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6

Postmodernism: Theorising Fragmentation and Uncertainty

By the end of this chapter you should:

- have a critical understanding of the notions of postmodernism and postmodernity;
- appreciate the significance of Nietzsche to postmodern theorising;
- be familiar with the key postmodern writers: Lyotard, Bauman, Baudrillard, Vattimo, Deleuze and Guattari, Rorty, and Fish;
- be aware of some of the central critiques of postmodernism: Sokal, Habermas, Giddens, Philo, Kellner.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) invented many of the central ideas and concepts which postmodernism raises about the foundations of society. In particular, Nietzsche's anti-foundationalist ideas, built upon the assumption that 'God is dead', together with his refusal to privilege his own position, have influenced most of the postmodern writers that we shall review in this chapter. According to Anthony Giddens: 'Nietzsche offers a refuge for those who have lost their modernist illusions without relapsing into complete cynicism or apathy' (Giddens, 1995: 261).

Nietzsche attempted to undermine the foundations of truth, morality, science, identity and religion. Truth, in Nietzsche's view, was nothing more than a mobile host of metaphors and illusions, and in the last analysis the 'will to truth' is a manifestation of 'the will to power'. In other words, for Nietzsche, truth like everything else is a function of power. Nietzsche's 'project' was to undermine the foundation of all systems of belief; an intellectual process that he called the transvaluation of all values, in which the *will to truth* would be seen for what it is, the social theorist attempting to impose their will or prejudices upon others, whilst presenting their ideas as truth.

Above all, Nietzsche argued that all people attempted to impose their thoughts, ideas and morality on others, by all possible means including danger, pain, lies and deception, which he termed the 'will to power'. When people say morals are necessary what they mean is 'I don't like how you are behaving', hence for Nietzsche the police are always necessary to impose morality.

> A philosopher recuperates his strength in a way quite his own . . . he does it, for instance, with nihilism. The belief that there is no such thing as truth, the nihilistic belief, is a tremendous relaxation for one who, as a warrior of knowledge, is unremittingly struggling with a host of hateful truths. For truth is ugly. (Nietzsche, 1967: §598)

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche makes a distinction between **master morality** and **servant morality**, and argues that the traditional ideals of Christian morality are based upon self-deception, as they were built upon the will to power. The concept of the **slave morality** was taken up by Nietzsche in his later works such as *The Antichrist, Curse on Christianity* (1888), where he argues that Christianity is a religion for weak and unhealthy people and that its central ideas, such as compassion for the less fortunate, have undermined Western culture, in that people are made to feel guilt for attempting to fulfil their desires.

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1888) Zarathustra informs the people that God is dead and that with an understanding of the eternal return we need no longer be seduced by notions of good and evil or threats of hell and hopes of paradise. The theory of the eternal return suggests that we are all going to live our identical lives over and over again, down to the smallest details, because time is an ever-repeating cycle: 'Everything goeth, everything returneth; eternally rolleth the wheel of existence. Everything dieth, everything blossometh forth again; eternally runneth on the year of existence' (Nietzsche, 1999: 153).

Moreover, because we have no soul that lives after the body is dead and no recollection of living our lives over and over again – escape is impossible. However, the concept of the eternal return is Zarathustra's gift to humankind. Armed with the knowledge of the eternal return a person can become the ***Übermensch*** (the overman/superman, people such as Caesar, Napoleon, Goethe, Dostoevsky and Thucydides): they can undertake a process of self-overcoming, liberate themselves from the arbitrary constraints of truth and morality imposed upon them and can become whatever they desire and achieve satisfaction with themselves. For Nietzsche, you are what you do, in other words the person is constituted by *practice*, hence there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything. The *Übermensch* is a person with qualities beyond those of an ordinary person. As described by Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* was a self-created person who was emotionally 'tougher' than most people, because of having created a personality drawn from many contradictory dimensions.

Activity

Would you like to live in a world where morally anything goes? Outline two lists: one of arguments in favour of living in such a morally free world, and one of arguments against living in such a world. Complete the following chart.

I would like to live in a morally free world because . . .	*I would not like to live in a morally free world because . . .*
1	1
2	2
3	3

The postmodern approach to ethics does not reject the moral concerns that individuals in the modern world have. However, it rejects the coercive response to ethical issues by any central authority. The simple division between the 'right way' and the 'wrong way' becomes subject to forms of evaluation that allow actions to be viewed as 'right' in one way or 'wrong' in another. Bauman (1997) makes a division between the 'economically pleasing', 'aesthetically pleasing' and 'morally proper'. The modern world became secular as individuals lost belief in religious dogma. Their lives became fragmented to the degree that any unitary vision provided by a religion could never be satisfactory in explaining aspects of an individual's life.

Outline, in a short paragraph, why a world with no moral code might be a place of great cruelty. Discuss your findings with another sociology student.

At this point, should the state attempt to create a comprehensive moral code and impose it upon individuals?

Activity

1 Do you feel sympathy, and other forms of emotional attachment, for people who are weaker than you? Suggest some reasons for your answer.
2 In your view, does this provide a sound foundation for a theory of 'rights'?

I will critically outline the contribution of a range of postmodern writers: Lyotard, Rorty, Bauman, Deleuze, Vattimo and Baudrillard, and will attempt to show that their theorising has a postmodern feel to it. However, beneath the postmodern gloss there is a coherent set of modernist assumptions which in many cases lack the sophistication of a writer such as Durkheim. Finally, by way of a summary, I will extrapolate from these writers a set of characteristics or feeling states that an individual might well experience in the postmodern condition. This will allow readers to reflect on whether people do experience the uncertainty that postmodern writers suggest.

Activity: what is postmodernism?

Nigel Wheale (1995) outlines what he calls a lexicon of postmodern techniques – a list of key terms that you would expect to find in postmodern texts. He suggests that:

> An all-purpose postmodern item might be constructed like this: it uses eclecticism to generate parody and irony; its style may owe something to schlock, kitsch or camp taste. It may be partly allegorical, certainly self-reflexive and contain some kind of list. It will not be realistic. (Wheale, 1995: 42)

Wheale goes on to explain the terms in the sentences below. Read the sentences and rewrite the quote from Wheale, using your own words.

Explanation of key terms

- *allegory*: the idea that any item can have covert or secret meanings other than the obvious meaning.
- *camp*: the culture of a minority clique or group, usually built upon a closet or private language. It can be a key source of identity for the individuals involved.
- *eclecticism*: a picking and mixing of styles and themes.
- *irony*: postmodern items are said to be ironic because they are not based upon any moral code or other foundation separate from the item itself.
- *kitsch*: 'bad taste', combined with bragging. People gloat about the things they have or the things they give but are unaware of the bad taste of the items.
- *lists*: postmodern items usually contain lists of paraphernalia or other things from which a choice can be made.
- *parody*: a copy of an original, often in a satirical fashion.
- *schlock*: nonsensical or frivolous things.
- *simulacrum*: first used by Baudrillard (1983) to explain that media products are constantly reproduced to the point where they take on a meaning mainly by reference to earlier versions of similar media products, hence they have a pace and reason of their own. It is not possible to distinguish between the 'real' and the 'representation': we live in a world of 'hyperreality', where media representations give an experience of the world which feels realler than real.
- *realism*: the opposite of the postmodern way.

'Gloss' and 'disclaimers' in the writings of Jean-François Lyotard

Postmodernism is said to be both historically and conceptually different from modernism or theories rooted in modernity. It is a rupture with the past, a fundamental departure from 'modernity'. Theories firmly established in modernity are said to include Durkheim's sociology, Marxism, functionalism, feminism and other 'grand narratives'. Narratives are 'stories' which provide people with values. In addition, narratives give explanations; identify causes and chains of events. When we read a narrative, we can anticipate how the events will unfold within that narrative. Grand narratives are 'big theories' which strive to spell out movements of history, as well as giving us advice on how people lead their lives, what to think and how to think it. As Lyotard says in *The Postmodern Explained to Children*:

> These narratives aren't myths in the sense that fables would be (not even the Christian narrative). Of course, like myths, they have the goal of legitimating social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics ways of thinking. (Lyotard, 1992: 29)

When Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) died in April 1998 his obituary in *The Times* suggested that he was one of the people who 'unleashed' postmodernism on the unsuspecting modern world. Lyotard embraced uncertainty and rejected all grand theories (grand narratives) such as Marxism or feminism as 'totalitarian'. Lyotard's writings are often described as 'episodic' or 'drifting', which makes a coherent summary difficult. In this section we shall look at what Lyotard had to say in his key texts and evaluate his contribution to postmodern thought.

For Lyotard modernity is a mode of thought that is concerned with organising time and mastering nature. Contained within all grand narratives of modern ways of thinking is the idea of a 'universal history of humanity'. Nevertheless, in the modern world 'grand narratives' compete with each other, for example the Marxian and the capitalist. All such narratives are concerned with emancipation and the creation of a community of subjects, and have 'freedom' as their end point. Having read Lyotard one would think that grand narratives contain the notion of purity, and that those who do not accept the grand narrative are impure and must be dealt with accordingly. This may be by the use of new academic programmes: clearly defining how one can and cannot address others, the semiotic strait-jacket of political correctness, the mental hospital, or the gulag. If modern ways of thinking are about anything they are about the definition and treatment of the 'other'. Lyotard backs away from such a critique. He does not have the will to see his analysis to its obvious postmodernist conclusion.

Although he talks about 'incredulity' towards grand narratives and a 'war' on 'totality', through a re-examination of the Enlightenment, Lyotard was not a postmodernist; his analysis is in many respects a debate within parameters set by Freud, Marx and Saussure. Lyotard's analysis adopts the modernist distinction between 'facts' and 'signs' and 'nature' and the 'social'. Many of his later books have a postmodern gloss, but they all contain a modernist disclaimer, to distance Lyotard from the consequences of his postmodern gloss.

The postmodern gloss

In *Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation: Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity* (1984a) Lyotard argues that:

> philosophy heads not towards the unity of meaning or the unity of being, not towards transcendence, but towards multiplicity and the incommensurability of works. A philosophical task doubtless exists, which is to reflect according to opacity. (Lyotard, 1984a: 193)

The modernist disclaimer

In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), after Lyotard has signalled the breaking up of grand narratives, he explains:

> This breaking up of the grand Narratives leads to what some authors analyse in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion. Nothing of the kind is happening. (Lyotard, 1984: 15)

What is the role and purpose of the narrative for Lyotard?

Narratives are made up of 'statements', which are in themselves 'moves' within a 'framework' of 'generally applicable rules' (Lyotard, 1984: 26). The narrative has three purposes:

- It bestows legitimacy upon institutions, which Lyotard refers to as the function of myth (1984: 20). People learn the culture of a society in the form of 'little stories'; when the stories are repeated this allows the community to feel it has permanence and legitimacy.
- The narrative represents positive or negative models, which Lyotard refers to as creation of the successful or unsuccessful hero (1984: 20).
- Individuals are integrated into established institutions: Lyotard refers to this as the creation of legends and tales (1984: 20). Narratives enable the self-identification of a culture and help to maintain self-identity of a people who share the culture.

As Lyotard makes clear: 'What is transmitted through these narratives is the set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond' (1984: 21).

The narrative defines a community's relationship to itself and its environment. Moreover, the narration 'betokens a theoretical identity between each of the narrative's occurrences' (1984: 22). I believe this means that the narrative contains within itself the pragmatic rules of when and why it should appear. Each time the narrative is drawn upon, this suggests something about the appropriateness of the narrative's use, role and purpose in holding together the social bond. Narratives have to be put into 'play' (1984: 23) within institutions by people. The narrative in this way defines what is right and what is appropriate within a culture. At the same time, the narrator has a need for collective approval; the narrator must be seen to be competent.

So narratives permit a society in which they are told to fix the limits of its basis for competence and to evaluate according to those limits what actions are carried out or what actions can be carried out. In an effort to distance himself from modernist ways of thinking, Lyotard outlines what he calls a non-universalised pragmatics for the transmission of narratives. He is keen to point out that this does not mean a set of pre-existing categories. Instead the pragmatic of the narrative is 'intrinsic to them' (Lyotard, 1984: 20): for example a narrative may have a fixed formula. In addition, the narrator has no other claim to capability for telling the story than having heard the story before. The narrator is an agent, and his or her role presupposes a social relationship in which one person is telling the story and the others are cast in the role of listeners. These narrator–listener relationships, and the ability to recognise and follow the narrative structure, pre-date the telling of the narrative, despite Lyotard's claim that he does not intend a set of pre-existing categories. It is for this reason that I suggest that Lyotard's notion of narrative presupposes a social relationship in which narration can take place.

For Lyotard, postmodernity is about mourning the destruction of meaning because 'knowledge is no longer principally narrative' (1984: 26). This may well mean that Lyotard mourns the destruction of the social relationship in which grand narration takes place – modernity. Nevertheless, the social is still in a narrative form, albeit little narratives rather than grand narratives. The narrative function remains the same.

The notion of the language game, a key element in narration, is more fully developed by Lyotard in *The Différend*.

Lyotard, *The Différend: Phrases in Dispute* (1988)

According to Lyotard, people make language for their own ends. A 'differend' describes a case in which there is a conflict between two parties that cannot be resolved because both sides have a legitimate case, but they speak in different idioms. Because there has been a decline in universalist discourses, such situations are more problematical than ever.

Taking his starting point from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Lyotard describes the decline in universalist doctrines as the decline in the acceptance of terms which would once have been used to resolve differends – for example reality, subject, community and finality. Universality cannot be based upon sensations such as impressions, affect or taste. It is not possible to avoid conflicts, and such conflicts are much more intense because there is no 'universal genre of discourse to regulate' (Lyotard, 1988: xi) such conflicts. As Lyotard explains:

> A case of differend between two parties takes place when the 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the parties is not signified in that idiom . . . The differend is signalled by [the] inability to prove. The one who lodges a complaint is heard, but the one who is a victim, and who is perhaps the same one, is reduced to silence. (Lyotard, 1988: 9–10)

The purpose of *The Différend: Phrases in Dispute* is to 'examine cases of differend and to find rules for the heterogeneous genres of discourse that bring about these cases' (Lyotard, 1988: xii).

Any phrase is constituted by a set of rules which Lyotard labels as the **phrase regimens**; these include reasoning, knowing, describing, recounting, questioning, showing, ordering, prescriptiveness, evaluation, interrogativity, etc. It is important, claims Lyotard, to distinguish between different phrase regimens as this limits the competence of people to comment on only one form of phrase. The links between phrase regimens cannot have relevance. The impertinence may be opportune within a genre of discourse. In addition, Lyotard discusses **genres of discourse** which supply rules for linking together heterogeneous phrases. Genres of discourse always provide the framework for phrases and determine what is at stake in linking phrases. These include: 'the prescriptive', 'the cognitive', 'the appraisal' and 'the phrase of the Idea', all of which make some appeal to authority. The only exception to this is 'vengeance', which makes no appeal to authority; such as statements about the time. These rules help us to attain certain goals: to know, to teach, to be just, to seduce, to justify, to evaluate, to rouse emotion. In particular, 'reality' is found within three families of phrases – cognitive phrases, nominations and ostensives. However, genres of discourse merely shift the differend from the point of phrase regimens to that of ends.

According to Lyotard, 'validation' is a genre of discourse, not a phrase regimen. No phrase can be validated from inside its own regimen, and a descriptive can be validated cognitively only by recourse to an 'ostensive'. A 'prescriptive' is validated juridically or politically by a 'normative' – comments which start with the statement *it is the norm that* . . . – or ethically, by reference to a feeling state that *things ought to be*.

A cognitive phrase, such as 'This wall is white' can be validated by a descriptive phrase such as 'It was declared that the wall is white'. A conjunction verifies a referent. With a cognitive phrase a conjunction is required which takes the form of a conjunction of knowledge. Judgements outside of the area of cognition are not based upon an appeal to knowledge but refer to moral, aesthetic appeals or make some other appeal to the imagination or intuition. It is not possible to make statements about such positions in relation to the 'truth' content or 'falsehood' of such statements.

One of the central issues here is that authority is exercised at the level of the normative phrase. Acceptance of the norm transforms a prescription into a law. This is the notion of the 'metalanguage', which performs the important function for authority of building a connection between heterogeneous phrases, allowing some and forbidding others. The problem with any metalanguage is that the addresser can also play the role of addressee: what is acceptable is acceptable only according to the view of one party. As Lyotard suggests: 'Ethics prohibits dialogue' (1988: 111).

In Lyotard's view, it is by following an order, by doing it, that a new norm is created. However, as he points out in his discussion of Auschwitz, the Nazis made laws without reference to anyone except themselves. The reason for this was because the 'absence of an addressee is also the absence of a witness' (Lyotard, 1988: 102). The notion of *we* vanished at Auschwitz. For Lyotard, Auschwitz designates: 'the conjunction of two unconjugateable phrases: a norm without an addressee, a death sentence without legitimacy' (1988: 103). This is a universalising logic which states that 'what is foreign to the people gives rise to a policing by extermination' (1988: 106). Clearly, Lyotard rejects 'terror' as something which is without morality and accepts 'justice' as something which is moral.

In Lyotard's view a differend can be brought to a satisfactory conclusion for all parties by the imposition of a narrative. The key narrative function is the imposition of a space of internal peace, which involves the pushing aside of pertinent meaning to the edge of a community and hence ending disputes. This is known as a 'regimentation in principle' (Lyotard, 1988: 153), by which a community assures itself of meaning. The narrative constitutes the culture of the community. The universalisation of the community reduces conflict within the community.

Both phrase regimens and genres of discourse are used to neutralise differends within narratives. This is because the narrative has a privileged place, because it has an affinity with the people. Lyotard gives the example of the narrative '*Love one another*' (1988: 159, italics in original). This statement has authority that can be extended to all narratives, although it may take on a more secular or worldly form, such as 'republican brotherhood' or 'communist solidarity'. The narrative has then a universal and moral character that applies to all people within a community.

Critique of Lyotard

One of the problems with *The Différend* (1988) is Lyotard's Manichaean worldview – his belief that the world can be clearly divided between good and evil forces: the Postmodernists against the Fascists. However, Lyotard ends up committing the same sin that he accuses the modernists of committing. He argues in favour of universalist metalanguage because it can guarantee freedom and liberty, whilst at the same time condemning universalist metalanguage because it cannot guarantee freedom and liberty, leading in the last analysis to Auschwitz. This would suggest that there is nothing in itself inherently wrong with universalist metalanguage, and oddly enough, Lyotard draws upon a number of ethical phrases to create the norm that Fascism is wrong. Lyotard has an unstated universalist moral code, which draws upon ideas of what it means to be 'human' and how the human should be treated.

As we saw above, Lyotard argues that the breaking up of grand narrative does not lead to the dissolution of the social bond. In addition, he suggests that 'language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist' (1984: 15). This statement, however, presupposes that a 'social' relationship exists before the 'language game' can take place. As Lyotard makes clear, we as individuals are 'nodal points' (ibid.) in the framework of social relationships. There is then an unstated notion of the social that is universalist in nature. Lyotard never embraced uncertainty. The narrative structure, with its pre-existing social relationship, is this unstated and universal notion of the social that allows Lyotard to have an answer to the question 'How is society possible?' This is seen most clearly in his 'Philosophy and painting in the age of experimentation' (1984a), where he discusses the concept of 'structure'. In place of 'structure' or 'system' Lyotard refers to a 'game' relationship between an addresser and an addressee on a stage that has no 'off-stage' component. Each component of the stage is an 'instance' or 'episode' and our ability to speak to each other can switch from one episode to another. When the addresser speaks to the addressee they present 'micrologics' – tiny universes that are envious of other 'micrologics'. This is said by Lyotard to reject the 'concrete universal', but it does not because such 'games' presuppose a pre-existing 'social' relationship. The notion of 'game' is yet another gloss. In short, Lyotard's work is 'modernist' in nature, because of its essential, but often valid, appeal to a universalist notion of the social.

Activity: what does the word 'social' mean?

Contemplate for a few moments what you consider to be the difference between the following lists of terms, and then attempt the question below:

Term	*Definition*	*Term*	*Definition*
Justice		Social justice	
Democracy		Social democracy	
Welfare		Social welfare	
Security		Social security	
Care		Social care	
Work		Social work	

What do you understand by the term 'social'? Write a short paragraph in which you outline your ideas.

Richard Rorty

Richard Rorty is one of the world's most persuasive contemporary postmodern philosophers. He has looked at a number of issues which sociologists have concerned themselves with, notably the nature of solidarity – where Rorty attempts to answer the age-old sociological question 'How is society possible?' In addition he has investigated the nature and foundations of knowledge, and rejected the traditional conceptions of 'the self'. Rorty endeavours to create a theory of morality/solidarity in a situation of loss of certainty in people's lives. He discredits traditional philosophy, replacing its well-established but misguided foundations with concepts and constructs that are more postmodern in nature. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) Rorty argues that it is possible to develop a theory which treats both our individual need for self-creation and our collective need for human solidarity as equally convincing and yet at the same time distinct. Rorty defines his key terms as **liberal**: 'people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do' (1989: xv) and **ironist** as: 'the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own central beliefs and desires'. The 'ironist' is an individual who is aware that their core convictions and aspirations are related to the circumstances that they choose to place themselves in. Another key concept is **vocabulary**, which is primarily concerned with giving indications of possible future outcomes, such as 'What shall I be?' and 'What can I become?' The 'liberal ironist' is a person who wishes to end the suffering and humiliation of other human beings. The central idea of a liberal society is that in terms of words and persuasion 'anything goes'.

In Rorty's view, human solidarity is something that we as people have to accomplish; it is not simply 'given'. In other words, solidarity is created not discovered. A key element of this accomplishment is our ability to see 'others' not as strange people whom we can marginalise, but as fellow human beings, who can feel pain. The task of bringing about a change in our perception of 'the other' is not one for theory, but a task for ethnographers, docudrama makers and especially novelists. What works of fiction can do is to show us the kind of cruelty we are able to inflict upon other humans and at the same give us an opportunity to redefine ourselves. Books can encourage us to become less diabolical and Rorty divides them into two types:

- books which encourage us to comprehend the consequences of routines, customs and institutions for others;
- books that encourage us to see the consequences of our own personal peculiarities for others.

The result of this is that for Rorty 'doing philosophy' is like having a conversation: often-imaginary conversations with dead authors. Both 'truth' and 'solidarity' emerge from such conversations. By reading stories, such as the ones mentioned above, we investigate different vocabularies and reconstruct both society and ourselves.

At the end of the eighteenth century, intellectuals across Europe started to accept the notion that 'truth' was something to be created rather than discovered. This was highly significant for politics because it meant that humans were capable of creating new forms of society.

Rorty is not suggesting that there is no truth. In contrast, he is suggesting that truth is a property that all true statements share; and that it is the name we give to statements that can be justified as good in relation to our beliefs. In the latter case, we may not be in a position to prove that the time is 3.30p.m.; however, we can say that we believe that clocks can be used to tell the time and trust that others will share our interpretation that the clock hands can be read as saying that it is 3.30p.m.

Rorty makes a distinction between the statements 'The world is out there' and 'The truth is out there'. The first suggests that the world is a 'thing' that exists independently of human thought. The world was created without the use of the mental processes of human beings. In contrast, the latter statement, that 'The truth is out there', is not acceptable, because individual people create the truth. The truth is built up of sentences, constructed by people and used to describe and explain the world. These sentences can be either true or false, but they are only there in time and space because we place them there. Truth is a property of any sentence. As Rorty explains: 'only sentences can be true, and . . . human beings make truths by making languages in which to phrase sentences' (1989: 9).

We can spell out Rorty's argument as follows:

- Truth is a characteristic of sentences.
- Sentences can exist only if vocabularies exist first.
- Vocabularies are created by human beings.
- It follows that human beings create truths.

Rorty argues that there is no pre-linguistic truth embedded within a pre-linguistic consciousness that could act as a criterion for judging the validity of any truth statements. Truth is found within our final vocabulary. To create a new vocabulary, we need to have a detailed knowledge of past writers. This will give us an insight into forms of intellectual life that are different from our own. Truth in these circumstances becomes a matter of classification: taking an expression or idea from our reading and conversations and reviewing it in the context of other expressions or ideas that we might be willing to make our own. Rather than the traditional view of truth – attempting to find a match between an idea and some 'given' external reality over which we have no control – in Rorty's view 'truth' and 'meaning' are one and the same.

The human self is also created by vocabulary, which is a set of words that people make use of to defend their actions, beliefs and how they organise their lives. The traditional view of the self was that we had a 'core self' which held beliefs and desires. These were expressed by the self if and when the self thought it appropriate to do so. The views as expressed by the self could be criticised on the grounds that they did not agree with reality. Rorty's argument is that the core self is a network of beliefs and desires; and, just like truth, statements are human creations dependent upon sentences and in the last analysis upon vocabulary; so is the self. The self is made and it is a linguistic entity. In getting to know ourselves, we come to accept that we cannot discover a 'true' self but we can create a self. In dealing with the situations that individual selves find themselves in, we have to create a new language upon which our self will be built.

The ironist has serious doubts about their chosen vocabulary, and is often impressed by rival vocabularies. For the ironist we can revise our own moral identity by revising our vocabulary, but nothing can act as a critique of our chosen vocabulary except an alternative vocabulary and there is nothing beyond vocabularies. Hence, the ironist spends a great deal of time reflecting on whether they have chosen the wrong vocabulary and reading books in an effort to experience alternative vocabularies.

There is always more than one vocabulary and liberal societies are bound together by common vocabularies and common hopes. This suggests that the liberal society always has great potential for conflict. Therefore, in liberal societies, we have a need for persuasion rather than force; reform rather than revolution; open rather than closed meetings. In other words, the liberal society 'is one which has no purpose except freedom' (Rorty, 1989: 60). As Rorty states:

> If we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself. If we are ironic enough about our final vocabularies, and curious enough about everyone else's, we do not have to worry about whether we are in direct contact with moral reality, or whether we are blinded by ideology, or whether we are being weakly 'relativistic'. (1989: 176–7)

Traditionally, the need for 'human solidarity' has been seen as a component of the 'core self' of all individuals. But Rorty rejects the notion of a 'core self': people are what is socialised into them, and this does not include any inner freedom, biologically driven desire or built-in human nature for solidarity. All we share with others is the ability to feel pain. In Rorty's view solidarity is, in the first instance, built upon **we-intentions**. A 'we-intention' is a sentence drawn from our vocabulary that starts with the phrase: 'We all want . . .' rather than 'I want . . .'. Hence we feel our strongest sense of solidarity with people who are thought of as 'one of us', people who are viewed as 'local' rather than as members of the human race. Whom we choose to define as 'local' is a matter for our 'final vocabulary'. Solidarity is about breaking down these divisions, making 'they' into 'we', viewing 'others' as people who can feel pain and humiliation, the same as we do. 'We-intentions' as the foundation of a moral obligation allow us to develop ethical considerations within a sense of solidarity and because of an attraction we have as individuals to another individual. Finally, 'we-intentions' allow us to develop our own personal self-creation as an ethical process.

This means that for Rorty, in contrast to Marxists, solidarity is produced in the course of history and political progress is brought about by the 'accidental coincidence' of a private obsession with a public need. Rorty then attempts to produce a form of postmodern politics which is without a 'certainist discourse' and without absolute foundations, such as the Marxian mode of production, and in which people have a full and fair chance to achieve their potential. There will be a willingness to listen, as this will be a world of political liberals and philosophical ironists.

One of the consequences of Rorty's attempt to construct a postmodern ethics built, as it currently stands, upon an anti-foundationalism, is that morality becomes a matter of personal taste. To do otherwise is to argue from a position that assumes a universally valid foundation for all morality, which would be outside of an individual's vocabulary. One might ask if Rorty's theory of truth/solidarity/morality can be built upon the foundation of personal taste. In Rorty's view liberal democracy is 'good' and Fascism is bad, yet his anti-foundationalism prevents him from discussing this. But how do people justify acts of cruelty to themselves? What is so attractive in humiliating and hurting others? Concentration camp guards are people; they too can feel pain and humiliation; they too can read Nabakov and Orwell; they too have families that they love and care for – yet they choose a vocabulary of cruelty and humiliation. What Rorty does is to make all vocabularies of equal validity and for this reason we might wonder why a person could or should become an ironist. In a world where nothing can be wrong, why search for what is right?

Zygmunt Bauman

When the kids had killed the man,
I had to break up the band.
David Bowie, 'Ziggy Stardust'

Here I outline the continuity of modernist assumptions in the English-language writings of Zygmunt Bauman (1925–present) from the 1970s through to the end of the 1990s. Bauman's work on morality is found to be yet another illustration of the agency–structure debate which has dominated sociological theorising throughout the twentieth century. He attempts to locate and describe the relationship between the external relations in the world (the structure, or the social) and the internal condition of the person (the nature of agency). Bauman's work is built upon a modernist concept of the social, of the self as a person type, his notion of a postmodern ethics is oppressive and could be used as a justification for cruelty. The postmodern Bauman never existed: it is a myth created by people such as the editors of the *THeory, CUlture & Society Festschrift*. I will end by giving an indication of what an amoral postmodern self should look like.

No area of either academic life or popular culture is untouched by the influence of postmodern ideas and yet there is confusion about the nature of postmodernism. What is it? For many people, Zygmunt Bauman is the person who has provided the most effective response to this question. Taking as my starting point Bauman's postmodern ethics, the opinion developed here is rather different: that Bauman speaks from a moral position that he cannot acknowledge.

Bauman's work on ethics in a postmodern world draws heavily upon the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Understanding 'the Other', understanding their suffering and powerlessness even when the Other is a stranger, is central to his conception of intersubjectivity. We have a responsibility for the Other, and a duty to respect the difference of the Other. In contrast to what he terms the 'philosophy of subjectivity' – the strong emphasis on self – which underpins most modern philosophy and to Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), Levinas offers the Hebrew phrase *Hineni* (Here I am). Our relationship with 'the Other' may not be one of equality, but it should be such that we attend to their suffering. Levinas terms this **the ethical relation**. Responsibility for the Other is what underpins the pursuit of justice.

In *Alone Again: Ethics after Certainty* (1994) Bauman opens his discussion by contrasting the views and life experience of Leon Shestov who believed that 'In each of our neighbours we fear a wolf' with Knud Logstrup who believed that 'It is a characteristic of human life that we mutually trust each other' (1994: 1). He accounts for the difference in views between the two philosophers by comparing their very different life experiences in two very different societies: 'Their generalizations contradicted each other, but so did the lives they generalized from. And this seems to apply to all of us' (1994: 2).

This comment, on the surface, is a rather obvious statement; however, it contains Bauman's notion of the 'social' (first developed in his Ph.D. thesis) and an inclination of how the 'social' operates on the individual human agent.

From this point Bauman goes on to outline his theory of morality:

> morality means *being-for* (not merely being-aside or even being-with) the Other. To take a moral stance means to assume responsibility for the Other; to act on the assumption that the well-being of the Other is a precious thing calling for my effort to preserve and enhance it, that whatever I do or do not do affects it, and that if I have not done it, it might not have been done at all, and that even if others do or can do it this does not cancel my responsibility for doing it myself . . . And this being-for is unconditional. (Bauman, 1994: 18–19)

These ideas are more fully developed in *Life in Fragments* (1995) in which Bauman repeats the above comment:

> We are, so to speak, ineluctably – *existentially* – moral beings: that is, we are faced with the challenge of the Other, which is the challenge of responsibility for the Other, a condition of *being-for*. (1995: 1)

The difference between *being-with* and *being-for* the Other is about our level of commitment, about our emotional engagement with the Other. This involves regarding the Other not as a type or a category but as a unique person. It means:

- rejecting indifference towards the Other;
- rejecting stereotyped certainty about the Other;
- viewing the Other in a fashion that is free from sentiment.

It is in relation to the Other that we make our choice between good and evil. Moreover, as Bauman clearly explains, *being-for* the Other is in the last analysis a power relationship because it involves being responsible for the Other:

> I am responsible for defining the needs of the Other; for what is good, and what is evil for the Other. If I love her and thus desire her happiness, it is my responsibility to decide what would make her truly happy. If I admire her and wish her perfection, it is my responsibility to decide what her perfect form would be like. If I respect her and want to preserve and enhance her freedom, it is again my responsibility to spell out what her genuine autonomy would consist of. (Bauman, 1995: 65)

What Bauman is doing has a great deal in common with the approach of Durkheim and Giddens. Far from being a postmodernist, Bauman is a collaborator with all the key modernist assumptions contained within his social theory. He claims to have found a natural moral faculty within the human being. But how are such moral judgements possible? The answer is through our human faculty – our human agency. The problem with the natural moral faculty is that it is questionable if 'nature' has any 'morality'. It is when Bauman talks about the source of morality that his convictions appear on the scene. Bauman attempts to give morality a basis, but morality itself is regarded as something universal and 'given'. It is treated as 'that which has always been', which justifies the actions of a person in the eyes of 'the Other'. Suffering is something that must be done away with. What is the aim of Bauman's conception of morality? To shame the person into obedience? To make us believe in our own virtue? Or discover our conscience? To find our soul? At the same time Bauman attempts to cast the postmodern self as the wicked but happy 'Other'. As we shall see in our discussion of his 'postmodern ethics', for Bauman morality is a mode of biological fact. Fundamentally, Bauman provides what he calls a 'natural', hence beyond critique or emancipation, discussion of what causes us to desire our own domination.

One of the many problems with Bauman's theory of morality is that what is fair to one may not be fair to another. There is always the risk that morality can be little more than an apology for cruelty. Whenever a person raises the issue of morality, they have 'the Other' in mind and the idea in their head of 'the Other' behaving in a way which is unacceptable. The appeal to morality allows one to impose one's will on the Other with justification. In this sense Bauman is no different from the Nazis he so strongly condemns in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989).

Whatever else postmodernism is about, it is about saying goodbye to morality and about losing the ability to be appalled by acts of cruelty. In contrast, Bauman's postmodern ethics is about providing a justification for action against the behaviour of others. We do not like the behaviour of the Other; it breaks our moral code, so we take action. To act is to impose our will on the Other and this may mean acting in a way that makes use of the methods that cruel people use. Moral codes not only harbour their own kind of purity, they necessarily provide justifications for cruelty.

The creation of a postmodernist

In his contribution to the *Theory, Culture & Society Festschrift* of Bauman's work, Stefan Morawski commented:

> Richard Kilminster suggested to me that I should possibly focus on the Polish track. A reasonable idea – in line with the famous saying of Goethe: '*Wer den Dichter will verstehen, muss in Dichters Lande gehen*' (who wants to understand the poet, must go to the poet's homeland). There are compelling elements of Zygmunt's biography which bear on his scholarly achievements. (Morawski, 1998: 29)

The image of Bauman that Richard Kilminster and Ian Varcoe (1998) present is a myth, the sole purpose of which is to inflate Bauman's postmodernist representation of himself in his own work. The *Festschrift* presents an image of Bauman as a free-floating individual, general sociologist, independent thinker and postmodernist, expelled from both his homeland and his chair by a harsh and oppressive communist regime. On becoming an intellectual refugee Bauman is said to have moved from Tel Aviv to Leeds – a home for intellectual refugees. However, this is a created biography. Bauman was an intellectual tourist. He had spent a considerable time in England prior to his expulsion from Poland in 1968, first as a research student at the LSE under the supervision of Robert McKenzie, from the mid- to the late 1950s, and then as a lecturer at the University of Manchester in the early 1960s.

In Bauman's writings at this time, which are often confused, he attempts to make clear his relationship to modernity, Marxism, human agency and the Communist Party. Far from a postmodern narrating of uncertainty, the modernist assumptions he developed in these works are still to be found in Bauman's current writings. The only difference is that his writings now have a surface postmodern gloss. People who are impressed by Bauman's work see this surface shine and confuse it with depth. It is not.

Bauman is unable to abandon specific key Enlightenment assumptions. I argue that Bauman's sociology is constructed around several modernist inventions: the social, the self, categorisation, person types and the biological origin of morality built upon the animal pity we sense when we see human suffering. Bauman uses these modernist assumptions to conceal his (arguably) inadequate notions of the self as agent and solidarity.

Bauman as modernist

1972

What are the modernist assumptions within the writings of Zygmunt Bauman? To answer this question we need to take a close look at his writing career, starting with his 1972 text, *Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement. A Sociological Study*. Bauman explains that his study is 'sociological in character. Its primary task is to grasp general social laws and trends, while the presentation of a chronology of historical events falls into a subsidiary place' (1972: 230).

What is the sociological content of Bauman's 1972 text? Bauman views the social as something which is over and above the individual human agent and which shapes the agent and the actions of the agent. The social is described as a 'superstructure sui generis' (1972: 141). In addition the social evolves in a similar fashion to the evolution that we find in modern Marxian or functionalist sociologies 'determined not just by the contemporary cultural climate but by the material characteristics of an evolving environment' (1972: 34). Bauman also takes up the notion of person types and undervalues the role of the human agent. Consider the following examples: 'The personal characteristics which designated the man who possessed them as a potential leader of a workers' organisation were determined by the social milieu in whose terrain the organisation was to function' (1972: 54) and 'The widely differing cultural backgrounds and diverse origins of the masses of factory workers made them plastic, receptive and ready to accept conceptions and structures from without' (1972: 29).

Bauman concludes his study as follows:

> What seems to be significant is the fact that nothing important happens in human history unless the two analytically separable deterministic chains of 'situation' and its 'ideological assessment' meet, i.e. unless an available ideology renders a privately or collectively experienced situation intelligible to the actors and does it in a way which makes the ideologically reshaped aims of the actors feasible. The relation is dialectical and not deterministic, since the compatibility of a situation with an ideology within reach happens to be an after-effect of this ideology as it was operative at an earlier phase; at least to the same extent the selection of an ideology from those which are available is a function of the form taken by the situation. (Bauman, 1972: 327)

The human agent can only choose what to believe from within a narrow range of given ideologies. This undervaluing of the human agent is a theme that is found in all of Bauman's texts, even those that are presented with a postmodern gloss.

1973

In *Culture as Praxis* (1973) Bauman makes clear the concept of **person types** that plays an important but hidden role in his latter texts:

> Using the term 'culture' with the indefinite article makes sense only if supported by an implicit assumption that nothing universal can be a cultural phenomenon; there are, to be sure, numerous universal features of social and cultural systems, but they do not, by definition, belong to the field denoted by the word 'culture' . . . and would have been better referred to some psycho-biological, proto-cultural phenomena. (1973: 22)

> The only idea of universally compatible with the differential concept of culture is the universal presence of some sort of a culture in the human species (exactly as in the case of Saussurean language); but what is meant in the above statement is rather a universal feature of human beings, not of culture itself. (1973: 23)

Bauman further develops his modernist notion of structure, writing that 'social structure is a hard core of the social organisation . . . the lasting, time-spanning, little changing skeleton of the social practice' (1973: 107). This builds on his earlier notion that 'the social' is a 'superstructure sui generis' (1972: 141).

Bauman's descriptors of structure (1973)

- 'structure is limiting'
- structure = communication
- structure = rules
- rules = patterns
- 'structure is not directly accessible to sensory experience. Neither is it derivable directly from processing the experiential data'
- 'Universals are generative rules, found in all areas of social life, which cannot be seen but which "govern" human praxis' (Bauman, 1973: 63–4, 80)

This modernist notion of structure is supplemented by Bauman's discussion of culture as reality. For him, 'ordering human environment and patterning human relations is one of its universally admitted functions' (1973: 100).

What is the role of the human agent in this structure? According to Bauman, forces outside of its control shape the person: 'universals may be established on the level of factors operative in shaping both "epistemic beings" and "praxis actors", i.e. both human individuals and networks of their relationships' (1973: 79–80).

Bauman also gives a full and clear outline of 'uncertainty', which he describes as by no means a subjective phenomenon' (1973: 66).

1976

For Bauman in 1976 there is a distinction between 'being', which he claims is an attribute of nature, and 'becoming' which is described as a 'human way of being-in-the-world' (Bauman, 1976a: 34). Bauman also makes a distinction between 'reality' and 'possible reality'. Drawing upon rationality to bring about a change from the current objective reality to an alternative objective reality Bauman described as 'the human modality' (1976a: 35). In other words, rationality is the resource that the agent draws upon to make a difference in the world. The human is essentially rational.

For Bauman, 'reality' is to be approached sociologically as an 'object'. The social, or as he terms it 'the social background', should be seen 'as an objectified artefact of human thinking' (1976a: 37).

In his 1976 work Bauman (1976a) describes the social as an 'impersonal structure', which contains a 'civil society' made up of a 'network of economic dependencies' and 'a web of communication'. The social has a game-like quality that takes the form of a structure beyond the control of the individual human agent:

> The activity of meaning-negotiating never takes off from a zero-point; in each case the cards have already been distributed and the hands are not even, while the rules of the game itself are hardly open to negotiation by the current players. (1976a: 40)

The 'game', and the social as a game, is a common theme in Bauman's work well into the 1990s. In the 1976(a) text there is a discussion of morality within the Soviet system, where Bauman make use of his notion of 'game'. As he explains, Soviet morality 'frowns upon shy mutterings about the individual's right to disobedience, for non-compliance with the rules of the game is a social sin and puts the sinner outside the community' (1976a: 91).

In a similar fashion, in his discussion of planning in the Soviet Union Bauman argues that: 'The forced labour conditions imposed upon Soviet industry made the workers' performance essentially independent of the game of material rewards' (1976a: 94–5).

In summary a 'game' is contained with 'the social' and has a number of characteristics:

- It binds and controls people.
- It restricts choice.
- It directs thought.
- It exists independently of the historical epoch.
- It is objective.
- It is concrete.

Bauman's conception of 'the social' in 1976

- It is a codified domain.
- It is free of subjective human traits – objective and impersonal.
- It is an objective civil society.
- It is a network of economic dependencies.
- It is web of communication.
- It is rule governed.
- The human agent is rational within it.
- The human agent is rule following rather than rule making.
- The social has a game-like structure, with the rules outside of the control of the human agent.
- The behaviour of the human agent is at least partly determined by economic factors.
- Debates between systems of thought take place independently of the human agent.

It is little wonder that Bauman describes the human agent as 'the abandoned individual' (1976b: 48).

This 1976(b) text also returns the reader to the notion of uncertainty, which also is a key theme in Bauman's later texts. He outlines several 'objects' which are privately owned and which 'control access to the means of existence' (1976b: 92). They include tools of production, new materials and access to merchandising. The 'supreme uncertainty' is said to be 'terror'. As Bauman explains: 'Whoever controls these objects, therefore, holds in his hands paramount foci of uncertainty' (ibid.). Terror is said to be 'in the situation of individuals, the paramount determinant of conduct, deflating all the other traditional factors' (1976b: 95).

1978

Bauman's *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding* (1978) is about the response of social science to hermeneutics. Here Bauman uses the opportunity to outline what he understands by the nature of understanding:

> Understanding as such can be achieved only by 'universalising' anew the Spirit hidden in the endless variety of human cultural creation. (1978: 28)

Bauman assumes that essential subjective human action can be understood objectively – the psyche can not only be described but its motivation can be classified and understood. This world is a reality for Bauman because it is built upon a biological morality. The 1978 text make only passing reference to morality; however, it does look at some length at the 'stock of knowledge', information which is needed for social action to take place: 'Perhaps parts of the stock are elements of "natural endowment" of a human agent, Kant-like; perhaps other parts are societally-induced and sedimented from initial stages of socialization' (1978: 183).

Bauman also introduces the notion of classification into 'types':

> 'Types' are an indispensable element of the stock of knowledge. Our impressions are not analysable if chaotic, they are thinkable only if they are from the start organized into objects and events which belong to classes, each with its distinctive features and clues facilitating their recognition. Types have a lasting quality; an important feature of the natural attitude is the 'and so forth' generalization, implying that things will continue to be what they are at the moment, and that, consequently, I will be able to repeat in the future the same operations that I have committed on things in the past. All this I accept uncritically . . . (1978: 183)

In the light of this comment, we need to read very carefully the comments about 'structure' in Bauman's 1991 book, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, for example, when Bauman argues that structure is 'a normal aspect of linguistic practice. It arises from one of the main functions of language: that of naming and classifying . . . To classify . . . is to give the world a *structure*: to manipulate its probabilities; to make some events more likely than some others; to behave as if events were not random, or to limit or eliminate randomness of events . . . Language strives to sustain the order and to deny or suppress randomness and contingency' (1991: 186). The natural attitude is real, the natural endowment is real, and these factors shape our experience of the world and divide up the world into distinct categories that organise experience and form the basis of all ontology.

It is important not to underestimate the role of 'nature' in Bauman's analysis; nature is 'the realm of unfreedom', it is 'the ultimate limit of human action' (Bauman, 1976a: 2). As Bauman makes explicit in *Towards a Critical Sociology: An Essay on Commonsense and Emancipation*. '"Nature" is a cultural concept. It stands for that irremovable component of human experience which defies human will and sets unencroachable limits to human action' (1976b: 2). This may sound innocent enough; however, Bauman continues by saying: 'it is Nature, the hostess, who sets the rules of the game, and who defines this freedom' (1976b: 4). What is important here is that Bauman identifies the origin of **the rules of the game**, which play such a crucial role in all his later works. Finally, he gives us a clear account of the relationship between human action and nature: 'Nature supplies not just the boundaries of reasonable action and thought: it supplies reason itself. All valid knowledge is a reflection of nature' (1976b: 5).

Bauman as postmodernist

Bauman starts his postmodern analysis with what he considers to be the uncertain and/or unfamiliar and traces it back to what he considers to be both certain and familiar. However, all people have the ability to 'suspend the natural attitude' and treat anything and everything as uncertain and unfamiliar. Most of us seem to regard the world as a fairly ordered place, until something comes along to make us think otherwise. What Bauman simply does is to 'suspend the natural attitude' about everything, and pass this off as postmodernism. Moreover, Bauman reimposes 'the natural attitude' on the ground where he felt most comfortable, his own moral conviction about the attitude we should have towards the Other.

For the moment let us look in the window, at the consumer gloss. For Zygmunt Bauman, 'the postmodern' is not only about disregarding the 'totality' in our theorising, but also about the creation of a distinct epoch of history, detached from the past. For Bauman, modernity is a social totality which is Parsons-like in nature and murderous in the bureaucratic rationality of its intent:

> a 'principally co-ordinated' and enclosed totality (a) with a degree of cohesiveness, (b) equilibrated or marked by an overwhelming tendency to equilibration, (c) unified by an internally coherent value syndrome and a core authority able to promote and enforce it and (d) defining its elements in terms of the function they perform in that process of equilibration or the reproduction of the equilibrated state. (Bauman, 1992: 189)

For Bauman modernity is essentially bureaucratic in nature, and this is dangerous in the extreme. The Holocaust was a direct consequence of the Prussianised Weberian bureaucracy:

> in Weber's exposition of modern bureaucracy, rational spirit, principle of efficiency, scientific mentality, relegation of values to the realm of subjectivity etc. no mechanism was recorded that was capable of excluding the possibility of Nazi excesses . . . moreover there was nothing in Weber's ideal types that would necessitate the description of the activities of the Nazi state as *excesses*. For example, no horror perpetuated by the German medical profession or German technocrats was inconsistent with the view that values are inherently subjective and that science is intrinsically instrumental and value free. (Bauman, 1989: 10, italics added)

> *I propose to treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society* . . . Modern civilisation was not the Holocaust's *sufficient* condition; it was, however, most certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilisation that made the Holocaust thinkable. The Nazi mass murder of the European Jewry was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also the organisational achievement of a bureaucratic society . . . bureaucratic rationality is at its most dazzling once we realise the extent to which *the very idea of the* Endlosung *was an outcome of the bureaucratic culture* . . . At no point of its long and tortuous execution did the Holocaust come in conflict with the principles of rationality. The 'Final Solution' did not clash at any stage with the rational pursuit of efficient, optimal goal implementation. On the contrary, *it arose out of a genuine rational concern, and it was generated by bureaucracy true to its form and purpose*. (Bauman 1989: 12, 13, 15 and 17, italics added)

Guenther Roth, the distinguished Weberian scholar, has said of these views that he cannot agree with one sentence. 'Weber was a liberal, loved the constitution and approved of the working class's voting rights (and thus, presumably, could not be called in conjunction with a thing so abominable as the Holocaust)' (cited in Bauman, 1989: 10).

Bauman sees the modern social system as a self-regulating and self-balancing system, with its own shared values, attitudes, beliefs and mechanisms of self-reproduction. All human agents and institutions have a role and function to perform under the clear direction of a single rational legal authority which sets targets that cannot be reached and are often undesirable. Such progress, in the eyes of the central authority, is essential for maintaining solidarity. The human agent within this form of modernity is a cultural dope characterised by 'universality', 'homogeneity', and pushed about by forces outside of their control. In contrast:

> Postmodernity is modernity coming of age: modernity looking at itself at a distance rather than from inside, making a full inventory of its gains and losses, psychoanalysing itself, discovering the intentions it never before spelled out, finding them mutually cancelling and incongruous. Postmodernity is modernity coming to terms with its own impossibility; a self monitoring modernity that consciously discards what it was once unconsciously doing. (Bauman, 1991: 272)

In other words, postmodernity is a 'modernity conscious of its true nature' (Bauman, 1992: 187). A form of modernity that is self-critical, self-denigrating and self-dismantling. The most visible characteristics of this 'modernity for itself' are 'institutionalized pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence' (ibid.). Bauman is particularly concerned with the issue of 'ambivalence' and has devoted a book to this. Ambivalence is characterised by action that takes place within a habitat where one would expect individual human agents to have to choose between many rival and contradictory meanings: a situation where action is not determined by factors outside of human control. In a postmodern politics, this ambivalence becomes the main dimension of inequality, as access to knowledge is the key to freedom and enhanced social standing. Postmodernity has its own distinctive features which are self-contained and self-reproducing, constructed within a cognitive space which is very different from that of modernity.

The nature of postmodernity is described, by Bauman, as a pattern generated by human agents from their own random movements which may emerge for a short time before continuing with its constant renewal; a form of sociality rather than society that is both undetermined and undetermining, and contains no notion of progress in the modern sense of the word. In contrast to Giddens's conception of modernity, Bauman argues that postmodernity: '"unbinds" time, weakens the constraining impact of the past and effectively prevents colonization of the future' (1992: 190).

In Bauman's postmodern analysis, one would expect the focus to be upon the self-constituting human agent, which operates within the postmodern habitat. The concept of **habitat** is explained by Bauman as a 'complex system', a term derived from mathematics which suggests, first, that the system is unpredictable and, secondly, that forces outside of the control of the human agents do not control it that operate with it. There are no goal-setting, managing or coordinating institutions within the complex system, this makes constraint fall to an absolute minimum. Therefore, the human agents or any other element cannot be discussed by reference to its functionality or dysfunctionality; and no one agency can determine the activity of any other agent. Although Bauman explains that 'the postmodern eye (that is, the modern eye liberated from modern fears and inhibitions) views difference with zest and glee: difference is beautiful and no less good for that' (1991: 255).

In a similar fashion to a range of other writers, in Bauman's work the term 'postmodern' suggests a radical or 'experiential' break with the past. Whereas for Jean-François Lyotard, the postmodern condition is a situation in which individuals have lost faith in what he calls 'grand narratives', belief systems that were once accepted and that gave us a feeling of security, for Bauman postmodernity is characterised by a rejection of rationality in all its forms. We feel as if the 'social' is dissolving. The bonds of rational legal authority, which once held communities together, no longer have the same force. As a social formation postmodernity has no foundations, no shared culture to give us a feeling of security, no grand theory to help us explain or understand the situation we are in. The self is isolated in the postmodern condition without logic, rationality or morality to guide it. The postmodern condition is a world without certainty. However, everyone is said to have a need for both meaning and predictability in their lives and relationships.

Meanings generate a basis for predictability in our social relationships; but in the postmodern condition there is no legitimate order to provide such a foundation. Postmodern meanings take the form of kitsch, camp and above all the simulacrum (see 1991: 332).

What is a modern person?

Individual people have knowledge of their own existence, and a belief that they are the authors of their own actions. We can say that the self is an 'agent'. In other words, people feel that they are responsible for their actions. In addition individual people have an identity, a feeling of being part of a wider group, of being part of a number of wider associations, yet at the same time, a feeling of being unique. People who do not believe that they are themselves are thought to be suffering from some form of mental illness, such as Capgras Syndrome – a condition where an individual believes that either themselves or those close to them have been taken over by hostile agents.

The modern identity

The modern identity had two key elements:

- to be like the other people within a group and
- a common categorising of outward phenomena, such as race or the clothes people wear

In summary, a modern person is an agent, a unique individual with an identity. The modern sociological analysis of these issues was based upon the search for 'person types'.

In the postmodern condition notions of self, agency and identity should have changed. For the postmodernist there is no unitary self. Our analyses should involve very different conceptual strategies to cope with the plural and unstable constitution of the postmodern self. As Foucault made clear, before the end of the eighteenth century the self as we know it did not exist and with the coming of the end of modernity the self will be 'erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea' (cited in Ashley, 1997: 20). Many postmodern writers have recoiled from this startling conclusion of the death of the self.

According to Zygmunt Bauman (1996), in the postmodern world identity is becoming reconstructed and redefined, beyond these two key elements. Bauman agrees with Foucault that identity was a modern innovation. In the modern world, the problem was how to construct and maintain our identity in an effort to secure our place in the world and avoid uncertainty. This was because in the modern world the avoidance of uncertainty was seen as an individual problem, although support was always available from various professionals such as teachers and counsellors. Modern people view the city as a desert, a place in which name and identity are not fixed or given. The modern city is a place of nothingness that people had to find their way through. For this reason modern people would construct an identity not out of choice but out of necessity. Without our pilgrimage to a secure identity we may become lost in the desert. In the first instance, on our journey we need a place to walk to. This is our life project, which ideally should be established early in life and be used to make sense of the various uncertainties, fragments and divisions of experience that make up the post-traditional world. By creating a fixed and secure identity we attempt to make the world more ordered and more predictable for ourselves.

In contrast, in the postmodern world the problem of identity is one of *avoiding* a fixed identity and keeping our options open, avoiding long-term commitments, consistency and devotion. In place of a life project established as early as possible, that we loyally keep to, postmodern people choose to have a series of short projects that are not fixed. The world has the feel of being in a continuous present. It is no longer agreeable to pilgrims. In place of the pilgrim, a number of other lifestyles emerge: the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player. These lifestyles are not new to the postmodern world, but whereas in previous times marginal people in marginal situations adopted such lifestyles, they are now common to the majority of people in many situations.

These four successors to the pilgrim are postmodern life strategies:

- The **stroller** or the ***flâneur***. According to Bauman this became 'the central symbolic figure of the modern city' (Bauman, 1996: 26). This identity type looks at the surface meaning of things in the metropolitan environment: there is no deeper meaning underneath the surface of anything. The shopping mall is the place where we are most likely to see the *flâneur* in the postmodern world.
- The **vagabond**. This identity type is continually 'the stranger'; in a similar fashion to the pilgrim this person is perpetually on the move, but their movements have no preceding itinerary. In the modern and pre-modern world the vagabond was unable to settle down in any one place because they were always unsettled: 'The settled were many, the vagabonds few. Postmodernity reversed the ratio . . . Now the vagabond is a vagabond not because of the reluctance or difficulty of settling down, but because of the scarcity of settled places' (Bauman, 1996: 29). The world is becoming increasingly uncertain and unsettled.
- The **tourist**. The tourist moves purposefully away from home in search of a new experience. In the postmodern world we are losing the need for a home, but have a greater taste for the new experience. Home may offer security, but it has the numbing boredom of a prison.
- The **player**. For the player life is a game. Nothing is serious, nothing is controllable and nothing is predictable. Life is a series of 'moves' in a game that can be skilled, perceptive and deceptive. The point of the game is to 'stay ahead' and to embrace the game itself.

Life then is developing a rather shallow feel; it is fragmented and discontinuous in nature.

Wagner (1994) also outlines the notion of self in the postmodern condition. He argues that modernity gave individuals scope to construct their own identities but in the postmodern condition a superabundance of material products, cultural orientations and consumer practices has led to a very wide range of identity constructions. In addition, the 'enterprise culture' led directly to the 'enterprise self' – and to a significant increase in individual autonomy:

> Rather than resting on a secure place in a stable social order, individuals are asked to engage themselves actively in shaping their lives and social positions in a constantly moving social context. Such a shift must increase uncertainties and even anxieties' (Wagner, 1994: 165)

Modernism was a form of social organisation that attempted to refashion and control the irrational forces of nature in the interests of satisfying human need or human desire. Relationships between people were almost always rational and logical. Legal codes were put together on the basis of 'due process' of law and policed by rational organisations using bureaucratic methods. Within modernity, life had a secure and logical feel. Postmodernity is the form of society we are left with when the process of modernisation is complete. Human behaviour has little or no direct dealing with nature: we live in an artificial or manufactured environment. In the postmodern condition, the world has an abandoned, relative and unprotected feel for the individual human agent. Even sex and food, which for thousands of years were the pleasurable building blocks of life, are now amongst the numerous sources of danger. Lacking the protection of class and communal togetherness, lacking racial and gender identities, individuals are left to experience isolation and detachment, having to create their own bonds of solidarity, selfhood and rectitude. This is the postmodern predicament; for individuals *anything goes*: morally, spiritually and communally. For many of us, life is in fragments and we experience everyday life as an open space of moral, political and personal dilemmas.

Although his labels of tourist etc. seem postmodern, what Bauman is attempting to do is to identify 'person types'. This is exactly the same as the modernist practice of labelling people as homosexual, delinquent, hyperactive, nymphomaniac, etc. Such categories of self/identity are prefashioned and action limiting. Identities are given, formed by historical factors outside the control of the individual. This is most clearly stated when Bauman discusses life as having a 'game'-like structure. The self, in Bauman's analysis has an inherent property, like the 'thing' in Durkheim's analysis. In Bauman's work there is no deconstruction of the self or identity, no attempt to reflect on the possibility of the obvious terminus of the postmodern discourse on identity: a post-identity order. The self remains unified and coherent with a structure of rules externally imposed and referred to as a 'game'.

What Bauman's notion of self is about is the formulation, by invention, of the universality of identity without reference to the everyday lives of people. The categories of self, tourist etc. are presented as a form of postmodern pastiche, but there is no poststructuralist critique of the essential identity, and no reference to individual people's lives within the postmodern condition; no appeal to the experience of people; the diversity of their lives or their struggles to achieve an identity that they want or desire. The self is stripped of any meaningful past, because it is an invention. Invented histories; invented biographies; invented affinities. For example, let us take the simple question: what does it mean to be a woman? To be a woman is a project in itself that involves a personal and political struggle. The male to female transsexual has to fight to be a woman, which can be both threatening as well as exciting. To lose this fight is to be plunged into a world of non-identity. Our identity is forged, as a practical accomplishment within a context, or a history. The understanding of the individual self, as a self, is inextricably bound up with our understanding of the collectivities we have to combat as agents. In a world of nationalism, ethnic cleansing, religious fundamentalism, racial violence and crises of gender identity, what is the point of Bauman's feeble attempt to invent a set of strategic essentialisms which have little, if any, relationship to the experience of individuals' lives?

What is the nature of self and self-identity in the postmodern condition? Above all, what life strategies do individuals employ to make their passage in the world? How do individuals' selves navigate a life in fragments?

What makes being a self such a complex activity in the postmodern condition is that the context is open to a number of valid interpretations, and in the absence of an agreed moral code to guide the self in the choice of right and good, this can generate feelings of insecurity. So the construction of an imaginary world for the self becomes a much more difficult activity; and having to cope with unforeseen consequences is a skill which the self must continually exercise. Living is now a highly skilled activity, and our key human skill is to direct the course of the fragments that constitute human existence in an effort to feel comfortable and secure. Individuals as dynamic agents attempt to secure or formulate *all* forms of solidarity, including those of class, community, race and gender. This is because, for individuals, class, race and gender have lost all influence on life events and life chances. In the postmodern condition, individuals have no independent identity other than that which they create for themselves; this is a world in which class, race and gender are immaterial. In the postmodern world you are what you appear.

In contrast to Bauman's view the self in the postmodern condition is a series of activities that are conscious of their own existence. The self must define itself; the self must define and maintain its parameters and at the same time contribute to the construction of a context in which it feels both physically and ontologically secure; the self must select and construct motives and intentions, a worldview, a moral code, notions of right and wrong, true and false; the self needs to develop modes of reflexivity, which may take place outside of time and space. The self exists within a context, but must maintain some degree of independence from that context in order to maintain itself as an independent self.

Most definitions of the self assume that it is a physical entity or make use of geographical reasoning, assuming that the self is to be found within distinct geographical regions of the brain. As John Macmurry comments: 'As agent, therefore, the Self is the body' (1957: 91).

Thinking about its own existence, thinking about its own intentions, and thinking about accumulating resources to satisfy those intentions – these are the basic reflexive issues for any self. The physicality, if any, of the self is minimal. In this sense, the self may have a form like a virus; the physicality of the entity is of little, if any, significance: what we are primarily interested in is its activity. Something with minimal physicality can send messages to the body and manipulate DNA. If the self does have any organic element to it, this is better understood as a form of scaffold, to be disposed of at the earliest opportunity. The self also has the skill of bodily manipulation, but in addition also has consciousness, and above all else knowledge of its own existence as something independent of its context. Finally, the self has knowledge of its own finitude. It is an element of the universalising logic of modernity that the self should be conceived of as an organic entity. In the postmodern condition, no such objective basis can be assigned to the self: it is the product of its own subjective construction.

The self must maintain its own parameters, which are self-defined. The self resists all efforts to universalise it by outside agencies. Without such parameters the self is engulfed by the context: such a person has no thoughts of their own, they simply follow the values, attitudes and beliefs of a group, without question. Parameters of selfhood are maintained by the appropriation of resources; at the most basic level the self needs to maintain a body. Without a body, the self as we know it cannot fulfil all its goals and intentions. The self must also maintain communicative resources and ascetic resources. These are necessary for accessing pleasure and avoiding anything unpleasurable for the self. For this reason an understanding of the postmodern self must make use of the concept of **performativity**, because the self is searching for the best possible input/ output equation. This does not have to be on rational grounds (as in public choice theory, for example) but on the basis of any criteria which the individual self considers reasonable or acceptable. Goffman (1959) was the first to discuss the use of such resources. In addition, the self must maintain its own security; this is not simply a question of physical security but also what Giddens (1990) terms 'ontological security'. Most philosophies would argue that ontological security is maintained by positioning the self within a moral code. Most postmodernists argue that morally 'anything goes'.

The postmodern self is concerned with doing things: with or *activity*, or performativity. Social action is about making a difference in the world. All social action will make to some extent change the context, so we would expect that social action will always meet some form of resistance. Social action can be brought about only if the self has sufficient power to overcome the resistance to change, or to the direction of change. This means that all social action will involve the use of power, and the self's ability to accumulate resources will enable it to make a greater difference in the world. We must also keep in mind that social actions have both intended and unintended consequences. For this reason, the self needs to develop an almost infinite number of modes of reflexivity. Reflexivity can allow the self to gain maximum outcome from a social action, without having to make use of all the resources available to it. For most individuals there will be a reflexive element in action: the individual will decide if a given action will have the desired result. This involves the self recreating an imaginary world, which is the context where the projected action will take place. In this world, the self can contemplate an infinite number of possible choices of action and possible consequences of moving from the here now to the there then. All effective social action is then both active and reflexive, because action for the self means choice, choice of direction and choice of resources. It is up to you. The choice is yours.

Bauman: the critique of life in the postmodern condition

In his books that have been published since the turn of the century Bauman has been highly critical of the circumstance of life in the post-modern condition.

The Individualised Society (2001b) is a collection of papers and lectures which outlines the human consequences of a process of articulation which has seen society move away from the 'warm circle' of community, where people lived happily together by agreeing, sharing and respecting what they shared, to a situation of individualisation. For Bauman there has been a '*decolonization* of the public sphere'. There has been a devaluation of order and the public sector institutions no longer provide security. An individualised society is a society in which all messes that a person finds himself or herself in are assumed to be of the individual person's own making. The ways in which society operates are assumed to be of no consequence to an individual's destiny. Blame has been turned away from public institutions and towards the self, and particularly the inadequacies of self. This change exposes people to endemic insecurity both in terms of position and action; public issues have become privatised and deregulated.

For Bauman we are living in an atmosphere of **ambient fear**, characterised by uncertainty, unpredictability and instability, in which there is 'unqualified priority awarded to the irrationality and moral blindness of market competition', unbounded freedom given to capital and finance, destruction of safety nets which were once formally provided by the state and informally by the family, friends and the community. People are becoming subjected to polarisation, hesitation and lack of control. We are also uncertain about the political agency that we can draw upon to challenge this unnerving experience. Bauman's argument is that: '*specifically postmodern forms of violence arise from the privatization, deregulation and decentralization of identity problems*' (2001b: 92). We have a fear of strangers that gives raise to a politics of exclusion that has a tribal element to it, or as Bauman expresses it 'the balkanisation of human coexistence' (2001b: 96).

The same themes are developed in *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (2001a) where Bauman builds upon his critique of communitarianism in *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997) and *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (1998b).

Communitarianism is a modernist approach, claims Bauman, which demands:

> the power of enforcement. The power to make sure that people would act in a certain way rather than in other ways, to taper the range of their options, to manipulate the probabilities; to make them do what they otherwise would probably not do, (if they would, why all this fuss), to make them less than they would otherwise be. (Bauman, 1997: 191)

Bauman has now supplemented this view by arguing that 'community' has no foundation other than shared agreement. The 'warm circle' of community that we find in communitarian discourse is built upon two 'collapsed together and confused' (2001a: 72) notions of community. First, that people are individuals who should resolve their own problems, and secondly that community should be built upon 'fraternal sharing'. 'Community' has then an ethical foundation. The 'community' of communitarian discourse cannot survive self-conscious critique, contemplation or scrutiny. When subjected to such evaluation we see 'community' for what it is: 'numb – or dead' (Bauman, 2001a: 11).

Sociologically, Blair, Clinton and others have attempted to bring together 'freedom' and 'security' by rebuilding the idea of 'the community' within a postmodern world. In the postmodern condition fragmented culture allows individuals to select their own identities. However, the Blair government in the UK does not want to allow people to choose an identity that does not include work. Bauman makes reference to Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown's suggestion that the unemployed should be provided with mobile phones so that they can be kept in touch with the job market. Communitarianism sacrifices freedom for greater security.

Bauman (1998b) argued that we should see the work ethic as something that generates a 'moral economy' filled with 'concentrated and unchallenged discrimination'. In its place we should have an 'ethics of workmanship' which recognises the value of unpaid work, currently classed as non-work. In addition, we should consider 'decoupling income entitlement from income-earning capacity' (Bauman, 1998b: 97). This is an interesting choice of words, but it cannot hide the stale, old message: let's bring back the 'warm circle' of community. Bauman is saying the same as Marx did in the nineteenth century: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.' Not only has socialism been rejected fully and comprehensively by almost everybody (including Bauman in a range of publications), but this highlights a flaw in both Bauman's analysis and socialism. When we take responsibility for the Other, we run the risk of imposing our will on the Other and this can lead to cruelty. Bauman fails to take into account the ability of people to take responsibility for their own lives and their own actions and at the same time undermines the assumptions of his own work since *Postmodern Ethics* (1993).

In conclusion Bauman's discussion of self and identity is an attempt to invent a set of strategic essentialisms, which have little if any relationship to the experience of individual people's lives. Bauman's discussion of self takes place within a problematical *habitat* that on closer examination turns out to be the modernist social, by another name, not a world of post-modern diverse counter-publics.

Deleuze and Guattari

> thought thinks only by means of difference, around this point of ungrounding. (Deleuze, 1997: 276)

To me this is full-blown postmodernism, but is it possible for Deleuze and Guattari to construct a social theory that can deliver?

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have made what many people consider to be a significant contribution to postmodern thought. Any summary of the work of any writer involves the selection and prioritising of some concepts and ideas and the neglect of others. In the work of Deleuze and Guattari such a summary is not possible, as it goes against the spirit of their work. For Deleuze and Guattari writing should take the form of a rhizome. Think of the structure of writing, and the structure of thought, as a strawberry plant: no one part of the plant is superior to any other part. If we stamp on one section another will spring up. So the reader must view the summary that follows as a journey through the work of Deleuze and Guattari. I have done as they suggest the reader should do; the places where I stop are like my favourite tracks on a CD, and I just want to play them again.

The texts are very difficult to follow, and can almost defy exegesis. Wonderful-sounding phrases such as 'body without organs' is said to be 'the body without an image' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 8) and 'nothing but bands of intensity, potentials, thresholds, and gradients' (1983: 19). Here I attempt to identify what I consider to be the modernist assumptions upon which their key contribution to postmodern thought is built. In other words this is exegesis with an edge. Deleuze and Guattari discuss a number of highly inventive concepts, which in the first instance appear to direct analysis into areas previously disregarded by modernist thinkers: desiring-machines; the body without organs; the nomadic subject.

Deleuze and Guattari derive a number of concepts from the physical sciences in order to understand the human condition, most notably the notion of 'the singularity', which is used to describe a 'blackhole'. They also build their analysis upon a modernist notion of structure, usually a variation of Saussure's structuralism. They argue that a minimal structure should be seen as two heterogeneous series of terms that are set in relation by, and converge in, a paradoxical element.

This notion of structure is given a postmodern gloss by Deleuze and Guattari, who redefine structure in the form of a 'game'. This suggests that the structure of society is a human creation, whereas in their work it is not, yet at the same time the game is rule governed and involves the exercise of constraint in a clearly modernist fashion.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that modernist thought takes the form of a hierarchy, in which some ways of thinking are seen to be superior to other ways of thinking. They ask us to consider the notion of the 'tree of knowledge'. Freud, for example, looks for roots in his analysis, rather than developing his thought in the form of a 'rhizome'. In contrast to hierarchical ways of thinking, Deleuze and Guattari draw upon the Nietzschean concept of 'the will to power': people whose ways of thinking are accepted as superior are simply making use of their ability to dominate others. Deleuze and Guattari criticise such discourses and institutions that repress desire and proliferate fascist subjectivities. The discourses and institutions of modernity impose a definition of normality from the perspective of the powerful. Deleuze first introduced the rhizome concept in his study of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch:

> A popular joke tells of the meeting between a sadist and a masochist; the masochist says: 'Hurt me.' The sadist replies: 'No.' This is a particularly stupid joke, not only because it is unrealistic but because it foolishly claims competence to pass judgement on the world of perversions. (Deleuze, 1989: 40)

What is philosophy?

In *What Is Philosophy?* (1994) Deleuze claims that the question 'What is philosophy?' should be poised only late in life. Philosophy is not about contemplation, reflection or communication. The answer is that philosophy is about 'creating' concepts. Concepts are not to be seen as gifts which we can purify and polish; we have to create them in a form that makes them more convincing than rival concepts.

Philosophy has three elements for Deleuze:

- **immanence** – a pre-philosophical plane that must be explained;
- **insistence** – the conceptual persona that must be invented and brought to life;
- **consistency** – the philosophical concepts that need to be created.

The first principle of philosophy is that universals in themselves explain nothing. The universal statement itself must be explained. To do this we need exceptional concepts, as it is through our concepts that we find knowledge.

One of the main themes running through the text is about the conceptual persona. Concepts need a conceptual persona and the notion of 'friend' is one such persona. In other words, we distrust rival concepts. As Deleuze explains: 'Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature' (Deleuze, 1994: 6).

It is for this reason that concepts are often signed with the author's name, such as 'Descartes' cogito'. In addition, concepts are not like a jigsaw puzzle: their edges do not neatly fit together. The concept is more like the throw of a dice in terms of the new possibilities that the concept launches. Concepts form a skeletal frame across a chosen plane, informing us what it means to think and how to make use of thought. The plane of immanence, which plays a key role in the thought of Deleuze and Guattari, is being constantly woven 'like a gigantic shuttle' (Deleuze, 1994: 38) and has a 'fractal' nature with movements caught and 'folded' in the others. Immanence is radically empirical in character. Empiricism is only concerned with events and people and is an important strategy for formulating concepts. The various elements of the plane, such as thought and nature, are 'diagrammatic features' (which are 'directions' or 'intuitions') whereas concepts are 'intensive features' – which are 'absolute dimensions' or 'intentions'.

The plane of immanence is surrounded by illusions, which take the form of ready-made paths of dominant opinions for us to follow. The reason why these paths appear so attractive is because they appeal to our intolerance of people who deviate from the norm. The illusions form a thick fog around the plane that prevents us from fully constructing our nomadic journey between the singularities. Such illusions include:

- illusion of transcendence – in which immanence is made immanent to something other than itself;
- illusion of universals – when concepts are confused with the plane. Universals do not explain anything: we must explain the existence of the universal itself;
- illusion of the eternal – when we simply forget that concepts need to be created;
- illusion of discursiveness – when propositions are confused with concepts.

What is a concept?

Whilst looking at the nature of the concept as a philosophical reality, Deleuze explains that there are no 'simple' concepts. Every concept is a multiplicity. All concepts are made up of a number of components. All concepts have a history; a 'becoming' that involves their relationship with concepts situated on the same plane. It is by reference to the plane that we can articulate support and coordinate the problems that the concept is concerned with:

- Every concept relates to other concepts, their history, and becoming and present connections.
- Concepts have a 'consistency', they make components internally consistent.
- A concept is in part an accumulation of its components.
- A concept is incorporeal. It is both absolute and relative: relative in relation to its own components, the plane on which it is situated and in terms of the problems it addresses; and absolute in the way it 'traces the contour of its components' (Deleuze, 1994: 17).

Deleuze uses the notion of 'construction' to unite the relative and the absolute dimensions of the concept.

What are conceptual personae?

Conceptual personae are not reducible to 'psychological types': 'The role of conceptual personae is to show thought's territories, its absolute deterritorializations and reterritorializations' (Deleuze, 1994: 69).

Deleuze outlines the features of conceptual personae:

- **pathic features**, associated with the idiot, madman and schizophrenic, people who want to think for themselves, people who discover in thought the inability to think;
- **relational features** – such as the friend who has a relationship only through the thing loved;
- **dynamic features** – which insert themselves into existing moving energetic networks;
- **juridical features** – lays claim to what is right;
- **existential features** – inventing new ways of living or possibilities of life.

The conceptual persona and the plane of immanence presuppose each other:

> Conceptual personae constitute points of view according to which planes of immanence are distinguished from one another . . . and constitute the condition under which each plane finds itself filled with concepts of the same group. (Deleuze, 1994: 75)

Deleuze makes clear that the concepts are not deduced from the plane. The conceptual personae are needed to construct concepts on the plane, just as the plane itself needs to be laid open and constructed itself. There are countless planes; each has an alterable curve, and the planes group together or separate themselves according to points of view composed with the use of a chosen conceptual persona.

Libidinal flows

Deleuze and Guattari attempt to decode libidinal flows created by the institutions of capitalism. They do this by attempting a 'schizoanalytic' destruction of the ego and the superego and putting forward the notion of a dynamic unconscious. They refer to this as a process of becoming. This 'becoming' leads to the emergence of new types of decentred subjects, the schizo and the nomad, who are free from fixed and unified identities, modernist/Freudian subjectivities and their bodies.

Nietzsche

According to Ronald Bogue (1989), Deleuze's book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1983) contains many of the central themes that Deleuze develops in later works. For Deleuze, Nietzsche is an intellectually consistent thinker, whose major goals were to

- overturn Platonism;
- develop a philosophy of becoming based on a physics of force;

- replace Hegel's 'negation of negation' with a philosophy of affirmation;
- complete Kant's project for critical philosophy by directing it against the traditional principles of Western rationality.

Nietzsche has two key concepts that Deleuze draws upon: the 'will to power' and the 'eternal return'.

Meaning

For Deleuze meaning is indifferent to questions of truth or falsehood, existence or non-existence; it has no fixed and stable objects or subjects, and is devoid of irreversible relations of implication, including relations of cause or effect, before and after, bigger and smaller. In other words, meaning both precedes and is indifferent to:

- designation – the relation of the proposition to a state of things;
- manifestation – the relation of the proposition to a state of things;
- signification – the relation of words to general concepts, and of syntactic links to the implications and consequent assertions of concepts.

Meaning is then a simulacrum, a paradoxical, contradictory entity that defies common sense. In this respect Deleuze discusses the work of Lewis Carroll, whose *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking-glass* are normally classed as nonsense works: they are not devoid of meaning, he argues: the message in these texts embraces both logical and illogical meanings.

Deleuze calls the *loguendum* – the ground or condition upon which language rests. The *loguendum* is the contradictory simulacrum within language.

Anti-Oedipus

In their *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) Deleuze and Guattari challenge a range of psychological theories. For Deleuze and Guattari, the fundamental problem with psychoanalysis is its conception of desire. They argue that desire is social rather than familial. The Oedipal family structure is one of the primary modes of restricting desire in capitalist societies, and psychoanalysis helps to enforce that restriction. The Oedipus complex ensures that human desire is concentrated in the nuclear family. In contrast to psychoanalysis's view, desire should not be treated as a 'lack'. Desire is a form of production. It is an unbound, free-floating energy, similar to what Freud terms the libido and what Nietzsche terms the will to power. In other words, desire is unconscious. The best guide to desire is the schizophrenic id rather than neurotic ego. What this means is that their notion of desiring-production is derived from the experiences of psychotics. This allows them to reveal the genuine questions of unconscious desire which all people face, but which psychotics confront in a particularly direct manner. Psychotics often experience various parts of their bodies as separate entities, and sometimes as invading, persecuting machines. Schizophrenics enter catatonic states in which they seem to inhabit a body that has no organs. Finally, some schizophrenics have shifting, multiple personalities. These three psychotic experiences form the basis of the fundamental components of desiring-production:

- desiring-machines
- the body without organs
- the nomadic subject

Deleuze and Guattari present a universal history of desiring-production which focuses on the relationship between the *socius* – the natural divine presupposition of production:

- the body of the earth of primitive societies
- the body of the despot of barbaric societies
- the body of capital of capitalistic societies

and its related network of desiring-machines. In relation to this they discuss:

- primitive societies and the exchangist model of structural anthropology
- despotic societies and theories of the state
- capitalist societies and Marxist economics.

The three machines therefore are roughly described as pre-state, state and post-state machines.

They subsume Marx and Freud within a Nietzschean framework and attempt to libidinalise Marx. This notion of libidinalised production subverts the traditional Marxian distinction between production, distribution and consumption. The coupling of desire and production also problematises the Marxist distinction between use value and exchange value. Deleuze and Guattari assume a libidinal nature of groups and a social nature of the unconscious. Capitalism is identified as a force for concomitant deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. The state is a machine of anti-production: it controls and limits production.

The singularity

Singularities are a set of singular points (ideal events) which are not based upon the generality or universality of a concept. They are pre-individual, non-personal and a-conceptual. They are the points that characterise a mathematical curve, a physical state of affairs a psychological and moral person.

To reverse Platonism, claims Deleuze, we must remove 'essences' and substitute events in their place as jets of singularities. The distribution of singularities form fields of problem. And the paradox is the locus of the question.

> Singularities are turning points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points. Such singularities, however, should not be confused either with the personality of the one expressing herself in discourse, or with the individuality of a state of affairs designated by a proposition, or even with the generality or universality of a concept signified by a figure or a curve. (Deleuze, 1990: 52)

Singularities are beyond direct human experience: they are intuitive and abstract events that control the formation or generation of individuals as persons, a process that Deleuze refers to as 'becoming'. Singularities belong to a sphere of operation that is impersonal. They manifest on the surface of the unconscious in the form of a 'nomadic distribution' that is not fixed.

The singularities run parallel with a series that is very varied in its content, but organised into a system that is neither stable nor unstable but described as 'metastable'. This series has the ability and the energy to bring about events. In addition, singularities automatically unify into a series. This unifying process is always mobile and in conflict with any preconceived notions. The series contains a paradoxical element which lies across the series and which echoes to all corresponding singularities in the form of a chance ordering which underpins their composition as a series. Singularities are potentials, and the individual is descended from the plane of singularities. So a singularity is an unstable resource that individuals draw upon in a process of becoming. Individual people actualise singularities, in other words, they draw something from the singularity that they use to make a life for themselves. This allows various points to converge that can be followed by a person as a way of living their life. In this way, 'singularities are actualised both in a world and in the individuals which are parts of the world' (Deleuze, 1990: 110). Singularities allow us to make sense of the world if they are placed within a 'community of organs', that is, if we can superimpose some of the organisation upon the way they are distributed. We know about the existence and distribution of singularities before we know their nature.

Nomads

The nomad is said to have neither a past nor future: it has only becomings. Nomads have no history, they have only geography. Deleuze describes the notion of 'becoming' in the following terms:

> To write is to become, but has nothing to do with becoming a writer. That is to become something else . . . The becomings contained in writing when it is not

> wedded to established order-words, but itself traces lines of flight are quite different . . . There is a woman-becoming in writing. (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 43)

Power and becoming

In Deleuze's view all power formations have a need for a form of knowledge to make the execution of that power effective. He gives the example of the Greek city and Euclidean geometry. 'It was not because the geometricians had power but because Euclidean geometry constituted the knowledge, or the abstract machine, that the city needed for its organisation of power, space and time' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).

The argument here is that all states have an image, or an axiomatic system, of how the individual should behave and think in every situation and circumstance. This self-evident system of thought is what Deleuze terms the 'abstract machine'. Today it is the human sciences that have taken on this role of providing the abstract machine for the modern apparatuses of power.

One of the central themes in Deleuze is the relationship between power and desire.

Desire

In his discussion of the process of becoming, Deleuze describes two types of 'plane'.

The plane of organisation This plane is concerned with the formation of subjects and attempts to crush desire by use of forces like the law. This plane is said to be made up of *molar lines with segments*; both individuals and groups are made up of 'lines'. This molar line includes such things as the family, the school, the factory and retirement. It is one of 'rigid segmentarity' in which individuals are moulded to behave and think in appropriate ways. Deleuze gives us the examples of people in the family telling others: 'Now you're not a baby any more', and at school 'You're not at home now'. Segments are devices of power in that they fix a code of behaviour within a defined territory. In the last analysis, the state 'overcodes' all the segments. This overcoding 'ensures the homogenisation of different segments' (1988: 129). This is achieved by the use of 'the abstract machine' that imposes the normal/usual ways of thinking and behaving from the point of view of the state.

The plane of consistence/the plane of immanence In contrast to the molar line with segments, the plane of consistence is concerned with *molecular fluxes with thresholds or quanta*. These are lines of segmentarity that are molecular or supple. These lines are concerned detours and modification; this is a line of becoming. On the plane of organisation, the segments depend upon 'binary machines': you are one case or its logical alternative, for example you are one class or another; one sex or the other;

one race or the other. These classifications appear to be dichotomic but operate diachronically. If you are not a man or a woman then you are a transvestite. To move along this plane one must first construct it: the plane does not pre-exist desire. As we move along this plane that we have constructed we become a **body without organs**. By this term Deleuze means a body without organisation – one who fulfils their desires by attempting to liberate themselves from the plane of organisation. Desire exists only when it is assembled or machined. The plane of consistence is concerned with movement, and it deals with 'hecceities' rather than subjects. Hecceities are degrees of power. The plane of consistence is described as:

> successions of catatonic states and periods of extreme haste, of suspensions and shootings, coexistences of variable speeds, blocks of becoming, leaps across voids, displacements of a centre of gravity on an abstract line, conjunction of lines on a plane of immanence, a 'stationary process' at dizzying speed which sets free particles and affects. (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 95)

Every person or group can construct a plane of immanence on which to lead his or her life.

Territorialisation/deterritorialisation

The issue of territorialisation is about the problem of 'holding together heterogeneous elements (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 323). Not to follow the line of organisation is referred to as 'deterritorialisation'. In this process 'knots of arboresence' – by which Deleuze and Guattari mean thinking hierarchy – become 'resumptions and upsurges in a rhizome' (1988: 134). Territory for Deleuze is an 'assemblage', it is an environment experienced in harmony, with a distance between people marked by 'indexes' which form the basis of 'territorialising expressions' and 'territorialised functions'. The basis of territory is aggressiveness. However, territory regulates the coexistence of individuals of the same species by keeping them separated. The effect of territory is to allow different people to coexist by specialising in different activities.

The direction of the process of 'territorialisation' is referred to by Deleuze as a 'refrain' – which is an aggregate of expressions and territorial motifs. The refrain acts upon whatever surrounds it and forms an organised mass. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, within a territory: 'Every consciousness pursues its own death, every love-passion its own end, attracted by a blackhole, and all the blackholes resonate together' (1988: 133).

This is the operation of the line of organisation and it is about killing desire by preventing 'the absolute deterritorialisation of the cogito' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 133). It is within deterritorialisation that we construct the field of immanence or the plane of consistency – a very different assemblage from the line of organisation. The assemblage that makes up the field of immanence is constructed piece by piece: a person 'takes and makes what she or he can, according to taste' (1988: 157). This is the 'body without organs', the 'connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities' (1988: 161). The body without organs may not be easy to compose and there is no guarantee that it will be understood.

The person is made up of bundles of lines, such as:

- lines of flight
- lines of drift
- customary lines

Some of these lines are imported from the outside, some emerge by chance, and some are invented. The lines have singularities, segments and quanta and they are not easily differentiated, notably because the lines themselves are an invention of cartography.

Becoming

In *What Children Say* (1998), Deleuze explains that children never stop talking about what they are doing or trying to do. Children do this by means of dynamic trajectories and by drawing mental maps of those trajectories. Such maps are essential to our psychic activity. They form lines, such as the line of immanence, which are constantly referred to in Deleuze's work.

For Deleuze, there is no fixed conception of 'being'; instead he looks at the self as an imminent or emerging 'becoming' which has no established elements that define or constrain our identity. The emergent becoming is built upon a practical ontology. Becoming is 'molecular' in nature and is described in terms of emitting particles which enter into proximity with particles of the thing which the self wishes to become: woman, child, animal, dog, vegetable, minor, imperceptible, etc. Becoming is a tension between modes of desire plotting a vector of transformation between molar coordinates. Becoming is then directional; 'becoming' allows the self to emerge into anything it chooses, a process in which the body is involved in leaving its normal habitat. This process is not simply a matter of imitation or metamorphosis as imitation involves respect for the boundaries that constrain the self. All forms of becoming are said to be 'minoritarian' in nature, in that they involve movement away from the 'standard man' that is firmly rooted on the plane of organisation. This movement can be taken to the point where identity in any conventional sense is destroyed. Immanence is immanent only to itself. This is what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as 'becoming-imperceptible' which sweeps away the majority.

The self has three elements in Deleuze's work:

- a foundation – which is described as a synthesis of habit;
- a past – which is a synthesis of memory;
- a spiritual repetition that allows the self to make a distinction with others.

In the case of becoming-dog, a person does not literally become a dog in the way that Kafka's character Gregor Samsa becomes an insect. Rather, when a person is involved in becoming-dog this means becoming a body without organs, escaping Oedipality and leading a life which is entirely immanent in nature.

Becoming is the process of individuation, free from organisation. 'Becoming produces nothing other than itself' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 238).

- It is involutionary
- It is creative
- It is not imitating
- It is not identifying
- It is not regressing–progressing
- It is not corresponding
- It is not producing
- It is not a filiation

Becoming is about the process of desire: it means liberating the body from the line of organisation. If we take the example of 'becoming-woman', the line of organisation imposes a universal woman upon some bodies. Young women will be told, 'Stop behaving like that; you are not a little girl any more', 'You're not a tomboy', etc. This is what Deleuze refers to as aborescence, which is the submission of a person to the line of organisation, the installation of a semiotic and subjectification on to the body. Psychoanalysis is one technique used for achieving this imposition, and hence for repressing desire. The body without organs is what is left when you take away all organisation and aborescence, allowing becoming to happen.

Aborescence is submission to molar segmentation, which is rigid but can guarantee certainty and security: 'The more rigid the segmentarity, the more reassuring it is for us. That is what fear is, and how it makes us retreat into the first line' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 227–8). The human being is often seen to be a segmentary animal, and is segmented in a binary fashion: male–female, adult–child, etc.

Becoming-animal

Becoming-animal is absolute deterritorialisation (Deleuze, 1975: 13). It is the schizo escape from the Oedipus complex. However, for Deleuze, in the case of Gregor Samsa this ends in failure as he attempts to re-Oedipalise himself, as the transformation is incomplete. Becoming-animal was explored by Kafka in a number of stories, including 'The Metamorphosis', in which Samsa becomes-insect, which involves the deterritorialisation of his family relationships and his bureaucratic and commercial relationships from his working life. Other Kafka stories are: 'Investigations of a Dog'; 'Report to the Academy' and 'Josephine the Singer'.

When faced with a simulacrum, animals, children and the ignorant, who do not possess the antidote of reason and knowledge, lose the distinction between truth and illusion. The animal could never have a real thought because it would simultaneously forget what it was on the verge of thinking. To become-animal is to make use of a machine of expression that expresses itself first and conceptualises later. This is pure content which is not separate from its expression.

Modernist assumptions

Deleuze and Guattari, as we have seen, draw upon terms from the physical sciences to describe the human condition, most notably their notion of 'the singularity', a term which is used to describe a 'blackhole'. They build their analysis upon a modernist notion of structure, which they often redefine in terms of a 'game'.

Structure The convergence of the corporeal and the incorporeal forms the basic structure of meaning.

According to Deleuze: 'Structure is in fact a machine for the production of incorporeal sense (*skindapsos*)' (1990: 71). Within any structure there are two series, one signifying and the other signified. The signifying is characterised by 'an excess' and the signifying by a 'lack'. This is seen as a relationship of 'eternal disequilibrium' and 'perpetual displacement'. The signified series is known and arranges produced totalities. The signifying series arranges produced totalities (Deleuze, 1990: 48).

Totalising ways of thinking can be based on either

- the 'error of reformism or technology', which is about imposing partial arrangements of social relations according to the rhythm of technical achievements; or
- the error of totalitarianism, which attempts to constitute a totalisation of the signifiable and known, according to the rhythm of the social totality existing at a given moment.

'The technocrat is the natural friend of the dictator' (Deleuze, 1990: 49).

The minimal conditions for a structure are presented as:

- Two heterogeneous series exist: one signifying, the other signified.
- Each series exists only in terms of its relationship with the other.
- The series is made up of the attachment of singular points known as *singularities*.

- The two heterogeneous series converge towards a paradoxical element which is their 'differentiation' – this is the principle of the emission of singularities.
- The singularity appears at the same time as an excess and as an 'empty box' – in other words as part of both of the two heterogeneous series.
- The singularity has the function of articulating the two series to each other.
- The distribution of singularities corresponds to each series from fields of problems.

The problem for Deleuze and Guattari is that difference cannot be thought in itself, it is inaccessible to representative thought. Difference can only become thinkable when it is tamed, in other words when it has representation forced upon it. Deleuze outlines four 'iron collars' of representation, which were first put into place by Plato, 'who rigorously established the distinction between essence and appearance, between the model and the copy. The purpose of this is the subjection of difference' (Deleuze, 1997: 264).

The 'iron collars' are:

- identity in the concept
- opposition in the predicate
- analogy in judgement
- resemblance in perception

Difference not rooted in one of these is believed to be unbounded, uncoordinated and inorganic. Such difference, it is suggested, cannot be thought and cannot exist. As such, these unthought differences are said to be 'non-being'. Deleuze describes the assimilation of difference into 'non-being' as 'unjust' (1997: 268). The role of philosophy, for Deleuze, is to invent techniques to explore such differential relations and singular points in which 'essences in the form of centres of envelopment around singularities' (1997: 264). This sounds wonderful, but it is not possible for Deleuze and Guattari to proceed in this fashion: they fall back on good old modernist 'representation' in order to present meaning to their readers. Most notably, this occurs when they make use of the analogy of 'game' to present a resemblance in our perception of the similarity of 'structure' to 'game'.

Game The notion of structure is given a postmodern gloss by Deleuze and Guattari, who redefine it in the form of a 'game'. This suggests that the structure is a human creation, whereas clearly in their work it is not, yet at the same time the game is rule governed and involves the exercise of constraint in a modernist fashion.

In Deleuze and Parnet's *Dialogues* (1987), the games with which we are associated are said to contain a number of principles:

- It is necessary that a set of rules pre-exists the playing of the game – a categorical value.
- These rules determine hypotheses which divide and apportion chance: hypotheses of loss or gain.
- Hypotheses organise the playing of the game (i.e. how many throws).
- The hypotheses outline the consequences of throws, i.e. 'victory' or 'defeat'.

As Deleuze and Parnet explain: 'The characteristics of normal games are therefore pre-existing categorical rules, the distributing hypotheses, the fixed and numerically distinct distribution, and the ensuing results' (1987: 59).

In contrast to this, Deleuze outlines a 'pure' game, which has the following characteristics: there are no pre-existing rules; each move invents its own rules. 'Far from dividing and apportioning chance in a really distinct number of throws, all throws affirm chance and endlessly ramify it with each throw' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 58):

> Each throw is itself a series, but *in a time much smaller than the minimum* of continuous, thinkable time; and, to this serial minimum, a distribution of singularities corresponds. Each throw emits singular points – the points on the dice, for example. But the set of throws is included in the aleatory point, a unique cast which is endlessly displaced throughout all series, *in a time greeted than the maximum* of continuous thinkable time. (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 59)

The game 'is the reality of thought itself and the unconscious of pure thought'. 'Each thought emits a distribution of singularities in one long thought, causing all the forms or figures of the nomadic distribution to correspond to its own displacement' (1987: 60).

Deleuze and Guattari, like many postmodern thinkers, claimed to present an analysis which was built upon an 'anything goes' triumphalism. However, in the end they take a look over the brink of their own postmodern plateau and then pull back from the full implications of their analysis. The postmodern condition is a world without 'the social'; it is a world without 'the self'. Deleuze and Guattari, despite their own theories, look for roots rather than assemble rhizomes; they describe a self constituted by lines of singularities, together with some elements such as libido, from the Freudian conception of self. In other words, the self is constituted out of 'grand narrative' conceptions: it is an assemblage constructed outside of the individual human being, independently of the human's own agency. Moreover, this self inhabits a world constituted of concepts drawn from the language of the physical sciences. As suggested above, Deleuze describes singularities as beyond direct human experience, as intuitive and abstract events which control the formation or generation of individuals as persons, a process that he refers to as 'becoming'. Singularities belong to a sphere of operation that is impersonal. The emission of singularities is on the surface of the unconscious in the form of a 'nomadic distribution', which is not fixed.

What is the 'postmodernism' of Deleuze and Guattari? A modern self in a modern world, described by two modern thinkers.

Jean Baudrillard (1929–present)

In a series of essays, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (1993), Baudrillard attempts to describe a situation that he refers to as 'after the orgy'. This is the situation that now exists in the areas of sexuality, economics, politics, etc., after the struggles for liberation of modernity. We need to rethink what we understand by 'value'. Baudrillard explains that we have moved through a number of stages, from

- a **natural** stage (use value)
- a **commodity** stage (exchange value)
- a **structural** phase (sign value)
- to a **fractal** stage (or **viral** or **radiant** stage) of value.

In this last stage Baudrillard explains, 'there is no point of reference at all, and value radiates in all directions . . . without reference to anything what so ever, by virtue of pure contiguity' (Baudrillard, 1993: 5).

A sociology of cultural products

The work of Baudrillard is an attempt to make intelligible the significance of the proliferation of communication via the mass media. He argues that a new cultural form has emerged which traditional theories such as those of Durkheim, Weber and Marx cannot make sense of. **Simulations** – objects or discourses that have no firm origin and no foundation – now dominate culture. Baudrillard is a former Marxist who became a post-modernist; he turned his back on the Marxist theory of culture and ideology because of its inadequacy in dealing with issues of culture and value. For Baudrillard, objects are not given value because of 'use value', but because we desire them.

Starting with *The System of Objects* (1968) and his other early works, from a neo-Marxist position, and drawing upon both Freud and Saussure's structuralism, Baudrillard argues that classification within our social order is now based upon consumption. Objects have 'meaning' for a consumer, and advertising codes products into a system of signs. This is a network of floating signifiers that invite desire. At this stage in his career, Baudrillard argued:

> let us not be fooled: objects are categories of objects which quite tyrannically induce categories of persons. They undertake the policing of social meanings,

> and the significations they engender are controlled, their proliferation, simultaneously arbitrary and coherent, to materialise itself effectively under the sign of affluence. (Baudrillard, 1968: 16–17)

In order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign; that is, in some way it must become external to a relation that it now only signifies, a sign arbitrarily and non-coherently to this concrete relation, yet obtaining its coherence, and consequently its meaning, from an abstract and systematic relation to all other object-signs. It is this way that it becomes 'personalised' and enters the series. In the pre-industrial world signs were symbolic, they had 'referents' which related directly to the real meaning of objects. In the twentieth century, signs were separated from their referents, and became more like signals, in the same way that traffic lights have a relation to the traffic.

We no longer have signs which represent the true meaning of the object. In their place are **simulacra**, with no referent or ground in any 'reality' except their own – a **hyperreality**, a world of self-referential signs: for example the television newscast that creates the news so that it can narrate it. There is no representational subject, and no categories such as 'truth' and 'fiction'. Simulations are immune from rational critique. If we take the case of advertising, in the 1950s adverts were straightforward; the message was: 'Buy this, it is nice'. The situation today is rather different. We conceive the meaning of a product through advertising. Consensus on the meaning is based upon nothing but faith. An arbitrary sign induces people to be receptive, it mobilises our consciousness, and reconstitutes itself as a collective meaning. Advertising ratifies its own meaning.

Implosion

According to Baudrillard the mass media is opposed to mediation. It is concerned with one-way communication – there is no exchange. This simple emission/reception of information can be viewed as the forced silence of the masses. The 'stupor' that the masses appear to be in is said by Baudrillard to make the masses radically uncertain about their own desires. Media images are no longer differentiated from 'reality' or 'human nature', but this is not because of some simple manipulation in a Marxian sense: the masses have an almost infinite abundance of entertainment and other forms of useless information. They have a greater and greater desire for spectacle, and it is because of this demand that films become ever more expensive to produce, have better and better special effects, the promotion and hype are more intense and the merchandising includes all possible commodities. We have a televisually created politics of disillusion and disaffection. The end result is a series of implosions: class conflict between labour and capital; politics and entertainment; high culture and low culture. All such divisions collapse in on themselves to form a political void, ending often in the 'sudden crystallisation of latent violence' (Baudrillard, 1993: 76), which manifest as irrational episodes.

Spectators turn themselves into actors, inventing their own spectacle for the gaze of the media. Baudrillard discusses examples such as violence at the Heysel Stadium, the Real Madrid–Naples European Cup Final and Margaret Thatcher's conflict with the miners.

There is then no 'law' of value at the **fractal** stage. There are no criteria for judging 'good' and 'evil', 'beautiful' and 'ugly', because these are freed from points of reference. 'Things', 'signs' and 'actions' can follow their own trajectory and start an endless process of self-reproduction. As Baudrillard explains: 'This is where the order (or rather, disorder) or metastasis begins . . . the rule of propagation through mere contiguity' (Baudrillard, 1993: 7). Metaphor disappears in a general tendency towards transsexuality:

- Economics becomes transeconomics.
- Aesthetics becomes transaesthetics.
- Sex becomes transsexuality.

The essential point here is that there is a confusion of categories. There are no agreed or acceptable criteria for judgement in areas as diverse as aesthetic judgement and pleasure. If we take the example of art, Baudrillard argues that all present day art is a set of rituals without reference to any objective aesthetic judgement. We 'read' works of art, film, etc., according to ever more contradictory criteria. This is the situation of metastasis: 'a fundamental break in the secret code of aesthetics' (Baudrillard, 1993: 17). We are released from the need to decide between beautiful and ugly, real and unreal, transcendence and immanence. We are condemned to indifference, claims Baudrillard. All such disappearing forms attempt to reproduce themselves by means of simulation.

Transsexuality

Baudrillard does not discuss the 'transsexual' (in the anatomical sense). Rather he views 'transvestism' as 'playing with the computability of the signs . . . the lack of differentiation' not just in terms of sex (Baudrillard, 1993: 20). In any area of activity, transsexuality is underpinned ingenuity, in terms of the reinvention and rereading as well as simply playing with categories which were once seen as fixed, but which are now seen as irrelevant to our life. Sexual liberation, like all revolutions, is seen by Baudrillard as one stage that we went through on the road to transsexuality and has now become a 'transsexual myth' because it depends upon redundant fixed categories of sex and sexuality. However, it is not just sexual culture, but also political culture and the economy that are affected by transvestism. Such transvestism becomes the central element in our search for difference and the basis of our behaviour. After the orgy we are now left looking for an identity. As Baudrillard illustrates, we all seek a *look*: not simply a need to be seen but an image. We 'play at difference without believing in it' (Baudrillard, 1993: 24).

In the process of transsexuality we become 'transpoliticals':

> politically indifferent and undifferentiated beings [who have] embraced, digested and rejected the most contradictory ideologies and were left wearing only [our] masks: we had become, in our own heads and perhaps unbeknown to ourselves – transvestites of the political realm. (Baudrillard, 1993: 25)

Transeconomics

Our society, claims Baudrillard, is founded on proliferation, on growth that cannot be measured against any clear goals: where growth is uncontrollable and the causes of growth disappear. In contrast to Marxian accounts, the motor of such change is not the economic base: 'but rather the destructuring of value, the destabilisation of real markets and economies and the victory of an economy unencumbered by ideologies, by social science, by history – an economy freed from "Economics" and given over to pure speculation; a virtual economy emancipated from real economies' (Baudrillard, 1993: 34).

In Baudrillard's analysis speculation is totally detached from production and the creation of surplus value in a Marxian sense. Speculation has its own revolving motion irrespective of the amount of labour power that went into its production.

What we have is a situation of great uncertainty or total unpredictability, about the reality of objects. We attempt to escape from this uncertainty by depending more on information and communication systems. However, with the collapse of codes in the political, sexual and genetic spheres, and the constant exposure on all sides to images and information, this merely exacerbates the uncertainty.

The end of history

Baudrillard attempts to describe the turn that history is now taking. We are moving not towards the end of history but towards historical reversal and elimination. This is why Baudrillard suggested that the year 2000 would never occur, because we are on a reverse trajectory. We look as though we are approaching the end, only to veer off at the last moment in the opposite direction.

Gianni Vattimo (1936–present)

Gianni Vattimo is a professor of philosophy at the University of Turin. He argues that many of the issues that postmodernists are concerned with were first raised by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Vattimo attempts to outline a philosophical basis for making sense of our human existence at the end of modernity. For Vattimo modernity is concerned with stable beings within strong structures, and the prefix 'post' means to take leave of modernity. Modernity is seen as an era of history opposed to ancient ways of thinking. It is dominated by the idea of 'progressive enlightenment', in that the history of Western thought is one of recoveries, rebirths and returns, in other words, progressive development. Gianni Vattimo attempts to show that the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger – notably Heidegger's critique of humanism and Nietzsche's view of 'accomplished nihilism' – seriously question the heritage of modern European thought.

Referring to 'accomplished nihilism', Nietzsche argues that 'man rolls from the centre toward X', in other words that there is nothing left of Being and that nihilism is the only hope for the person. Nietzsche sums up this process in his notion of the death of God. God is allowed to die because knowledge no longer needs to have absolute causes, the world is becoming ever less real and we no longer need to believe in an immortal soul. A number of social theories have attempted to stand in the way of the accomplishment of nihilism, notably phenomenology and Marxism.

Nietzsche and Heidegger challenge the foundations of 'progressive enlightenment', yet neither bases his philosophy on another, truer foundation. It is the absence of true foundations to their thought that make Nietzsche and Heidegger philosophers of postmodernity, claims Vattimo. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger are also relevant to recent debates about postmodernity because they provide rigour and credibility to often incoherent postmodern theories.

> . . . the post-modern not only as something new in relation to the modern, but also as a dissolution of the category new – in other words, as an experience of 'the end of history' – rather than as the appearance of a different stage of history itself. (Vattimo, 1988: 4)

Vattimo does not treat postmodernity as 'the end of history' in any catastrophic sense, but as the end of 'historicity'. We cannot see history as an objective process within which we are located. History has become a problem for theory, not simply fact gathering. The idea of the 'end of history' dissolves the idea of 'history as progress' that has underpinned Western thought. History then loses its unity. There is not one *history*, but many *histories*. History was written from the 'point of view of the victors', and used to legitimise their power. We now have an awareness of the 'rhetorical mechanisms' contained within historical accounts, and this gives us the resources to reject any narrative and reconstruct the past in any way we wish. In addition, because of the global spread of the mass media there are more centres giving out information about events, which can be used to construct our histories.

Likewise, for Vattimo, the 'truth' becomes an interpretative matter, similar to an aesthetic or rhetorical experience. Truth becomes a fable. However, he claims, this is not to say that 'truth' is reduced to 'subjective' emotions and feelings. It is to say that 'truth' is not simply the recognition and reinforcement of 'common sense': 'On the contrary, it is a first step towards recognizing the link between truth on the one hand and what may on the other hand be called the monument, the social contract, or the very "substantiality" (in the Hegelian sense of the objective spirit) of historical transmission' (Vattimo, 1988: 12).

Using the aesthetic experience as a model to experience truth is to say that truth is more than common sense. Our 'discourses' do not simply reproduce what already exists, but form 'more intensely concentrated nuclei of meaning' (1988: 13) that are capable of criticising what is said to exist.

Nietzsche and Heidegger allow us to pass from a critical and negative description of the postmodern condition to the postmodern condition as the destruction of ontology, as a positive possibility and opportunity.

Nietzsche is described by Vattimo as the first radically non-humanistic thinker, who argued that the absence of any transcendental foundation has brought about a crisis of humanism. In contrast to the Frankfurt School, and others who argue that the crisis of humanism and the dehumanism that comes with it were brought about by the spread of technology and rationalisation, Vattimo argues that:

> the subject that supposedly has to be defended from technological dehumanism is itself the very root of this dehumanization, since the kind of subjectivity which is defined as the object is a pure function of the world of objectivity, and inevitably tends to become itself an object of manipulation. (1988: 46)

Vattimo casts doubt on the stable structures of Being, which provided certainty for the major contributions to Western thought in the nineteenth century. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger saw Being as an *event*.

For Vattimo there is a relationship between Being and truth that is at the core of the argument about the nature of the postmodern condition. Truth is not a 'metaphysically stable structure but an event' (1988: 76). Truth is an 'opening' of the world, which is future oriented – a form of anticipation. However, a view of progress has a tendency to dissolve our vision of Being. The individual is viewed as *Dasein* – Being in the world – as a hermeneutic totality. This means that *Dasein* is 'always already familiar with a totality of meanings, that is, with a context of references' (Vattimo, 1988: 115).

Dasein has a threefold existential structure:

- *Befindlichkeit* – state of mind;
- *Verstehen–Auslegung* – understanding–interpreting;
- *Rede* – discourse.

This hermeneutic constitution of *Dasein* is nihilistic in nature. First, because such a structure of *Dasein* brings about a situation in which the human person recognises that they have no foundation. Secondly, we recognise that every foundation is already given within a specific epoch of Being, but that epoch is not founded by Being.

When constructing the essence of reality by the use of *Verwindung* (our critical overcoming), history no longer appears to be linear, it appears as a form of distortion. The foundations of thought, history, metaphysics, morality and art are seen as a set of 'false constructs'. So-called 'metaphysical truths' are said by Vattimo to be no more than the subjective values and opinions of individuals or groups imposed upon us. *Verwindung* is a form of emancipation and by the use of it 'the real world has become a fiction' (Vattimo, 1988: 169).

Nihilism is the destiny of Being itself.

Critiques of postmodernism

One of the most well-publicised critiques of postmodernism is that of Sokal and Bricmont. In *Intellectual Impostures* (2000) they attempt to undermine all the big names of postmodern writing: Luce Irigaray, Bruno Latour, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Deleuze and Guattari. However, instead of engaging with the ideas, Sokal and Bricmont choose to reproduce long quotes from postmodern writers and attach some insult, such as 'meaningless from a scientific point of view', 'stupefyingly boring', and of course 'the emperor has no clothes'. The reader is left to read the quotes with no guidance as to why Sokal and Bricmont come to the conclusions that they do. When postmodernists write about science, they reject the assumptions and ways of reasoning that are commonly shared by scientists; it is this that Sokal and Bricmont seem to find so objectionable.

In 1996 Sokal submitted a paper called 'Transgressing the boundaries: towards a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity' to the American journal *Social Text*. It was a carefully crafted parody of postmodern writing: from the start, Sokal intended the paper to be nonsense. As Richard Dawkins's review of Sokal and Bricmont explains:

> Sokal's paper must have seemed a gift to the editors because this was a *physicist* saying all the right-on things they wanted to hear, attacking the 'post-Enlightenment hegemony' and such uncool notions as the existence of the real world. They didn't know that Sokal had also crammed his paper with egregious scientific howlers, of a kind that any referee with an undergraduate degree in physics would instantly have detected. It was sent to no such referee. The editors, Andrew Ross and others, were satisfied that its ideology conformed to their own, and were perhaps flattered by references to their own works. This ignominious piece of editing rightly earned them the 1996 Ig Nobel Prize for literature. (Dawkins, 1998: 141–3)

Jürgen Habermas argues that for the postmodern observer: 'The premises of the Enlightenment are dead; only their consequences continue on' (1987: 3). With Arnold Gehlen as his target, Habermas describes postmodernism as 'neoconservative' and 'leave-taking from modernity' (ibid.). Taking Nietzsche as their starting point, postmodernists believe they have moved beyond the Enlightenment tradition of reason which modernity makes use of to understand itself. However, claims Habermas: 'postmodern thought merely claims a transcendent status, while it remains in fact dependent on presuppositions of modern self-understanding that were brought to light by Hegel' (Habermas, 1987: 4–5).

Postmodernism is then counter-Enlightenment rather than post-Enlightenment. What Habermas is doing here is challenging postmodern theories by outlining in advance a set of rationalistic assumptions that he uses to evaluate theorising. He is refusing to look critically at his own assumptions for testing the validity of theorising, even when it is those very Enlightenment assumptions that are the focus for postmodern approaches.

If postmodernism is inspirational, in the way that Habermas suggests, it is so because nothing is left outside or beyond critique, even the very benchmarks that we use to judge the effectiveness of our critiques.

In his introduction to Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) Thomas McCarthy argues that Habermas's aim was to attempt to reconstruct an 'abstract core' of moral institutions, a moral principle against which all competing normative claims could be fairly and impartially adjudicated. McCarthy argues that the rejection of moral universalism by postmodernists had undervalued the key Enlightenment concepts of fairness, tolerance and respect for the individual. Habermas was attempting to reinforce the value of the common good by identifying its 'structural aspects'.

In contrast to this approach, Stanley Fish, who has taken on board many of the arguments and assumptions of postmodernists, challenges the Enlightenment conception of reason that Habermas makes use of. '*Toleration is exercised in an inverse proportion to there being anything at stake*' (Fish, 1994: 217, italics added).

From the publication of *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech* (1994) a common theme in the work of Stanley Fish has been a critique or deconstruction of some of the key assumptions that underpin liberal thought. In particular Fish makes objection to the notion of *reason* and other liberal procedural mechanisms that are used to enclose biased positions in a non-biased structure. It is reason that stands in opposition to all forms of dogma, because reason is independent. Real world issues become reduced to problems of moral algebra, claims Fish. The only people who reject reason stand for ideological intransigence. These are the people who fight religious wars; who have theological disputes; and who will not subject their thinking to the cool logic of reason. What reason provides is a 'market place of ideas' where no ideology is preferred to any other, where all points of view are heard and assessed without prejudice. As Fish explains: 'if you propose to examine and assess assumptions, what will you examine and assess them *with*? And the answer is that you will examine and assess them with forms of thought that themselves rest on underlying assumptions' (Fish, 1994: 18).

In contrast to the liberal view, Fish argues that reason is not a neutral category that regulates conflicting ideological positions without regard to their content. On the contrary, Fish argues, whenever reason is successfully invoked it is to present the arguments of our opponents as unreasonable. Reason is then a political entity derived from our personal and institutional history. Moreover, our opponents may not see our arguments as reasoned, but as forms of politically motivated irrationality: 'At that moment the appeal to Reason will have run its course and produced the kind of partisan impasse from which Reason supposedly offers us an escape' (Fish, 1994: 18).

However, I have to say that I accept Habermas's critique of postmodernism, but whereas he sees something fundamentally wrong with the postmodern approaches, because they fall short of his own unquestioned Enlightenment assumptions, I would blame the cowardice of the authors. Lyotard, for example, seems to look at the consequences of his own argument – that there is no adequate theory of society and no adequate theory of the person – and retreat into modernist conceptions of the 'social'.

A number of more ideological critiques of postmodernism are developed in the volume, *Market Killing: What the Free Market Does and What Social Scientists Can Do About It* (2000), edited by Greg Philo and David Miller. The central aim of Philo and Miller's book is to demonstrate that since the emergence of Thatcherism/Reaganism in the late 1970s, much social science has 'wandered up a series of dead ends which made it socially irrelevant as a discipline and incapable of commenting critically on the society within which it existed' (Philo and Miller, 2000: 2). Above all else, they argue, there is a need for social scientists to reposition themselves on a firm positivist footing, to become engaged in independent empirical research, which can identify key social problems and possibilities for change. The main thrust of their argument is 'back to modernity' and their main target is postmodernism.

The book starts with an essay by Greg Philo and Davis Miller, followed by essays from Noam Chomsky, Derek Bouse, Angela McRobbie, John Corner, Chris Hammett, Andrew Gamble, Philip Schlesinger, Barbara Epstein, James Curran, Danny Schecter and Hilary Wainwright.

Philo and Miller mourn the demise of the concept of ideology in academic work, a theme taken up by John Corner. They state that the social relations of production and the tendency for capitalists to accumulate capital exist today as they did when Marx was writing. Moreover, changes that have taken place, such as the development of global corporations 'based in powerful nation states which defend their interests', were fully anticipated by Marx, 'a process which Marx referred to as the internationalisation of capital' (Philo and Miller, 2000: 23). Philo and Miller's introduction is full of Marxism-sounding sentences such as 'So in place of a collective commitment to the use and value of what is produced, there is division and competition' (2000: 7). Marxian-sounding questions are also posed: 'How does change in the production/exchange of commodities affect the growth of new attitudes, motivations and behaviour and how are these "market values" contested or rejected?' (2000: 10). Most Marxist purists would no doubt be dismayed by Philo and Miller's references to 'elites' rather than the ruling class or, better still, the bourgeoisie: these latter terms never get a mention in the text.

There are several problems with Greg Philo and David Miller's approach. The first is their emphasis on ideology: 'We have described above the social relationships of power and interest which structure our society as it is. The purpose of social ideologies is to justify and legitimise those relationships' (2000: 26). I would have expected that they would give their reader some indication of how to identify and empirically measure ideology. Instead of this difficult empirical task that they identify, they choose to bring together quotes and statistics from newspapers, television news and official statistics. Drawing 'evidence' from the capitalist media, the capitalist state and capitalists themselves such as Park Human Resources Limited is flawed in itself, but more importantly, Philo and Miller get nowhere near the difficult task of identifying and measuring what they claim ideology is capable of.

Marxists have a very simplistic notion of 'representation' contained within the concept of ideology. In the Marxian analysis, working-class people have their ideas and worldview manipulated. The bourgeoisie are said to be capable of taking any object or idea and give it a new representation or meaning in the minds of the working class. This new representation is supportive of capitalism, justifies the position of the bourgeoisie and legitimises the exploitation of the working class in their own minds.

I would like to see Greg Philo and David Miller demonstrate the *real* existence of an ideology and demonstrate empirically how it *really* works. As it currently stands, their argument is that we should trust their notion of ideology because they have seen it on the telly or read it in the papers! The respect that the authors have for journalists needs some justification. 'It is interesting that television journalists could pose the issue of political power and the use of information so acutely, just as media studies was moving away from the analysis of ideology and propaganda' (Philo and Miller, 2000: 31). This last point is surprising given the authors' comment that 'Acquisition and material desire are thus officially sanctioned and parts of television (notably the news) took on a public relations function for these key values of the 1980s' (2000: 8). For some reason this reminded me of a televised 'debate' shortly after the publication of *Bad News* in 1976 in which Labour MP Michael Meacher and Greg Philo were discussing bias in the media. I can recall vividly Kelvin McKenzie, who was later to go on to become editor of the *Sun*, waving a copy of the *British Journal of Sociology* at Greg Philo and demanding that he justify the simple content analysis. Greg was unwilling or unable to do so; this was a low point for the social sciences.

The rest of their opening chapter outlines a weak 'critique' of postmodernism and truth, which is very well rehearsed. Philo and Miller's argument rarely gets above the level of name-calling: postmodernists are responsible for television violence, the Ridings School, Black Monday, Pulp Fiction, the Smurfs, Michael Barrymore, the state of the NHS, school bullying, BSE, AIDS . . .

At first sight the papers by Noam Chomsky and Hilary Rose are a little out of place in this volume. However, Rose wants to 'restore natural science to its proper place' (2000: 123), which for her involves a critique of new developments in biology, a critique of Steve Hawkin as a 'new ager' and a repetition of the tired critique of postmodernism that we read in the introduction, that postmodern positions suffer when their own arguments are pointed against them. However, Rose ends her paper by praising the 'achievement' of 'conflicting cultural currents and plural epistemologies' (2000: 123). What these two papers do is to cast doubt upon the assumption in Philo and Miller's introduction that doing empirical research is unproblematic in nature.

Both Derek Bouse and Chris Hamnett are critical of the difficult language that postmodern writers often use. Hamnett is also critical of the ways in which postmodernists have looked at conceptions of 'truth' and 'science' as 'a product of localised beliefs', by reference to perceptions of the Holocaust. There are problems for scientists when dealing with the Holocaust. The 'scientists' who carried out experiments on involuntary inmates were 'real' scientists, the experiments were conducted using strict experimental designs and their findings are high in validity and reliability. However, most doctors will not make use of this scientific data, because this truth is 'relativised into a language game' or 'final vocabulary' that is part of a 'cultural context' they find abhorrent.

Angela McRobbie distances herself from the introduction, and in her thought-provoking paper discusses the issues and problems facing a new generation of feminists who have moved away from the concerns of the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the politically unanchored TV blonde.

The collection ends with a paper by Hilary Wainwright, 'Political frustrations in the post-modern fog', which starts in the same vein as the Philo and Miller introduction: 'The belief underlying this essay is that much of what came to be described as "post-modernism" clouded and distorted the political choices that we faced in the 1970s and 1980s' (2000: 240). However, as she continues the argument becomes less and less hostile to the postmodern contribution:

> We share with post-modernists, for instance, a commitment to scrutinise and deconstruct the cultural consensus; to challenge simplistic uses of universal concepts such as 'citizenship' and 'human rights' to hide differences and inequalities; to subvert modernist optimism in technological 'progress' and reveal values embedded in shaping our cultural and social life rather than simply reflecting a reality 'out there'. (Philo and Miller, 2000: 243)

Wainwright's conclusion, although grudging and guarded, is that the tools we need as social scientists and researchers are to be found within the postmodern discourse.

However, James Curran's excellent contribution gives a well-balanced and well-informed critical account of current media theory and research. The book is worth looking at for his contribution alone.

What Greg Philo and David Miller seem unwilling to come to terms with is the simple point that many people embrace postmodern positions because of the total and complete intellectual collapse of Marxism as the basis of an explanatory framework for anything. Marxists are incapable of theorising about capitalism, 'base' has collapsed into 'superstructure', value is now related to fad, fashion and desire, capitalists can generate surplus value without the need for labour power, capitalists exploit other capitalists . . . and so it continues.

Activity

What do you understand by the terms modernity and postmodernity?

What do you consider to be the differences between modernity and postmodernity?

Complete the boxes with your own definitions.

Definition of modernity	*Definition of postmodernity*

Differences between modernity and postmodernity

Modernity	*Postmodernity*
1 In the modern world 'grand narratives' are needed as a foundation for 'truth'.	1 In the postmodern condition 'grand narratives' are seen as oppressive and irrelevant.
2 There is 'truth'.	2 There is no truth.
3	3
4	4

In conclusion: living in the postmodern condition

If we had to speculate as to what life is like for an individual living in the postmodern world, what could we say? Below are some possible outcomes of how life is experienced by individuals in the postmodern world:

Lyotard

If we accept what Lyotard has to say then people should demonstrate 'incredulity' towards grand narratives and be engaged in a 'war' on 'totality', through a re-examination of the Enlightenment. People should feel that the social bond is dissolving. They should speak to each other by the use of 'micrologics' as they make language for their own ends, and reject universalist discourses.

Deleuze and Guattari

The self has a sense of uncertainty that emerges with the process of becoming. The postmodern self is aware of the internalised discipline and constraint derived from the 'will to power', used in modern society for the construction of the modern person in accordance with the 'line of organisation'. The postmodern self is both aware of and can choose to become a detached subject – a schizo, nomad or 'body without organs'. This Deleuze and Guattari refer to as *becoming reactive*, in which people draw upon the resources of the singularity.

All problems that people have are based upon a foundation in 'virtual structures', not 'actual structures' – we make problems become more actual by making ourselves believe this or our process of individuation.

Baudrillard

For Baudrillard the postmodern self has a confusion of categories. What were once fixed categories such as 'value' can no longer be measured against clear and objective goals. Postmodern *society* is founded upon proliferation. What we have is great uncertainty. The postmodern self attempts to escape from this by having a greater degree of dependency on information and communication systems. However, with the collapse of codes in the political, sexual and genetic spheres, and the constant exposure on all sides to images and information, this merely exacerbates feelings of uncertainty.

Vattimo

For Vattimo we are unstable beings with no strong structures. We have lost our faith in 'progressive enlightenment'; we have no justification for truth claims. The postmodern self should express this destruction of ontology as 'possibilities' and 'opportunities'. The postmodern self should become an 'accomplished nihilist' – there should be nothing left of 'being'. The world should be experienced as becoming less 'real', and as made up of 'rhetorical mechanisms'. The postmodern self should be continually rewriting its past, creating an account of the own biography which it feels most comfortable with. This ontological insecurity should allow the postmodern self to dissolve, decentre or otherwise deconstruct any problem.

Rorty

If we accept what Rorty has to say, then people should experience a need for continual self-creation and a need to continually reflect on core beliefs. Given Rorty's view that the self is created by vocabulary – a set of words to defend actions and belief and to organise our individual lives – people should spend a great deal of time reflecting on whether they have chosen the wrong vocabulary.

In summary, people should experience:

- epistemological uncertainty
- ontological plurality

However, social theory has since its beginning attempted to make sense of the world, in an effort to generate feelings of certainty in a rapidly changing world. Many postmodernists have, I believe, underestimated the capability of *early modernist* writers such as Durkheim or Parsons to deal with issues of uncertainty and the relationship between agency and structure in a changing world.

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