve meaning not within ‘virtually present closed sets’ but ones open to the development of meaning in historical exchange is absent from Baudrillard’s work. The move from symbolic to semiotic order via semiosis in Baudrillard, Lash and Urry accounts is inadequately treated in this regard. In the development of my own position I shall make room for a historically constitutive virtualism within communicative exchange.

#### **4.7.3. Lash, the return of the subject and navigation**

Postmodernization for Lash (2002) means the replacement of social structures by information and communication structures. These latter structures are whatever ‘frames’ “flows of information, communications, images, money, ideas and technology” (Lash, 2002: 28). Flows are quite ‘real’ in their effects producing for Lash ‘live and dead zones’, places of more and less intense social relations and cultural activities, even an underclass defined as not having access to flows. The ‘information city’, characterised by its flows, presents the embodied subject according to Lash (2002: 205) with a *problem of navigation*. He returns us to the vocabulary of subject and actor, as opposed to Urry’s ‘actant’. The problem of navigation posed in contemporary late modernity is not the same as that presented, say, to earlier moderns such as that form of self coherence strategy enshrined in Benjamin’s flaneur. The flaneur constitutes coherence in action and experience through allowing the metropolis to become a contingent and surprising place in the activity of walking. Coherence here refers to the nature of the engagement of embodied skills and the

physical space that constitutes the bodily movement. Lash imagines the embodied subject as analytically detached from the ICTs with which they are ‘involved’. This raises the question of the kind of engagement we are talking about. He views the concept of interface as necessary here. This means that we cannot view, contrary to what he says elsewhere about flows, the flows of cyberspace as forms of engagement like walking in physical space. This runs counter to what we need to believe to accept the absorption thesis. In considering ‘technological forms of life’ he says,

“I operate as a man-machine (sic) interface – that is, as a technological form of natural life – because I must necessarily navigate through technological forms of social life. As technological nature, I must navigate through technological culture. And technological culture is constitutively culture *at a distance*. Forms of life become forms of life at-a-distance. Because my forms of social life are so normally and chronically at-a-distance, I cannot navigate these distances, I cannot achieve sociality apart from my machine interface. I cannot achieve sociality in the absence of technological systems” (Lash, 2002: 15)

This now seems to fly completely in the face of the ‘flow’ idea. In order to understand, then, in what ways the traditional grounding conditions of co-presence become absorbed into ‘flows’ that turn the problem of self *coherence* into a problem of *navigation* we need to have an idea of what the medium of navigation is. However, nothing more is said than what can be covered by the traditional idea of ergonomic relations between subject, body, skill and technology. Flow now appears to consist of two connected ideas that give liquidity to the late modern condition: networks and signs. For networks Lash’s account is in some tension with the idea of the embodied subject before an interface,

“Networks are the sites through which the flows (of money, images, utterances, people, objects, communications, technology) navigate...For [Deleuze and Guattari] most important are flows, ‘pulsions’ of desire and ‘lines of flight’. These flows gain hegemony in the general ‘de-territorialisation’ of structures and institutions. But there is never the pure indifference of flows. The de-territorialised flows wind up ‘solidifying’ in a group of new ‘re-territorialisations’, some of which become infrastructures for the flows themselves. Networks and actor-networks are such re-territorialisations.” (Lash, 2002: 205)

Here the problem of navigation, what the problem of coherence becomes, depends on what ‘making links’ means. The sociology of flows renders the activity of making links problematic to human life. Or put another way, the condition of flows entails that the

human act of ‘making’ shows up as ‘making *links*’. Making links in itself, and the problems it poses, is not a new idea. The traditional view of the skilled actor is imagined here as embodying capacities that enable engagement with an ‘object-world’. However, there is now a new twist which the concept of flow suggests. The basis on which making links is achieved is one where the linkage itself becomes the primary object. The traditional view of skill as embodied capacity relies on a figure-ground view of skilled performance where the activity of making the links is invisible relative to what is linked. While this still has to continue to be the case, the implication of flows is that the background is routinely fore-grounded. We become sensitive to the flow itself and of ourselves in the context of our own complicity with it. In a curious parallel with McLuhan’s phrase, ‘the medium is the message’, what coherence has become in the sociology of flows is a situation where my grasp of the *flow itself* is somehow more important than *what flows*.

Indeed, ICT networking devices, such as the internet mobile phone, gain their value not from ‘content’ but from their re-territorialising of concerns. Managing one’s mobile work colleagues, keeping up with changing personnel in the choir to which one belongs, storing and retrieving documents in phone memory, deciding on weekend trips while downloading weekend road closures, buying a gift for a family member online and having it posted to their address become events abstracted from their material point of origin (de-distanced). Our sensitisation to our own concerns become contingent in an embodied way on the way the phone permits a ‘condensation’ of the managerial problems posed by flows. Rather, that the contingency and responsibility of those concerns are complicit with, produced by and show up with the manner in which the flow has now become managed, or navigated, and condensed with other concerns. This seems to be the work of ‘navigation’. Condensing flows in this manner is not the same as co-presence. By attending to the condensation of flows themselves we construct strategies of coherence that promote sociality always at a distance. I take up this example of the mobile phone again in chapter 6 in pursuit of an alternative explanatory framework.

#### **4.7.4. The Urry Paradox**

The final issue to take forward in the construction of a new position arises from my critical remarks of Urry's work given in greater detail at 4.4. In brief, there needs to be a unity of theoretical language in pursuit of different examples to be theorised and these examples should not be both symptoms of historical change and its explanation.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This critical review of absorptionism questions the extent to which contemporary social phenomena, are better served by concepts such as semiosis, simulation and flow.

Absorptionism identifies points in history when flows and simulations began. But when we examine the theoretical building blocks we cannot say that there are fundamental differences between pre- and late modern practices. Socialising humans into pre-modern, symbolic orders, from the Saussurean point of view on language, *always* involves a move into semiosis, and detachment from the co-present, symbolic unification of signified and signifier. This detachment is not a historical one-off. Semiosis and flow are, in themselves, insufficient to establish the erosion of co-present forms of sociality.

Additionally, re-configuring contemporary problems of stability (self and social life) as problems of navigation of semiosis and other flows leaves us with an unresolved individual/subject analytical tension.

My approach argues that what are regarded as erosions of sociality, such as dissimulation, (and the indifference that arises from it) are better construed as constitutive orientations within a 'zone of social constructive activity'.

## **PART TWO: TOWARDS THE ZONE OF SOCIAL MAKING**

## Chapter 5: From Critique to the Grounding Parameters of the Social

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter does the following: summarises the key critiques of arguments for social apocalypse as presented in Part One; locates these points in relation to the overall argument of the thesis that the symptoms of apocalypse are not situated within an adequate framework of social or historical analysis; establishes a revised basis on which to construct an understanding of the social adequate to the issues raised in Part One. Firstly, the critical issues raised in Part One are here cross-referenced with each other to generate more coherent guidelines for the platform on which the new position is developed. Secondly, I examine and find new departure points in the Weberian understanding of social action with a view to establishing a revised set of theoretical parameters for understanding action starting with hermeneutical, embodied and temporal dimensions of analysis. The implications of these revisions are applied to Bauman's and Giddens' models of action and sociation and a new approach is proposed, in contradistinction to these, that is further developed in the course of Part Two.

My approach draws on and develops rather than dismisses the theoretical viewpoints I reviewed. Part Two demonstrates that key aspects of the experience and pattern of sosciation correlated with late modernity as symptomatic of the demise of the social are re-read here as chronic *parameters and constituents of the social*. The argument for this is developed later this chapter. The next section draws together the main points raised by the critiques of the arguments reviewed in Part One. In so doing I bring out further, and highlight, the importance of the 'scene of sosciation' in those arguments and begin to broaden their scope. This becomes the principal topic of discussion in the reconstruction of the social in Part Two together with an account of its analytical characteristics that need to be foregrounded in discussion of 'the social' and its grounding in human activity.

## 5.2 Key critical points to be addressed

In Part One the ‘ground’ of social life, and threats to it, were conceptualised differently in the work of dislocationists, absorptionists and social constructionists. Despite family resemblances, their approaches have diverse problems accruing to the particular paths they take. An infection of the sensing conditions of social engagement and the sincerity of communication leading to irony, ambivalence and moral expropriation; an irreversible jettisoning of the symbolic order, grounded in reciprocity, in favour of a less ‘grounded’ semiotic one vulnerable to the vicissitudes of flows; or, alienation and irony in the conditions of communication and constructive capacity show family resemblance. This is a key link between all theoretical positions discussed in Part One. Here I bring together the issues generated by these conceptions and condense their implications for the task of reconstruction.

### 5.2.1. Registers, terms, concepts

Firstly, terminology, concepts and the forms of analysis which deploy them require internal coherence. This is difficult to deliver if parts of the theoretical language and concepts belong to different theoretical registers entirely such as seen in chapter 2 with Giddens’ and Habermas’ use of psychological theories of socialisation employed in accounts of social change. ‘Register transcendence’ can lead to the incoherence of positions such as that developed by Urry (chapter 4) where comments based on the characteristics of ‘actants’, conceived as actor-networks, become interchangeable with their sub-components: actors and social conditions of change. Similarly Giddens (chapter 2) and Lash (chapter 4) shift between ‘agency’ and ‘individual’ when changing from analytical to political registers. It is desirable to render all terms and concepts into a single sociological register where possible. While flawed in other ways, Parsons’ account of the domain of ‘personality’ was not one that *relied* on a psychological elaboration. He produced an account of it integrated with his account of social and cultural domains. His description of an apparently psychological concept, personality, can be derived entirely theoretically from his account of the social and culture.

### 5.2.2 Cognition, embodiment and sensuousness

We need an account that integrates hermeneutical and embodied action and experience. We saw a heavy cognitive bias in the work of Habermas and Giddens (chapter 2) underscored by many references to knowledgeability and linguistic ability. Bauman (chapter 2) invokes the additional strains placed on hermeneutical work within social relationships defining the contemporary condition. Likewise, Berger et al's work (chapter 3) suggests that the demise of the social is accompanied by infractions of knowledge and meaning and difficulties in applying them. Delanty's (1999) discussion of the resurgence of the social as a theoretical rallying point is underscored by the resurgence of interest in creative, knowledgeable agency; new political discourse arises from the evolution of hermeneutical powers. Yet, in all these cases key moves in their accounts of social change and social demise depend on a view of social agents as embodied beings who necessarily need to grasp the structures of feeling and anticipation within activity and sociality (Berger et al), in the 'sensuous' properties of language (Habermas) and in the 'play' involved in co-presence (Giddens). Urry (chapter 4) takes the transformation of senses themselves as a major *site* of mobility and flow. Sociologies of the body and emotions are now well-established fields (e.g. Crossley, 2001; Williams, 2001) such that we can speak sensibly about the notion that human performance is both meaningful (cognitive-semantic content) and simultaneously embodied-emotional. Despite the acceptance of this I have not yet found any sociological account that discusses 'sensuous properties of thought' addressing the issues raised in Part One. Such an account would hold out the prospect of an answer to a number of key questions. 'Sensuousness of thought' alludes to both the material immediacy of situated practice and experience as well as a cognitive realm, apparently, transcendental to it. I want to retain the situated and material properties here but want to avoid transcendentalism. I propose instead a 'material virtualism' (chapter 1, table 1.1).

Bourdieu's and Crossley's uses of Merleau-Ponty (cf Crossley, 2001) are useful but the question of the social is suspended or begged in Merleau-Ponty where it meets situated social action. It is not clear how it deals, for example, with the problem of *responsivity* raised with Habermas (see 2.4). The latter is key to any reconstructed understanding of the social and is absent from extended accounts of the body. Nor does the sociology of the

body comment on any connection between embodied and hermeneutic action. It can be argued that these should not be distinguished, i.e. that hermeneutical action is always already embodied action. But they need to be distinguished analytically as the definition of each contains the negation of the other. If we construe embodied activity as skill, for example (as Garfinkel, Schutz and Giddens do), then we have also to think of hermeneutical action as something that *interrupts* skill, stops the smooth flow of activity in its tracks (this is the basis of reflexivity in, say, Giddens' account). The unreconstructed deployment of Merleau-Ponty in sociological accounts on this issue is of the same order of 'register infringement' (see 5.2.1) as the use of Piaget and Kohlberg by Habermas and Giddens. Likewise, Butler's conceptualisations of performance and performativity (which conceptualise practice as embodied repertoires of skilled activity) do not extend Foucault's own accounts of his concept of 'gaze' i.e. his attempt at elaborating the nature of the body/knowledge axis in the context of skilled social practices that find themselves in historically novel moments of contingent interruption (Foucault, 1973). Butler (1997) recontextualises Foucault in useful ways but takes us no further analytically. Foucault's concept of 'gaze' is much closer to what is required.

#### *Summary of task from this section*

The task is to develop a theoretical and analytical space that grasps the nettle of an embodied-hermeneutical dimension to the elaboration of activity. It also needs to take into account and explain the forms of experience that arise within that activity. As argued in Part One, it is experiential shifts that register the symptoms of social life brought about, allegedly, by historical changes impacting on the 'ground' of sociality and action.

### **5.2.3. The problem of socialisation and internalization in social reproduction and change**

Little attention is paid to processes of internalisation or socialisation in contemporary sociology. The tendency is to 'outsource' for detail, to aid established positions, from social and development psychology. However, Berger and Luckmann's (1967) account of 'social construction' *predicates* a sociological account of socialisation, and is unique in this regard. The distinct advantage of this is that the language of 'deposits', 'sediments'

can take the scene of everyday social interaction *and* the scene of socialisation in the same analytical terms. In other words, the process of becoming an 'I' and a competent member of a social order from the position of relative incompetence is grounded always in the same analytic terms. Many questions remain, but logically it regards the 'scene of *socialisation*' as a special kind of 'scene of *sociation*'.

For Giddens (see 2.4) the problems which the scene of *sociation* faces in late modernity are understood by a theory of *sociation* and co-presence itself *predicated by* a theory of socialisation and internalisation (in contrast to Berger and Luckmann). I dealt at length with the problems connected with Giddens' way of proceeding. They are largely to do with the nature of the accounts he draws on to plug the gaps in structuration theory. These latter (the works of Piaget and Erikson) beg most of the questions Giddens takes as answered. I argued (2.4) that Giddens fails to understand scenes of socialisation as, themselves, scenes contiguous with those with which structuration deals. It is as if the account of everyday practice arising from the discourse of the duality of structure and the skill repertoires engaged by the reflexive monitoring of action were somehow not applicable to the forms of co-present activities of, say, mothers and babies. It cannot be meant, though it is strongly implied (Giddens, 1984), that *sociation* with *pre-social* beings constitutes a kind of 'time out' from structuration itself. Or at least, if what I argue has merit, then with regard to the special forms of action which comprise socialisation Giddens' theory of structuration simply reverts to standard Parsonian processes of internalisation. The major problem with Parsons' view is it presumes the competences of shared goal identification as a feature of the competences being acquired. This leads to an analytic regress with regard to the identification of action orientating towards shared goals.

It is this problem that leads Habermas (see chapter 2) to Piaget, principally because Piaget's major theoretical achievement is to get out of the regress. Piaget attracts because he provides an account of 'activity' that appears to show dialectical properties that explain how subjects are made at the same time as activities transform the material substance of the world. (Miller, 1987, uses this as the basis for his theory of consumption for the same reasons). However, I have indicated (2.4.3) that Piaget's account relies on the principle of ergodicity (that the world consists already of the relations between identifiable things); and it cannot distinguish ultimately between objects and subjects. The principle of ergodicity

runs counter to the view of human action as comprising transformative capacities. The latter is central to the definition of activity in Giddens' work. Habermas (2003: 16; 1992: 332ff) invokes this issue in his discussions on Marx and selfhood. As in Miller (1987) one can see the desire to promote the essentially Marxian view of the transformative properties of activity by the use of Piaget. But as I have argued (chapter 2) Piagetian theory erases the social by reducing it to ergodic object relations. This reduction does not bother Piaget given his own terms of reference. But it should bother Habermas who, subsequently, comes to rely on Mead and Schutz (Habermas, 1987; 1995: 178ff) to develop an account of subject-subject communication and intersubjectivity with a distinctive social character but which is *immersed* in activity entirely described in the Piagetian way.

Habermas confuses the interactions involved in socialising humans those of everyday interactions between socialised adults. In TCA II Habermas clearly narrates the historical shift from the sacred basis of the social bond to discourse via the process of linguistification of the bond as a historical process befalling society. Yet, the linguistification of association is also a definition of socialisation itself. The history of society in the era of linguistification is also a moment, surely, that has to be undertaken again and again within all socialising relationships (this is after all what Piagetian theory is designed to illuminate). If the processes are similar then we must ask what is unique about contemporary cultural absorption that distinguishes it from processes at work in any social setting at any time?

#### *Summary of task from this section*

The task here is to develop a position in which the activities involved in acquiring culture are congruent with a general case account of activity. We also need an account that does not *commute* social relations to object relations (Piaget, 1973: 45ff, in his discussion of structuralism and vitalism, claims his account is not *reductive*. Accepting the spirit of his claim, my view is that the deployment of Piaget in the social theories reviewed do have to address the issue of accounting for social relations by object relations).

This section also indicates the need to disentangle 'types of time'. There is (i) the social evolutionary time invoked by Habermas and Bauman where changes to the constitution of the social bond are deemed to have consequences for the experience of action; (ii) there is

the ‘individual’ time of socialisation; and (iii) there is the time of the elaboration of activity. These are confused in the frameworks discussed in Part One. Giddens (1979, 1981) and Schutz (1980) promote a discussion of time (indeed argue for its theoretical primacy) and attempt to distinguish between types of time, drawing on the work of Bergson, from an *experiential*, phenomenological, point of view. However, the distinctions they refer to, derived from Bergson, do not subsequently form part of their *analytic* frameworks for social activity. This needs sorting out.

#### **5.2.4. The problem of historical comparison, relativity and universality in social action and experience**

Central to the arguments about the apocalypse of the social is the idea that contemporary practice and experience is qualitatively different to what it was prior to forms of social change unique to modernity and late modernity. I argued (Part One) that there are serious problems in accounts that historicise this way. Three main issues were identified. Firstly, there are logical problems in the accounts themselves, such as Berger et al’s (1974), which deploy a form of social constructionism that cannot decide between the anthropologically universal and simply contingent in the nature of activity. Is alienation a product of modernity or a feature of being human?

Secondly, theorists of socio-experiential change (e.g. Urry, 2000; 2007) imply that quantity is an important dimension of change. Adjectival comparisons are made (there is *greater* use of texting; information travels *faster* etc.). We are not told if such comparators are logically reversible sociological dimensions or not. For example, does less texting and more postcard sending imply less social anonymity? Or is it simply correlated with it? While Castells (1996), for example, does provide quantitative data on the technological transformation of late modernity he desists, interestingly, from remarking on changes to the *quality of action* and our experience. Urry (chapter 4) historicises, for example by drawing attention to transitions between networks as conceived by actor-network theory. I drew attention to problems with his definition and use of ‘actant’ and argued that transitions between networks, strictly, is itself *another* network requiring explanation. There are no qualitative or logical differences between pre-modern and modern networks anywhere within ANT. Accepting that fundamental, experience-changing shifts have

occurred in recent centuries, we have no adequate sociological benchmarks for mapping them.

Thirdly, we have the symptoms of shifts in the *quality* of action and experience: ironic distance and ontological insecurity; the disembodiment and hermeneuticisation of the social rule; self-alienation etc. My problem with these as symptoms of the quality of activity in late modernity is simply that I am not convinced they are unique to our age in the forms they have been crudely put. Again, I do not deny facts of change. For example, more experts dealing with more differentiated aspects of our experience (Giddens, 1992), could have experiential and subject-reconstituting consequences. The professionalisation of medicine, for example, brings with it new problems to solve about such things as the interpretation of one's illness and ways for the self to relate to this and others. This is visible in medical systems undergoing modernisation (see Last and Chavanduka, 1988) such as in Nigeria between traditional and Western medical regimes. Confronted with *the choice* of traditional or modern healing leaves the sick person with a novel set of problems constituted entirely by historical and contingent change to the organisation of 'expertise' relative to community and self.

Similarly, Westernisation has consequences for the forms of practice, belief and institutions of Islam (see Gilsenan, 2000 for adaptations of Islam in, among other places, Dalston, London). Heilman (1987) examines differences between hermeneutical practices between different Jewish groups differentially contextualised by geography and affiliation in New York and Jerusalem and how people differentially constitute themselves in their jewishness. These studies are examples of work that give us nuanced discussions about the kinds of irony and insecurity that begin to appear in contexts of change. My view is that social theoretical accounts that symptomatise experience, as in Part One, consequent upon change need to be more nuanced in that pursuit. The question, I maintain, cannot be about the *rise* of ontological insecurity, irony etc. in contemporary life. Ontological insecurity was a feature of late sixteenth century life in England (Jones, 2002) when everybody's religious affiliation was a matter of routine report.

We need to move away from consideration of simply the *onset* of symptoms in late modernity but rather the relational alterations to them as features of activity. This is argued in Part Two.

#### *Summary of task from this section*

The issue of how time is configured within any analytical framework is already a task arising from the problems discussed in the preceding section (see 5.2.3). This will be treated as an analytical problem and a solution provided on that basis that works, I believe, for both sets of issues. This does not imply that other approaches to time, social change and history are wrong, but rather that where the particular task is to understand the nuanced ways in which experience of the social may have changed then an analytical approach that brings aspects of experience into relation with key dimensions of action and sociation is advantageous.

### **5.3 Towards a new account of the basis of the social in sosciation**

By now it will be clear that any reconstruction of our understanding of sosciation that takes into account the issues that have been summarised above will need to be fairly radical. In other words, some of the very basic assumptions and concepts of social theoretical discourse need examination, further clarification and, where necessary, radical revision. The point also needs to be made that while all the issues summarised in 5.2 strongly indicate the location where reconstructive work needs to be carried out this does not mean that merely addressing the critical points raised is a task sufficient, in itself, to achieve the reconstruction. At this point the remit looks daunting if this is taken to mean a completely new theoretical system. For present purposes this is not necessary. Instead, the scale is closer to the remit of Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* (1949). I cover very different ground than Parsons, having to address very different concerns, but his approach to argument construction is worth emulating. In Part Two I argue for revisions to key grounding concepts in social theory. In this chapter I outline what is involved.

In brief, what we mean by activity itself needs revision. A formal reassessment and re-examination is necessary of the rather loose *topos* in social theory that entertains the conceptual sub-divisions of activity as: (i) goal-oriented, purposive behaviour (crucial in

different ways to the Parsonian and post-Parsonian accounts in Part One); (ii) activity as related to sociality (what kinds of connection need to be made between social action and social bond?); (iii) activity as embodied skills and also hermeneutic, reflexive practice; activity as a chain of coherence in human life (what gives coherence to the special order of events we call activity?) Problems have been raised so far with approaches that specify coherence as given by, variously, co-presence, lifeworld, intersubjectivity etc.

The next section revisits Weber's ideas about action and its ordered properties with a view to highlighting features routinely overlooked. This move is not to overturn the traditional usages of Weber in the elaboration of the account of human behaviour as, essentially, a hermeneutical endeavour requiring an interpretive sociology. Indeed, Weber is at the foundation of the issue. Rather, the aim is to highlight another, nascent, dimension in the theorisation of activity presented within Weber's work that has a bearing on many of the questions raised in the discussion so far. This follows the principles, indicated in chapter 1, that in the marginalia of classical and canonical works one may find the undeveloped answers to contemporary questions, or the beginnings of answers. I find productive marginalia in the works of Weber, Schutz, Giddens, Marx and Shotter that contribute to the development of my own position.

### **5.3.1 Returning to basics: Weber re-visited and another path discovered**

Many of the problems raised have origins in Weber's understanding of the nature of social action (in particular, Weber, 1978: 7ff 'the nature of social action' and 99ff 'the concept of following a rule'). I return to several points in Weber's work where he alludes to the primacy of alternative dimensions in action and sociation than the ones he is most remembered for. He worries about different kinds of time and causation (from a methodological point of view) and he is also concerned to highlight a 'sub-Verstehen' domain of action that I develop as sub-hermeneutical. This is important because in our search for the 'ground' of social life in Part One the concern became one of how human activity gets its *form*. The link between goal-directedness, social rule, co-operative behaviour, rules of communication and even semiotic flows is that these are all examples of how activity 'takes form'. I examine the basis of this in Weber.

There has been considerable debate about what rule following means (e.g. Winch, 1963; Scheff, 1966). Here though I want to pursue Weber's thinking on framework issues that cross the social-natural boundary and the differences in time as an analytical dimension that he indicates. In 'the concept of following a rule' Weber makes a case about the status of the rule with regard to social and natural contexts together with how the observer may view the events comprised of such things. He suggests, for example, that while an individual's actions may be structured by socially derived purposes, nevertheless we may view action from a number of different causal points of view including ones aimed at understanding the elaboration from the point of view of the technology (in, say, production processes). The interface between the socially derived individual and the natural world, to which technologies may be applied, are not distinct logically when it comes to the status of the rules which come to form the sequence of events that comprise action. In doing so Weber alerts us to an analytical problem about time. If we look at actions connected with, to take one of his examples, satisfying hunger the ordered qualities of the actions and the rule-like principle derived from them follows "a certain temporal sequence. The rule [*here*] is an abstraction from *the course of nature*." (Weber, 1978: 103 my emphases). That is to say, the temporal sequence comprises a distribution of events linked by causation defined within a universal time frame. However, the same empirical activity constitutes the nature of the rule differently when described as a rule followed as a social norm in purposive behaviour. The teleological pursuit of goals here involves evaluative, hermeneutical work relative to an ideal: in this instance something *pursued for* nature. The 'course' of events implied in rules derivable from norms *may*, Weber says, coincide in fact but they are nevertheless conceptually distinct because the regularities they point to have very different origins. The sequence of events implies time, but their *temporal distribution* is of a different order.

Weber does not go on to discuss the temporal dimension further and at length. Nevertheless the distinctions he draws between natural and social domains, and their interfaces, suggest that we cannot treat all ordered events, however constituted between these domains, as simply subsisting in a single Newtonian temporal framework. There is a warning here which has a bearing on how we might reconstruct our conceptual grasp of action. Later I develop my own account of activity based on a further consideration of this

warning. In pursuit of that reconstruction I shall unravel entirely the temporal dimension built into the approaches to activity discussed in Part One.

A second matter of emphasis arising in Weber's work which benefits this discussion by further elaboration is how he conceptualises reciprocity and mutuality as a dimension of action, that is, as a dimension *other than that of primarily semantic, interpretative or hermeneutical qualities*. Meaning, in the form of semantic exchange and its action-orienting properties in goal-directed behaviour, always gets top-billing in discussions of Weber and social constructionism in general. However, Weber does have some comments on the questions of responsiveness and the more sensuous aspects of *inter-action*, or exchange, in his original discussion on 'the nature of social action'. Turning to this discussion, we see that Weber allows for a view of social relationships that admits of their approximations, misfires, misunderstandings and attempts that fail to achieve meaning. It is easy to see why the drive to establish a sociological account of normalcy and social order might actually overlook such considerations.

In arriving at his own (i.e. non-Maussian) image of mutuality and reciprocity Weber invokes not one but actually two dimensions that have featured already in my Part One discussion: that of a hermeneutical domain of action and something more at an embodied level. At the hermeneutical level, and to use his example, the key to ordered social relationships is given by a focus on 'maxims'. The latter are formulable orientations to actions which partners need to observe (and clearly Habermas develops this). Maxims, however, may be less open to rational formulation in affective and sexual relationships he suggests. Indeed, there may be more dependency on another 'grounding principle' (my terms) of (as)sociation. The ground of a relationship (in both affective as well as more contractually based ones involving rationally formulable maxims) consists in people's reciprocal *adjustments* of "behaviour to each other with respect to the meaning which they give to it, and when this reciprocal adjustment determines the form which it takes."

(Weber, 1978:30 my emphases).

The notion of 'reciprocal adjustments', not fully formulated in Weber but posited as a sub-hermeneutical domain, is the key to the problems raised in the question of the social in Weberian and post-Weberian approaches (and all approaches in Part One). It seems to be

more important as a grounding principle for sociality than meaning-attachments and anything in the hermeneutical domain (*Verstehen*). The idea that sub-hermeneutical reciprocal adjustments might actually determine the form of social behaviour is not something readily associated with Weber. Indeed, while he does imply that social encounters depend on ‘meanings given’ within responsive moments, he is also quite clear that,

“At no point have we said that ‘reciprocity’ is present in the sense that those who... relate their actions to each other attach the *same* meaning to their social relationship, or that the meaning which each inwardly attaches to his own action varies in correspondence with that of the other.” (Weber, 1978: 31 Weber’s emphasis).

The form that reciprocal and mutually co-operative action takes, at root, is one where continuing relations subsist *within* activities. This allows the connection of the expectations people have of each other to the process of ‘reciprocal adjustments’ and exchange (*Gemein*). Weber goes on to say that enduring relationships have *some* convergence of meaning, but he situates the grounding principle in *responsivity*. He also allows for the possibility that meanings will not be found in situations where, nevertheless, people still ‘go on’.

The quote above strongly suggests that in the absence of the attachment of the same meanings a relationship falls back on *another* form-giving, sub-hermeneutical grounding. Most accounts of Weber seem to focus on his view that social life, with its ordered properties, is formed around the production of meaning and its attachment to things and events. Here I emphasise responsivity as the more important, more basic principle. This emphasis arises directly from the critiques of positions in Part One. The difficulties seen with Habermas (2.5), in the gap that opens in his account between ‘sensing’ the ground of a social encounter and understanding it in terms that can be formulated in language, is directly related to this gap in Weber’s account between, what I call, responsivity and meaning. The gap is present too in Bauman’s work. Indeed he exploits it to some extent suggesting (chapter 2) that one of the deep contemporary problems of sociality is that a *distance* between responsiveness and meaning has widened. The social may, for Bauman, actually collapse into this gap but it is still a theoretical problem that needs closure and we need a firmer conceptual grasp of it than Part One theorists supply. I speculate that Weber

does not pursue the sub-hermeneutical aspects of action himself because his main goal is the establishment of social research methodologies. These methodologies could not focus on any *sub*-hermeneutical domain in the way things panned out, but it is clear that Weber was aware of other dimensions of activity. Indeed, the notion of *Gemein*, the root of *Gemeinschaft*, implies in old high German a basic form of turn-taking and exchange (Buechs, 2008, PC). I believe this also underlies Marx's understanding of, if you will, a sub-societal 'species-being' form of interaction central to his concept of co-operative labour and sociability, its enjoyment in "its mode of existence" (Marx, 1977: 90ff).

Parsons gives us theoretical foreclosure of this gap between the feel of an interaction and its linguistic formulability. Such discussion of actors' sensing and feeling moral compulsions in social life, as Parsons gives us, is from his discussion (Parsons, 1949: 414ff) of Durkheim and the sacred. Parsons' account is aimed at the proper objects of social analysis and so the issue of the actor's mode of engagement, *feeling a sense of moral obligation*, with otherness is commented on in passing in an extended footnote. Parsons (1949: 419) pauses to consider the relation of the regard paid to symbols and their embeddedness in our mundane actions as forms of sentiment. What might have been a formal link between regard/respect as a form of responsivity in conceptualising action itself is passed over as a residual category. In the general theory of action (Parsons et al, 1951) 'the framework of reference for a theory of action' certainly discusses the actor's 'sensitivity' to already-constituted social and non-social objects but the issue is side-stepped by employing the psychoanalytic notion of cathexis as an *individual's* state of "affective significance". Thereafter, the idea of action is consolidated as a system of orientations towards objects and goals.

I do not rehearse again the problems of Parsons' approach but rather highlight the progressive elisions of a grounding principle in Weber that has not been developed to anywhere near the same extent as the form-giving processes of goal orientation and meaning in social life. The latter take centre-stage in post-Weberian accounts of action. There is little formal recognition in contemporary debates on the body and emotions of Weber's insights here.

Next I argue how to reconceptualize the problem in the wake of the preceding discussion and set out a new position. The first task is to open up the question of hermeneutical and embodied activity. This features strongly in all approaches suggesting the demise of the social, viewing it as a key site of change. This is central to our grasp of sociation and what is claimed to have happened to it: i.e. Bauman: more hermeneutical is work required to manage social relationships; Giddens: the new demands on reflexivity and knowledgeability with irony generated at the hermeneutical level and ontological insecurity at the embodied level; Habermas: the social transition from embodied to hermeneutical practice and the dangers of ‘structural violence’ by the media to the roots of sociality; Schutz, Berger and Luckmann: the rise of hermeneutical irony at the same time as the disorientation of embodied skills within modern bureaucracies and production processes; Baudrillard: the severance of hermeneutical action and embodiment – the former absorbed into semiosis and hyperreality and the latter becoming unresponsive to otherness; Urry and Lash imply a similar kind of severance as activity becomes embedded in different and differentiated mobilities and flows.

### **5.3.2 Hermeneutical and embodied activity**

To re-iterate: if we are looking at activity, its order, organisation, elaboration in time and social ‘context’ etc. then reference to distinct *modalities* of activity (hermeneutical and embodied) does not imply any ontological distinction, for example, that hermeneutical work is somehow a disembodied, mental event in the Cartesian sense.

However, from the argument thus far it will not do to leave it such that the two modalities may simply blur into each other as is the case in sociological accounts generally.

The discussion of Weber (5.3.1) suggests that the separation of hermeneutics and embodiment is an artificial move. The problems arise analytically when they are not reconnected. Also, I argued (5.2.2) that by definition in the context of social theory, as well as in research on the nature of skill (Miller et al, 1960; Legge, 1969), hermeneutical work in the form of problem-solving and reflexivity is constituted in *an interruption* of the smooth flow of relatively unreflexive, skilled embodied, activity. In one of my undergraduate finals examinations a question appeared simply as “Is thinking a skill?”. I

did not do the question but was very amused by it and have often thought about it since. The question presents a paradox. Skilled activity as a performed embodied enactment is defined as action that takes place, and can take place ‘without thinking’. Thinking about the activity interferes with the performance. Indeed, Goffman (1968) frequently alludes to this phenomenon in sociological contexts. And if we re-examine Garfinkel’s experiments (Garfinkel, 1990), clearly *the arrest of skilled social exchanges* is actually occasioned by inserting *unwarranted hermeneutical events* into them. On the other hand, however, we are not aware of the processes we must perform in order to constitute the process of thinking itself (the processes of thought are not given to thought) and therefore we apparently rely on events skilfully (i.e. thoughtlessly) linked to produce thought: hence the paradox.

Sociologically we are presented with a less paradoxical problem of how to link the two modalities. *All the theoretical approaches considered so far assume a ‘two-layered model’ at the basis of activity. Activity is organised into embodied events organised by reflexivity.* The social impacts on the body via hermeneutical capacities that organize the body, its skills, feelings and orientation. We have no way of connecting reflexivity and skill at a level of detail that sheds light on the problems raised in Part One. If we imagine scenes of sosciation atrophied by forces of late modern ‘entropy’ then we are confronted by actors who fail to ‘be present to one another’, whose skills enable a social reproduction of the conditions of sosciation but whose minds and commitments are engaged elsewhere; who react to the imperatives of the present moment with increased hermeneutical work; whose responsivity is compromised. The image is of thought engaged primarily with memory and representations of future scenarios but lacking the immediacy of ‘roots in the present’ as Bauman likes to put it. Indeed, the location of the social means (the rules) to deal with the present moment, to discover or invent the means to go on, becomes a hermeneutical matter rather than one subsisting within the grounding and immediate responsivities of those present in a social encounter.

Theorists discussed in Part One make no formal connections between hermeneutical and embodied dimensions of action. Instead, they rely on imaginary examples to illustrate family resemblances between descriptions of contemporary social encounters. Where these examples come from novels and films only presumed or contingent links to changing

historical conditions can be made (Cf. Bauman, 1993, 2006; Giddens, 1990, 1992; Foucault, 1977b; Harrington, 2003; Berger, 1970; Riley, 2000 where literary references abound). The question arises whether the struggle to find a rule as a means to go on in uncertain circumstances (Bauman) is historically new or simply endemic to activity. Likewise, we should ask if coming to rely on external, perhaps expert judgements in the pursuit of the definition of and resolution to personal or interpersonal difficulties (Giddens) is a recent phenomenon. How should we distinguish these examples from other kinds of hermeneutical puzzlements such as those artificially created in Garfinkel's experiments? Or from encounters with humans displaying bizarre behaviours where responsibility is ordinarily compromised? To what extent are such examples accommodated within frameworks which regard social interaction as always based on a dialectic of problematic and unproblematic, unreflective activity (as proposed by Schutz, Berger and Luckmann for example and also Simmel in his notion of sociability)? We should not be complacent about such questions. Bauman, for one, goes on to make a claim that real social changes are explained by people's reactions to their daily hermeneutical struggles. He even sees the abandonment of these struggles, in favour of a sociality dominated by Durkheim's form of life typified by effervescence (Fish, 2003), as an indicator of major social change.

I propose, following the discussion of Weber above, that the *two-layer model* of hermeneutical/embodied action is better conceived as a continuum. Theorists in Part One tend to produce a dualism here in the interests of analysis e.g. Giddens' notion of reflexivity is an analytical description of an activity that takes embodied, skilfully reproduced outcomes as *objects*. However, on other occasions 'blurring' is permitted in ways that lead to the problems summarised in earlier sections of this chapter.

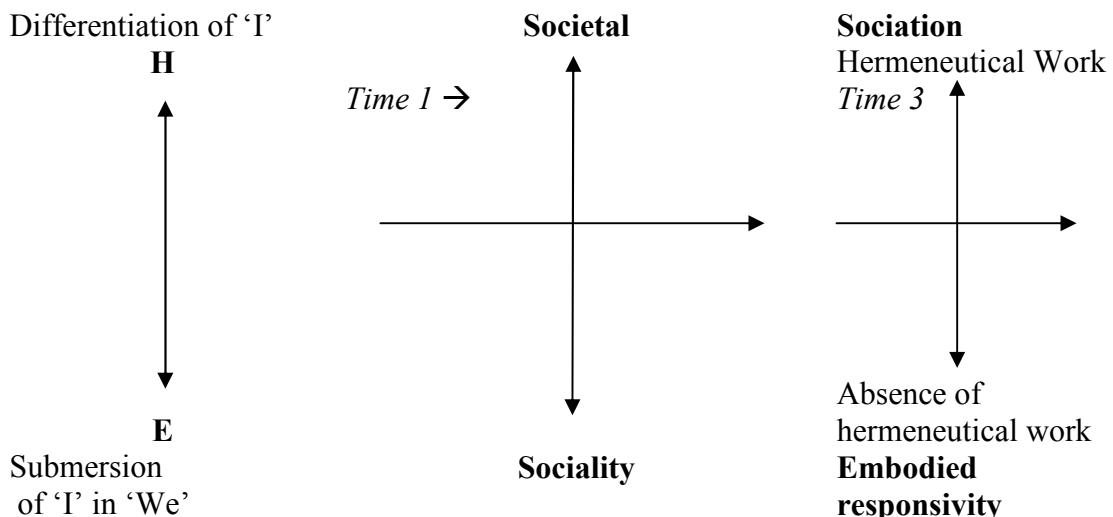
My proposal shows that we can identify further 'layers' to activity other than reflexivity and embodiment. The qualitative differences between the layers give us better insight into the character of activity. I provide examples illustrating how the idea of a continuum works better in addressing the problems with the ideas in Part One and give example cases in chapter 6 that present flawed theoretical arguments because they are based on a two-layer model of activity. For now, the immediate theoretical issues raised in the summary sections of this chapter need to be addressed systematically. These need to be tackled first because we need a framework for action that can deal with any incipient problems with my nascent

proposal. The first problem with it will be the observation that hermeneutical activity implies the individualisation of participants as an outcome. The proposal of a hermeneutical/embodied continuum, to have any social theoretical credibility, must belong to a framework that can relate shifts the character of the social bond to shifts in the modality of the activity. The final sections of this chapter address the construction of that new framework by dealing with formal issues with existing approaches.

### **5.3.3 Modalities of action: from dualism to continuum**

Our understanding of hermeneutical activity (H) seems to be comprised somewhat loosely of interpretative actions, evaluations of maxims derived from or tested from discourse, problem-solving, the testing of the legitimacy and validity claims in argument etc. (Part One). Embodied, skilled activity (E) is said *to be oriented by* the former in some way. However, the preceding discussion of Weber undermines this common take. Sociation, has been described (Part One) as a region of social life where H and E are increasingly problematic, as a consequence of the conditions of late modernity. A greater understanding of the link between the hermeneutical and more routinized, embodied aspects of activity, that addresses experience more directly needs to be established.

The connection between H and E is central in sociological understanding of action and sociation. But *the nature of their articulation remains a mystery*. If we take Bauman's model (derived from Bauman, 1993), Figure 5.2 as a starting point we can see where a H-E continuum is embedded in it.

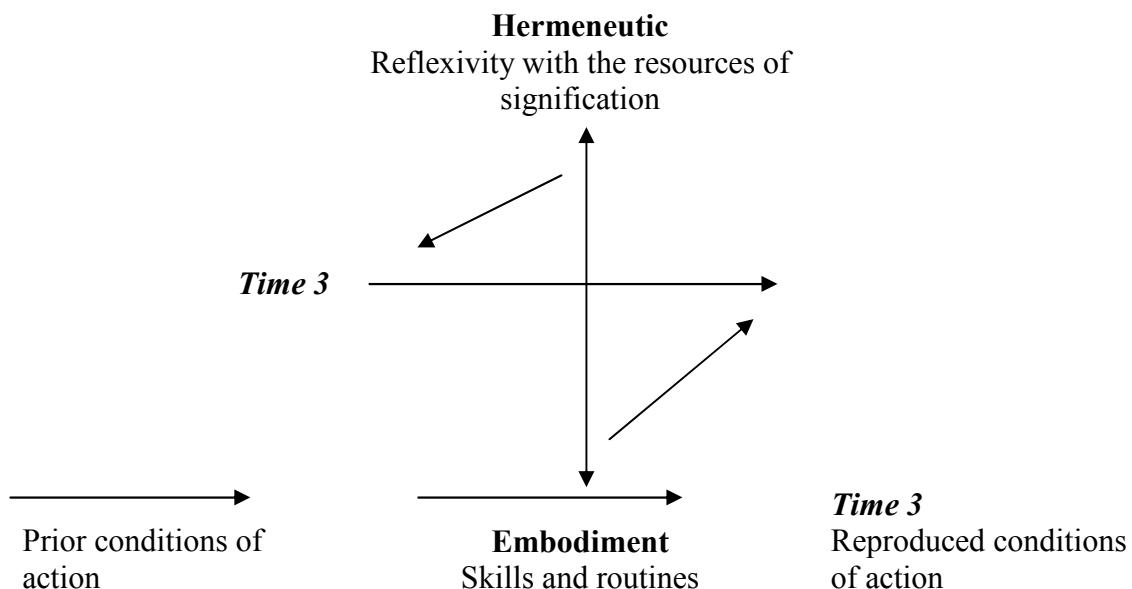


**Fig. 5.2 Bauman's model (my schematic derivation)**

The vertical dimension indicates ranges of possibility for the social differentiation of an 'I' rendered as problematic by social circumstances comprising varying degrees of hermeneutical difficulty and 'management'. At the other end the 'spontaneous' responsiveness of the 'we' dominates. As is common in *two-layer models*, the horizontal dimension is 'time'. Bauman suggests that recent social change has produced more occasions in which people abandon reflexivity, hermeneutical ways of organising their activities. They prefer to promote the 'we' and attenuate the 'I'. Bauman sees here a 'cultural shift'. Of the three types of time defined earlier (summary section of 5.2.2), societal time, or the time of social change is at work. Evolutionary change is a *societal* reaction to the discomforts of sociation saturated with hermeneutical *work*. However, his dimensioning arises from a conception of sociation at two different levels of analysis.

In Fig. 5.2 the differentiation and de-differentiation of the ‘I’ is simultaneously a symptom of societal change in the production of the conditions of sociality (where the ‘sublime’, Bauman suggests, supercedes the ‘rational’) but is also associated with the elaboration of activity. To overcome the switches of level of analysis Bauman invokes Giddens’ theory of structuration (Bauman, 1993: 119). However, as claimed earlier Giddens suffers from the same problem.

Figure 5.3 is one version of the way in which the serial order of activity is captured and



*Fig. 5.3 Giddens' duality of structure model of H-E showing time seriality*

dimensioned to show the relationships between the flow of embodied skills and routines. Hermeneutical work is part of a process that engages material and communicational resources. Here the ‘social’ becomes exclusively over-identified with the ‘hermeneutic’ layer. Giddens’ theoretical understanding of *socialisation*, on the other hand as we have seen, suggests something different. There we saw that pre-social, embodied practices, for example, are able to give form to hermeneutic events (chapter 2).

The problem with working with these *two-layer models* is the mysterious connection between the two layers. We want to know how activities get their organisation and form. The importance of the direction of action and what it is oriented by takes extreme

importance. Hermeneutical work is commonly conceived to be oriented towards goals to which meaning may be attached and shared. Without the notion of goal it is difficult to see what would be ‘distributed’ (or *given form*) within a serial ordering of activity available to reflection or hermeneutical work.

Reflexivity has the power to turn the flow of activity into ‘episodes’ *whose coherence is given by goals*. Giddens’ description of embodiment is individualised despite being a description of essentially co-present sociation. In addition, the form-giving power of reciprocal, situated adjustments (see discussion on Weber above) is actually exorcised in this approach. The question to put to it is, ‘what kind of activity *links* embodied, skilled routinized activity to hermeneutical activity and what kind of time does it take place in?’ These may be carping questions, but by posing them the description may become more refined.

A link is merely indicated between embodied and hermeneutical activity. However, a temporal fallacy runs throughout our understanding of activity. Overcoming this will enable a re-thinking of the link. Firstly I deal with the mistake where, in two-layer, reflexivity/skill models, time itself is assumed to have form-giving powers i.e. is a *distributive medium* of activity itself. Sociology commonly recognises activity as a having a form as characterised in fig. 5.4. There are many variants of this; the one depicted here is a



**Fig. 5.4 The goal-formed temporal distribution of activity**

variant derived from many takes of Weber. The correctness of this image has been questioned many times (e.g. from a phenomenological perspective by Schutz, 1964; and from a symbolic interactionist perspective by Charon, 1979) but the critiques, as far as I can tell are simply moving the deck chairs around without dealing with the underlying problem. *Fig. 5.4 shows how a goal ‘distributes’ the sub-component parts of the act leading up to it. We can imagine any act consisting of sub-acts. The goal is not just the end-point of an action. It serves to give form to all the different bits of an act leading up to*

*the goal. ‘Giving form’ means ‘distributing’ these components in relation to each other such that the goal is achieved or attemptable.* Schutz worthily wants to absorb the ‘distributive power’ of the goal of any action into a broader ‘project structure’ in the context of the lifeworld. Goals for Schutz subsist in lifeworld structures, and emerge from ‘fields’ of unreflexive, taken-for-granted events.

Charon, on the other hand, argues that ‘goals’ may subsist in acts comprised of on-going negotiations about what might happen next. Indeed, goals may be the object of negotiations. Symbolic Interactionism (S.I.) even provides for ‘outcomes’ to social occasions where no goals were ever clearly formulated by, say, groups of people sat relaxing discussing how they might spend their evening, but where, nevertheless, there are specific outcomes. However, both these critical variants (Schutz and S.I.) are logically identical to that shown in fig. 5.4. The only difference between them is how they configure the seriality of acts with respect to clock time. Even the notion of activity in S.I., described as goal-less by virtue of being without clarity of purpose, is actually constituted in its lack of clarity precisely by the absence of a well-formulated goal. The idea of ‘goal’ here is still having distributive, form-giving powers. But there is a major problem. Parsons, S.I. and Schutz all confuse seriality with clock time or temporal order. *To be emphatic, what this means is that these theorists do not tell us the difference between two versions of describing the ordering of acts. Does a ‘goal’ give distributive order to the sub-components of an act? Or is it simply the serial order of time that organises? The conception given in fig. 5.4 actually conflates the two.*

The two-fold problem to be solved here may be expressed in the following way. If we think of acts as consisting of a range of hermeneutical and embodied moments then we need to understand how order appears in any actual, disparate range of moments. Firstly a range of empirical possibilities can be imagined along the vertical axis from the highly hermeneutical features of action to the highly embodied in both figs. 5.2 and 5.3. At the extremes we might posit respectively a Garfinkelian hermeneutical arrest(!) at one end (i.e. serious problems simply in finding ways to go on and relying on resources external to sociative means) and effervescent at a rave at the other. Below the centre line we can posit large tracts of unreflexive activities that may require occasional hermeneutical orienting. Above the line we have negotiated goals. As it stands though any such range as can be

imagined makes sense only from the perspective of the societal and societal time (type 1) because a whole type of action is being categorised. It will be seen from this example, however, that the time of the elaboration of activity (type 3) is also implied in different ways with such examples.

Secondly, we have the problem of how resources and meanings drawn on in the elaboration of activity, and how any produced in the course of it, are configured within the range proposed. This is *very* important because how people are situated with respect to the resources and products of their activities as well as each other through their mediation is what the symptoms of the ‘end of the social’ turn on. We must recall that for Bauman the search for sociality is occasioned by the lack of authenticity in hermeneutical dealings within *sociation*; for Giddens, Berger and Schutz the failures of co-presence occasion the irony with which we deploy resources and then relate to the outcomes of our actions.

In order to provide a better account of the situation from the perspective of activity I remove the temporal dimension entirely. In chapter 7 I demonstrate that we can better grasp the dimensions of action that permit us to deal with the symptoms of the condition of the social this way.

Time is central to any account of the nature of social life, indeed it may be called the primary medium of being. Phenomenological and Bergsonian distinctions (*duree*, *longue duree* etc.) are useful in attempts to grasp the elaboration of activity and distinguish this from, say, institutional time. But such conceptions of time fail to have any analytical bearing on our understanding of activities as themselves *distributed* and *distributing* events. By this I mean that if we conceive of activities as comprising regions (Giddens), multiple realities (Schutz) or games appropriate to ‘forms of life’ (Shotter after Wittgenstein) then we need ways to conceptualise activities as not only special to different regions of social life but also constituting the differences between them. Additionally, we need to be able: to indicate the special kinds of activities that enable the crossing of supposed boundaries between social realities and enable the production of new regions (Bourdieu, 1990; Mouzelis, 2007).

In addition, there is a logical problem which Figs 5.2 and 5.3 illustrate. Bauman and Giddens, where the point is best illustrated for now, have time running on the (horizontal) axes orthogonal to the vertical. However, time is also implied in their orthogonal (vertical) dimensions. Thus Bauman discusses horizontal time showing the path *from* societal forms of exchange *to* ones characterized by spontaneous sociality. However, surely he cannot intend to deny (and does not PC), that actors, at different times (when they are not ‘effervescent’ at ‘raves’ for example), may indeed be caught up again in the hermeneutical quagmire that has become so distasteful to them and to which they develop an ironic stance.

The situation here is worse for Giddens. His conceptualization has the time of action running horizontally, the time of movement between unreflexive and reflexive action running vertically (hence the feedback arrows) but he also has the time of the conditions and consequences of action running below both these. It may work as a rough conceptual scheme, but analytically it does not. The image itself is flawed. It suggests that time itself is a distributive medium. *That is to say, that the elaboration of time determines in some way the elaboration of action.* The Newtonian time frame, far from simplifying our viewpoint provides us with a set of nested time frames that leaves us the task of trying to sort out how they relate to one another. So, my solution is that time has to be bracketed out (as an analytic dimension).

### **5.3.4 From temporality to modalities of differencing**

The purpose now is to re-think activity as consisting of more layers than in the two-layer model. Chapter 7 develops proposes a *four-layer model*. Each layer does not initially pursue ‘goals’. Rather, in the first instance we are interested in how there are very different modalities actors have at their disposal which differentiate the world (physical, human, cultural and social) into ‘aspects’ for further activity to take place. The attraction of this approach is that: (i) it gives us analytical consistency between different modalities; (ii) it gives us a way of looking at patterns of difference between experiences from different kinds of social context (historical or geographical); (iii) it suggests that time is produced within activity through the activity of differentiating and accounting practices.

Theoretically this move continues the thinking abandoned by Giddens (1979, 1981). He sought to establish a post-structuralist position by attempting to reconcile structuralism with the concept of a ‘subject’ (Giddens, 1979 pp. 9-95). My task, however, is to investigate how hermeneutical and embodied work constitute ‘zones of social making’. I want to know better how the multiple regions of practice in which actors engage shape activity and experience.

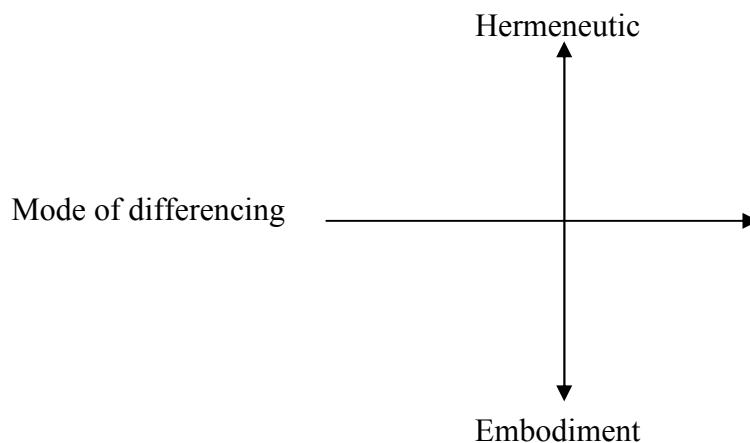
Saussure (Harris, 1987; Giddens, 1979) made formal distinctions concerning the organisation of language that are helpful here. Language is, par excellence, a human activity. Garfinkel’s ‘hermeneutical arrests’ and Bauman’s interactional difficulties often reduce to finding the linguistic means to go on. However, Kristeva (1982) argues that language has sensuous, embodied properties and may, as I propose later, be thought of as a sub-hermeneutical form of responsibility. That is, there may be another kind of hermeneutical layer in language that has not been considered in its own right. We should be able to consider more layers of activity as processes by which actors differentiate aspects of their circumstances in the way that language generates differentiations.

Harris (1987) warns that one of the problems with the Saussarean approach is that it is ‘blunted by familiarity’. My use of Saussure’s concepts here is simply to show how we might conceptualise the ‘link’ between hermeneutic and embodied layers of activity. Saussure proposes the familiar diachronic and synchronic dimensions to distinguish (i) synchrony: patterns of difference within any historical moment of a language from which speakers may construct and exchange meaning, from (ii) changes to that set of differences over historical time. However, when one asks about the organisation of patterns of difference *within* any *synchronic* arrangement Saussure has another set of orthogonal dimensions: *syntagmatic relations* between events concatenated in linguistic activity and *paradigmatic relations* which refer to the organisation of contrastive differences available as a resource for meaningful exchange.

These concepts are invoked to avoid the confusions in traditional theory where it is impossible to distinguish the difference between the ‘goal-directed’ ordering of action and the ‘time-elaborated’ ordering of action. Time itself is open to reflective patterning as much as it is the medium of embodied skill. The important thing to grasp is how actors

‘differentiate’ their circumstances into unique sets of aspects to provide the basis for subsequent acting. Thus, when looking at co-present exchange I intend a syntagmatic/paradigmatic set of relations. This contrasts with patterns in historical time or diachronic/synchronic relations. This is not to impose a linguistic theory tools on a sociological problem. It is to sort out better when we mean patterns of contrastive differences available to zones of interaction and how these patterns are configured with respect to differences diachronically.

Activity now looks as in fig. 5.5. Instead of time distributing hermeneutic and embodied events, we focus on the actors’ modes of differentiating their circumstances.



**Fig. 5.5 Mode of activity against mode of differencing**

In this model what becomes significant are the aspects of circumstances that are uniquely differentiated by actors in any situation. Differentiations rely on embodied habits and skills as well as on ranges of hermeneutical styles. As a crude example we might consider a guest anthropologist present at a meeting of academic psychologists. The anthropologist differentiates aspects of the situation and is engaged, bodily with the situation in a different way to those focussed on the ‘agenda’ of the meeting. Of interest are the practices by participants that simply differentiate the situation into a series of ‘aspects’ (those important and unimportant; those embarrassing and those emotionally neutral and so on). One could apply an analysis based on the different ‘goals’ of those present. But, as argued above, this becomes too easily conflated with the temporal elaboration of the situation itself. Of greater interest are the different kinds of reflective activity available to the situation; how

the relationship between these creates spaces for new differences to develop; and how more complex experiences can be associated with them.

But how does such an approach to analysis help us with the question about sorting out the question of deciding about historical changes? As an example, let us take the Bauman problem of late modernity as posing a problem of relating to rules (implicit or explicit) within mundane interactivity. Assuming attention to rules highlights the hermeneutic ‘aspects’ of situations, we can do the following. We can pose kinds of rules as belonging to a paradigmatic set of rule types: for simplicity’s sake let us say a set containing two kinds, (i) rule-following and (ii) rule-making. We may now produce an account as in table 5.2.

Syntagmatic Coherence		
Paradigmatic distribution	Hermeneutic	Embodied
Rule following	<i>ironic distance</i>	<i>collective participation</i>
Rule making	<i>artifice</i>	<i>collective inertia</i>

**Table 5.2 Bauman’s experience/sociality relation reconfigured**

Table 5.2 reconfigures the terms Bauman deploys to show how our basic H-E dimension, construed syntagmatically in an activity, cross tabulates with the idea of rules now brought into (paradigmatic) contrastive distribution with each other might become prominent ‘aspects’ of situations in their own right. So, we are asking more particular questions about the practices of actors. Are the actors having difficulties because they are bringing to bear a new range of reflective attention to rules as a means of differentiating aspects in them? If so, is it the arising awareness of these new aspects in relation to one another that becomes associated with the social experiences that Bauman claims? When he says that couples ‘grab at the rules’ (2.3.2) because the circumstances that embed them seem devoid of any non-hermeneutical means of carrying on, we should be asking, ‘what kinds of ways of hermeneutically differentiating circumstances are available to such couples?’ Furthermore, and to resolve the historical issues sociologists face, we need to ask what the

effects are of there being several different kinds. A couple may find they are ‘rule-following’ to maintain a relationship in an ‘empty’ way. But their orientation to, and experience of, that rule following will be different if other hermeneutical differentiations change the range of rules available in the situation. Thus, by altering the constitution of the range of rule behaviours available rule-making, as a consistent contrastive mode to rule-following, can give rise to a more contrastive set of experiences (table 5.2).

By continuing in like manner we can examine the regions of Bauman’s thinking and ask if the positions in the cross tabulation are viable historically and when and how ‘inauthenticity’ is constituted. This is otherwise difficult to extract from Bauman. Table 5.2 demonstrates how experience may be linked to acts of making and dealings with others through an ‘orientation’ to, in this case, rules. We may then pose the diachronic question: how and when are rule types brought into contrastive relation with one another. This does not cover the ‘ground’ of the sociation insofar as answering how we are ‘bound’ to the rules we choose or make within the paradigm. This is discussed in chapter 8.

## **Summary**

This chapter collates the arguments of Part One and conceptually linked their critiques. In pursuit of an analytical approach to sociation, where the problems of late modernity precipitate, foundational arguments of the nature of social action were revisited in Weber to identify another path. This path pursues an elaboration of the link between the hermeneutical and the embodied activity, but which privileges responsivity. Additionally, I consolidated the hermeneutical-embodied dualism as a continuum for theoretical and analytical purposes. This forms a key dimension to the development of the revised conception of sociation and action: the zone of social making. Chapter 6 introduces case study examples whose claims and counter-claims about the relation between activity and social change are shown to be unresolvable. I show that their confusion is based on the use of theories subscribing to the two-layer model of activity. The difficulties examined both warrant, and show how, a different approach is called for. The example cases are then taken forward (chapters 7 and 8) into the reconstructive process showing what is required in a revised account.

## Chapter 6: The Rationale for the Zone of Social Making: revisiting activity

### 6.1 Introduction and Aims

Assuming that, despite the criticisms, apocalyptic thinkers have important things to say about social change and contemporary experience we need to be mindful of two things. Firstly, we need to know how and where humans and their forms of association become ‘damaged’ by simply interacting with what appears to us as new in contemporary culture, whether that is technology, customs, places or institutions. Secondly, we require analytic tools that can point to historical shifts in the bases of communication and action. Action, in the sense of ordinary human activities, is where the *turbulence* of any change manifests itself. All the work reviewed in Part One indicates this, and my critical appraisal of it was mainly concerned to examine difficulties at this level.

We may ask why a different analytic approach is needed. The kinds of historical change that Lash and Urry or Giddens and Bauman refer to seem obvious on the face of it. The problem arises in how we benchmark change beyond simply the ‘literary appreciative’ style of critique that is found in their work (see chapters 2 and 5). Theorists are too ready to use extracts from contemporary novels, or descriptions of the impact of technology that *gesture towards* fundamental social and cultural shifts but that do not formally locate the nature of the change as dimensions of experience and behaviour. By applying a framework that relates experience and behaviour as dimensions of action (argued in chapter 5) we can begin to move beyond such speculative gestures. I gave an example of how Bauman’s work can begin to be recast in this way earlier (5.3.4; table 5.2). Without outlining a theoretical framework that maps human activity across its key dimensions, sociological sensibility is prone to the endless cycle of finding novelty in essentially old phenomena (chapter 1).

A new position on sociation at the level of activity, based on the requirements elaborated in chapter 5, needs to be established in outline. The account developed in the remaining chapters here progressively describes the features of what I call ‘the zone of social making’ (ZSM). The principal features of the ZSM discussed in the thesis are those most pertinent and general to the central analytical question of the thesis: what kind of account allows us

to re-define the roots of sociation and social activity in a nuanced way and responds to the issues raised in chapter 5.

ZSM replaces some root concepts in social theories of action as deployed by theorists in Part One: flow and skill is recast (chapter 7) also reciprocity, mutuality, exchange, horizon, thematic unity (chapter 8). These concepts are highly effective in the work of Schutz, Habermas, Lash and Urry etc.. They teach us ways to look at activity. For example, they may enable us to see activity as the skilful establishment of social contexts; that these contexts have limits or ‘horizons’ for the actors; that actors order their interactions and discourse by confining themselves to ‘themes’ and so on. However much insight this gives us into the nature of activity, these concepts *fail to resolve* structures and relationships that need to be examined at a level of resolution necessary to determine what properly belongs to the constitution of human action as opposed to what may be contingent and attributable to social change. This is not necessarily to challenge these concepts when deployed for other purposes.

In proposing an alternative it should be noted that a complete description of the ‘zone of social making’ lies beyond the scope of the current work. This project is theoretical and seeks to establish the key dimensions to a new analytical conception of activity based on existing theoretical precedence. Some of the examples used in illustration provide an opportunity to indicate applications and what kinds of empirical benefits may be derived. I develop discussion of ZSM by reference to examples introduced below. In doing this I am wary of confusions that arose in the interpretation of Parsons’ work in the creation of concepts in outline form. Parsons, in developing his analytical understanding of action in terms of ‘unit acts’, said that examination of empirical cases should be addressed once the wider scheme has been fully elaborated. As Holmwood (2006: 6) argues “failure to recognise this...is to commit the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’”. The example of ‘the doctor-patient’ relation Parsons used many years after the basic dimensions to his theory of action were outlined. That exemplar case contains *both* specific ‘residual elements’, i.e. aspects of action that are not in the description of the original account of activity Parsons provided; but also, aspects of action simply contingent to the material circumstances of the example. Likewise, I confront a similar issue. The main difference to Parsons arising with ZSM in this regard is that I have argued (Part One; chapter 5) that so-

called ‘residual elements’ may need to be part of the basic schema. Thus, the alternative reading (chapter 5) of Weber’s theory of action suggests that the sensuous quality of interaction needs to become part of its formal description. Parsons turned the sensuous dimension into an ‘affective variable’ determined by what had already been established in his ‘framework’. I need to offer this sensuous dimension a more determining role and at the same time, when considering examples, be conscious of what might be peculiar and contingent to specific cases. With that in mind I now turn to examples that demonstrate the concerns raised in the thesis and warrant a new approach.

These examples are derived from work that presents us with claim, and counter-claim about the impact of the forces of change at the level of activity. Thus, everyday practices of ‘mobility versus belonging’ (e.g. Lash, 2002; Urry, 2007) as well as institutional settings pervaded by new technologies (e.g. Lafontaine and Robitaille, 2008; Parrinello, 2008) provide, these authors claim, examples that the turbulence of change, at the level of action, erodes traditional features of sociality. But similar examples (e.g. Savage et al, 2005; Dyb and Halford, 2009) show us that the sociality can be resistant to the same forces of erosion. I look at what these examples say about activity itself. Activity is the surface on which, in all these cases, change and resistance to change comes to the attention of the researchers. My argument is that with existing sociological models of activity these claims and counter claims are, as they stand, simply *undecideable*. The problem is how we conceive of ‘action’ and ‘activity’ and how we operationalise these in empirical research.

Three different models of activity dominate in these particular examples, and in some cases more than one model. Models of activity appear in how the researchers view, represent and interpret actors’ situated actions and communications. It is in the context of these interpretations that claims about the impact of, or resistance to, change are made. I demonstrate that the models themselves are indecisive. This enhances my rationale for moving beyond these models along the path adumbrated by the theoretical critiques raised in Part One. Firstly, I identify what models are deployed in the cases. Secondly, I show how these are dependent on a ‘two-layer’ model of reflexivity and skill. Thirdly, I argue why we need to move beyond it.

## 6.2 Looking more closely at activity: three empirically based examples

Technological or other innovations are resisted or conversely they radically change us. In either case the region where they have their impact is in our activities. If we become ‘absorbed into technologically sustained flows’ (Chapter 4) or if we are led into ontological insecurity or relationships with greater hermeneutical demands on us (Chapter 2; 5.3.3) then it is through the medium of activity and interactivity that these features of social life materialise. This was essentially what theorists in Part One were found to be arguing. The Weberian and Parsonian legacy was paramount insofar as many of the conceptions of activity to be found in Part One were based on this legacy. However, in chapter 4 other perspectives came into view such as the idea that activity is a kind of ‘network’ or part of a ‘flow’. If, on the other hand, we examine the literature which *contests* the principle of radical change (e.g. work cited in 6.1) then we find that three models of activity are similarly, commonly invoked. These models may be characterised as follows.

‘Chain’ approaches see activity as chains of acts that involve plans, goals, and orienting mechanisms such as values (Weber and Parsons, chapter 5). ‘Network’ approaches see activity as nodes and links between ‘enrolled’ human and non-human resources (Latour, Urry, chapter 4). ‘Field’ approaches see activity as elaborated by agents deploying capacities that access the different kinds of resources available in social settings (Schutz, Berger and Luckman Chapter 3; Bourdieu, 1979; 1990). There are sub-concepts common to each approach such as the idea of ‘skill’. Most often concepts at this level are undefined: ‘skill’ is a good example. The notional, public meaning of ‘skill’ is invoked in these approaches with the result that there is little consistency of meaning. That is, either nothing more is meant by skill than is common in public discourse, or its meaning is defined by its use in a writer’s interpretation of data. This is unfortunate because as suggested in Part One, if I do not understand skill in any depth how can I distinguish between cases that make different claims upon it? For example, how can we tell the difference between skill failure in a social transaction which Garfinkel (1990) claims is a

*routine* feature of activity, and skill failure in a transaction where Bauman (chapter 2) finds evidence of greater hermeneutical demands and so a *non-routine* erosion of the social?

My argument is that observations in empirical work that search for the effects of change, or lack of it, do so within models of activity, sometimes not even explicitly stated, that are unable to decide either way. We need to give closer inspection to activity, the site where the damage or irreversible change wrought by late modernity is claimed to take place. This ‘site’ is human interaction with each other and things: conversations, medical examinations, computer-mediated communication or economic transactions. My view is that the concepts at the level of act, activity and action that we generally make use of in these circumstances are incapable of placing on the table all that is necessary for us to attend to changes in the *form* of the activity. These concepts leave *experience* and *embodiment* as residual matter. The latter form significant aspects of contemporary sociology but are not formally worked into any composite understanding of action. Chain, Network and Field approaches do not combine form, embodiment and experience each as formal features of a theory of activity in performance. When such attempts are made, as we saw in chapter 2, the vision (e.g. Giddens’) leads to a social theory that operates in different registers that may ‘indicate’ and cross refer form and embodiment but which cannot formally connect them. If we take seriously the idea that the accounts of social apocalypse in Part One are creditable then we are in the inconvenient position of claiming that activity at the level of human interaction is the medium of our ‘corruption’ towards an asocial state of being; but, without being able to say much about the medium itself.

To make the issue more concrete I consider below three empirically oriented works that discuss, for and against, the supposed erosion or absorption of sociality as, in these cases, an issue of co-presence and place. My subsequent discussion of these arguments indicates that, as they stand, their theoretical generalism concerning activity make their conclusions undecidable. More productively, the features of activity they do discuss begin to clarify what is required of a theory of activity. These examples both warrant, and are formative of, the ZSM approach.

### 6.2.1 The flow and navigation example: the case of mobile phones

It is by active engagement in what Lash and Urry (chapter 4) refer to as ‘globalised flows’ that we are drawn into, absorbed by heterogeneous collections of information, geographical spaces and interpersonal milieu that do not have roots in geographically stable *social* deposits and resources. This is a loss because through those we once made ourselves coherent, and *felt* that coherence, in the very activity of making links with people and things. Activity is, they claim, a dynamic process in their absorption account through the medium of which the stabilities of traditional life and practices are broken up and caught by turbulent flows. The problem for humans, it is claimed, *becomes* one of *navigation* through myriad flows. Here we need to know more clearly what is meant by ‘broken up’, by coherence and by navigation.

Firstly, how does a problem of coherence manifest itself? Let us return to the problem of flow and navigation raised earlier (4.7.3) and deal with issues in the light of the discussion of chapter 5. Following Lash (2002) and Urry (2000; 2007) ICT networking devices, such as the internet enabled mobile phone, gain their value not from ‘content’ but from their power as a resource to coagulate or ‘condense’ human concerns in particular ways (Vass, 2008). The whereabouts of one’s children, tracking today’s urgent transfer gossip for one’s football team, taking a photo, storing a memory, retrieving data, receiving weather and transport reports, planning and re-planning one’s journey while on the move, following an ecological or human disaster to which one has formed a commitment, sending work e-mails become ‘de-distanced’ or ‘condensed’ events. My sensitisation to my own concerns becomes contingent on the way the phone itself permits a clustering or condensing of the managerial problems posed by the interactive flows of information, data and communication. This is not to say that locating one’s children becomes less important than managing the information of their whereabouts! Rather, that the contingency and responsivity of those concerns become complicit with, produced by, and show up together with the manner in which the flow has now become managed, or navigated, and condensed with other concerns. This seems to be the meaning of ‘navigation’ and the problems it throws up from Lash’s (2002) work in this particular context. Condensing flows in this example is not the same as acting by making links between events in a conversation between two people sat at the same table where they are under the auspices of socio-

geographical co-presence in the traditional sense. By attending to the condensation of flows themselves one constructs strategies of coherence that promote ‘de-centred and de-localised sociality’. In other words the stability one is able to produce for oneself does not come from a place or location with stable resources accessible by routinized skills in which relationships were sustained over time. Stability comes from the way one learns to manage disembedded information flows.

Green and Singleton (2009) in a study of mobile phone use show the impact of the device as a means to maintain and contingently manage local and global friendships. However, use of the mobile also enables new ways of understanding and managing, for example, gender roles through playing with the rules of being connected. These rules cannot be defined apart from the characteristics of the device itself. These rules are concerned with how one controls the flow of messages via the phone. Unpacking the Lash/Urry thesis further in this context let us see what is meant. A radical distinction is drawn in the Lash and Urry account between a traditional co-presence based on geographical co-location and the social actors and activities comprising it. Actions there are coherent because they emanate under the auspices of tradition in location. Auspices here, we must imagine, are the co-present guarantees of understanding (Habermas 2.4.3) or acceptable means of ‘good social repair’ (explored in Chapter 3). These auspices disappear on-the-move, so to speak. The agent now seeks to re-establish coherence in activity through a managerial or navigational procedure, or strategy.

Lash and Urry (chapter 4) take this as a warrant for the demise of the social as revealed *in action as a flow* and its absorption into flows of information etc. For Urry (2000, 2007) such processes erode the primacy of ‘place’ as a basic resource of the social and a grounding condition of co-presence. The mobile phone is just one transforming device where we are said to develop managerial and navigational strategies in the absence of such auspices. Furthermore, and following the Green and Singleton (2009) data, the finding is that as British-Pakistani women use mobile phone interaction to develop, via the characteristics of the technology, a ‘female cyberspace’ and males use the device to establish masculine modes of managing the flow of information, interpersonal ties through traditional means are weakened. The key issue here is the manner in which coherence and stability of identity is transferred from co-present, interpersonal skills using situated

resources to one where coherence and stability of the self- becomes a matter of device and information management.

I feel this account unravels as it stands, not because its basic message is necessarily flawed but because I am not enabled simply to make a decision about these claims. Let me make this clear by posing further questions. When looking at co-present actors and their traditional, situated social encounters why could we not describe these as involving ‘problems of navigation’ or strategies? Does not the whole question of navigation rely on traditional theoretical conceptions of the actor who has intelligible goals and who develops plans for action? Lash and Urry imply distinctions between how actors are oriented to the resources of their activities. Do they provide a language for talking about how an actor is *oriented* to their circumstances or situation? To say that contemporary life poses us new problems of navigation suggests that we have a need to attend to how our activities are more or less hermeneutical and more or less embodied. Lash and Urry seem to refer to aspects of life that make more demands on hermeneutical capacities and create the conditions for new sets of embodied skills warranted by the way we discipline our bodies to interact with technologies. They do not, however, produce an account of activity that sets out these dimensions. Also lacking in what they say is the nature and experience of the kind of new work that is demanded of us as actors by ‘flows’.

### **6.2.2 Strategies of local attachment: a case study employing chain and field views of activity**

The theme of co-presence as allied to ‘place’, and hence the dangers for the social inherent in any erosion of place, is continued in the following account.

In *Globalisation and Belonging* Savage et al (2005) discuss data from studies of residential groups around Manchester, UK. Of interest is the heterogeneous demography (ethnically, occupationally and length of residence) of these residential areas and how different actors, old residents and new arrivals, develop senses of identity and belonging. Migration is a flow in the sense used by Lash and Urry and moving into new residential areas constitutes new problems of navigation of flows (of communication and information as resources for identity) for the migrant or geographically mobile people who seek to attach to and live in

‘places’. One may retain longstanding loyalties with friendship networks by maintaining links with internet sites such as Facebook. But the question arises for people new to an area of how they constitute their identities within it. Savage et al find, for example, that actors develop *particularising strategies* that facilitate ‘elective belonging’ in this instance. Some informant mothers emphasised the channels of communication with their children’s schools as a mechanism to establish a sense of local identity and belonging. For some families the dialectic between local connections and technologically mediated ones are discussed in interviews that reveal a sense of loss of the past, but not necessarily a loss of belonging. Others feel that their area of residence serves a purpose in their individual life plans but do not necessarily identify with it. Overall, the arguments offered by Savage et al suggest that the local activities that constitute ‘place’ for residents serve to at least limit the ‘spatial extension tendencies’ of globalisation. Such limits are difficult to impose on media technologies and so Savage et al see place-situated action as fundamentally different from technology-situated action. Put another way, global flows are highly differentiated and are not all corrosive in the same way because actors make choices and assert their attachment to localities through diverse strategies that give rise to new types of solidarity sustained by a resource we call ‘place’ (cf. Butler, 2003). “This is a process that defines residential space as a habitus for social groups to form, to cohere, to act” (Savage et al, 2005: 29). As Butler (*ibid*) identified people may choose to live with what they perceive as ‘people like’ us. However, pursuing that as a strategy may have, say, economic consequences, it may mean lowering accommodation quality.

Interestingly, when we look at this from the point of view of what actors do we find that they use place strategically but also hermeneutically. That is, they take up an interpretational stance towards it in much the same way as Lash and Urry’s actors attempt to navigate flows. The use of particularising strategies by the informants in Savage et al’s work is given to us as evidence not for the geographically manifested erosion of the social, but rather for *limits* to the impact of globalisation. Recall that the development of strategic action in Lash and Urry’s accounts serve to show us, on the contrary, the invasiveness of globalisation. How can this be?

Counter claims and challenges to the idea that the forces of globalisation erode place (in this example the grounding of sociality) tend to subscribe to the same theoretical accounts

of activity. My point here is that an inadequate account of activity means we cannot decide between these claims and counter claims. One of the issues not considered by Savage et al nor by Butler are the effects of multiple strands of hermeneutics at work within these strategies (choosing a place; reflecting on identity; making economic calculations etc.) and how these strands may re-configure one another. Firstly, let us see how the counter claim works by looking at it in terms of notional theories of activity embedded in these studies. The sense of belonging people feel in an age of globalisation where migration is routine, Savage et al (2005) argue, results in action becoming *strategic* where, say, people, feel displaced when having moved to a new area. So, they construct a sense of belonging through relationships with their children's schools. This *new* strategic orientation, orienting people's behaviour and goals at the level of interaction and colouring their experience of belonging, is presented to us as arising out of historical changes. However, what our current views of activity miss here are the interrelations between the form of the activity, one's experience of it, how it needs to become skilfully embodied and, in this case, its strategic properties. Savage et al claim that elective belonging involves 'embodying attachments' in local places from where residents may subsequently sally forth into a globalised world developing further strategies to deal with hermeneutical problems around identity conflict. We would be on very shaky ground if we claimed, from this example, that simply the rise or occurrence of strategic orientations within 'belonging behaviours' was an effect of globalisation. This would fly in the face of any sensible counter claim that human action has always had a place for strategy. How far can we now pursue the question of the historical uniqueness of 'strategy' (elective belonging) and the role of hermeneutical and embodied concerns of identity in an empirical example like Savage et al's?

From the point of view of the traditionally defined 'act' there is not much we can do. We can talk about the uniqueness of the 'goal' i.e. people *now* have come to use their children's schools as a focus for belonging behaviours. We can talk about how residents revise their life plans and how these new goals and plans re-distribute (re-cast, re-organise) the chains of actions carried out in the context of new daily routines. But we cannot be as precise about any *new differences* there may be between, say, old and new habits of orientation to life's daily routines and the strategies that emerge within them, or the conflicts that might arise when looking at one's children as a medium of belonging. Where

do the vaguer feelings of loss and sense of operating outside traditional values, indicated by the data, fit theoretically in our understanding of the form of these everyday practices of strategy making? These are issues for the action theorist where, we say that the turbulence wrought by change occurs at the level of everyday practices.

The example introduced above tells us about people's embodiments, feelings and experiences, and also how actors are hermeneutically oriented to the social resources (including place) at their disposal to make social life coherent, to establish and maintain relationships and so on. But despite taking the reader to the level of what the actor does and providing empirical narratives of people practising their identities we have no clear theory of action that contains the basic criteria on which the burden of the arguments are based. We see a tension in Savage et al's data between their informants' 'embodied attachments' and their hermeneutics of identity choices. We are not given a theory of action that actually employs what are identified as key dimensions in the empirical part of the study. The occasional use of the term 'habitus' does not cover the range of issues the data warrant.

### **6.2.3 Telemedicine: a case study using a 'Network' approach to activity**

Dyb and Halford (2009) undertook a fieldwork-based study of a Norwegian project to establish a 'virtual hospital'. Medical experts and clinicians located on the mainland are linked to obstetric patients on offshore islands by digital scanning technologies. The study involved obstetric patients and midwives on an island in digital relationships to clinicians on the mainland. Dyb and Halford's arguments are aimed at showing how such virtual arrangements, while appearing to underscore the globalising and technological erosion of the importance of place and its co-present relationships, nevertheless actually fail to do this. They say that "[t]he development and proliferation of new and communication technologies has generated some profound claims about the erasure of place...Our analysis is that...empirical outcomes are legible only through the lens of place." (Dyb and Halford: 232). They question claims, such as those of Lash and Urry, about the transformation, erosion or diminishment of place through global electronic media. Specifically they focus on and take issue with those who say that major transformations entail 'new forms of social interaction' rooted in global media rather than rooted in the 'traditional resource' of

‘place’. Dyb and Halford’s research, like mine, asks questions about the relations between technology and place as these relations are played out in situated activity. Their review of their data based on observations and interviews suggests that when we look carefully at the interactions involved in situ we find limits to “technologically enabled flows and inter-connections” (ibid: 233).

Dyb and Halford’s account echoes Savage et al’s (see 6.2.2) and raises the same themes concerning how to understand human activity and interaction. For example, and poignant in this medical study, they underline the theme of embodiment, “belonging is embedded in property and bodies, and technology cannot transcend this” (Dyb and Halford, 2009: 235). By aligning themselves with such statements the authors are making claims about the primacy of place in the part it plays in the elaboration of human interactivity and the social rootedness we invest in it.

Unlike Savage et al, who appear to subscribe both to Parsonian and Bourdieuian accounts of activity, Dyb and Halford embrace actor network theory (ANT; see also 4.4) in order to try to grasp, at the level of situated activity, the relations between technology and located actors. Like me they identify activity as the key theoretical region in which to examine the effect of globalising media. ANT is useful for this because it focuses on the ways objects and actors are transformed by their interactions. ANT holds, for example, that technological objects are never to be understood as ‘finished products’ (ibid: 235). They have to be understood as part of ‘assemblages’ in networks with other objects and actors. These assemblages are always in different conditions of turbulence as objects come into the sway of actors’ performances. Significantly Dyb and Halford do not see ‘place’ itself as simply a ‘backdrop’ to these socio-technical relations but part of the performances of actors. So, actors are not ‘absorbed’ into the flows promulgated by globally networked assemblages, the flows do not vaporise place as is claimed in absorption accounts (e.g. 6.2.1). In the latter the mobile actor’s ‘stability’ is rooted in the skills they deploy *to manage* their mobile phone. However, according to Dyb and Halford, something about place claims human actors, and it is something that ANT finds elusive: “emotions, feelings, identities and memories” (ibid: 237). These socially rooted aspects of life are part of the activities that produce spatial relations and link actors to each other and the technological resources that appear in ‘places’.

On the face of it, expert clinicians who deal with patients miles away through the medium of digital scanning technology are involved in what Dyb and Halford (*ibid*: 240) say is an application of technology which abstracts knowledge from its point of production.

‘Images of foetus, placenta and the mother’s contractions were rendered as place-less facts’ (*ibid*: 240). So what, according to Dyb and Halford, does place have that cannot be transmitted? In interviews the midwives, located with the patients, said that important knowledge in obstetric situations is of an intuitive order: ‘the midwife feeling’ is difficult to put into words. Midwives have situated knowledge based on smell, touch and sound in co-presence with the patient. The ‘facts’ transmitted to the clinician cannot encompass this located panoply of experiences which are central to the emotional and embodied features of the activities in the entire obstetric act taking place.

Dyb and Halford are claiming that there are key aspects to human activity in the use and production of place which are not amenable to become part of a flow of information (in the Lash sense) sustained by globalising technologies. As they say, some “knowledges are sensual and embodied and here, at least, not abstractable from place” (*ibid*: 241). So, limits are set to both Giddens’ disembedding of social relations and Lash and Urry’s absorption of them. For me, there is still a sense, as with the Savage et al study (6.2.2), that we are unable to decide on this account either way whether place, as the basis in this case of an embodied sociality, can or cannot, by virtue of how it stages human feelings, be absorbed into a flow of information. I shall say why in the general discussion of these cases below.

### **6.3 Discussion of Cases**

Each of the cases above, in different ways, struggles to assert, reject or limit the impact of globalising forces on the ground which sustains co-present social life. In pursuing their arguments each focuses on specific human activities: in places, with technology, with media and with institutions. It is in the performance of activities that any turbulence caused by globalising forces appears. The problems with these accounts have to do with the theoretical models of action applied to their specific case materials rather than the overall arguments made. For example, chain, field and network approaches to action

enable us to deal with the empirical evidence insofar as case examples show the trend of ‘strategy development’ in the face of media technology incursions into social life.

However, we are not so deft at examining and accounting for any new divisions between ‘facts’ and ‘feelings’, to use the vocabulary of the third case example, that arise.

In the telemedicine case (6.2.3) ANT is used to narrate a story about assemblages of medical personnel, patients and communication technologies. Dyb and Halford clearly say that ANT is limited when it comes to finding a place in the assemblage for embodiment: sensuality, feeling, memory and identity. These features of human practice are for them, in this case study at least, co-terminus with ‘place’ and co-presence. However, when it comes to suggesting how and where transforming technologies are limited it is, they argue, due to the inability of the media involved to absorb and re-distribute this embodiment as ‘facts’ for clinicians to assess some distance from the place of origin. It is unfortunate that a theoretical approach, ANT, that has a blind spot for sensuality, feeling and embodiment is deployed when such matters are empirically key to the argument.

However, what is interesting about this research is that it does identify as key features of the analysis of the activities in telemedicine, dimensions to activity that I have argued need to be revisited in Weber (see chapter 5). Indeed, in all three cases above we have seen that in analyses of data undertaken by researchers their attention is drawn to the behaviour of actors, in particular the differences accruing to their *hermeneutic* and *embodied* actions. To use the language of chapter 5 in relation to the telemedicine example we can recast the situation in the following way.

We have a group of professionals dealing with an obstetric case. The clinician is linked to the patient and midwives via digital media. The researchers claim that the digital media relay ‘facts’ i.e. scans of the foetus and other facts. In my language the clinician is then claimed by the researchers to be engaged primarily in a *hermeneutical task* of dealing with the patient and the obstetric scene through *differentiating* aspects of the scene as digital facts only. The midwife and patient on the other hand are, it is claimed, acting *to differentiate* aspects of the same scene using embodied and intuitive knowledge. These then are actors using different ‘modalities of differencing’ (5.3.4) in a scene giving rise to both embodied and hermeneutical ‘work’. Owing to the radical socio-technological

change that splits the places and the way the activities of the clinician and the others occurs, we also see different arrangements of the hermeneutic and embodied dimensions of the entire obstetric scene.

One midwife explains that the practical difficulties this poses to all involved is that,

“it is difficult to get the right image to...the doctor’s hand so to speak. Because we are driving with this probe and the doctor is demanding certain pictures and it’s difficult” (Dyb and Halford, 2009: 241)

The midwife goes on to explain that that ‘without thinking about it’ she moves the probe around (i.e. for her an embodied modality) and she *guesses* maybe the doctor actually wants another picture (moving into hermeneutic modality). Another important feature of the telemedicine study that needs to be incorporated in any theory of action, as I show Weber (chapter 5) anticipated, is the nature and quality of the *responsivity* available in any scenario. Dyb and Halford are concerned to stress that divisions between embodied skills, sensuality, modes of responsiveness and the formal expertise of the doctor by location shows the continuing importance of place as a site of human co-presence in, at least, obstetric activity.

Theirs is an important analysis, but I now want to show why it cannot make claims about the persistence of place on the ANT analysis alone. It would be better to have a theory of action that told us how links occur between actors’ ways of differentiating aspects of the scene of action (e.g. a distant clinician differentiates the scene as different kinds of ‘fact’ relayed by different media). This is what I call generically ‘modes of differencing’ (chapter 5) referring to the range of tasks that confront actors along the hermeneutic-embodied dimension. Looked at again we could see the obstetric scenario presented by Dyb and Halford as a group of actors and technologies acting to differentiate both a range of hermeneutic experiences as well as intuitive embodied ones. It is not only the distant clinician who is dealing with hermeneutical facts. Note the nurse who is holding the probe locally. She is also put into a responsive mode with the clinician whereby his demands become hermeneutical *guesses* for her. In other words, the *distribution* of hermeneutical and embodied events in the total activity comprising this scene is not simply that all the

hermeneutical work is done by the distant clinicians and all the embodied work happens locally. As Dyb and Halford point out the scene is also one where the very medical activities and responses we are considering are also material to the institutional life of the actors and technologies, their social positions etc.. The midwife guessing at what the clinician wants her to do with the probe, is also, we may imagine, part of a set of guesses about how her performance attaches to her professional competences.

However, we might be over confident to assume that the distribution of hermeneutical and embodied features of a scene across geographical distances (all the feelings in one part of the scene and all the facts at another place) allowed us to make a claim, or counter claim, concerning the erosion or resilience of place as a pillar of sociality. What if we change the distribution of hermeneutical and embodied events to these activities?

Let us imagine two co-present actors in the same ‘place’. One is showing the other how to tie shoelaces using the medium of language only and giving the tutee instructions. Here the outcomes of the tutee’s attempts are present as outcomes, visual facts to the tutor. The tutee is trying to engage bodily with the laces while attending to the instructions of the tutor. Here the hermeneutics of the task, the facts that need to be interpreted and the embodied aspects are all co-located. But can we simulate the problems presented by Dyb and Halford if we just have our tutor issue instructions and the tutee attempt to follow them *as* instructions? We can add a helper to represent the midwife for the tutee who is likewise bound by the tutor’s instructions. We would see in this example a simulation, not involving distances, of many of the features of the telemedicine case. The tutor’s instructions involve ‘guesses’ by the tutee about the feel of where to put the ends of the laces in relation to each other. The various ‘states’ in which the tutee ends up during the activity become ‘facts’ for the instructor and so on. Differentiating and distributing the hermeneutic and embodied aspects of a scene by participants, who happen to occupy different positions relative to each other, is not any *necessary* function of degree of co-presence of participants and the technology between them. Consider a converse example.

We have seen the rise of internet based tutorials for learning skills like playing musical instruments where people separated by vast distances can be shown to develop styles, sensitivities to pitch and operate like co-located musicians in response to each others’

embodied skills and intuitions. Indeed, there are many websites (e.g. [virtualsoundexchange.net](http://virtualsoundexchange.net)) where musicians separated by distance are enabled to play together online. Here embodied and emotional responsiveness to the music is entirely facilitated by the technology. The digitised information transmitted to people remote from each other is not of the ‘factual’ (highly hermeneutic) kind by virtue of the technology or the distance between locations.

These further scenarios show that an ANT-inspired analysis, in itself, does not help us distinguish what the essential differences are between the telemedicine scenario and the two latter ones. The reason is that if we view each scenario as an actor-technology network there are no essential differences between the networks joining distant clinicians to obstetric patients or co-located instructors with shoe-laces and tutees. From a theoretical point of view we need something different to account for all these variant possibilities. The crucial features of these scenes are those that allow us to connect the hermeneutic-embodied dimension with the varieties of ‘difference-making’ the actors in a scenario are engaged in. The example of instructing someone to tie shoelaces renders place irrelevant, it would be the same set of issues if they were communicating by telephone while geographically distant. Tying shoelaces and obstetric probing are notionally different activities. But where within ANT are their differences and similarities articulated according to the historically changing demands placed on actors? (cf. 4.4). There are many other aspects to Dyb and Halford’s study that relate to the institutional context of telemedicine in Norway, and their research makes these clear, I am looking solely at the articulation of the case with ANT where the term ‘context’ is rather meaningless. On the issues of embodiment, poignant in the quoted study, ANT describes links but ignores how it feels to go about making them.

ZSM draws on the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) in helping to understand scenarios such as these. Vygotsky sees these scenarios as showing different ‘developmental’ characteristics of participants and the problems posed to them in developing the kinds of links and resources we have been considering. He poses the question in the form of how one member of a scene is able to help another participant re-differentiate scenes in new ways and, indeed, overcome the effects of distance between them. His approach is to focus on the character of the responsiveness between participants and the technologies that

comprise their relationships within these scenes that he refers to as Zones of Proximal Development (ZPDs). In the obstetric case it is, it seems to me, a case of understanding how the *responses* people are making impact hermeneutically or intuitively on the ways the scene develops and how they feel about the ‘links’ constructed in the network.

With Savage et al’s (2005) study I find similar issues. The practice of belonging in a locality relies not only on actors engaged in activities with different hermeneutical and embodied emphases, but the analysis also points to how actors are differently *oriented to* their own practices. By engaging in different ‘belonging projects’ (through my child’s school and through internet based organisations) we have to make room theoretically for how the projects are put into dialogue with one another. Moving to a new residential area recasts for me what is essentially going to be hermeneutical (behaviour, people, places, customs that I need to interpret) and what is embodied (basic skills of engagement). However, by creating projects one manufactures belonging practices in a ‘state of difference from one another’. It may be that my attachments and sense of belonging are subject to how these different projects situate themselves in my life course and become oriented to one another. Clearly, the informants in Savage et al’s study had unclear, sometimes contradictory senses of belonging and also self understanding when they were being strategic. The introduction of this ‘hermeneutical dimension’ to their lives is difficult for Parsonian (chain) and Bourdieuan (field) approaches to entertain because this dimension of action does not show up specifically on the ‘radar’ of their models of activity.

To look at action as chains of plans, acts and goals, qua Parsons, seems to show us how radical demographic and social changes have produced turbulence at the level of activity. But Parsons and Shils (1951) see doubts, contradictions, resistance, fear of commitment and antipathy towards acting, i.e. the fact we take up orientational stances towards acting, either as ‘residual matter’ to the action framework or as simply the base confusion in human experience that needs to be structured towards some goal. However, the reinterpretation of Weber (chapter 5) suggested that far from such matter being residual we should view it as part and parcel of action. The chain model sees the breakdown of the social as the loss of tutelage that the ordered properties of chains provide. The Parsonian approach finds it difficult to see how order is realised if vagueness (Schofield, 2003) and

the rationally indeterminate (Vass, 1998) have to be seen as a chronically intertwined and embedded feature of action. Tyriakian (2005) argues that Parsons was aware of this tension in his work, and during the 1950s increasingly spoke of a need to develop a ‘phenomenological dimension’ to his ‘action frame of reference’. We have seen, however, that this direction in Giddens leads to problems in how we connect activity to experience (chapter 2).

Savage et al also refer to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus in trying to account for the complexification of the ‘field’ of belonging. Bourdieu’s (1977, 1992) understanding of social practice and the concepts of habitus, field and embodiment (disposition, skill and hexis etc.) seem to offer much to Savage et al. Bourdieu provides for a view of repertoires of embodied predispositions to act that is strategic (i.e. hermeneutically engaged) and also one that draws on traditional resources in unreflective ways (similar to the ‘natural attitude’ that Schutz deploys- see chapter 3). Social change can be said (Bourdieu, 1991) to be observable in the re-orientations the social actor makes to the very character of the rules and dispositions occasioned by the ‘fields’ of practice in which the actor moves. The idea that social change propagates re-orientations within a chronically durable set of parameters leaves unsaid the degree to which the actor and the degree to which the field creates this change. Bourdieu aligns with ‘social phenomenology’ to theorise the embodied dimension of habitus. Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice did at least suggest that the whole issue of embodied skill needs to be opened up as a problem of sociology rather than allowing it to remain an unproblematic notional term. Bourdieu’s work has compelling ideas and observations. Here I can only summarise my problems with it for dealing with the case studies presented above. Firstly, habitus and field in Bourdieu’s approach do not resolve at all: from whatever height one views habitus the picture remains the same. The level of empirical detail does not help us decide anything about the kinds of changes under review. Precisely what is required in Bourdieuian scholarship is something of the resolution of habitus that Schutz and Luckman (1973, 1989) provide for structures of the life-world. From the point of view of ZSM the major difficulty with Bourdieu’s rendering of habitus and skill is that they are *non-social*. They are derived from an *ethological* viewpoint on the natural construction of human behaviour or the pre-social power of humans to simply serially order their activity. Bourdieu does provide a compelling account of the social *shaping* of these pre-social powers through symbolic exchange and the social organization

of fields, and by this means also accounts for socialisation as a part of sociation. However, like the phenomenologists he criticises, Bourdieu does not actually *connect* the hermeneutical/embodiment domains, so we are left with the question “But what conception of the body are we to adopt...The body that sustains the *intellectus* or the body that sustains the *habitus*?” (Lefebvre 1991: 194, emphasis original). Put another way, is there a theoretical difference between hermeneutical and embodied action for him? Unless this question can be answered we cannot use Bourdieu’s work to decide between the historical change issues in Dyb and Halford or Savage et al’s studies since these studies often crucially turn on what and where and by whom the hermeneutical work as opposed to the embodied work is being carried out.

But the biggest problem is the character of whatever means there is to give *coherence* to what in human action, as I argue below, is a highly disparate and heterogeneous set of constituents, skills, subjectivities, resources etc. As Crossley argues, for Bourdieu, it is habitus whose purpose is to give *coherence* and order to practice without detracting from its strategic nature (*intellectus*?). But habitus is *an agent’s* “residue or sediment of their past experiences which functions in their present, shaping their perception, thought and action...” (Crossley, 2001:93). It is problematic to source the origin of coherence to this.

The principal difference of principle between what I want to develop (ZSM) and habitus/field is that which provides *coherence* to activity in all modalities of the hermeneutic-embodied continuum. For ZSM it is not an unproblematic, embodied ‘store’ of skills which may be strategically oriented to the present moment (habitus). One can describe the problems faced by midwives, nurses and clinicians in the technologically mediated action in the Dyb and Halford (2009) study as a breakdown of coherence occasioned by geographical distance and a separation of (embodied) feelings and (hermeneutical) facts. Two issues here: firstly, while Bourdieu is deft at showing how styles of orientation towards people and objects in the field alter in the light of change there is still no theoretical examination of how objects as such are related to actors in such scenes. This may be contrasted with Schutz’s attempt, for example, to deploy the Heideggerian concepts of *zuhanden* and *vorhanden* (things ready-to-hand in a practical sense and things abstracted from contexts and to which hermeneutical action must be applied) (Heidegger, 1962). This distinction illuminates the problem presented in Dyb and

Halford's (ibid) study. Schutz and Heidegger realise that any scene, irrespective of its geographical distribution needs to show how the materials in it are related to the actor's activities. If I pick up a hammer my relation to it is fundamentally different if I focus on a nail to be hammered where the hammer becomes *zuhanden*, and when I contemplate the hammer (*vorhanden*). This is the distinction in the Dyb and Halford study that might be applied to the midwife holding the probe but dependent on what she does with it on the clinician's instructions. The probe should be '*zuhanden*', but it is rendered '*vorhanden*'. But it is not by virtue of distance that this occurs. The relatively embodied (*zuhanden*) and the relatively hermeneutic (*vorhanden*) is a dialectic feature of any activity.

Secondly, habitus as something that gives coherence to activity, apart from being a property of the agent (and so its sociality needs explaining anyway) is primarily a concept that, theoretically, solves the problem of *order*. I find the extension of the habitus concept problematic, if for no other reason than the definition of coherence here becomes the application of one order (habitus) to the problem posed by another such as moving between 'fields', say. In this example, the agent engages in the activity of 'transposition' or translating between fields. If we refer to Savage et al's study of mobile people relocating to new residential areas we would not easily, using Bourdieu's ideas, see the difference between the act of translation and any act of interpreting. For example, say new residents are engaged in a project of belonging involving focusing on their children's schools. They may translate an existing similar project from their old residential situation into terms suited to the new one. Bourdieu presumes here that transposition and re-embedding can rely on relatively ordered and coherent skill sets. Savage et al's study actually shows that residents may contradict at a hermeneutical level what they are deploying at the level of skill, and indeed the latter may fail them. Too much has been assumed for these skill sets.

On the issue with which this chapter started of how we might use theoretical accounts of action to demonstrate the impact or otherwise on sociality of historical changes, the most obvious objection to the use of Bourdieu is that the problem of translation of habitus, skill sets and hermeneutical knowledge is not confined to moving between one field and another. Dyb and Halford's (2009) study and Savage et al's (2005) are occasioned by the problems posed of medical information and mobile residents respectively move between

fields. However, the activity of translation may not be confined to movements *between* fields. Sometimes the simple act of problem-solving may require agents recasting the single field they inhabit in different ways and shifting how they are oriented to different aspects of the field (see also Mouzelis, 2007). So, we cannot even show using the idea of field that translation is any indicator of historical change.

#### 6.4 Conclusions

This chapter has examined selected empirical, and empirically-derived, case studies to give examples of the problems of using existing approaches to theories of human activity in establishing whether or not historical changes wrought by globalising technologies, media or demographic behaviours have happened or not. The conclusion is that these theoretical approaches leave the cases undecided. The reason for this is that the key features of social action, which emerge from the data, focus on dimensions of human practice and experience that these accounts fail to relate, articulate or make part of the explanatory frameworks. Specifically, in all cases we have seen that the features of human action most frequently cited empirically as indicating change do not form part of the theoretical approaches deployed. These features are: *hermeneutic and embodied dimensions* to practice (including feelings and emotions) that have been crudely collapsed into a ‘two-layer reflexivity/skill model’ of practice; the ways in which participants to action *differentiate* and make available to themselves, and others, aspects of the scene; and how any differentiations made by actors provide for *new ways of orienting* what is available: human, technological, geographical.

The purpose of developing ZSM is to provide an approach that accommodates these features in one framework. The ZSM framework takes hermeneutic and embodied dimensions of practice beyond the ‘two-layer’ model.

## **Chapter 7: ZSM The Hermeneutic-Embodied Continuum and its Modes of Differencing**

### **7.1.1 Introduction**

Human activity is highly variegated before we even consider the effects of any changes on its composition or form as a consequence of forces like globalisation. The term ‘activity’ itself may give a false sense of conceptual unity. As the examples in chapter 6 show, we are often confronted empirically by situations that comprise actors engaged in a wide range of heterogeneous activities. The telemedicine obstetric example (6.2.3) illustrates that, an actor (midwife) may be using a probe to examine a patient, to produce a perceived competent performance in the eyes of the institution for which she works, to assist a distant clinician, to interpret and assuage emotional feelings in the examination room and so on. The task for social historians of change is hard, in such circumstances. If we are searching for historical differences in the range of tasks and experiences in any setting, then we first have to confront the high degree of variegation *always already* present. Furthermore, if we focus on subjectivity, embodiment, mood and feeling as registers of change we also have to bear in mind that moment by moment changes to these always properly belong to any social situation (Tonkin, 2005).

The problem is identifying what peculiarly *new* difficulties actors face when bringing coherence to the heterogeneity of the disparate situated resources of action. This is the case whether the ‘resources’ are skills, tools, procedures, emotions or social connections that belong to, are developed, or are constructed, in settings. The theoretical task is to provide a framework that relates resource, place, subjectivity and embodiment. These are present for all actors’ who put their ‘social constructive capacities’ to work. It was not possible to determine with any confidence in the obstetric case (6.2.3) whether the special difficulties introduced by geographical distance and communication technologies are the result of qualitative changes to the ‘composition or form’ of activity; in other words, whether processes of coherence and social construction or merely contingent quantitative ones pertain in this case. What might help determine this better?

The examples in chapter 6 focussed on what can be said about activity in the context of changes brought about by such events as the insertion of technology, the co-ordination of behaviour at geographical distance, but also migration and the relocation of one's household. Established theories do not clarify any details of change against a regular framework of action. We attempt to see how historical forces create *turbulence* in action, specifically (in the examples presented here) how new divisions arise within actors' constructive work. Chain, field and network approaches to action (6.2) do not distinguish qualitatively between everyday turbulence and that wrought by radical change. For example, if historical change is constituted for Bourdieu by the necessity for the actor to 'translate' between 'fields', then there is not sufficient theoretical distinction for us to understand how this differs from 'everyday translations' the actor makes between fields. Fields, and the differences between them, are already part of the definition of the actor's constructive capacities (habitus) (cf. Mouzelis, 2007). Consider Savage et al's (2005) migrating households. They stage the actors' invention and deployment of new strategies that 'divide' aspects of identity construction and maintenance (e.g. make school choice and participation a distinctive new practice in their repertoire). This emergence, of a new portfolio of strategic practices, does not offer, in itself, anything decisive with regards to making claims about qualitative changes to action. As argued in chapter 6, we cannot decide if such practices show fundamental change or active resistance to it.

The obstetric case offers us a view of the turbulence wrought by the introduction to medical practice of 'telemedicine'. Telemedicine bi-locates clinical work and divides 'facts' from 'feelings'. Essentially, Urry, Lash, Dyb, Halford, and Savage et al are concerned to see what the actor does about these new divisions. For example, Dyb and Halford ask how the obstetric encounter achieves its social coherence in the face of a heterogeneity produced by a split between medical expertise, the patient and their technological mediation. However, looking at 'traditional' co-located medical encounters we *already* have *turbulence* in mundane activities. There is *already* a heterogeneity consisting of emoting subjects, the hermeneutical handling of aspects of scenes, intuitions and feelings. So, we are deciding between two heterogeneities. It was argued in chapter 6 that the ANT approach does not assist here.

I argued earlier (6.3), following the critical work of Part One and chapter 5 (5.3.3), that the features of activity that need further elaboration to make this problem more tractable are: ‘the modes of differentiation’ by which participants in any situation construct and respond to the features and aspects of that situation that are becoming differentiated. In the obstetric case we saw, through the testimony of the clinician and the midwife, a set of *differentiating practices* that emerge in a patterned way. The clinician’s practice became one of making a clinical examination through having to differentiate the scene by distinguishing between relayed, digitised ‘facts’ among other newly significant and newly insignificant aspects apparent from his position in the scene. The data are interpreted by the researchers as suggesting a substantial shift to a *hermeneutical mode of differentiation*. The data also reveal that the midwife’s practice was constituted by both *embodied modes of differentiation* (the construction of and response to intuitions and feelings at the site, or ‘place’, of the medical examination) and also *hermeneutical modes of differentiation* (the need ‘to guess’ at what the clinician wanted her to do with the probe).

Why the need to introduce this language? The problem we have had to deal with throughout the thesis results from inadequacies found in trying to conceptualise actors’ communicative and practical exchanges. The model that something cognitive and hermeneutical (reflexivity) on the one hand orients or guides the otherwise unproblematic elaboration of embodied skills (routines and habits) on the other, was found to lie at the heart of the confusion. This model, for example, is central to structuration theory and I examined its problems earlier (5.3.3 and fig. 5.3). It lies at the base of most theories of action. Failure to further elaborate it lies at the root of the critiques I made of Part One theorists from Habermas to Schutz. The Reflexivity/Skill model makes the assumption that reflective awareness is responsible for all the adaptations and revisions of practices at the level of routines and skills. Contrary to this I argue that we need to look at different types of hermeneutical work, and also different types of ‘embodied action’. Instead of thinking simply that action is a musical score with two ‘staves’: reflexivity and skill, there are good reasons to suppose that there are different types of reflexivity and embodiment. Each of these different types, or modalities, is capable of differentiating social settings according to its particular characteristics. I shall increase the number of ‘staves’ to four.

If we re-think the telemedicine case along these lines we can identify subtle shifts in practices for participants within an alternative framework. The framework views action as a process of differentiation undertaken in a variety of ‘modes’. Essentially the telemedicine study shows participants engaging in a *range* of more and less hermeneutical work, and more and less embodied work (skilful and intuitive-emotional activity). This gives us the first part of a framework: a *range* of hermeneutical and embodied modalities as a dimension of action. I shall argue why we are to see hermeneutical and embodied action as a single continuum, along which a range of activity-modes appear, later. Chain models of action (Parsons) enable us to interpret the telemedicine example as a complex array of personal, professional and institutional goals and social roles that have been re-arranged by geography and technology. This leads to the implication that some kind of ‘interface’ between skills and reflexivity changes from that of a traditional medical setting. But chain models give us unsatisfactory outcomes when examining the relation between reflection, skill and emotion. Parsons had continuing problems with this. ‘Affect’ in his action frame of reference has an ambiguous place because for Parsons emotions, like skills, are either ‘residual’, or under cognitive or reflective control (Bershady, 2005). Emotionality is an entirely sub-ordinate and dependent variable to cognitively managed, goal-directed activity in Parsonian theory. We have already seen similar problems with field and network approaches (chapter 6).

I argued in the last chapter that we find people developing multiple, new and more specialised practices as a strategic response to their changing circumstances. So, a language is required to discuss how these practices enter into dialogue with one another; how they create new *orientations* within the process of acting (cf. Mouzelis, 2007 on Bourdieu); and what kinds of consequences for experience are implied by all this. We need a finer tuned framework to discuss how the actor’s embodied subjectivity becomes a ‘mooded’ locus of disparate multi-tasked projects. One’s action consists of a co-ordinated ‘range’ of different modes of activity each directed at very different physical, social, technological aspects of one’s situation. Each shares in the contingent frustrations of the strivings of the other. These modalities take up orientations to one another. By developing a sense of these modalities we move beyond the ‘habitus’ model. Contrary to chain, field and network approaches, *this involves seeing embodiment and emotionality in less sub-ordinate roles*. It means finding ways of describing how emotion and embodiment are

implicated in and determine reflexivity. Two issues emerge immediately: (i) the problem of coherence across a more diverse and heterogeneous range of processes (discussed further in chapter 8); and (ii) the multi-modal character of action having hermeneutic and embodied forms. These modes ‘tangle’ with disparate materials and making them tractable within social constructive capacity.

Resolution of these issues requires making further theoretical distinctions within what we term reflexive or hermeneutical activity. Likewise we need to examine embodied activity as more than just sets of habits and skills. Skill has been central to chain, field and network approaches to human action. As a ‘basic unit’ it supplies structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), for example, with the foundation quantum of human practice. As we have seen for Lash and Urry (chapter 4) skill becomes a basic quantum of the notion of ‘flow’. But analytically it is obscure.

Below I extend the framework developed so far and describe the hermeneutic-embodied dimension as a basic, single continuum. Giddens was unable to develop a model that respected his early insight that reflection and meaning were continuous with other dimensions of practice. He had argued for the need to view activity, across its reflexive and embodied properties, and of one piece: “There are no signifying practices; signification should rather be understood as an integral element of social practices in general” (Giddens, 1979: 39). No-one has yet achieved a theoretical account of what this ‘integration’ means. My approach is to propose that a continuum of hermeneutical and embodied practices is established consisting not of ‘thought’ and ‘skills’, but rather more basic human modes of acting that I have termed (5.3.3) *differencing*. Thought and skills arise from differencing. This argument shows why skills are not themselves the basic units of human practice.

To address the questions posed about activity and sociation throughout this thesis we need to know more about the process of giving form and coherence to the sheer variety of our situations. I include accounting for the moodedness of activity (beyond indigenous emotion terms). We are aware that skilful practice is applied with ‘commitment’, ‘confidence’, ‘trust’, ‘irony’ etc. So we need to understand more sociologically about the composition of skill. Skills may be goal-directed, but may also be enacted with irony, in

anger or in bad faith. We orient to, but are also oriented by, the skills we deploy (cf. Foucault, 1976). To investigate the overall coherence of practice then we need to bring these matters into the framework.

By going beyond reflection and skill as impenetrable categories and examining more of their ‘sub-regions’, their characteristics, endemic heterogeneity and the orientational possibilities, we can assess a broader range of relationships between sub-regions that may give rise to the so-called ‘symptoms’ of late modern life. Closer examination of the heterogeneity of human action and experience, by virtue of the (ZSM) framework, casts a different light on what is perennial and what contingent in social settings.

Here, and the next chapter, the ZSM general framework is elaborated. This chapter focuses on breaking up the standard ‘reflexivity-skill’ model that chain, field and network theorists view as being elaborated over time and towards ‘goals’ etc. Concentrating for now on breaking up reflexivity-skill, and replacing it with hermeneutical-embodied (H-E) action, I detail a *range* of hermeneutical and embodied modalities by which social actors differentiate and construct aspects of their circumstances. Where feasible I shall relate these to the examples used in chapter 6. I argue further (from arguments presented in chapter 5) why these modalities of differentiation belong to a continuum (the H-E continuum). I confirm why skill cannot be a basic sociological unit of analysis. I demonstrate how these modalities can become oriented to one another and so give rise to, intersubjective complexity for actors. I indicated how action is integral with mood and emotion. Most importantly, we see how the different modalities can give shape to each other. This enables us to go beyond the standard sociological assumption that cognition or reflection orients basic skills sets. Chapter 8 deals with the processes by which a disparate range of modalities of differentiation achieve overall coherence.

### **7.1.2 Zone of Social Making: A position statement**

ZSM proposes that where there is human life it is always already social. We should see ‘sociation’ (Outhwaite, 2006) as consisting of actors jointly engaged in settings. However, the elaboration of actors’ involvements with each other and their settings need now to be seen across a wider and more variegated range of hermeneutical and embodied activities,

that is, move beyond the view that activity is articulated by reflexivity and skill. The task is to show where and how we arrive at the more variegated, ZSM, version of these involvements. The modes of activity considered are not only very different from each other, but also have properties and relations that extend beyond any notional or empirical ‘setting’. Even in the simpler reflexivity-skill model we are aware that, say, skills are *adapted* to, dependent on and further specified by, settings and their material resources. There is no skill without this specificity. Try going through the motions of tying a pair of shoe laces without the appropriate material resource: laces. The resource has a determining effect on the form of the action. When we examine each of the H-E modes (later this chapter) that are replacing the simplistic reflection-skill model, we find that each mode has its own intrinsic characteristics that interface with social, cognitive, embodied and material resources in different ways, giving them form and shaping them. Speaking, performing, feeling and thinking, while all ‘elaborative activities’, nevertheless have very different internal characteristics. Actors, in the midst of their social involvements, are subject to the manner in which subordinate aspects of their practices seem to independently ‘reach beyond’ the immediate definable setting towards varieties of ‘otherness’. This is brought into the heart of soscience in the context of elaborative activities in all their variety, constituting both it and our experience of it. The term ‘setting’ belongs to the actors’ or empiricist’s discourse. So I distinguish between ‘setting’ and ‘zone’. The concept of zone recognizes that the different modes of practice orchestrated in settings are always partly constituted by the interfaces that these modes have with social and natural otherness.

Humans develop in settings that contain other actors engaged in the full range of H-E modes of activity. Yet, characteristically children acquire this full range progressively. Opinion, since Itard’s (1972) account of the *Wild Boy of Aveyron* (Lane, 1977; Malson, 1972; Hirst and Woolley, 1982) suggests that newborn humans, by and large, are quintessentially *non-social bodies that become social through hermeneutical practices* that constitute the social character of the body. Again the pernicious dominance of the ‘reflection-skill’ model holds sway here. It is wrong to suggest that it is entirely the task of reflective, interpretative thought that co-ordinates and orders the newborn’s otherwise random movements such that they develop into skills.

ZSM develops its case from an alternative, empirically derived discussion that proposes the already-social body. The body is already engaged in articulating, elaborating and ‘differencing’, even in ‘counter-socialising’ moves with its caretakers from birth. That earliest pre-skilled activity shows some structure is key to resolving the under-resolved sociological conception of embodied skills. I support the view taken by Itard that entry into sociality is by communicative exchange. However, like Weber he alludes to a ‘sub-hermeneutical domain’ without developing it. Itard proposes that sociality and the co-ordination of joint action is achieved in exchanges other than primarily linguistic and hermeneutical ones. Itard’s account of socialisation return us to Durkheim’s paradox (chapter 2): what forms of communication or exchange do there need to be before one can communicate and exchange? This problem of pre-social sociality is resolved here by providing a framework for the connections between embodied and hermeneutical modes of action. Contrary to Habermas’ thinking (chapter 2), that some form of sensuous or embodied ‘contract’ must underlie or precede ‘social contracts’ established hermeneutically, ZSM develops the position that the variety of embodied and hermeneutical actions available to us always co-exist and ground, or conflict with, one another. Their ‘coherence’ is a separate matter and dealt with in chapter 8.

It is important to keep this question alive because suggestions that one or more of the following impact on some ‘antecedent or primordial ground of sociality’ are central to apocalyptic arguments: structural violence (Habermas); ironic distance (Giddens); the disconnection between action and the hermeneutic ‘whole’ of which it ‘should’ form a part (Berger et al, 1974); or terminal separation between the symbolic and the body (Baudrillard). These thinkers gesture towards ‘penetrative intrusions’ showing up, ultimately, in the domain of skilled and embodied practices, our awareness of them and the quality of their ‘feel’.

### 7.2.2 ZSM and Social Constructionism

ZSM has affinities with, but is distinguishable from, the approach in *The Social Construction of Reality* (SCR) (Berger and Luckman, 1967; cf. chapter 3). ZSM takes further the problematic relation of agency and situated resources. SCR relates embodiment to reflexive thought. We are shown how a *suspicious* mood arises (Berger et al, 1973)

when actors become ironically situated with respect the resources they make and deploy in social settings. However, the feelings appear in SCR as mere ‘aftertastes’ of activity. ZSM frames the feeling and sensorial aspects of activity together as necessarily co-implicated with or hermeneutical practices. This addresses the problems raised by Habermas’s work (chapter 2) regarding his inability to articulate the sensorial properties of communication with its language dominated hermeneutical features.

Likewise ZSM moves beyond ‘structures of the life-world’ (Schutz and Luckmann, vol. 1, 1973; vol.2, 1989) for the same reasons and despite Schutz’s own attempts at elaborating an emotional, embodied and sensorial dimension to his understanding of action in his ‘applied theory’ (Schutz, CPII, 1964). Schutz’s outline of a ‘zone of operation’ (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973) has inspired the ZSM framework. However, Schutz develops his argument as a social theoretical *problem of order* placed on the shoulders of the already socialised autonomous agent. Schutz sees the zone of operation as socially produced and occasioned, its ordered properties (the temporal ordering of activity, communication, empathy and skill). But these emanate from already competent individuals for whom ‘the problem of reciprocity’, bonding and social contract, come from within (inter) subjective ‘streams of consciousness’. Like Habermas, Schutz sees the social contract ultimately as a hermeneutical achievement of the thinking subject.

Schutz’s work with modifications, however, addresses very contemporary issues. Many of the so-called experiential symptoms of late modern life are already elaborated in Schutz’s work as *chronic* constituents of the life-world. Uncertainty about how to go on; lack of clarity in one’s horizons of action; the sense of risk and anonymity associated with social life are already there. However, Schutz discusses such things as qualities of ‘elements of knowledge’, literally ‘knowledge of the life-world’ (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973, 1989). The ZSM position is, in agreement, that such experiential symptoms must be viewed as permanent constituents of activity, and not the outcomes of forces peculiar to post/late modernity. However, ZSM approaches this differently. Firstly, the problem is not constituted entirely within the hermeneutical domain of the ‘knowledge of the life-world’ where embodiment becomes the passive ‘theatre of experience’. Secondly, ZSM foregrounds the very orientation activity, or ‘making’, has *towards* knowledge. It is this second point that has been a central confusion in sociology. When the deployment of

knowledge in activity appears to us merely in its effects, what is lost is the *manner* and experience of its deployment. Knowledge can be deployed skilfully, transparently, or with irony, or insecurely, or as giving rise to a sense of artifice and so on. These denote agents' orientations within their own activities, not afterthoughts of them.

For example, in a study (Vass, 2005) of socio-economic behaviour and financial discourse it was noted that many previous studies had concluded that women tend to be 'financially naïve' compared to men when dealing with financial and life-course planning. When interviewed individually the women in the study confessed that the contingencies of their life courses, and the fearful shadows into which these seemed to extend, left them incapacitated when it came to financial planning. Current social policy even recommends that they improve their 'financial literacy'. However, focus groups with the same women asked to think through the life course and financial problems related to it (quite difficult ones like: retirement planning for a cross-generational couple; debt and obligation among kinship networks for single parent families) *but* presented as 'case studies' of other women enabled participants to make very sophisticated recommendations to the women portrayed in the case studies. Orientations and feelings towards hermeneutical tasks impact formatively on the way they are elaborated.

As we become further enmeshed in technologically mediated modes of making via the Internet and information and computing technologies (ICTs) it will be more crucial to have higher resolution benchmarks for examining action in sufficient detail that we can see how sub-regions of action take up orientations to each other. For example, one of the problems posed by ICTs concerns the extension of agency and sociality via technologies and new arrangements for 'thresholds' (Vass, 2008) of responsibility, joint activity, sensitivity to obligation, modes of exclusion etc. In Schutzian language we expect social life, in the face of globalised communications, to alter our how we 'typify' social encounters and how we determine fields of 'relevance' for that communication. Interaction with ICTs is not resolvable in sociological analysis using the terms of reference, as they stand, which Schutz and Habermas have deployed for the *lifeworld* and face-to-face encounters. Schutz was not challenged by such innovation. However, Schutz (1964: 106ff), did find himself having to write supplementary accounts that took cognizance of what happens when lifeworlds fail to coincide ("disrupted we-relations", *ibid*:114). His essay on soldiers

returning after World War II takes account of these disruptions theorizing fundamental breaks between the lifeworld ‘horizons’ of those returning and those who never left. Schutz had to embellish the concept of the lifeworld to incorporate what he now saw as a new type of ‘resource’ within social settings: ‘pseudo-typifications’ and ‘pseudo-relevances’ i.e transient, makeshift knowledge insincerely applied in social encounters. He did not take the simpler position that transience and insincerity may be permanent features of lifeworlds.

ZSM proposes, instead, that the ‘zone’ is understood as an activity space where the boundaries, limiting conditions, modes of subjectivizing of participants, deployment of resources etc. are mapped against parameters that always cater for the possibilities that Schutz found. What Schutz regarded as the ‘zone of operation’ should not need itself to undergo ontological revisions when it meets new circumstances such as ICTs.

### 7.3 The Limits of the Zone

The first aim of ZSM is to provide an alternative theoretical account of human action and its coherence by expanding the concept of action. I start with the concept of ‘zone’ and define its limits. Limits or boundaries do not coincide with empirically analytic terms like ‘setting’ or ‘context’. The division between ‘text’ (the performances and interactions of actors) and ‘context’ (the precise location in which these events happen), to use Atkinson’s (1990) terminology, is highly problematic at the interface of theory and method. If you believe that actors create their contexts, or even further develop what is already there (cf. Dyb and Halford, 2009) then the distinctions between text and context, action and setting become blurred. They are methodological conveniences.

A ZSM is not a ‘domain’ in the ontic sense developed by, say, Layder (1997) from structuration theory in which ‘settings’ with different properties, resources and textures can be described with respect to their dualities of structure. A domain in Layder’s sense is partly an *ontic* and partly an *ontological* construction. That is, he does not decide whether a domain is simply an empirically countable thing, or whether it is a theoretical fiction that points to an underlying sociological reality. A ZSM, by contrast, is a theorization of activity. Activity is viewed as consisting of layers of hermeneutic and embodied

processes. Rather than see these layers in the traditional way as episodes of behaviour that pursue goals over time (see 5.3.3) the layers are first examined in a more basic form. We saw (chapter 5) that there were theoretical problems accounting for the organisation of human action. There is a fundamental confusion in the social theoretical understanding of action that permits us to account for its order and coherence by reference to goals and time. Simply, the two things are confused. When we say that human action ‘is elaborated over time’ or ‘is goal-oriented’ we are making claims about how either time, or a goal, is responsible for shaping and forming an action. If I want to travel to London by train then this ‘goal’ will have *formative consequences* on a complex series of behaviours and other smaller sub-goals. The overall goal of a task *distributes* the contents of the entire act. When using ‘chain models’ of action we cannot distinguish the effect of the goal from the effect of time (5.3.3) as the source of the distribution. Consider how far the term ‘goal’ itself is bound up with time as a concept. ‘Goal’ is meaningless without presupposing time itself as an ordering principle (chapter 5).

However, the term ‘distribution’ is not confounded with time. Foucault (1974) uses this term when describing what happens when two discourses (fields of resources and activities) merge. He does not attempt to find the ‘contextual’ boundaries of the discourses: i.e. what actors and actions, and what settings they consist in, relative to the temporal elaboration of goals. Rather, he asks first, simply, how the contents of one discourse become ‘re-distributed’ by the contents of the other. For example, if an educational encounter becomes subject to a medical intervention, then the contents of the two discourses change with regard to the way they give shape and meaning to events. The contents of the two discourses are said *to be re-distributed* with respect to each other.

I propose and describe (this chapter) layers of activity each of which operates like discourses in this manner. Chapter 8 is concerned with how coherence and social form is given to these layers overall. ZSM is a theoretical description of the way layers of activity *distribute each other and how coherence arises overall*. A ZSM has a family resemblance to a ‘zone of operation’ (Schutz and Luckman, 1973; 1989; 7.2.2). But I cannot align myself fully with the following highly appealing description. Schutz et al claim that activity gains coherent form because actors in ‘lifeworlds’ organize their activities into ‘project structures’. These confer ‘thematic unity’ on activity. According to Schutz and

Luckman we rely on the unity given to us by joint action within projects. Projects are essentially goal-directed. Schutz and Luckman deal with the quality of the social bonds we experience. These, they claim, can be theoretically accounted for within the language of projects, themes and horizons. Social reciprocity, for example, arises from joint action on projects that have thematic unities. What this approach lacks is any description of how projects or themes in the organisation of the lifeworld change each others' forms in practice i.e. how they 're-distribute' each other. Schutz prefers to invent new concepts in the face of significant change.

Clearly, the Schutzian approach (shared by Bauman, Habermas and Berger) identifies lifeworlds, and zones of operation as 'envelopes or containers of activity'. The limit of a ZSM is not a 'boundary' in the ontological sense but is better expressed as a 'finitude' in the phenomenological sense (Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Schutz, 1964). It is convenient and tempting to think exclusively from empirical considerations that 'human activities occur in social settings' we can define and provide methodological descriptors for. But we become rapidly compromised when dealing with the more existential and experiential features of action.

Recall Dyb and Halford's telemedicine study (chapter 6) where the convenience of the 'network' concept to describe links between place, patient, clinician and technology was matched by its inconvenience in finding a place for emotionality. Medical encounters can involve participants facing a different kind of 'limit condition' than the 'cognitive' definition of the context. Bauman (chapter 2) invoked Durkheim's notion that sociality provides us with a shelter from which to escape 'the horror of one's own transience'. This is more than a poetic turn. The 'unheimlich' has a place in structural theory (cf. Torfing, 1999; Laclau, 1992) not merely as an effect of it. As Berger insists (chapter 3) our immersion in sociality and its activities must always be tinged with this horror which arises from the contradiction of our social and natural constitution. We must make room for this brush with finitude in our understanding of activity. Giddens actually once gave it a formal structural place but did not develop it. ZSM accepts this as a fundamental theorem from Giddens' structuration theory as originally conceived. Finitude, in this case, comes from Marx's idea that,

“human beings exist in contradictory relation to nature...because they are in and of nature, as corporeal beings existing in material environments; and yet at the same time they are set off against nature, as having a ‘second nature’ of their own, irreducible to physical objects or events” (Giddens, 1979: 161)

Clearly, sociology is wrong where it defines its field and object as what happens exclusively in ‘second nature’. In the light of this distinction, we should not produce frameworks analytically derived from, or aimed at, second nature only. Of greater import here, Giddens suggests that the contradictory *unity* of the two natures “sustains the accommodations reached with it” (*ibid.*). That is, we must suppose that in mundane activities, saturated with humanly made meaning etc. we must be prepared for some shocks, *not from outside* contextual boundaries of socially constructed ‘settings’. Rather, the very form of those activities always hold within their structures ‘limits’ not of human making: i.e. a finitude, marked by ‘having been set off against’ first nature. This kind of limit is existential rather than ontological. Duality of structure (developed by Giddens later, 1984) is discussed as drawing on rules and resources in the routine reproduction of the same as if everything were situated within secondary, or constructed, nature. Reference to ‘finitude’ (Giddens, 1979) was lost. I stress that this finitude is in the DNA, if you will, of duality of structure. Merleau-Ponty seized Montaigne’s conjecture that the finitude of death gives shape to that “zone which is ourselves” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 201) i.e. it is a routinely unacknowledged, constituting, shaping feature of identity practices. Increasingly, theory attempts to accommodate the social as, partially, non-humanly made, cf. Lash and Urry (1994) Knorr Cetina (2003) and Latour (2005). Illness, childbirth, some disabilities, accidents, death and emotional experiences like love and anger can make finitude prominent within the feel and elaboration of action.

#### **7.4.1 Constructing the Zone of Social Making (ZSM)**

The aim is to replace the ‘two-layer’ reflexivity-skill model of action with a multi-layer model where hermeneutical and embodied activities are further sub-divided. This enables us to gain insight into not only the greater complexity of action, but also how its layers are open to interaction with one another. This does two things: (i) it creates a theoretical space for discussing how any layer of activity enters into a dialectic with another layer, giving shape and form to both. This removes the obvious dominance of hermeneutics over

embodiment; (ii) it allows us to think through how different ‘parts’ of activity can become ‘oriented’ to one another. Recalling the examples introduced in chapter 6, attention was drawn to Savage et al’s informants who, in their daily identity practices, developed a series of ‘particularising strategies’ which separated out elements of their identity activity (say, with schools and with other interest groups). One of the problems with the ‘habitus’ model is that, as I (chapter 6) and Mouzelis (2007) have argued, while we can see ‘changes of practice as a consequence of migration as a whole’ we do not understand how these new practices are related or *oriented to* one another. This is because the Bourdieuan language of habitus does not break down the practice below the level of actor and skill.

In practical terms, the ZSM position is a description of the relationship between *zonal parameters* (i.e. basic dimensions always present in sociality such as hermeneutic-embodied action) and *zonal constituents* that may take more contingent *orientations* and connections in the zone. Parameters and constituents form part of an analytic space (cf. Dowling, 1998, 2009). The first task is to put in the first parameter which is the H-E continuum itself. The second parameter is differencing (5.3.3). I am less concerned with what unfolds in time when looking at action and more concerned with the fact that differentiations occur among aspects of situations involving humans, resources and technologies. This was a theme running through the examples in chapter 6. The telemedicine case study showed that, as a consequence of professionals connected by communications technology, the key medical practices (knowledges, facts, feelings, social positions, tools and communication) associated with traditional obstetrics became re-differentiated in their new arrangements. The ZSM approach is to re-sort these differentiations according to our two parameters, the H-E continuum and differencing (see 5.3.3). Next I turn to how this is achieved.

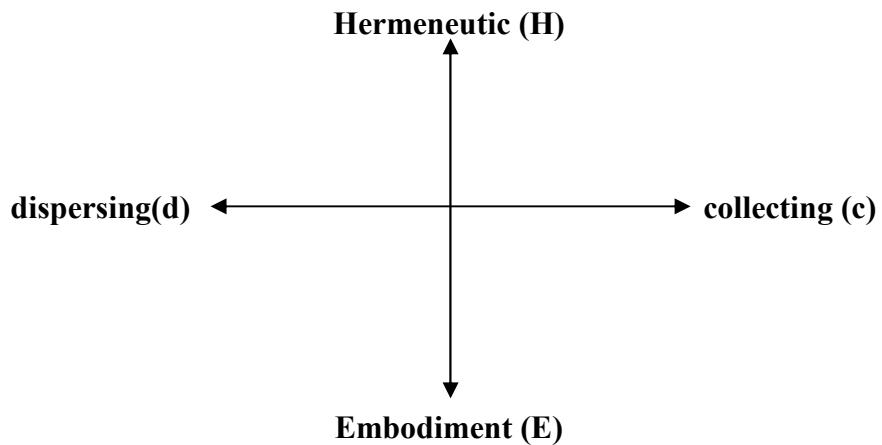
#### **7.4.2 H-E continuum, differencing and basic modes**

Following the logic of the alternative path through Weberian approaches to activity (chapter 5 and above), a hermeneutic-embodied continuum is conceptualized providing for different kinds, or modalities, of differencing. The H-E continuum recognizes Weber’s point that embodied, anticipatory responses can direct or subvert hermeneutical endeavour. The latter does not always have the guiding role Parsonian theory suggests. We

differentiate in many media: language, images, physical techniques, movements, interactions with physical or abstract things. The task is to provide a schema that gives an overview of these different modalities. But, we need to eliminate the idea that hermeneutic layers are just ‘thought’ and embodied layers are just ‘skills’. We need first disassemble the idea of skill.

Skill is not a form of ordering behaviour without which activity is random. This is the assumption made by action theories in general. Skilled activity may be better defined as relatively indeterminate activity that is made more determinate in relation to actors, actions or objects. Human activity is not entirely random before it acquires form that culminates in skill (Wood, 1997). Prior to becoming ‘goal-directed’, human activity has a basic ‘inchoate’ structure (Bruun and Langlais, 2003; Shotter, 1984). To make any situation in which we find ourselves ‘less inchoate’ we have, naturally available to us, ways of resolving ourselves and our situation into ‘features’. Through these we may resolve further aspects. The difference between what I am saying here and a similar account given in Berger and Luckmann (1967) is that the process of resolution there depends upon already-formulated skills. Young children, for example, do not necessarily have these skills. The skills themselves need to be shaped from something. I contend that skills are shaped from basic routines through which we ‘differentiate’ aspects of situations (including ourselves).

The most basic differencing activity that can be performed is ‘gathering and dispersing’ according to Heidegger (1984; 1968). The principle is human activity in its simplest movement, or ‘flow’, can ‘bring stuff together’ or disperse it. A child playing with toy cars may bring them together and line them up and can split them up again. This is simply available to ‘the flow of doing’ and requires no organising principle or reason (Heidegger uses the term *logos*) to guide it. This is more basic than the concept of skill which entails, as argued (5.3.3) a direction-oriented solution to the problem of the serial order of behaviour, i.e. what sub-skills and sub-episodes or sub-events of activity need to go where and how they are related. Without the concept of goal and/or reason skill unravels.



**Fig. 7.1 ZSM basics of making: differencing and H-E continuum**

Figure 7.1. shows the H-E continuum with the modality of differencing. Having bracketed out skill and time-ordered behaviour as the basis of action in the skill-reflexivity model; ZSM proposes that available to actors in situations are a variety of ways of making these situations resolve into features accessible to further activity. At root the various ways of doing this are simply based on collecting or dispersing anything material to the situation of an embodied or hermeneutical kind. In a traditional medical encounter, for example, many of the *interpretational* features of the situation would be *collected* or *collectible* (symptoms, patient's history, circumstantial facts etc.) Available to the participants are ways of 'dispersing' or disassembling features of the situation. So, conversation may operate along the lines of patients saying, 'yes I have these symptoms, *but not* with these additions' and so on. Language used in this way (collecting-dispersing) is not giving any final interpretation. It is rather using the participants' communication in a 'positing and countervailing mode'. This further specifies and resolves aspects of the situation for participants (Vygotsky, 1986; Strong, 1988). Clearly, in a medical encounter there may be also a physical examination in which similar positing and countervailing moves are made to differentiate the situation further.

At this point we move into more 'embodied collecting-dispersing' territory. Since, by definition aspects of the situation which may emerge or be resolved here are less open to hermeneutic classification and definition it is possible that 'unclear aspects' remain part of the ongoing situation. I have elsewhere referred to these as 'rationally unclear phenomena' (Vass, 1998). ZSM wants to give much greater space in sociological discourse to things

that remain unclear or cannot be clarified. In Berger and Luckmann's (1967) thinking, by contrast, 'deposits' and 'sediments' are said to emerge, or are found, in social interactions in an approach to social order that is always 'meaning-saturated' or 'meaning-decidable'.

The notion that at embodied levels of engagement actors are already developing aspects of their situations which are not available to reflexive guidance, interpretation or attention, leaves room for the idea that some 'vague' (Schofield, 2003) or 'present, felt but unknowable' ('nichtwissen', Gross, 2009) features emerge through differentiating activities. ZSMs give rise to uncanny (unheimlich) events that persist in social relations (cf. Torfing, 1999; Laclau, 1993). Fig 7.1 suggests that there are areas of activity ('embodied-collecting') where undefined events occur. To develop this line of enquiry we need to say more about the types of 'differencing' that can occur at different points along the H-E continuum.

By proposing a 'continuum' I suggest there are a variety of embodied, and a variety of hermeneutical ways of differentiating aspects of situations by actors. The primordial distinction between 'actor' and 'situation' is inconvenient because this is itself a differentiation, which may or may not be made by participants. 'Zone of social making' suggests that actors, resources, technologies, places etc. pertinent to a practice need to be accounted for in how they have emerged and become resolved into features.

For my purposes here I sub-divide hermeneutical differencing into two modalities and likewise I sub-divide embodied differencing. The reflexivity-skill model is too crude. With several types of embodiment and hermeneutical work available to analysis we can present a better account. Table 7.1 shows a breakdown of activity in its basic form. We can think of dispersing-collecting procedures, for example, at high hermeneutical levels. This gives us something we are familiar with: analysing and synthesizing. The latter is what happens when we collect and disperse at the level of abstract thought or use informational aspects of situations.

H-E	dispersing	collecting
H	<i>analysing</i>	<i>synthesizing</i>
	<i>contradicting</i>	<i>resolving</i>
E	<i>countervailing</i>	<i>combining</i>
	<i>syncopating kinesis</i>	<i>phasing kinesis</i>

**Table 7.1 H-E continuum against d-c modalities of differencing practices**

I want to claim that ‘lower’ forms of hermeneutical differencing also occur. Interpretation of a highly abstract kind does not exhaust what it means for humans to apply reflective attention to circumstances. Some forms of hermeneutical work are carried out more contingently and are more ‘indexically-linked’ (Garfinkel, 1990) in practice. Any social event is a communicative one involving some arrangement of these (or similar) constituent sets. I define the terms below, but, for example, giving coins as change in a shop is not simply a hermeneutico-rational action. The process can involve arriving at the correct change through using *all* the dispersing-collecting layers of table 7.1. An embodied ‘touching’ occurs as coins are deposited into the hand. The rhythm of the depositing, its ‘beats’, (kinesis) enables a form of counting (synthesizing) at hermeneutical levels. Additionally, the action can become mooded depending on how the beats happen and so on. Change giving looks ‘goal-directed’, but it has to be configured as such first by making all the layers of action involved cohere.

Differencing, unlike skill, is not oriented to, and does not derive its form from, a ‘goal’. Goals, and skill-forms that are articulated with respect to them, emerge and are *secondary aspects*, in the view presented here. Goals are merely what gives skilled flows of activity their coherence. For the constituents of table 7.1 there is much more to be done than can be achieved by a goal. Coherence to action is not provided by anything *within* the mode of difference itself.

Each layer of the H-E continuum is a basic movement of dispersing-collecting which ‘textures’ social circumstances. The forms of differencing in Table 7.1 refer to movements or flows, they are not ‘binary oppositions’. A pair, such as analysing-synthesizing, represents a possible ‘structured flow’ within activity that makes the informational aspects

of the world tractable to social activity by establishing shareable features. This idea is clearly derived from Schutzian thought but is a *dialectical* revision of it. The world appears to us as ‘figure and ground’. ‘Figured aspects’ provide affordances for further activity. They do not emerge through a single type of action oriented towards a pre-existing self-contained, fully determinate ‘ergodic’ object (as Piaget and Habermas hold, see 2.5). ZSM proposes, by contrast, that *the movement is itself dialectical* but is occasioned by *indeterminate material* available for further specification by modes of differencing. Dyb and Halford (2009) refer to the idea that objects do not just sit fully-formed waiting for actors to appear and use them in pre-ordained ways. Any thing first needs to be differentiated as an aspect of circumstances available to me (affordance).

Each layer of dispersing-collecting deals with its own type of resource. Imaginary resources, tractable at high *hermeneutical* levels (such as mathematical concepts, or social events recalled to memory available for reflection in episodic order) are not like dealing with tactile objects available to *embodied* activity. Any social event operates at all levels at once, but each level ‘differences’ idiosyncratically.

Each modality also subjectifies differently. Unlike Bauman, I do not find that hermeneutical modalities are the exclusive domain of the ‘I’ while embodiment is the domain of all unreflexive action. The issue of subjectivities is a question about how, in the midst of situated practices, actors are made subjects. The ZSM approach sees this as a process of making the all the diverse types of activity considered on the H-E axis coherent (the topic of chapter 8). Coherence for this *heterogeneous collection* of modalities of differencing movements and flows comes from *without*. Different modalities of activity ‘lend form’ to each other.

The task now is to establish each of the layers of the H-E continuum and its unique characteristics. I demonstrate that, taken individually, each layer theoretical justification. They have not been previously combined in the way it has been argued (chapters 5 and 7) that they should be. By taking the layers together, how they orient to one another and dialectically engage with each other, we can get some further purchase on the situations met in the examples of chapter 6.

## 7.5 Syncopating and phasing kinesis

Habitus and structuration rely on somewhat smoothly organized embodied skill sets. ZSM indicates a somewhat rougher dialectic at work in the development and operation of embodied movement viewed as a mode of differencing. The sources for this viewpoint come from studies in the growth of infant sociability (e.g. Braten, 1999; Richards, 1974; Richards and Light, 1986; Wood, 2006) and sociologies of body motion (e.g. Birdwhistell, 1970). Kinesis is taken from Birdwhistell's book on kinesics which appeared in a series edited by Goffman entitled 'conduct and communication'. Trevarthen (1999) is responsible for a series of studies examining mother-infant dyadic communication involving the development of mutuality through convergent and divergent phasing. Before the onset of language and pre-lingusitic vocalisations, mothers and babies 'keep phase' with each others' regard. Subtle facial changes and movements are more than mimicked by each. While the movements and 'expressions' grow in complexity over time the key issue is not that mutuality and intersubjectivity come about through imitation. Rather, each makes their movement contingent on the other's to produce sympathetic phasing of movement. Contingencies which arise from outside the mutual gazing and responding occasion, what I term, 'syncopations'. In other words, emergent properties of the world that make their appearance as if from an otherwise unacknowledged background, as a kind of interruption, in a social relation based on sympathetic phasing involve a syncopation of that phasing: this is an 'interference pattern' at a kinesic level.

The importance of the phasing and mutual gaze is demonstrated by Trevarthen in observations of babies with films of their mothers' faces. Babies will respond and move into sympathetic phasing with a film of their mother's face making the usual movements. But if the film is moved out of phase slightly with what the baby is doing then there is puzzlement and an arrest of the flow with some signs of distress. Furthermore the direction of the phasing is important. It is not that the child now finds it difficult to copy or understand what is going on, except insofar as the mother's movements are no longer contingent on the child's actions. Phasing works by establishing contingency sensitive flows between participants to the flow. In my language once there is such a flow then a mode of differencing can be established such that things may appear in the flow by virtue

of their rupturing syncopation with it. A rupture occasions a ‘remedial’ ordering by accommodating the ‘figured event’ into another kind of flow (cf. Foucault, 1973, and the notion of gaze).

Birdwhistell’s (1970) work on communicative behaviour is of its time with frequent, perhaps unhelpful, ethological references to ‘signals’ that pass between people. However, the preconditions of social encounters and communication, he argues, (*ibid.*: 200 ff.) begin with ‘stance’ and bodily ‘states of readiness’ which anticipate phasing and rupture in the sense outlined above. This ‘sensory contact’ with others is sustained throughout encounters and depends on it. This indicates that Trevarthen’s work, geared towards understanding the development of subjectivity and autonomous competences, needs to be thought of as a constituent of sociation beyond the activity forms of the mother-infant dyad. In kinesis we can see how a form of movement, occasioned by a dyad in this case, constitutes the emergence of figures that become material to that movement.

## **7.6 Countervailing and Combining**

This movement refers to human activity that co-ordinates actors with actors and actors with the world in an embodied way. However, it shows greater staging of resistance, or stronger proclivities, to link things than in the phasing case. Countervailing-combining has had considerable attention, in disparate social scientific traditions and features strongly in anthropological ethnographic work.

Kristeva (1978; 1980; 1992) has established an approach to communicative action that is applicable to activity generally. Kristeva identifies what others (e.g. Trevarthen above) see as moments in human development as chronic, co-present features of activity. In her discussion of Birdwhistell, Kristeva (1978) points out that, moving on from kinesis, gesture, is what situates language as an everyday embodied practice. Gesture is a bodily movement responsive to and productive of active engagement with human and physical resources in a locality. Kristeva argues for a view of a sub-hermeneutical domain of activity which is inclusive of *self-awareness* i.e. when a self becomes a significant, addressable aspect of a situation. In kinesis, by contrast, the self emerges, contingently, as an interruption or ‘hiccup’ in the flow of action. In countervailing-combining the ‘hiccup’

becomes is managed further and sustained for longer in time. This stability arises through two dialectically related processes. Firstly, there is a self-reflection where memories are combined with this ‘new but contingent stability’. Secondly, there are attempts to ‘countervail it’ i.e. by denying it, responding negatively, crossing it etc. Countervailing is an attempt by actors to find the limits of things, and define them in action, if not in meaning.

I take ‘countervailing’ from Kristeva’s (1980: 18) definition of signifying practice. She suggests that *establishing* an identity “calls for the identity of a speaking subject within a social framework, which he (sic) recognizes as a basis for that identity” (ibid.:18) Counter to establishing/combining moves are ‘countervailing’ moves which involve an ‘unsettling’ ‘question[ing]’ process that “indirectly challenges the social framework” with which the subject is identified.

Combining, or combinatorial flow, is about establishing (objects, subjects) in Kristeva’s language as aspects of situations with significant continuity. Establishing identities, or any aspect of a situation, involves an ‘affront’. I say, ‘the world is like x’. This establishment, more than the meaning and language involved, invites a countervailing move.

Countervailing recognises the immanence of establishment or combining. Combining recognises the countervailing move in its margins. This develops what Weber (5.3.3) referred to as the ‘anticipatory moves’ around the linguistic elements of conversation. Any combinatorial move must involve itself in countervailing. This janus faced movement, is close to Goffman’s (1970) notion of ‘tact’.

Bourdieu (1977) in describing honour exchanges among the Kabyle talks of gestures and bodily stances ‘pregnant’ with anticipatory feeling. Knowing the ‘right moment to apply a rule’ (ibid: 20) is for Bourdieu an embodied disposition. This provides for not only knowing in a reflexive sense when to apply a rule, but also its accompanying ‘sense of honour’. Hermeneutical events appear to come into play (recognition of an affront and the playfulness of the consequences) but these cannot be dealt with as intellectual events, ‘constructs’ Bourdieu calls them. ZSM develops this beyond the habitus model. In Bourdieu’s analysis countervailing occurs in response to an affront: I present an identity or proposition to another and they engage with it through ‘resistance’, or by ‘dispersing’ or

loosening its credibility in the social framework. These gestural stances need to be taken with their combinatory moves. Actors ‘pull together’ the identity of the speaker with other aspects of the situation into a whole.

Combining is central to the notion of *techne*, beloved of ANT theorists where it appears as *assembling*: the basic process of forming links in assemblages and networks (Latour, 2005). It appears in the philosophy of action in the concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom knowledge; Gadamer, 1980) taken from Aristotle. The ANT view of assembling does not recognise any ‘counter-assembling’ moves that are a dialectical part of the process of forming links. As Gadamer (*ibid*) points out Aristotle envisaged that ‘human making’, as a process of constructing, always has an ‘underside’ of resistance, of counter-establishing moves. The idea that combining/crafting/making was originally conceptualised as having a shady underside was crucial to how the *means* and *outcomes* of activity were construed as events in the Greek world. Briefly, human making (*techne*) was always seen as a performance under socio-political auspices. For Plato and Aristotle *techne* had to be distinguished from *tribe*: ‘mere’ practice, cunning. The difference between them marks the difference so important to Habermas about the seriousness and quality with which something is done or said (2.5). For example, and very crudely, we feel that we can judge the difference between combinatorial activity (establishments, performances) that proceeds from ‘true knowledge and command, *logos*’ and that which is imitative and contrived. The difference between the two was thought distinguishable at the level of skilled practice. In Greek thought *techne* (combining) and *tribe* (undermining) went hand in hand.

This crucial distinction, which represents *orientations* in activity, is at the centre of Socrates’ problem with Sophists. Sophistry is essentially the dominance of *tribe* in approaching the position of others. The most important thing is not the argument and the arguer’s profound identification with it, but the aim to *just* to bring off a style of performance. Socrates even feared the *techne* of writing (the written *assembling* of words) as opposed to speech because it could lead to the erosion of the presence of speech and enable people to produce ever closer, cunning, approximations to *logos*. If I speak from a script the combining of words is pre-given and crudely its *logos* is a sham. (Some older politicians in the British parliament are scornful of new members who give speeches from notes). Recall the importance of the ‘sincerity’ rule for Habermas (2.5). For Habermas

media institutions cause damage by breaching the application of the sincerity rule in everyday communication. In Greek thought they were structurally inseparable, dialogic aspects of communication. It is important to restore this sensibility.

This issue is so important that some (e.g. Gadamer, 1980, 1991; Roochnik, 1990) have suggested that the Socratic dialogues by Plato are dialogic because this is the best way of using communication *as a sensuous means* (cf. Weber, 5.3.3) to determine the role of *tribe* in the *techne* (combinatorial moves) of participants to a conversation. Clearly this sensing properly belongs to the sub-hermeneutical level of interaction. Engaging with the Sophists, and quite apart from notable victories in logic, Socrates, like the Kabyle was involved in an honour exchange at the same time constituted as a sensorial search for sham.

Lyotard (1993) has more recently contributed to this debate by developing the notions of ‘breaching’ and ‘scanning’ in pursuit of understanding the relations of humans to technology. Breaching refers to the *combination* of elements by habit in an ‘affordance-landscape’ where humans and non-humans form a continuous field. Breaching means combining. The metaphor focuses on activity as presupposing that ‘gaps between things need to be *breached* in making something’. Elements comprising the field of things are never exhausted by, indeed they exceed, their definitions. Elements, not being fixed, become available for combination within a context that provides stability. Lyotard is not clear on what ‘context’ means but seems to indicate that coherence would fail if elements were ‘de-contexted’.

‘Scanning’ is a *simulation* of combining. Historically the simulation began by humans reconstituting series of combinatory acts from memory. Here memory takes on the task of providing coherence to what is combined. With the development of technologies this process passes out of the originary context providing stability to the process of combining. Lyotard argues, that this newly ‘synthetic process’ is produced at the cost of the responsibility that was available to breaching. Scanning has less care of the process and outcomes of combining things.

## 7.7 Contradicting and Resolving

Negotiation is much discussed in S.I. Perhaps its major contribution is the insight that social life proceeds through spontaneous negotiating movements. Contradicting is like countervailing whose sensuous properties already have been alluded to. But it operates in more linguistic environments. Negotiation, in terms of the layers identified this chapter, is a hybrid practice. The word itself is a testament to this. *Nego otium*: 'I deny leisure', meant literally I must leave the domain activities that take care of themselves in the routine elaboration of life without much reflexive attention; and must now pay some attention, irksome though this will be.

This mode of differencing is constitutive of thought itself, as routinely socially deployed, according to Billig (1996) and Billig et al (1989). Billig's view of ideology, for example, is that it is realised in communicative encounters in the throes of contradiction and resolution. Argument does not proceed from a fully formed consistent arrangement of ideas at the highest hermeneutical level of definition, but rather disparate (ideological) dilemmas form the basis of thought itself. I would say more sensual basis. Thought is occasioned and constituted in the very practical dilemmas posed by social settings. This is consistent with Vygotsky's (1986) view that thought is 'internalised' action, where association stages contrary positions that require resolution. We do not argue *from* an ideology but *via* the dilemmas posed by the field of positions we are confronted with. Edley (2001) for example looks at how discourse manages dilemmatic settings dealing with masculinities: how do I reconcile my pub brawls and my appreciation of opera? I have to think *into the difference rather than out of* two ideologies. Billig refers to this kind of thought as Protagorean (after the Platonic dialogue involving Protagoras and Meno). Contradiction and resolution marks out a basic kind of movement in the elaboration of discourse, and thought appears to occupy a space between moments in this movement.

Billig (1996) examines styles of argument in many different kinds of tradition including forms to be found in Greek dialogue (protagorean) and Jewish religious practice. He claims that Judaic tradition proceeds by argument (not necessarily showing signs of Aristotelian logic) that the reproduction of the tradition is occasioned by the living thrashing out dilemmatic issues arising from the *Talmud* and in application of its teachings

to contemporary contexts. Billig treats the process of elaboration as a movement on one level only. As one available to dialogic form comprising contradiction and resolution (not necessarily by Aristotelian means). Billig misses the ‘sensuous’ underside of this level i.e. the sub-hermeneutical combining/countervailing movement discussed previously.

Taking Billig’s ideas beyond the single layer of contradicting/resolving: both in Protagorean and Judaic styles of discourse we can identify asymmetries of movement where contradiction/resolution for example become dialectically involved with another layer of action. This ZSM derived insight shows where and how the sensuousness in communication occurs. Heilman’s (1987) dramaturgical study of different Talmudic study groups left him feeling that something was missing from the account which had confined itself to group solidarity and its highly combative argument style. In re-examining his fieldwork Heilman (1984) traces his own engagement with Talmud study groups. Crudely, his awareness had been drawn to a ‘feel’ for the emergence of a religious sensibility *within* but *aside from* the contents of the actors’ arguments that formed the basis of his data. To give an example: one Talmudic story studied in such groups sees two rabbis arguing over a typically Talmudic irresolvable question. The group is given a story about two rabbis arguing about how to tell who is right. The first rabbi eventually says, ‘God will decide between us, if I am right the walls will shake and crumble’. The walls do shake and crumble. The second rabbi, however, looking skywards, addressing God directly, says. ‘You stay out of this, it’s none of your business’. Such stories form the basis of study material that is argued out within different Talmudic study groups. For Heilman the orientation and stance (ironic in this instance) that emerged in his study group’s deliberations was central in socialising the religious sensibility of the group, its Judaic identity and unique grasp of God.

Transposing this to the generic issues raised in this thesis: we see here an example where ironic distance (cf. Giddens, chapter 2) in forms of argumentative exchange becomes the *instrument* of a group’s engagement with what it regards as the ‘sublime’ and not the *outcome*. Ironic distance here contra, Giddens, is not the entropy of solidarity but part of its means, its *techne*. A Jewish sensibility of God (with much dialectical variation: orthodox, liberal etc.) is produced in these ironic orientations. But the orientation is also productive of the solidarity of the group. Billig misses this entirely. Later this observation,

together with the comments made so far on the centrality of artifice, cunning and pretence to social constructionism will lead me to question further Habermas's founding principle of communication itself: the sincerity rule (2.4.3).

## 7.8 Analysing and Synthesizing

In academic life we have some familiarity with this type of movement as involved in processes of 'rationality'. The difficulty is separating the movement from its mode of coherence: rationality. Its deployment clearly has embodied aspects (7.4.2) although its institutional establishment tends to expropriate it from other types of activity (Giddens, 1981; Gadamer, 1981). I want to indicate chiefly why and where it has dialectical involvement with other aspects of practice and how it is implicated in the *We* rather than just being thought of as an individualising and individuating medium. The best thing here is simply to go for the jugular direct and say that even mathematical reasoning is a social activity (cf. Dowling, 1998; Lave, 1988; Merttens and Vass, 1987).

Analysing/synthesizing takes place in highly hermeneutical activities where the mode of elaboration is 'problem-solving' i.e. constructing aspects of situations as rational problems and then setting in train processes to resolve them. In Lave's (1988) ethnographic study of supermarket shopping rationality becomes 'dirty' in everyday practice. Shopping, budgeting and planning appear to us rationally separable activities. However, in practice they turn out to be highly dependent on context, and dialectically involved with each other. Judging the value of a bargain in a supermarket may involve counter-rational decisions: uncle Tom loves Kellog's cornflakes, you need to make up with him after a family row. Asda has an offer of 50 boxes of Asda cornflakes for the price of 6. If you get those you will need to get your teenage son to clear out the garage to find space to put them, which means letting him off being grounded for not doing his homework, which will displease his father having newly instituted the rule.... The outcome to all this may be accountable but not mathematically rational in the narrow sense. The movement of analysing/synthesizing is dialectically related to other modalities of differencing in practice, it takes institutional forms to expropriate rationality from its situated practice and turn this into socially divisive means (cf. Dowling, 1998, 2009). What is seen in rational-mathematical activity is the application of form from one kind of differencing to another.

## 7.9 Summary and reflection on working examples

I have broadened the two-layer reflexivity-skill model of action into a four layer approach that distinguishes between types or modes of embodied and hermeneutical activity. The dialectical relations between these show how we can account for the sensuous and embodied character of action in a way that escapes theorists discussed in Part One. The modalities are heterogeneous layers of action and lack by themselves any co-ordination. Goals, which have primary importance in shaping action in previous approaches, are considered here as secondary, emergent features of action. In practice, modalities of action provide the means of making different aspects of the world tractable by ‘texturing’ it and realising well, and less well-formed aspects to which participants orient themselves in zones of social making. This view is a development of the social constructionist position. The ‘four layer’ approach gives finer resolving power to the analysis of activity, and removes the impermeable membrane separating reflexivity and skill in the traditional approach. The dialectical relation between the layers means that they can be in conflict as well as co-operation. They can give form to circumstances, realise aspects of situations as resources, but also generate routinely indistinct aspects.

With regard to the example cases in chapter 6 we saw there that social, geographical and technological changes to actors’ circumstances appeared to have an effect on their routine activities. The authors of those studies contested whether these effects represent fundamental qualitative changes. Their arguments rest on ‘two-layer model’ of action. I claimed that this made the arguments undecidable. I can now say further that the reason for this is that the analyses we were given are unable to show how different modalities of action have formative consequences on other modalities. I shall take this further in the next chapter as key to the interpretation of those studies is how ‘coherence’ in action is achieved.

## Chapter 8: The Residuum of the Social: Coherence and Subjectivity

### 8.1 Introduction and Aims

This chapter establishes ‘the social’ as an internal, structural feature of activity rather than an external imposition upon it. The standard reflexivity-skill (two-layer) model, in the work of Part One theorists, assumes that the social is a pre-requisite or an outcome of activity (or both as in Giddens’ concept of ‘duality of structure’). This model, derived from Weber, reflected in the work of Parsons, Habermas, Giddens, Bauman, Schutz and Bourdieu, suggests that embodied action is *oriented* by ‘the social’ through the mechanisms of reflexivity. These theorists have different ways of saying the same thing (Part One; chapter 5). ZSM suggests the model has outlived its usefulness for three reasons.

Firstly, we have seen that when we review examples (chapter 6), where the reflexivity-skill model has been complicit in empirical enquiries connected with social erosion, the findings are undecideable with regard to that erosion. Using the assumptions of the two-layer model we cannot interpret the behavioural changes of Savage et al’s (2005) newly arrived Manchester residents decisively. The residents develop new identity routines focussed on newly differentiated aspects of place. We cannot say, however, if the focus on ‘place’ constitutes a geographical resistance to globalisation; or whether the need to develop new reflexive strategies about identity marks a qualitative break of some kind with previous forms of subjectivity.

Secondly, it was argued (chapter 7) that when we look at activity close-up there are good reasons for proposing that ‘reflexivity’ is made up of different kinds of hermeneutical ‘work’. When we look at the embodied stratum, again, we find good reasons for arguing that routinized, skilful activity is made up of layers of very different kinds of embodied ‘work’. Essentially, all these layers of ‘work’ are simply, but strikingly, different ways of producing differentiation, or ‘creating differences’ in the zone of activity. We arrived at the layers by looking at what is left of action when goals are removed as its ordering principle. The zone is a site where subjectivities, identities, physical and informational resources are differentiated into aspects available to actors for further differentiation or specification.

Thirdly, claims and counter-claims about the apocalypse of the social (Part One) rely on an interpretation about what kinds of qualitative changes impact on people's reflexive capacities. Giddens and Bauman (chapter 2) observe that people are engaged in more and different hermeneutical work than at some previous point in history. Bauman and Habermas (chapter 2) find problems at the reflexive/experiential interface: people carry on their activities but with the danger of insincerity, inauthenticity and ontological insecurity and so on. Such interpretations are based on the *two-layer model* insofar as these theorists assume that insincerity, ontological insecurity etc. are re-orientations of hermeneutical work (viewed simply as reflexive attention) towards embodied experience. The two-layer model has always assumed the dialectical relation between reflexivity and skill. ZSM, by contrast, and by virtue of being a *four-layer model*, suggests that there are already too many intrinsically possible ways in which one layer of activity could relate to, give shape to or disrupt another layer.

It follows from the conception that action layers are dialectically related that having four layers *in itself* gives rise to many possibilities by which these layers orient to one another. This motivates my suggestion to review the experiential 'symptoms' to which activity gives rise. Take 'inauthenticity' as an example. Bauman views this (2.5) as a late modern symptom of the way embodied performances (habitus) have become situated with respect to the actor's hermeneutical-reflexive activity. For Bauman the contemporary positioned and defined ego routinely attempts to draw on hermeneutical resources that are, in some way, at variance with how the actor's embodiment is positioned with respect their own ego and others'. This is partly an artefact of the two-layer model. A four-layer model suggests that there is already a large intrinsic capacity for inauthenticity, defined in Bauman's terms, as a permanent feature of everyday practice, not merely a historically occasioned one.

To secure this position, further work needs to be done on the ZSM model beyond arguing the case for a more detailed view of layers of activity. Chapter 7 argued that we view activity as consisting of four disparate and heterogeneous layers. These layers, in a dialectical manner, differentiate aspects of the world giving it texture and tractability for actors' further work of differentiation. Two questions remain. Firstly, what gives

coherence to these disparate layers of activity? Secondly, in what sense is this activity essentially social? ZSM rejects the idea that ‘the social’ gives shape to embodiment via some kind of hermeneutic medium such as linguistic exchange e.g. mothers *talk* to their babies and the latter become social beings. Social theory at large presents us with some variant of that position which is clearly based on a two-layer model. It assumes that because language is socially constituted the socialising of the body *follows*. The same holds for Foucault’s (1976) concept of ‘docility’, i.e. that the shapes given to embodiments arise from the way socially organised meanings and spaces *inscribe* themselves into human bodies via learned skills.

Instead, it is proposed in this chapter that each layer of activity, embodied as well as hermeneutical, gets its coherence and operational structure from a *mode of response*, appropriate to each layer, from other actors. I call this principle *responsivity*. Each layer of activity, or mode of differencing (chapter 7), cannot operate unless it is *enabled* and *completed* in some way. The two-layer model relies almost exclusively on the concept of ‘goals’ to give *primary* enablement and completion to regions of activity. I reduced goals to a secondary role (chapters 5 & 7). ZSM gives the primary role of making activity coherent to responsivity. Activity, in its very structure, looks for, or is constituted by, a responsiveness. This is an adaptation of a phenomenological premise (cf. Schutz, 1973). In quite routine ways an actor’s incipient movements toward action ‘call on’ the co-operative responsiveness of others to complete them (cf Bakhtin, 1986), or at least further specify them (Shotter, 1993). The importance of responsivity defined this way, is important in actor-network theory (Latour, 2005). In all these cases the arguments focus on how ‘subjects’ and other subjects or ‘objects’ complete one another. Dyb and Halford (2009: 235) quote the example of how an asthmatic’s aspirator is not a pre-established, ‘finished product’. They claim the object ‘is brought into being in specific times and places’. This idea makes use of the phenomenological premise that subjects and objects are each brought to completion via an interaction. But it is not an interaction between already completed things as pre-established scientific facts. It is rather the way an interaction of a special kind affords a response to the contingencies of subjects and objects.

At the hermeneutical end, the structure of language ought to be seen in the same way according to Bakhtin (1986) and Harris (1987). They argue its organisation makes more

sense when viewed as based on contingent responsiveness rather than as having been ‘generated by underlying systems of grammar and directed toward goals’. The structure of both language and skilled action has always been something of a mystery when viewed as a nested system of goal oriented skills. Lashley (1951) stated the problem as that of pursuing an account of language and skill as ‘serially ordered behaviour’ generated by ‘something’ that cannot be described. It was not possible to describe a system capable of generating what was observed in practice. The mistake was assuming that behaviour is a matter of individuals possessing all that is necessary to generate their involvement with their environment (Shotter, 1984; Harris, *ibid*; Gibson, 1977; 1979).

The implication of the principle of responsivity, by contrast, is that the shape of action is always primarily social in its structure. This means that constructive capacity relies on human or physical otherness to order and effect its operation. This chapter sets out in more detail what this means and what is involved.

The present task is to do three things. **Firstly**, I account for the way subjects and objects come about in ordered ways as a function of how ‘coherence’ (see below) is established. Activity is multi-layered and heterogeneous. Subjects and objects undergo formation during activities. Following these statements, action, as a process of ‘social making’ is always profoundly complex. ‘Coherence’ is the term I use to describe the quality of ‘social making’ where, for all practical purposes, actors manage to carry on in relatively ordered ways in the circumstances that embed them.

The notion of coherence requires that the traditional sociological reliance on ‘rules’ governing action be revised. So, **secondly**, I revisit the concept of rules from the ZSM perspective. I examine ‘rules’, in the light of the discussion of differencing (chapter 7) and coherence (8.2). The emphasis is to see rules as a way in which activity can take, or be given, form. The standard two-layer model that takes rules as, for example, enabling/constraining, does not help me understand at all the problems posed by Part One theorists (5.3.3 and fig. 5.3). The two-layer approach, as we saw in Part One, struggles with: ironic distance from rules (Giddens, Berger et al); the sincerity or insincerity of their application (Habermas); the need ‘to search’ for them (Bauman), the need to make them (Shotter) or the performative over-alignment with them (Baudrillard).

**Thirdly**, and finally, ZSM presents a picture of multi-layered action striving for coherence in its engagement with otherness. This gives rise to many ‘orientational possibilities’ of subjects, objects and behaviours. By going to this level of detail we go beyond habitus. A new account of ‘rules’ based on Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) work on the how people engage with the imaginary is drawn on. This is used to explain how subjects are produced and how coherence comes about routinely. The imaginary, as a feature of rule structure and rule origin, provides for the fact that action always treads a thin line between the so-called apocalyptic symptoms of modernity and their opposites. In other words, my final claim is that what Part One theorists describe as the outcome of late modern conditions, I affirm as permanent structural features of practical action.

## **8.2 Defining Coherence**

Actors are involved and engaged in the world in the world at a number of levels. I claim there are more than two levels to appreciate. The two-layer model assumes that actors are directed towards goals. These give coherence to that activity. Actors pursue their goals through embodied skill and reflexivity. Chapter 7 presented the four-layer model of basic activity. ‘Goal’, as an aspect of the world that needs to be constructed, was removed as the principle by which activity achieves coherence and form. In the four-layer model each layer is specialised in form and function and is linked problematically to other layers. In practice they develop dialectical relations. The problem of giving to shape to action arises and is less certain than proposed in the two-layer model. Garfinkel’s (1990) notion of ‘good repair’, and the problems that beset it, has perhaps deeper roots than he imagined. Social activity is fraught intrinsically with dissolution and fragmentation. This is simply a fact of its multi-layered, heterogeneous organisation. This is not a late modern condition. This fragmentation is a pre-condition of activity, subjectivity and their organization as described throughout chapter 7. The question now is to ask what kinds of process are available to give shape and form to activity? The answer is that coherence is given to each layer by a form of ‘external response’ unique to each level. Coherence comes from a source external to the actor and has two dimensions: recognition and responsivity.

This view is a development of Lacan's (1977) argument. He proposed that the originary fragmentation of the body is made coherent by a developing subjective grasp of its wholeness in an external specular image. At a crucial moment in early socialisation, experience of one's fragmentary, uncoordinated body is given sudden coherence via the reflection of an 'apparent whole' in a mirror where this new visual differentiation becomes 'my' body. One gains control of the body via an external image of its wholeness.

Importantly, the subject is constituted through an image outside of its self, that is, in an inaugurating moment the subject gets 'its definition' from an image alienated from the subject's voluntarily controlled activity. To be clear, the external image is 'an otherness' which permits the uncoordinated body to have an increasing degree of control and coherence. For Lacan this produces a subject dominated by external images until such times as the subject gains any coherence at a symbolic, or hermeneutical level. Giddens (1979) recruits this latter stage into his theory of the subject quoting Lacan's famous line 'the I comes about through the discourse of the other' (ibid: 38). That means that Giddens wanted to acknowledge the argument that a social self is produced as a 'coherence' *through the responsivity of an otherness*. Knorr Cetina (2003), in her discussion of 'post-social relations', makes similar use of this arguing that the stability of the subject comes to rely on image identifications that can be transferred to other visual media such as film.

Attractive though these accounts are I feel they are ultimately unreliable to account for everyday practical coherence because they are too dependent on theoretical work that focuses on either language, images or both. These foci derive from the dominance of the two-layer, hermeneutic/reflexivity model. It is not obvious, for example, how Giddens or Knorr Cetina would deal with Dyb and Halford's (2009) example of how asthmatic subjects and aspirators produced coherence of the kind under discussion here. Instead ZSM proposes the following modification. Subjectivity arises in a process where a response from otherness (natural, artificial or social) *is made contingent on an actor's incipient action*. Recall that incipient action is made up of four layers of 'differencing': syncopating and phasing kinesis; countervailing-combining; contradicting-resolving and analysing synthesizing (chapter 7). These are simply open modes of active engagement with the world. But they need to be completed by a response of some kind appropriate to each layer in order that action has 'bite' or 'involvement' or tractability for the actor. The

completing response comes from outside, it is ‘other’. So, it leaves us with a permanent structural fault line at the heart of all action.

In Lacan’s terms what completes an action, gives it coherence and order, is at the same moment, alienating. ZSM is extending the consequences of this into all layers of hermeneutical and embodied work. At a kinesic-embodied level an aspirator directly responds to the process of difficult breathing. At a countervailing-embodied level the patient ‘experiments’ with rates of breathing in order to find out more about that breathing as a function of the way the aspirator works. At a contradicting-hermeneutical level the patient negotiates, and differentiates the discourse generated in the doctor’s surgery in order to get better purchase on the character of the affliction and how to be a morally coherent ‘asthmatic subject’. Strong (1988) argues, from doctor-patient conversational data, that spoken exchanges often work in this way. Responses are part of a sensuous practice whereby doctor and patient use conversational countervailing *instrumentally* to ‘feel out’ new moral positions, rather than simply conveying information. Strong’s work, for example, shows doctors using, what I call, ‘countervailing sequences’. The ostensible topic of conversation is about what mothers feed their children, but in the *pattern* of the exchange the doctor tests for the mothers’ orientation to medical knowledge, and the mother tests for the doctor’s perception of her mothering. The unfolding of such exchanges shows a multi-layer engagement as they hermeneutically access information, but also sensuously and instrumentally explore respective moral positionings.

Without this responsivity, activity cannot become coherent or gain purchase on its environment. However, a further stipulation is necessary. It is not *any* response that will suffice to complete any move towards engagement. There also needs to be ‘recognition’. It was stated above that whatever responds to a movement must do so ‘contingently’ (cf. Wood, 2006). It would be rather pointless if an aspirator did not function so as to be in tune with the phasing of breathing. Just as in Lacan’s mirror image the body gets a sense of completeness because the image in the mirror makes itself contingent on the movement of the actor. This implies ‘recognition’. In normal communication, speakers enter into a kinesic rhythm of exchange; they rupture, countervail and contradict etc. but they do so *contingently* on each others’ responses. This constitutes the *recognition* of the other. This gives a sense of completeness as any image in a mirror would do to a child’s body.

Research on socialisation, read in this light, serves to illustrate the processes involved. Recognition of subjectivity is achieved through response (cf. Shotter and Gregory, 1976; Lock, 1978; 1980; Shotter, 1984; 1989; 1999). For example, in conversations between mothers and children learning to talk there develops a progressive differentiation of both world and subjects. This happens typically around verb forms: a child says: 'want'; a parent responds: 'want what?'. From there: 'want that', 'who wants that?', 'I want that'. The responsive questioning in elaborate versions of this basic form define 'I's further in their coherence. The 'I' becomes an accountable aspect of the zone of activity, separate from, but related to, the consequences of the activity. Also, such exchanges further differentiate and specify objects as aspects of the actors' shared world. This is quite different to the assumptions of Giddens and Habermas in Part One (Piaget's approach discussed in chapters 2 and 5). For Piaget subjects and objects are already coherent. Piaget explores subjectivity by asking children directly what they 'think' about already defined objects and events. Investigation of early conversations shows, by contrast, the role of the other in recognising and completing activities. It shows also the necessary social element of action. The effect of another responding to me is that they 're-distribute' (chapter 7) the organisation of my activity into a responsive form. I gain purchase on the world that becomes more textured and, as a subject, I gain recognition as an aspect of the situation in which I am embedded.

This position is distinguishable from Mead's (1934) who is also central to the arguments built by Habermas and Symbolic Interactionists. Mead famously contrasts the use of meaning-making by machine, where meanings are all defined in advance, and by humans where for the latter "there cannot be symbols unless there are responses" (Mead, 1934: 190). However, Mead's view of a socially organized system of symbols and their deployment is geared towards showing responsiveness, but only through the *application of already-constituted* meanings. The use of symbols in S.I. is a mediation of reality rather than a productivity within it; meanings are required to 'control responses' (ibid.: 132). Meanings may be 'negotiated', but essentially this means finding pre-existent labels for already-defined events. In contrast, the approach pursued here is that we do not first relate to a symbol system on our way to dealing with reality and otherness (Volosinov, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978; Silverman and Torode, 1980). Objects appear in the Meadian universe as

the symbol system lends them merely an epiphenomenal significance and distal unity (Mead, 1934: 130ff.). Mead did not see the system potentially failing in this task. We cannot take symbolic interactionism beyond the idea of a ‘symbolic *mediation* of social and natural realities’. Having said that, there is much in Mead of contemporary importance.

In agreement with Lacan, coherence has a price: *alienation*. In this regard ZSM sides with Berger’s (ch.3; Berger, 1967) first position that alienation is primary rather than contingent on history (Berger et al, 1974). The view presented here is that modern forces of entropy do not fragment what is already whole, ending with subjects experiencing alienation. Rather, the basis of activity is itself complex and fragmented, always requiring coherence. The *four-layer model* of activity proposes that we need to acknowledge different modes by which coherence is given to each layer. The four modes are shown in Table 8.1 below. Each mode of coherence is a process by which the incipient activity of an actor gains *responsivity* and *recognition* from an otherness (i.e. a human other, or natural or physical other).

H-E	dispersing	collecting	Mode of Coherence
H	<i>analysing</i>	<i>synthesizing</i>	<i>logos</i>
	<i>contradicting</i>	<i>resolving</i>	<i>topos</i>
E	<i>countervailing</i>	<i>combining</i>	<i>tact</i>
	<i>syncopating kinesis</i>	<i>phasing kinesis</i>	<i>care</i>

**Table 8.1 H-E continuum, d-c modalities of differencing and their modes of coherence**

Social activity normally consists of all four layers. The task below, however, is to describe each type of coherence mode (care, tact, topos and logos) in isolation. Each mode establishes how responsivity and recognition are conferred on the different layers of activity identified in chapter 7. The emphasis is on theoretical precedence for each mode in turn.

## *Care*

Care is a sensuous response to stances, bodily positions and movements of others. In particular we have awareness of ‘kinesic phasing’ (7.5). Any movement an actor makes shows a ‘proleptic structure’. Any spontaneous, incipient movement must remain sensitive and anticipate responses that enable it to become appropriate to its setting. At the kinesic level actors respond to and recognise the differences that bodily presences make or intend. A midwife has a sensitivity and emotional solidarity with a silent patient (chapter 6); she recognises the implications of subtle changes to the setting in a way that a distant clinician, intervening in the setting via digital media, can access only hermeneutically. The clinician can recognise the personhood of the patient through hermeneutical or imaginary means, but the kinesic level recognition would require a significant enhancement of existing technology.

Care is a ‘concernfulness for concern’ in its most elementary form. Foucault (1988: 25) and Heidegger (1980) suggest: “taking care of activity” itself, being mindful of its form, is something towards which actors are directed in everyday routines. Taking care of oneself involves the recognition by the other, Foucault argues, because, for oneself, there may be no known goal to shape a performance. Care directs the other towards us so that *they* can give form to our activity as it elaborates. At his most Heideggerian, Foucault draws on an account of how Socrates directs concern towards another to enable the care of that self in circumstances where there was no hermeneutical knowledge about where this should lead. In the absence of ability to provide closure to the other’s activity through hermeneutical means order prevails through care. Foucault (1988) argues that activity shows structure that others can attend to and complete without that activity having any hermeneutical dimension. Although kinesic level activity is most often accompanied by hermeneutics, here I want to establish care in isolation of this. Mothers often imagine their babies want definite things so they are able to supply a ‘structuring concernfulness in their responses in the absence of either ‘knowing the object of the action’ (Shotter, 1984).

### *Tact*

Tact can be defined as, “a particular sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations, and how to behave in them, for which we cannot find any knowledge from general principles. Hence an essential part of tact is inexplicability and inexpressibility.” (Gadamer, 1979: 16).

Gadamer observes that being tactful may involve passing over features of activity and leaving them unremarked and unsaid. Tact refers to aspects of situations involving actors in exchange that do not necessarily achieve hermeneutical level recognition. That is, aspects may not be marked by hermeneutical reflection, but, nevertheless, constitute subjects and objects as features of situations. Importantly such ill-defined things still remain material to situations. All constituents of the zone have to orient to them as much as anything else. This is a pre-strategic view of tact when compared to Goffman’s view of tact as a dramaturgical strategy. I do not see tact as a part of a performer’s toolbox that enables good performances to be kept in play because everyone understands everything that is happening at unspoken levels in all situations. Actors may be aware of unspoken aspects of situations that are not available for reflection. A ZSM perspective sees tact as part of the ‘formative making’ and constitution of the social event itself. Berger and Luckmann’s (chapter 3) approach to the social construction of reality suggests that whatever new aspects are constructed in reality by participants and that emerge in situations are subject to hermeneutical processes. This gives emergent properties forms that can be revisited by actors subsequently. However, relatively differentiated aspects of situations revisited by actors may occur simply at embodied levels and remain there without ‘hermeneutical definition’ (Vass, 1998; Scholfield, 2003; Gross, 2009). The fact that embodied, but unexpressed, emergent facts can co-exist with hermeneutical definitions of situations indicates that these layers could be at variance with one another and enable one aspect of activity to take an orientational viewpoint of another. This leads to an interesting *endemic* property of activity. Since the different layers of activity could take stances toward each other and be at variance, this suggests that guile and pretence are structurally inbuilt in the organization of activity.

From Goffman, tact already, at the embodied level, constitutes *a foundational pretence* in activity. Recalling his data (Goffman, 1976: 226) from interviews with female sex workers who suggested that the exercise of tact with regard to the sexual performances of their

clients was central to the constitution of the activity, indeed its vigour seemed to depend on it. For present purposes we note that tact enables the shared completion and recognition of constructed aspects of situations that can remain, unnamed as ongoing features of situations.

### *Topos*

People respond to the attempts by others to ‘make’ i.e. ‘assemble’ and connect in their practices. Actors identify ‘appropriate’ means to assist, or countervail, connections within an ‘affordance-landscape’ of connective opportunities (cf. Shotter, 1993b). Connecting brings with it greater ‘social definition’, or recognition, of putative social identity and position. The cut and thrust of interaction has its dynamic from actors that ‘countervail and resolve’ the connections that others make. This is a method for people to understand how they are all now situated with each other and any newly made material. At this level the role of a hermeneutical process, like language, reveals its character as a testing *instrument* before it is a conveyor of information. Hermeneutics is tasked with defining and unifying activity. *Topos* is closest to the notion of ‘thematic unities’ as found in Schutz and Luckmann (1973, 1989) and Habermas (1987). So, we need to relate ‘making’ to how it is ordered and unified by a ‘theme’.

Production has to be accountable and intelligible, and the latter means the capacity to grasp the identity of the other in relation to what is being produced. Any productive labour emerges from the organisation of combinatorial activity made coherent through the intervention of others. This has to be not only socially derived but the labour must show, in its form, its social ‘location’ or place. Combining can never be random, its intelligibility and accountability are central to its coherence. This is tantamount to the original definition of *techne* (cf. 7.6; Plato, 1997 *Phaedrus* 270b; Aristotle, 1970 *Ethics* 1140a). *Techne* straddles practical combining with the more intellectual form of resolving. In accepting, what appear to us as, each other’s contributions to the process of construction we have to find a legitimate place for them. This is the same as ‘recognising’ them. The phenomenological constructionists like Schutz saw that human productions, to be coherently viewed as such, need to be seen as part of a ‘thematic unity’. This is not automatic. There is an inbuilt anxiety about this. This arises because we realise that the

conferment of unity or coherence comes from a position outside our own making. Therefore the responsivity we require to make always takes us the limit conditions of the zone of operation (7.3).

Sensitivity to the fact that we are in some sense aware of an otherness at the core of what it is to make anything explains the seriousness with which human societies regard the production process. Often it remains a mystery subject to mythologizing. It is for this, and the following reasons, that I depart from the philosophical assumptions of Latour (2005) and his view of assembling. I have already discussed the troublesome relation between *techne* and *tribe* (art and cunning, see 7.6). It is worth pursuing an example of what is revealed in the way societies mythologize the production process. The otherness and human limits are given tangible form in religious belief. In Greek thought the techniques of making involve an awareness of *foundational* artifice and trickery, as chronic obverses to ‘authenticity’, and are structural constituents of making (Vernant, 2006). The sin of Prometheus<sup>5</sup> is not the theft of fire (literally the means of production) from the Gods and giving it to humans. The problem comes from compromising its ‘natural authenticity’ since, by theft, he permitted the “substitution of a *technique* for making fire in the place of natural fire” (ibid.: 265). Having control over a ‘natural process’ like fire seems to domesticate the ‘natural other’. This changes the limit conditions of human making. Subsequently, human making is not a human-Nature co-operation, but a human-only substitution, and therefore becomes ‘artifice’.

Technical artifice (simulation) and technical intelligence were strictly separated in Plato (this was part of his justification for defining the social class of artisans in Athens<sup>6</sup>). The growing importance of technology, its role in the city’s growing division of labour, meant that a deal needed to be struck between Gods (the original controllers of limit conditions) and humans (those previously subject to limit conditions). The deal permits humans to make things and employ techniques but only *within the auspices and limits* of the polis. In other words, in the Greek case, the polis itself became the horizon and *topos* (cf. Habermas) which enabled the intelligibility and accountability of technological making.

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<sup>5</sup> Prometheus is also the God of ‘making’, having made humans from clay. By virtue of having ‘forethought’ he was also considered ‘crafty’.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the division of labour in Athens proscribed the involvement of artisans in politics in Plato’s *Republic*

Labour and product must always show in their form their subordination to these auspices, or the deal between Gods and humans is felt to be broken.

Part of the intelligibility of what is produced is also a judgement about, and recognition of, the producer, author or speaker. Contradicting is a sensuous ‘testing’ procedure (7.7) that recognises a producer with regard to their limiting conditions (literally, the limits of the polis in this case). The procedure searches for simulation (and signs of dissimulation in the producer/author/speaker) in the first instance, as part of a strategy of understanding. An example illustrates this in speech production.

Socrates is accused, by the polis, of corrupting the young men of Athens who are viewed as merely ‘copying’ his style of argument and upsetting people in the elaboration of their beliefs and ideas. The fear is of the deployment of an artificial technique that does not impose limits on itself, that dissimulates its undermining purpose by questioning everything and so compromises the ‘deal’ that the polis has struck (Plato, *Euthyphro*) Socrates is accused, literally, of impiety by engaging in a style of speech.

Recall Baudrillard’s (chapter 4) notion of the increase and transformation of simulation alongside the growth of capitalism. Rather than seeing it as a consequence of developing modernity we should see it as something intrinsic to the nature of activity itself. The problem of simulation should be first thought of as a problem associated with the social recognition of making and what is involved in connecting *in itself*. Structurally, simulation is an outcome not of history but of how activity is itself constituted against the limit conditions imposed by whatever deal has been struck by human society to recognise the production of its members. The fear of dissimulation goes back much further than Baudrillard imagines. I would say that the structural conditions of activity always give rise to parody, irony.

*Topos* lends form to activity by providing unity with reference to the limit conditions that circumscribe both the making and the maker. It is for this reason, if I may add, that Garfinkel finds Schutz profound. Quite literally, engaging in social events contrived to interfere with their intelligibility may seem entertaining on one level, but at another we are brought up against the limit conditions that constitute the social itself.

### *Logos*

Logos gives form through developing hermeneutical techniques that impose rules that apprenticed users have to respect and subordinate themselves to. This occurs through coming to practise the application of rules in situations that recognise both the applicability of the rule and those applying it. We are used to this in academic life: learning to see situations as social scientists, or mathematicians requires imposing a set of specialist reflexive techniques. With logos the legitimacy of the user is imbricated with the correct application of the technique and the legitimacy of its deployment. Habermas assumes the socially pervasive form of logos as basic to human communication.

Logos, as a process that gives rational unity and coherence to human behaviour, has already been given far too much work to do in social scientific accounts of human action. We are too familiar with hermeneutical practices of social accountability and reflexivity enshrined in language. My claim has been that the ‘two-layer model’ of reflexivity-skill, that over-equates reflexivity with logos, is too simplistic to account for how, where and why human behaviour is oriented and achieves social realisation. Western intellectual culture is hyper-sensitive to the grounding conditions of rationality. Human constructive capacity is thought to be everywhere under the auspices of *ratio* (however imperfectly). Weber understood human action to take all its form from a pre-given logos. Schutz assumed we make sense of each other’s behaviour by applying logos to it through reflexive powers. Habermas argues that without a grounding logos to appeal to the social loses its connectivity and fragments.

My argument is that we are not entirely reliant on logos to confer sense, unity and coherence on what might otherwise be random behaviour. There are other processes beyond those ‘high hermeneutical ones that Weber, Habermas and Giddens rely on. Sometimes people need to refer to what they perceive as the ‘rational-grounding conditions’ of the situation that embeds them, and in order to interpret, what appear as, the ‘events’ leading up to the current situation. Logos operates in the zone of actors’ operations by constituting and ordering these ‘events’ into rationally-grounded ones. Bauman (chapter 2) situates many contemporary communication problems at this level. He finds interlocutors having interpersonal difficulties because they do not share the rules

for constituting events in the same way. Worse, it may be that when looking for rational ways to continue they find and apply rules towards which they take ironic stances. Again I see nothing *necessarily* new in this. Logos, as a process for responding to, and recognising, others and spontaneous events, is always set within and against the other processes we have looked at so far. Indeed, to be *solely* rational requires special effort and one must detach logos from other features of activity.

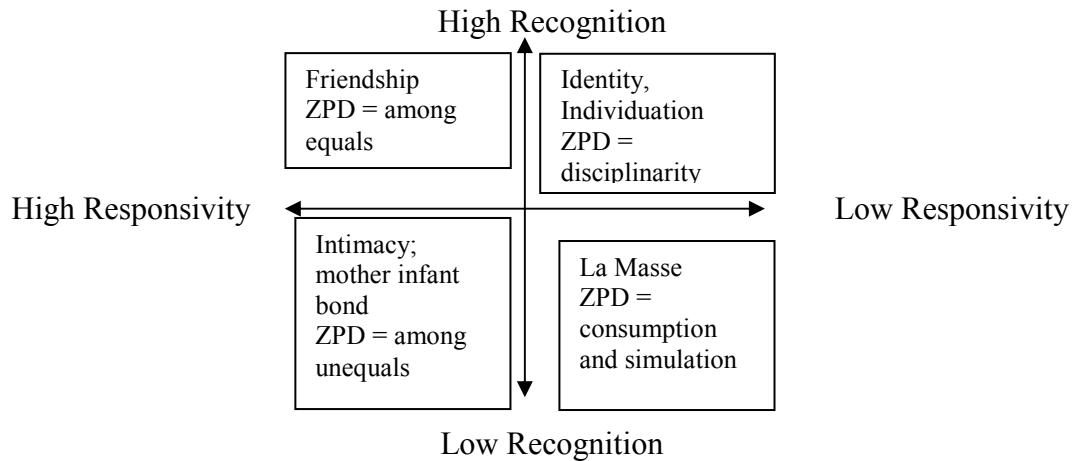
Contexts dominated by rational techniques may actually come to constitute ‘marginal’ areas of social life (cf. Giddens, 1990; Vass, 1993) where other modalities of coherence have greater bearing. From a marginal space, in otherwise rationalised modernity, logos can take on the appearance of another rhetoric. The rationality that, say, educationists deploy to argue for a particular approach to education (children should play to learn) becomes a ‘rhetoric’ when situated with a more hegemonic rational argument (children should be instructed). The availability of these competing *logoi* are structurally *oriented* to one another. Actors drawing on more than one logos are prone to a late modern feeling of irony, simply because the *logoi* co-exist. I say this in contrast to Bauman and Giddens who focus more on the effect of actors using analysing-synthesizing as a means to redistribute the contents of their everyday problems. The possibility of coherence though logos seems to have an ‘as if’ relation to practice because there appear to be many of them. The ‘as if’ is a virtuality to which we become oriented, but cannot inhabit.

### **8. 3 Coherence: Configuring Recognition and Responsivity**

I examined the processes of coherence. These processes, which enable the completion of all incipient and inchoate activity, come from otherness, outside the individual agent. Recognition produces subjectivities for all participants in a zone of activity. At the lower levels of embodiment, kinesis (chapter 7), for example, this meant permitting some emergent aspects of situations, which appear to actors as ‘syncopations’ in the rhythm of their exchanges, to become the elementary realization of subjectivity. A patient’s bodily discomfort during a medical examination, if ‘recognised’, will further define the character of the activity and subjectivise participants. In research on mother-child conversation, bodily syncopations are central to the emergence of subjectivity (chapter 7). This socialisation of the body through kinesic recognition occurs in all social situations.

Recognition at the hermeneutical level, on the other hand, implies the alignment of subjectivity, discourse and social position (Torfing, 1999; Giddens, 1979; Foucault, 1982; Shotter, 1984). Zones of activity involve hermeneutical work such as symbolic exchange, or, as Habermas would have it, communicative action. But part of the work of such exchanges is based on specifying the ‘who’ that speaks. Identity is not merely an outcome of exchange, but central to its dynamic responsivity. The intelligibility of talk is dependent on how the speakers become ‘aspects’ or ‘figures’ in the zone of activity and how recognition permits this specification. Goffman (1973) speaks of the relationship between Audience and Performance. Developing this idea: any performance is shaped by the way an audience, present or implied, makes the activity intelligible. The latter involves *recognising* emergent features of the activity through a *responsiveness* to them. Turning aspects of situations into aspects, subjects and features is entirely dependent on the audience response. Even an individual agent who sits and thinks is dependent on producing a performance that is shaped by an implied audience. The ZSM logic here is that ‘Audience’ constitutes the coherence of the ‘Performing’. Scott (2004) looking at the phenomenon of shyness argues that the ‘audience’ of the shy person constitutes the identity of competence in the non-shy other. This ‘constituting role’ of otherness is missing from the accounts of communication examined by theorists in Part One. While I have used Goffman’s terms here, he does not appear to be aware of the mechanism by which otherness lends shape to actors’ performances, or provides them with specification of their subjectivities.

The two-layer, reflexivity/skill, model of action gives us a very limited approach to the interpretation of the variety of types of human encounter. We are limited to the goals of the participants, the contents of their reflexive powers and their skill-sets. The ZSM four-layer model, by contrast, provides for a range of ways of viewing actors’ routine modes of active encounter. For example, when looking at the ways in which ‘shape’ and coherence can be given to action, actors’ subjectivities etc. in zones of activity, we can apply the continua of responsivity and recognition. ZSM proposes that any social situation will be typified by variations in the quality of coherence given activity in it. There can be high and low responsivity and high and low recognition in any given situation (Fig. 8.1)



**Fig. 8.1 Typical forms of coherence practice expressed as dimensions of recognition and responsivity**

The four layers of activity met in chapter 7 can be made coherent in a variety of ways. The variety is determined by degrees of relationship between responsivity and recognition (see fig. 8.1). Instead of arguing that hermeneutical level processes are responsible for giving shape to activity (reflexivity/skill model), ZSM proposes that there are a number of possibilities: coherence with high responsiveness and high recognition; low responsiveness with high recognition and so on. This ZSM approach theoretically unifies what has been a series of disparate observations of human practice hitherto. For example, Foucault's (1973) notion of 'gaze' has been defined as a modality in which expertise can 'individuate' a subject i.e. define them without engaging their responses. *This is an example of 'high recognition' but 'low responsivity'*. The process of recognition and response works to define and contain the other.

Baudrillard's theoretical concerns (chapter 4) were about the way in which human encounters have become 'inert' and tactical i.e. showing *low responsiveness and low recognition* in my terms. Note that in the ZSM schema this is an always-present possibility.

Both Schutz (1964) and Bauman (1993) refer to forms of sociality and activity that *de-differentiate*, or submerge, individuality into a an 'undifferentiated We'. In his essay on 'ensembles' Schutz (1964: 159 ff.) describes complexly co-ordinated activity but that at the same time mysteriously submerges sense of individuality. In ZSM terms this is simply

another condition of coherence: *high responsivity with low recognition*. Bauman sees this as a historical development, but essentially it is an permanent possibility of practice. Vygotsky's theory of socialisation draws on references to forms of practice that have strikingly similar characteristics to high responsivity/low recognition in the ZSM model. Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) refers to special circumstances where a socialising intimacy and joint action between a more and less skilful actors are engaged on a joint task. For Vygotsky in the ZPD a more capable other can structure a performance, make it coherent, in order for the less capable to perform task. Vygotsky used the word *instruction* to do the work of coherence, i.e. structuring performance. Empirical examination of joint actions (Vygotsky, 1978) typically shows heightened responsivity but low recognition and the separation of the other. Any identification of individuality that occurs merely enables the turn-taking movement of the activity.

If, however, the actors in a ZPD are teacher and pupil and the setting of the task is in a school, then the contours of the coherence shift towards one of disciplinarity: there is a stronger institutional need to define and establish features of performance and interaction outcomes to specific identities. The situation becomes closer to that of *high recognition but low responsivity*. Here we recognise Foucault's domain of interest insofar as the teacher-pupil performance becomes a feature of identity individuation (in accordance with the 'truth of the regime'). Neither Vygotsky nor Foucault have identified that their definitions of 'instruction' and 'disciplinarity' respectively can be viewed as instances of one another. The ZSM framework is showing these concerns as varieties of one another.

Extrapolating the dimensions of fig. 8.1 further we see the possibility of *high recognition and responsivity*. One of Montaigne's (1991: 211 ff.) classes of friendship describe what at first blush seems to be the same as Giddens' (1992) notion of a pure relationship insofar as there is a grounding equality in which each has a special recognition. But this is not a recognition of 'needs' which Montaigne finds somewhat mundane. Identification of interpersonal 'needs' might be symptomatic of actors individuating one another without much responsiveness. Instead, if recognition is a grounded responsiveness we arrive at something altogether different. Montaigne terms, a kind of 'folly' where one engages with the other where that other has the responsibility for one's own definition – 'he knows me

better than I know myself'. Montaigne argues such a seamless pairing has no need of a 'social bond', such a friendship 'loosens all other bonds'. Montaigne had such a friendship. His experience of it enabled him to make a classification of types of bond and how these types of association offer different modalities of recognition of the other. His discussion of a friendship that heightens recognition through a loss of mundane identity but that also manifests a high degree of responsiveness, while perhaps rare empirically, certainly fits theoretically in the description of coherence here. Recognition, therefore, is not always individuation in the Foucauldian sense; the latter is merely one possible strategy of it.

Foucault's 'individuation' suggests that where there is fragmentary activity it can be made to cohere through disciplining. Foucault's interest pursues disciplining as the main strategy of coherence in zones of human activity. It is little wonder that Foucault finds scant room for the responsiveness of the subject in social life other than their 'docility'. This is an unresponsive individuating form of recognition that takes the productive capacity of the subject and ensures that it coheres to pre-determined, hermeneutical forms (usually based in repositories of expert knowledge). Recognition working from hermeneutically organized knowledge serves, in Foucault's one-sided view, to fix identity and body via the shaping of capacities.

In summary, this section has argued that what different influential theories, based on the two-layer reflexivity/skill model, have said about the shaping of human joint action have actually identified different 'parts of the same elephant'. ZSM proposes that by showing the relationship between recognition and responsiveness, we can theoretically link these processes or strategies of shaping (i.e. that which gives coherence to action from the vantage point of otherness) and have a much more versatile approach.

#### **8.4 Giving shape to activity through indicative and virtual rules**

So far I have identified four types of 'action-layer' (chapter 7) and four strategies for making each layer tractable (8.2). Action as a whole is given shape by a process of coherence. This process consists of a variety of ways in which otherness responds and recognizes the inchoate actor's activity (8.3). It has also been claimed that the layers of activity are in dialectical relation with one another. Thus, kinesic phasing, for example,

and the circumstances that shape it can impact on the way the other layers become elaborated. This ZSM, multi-faceted picture of activity shows more ‘fractal’ detail than, say, Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Therefore, we are in a better position to grasp something missing from Bourdieu, and heavily obscured in two-layer, reflexivity/skill models. We can better appreciate that different sub-processes and sub-features within activity can take up different *orientations* to each other (cf. the problems raised by Mouzelis (2007) about Bourdieu; chapter 6). The fact that the evolving structure of activity can take up a complex series of different orientations should alert us to many of the issues connected with experience raised in Part One. For example, one may organize one’s activity by subordinating oneself to a rule and following it. Clearly, there is always going to be a correlation between the description of the rule and the order inherent in an act that is guided by it: this is Weber’s basic case (5.3). However, we were at a loss (Chapter 5) to accommodate a possible series of changes to *how one might be situated with respect to the rule*. I may be confident with it, later unconfident; my grasp of it may become ironic, over-zealous, or I may, as Bauman argues, indiscriminately ‘grab’ at it and so on. These kinds of experience were often taken by Part One theorists to be symptomatic of socially apocalyptic, historical changes to the conditions of activity. The ZSM viewpoint puts the case now, however, that the very fractal nature of the organization of activity means that changing orientations within activity is endemic to activity structure. In what follows I develop this proposition further.

A couple planning a marriage but then beginning to look at themselves from the point of view of a pre-nuptial agreement may find the way in which their joint activity elaborates changes. Embodied routines that interfaced comfortably with established hermeneutical resources in the relationship may become ‘re-oriented’ with respect to each other. Responsivity and recognition of emergent aspects of the new situation may change mode of management. The pre-nuptial agreement might warrant a shift to a more ‘tactical’ style of coherence to action (low responsivity/low recognition; 8.3). Such a change might further warrant a new orientation towards previously established features of the relationship.

As Torfing (1999) argues and also Vass (1998) social practice gives rise to phenomena which ‘dislocate’ structure and evade symbolisation (hermeneutical intervention), but, I emphasise, to which we remain oriented nevertheless in the further development of the

relationships involved. I refer to these as ‘rationally unclear phenomena’ insofar as they appear intersubjectively and may be talked about endlessly. “What’s this thing that’s crawled out between us?” the English wife of an Israeli journalist asks, in a play (Vass, 1998), some time after they have married and gone to live in Jerusalem. He, quite matter of factly, told her that he must do military service and this may involve shooting Palestinians. The relationship is transformed by the appearance of something newly introduced, previously not a feature of the relationship and becomes something not available to hermeneutical resolution. The remark made by the wife leads to an almost palpable ‘thing’ that cannot be resolved. Yet, the couple remains acutely aware of, and orientated towards *it*, in all further communication before ending their marriage.

The ‘thing’ in the above example is an aspect of the situation experienced at ‘embodied’ levels and is kept in play through combining-countervailing moves (7.6) by the actors. At hermeneutical levels the situation appears simply as one where two kinds of rule clash: the rules governing a good Israeli citizen and the rules established to date in the character of the relationship. What emerges, however, are the ways the emergent aspects of the situation change the way all these new developments can be made coherent. Effectively, the strategy for making communication coherent means switching from high interpersonal recognition and high responsivity to high recognition but low responsivity. The rules themselves become magnified, disciplinary instruments. The difficulty with this account arises from the fact we regard types of rules as belonging to distinct reflexive-hermeneutical, or embodied domains. It is difficult to see how a rule becomes a tangible aspect of an embodied situation that can re-orient the structure of activity as a whole. So, I need to re-examine the notion of rules and argue that the important point about them is what happens when actors sub-ordinate themselves to rules. The sub-ordination involved operates differently in each layer of activity.

Giddens (1984: 18 ff) argues that rules must always be seen in relation to resources available to activity. The structuration account (reflexivity/skill model) depends on drawing upon rules and resources in the elaboration of activity. In outlining his view of rules Giddens distinguishes between different kinds of rules (the rule defining checkmate in chess is...; a formula  $c = 2\pi r$ ; as a rule R gets up at 6 AM everyday; it is a rule all workers must clock in at 8 AM etc.). Drawing, like Habermas, on Searle he distinguishes,

among these examples, between constitutive and regulative rules in search of a type of rule that fits the structuration viewpoint of how rules and resources elaborate and reproduce the conditions of everyday activity. ZSM is more interested here in the family resemblance between all these cases of rule rather than the differences between them. In each case we see a subordination of the subject to a grammatically *indicative* form. Giddens invokes Wittgenstein (ibid.:20) to demonstrate that understanding how to apply a formula such as  $c = 2\pi r$  is the same kind of thing as “applied procedures implicated in the practical activities of day-to-day life” (ibid: 21) i.e. the latter procedures are generalisable rules in the same way as the formula.

However, if we think of each type of rule simply as a grammatically indicative form, but belonging to a different *layer of activity* than another, the crucial difference between each rule is, firstly, how one comes simply to be subordinated to each type; and, secondly, how does each type affect the way differentiation of human, subjective and physical aspects of the zone occurs. Thus Searle might well suggest that the rule governing checkmate in chess is an example of a constitutive rule whereas having to clock in at work at 8 AM is regulative. This may distinguish them semantically in some dictionary of rules. But from the point of view of the elaboration of activity, playing chess involves a subordination to a hermeneutical mode of differencing where the elaboration of moves are recognised as those of chess. Similarly, clocking in to work at 8 AM involves an embodied subordination insofar as one permits embodiment (qua habits) to become redistributed in a form that constitutes the indicative rule of the recognised working day. In this sense the rule of each type is the same, they merely show different configurations within the structures of ZSM.

This return to the notion of rule is important since in it we have seen the most consistent symptom of the apocalypse of the social: Bauman and the search for rules; Giddens and ironic distance from them; Berger et al and the impersonal application of them; Habermas and the sincerity rule; Urry and the social rules of connectivity absorbed into cultural flows and so on. What is apparent in these accounts is how far the conditions of (late) modernity constitute our relations to the rules, or the indicatively ordered properties of activities within forms of life that nevertheless give rise to senses of artifice, irony, trickery, dissimulation, pretence etc. The ZSM view is that such symptoms are the necessary

orientational properties of the structures of activity identified in this and chapter 7. I support this argument with two observations drawn from two quite different theoretical camps but which I have striven to recruit into the development of the ZSM position. These observations will help unify the notion of rule as a fact of sociation and at the same time a fact of socialisation.

In the development of his more general position on the social, Vygotsky (1978) refers to empirical work in which Sully had studied the development of two girls who happened to be sisters (Sully, 1904 in Vygotsky, 1978: 94). The original purpose had been to comment on the development of social role taking through the rule structures available within children's play. Vygotsky is interested in how we acquire particular social order in our activities through the development of the imaginary in action, remarking that we rarely find children under three years who make plans for events several days hence. The imaginary develops in response to the inevitable "unrealizable tendencies" that children develop when desire exceeds what can be given immediately.

For Vygotsky exposure to rules, and our grasp and deployment of them, come via the imaginary situations provided by play. Typically rules in the imaginary are harder to adhere to than their counterparts in 'reality', the imaginary depends on it. Sully had observed that the two sisters one day decided 'to play sisters'. In this game sisterhood (an unreflective condition of their existence hitherto) became a detailed concern to "display sisterhood". In the discovery, or creation, of the rules to adhere to within the imaginary, the girls *decided* they needed to talk alike, dress alike and do things that differentiated them from how others (i.e. not sisters, those excluded from and by the rules) are displayed. The game proceeded through the invention of ways in which the girls differentiated emergent aspects of their zones of activity that they deemed unique to them and different from what they identified as unique to other combinations of people. The imaginary situation, Vygotsky comments, has to contain rules. In the sisters' play the rules become very exacting. Crucially, Vygotsky adds, "every game with rules contains an imaginary situation" (ibid: 95).

Indeed, I extend this to say that all ordered social events have rules by virtue of the fact they contain an imaginary or 'virtual' form. This is expressed in ZSM as the

grammatically *subjunctive* orientation to the *indicative* form. Giddens argues by taking only the indicative form of rules. However, from Vygotsky we can view rules in a different way that shows how there imaginary form is always present alongside their indicative form. For example, we subordinate ourselves to the indicative form of chess, or the working day by constituting the rules as belonging to its imaginary situation. The sisters were, of course, always sisters, but they did not know how *to be* sisters in the indicative sense until they had subordinated themselves to the imaginary, or virtual rules of their own invention. The indicative and virtual or subjunctive are always co-present and present in the form of activity.

To take another example: Zizek (2006), from a very different perspective, and drawing on Lacan, invites us to consider a foundational imaginary complicity of, what I would term recognition and responsivity, that he illustrates by rules learned in the family. He suggests that our insistence on the judgement of action and its legitimacy by the precepts and rules of democracy do not emanate from any (what I would call) indicative factually present democracy, except insofar as the rules and precepts are elaborated. Like Father Christmas, whom no-one believes in either (according to Zizek), families find themselves acting in the rule like structure of the imaginary (in the Vygotskian sense). Parents place stockings by their children's beds. The children undertake to abide by the rule *not to see* and so not to expose their parents as fakes. The parents try not to put their children in the difficult position that exposes the fact that neither party believes in Father Christmas.

Zizek even extends this, rightfully in my view if surprisingly, to how we act in regard to democracy, the 'game' of human rights and so on. The important thing for 'democratic society' is that we act *as if* there were (subjunctive mood) such a thing as democracy and that it had rules other than those that are constituted in the imaginary. The major difference here is with Part One theorists. Habermas, believes the subjunctive mood here is apocalyptic because it erodes the sincerity of action. Habermas does not entertain the idea that the indicative and subjunctive forms are always co-present. Recall from chapter 2 that Habermas does indeed argue that action has an imaginary component. He says that actors should attempt to communicate in a 'discursive *as if*' i.e. as if an ethical horizon were already in place grounding their communication. Even in the absence of any actual or actualisable ability to access the ethical framework constituting the legitimacy of

discourse, he maintains that this must be done, at all costs, *sincerely*. This is achieved by actors subordinating themselves to ‘the sincerity rule’ in social transactions. But how can the sincerity rule appear outside the imaginary and outside the *as if* that actually, according to Vygotsky’s socialisation argument, constitutes the other rules? How else could it be constituted? Put another way, how do we know how to be sincere except by entering a game where such a rule can be first produced? As Vygotsky suggests, actors must first be able to put, as it were, ‘sincerity on display’ in an indicative mode. Why should the sincerity rule be exterior to the rule set interior to the imaginary? The only realistic position must be that sincerity, or its absence, is a constituent property of the zone and its structure just as much as pretence, cunning, trickery, irony and other strategic orientations to differencing that are always chronically configured there.

## 8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has developed the ZSM approach, in contrast to the traditional reflexivity/skill and habitus models, to the point where activity can be seen as always multi-layered and open to a variety of ways of imposing coherent form upon it. The complex and heterogeneous structure of activity affords it opportunities for changing the ways each facet of activity orients to, and relates, to other parts. Otherness plays a vital role in enabling activity, as a world transforming enterprise, to cohere. An important feature of all activity is the production of subjectivities. In reconsidering rules as important resources for action, it has been argued that much of what is presented by apocalyptic theorists as symptoms of change arising from our routine relationship with rules, cannot really be distinguished from the ever-present conditions of activity and its organisation. In particular, this has been explored with reference to examples presented in chapter 6 and which have been used to illustrate the ZSM approach in chapters 7 and 8.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

### **9.1 Returning to the thesis question and how it is answered**

#### **9.1.1 The problem posed**

The problem posed at the start is of the following form. Sociation, the ‘ground of social life’, is regarded, in apocalyptic theories, as the scene where the corruption of the social, from historical forces of one kind or another, shows itself symptomatically in the appearance of a range of interactional, communicational and experiential phenomena: irony, alienation, ambivalence, parody, insincerity, more work in ‘going on’, ontological insecurity, simulation and dissimulation. The sceptical and counterfactual stance taken, initially, with regard to this is that these phenomena are endemic to social experience rather than historically contingent. Scepticism warrants a closer engagement with the theoretical bases on which apocalyptic theories work and conceptualise the ground of the social.

#### **9.1.2 Productive purposes in engaging with apocalyptic theories**

The purpose in engaging with dislocationists, social constructionists and absorptionist theories in Part One was twofold. Firstly, it was necessary to examine how the ground of the social, subjected to eroding forces, had been conceptualised. In all cases compelling accounts of the condition of contemporary social experience, and its relation to change, relied on core concepts such as reciprocity, mutuality, exchange, activity and skill. These, as features of the ground of social life are argued, by proponents of apocalypse, as variously: expropriated of moral-bindingness leading to ironic distance and ambivalence; subject to structural violence leading to insincerity and the compromise of bases of solidarity; absorbed into flows that detach grounded, co-present, meaning into semiotic pretence and dissimulation. In each case threats to the ground smacked of the loss, or compromise, of coherence-giving, form-giving features of social life. However, closer examination of the theoretical accounts shows a series of flaws that makes their cases, in principle, undecidable. The core concepts of reciprocity, mutuality, activity, skill etc., as timeless, universal *sine qua nons* of sociality are too crude to be reliable registers of the

kinds of effects apocalyptic theorists imagine. Many of the phenomena of apocalypse, such as the passage of symbolic to semiotic communication in Baudrillard or the onset of alienation in Berger et al's account of modernity, for example, cannot be dissociated from these as routine processes of socialisation: learning a language detaches us from primordial grounds of exchange, and alienation is a fact of existence we have to come to terms with in any era.

The second purpose of engaging with apocalyptic theories is not to undermine. Rather the task is to see what critical engagement with them produces that enables us to define what is required from any reconstructive work that can be done to refine these ideas. If we resolve further the core concepts analytically we may introduce greater ability to decide what is owed to historical change and what is chronic to human practices. Thus, the critical work of Part One was to establish a set of guidelines for the development of the ZSM theoretical position based on analytic protocols derived from Part One positions and their flaws.

### **9.1.3 The construction of a new position**

The zone of social making 'splits' the notional core conceptual material (reciprocity, mutuality, activity etc.) into a larger set of relational terms. In looking more closely at otherwise diverse, singular sources, but used corroboratively here in the development of ZSM relational terms, it becomes manifest that some phenomena taken as symptoms of late modern practices are already structurally present as a constituent feature of activity. For example, Heilman's observation of communicative forms that use irony to interpret contingent questions of faith (chapter 7) was seen to be *a means* of solidarity rather than a threat to it. The task then is to think through how features of experience, such as irony, might be thought of as *orientations* within practice as opposed to an outcome of 'ground erosion'. The development of ZSM was built through a critique of the *reflexivity/skill two-layer model* that underpins all the social theories examined in Part One. We are unable to open up that model further as it is and so we cannot see any further detail in it other than the way hermeneutical matter can shape embodied matter and orient to one another. This led to a return to founding arguments about activity and what gives it form (e.g. rules) in Weber and Schutz (chapter 5).

The elaboration of ZSM results in two things: (i) the development of a more differentiated region of activity, which I called *the four-layer model* (chapter 7); and (ii) a set of strategies for making this heterogeneity coherent (chapter 8). Coherence arises from different configurations of responsiveness and recognition. Responsiveness is a degree of engagement, the extent to which one makes one's activity contingent on another and gives form to activity. Recognition is an orientation towards otherness: definitional work that recognises, or posits, the other in their distinctness. This approach shows activity as a more complex structure. Each part of the structure can take up a variety of orientations to other parts. The ability to theorise this takes us beyond what, say, habitus provides.

Taken together, the range of features comprising activity, and the range of possibilities for their coherence given by recognition/responsivity, gives us numerous possibilities for looking at how reciprocity and mutuality are configured in social life. For example, we are able to locate Foucault's position on individuation (chapter 8) as providing for particular forms of social engagement that give high recognition but low responsive form to activity. The same *four-layer model* enables us to see Baudrillard's position as simply another structural possibility, or configuration, within the same ZSM framework rather than a qualitative historical departure from the grounding conditions of the social.

Effectively, the thesis argues that the social does not end. If we detect that it is on the brink of ending this may be because it is always so. The 'necessary residuum of the social' (chapter 8) argues that what gives form to activity comes from outside the set of dialectical layers that make up activity (chapter 7). The concept of coherence developed (chapter 8) posits an approach to subjectivity and intersubjectivity at sociological levels of description within a novel philosophical position: material virtuality (chapter 1).

#### **9.1.4 Practical examples of the ZSM approach**

Chapter 6 introduced selected contemporary empirical examples of sociological research that examine the effects of social, geographical and technological changes on the quality of people's activities and their strategies for sustaining 'the social'. These studies make claims and counter-claims as to whether fundamental qualitative shifts to people's activities and experiences have occurred. Despite employing different theoretical

approaches in examining their data, each of the studies was shown to be a subscriber to the two-layer reflexivity/skill model of action. I demonstrated that, by virtue of the use of an inadequate model, the kinds of claims made, as to whether the social had, or had not, been eroded, were ultimately undecideable. I demonstrated where further investigation of hermeneutic and embodied activity needed to be undertaken to give us a more refined picture of the more numerous set of processes involved within activity. The deficiencies in the theories of activity present in these studies were used productively in chapters 7 and 8 to develop the four-layer model.

No empirical study has yet taken place using all of the ZSM features. The task of the thesis has been the theoretical development of a new model of activity. The studies cited in chapter 6 (Savage et al, 2005; Dyb and Halford, 2009; Green and Singleton, 2009) were not in a position to collect data that meet the terms of reference of the new model. But we are in a position, at the close of the thesis, to say what would be required in these studies in order to give us greater purchase on changes to the quality of action as a consequence of the historical changes that concern them.

For example, the Dyb and Halford study (*ibid.*) claims that despite formidable changes in the geographical dispersion of medical expertise and the technology that supports it, the ‘place’ of the obstetric examination contains essential, traditional forms of sociality that are managed by patient and midwife. There are a series of social consequences acknowledged by the researchers: for example, the de-professionalization of the midwife and the structural re-organization of medical expertise. But these are not interpreted as corrosive of ‘place’. ZSM takes particular interest in this kind of study because it clearly highlights and problematizes embodied and hermeneutical processes in action. In order to render such a study ‘decideable’ in terms of the claim about the erosion of the social ZSM argues that we would need data of the following kind.

In terms of the ‘hermeneutical layers’ are the ‘facts’ dealt with by doctor and midwife of the same order? The doctor is dealing remotely with digitized images, the midwife is dealing with the responses of the patient’s body and the instructions from the doctor. The ‘reflexivity model’ does not distinguish between these kinds of facts nor the differences between the kinds of actions involved. By contrast ZSM wants a breakdown of the entire

set of hermeneutical and embodied layers: kinesic, countervailing, contradicting and analysing. It wants an account of the dialectical relation between the layers. The questions then posed to this analysis would be: have there been any shifts in the relations between layers and how they are oriented to each other? What kinds of new, emergent, 'aspects' (chapter 7) of the situation have appeared and at what level on the H-E continuum, and have any anticipated aspects of the obstetric setting shifted layer? For example, we would want to investigate the way in which the deployment of the obstetric probe used by the midwife has become a hermeneutical, as opposed to embodied experience for her, dependent on a conversation held with a remote medic.

In addition to this we need to investigate shifts in the manner in which the entire obstetric activity as a zone of social making gets its 'coherence'. The recognition/responsivity continua identified in chapter 8 show multiple ways in which the layers of activity involved in the zone acquire coherence. The zone includes a patient, a nurse, a midwife, a doctor, medical and communication technologies, geography and physical spaces. Each of these is involved in 'differentiating' aspects of the scene. Qualitative historical change would be indicated by shifts in the achievement of coherence. That is, rather than assuming that *the deployment* of digital technology and the remoteness of expertise are the key constituting criteria of any social change, ZSM argues that we should be looking for changes in the way otherness manages the situation. Do any aspects of the obstetric treatment imply shifts from high responsivity/low recognition types of coherence (chapter 8) to one of the other possibilities? Some reported data in the study suggest that this is a fruitful line of inquiry. For example, some of the data seem to imply that the doctor's attention to the scene has become less 'disciplinary' (high recognition/ low responsivity) and more 'low/low' showing some more dependency on how the communication is managed from the vicinity of the patient. This would indicate qualitative shifts of practice, but clearly needs further investigation.

## 9.2 Further development of ZSM

Although ZSM is at a stage it can begin to engage empirically, ideally two things should happen. Firstly, further theoretical development of the zone focussing on its 'limit conditions' (chapter 8) should be undertaken. Merleau-Ponty's (1964) arguments, for

example, (chapter 8) indicate that ‘finitude’ has an effect similar to ‘recognition’ as a feature of coherence in so far as it can give definition to identity and individuate. Recognition, as defined in chapter 8, is a two-way process: I individuate as I am individuated whether I am master or slave, teacher or student, mother or child. However, finitude does not have this two-way aspect and further work here should be undertaken. Gender, as sexual difference, is of similar status. Sexual differencing can be incorporated into the concepts already explored under making, but the facticity of sexual difference I do not think can. Anthropological evidence (e.g. Strathern, 1980) that women are typically the objects of exchange among men in many different forms of sociality, cannot be explained entirely within a constructionist framework. The problem should be pursued as something constitutive of what it is to construct, and I hope ZSM provides a basis for this.

A fuller exposition of ZSM, following the ‘zonal limits’ aspect of the structure, would also engage with the problem of determinacy and indeterminacy in action. The description already presented explores the means by which form is given to activity. This is connected to what is involved in making activity ‘determinate’. However, part of the notion of the ‘ground’ of activity in the sources from which ZSM is derived, refer to ‘fields of indeterminacy’ (Giddens, 1976; Schutz, 1964). The project that this suggests is further exploration of the philosophical assumptions of action theory. However, it should be driven by sociological concerns rather than metaphysical ones.

It is also fair to say that further elaboration of the position already outlined in this thesis should be undertaken. The elaboration here errs toward the abstract to establish a rounded picture of the ZSM. But like any theory it would benefit from extended elaboration, discussion of examples and empirical application. Additionally, the task of this thesis has been to examine social life below the ‘institutional Plimsoll line’. While informed by analysis of social forms at institutional level, one task is to re-apply the lessons learned in the elaboration of ZSM to the world above the Plimsoll line. The problems of modernity, as they appear above the line, I think are tractable to the kind of work ZSM represents. Next I propose developments based on it.

### 9.2.1 The diachronic and comparative views

Given the development of structuration theory from theoretical, empirical and historically derived principles (Giddens, 1981), from which ZSM has taken its cue, I am surprised that it was never developed as a project in historical or comparative sociology. I envisaged that the relational terms of signifying practices (S), forms of domination (D) comprising authoritative and allocative resources, and practices of legitimization (L) would give rise to comparative analyses, based on variations in S-D-L characteristics in different settings and over time. I do intend that such a project be undertaken utilizing the terms of ZSM. For example, currently, there are confusions around how we are to treat the transformations in communication, social bonds and subjectivities connected to the extending use of ICTs. In chapter 4 I observed that Lash (2002) had presented us with some contradictory pronouncements on the way ‘people’ are connected via interfaces. One of the reasons we cannot decide between a view that ICTs are simply a novel means of communicating but otherwise the human processes are business as usual, and the view that ICTs have re-subjectifying consequences in the development of ‘virtual socialities’, is, I contend, because we have not applied a more detailed view of what kinds of reciprocities, mutualities and activity types ICT mediation involves. ZSM would look at the communicative forms that ICTs give rise to at a more detailed level of description.

For example, on the face of it ICT communication forms facilitate all the layers of activity identified in chapter 7: IM (instant messaging) can utilise kinesic phasing; countervailing/combining forms appear in online forums and multi-user access pages where users can add text or deface images and so on. Depending on the ‘genre’ of the website, the nature of the way actors manage their intersubjective exploration may not be entirely given by mundane notional terms unadapted to the Internet. Construed as actually cheating on one’s partner by having an online relationship with an avatar (Woods, 2008) seems bizarre, unless we are aware of the communicational dynamics and the way ICTs constitute thresholds for subjectivity. A ZSM approach would be to examine not just the changes to, or extension of, modalities of differencing in such cases but how ‘coherence is given’ to the range of activities implied in such settings. Linguistic and semiotic analyses of the communication of already-individuals tell us very little. I contend we need to know

about the resources that structure recognition and the modes of response in such circumstances.

ZSM might suggest that ICTs do not, in themselves, occasion ‘virtual sociality’ in that sociality is always already a virtuality grounded in material means of communication and the production of subjectivity (chapter 8). But this does not mean that we can understand, in advance of the application of theory to empirical work, how ICTs may transform the character of the virtual quality of subjectivity and activity.

### **9.2.2 Sociology of the emotions**

ZSM begins, in this thesis, to elaborate a position in the sociology of the emotions. In the way that I have returned to Weber and developed the hermeneutic-embodied continuum from chapter 5 I have difficulties with seeing emotions as, themselves, analytically distinct phenomena in sociation. I proposed that hermeneutical modes are sensuously instrumental as much as embodied processes can give shape to hermeneutical problems. Indeed, ZSM sees emotional experience as much as a shaping medium of activity *into* which activity moves and becomes re-distributed rather than *out of* which activity arises. There are parallels here, for example, with Lyng’s (2004) concept of ‘edgework’ in which risk taking in criminal behaviour takes embodiment and emotion as the leading edge giving shape to the elaboration of criminal intentions.

In addition there is room for further historical work based on the ZSM analytic terms. Within the sociology of emotions there is some debate on whether emotions accompany transformations to social orders. Demos (1996) argues that the forms of sociality to which modernity gave rise led to the transformation of community social control through shame to forms based on guilt. Scheff (1990) argues rather that guilt simply became what I would refer to as an ‘indicative form’ of an underlying sense of shame attached to modes of reflexivity. While there is some indigenous semantic confusion with emotional terms here, nevertheless there is sufficient suggestion that an examination of available evidence deploying single level descriptors, such as those of ZSM, would be productive. The interest is less in definitions of guilt and shame and more the strategies of coherence available. In other words, the question becomes how do guilt and shame practices differ in

respect of their modes of engagement? Demos (1996) argues that historical change is observed in communities moving from public shaming to private punishment through seclusion in the household. He looks at New England society between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In the latter period public shaming is eschewed in favour of secluding a child for the misdemeanour of putting a cat in a cauldron of boiling water. While the shift from shame to guilt looks obvious on the surface, surely we need to know more about how the child is individuated and made accountable across the possible types of responsiveness and recognition identified in chapter 8.

### **9.2.3 Socio-economic behaviour**

One area where difficulties arise in ‘going on’, making life cohere in late modernity, is in the difficulties posed by the de-traditionalised life-course. In particular, de-traditionalisation poses particular issues for personal and household financial planning. The extent to which partnerships and marriages develop ‘thematic unities and horizons’, to return to the language of Habermas and Schutz, in imagining life projects that unfold in a de-traditionalised way is highly questionable. Online management of joint accounts, future planning by cross-generational couples, financial communication between partners having obligations to former households, all give rise to new interpersonal communication forms and subjectivities (Vass, 2005; Leyshon et al, 1998). Financial instruments have taken on new importance in the articulations of sociality when, for example, couples can view and manage joint accounts online; or, ‘financial hermeneutics’ impacts on the articulation of a partnership (how far does the insistence on the maintenance of separate accounts imply distrust at the promotion of individual security?). The rapidly changing map of personal/household financial arrangements and the diverse living arrangements with which they are becoming associated appears to require some attention to what, notionally, we regard as mutualities and reciprocities.

## **9.3 Concluding remarks**

This thesis has brought together a diverse range of theoretical and empirical resources, many of them not, of course, designed to be directed at the central problem posed. I have recruited them in the development of a unique position aimed at the specific problem of

understanding the ground of social life as an indicator of social change. But this position proceeds within the auspices of the canonical sociological literature. In adapting and extending canonical sociology to new problems and circumstances that give the appearance of radical change from when first elaborated, we cannot have insurance policies against complexity. The important thing is to develop ideas that are adequate to finding our way around new problems rather than collapse new phenomena into old wineskins or to develop always new containers for always ‘apparently new’ phenomena.

Having posed the sceptical position from the point of view that the mooded quality of action is not an adequate register, in its notional guise, against which to observe societal transformation, I feel that the development of the thesis supports this scepticism. However, this is not to say that Bauman (1993), Steiner (1967) and Arendt (1958) are incorrect in their recognition that the twentieth century was unique in its barbarism and destructively penetrative of the grounds of sociation and sociality. Virginia Woolf famously declared, referring to the radical social changes of modernity, that ‘on or about December 1910 human character changed’ (Stansky, 1997). Webb (1986) transposed this declaring that, “on or about August 1945 something in human character died” referring specifically to the bombing of Hiroshima. In the centenary year of Woolf’s remark these statements are worthy of review. As far as ZSM is concerned Woolf’s remark belongs to the domain of problems reviewed in this thesis. But as elaborated so far it does not deal with Webb’s transposition. I would not take a sceptical attitude toward that. The impact of genocide and modern warfare, I feel, do alter the character of social life. Tizard (1986), for example, argued that the background anxiety of the Cold War impacted on behaviour at the micro level. But these aspects of practice I suggest are ones which throw us up against the finitude, or limiting conditions of sociation. And that is a problem for another day. In terms of human ‘making’ it is its resilience that is perhaps most surprising in the face of contemporary uncertainty and paradox.

At the end of a particularly ‘postmodern’ series of events in a day in the life of *The Simpsons* (cited in Dowling, 2009) the family are sat round the dinner table in silence. Lisa Simpson, the thoughtful, scholarly daughter, at last muses, with the nostalgia of modernist reflexivity, “Perhaps there is no moral to this story”. With postmodern ebullience, possibly, her father replies, “Exactly! Just a bunch of stuff that happened.” While our

ability to connect things and engage in ‘social making’ may sometimes elude us, somehow the social basis of making itself gives us some coherence and confidence that we can carry on in the complexity after all.

**APPENDICES: Notes to the Text**

## Note 1 (Chapter 1)

The social and political development of Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire was first founded on a struggle for order in the context of the militaristic migration of peoples and subsequently on ideological responses to the spread of Islam around the southern Mediterranean. During these massive historical changes new collectivities were being formed and collective identities constructed. Indeed, our attention is often drawn to the development of the value system associated with feudalism and people's sense and understanding of the kinds of obligations and social ties they found themselves with. However, evidence also suggests (e.g. ) that it was felt that even here, in the routine and manifest expression of feudal relations, that something had been lost. Both popular and courtly literature of the era harked back to an age (sometimes mythical sometimes real) when the character of the social ties and alliances formed between individuals and groups was not tainted by the unheroic and practical concerns of everyday feudal life that warranted a *mere strategic* orientation to others and to the world. Closer examination of the historical legacy might suggest not so much a one off disenchantment as Weber supposed but indeed something more like the continuous transformation of disenchantment. It seems to me that without such a view it would be very difficult to grasp two things. Firstly, and simply, the chronological appearance of certain categories of event would be difficult to interpret. The 'ironic distance' towards obligations owed to the monarch available to the English baronial class during events like Magna Carta and the depositions of Richard II and Edward II seem distinctly modern insofar as a strategic orientation toward the law and the interpretation of civic freedoms could be taken. Again, the formation of a peasant collective interest and the development of an antagonism toward repressive aristocratic interests in Europe were accompanied by an 'ironic stance' toward feudal obligations long before the political discourse of individualism emerged in the eighteenth century.

## **Note 2 (Chapter 2, Parsons)**

In 1951 culture was important to this development in the Parsons-Durkheimian paradigm. The concept of culture had been relegated by the time of Parsons and Platt (1973). Habermas (1987: 219) claims that Parsons, I might say catastrophically, clung onto the (Kantian) conception of the knowing subject. I would further argue, his understanding of action as motivated, purposive and *telic* made Kantianism a sine qua non. This provided him with a series of questions which were simply not logically resolvable in his scheme. For example, in Parsons' discourse it was not possible to distinguish any ontological differences between physical and cultural objects as resources on which actors instrumentally draw. These kinds of differences are very real to, if not actually theorised by, the speaking and acting subject who in the course of their involvements 'in' the social arena distinguishes between objects and symbolic meanings. Ideas, values and symbolic expression provide ways for us, in Parsons original scheme, to incorporate, locate and deploy physical objects and natural resources. Parsons confused the issue because he had to both maintain the externalised motivating, orienting force of culture and its elements at the same time as transforming them into empirical facts available in the social arena and its personalities. In other words the analytic cross-valencies achieved in 1951 had begun to disappear. The social arena remained primary and the cultural arena had become an independent phenomenon.

## **Note 2 (Chapter 2, Touraine)**

Touraine feels the conditions for hope are limited but at least there. I think he steers a path somewhere between Giddens and Bauman at least insofar as the success of autonomy is concerned. The following is a long quote from myself.

"Touraine's (1995) *Critique of Modernity* does at least two things which are helpful in this discussion. Firstly, he outlines the four main features, or sub-regions, of modernity which had come to comprise the social: sexuality, consumption, nation and 'the company'. Secondly he plots, in ways not dissimilar to Foucault, shifts in the relations between these, over the course of the last century, such that led to a fundamental change in the character and the experience of the human subject. Fragmentation came in the wake of 'instrumental

rationality' such that, as a set of strategies increasingly applied during the course of the century as a mode of organisation, order and thought, the effect was that the individual could only discover themselves and find coherence in the sub-regions of the social: ie sexuality or work or consumption. Within the 'new modernity' which has now discovered the means to 'reappropriate' fragmented experiences through devolved technologies made available to the individual, the subject enters a new relation with 'reason' and through its relations with the sub-regions. Touraine's analysis is predicated on his life-long project to re-align sociology around the relationship of the subject to social movements. In this respect the individual achieves a kind of authenticity by entering into a form of responsive political action with others. Failure to achieve this results in a 'narcissistic isolation' and this is the ironic twist to this tale." (Vass, 2003).

If this is an accurate representation, then we can at least see here where Touraine's account, starting with the disintegration of the social, leads us back, again, to the social constructive capacities that figure continuously and prominently in our search for an understanding of the grounds of coherence.

### **Note 2 (Chapter 2, Luhmann) When system can do without the social in principle and in fact**

Social constructive difficulties are announced in Luhmann's (1995) declaration of the end of the social. Luhmann is a central figure in the controversies of the social-system integration debate. I will steer a course blissfully away from this debate itself, which is largely about contesting the logic that the terms of the debate will allow. I am more concerned with what the outcomes of the debate indicate for my own focus.

Uncomfortably close both in sentiment and time to Mrs. Thatcher's empirical finding, Luhmann (1995) announces the end of the social by announcing the end of society as a consequence of differentiation, complexity and sub-system insularity. He takes to its most extreme logical implication that 'society', whatever that might be, has to include its own conception of itself within it. While this seems an essential move in understanding modernity according to its principal tension as outlined above, it leads him, however, to an extreme conception of a 'system' that entirely displaces the notional term 'society'. He

deals entirely in the functionalist currency of system theory and so benefits, ultimately, from a reductionism that allows him to treat all human phenomena at the same level of analysis. In other words, Luhmann starts with system and makes a virtue out of what in the critique of Parsons was ultimately deemed a conflation of action to the compulsive logic of system (and not the other way round as Parsons suggested). This distinguishes him from Mrs. Thatcher at least, as Luhmann proposes something less intuitive and tangible than even ‘society’. For Luhmann the interactivity of what above we have referred to as the ‘social arena’ also disappears through his development of the sociological precedents of Levi-Strauss and Althusser where the subject also is subsumed by system. Luhmann started by replacing Parsons’ general system of action with “three levels of differentiation: the level of simple interactions between present actors; ...organisations constituted through voluntary and disposable memberships; and finally the level of ‘society’ [but this defined as encompassing all interactions reachable, or accessible, in social spaces and historical times]” (Habermas, 1987:155).

However, Luhmann’s next move sought to push the lifeworld “behind media-steered subsystems [that are] no longer directly connected to action situations” (ibid.:155). Luhmann argues that social integration is compromised by a new level of complexity as a consequence of the process of differentiation. Following Durkheim but surpassing his expectations, differentiation has now exceeded the societal system’s capacity to sustain any regulative centre. As Delanty (ibid.:77) points out this calls into question, if borne out, the fundamental presuppositions of modernity that, for example, the cultural project of autonomy can be democratically pursued through concerted efforts at change to the social conditions of action. Politics or law, which *appear* to transcend what Luhmann thinks of as closed sub-‘systems’ of the social world, are themselves closed and self-referential subsystems. One consequence of this analysis is that our integrative participation as citizens becomes somewhat redundant and gives rise to a postmodern political indifference. I have myself made apparently similar points (Vass, 1993) in examining the ‘marginal’ speaking positions of parents in the face of professional discourses that exert powers of description on the careers of children through an apparent centrality of political viewpoint. From the point of view of communication between social groups one has to recognise the myth of an integrative public space which political discourse presumes and glamorously displays. Luhmann’s vision of the unintegrated social (qua societal) is one without the ‘centre’ that

something like political discourse asserts as the very basis for its universalism. Luhmann, however, emphasises the effect of system closure and impenetrability, whereas I would be more concerned at this point with the experience of difficulty in the relatively powerless attempt to elaborate concerns in the ‘public arena’ that were developed within one of its ‘sub-systems’ (cf. Vass, *ibid.*). Social sub-systems are closed but stage the activities of agents who ‘solve problems’ by choosing from among alternatives that contingently arise. The proximity of this to Parsons’ pattern variables is clear. In an action system like that of Parsons the whole point of accounting for ‘order’ is predicated on an assumption that order appears as, or through, the subordination of contingency. However, contingency is central to Luhmann’s understanding of the human condition and also his model of the societal and takes on more frightening qualities under the declaration of ‘the end of the social’ where there is no regulative centre. Here, order *is subordinated to* contingency. The result is a true inversion of Parsons’ thesis. As Rasch makes clear,

“...Luhmann’s description of modern society in terms of autonomous, self-reproducing social systems [] calls for a revaluation of those features of modernity that have so often provoked the most visceral complaints. Fragmentation, reification, alienation, and the loss of nerve of a culture (or an intellectual class) no longer anchored in traditional values are still the terms of choice for those...whose discontent with contingent modernity drives their ethical and political concerns. The affirmation of contingency, on the other hand, takes...self-alienating fragmentation and turns it into legitimate and legitimizing self-differentiation. In the final analysis, the description of modernity as inescapable differentiation forms the ground, and hence the norm, for disagreements about the contemporary world...That is to say, modernity as differentiation is not the object of some logically, morally or historically transcendental critique but rather the ground which replaces such critique.” (Rasch, 2000: 26).

Thus, for Luhmann the fundamental experiences of modernity flow from a relationship between social differentiation and the resultant new relationship to patterns of contingency. While we may complain about the former, one implication of this outlook is that our new positioning with respect to the contingencies for which our actions strive to deal in the search for order gives us an altogether new, somewhat unconventional, understanding of legitimization. To pursue this further, it is worth looking at the character of morality in

Luhmann's model. Far from thinking of morality as emanating in social regulative practices from 'central' standards and 'value orientations' as in the Parsons model, morality is construed as a kind of 'bacterial infection' of the system which repositions itself among the subsystems. That is to say, (and note well here the inverted language of integration) it does not form a 'metacode' that aims to 'totalize' across the system as a whole (Rasch, 2000: 146). That is, under Luhmann's radical subsuming of everything to system, Parsons' idea of, say, 'standards' and 'values' distributed and operative uniformly throughout culture, society and personality, would be seen now as an attempt at 'totalising a metacode'. The best morality can achieve is the continued 'autopoiesis', or self-reproduction, at work *within* the insular domains of the system. We determine 'good morality' where we see local attention given to the mechanics of autopoiesis, where, for example, there is a narrowed concern with the kinds of otherwise arbitrary linguistic distinctions (legal/illegal, government/opposition etc.) that form the communicative resources of the 'autopoetic' system. Outside of this attention morality is meaningless. Autopoiesis (the system's internal communication with itself which has itself as a reproductive outcome) is the real death knell of the social in Luhmann. He thinks of the system as entirely closed, like its internal sub-systems, from its 'environment'. There are no, *inter alia* causal effects. Rather, systems and sub-systems respond to their environments by 'being perturbed' by them. The most important structural fact about Luhmann's system is the concept of the boundary (i.e. between system and environment). "The boundary exists only as an instruction to cross it" (Luhmann, 1999: 145), in other words only as part of the system's communicative capacity. There is nothing apart from this.

Fundamentally, Luhmann's approach is a radical invitation to conflate agency, action, and the lifeworld to the communicatively based autopoiesis of the system. It radically imposes a system of communication that is self-referential and 'operatively closed'. Subsystems only 'perturb' each other and set in motion communicative operations. The idea of, for example, 'democratic social change' is something of a fantasy as is the individual, as is society. These are fictions in the recursive communicational networks of the system. If, for example, you really want to take the idea of 'individual' seriously in this social-less model he says this means,

“comprehending individuals as the product of their own activity, as self-referential historical machines, which determine with each auto-operation the starting condition for further operations and are able to do this *only* through their *own* operations... There is thus no normative integration of individuals into society... there are no norms... there is no consensus... There are only corresponding observational schemata in which an observer self-determines the observation that behaviour agrees or diverges from a norm,... the observer can be... a court, the mass media etc.” (Luhmann, *ibid*: 152).

Hence, the notion of system removes the currency of the concept of social as having any analytic power. But the end of the social is given by the radical closure of sub-systems that are the result of complex differentiation. This account demonstrates a radical absorption of the ‘performative social arena’ that is the referent of Parsons’ model of the social into a matrix of communication. And along with it what we conventionally understood as the processes operative between culture, personality and society (i.e. internalisation of values and standards, orientation to norms, institutionalisation of meaning etc.) become (simply) the grammatical inflections of a communication matrix.

If we wish to accept Luhmann’s starting points we are forced to follow his logic and arrive at the same conclusions. The ‘radical system approach’ takes us into a brave new world where even the ‘tension of modernity’, with which we started, between autonomy as cultural process and fragmentation as a social process disappears into a serious game through which we attend to the workings of ‘autopoiesis’. The insuperable social constructivist difficulty posed by Luhmann’s vision of the end of the social is constituted by his conception of the impermeable boundary conditions of the system. From the (fictional) citizen’s point of view the desire to transcend a boundary can never be realised as a simple consequence of social action however organised. This ‘dislocation’ in Luhmann, occasioned by the desire to transcend a boundary without becoming recontextualised, is effected by a loss of any regulative centre. My difficulties with this begin with the mechanism and process of recontextualisation.

My own approach to ‘production’ or ‘making’ will start from a quite different starting point. As far as Luhmann is concerned I will suggest that despite the radicalised approach to the idea of system its logic can only be developed within the narrative tradition of the

search for ‘order’ in a climate of contingency and chaos. My position starts from a critique of this conventional search in social theory. In proposing an alternative to the assumed ‘climate of order’ where Luhmann seeks to have the final word I will focus in quite different ways on the forms of attention and engagement that are given to ‘productive activity’ from the point of view of a revised starting position.

#### **Note 4 (Chapter 4, Baudrillard)**

Baudrillard is often thought of as a provocateur rather than a theorist in the conventional sense, yet he produced five major works of sustained social theoretical work based, in conventional ways, on a traditional canon. From the mid-1980s onwards his work (in English translation) became stylised and idiosyncratic, more startling ejaculation than logically sustained argument. He refers, latterly and reflexively, to this style and claims that it is new type of critical activity: ‘fatal strategy’. His project is to ‘upset the code’, to disturb the quietist tendencies that support an all-engulfing system of signification in which we live and move and have our being. He is *Neo*, the hero of *The Matrix* film trilogy ([ref](#)) whose role is to shatter the code, or at least come to a less destructive arrangement with it. The trilogy was inspired by Baudrillard’s work and carries some of the same message. My present thesis, for Baudrillard, is, simply, an accomplice of the code. It assists the code to masticate new or disturbing material. Sociological practice and research, especially in its so-called ‘critical moments’ is a prime of example of how the code works. Sociology much prefers to stock-pile data hyperactively in order to permit a kind of torpidity at the symbolic level. Critique really does nothing. The code merely says, ‘thank you very much’.

Our culture’s myths do not stem from an underlying, or hidden structural logic. Rather the myths are self-referential and detached from any underlying reality. There are only the myths that transform and circulate within a ‘semiotic medium of exchange’.

Sociology itself does not escape inclusion in the absorption as both institution and discourse, it is both mythical and part of the semiotic medium. This medium is more real for us than the real as taken in some ontological sense. This medium is famously referred to as ‘hyperreality’.

If I have interpreted his viewpoint correctly, I would say that the ‘emptying of discourse’ has to do with the disinvestment of the social into the idea of politics. He recounts that secular political discourse began in the Renaissance as a kind of game of signs, or ‘pure strategy’. Politics was not tied to an ideological system or a representation of the truth of the social. It was a theatrical medium designed to stage virtuosity. Since the (French) Revolution, however, it “took a social reference” and became invested with the ‘will of the people’. Political institutions still trade in this idea but now as a cultivated rhetoric. One senses again in political discourse something of its highly staged character, the difference perhaps with the politics of the Renaissance being its absorption into the media in general, what Beck and Habermas (cf. Chapter 2) both lament as the outcome of the ‘mediatisation’ of discourse.

The disappearance of the social into the masses constitutes a loss of the truthfulness that was constituted by the social-political link. Society was the boundary of the social, but it can now only engage in the ‘ritual of statistics and surveys’ which have, according to Baudrillard, no real object. Statistics deal in probabilities and their objects are ontologically indeterminate, political discourse allied to this shifts into the subjunctive mood, I would say, or, possibly, if it existed, a ‘virtual mood’, and no longer operates out of the indicative mood that characterises the socio-political link made at the time of the Revolution.

*In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* is a book troubled by the fate of the social. It realises that in order to pose its question it must enter into the gap created by the ambiguity of the social as rendered by the dilemma of French thought about this discussed above. Do modern societies, Baudrillard (1983: 65) asks correspond to a process of socialisation or to one of progressive de-socialisation? Is it the case, he asks, that the emergence of the social as seen in the development of the kinds of institutions, say, Donzelot (1979) writes about, (education, welfare, medicine, media etc.) has given rise to the mechanisms which both create and destroy it in one movement?

“If the social is formed out of abstract instances which are laid down one after the other on the ruins of the symbolic and ceremonial edifice of former societies, then these institutions produce more and more of them. But at the same time they consecrate that ravenous, all-

consuming abstraction which perhaps devours precisely the ‘essential marrow’ of the social. From that point of view, it could be said, that the social regresses to the same degree as its institutions develop.” (Baudrillard, 1983:66)

He ponders the idea that the ‘social relation’ in its modern sense has come to betoken a new kind of thing, but one which ironically, by its very appearance and proliferation destroys the social. His reading of historical anthropology permits him to claim there were societies without history where the “[n]etworks of symbolic ties were precisely neither ‘relational’ nor ‘social’” (ibid: 67). The social sciences offer us ‘gibberish’, by applying, I take it, these terms to human groups that privilege the symbolic order, and are come mainly to ‘consecrate’ the idea of the social, to produce a truth about it as if it were an ageless entity. [Footnote: I have noticed that Durkheim does this all the time in the *Division of Labour*] The social, in one sense, is a simulated object of the social sciences which attempt to produce a ‘panoptic viewpoint’ on it. He says, “[u]ltimately, things have never functioned socially, but symbolically, magically, irrationally” (ibid.: 68). For some reason the apparent agelessness of the object of this statement, ‘things’, appears to come from a panoptic viewpoint which is preferable to that of the social sciences! While we can see readily that this does connect very readily to the concerns of Durkheim, we do not get here a sustained account of the legitimacy of the viewpoint Baudrillard offers.

Both debates sought to connect the content of pedagogy to the needs of industry and in both cases this re-legitimation took its departure from a critical reaction to prevailing professional teaching practices and orthodoxy. The latter were predicated on an ideology of the child (Walkerdine, 1984; Rose, 1985). While a Marxist interpretation of these developments might focus on the interests at work in advancing the fluidity of exchange value, one would have to account for the immense system of surveillance that became instated from 1989 onwards and the scrutiny given by the system to the immediate, practical ‘use’ value of all educational activity (Vass, 1995). Indeed, we could also reflect on the application of the ideology of use value in Higher Education which has seen a steady decline in parts of the curriculum which have failed to justify their ‘uses’ as defined by the new moral custodians. The latter deploy terms related to the new value system like ‘relevance’ and ‘practical’ as if we could always determine in advance of the event the final value of an activity. The system invents a methodology always to disassemble.

Legitimacy is found in the lowest common denominators of exchange. Philosophy, Classics and possibly Sociology have to make claims to educative legitimacy through the discourse of ‘transferable skills’, and such like. In any event, the problem of the ideology of use value marks one of Baudrillard’s departures from Marx and will be important shortly in the context of the definition of symbolic and semiotic orders.

### **Note 6 (Chapter 6, Bourdieu)**

There are many parallels between ZSM and Bourdieu’s (1977, 1992) understanding of social practice and the concepts of habitus, field and embodiment (disposition, skill and hexis etc.). Bourdieu provides for a view of repertoires of embodied predispositions to act that is strategic (i.e. hermeneutically engaged) and draws on traditional resources in unreflective ways (doxa) similar to the ‘natural attitude’ that Schutz deploys. Indeed Bourdieu adds ‘rule-bending’ to our collection of alternatives to the Weberian case of the social rule (chapter 5). Social change can be said (Bourdieu, 1991) to re-orient the social actor to the very character of the rules and dispositions that are occasioned by the ‘fields’ of practice in which the actor moves. The idea that social change propagates re-orientation within a chronically durable set of parameters is very close, on the surface at least, to the ZSM position. Bourdieu also has alignments with ‘social phenomenology’ and an engagement with many of the positions within the genealogy of ZSM. It was Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice and Hirst and Woolley’s (1983) discussion of ‘repertoires of conduct’, while a student of Social Anthropology, that began to consolidate for me that the whole issue that skill needed to be opened up as a problem of sociology rather than allowing it to remain an unproblematic notional term. Bourdieu’s work has compelling ideas and observations essential to my present enterprise, but a full engagement with it is another thesis. Here I can only summarise my problems with it as a starting point and suggest why I need to go my own way given the terms of reference of the present work. Firstly, Bourdieu’s critiques of social phenomenology (summarised from a series of Bourdieu’s works in Crossley, 2001: 95) are very wide of the mark. Bourdieu suggests that these approaches are derived from a focus on the agent’s ‘interpretative horizon’ and fail to locate this in a structural context; there is failure to identify the different hermeneutical frameworks of different social groups and how they relate and so on.

In my own language the problem of the social phenomenologists is more a lack of balance in the degree of resolution given to hermeneutical and embodied matters and the connection between. Furthermore, the hermeneutical domain in Schutz's work is a work of induction rather than derivation. Indeed, habitus and field in Bourdieu's approach do not resolve at all: from whatever height one views habitus the picture remains the same. Precisely what is required in Bourdieu scholarship is something of the resolution of habitus that Schutz and Luckman (1973, 1989) provide for structures of the life-world. From the point of view of ZSM the major difficulty with Bourdieu's rendering of habitus and skill is that they are *non-social*. They are derived from an *ethological* viewpoint on the natural construction of human behaviour or the pre-social power to serially order activity. Bourdieu does provide a compelling account of the social *shaping* of these pre-social powers through symbolic exchange and the social organization of fields, and by this means also accounts for socialisation as a sub-species of sociation. However, like the phenomenologists, Bourdieu does not connect the hermeneutical/embodiment domains, so we are left with the question "But what conception of the body are we to adopt...The body that sustains the *intellectus* or the body that sustains the *habitus*?" (Lefebvre 1991: 194, emphasis original), is there a difference?

But the biggest problem is the character of whatever means there is to give *coherence* to what in human action, as I argue below, is a highly disparate and heterogeneous set of constituents, skills, subjectivities, resources etc. As Crossley argues, for Bourdieu, it is habitus whose purpose is to give *coherence* and order to practice without detracting from its strategic nature (*intellectus*?). But habitus is/are *an agent's* "residue or sediment of their past experiences which functions in their present, shaping their perception, thought and action..." (Crossley, 2001:93). It is problematic to source the origin of coherence to this.

The principal difference of principle between ZSM and habitus/field is that which provides *coherence* to activity in all modalities of the hermeneutic-embodied continuum. For ZSM it is not an unproblematic, embodied 'store' of skills which may be strategically oriented to the present moment (habitus). The social in the habitus/field view is the source of strategy itself (from symbolic exchange or hermeneutical activity in the 'field'). Two issues here: firstly, while Bourdieu is deft at naming styles (hexis) of orientation towards objects in the

field there is still no theoretical examination of how such objects are situated with respect to these styles. This may be contrasted with Schutz's attempt, for example, to deploy the Heideggerian concepts of *zuhanden* and *vorhanden* (things ready-to-hand in a practical sense and things abstracted from contexts and to which hermeneutical action must be applied) (Heidegger, 1962). It also contrasts further with ZSM where the investigation of any 'zone' may need to identify many other types of 'situatedness' of things than those differentiated by Schutz and Heidegger.

Secondly, habitus as something that gives coherence to activity, apart from being a property of the agent (and so its sociality needs explaining anyway) is primarily a concept that, theoretically, solves the problem of *order*. I find the extension of the habitus concept to higher order forms problematic, if for no other reason than the definition of coherence here becomes the application of one order (habitus) to the problem posed by another such as moving between 'fields', say. In this example, the agent engages in the activity of 'transposition' or translating between fields. The presupposition here is that transposition and re-embedment can rely on relatively ordered and coherent skill sets. ZSM holds, theoretically and empirically, that too much has been assumed for these skill sets and that even unary fields present agents with the problem of multiple transpositions within any field. Mouzelis (2007) seems to be arguing something similar to my last point except he does not go on to say how or why unary fields are constituted such that they give rise to problems of transposition.

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