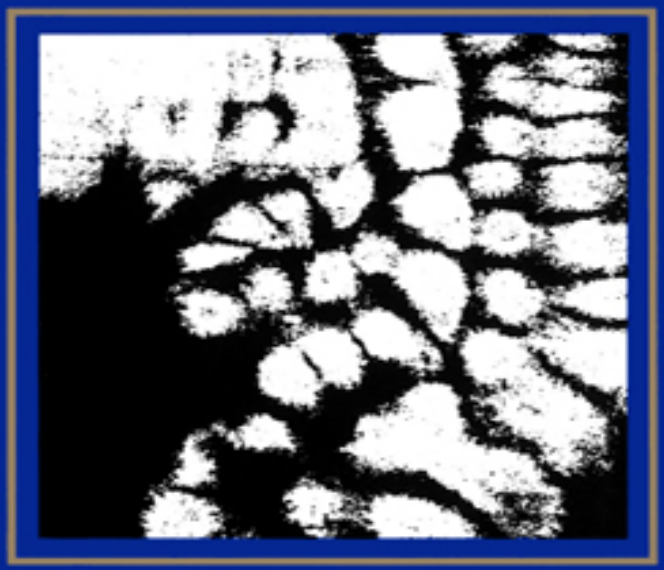
MODERNITY AND AMBIVALENCE



ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

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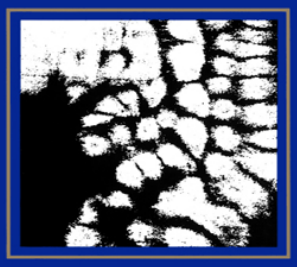

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One has to wait till the end of history
to grasp the material in its determined totality

Wilhelm Dilthey

The day that there will be a reading of the Oxford card,
the one and true reading,
will be the end of history

Jacques Derrida

Someone who writes nothing but postcards
will not have Hegel's problem
of how to end his book

Richard Rorty

Introduction: The Quest for Order

Ambivalence, the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category, is a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregating) function that language is meant to perform. The main symptom of disorder is the acute discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions.

It is because of the anxiety that accompanies it and the indecision which follows that we experience ambivalence as a disorder – and either blame language for lack of precision or ourselves for linguistic misuse. And yet ambivalence is not the product of the pathology of language or speech. It is, rather, a normal aspect of linguistic practice. It arises from one of the main functions of language: that of naming and classifying. Its volume grows depending on the effectivity with which that function is performed. Ambivalence is therefore the *alter ego* of language, and its permanent companion – indeed, its normal condition.

To classify means to set apart, to segregate. It means first to postulate that the world consists of discrete and distinctive entities; then to postulate that each entity has a group of similar or adjacent entities with which it belongs, and with which – together – it is opposed to some other entities; and then to make the postulated real by linking differential patterns of action to different classes of entities (the evocation of a specific behavioural pattern becoming the operative definition of the class). To classify, in other words, 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.

Through its naming/classifying function, language posits itself between a solidly founded, orderly world fit for human habitation, and a contingent world of randomness, in which human survival weapons – memory, the capacity for learning – would be useless, if not downright suicidal. Language strives to sustain the order and to deny or suppress randomness and contingency. An orderly world is a world in which 'one knows how to go on' (or, what amounts to the same, one knows how to find out – and find out *for sure* – how to go on), in which one knows how to calculate the probability of an event and how to increase or decrease that probability; a world in which links between certain situations and the effectivity of certain actions remain by and large constant, so that one can rely on past successes as guides for future ones. Because of our learning/memorizing ability we have vested interests in maintaining the orderliness of the world. For the same reason, we experience ambivalence as discomfort and a threat. Ambivalence confounds calculation of events and confuses the relevance of memorized action patterns.

The situation turns ambivalent if the linguistic tools of structuration prove inadequate; either the situation belongs to none of the linguistically distinguished classes, or it falls into several classes at the same time. None of the learned patterns could be proper in an ambivalent situation – or more than one of the learned patterns could be applied; whatever is the case, the outcome is the feeling of indecision, undecidability, and hence loss of control. The consequences of action become unpredictable, while randomness, allegedly done away with by the structuring effort, seems to make an unsolicited come-back.

Ostensibly, the naming/classifying function of language has the prevention of ambivalence as its purpose.

Performance is measured by the neatness of the divisions between classes, the precision of their definitional boundaries, and the unambiguity with which objects may be allocated to classes. And yet the application of such criteria, and the very activity whose progress they are to monitor, are the ultimate sources of ambivalence and the reasons why ambivalence is unlikely ever to become truly extinct, whatever the amount and the ardour of the structuring/ordering effort.

The ideal that the naming/classifying function strives to achieve is a sort of commodious filing cabinet that contains all the files that contain all the items that the world contains – but confines each file and each item within a separate place of its own (with remaining doubts solved by a cross-reference index). It is the non-viability of such a filing cabinet that makes ambivalence unavoidable. And it is the perseverance with which construction of such a cabinet is pursued that brings forth ever new supplies of ambivalence.

Classifying consists in the acts of inclusion and exclusion. Each act of naming splits the world into two: entities that answer to the name; all the rest that do not. Certain entities may be included into a class – *made a class* – only in as far as other entities are *excluded,* left outside. Invariably, such operation of inclusion/exclusion is an act of violence perpetrated upon the world, and requires the support of a certain amount of coercion. It can hold as long as the volume of applied coercion remains adequate to the task of outbalancing the extent of created discrepancy. Insufficiency of coercion shows itself in the manifest reluctance of entities postulated by the act of classification to fit into assigned classes, and in the appearance of entities under- or over-defined, with insufficient or excessive meaning – sending no readable signals for action, or sending signals that confuse the recipients for being mutually contradictory.

Ambivalence is a side-product of the labour of classification; and it calls for yet more classifying effort.

Though born of the naming/classifying urge, ambivalence may be fought only with a naming that is yet more exact, and classes that are yet more precisely defined: that is, with such operations as will set still tougher (counter-factual) demands on the discreteness and transparency of the world and thus give yet more occasion for ambiguity. The struggle against ambivalence is, therefore, both self-destructive and self-propelling. It goes on with unabating strength because it creates its own problems in the course of resolving them. Its intensity, however, varies over time, depending on the availability of force adequate to the task of controlling the extant volume of ambivalence, and also on the presence or absence of awareness that the reduction of ambivalence is a problem of the discovery and application of proper *technology:* a *managerial* problem. Both factors combined to make modern times an era of particularly bitter and relentless war against ambivalence.

How old is modernity? is a contentious question. There is no agreement on dating. There is no consensus on what is to be dated.[1] And once the effort of dating starts in earnest, the object itself begins to disappear. Modernity, like all other quasi-totalities we want to prise off from the continuous flow of being, become elusive: we discover that the concept is fraught with ambiguity, while its referent is opaque at the core and frayed at the edges. Hence the contention is unlikely to be resolved. The defining feature of modernity underlying these essays is part of the contention.

Among the multitude of impossible tasks that modernity set itself and that made modernity into what it is, the task of order (more precisely and most importantly, of *order as a task*) stands out – as the least possible among the impossible and the least disposable among the indispensable; indeed, as the archetype for all other tasks, one that renders all other tasks mere metaphors of itself.

Order is what is not chaos; chaos is what is not orderly. Order and chaos are *modern* twins. They had been conceived amidst the disruption and collapse of the divinely ordained world, which knew of neither necessity nor accident; one that just *was* – without ever thinking how to make itself to be. That unthinking and careless world which preceded the bifurcation into order and chaos we find difficult to decribe in its own terms. We try to grasp it mostly with the help of negations: we tell ourselves what that world was not, what it did not contain, what it did not know, what it was unaware of. That world would hardly have recognized itself in our descriptions. It would not understand what are we talking about. It would not have survived such understanding. The moment of understanding would have been the sign of its approaching death. And it was. Historically, this understanding was the last sigh of the passing world; and the first sound of new-born modernity.

We can think of modernity as of a time when order – of the world, of the human habitat, of the human self, and of the connection between all three – is *reflected upon;* a matter of thought, of concern, of a practice that is aware of itself, conscious of being a conscious practice and wary of the void it would leave were it to halt or merely relent. For the sake of convenience (the exact dating of birth, let us repeat, is bound to remain contentious: the project of dating is but one of the many *foci imaginarii* that, like butterflies, do not survive the moment when a pin is pushed through their body fo fix them in place) we can agree with Stephen L. Collins, who in his recent study took Hobbes's vision for the birthmark of the consciousness of order, that is – in our rendition – of modern consciousness, that is of modernity. ('Consciousness', says Collins, 'appears as the quality of perceiving order in things.')

> Hobbes understood that a world in flux was natural and that order must be created to restrain what was natural ... Society is no longer a transcendentally articulated reflection of something predefined, external, and beyond

> itself which orders existence hierarchically. It is now a nominal entity ordered by the sovereign state which is its own articulated representative ... [Forty years after Elisabeth's death] order was coming to be understood not as natural, but as artificial, created by man, and manifestly political and social ... Order must be designed to restrain what appeared ubiquitous [that is, flux]... Order became a matter of power, and power a matter of will, force and calculation ... Fundamental to the entire reconceptualization of the idea of society was the belief that the commonwealth, as was order, was a human creation.[2]

Collins is a scrupulous historian, wary of the dangers of projectionism and presentism, but he can hardly avoid imputing to the pre-Hobbesian world many a feature akin to our post-Hobbesian world – if only through indicating their absence; indeed, without such a strategy of description the pre-Hobbesian world would stay numb and meaningless to us. To make that world speak to us, we must, as it were, make its silences audible: to spell out what that world was unaware of. We must commit an act of violence: force that world to take a stance on issues to which it remained oblivious, and thus dismiss or bypass that oblivion that made it that world, a world so different and so incommunicado with our own. The attempt to communicate will defy its purpose. In this process of forced conversion, we shall render the hope of communication more remote still. In the end, instead of *reconstructing* that 'other world', we shall no more than *construe* 'the other' of the world of our own.

If it is true that we know that the order of things is not natural, this does not mean that the other, pre-Hobbesian, world thought of order as the work of nature: it did not think of order at all, not in a form we would think of as 'thinking of, not in the sense we think of it now. The discovery that order was *not natural* was discovery of *order as such.* The *concept* of order appeared in consciousness only simultaneously with the *problem* of order, of order as a matter *of design* and *action,* order as an obsession. To put it yet more bluntly, order as a problem emerged in the wake

of the ordering flurry, as a reflection on ordering practices. Declaration of the 'non-naturalness of order' stood for an order already coming out of hiding, out of non-existence, out of silence. 'Nature' means, after all, nothing but the silence of man.

If it is true that we, the moderns, think of order as a matter of design, this does not mean that before modernity the world was complacent about designing, and expected the order to come and stay on its own and unassisted. That world lived without such alternative; it would not be that world at all, were it giving its thought to it. If it is true that our world is shaped by the suspicion of the brittleness and fragility of the artificial man-designed and man-built islands of order among the sea of chaos, it does not follow that before modernity the world believed that the order stretched over the sea and the human archipelago alike; it was, rather, unaware of the distinction between land and water.[3]

We can say that the existence is modern in as far as it forks into order and chaos. The existence is modern in as far as it contains the *alternative* of order and chaos.

Indeed: order and *chaos,* full stop. If it is aimed at at all (that is, in as far as it is thought of), order is not aimed at as a substitute for an alternative order. The struggle for order is not a fight of one definition against another, of one way of articulating reality against a competitive proposal. It is a fight of determination against ambiguity, of semantic precision against ambivalence, of transparency against obscurity, clarity against fuzziness. Order as a concept, as a vision, as a purpose could not be conceived but for the insight into the total ambivalence, the randomness of chaos. Order is continuously engaged in the war of survival. The other of order is not another order: chaos is its only alternative. The other of order is the miasma of the indeterminate and unpredictable. The other is the uncertainty, that source and archetype of all fear. The

tropes of ‘the other of order’ are: undefinability, incoherence, incongruity, incompatibility, illogicality, irrationality, ambiguity, confusion, undecidability, ambivalence.

Chaos, ‘the other of order’, is pure negativity. It is a denial of all that the order strives to be. It is against that negativity that the positivity of order constitutes itself. But the negativity of chaos is a product of order’s self-constitution: its side-effect, its waste, and yet the condition *sine qua non* of its (reflective) possibility. Without the negativity of chaos, there is no positivity of order; without chaos, no order.

We can say that the existence is modern in as far as it is saturated by the ‘without us, a deluge’ feeling. The existence is modern in as far as it is guided by the urge of designing what otherwise would not be there: designing *of itself*

The raw existence, the existence free of intervention, the *unordered* existence, or the fringe of ordered existence, become now *nature:* something singularly unfit for human habitat – something not to be trusted and not to be left to its own devices, something to be *mastered, subordinated, remade* so as to be readjusted to human needs. Something to be held in check, restrained and contained, lifted from the state of shapelessness and given form – by effort and by force. Even if the form has been preordained by nature itself, it will not come about unassisted and will not survive undefended. Living according to nature needs a lot of designing, organized effort and vigilant monitoring. Nothing is more artificial than naturalness; nothing less natural than throwing oneself at the mercy of the laws of nature. Power, repression and purposeful action stand between nature and that socially effected order in which artificiality is natural.

We can say that existence is modern in as far as it is effected and sustained by *design, manipulation, management, engineering.* The existence is modern in as

far as it is administered by resourceful (that is, possessing knowledge, skill and technology), sovereign agencies. Agencies are sovereign in as far as they claim and successfully defend the right to manage and administer existence: the right to define order and, by implication, lay aside chaos, as that left-over that escapes the definition.

The typically modern practice, the substance of modern politics, of modern intellect, of modern life, is the effort to exterminate ambivalence: an effort to define precisely – and to suppress or eliminate everything that could not or would not be precisely defined. Modern practice is not aimed at the conquest of foreign lands, but at the filling of the blank spots in the *compleat mappa mundi.* It is the modern practice, not nature, that truly suffers no void.

Intolerance is, therefore, the natural inclination of modern practice. Construction of order sets the limits to incorporation and admission. It calls for the denial of rights, and of the grounds, of everything that cannot be assimilated – for de-legitimation of the other. As long as the urge to put paid to ambivalence guides collective and individual action, intolerance will follow – even if, ashamedly, it hides under the mask of toleration (which often means: you are abominable, but I, being generous, shall let you live).[4]

The other of the modern state is the no-man's or contested land: the under- or over-definition, the demon of ambiguity. Since the sovereignty of the modern state is the power to define and to make the definitions stick – everything that self-defines or eludes the power-assisted definition is subversive. The other of this sovereignty is no-go areas, unrest and disobedience, collapse of law and order.

The other of modern intellect is polysemy, cognitive dissonance, polyvalent definitions, contingency; the overlapping meanings in the world of tidy classifications and filing cabinets. Since the sovereignty of the modern intellect is the power to define and to make the definitions stick –

everything that eludes unequivocal allocation is an anomaly and a challenge. The other of this sovereignty is the violation of the law of the excluded middle.

In both cases, resistance to definition sets the limit to sovereignty, to power, to the transparency of the world, to its control, to order. That resistance is the stubborn and grim reminder of the flux which order wished to contain but in vain; of the limits to order; and of the necessity of ordering. Modern state and modern intellect alike need chaos – if only to go on creating order. They both thrive on the vanity of their effort.

Modern existence is both haunted and stirred into restless action by modern consciousness; and modern consciousness is the suspicion or awareness of the inconclusiveness of extant order; a consciousness prompted and moved by the premonition of inadequacy, nay non-viability, of the order-designing, ambivalence-eliminating project; of the randomness of the world and contingency of identities that constitute it. Consciousness is modern in as far as it reveals ever new layers of chaos underneath the lid of power-assisted order. Modern consciousness criticizes, warns and alerts. It makes the action unstoppable by ever anew unmasking its ineffectiveness. It perpetuates the ordering practice by disqualifying its achievements and laying bare its defeats.

Thus there is a *hate—love* relation between modern existence and modern culture (in the most advanced form of self-awareness), a symbiosis fraught with civil wars. In the modern era, culture is that obstreperous and vigilant Her Majesty's Opposition which makes the government feasible. There is no love lost, harmony, nor mirror-like similarity between the two: there is only mutual need and dependence – that *complementarity* which comes out of the opposition, which *is* opposition. However modernity resents its critique – it would not survive the armistice.

It would be futile to decide whether modern culture undermines or serves modern existence. It does both things. It can do each one only together with the other. Compulsive negation is the positivity of modern culture. Dysfunctionality of modern culture is its functionality. The modern powers' struggle for artificial order needs culture that explores the limits and the limitations of the power of artifice. The struggle for order informs that exploration and is in turn informed by its findings. In the process, the struggle sheds its initial hubris: the pugnacity born of naivety and ignorance. It learns, instead, to live with its own permanence, inconclusiveness – and prospectlessness. Hopefully, it would learn in the end the difficult skills of modesty and tolerance.

History of modernity is a history of tension between social existence and its culture. Modern existence forces its culture into opposition to itself. This disharmony is precisely the harmony modernity needs. The history of modernity draws its uncanny and unprecedented dynamism from the speed with which it discards successive versions of harmony having first discredited them as but pale and flawed reflections of it *foci imaginarii.* For the same reason, it can be seen as a history *of progress,* as the *natural history* of humanity.

As a form of life, modernity makes itself possible through setting itself an impossible task. It is precisely the endemic inconclusivity of effort that makes the life of continuous restlessness both feasible and inescapable, and effectively precludes the possibility that the effort may ever come to rest.

The impossible task is set by the *foci imaginarii*[5] of absolute truth, pure art, humanity as such, order, certainty, harmony, the end of history. Like all horizons, they can never be reached. Like all horizons, they make possible walking with a purpose. Like all horizons, they recede in the

course of, and because of, walking. Like all horizons, the quicker is the walking the faster they recede. Like all horizons, they never allow the purpose of walking to relent or be compromised. Like all horizons, they move continuously in time and thus lend the walking the supportive illusion of destination, pointer and purpose.

Foci imaginarii –the horizons that foreclose and open up, circumvent and distend the space of modernity – conjure up the phantom of itinerary in the space by itself devoid of direction. In that space, roads are made of walking and wash out again as the walkers pass by. In front of the walkers (and the front is where the walkers look) the road is marked out by the walkers' determination to go on; behind them, the roads can be imagined from thin lines of footprints, framed on both sides by thicker lines of waste and litter. 'In a desert – said Edmond Jabès – there are no avenues, no boulevards, no blind alleys and no streets. Only – here and there – fragmentary imprints of steps, quickly effaced and denied.'[6]

Modernity is what it is – an obsessive march forward – not because it always wants more, but because it never gets enough; not because it grows more ambitious and adventurous, but because its adventures are bitter and its ambitions frustrated. The march must go on because any place of arrival is but a temporary station. No place is privileged, no place better than another, as from no place the horizon is nearer than from any other. This is why the agitation and flurry are lived out as a forward march; this is, indeed, why the Brownian movement seems to acquire a front and a rear, and restlessness a direction: it is the detritus of burnt-out fuels and the soot of extinct flames that mark the trajectories of progress.

As Walter Benjamin observed, the storm irresistibly propels the walkers into the future to which their backs are turned, while the pile of debris before them grows skyward. 'This storm we call progress.'[7] On a closer scrutiny, the hope

of arrival turns out to be the urge to escape. In the linear time of modernity, only the point of departure is fixed: and it is the unstoppable movement of that point which straightens up disaffected existence into a line of historical time. What affixes a pointer to this line is not the anticipation of new bliss, but the certainty of past horrors; yesterday's suffering, not the happiness of tomorrow. As for today – it turns into the past before the sun is down. The linear time of modernity is stretched between the past that cannot last and the future that cannot be. There is no room for the middle. As it flows, time flattens into the sea of misery so that the pointer can stay afloat.

To set an impossible task means not to endear the future, but to devalue the present. Not being what it ought to be is the present's original and irredeemable sin. The present is always wanting, which makes it ugly, abhorrent and unendurable. The present is *obsolete.* It is obsolete before it comes to be. The moment it lands in the present, the coveted future is poisoned by the toxic effluvia of the wasted past. Its enjoyment can last but a *fleeting* moment: beyond that (and the beyond begins at the starting point) the joy acquires a necrophilic tinge, achievement turns into sin and immobility into death.

In the first two quotations with which these essays begin, Dilthey and Derrida speak of the same: full clarity means the end of history. The first speaks from the inside of modernity still young and daring: history will come to an end, and we shall foreclose it by making it universal. Derrida looks back to the dashed hopes. He knows that history will not end and that therefore the state of ambivalence will not end either.

There is another reason for which modernity equals restlessness; the restlessness is Sisyphean, and the fight with the uneasiness of the present takes on the appearance of historical progress.

The war against chaos splits into a multitude of local battles for order. Such battles are fought by guerilla units. For most of modern history there were no headquarters to co-ordinate the battles – certainly not commanders-in-chief able to chart the whole vastness of the universe to be conquered and to mould local bloodshed into a territorial conquest. There were only the mobile propaganda squads, with their pep talk aimed at keeping up the fighting spirit. 'The governors and the scientists alike (not to mention the commercial world) see human affairs as patterned upon purpose .. .'[8] But the governors and the scientists are aplenty, and so are their purposes. All governors and scientists guard jealously their hunting grounds, and so their right to set purposes. Because the hunting grounds are cut down to the size of their coercive and/or intellectual powers, and the purposes are cut to the measure of their grounds, their battles are victorious. Purposes are reached, chaos is chased out of gates, orders are established within.

Modernity prides itself on the *fragmentation* of the world as its foremost achievement. Fragmentation is the prime source of its strength. The world that falls apart into plethora of problems is a manageable world. Or, rather, since the problems are manageable – the question of the manageability of the world may never appear on the agenda, or at least be indefinitely postponed. The territorial and functional autonomy which the fragmentation of powers brings in its wake consists first and foremost in the right not to look beyond the fence and not to be looked at from outside of the fence. Autonomy is the right to decide when to keep the eyes open and when close them down; the right to separate, to discriminate, to peel off and to trim.

> The entire thrust of science has been ... to explain the whole as the *sum* of its parts and nothing more. In the past, it was assumed that if some holistic principle were found, it could merely be added to the parts already known, as an organizer. In other words, the holistic principle would be something like an administrator who runs a bureaucracy.[9]

The resemblance, let us add, is in no way accidental. Scientists and administrators share concerns with sovereignty and borderlines, and cannot conceive of the whole as anything but more administrators and more scientists with their sovereign and neatly fenced functions and fields of expertise (much as the way in which Mrs Thatcher visualized Europe). Urologists and laryngologists guard the autonomy of their clinical departments (and thus, by proxy, of kidneys and ears) as jealously as the Whitehall bureaucrats who manage, respectively, industry and employment guard the independence of their departments and areas of human existence subject to their jurisdiction.

One way of putting it is that the grand vision of order has been small-changed into solvable little problems. More to the point, the grand vision of order arises (if at all) out of the problem-solving flurry– as the ‘invisible hand’ or similar ‘metaphysical prop’. If it is given a thought, the harmonious totality is expected to arise, like Phoenix from the ashes, out of the zealous and astonishingly successful efforts to split it apart.

But the fragmentation turns the problem-solving into Sisyphean labour and incapacitates it as a tool of order-making. The autonomy of localities and functions is but a fiction made plausible by decrees and statute books. This is an autonomy of a river or an eddy or a hurricane (cut off the inflow and outflow of water, and there is no river left; cut off the inflow and outflow of air, and there is no tornado). Autarchy is the dream of all power. It flounders on the absence of autarky no autarchy can live without not secure. It is the powers that are fragmented; the world, stubbornly, is not. People stay multifunctional, words polysemic. Or, rather, people turn multifunctional because of the fragmentation of functions; words turn polysemic because of the fragmentation of meanings. Opacity emerges at the other end of the struggle for transparency. Confusion is born out of the fight for clarity. Contingency is discovered at the

place where many fragmentary works of determination meet, clash and intertangle.

The more secure the fragmentation, the more desultory and less controllable the resulting chaos. Autarchy allows resources to be focused on the task in hand (there is a strong hand to hold the task firmly) and thus makes the task feasible and the problem resolvable. As problem-resolution is a function of the resourcefulness of power, the scale of problems resolvable and resolved rises with the scope of autarchy (with the degree to which practices of power that hold together the relatively autonomous enclave shift from the ‘relative’ to the ‘autonomous’). Problems get bigger. So do their consequences. The less relative one autonomy, the more relative the other. The more thoroughly the initial problems have been solved, the less manageable are the problems that result. There was a task to increase agricultural crops – resolved thanks to the nitrates. And there was a task of steadying water supplies – resolved thanks to stemming the flow of water with dams. Then there was a task to purify water supplies poisoned by the seepage of unabsorbed nitrates – resolved thanks to the application of phosphates in specially built sewage-processing plants. Then there was a task to destroy toxic algae that thrive in reservoirs rich in phosphate compounds...

The drive to purpose-geared order drew its energy, as all drives to order do, from the abhorrence of ambivalence. But more ambivalence was the ultimate product of modern, fragmented, drives to order. Most problems today confronting the managers of local orders are outcomes of the problem-solving activity. Most of the ambivalence the practitioners and the theorists of social and intellectual orders face results from the efforts to suppress or declare non-existent the endemic relativity of autonomy. Problems are created by problem-solving, new areas of chaos are generated by ordering activity. Progress consists first and foremost in the obsolescence of yesterday’s solutions.

The horror of mixing reflects the obsession with separating. Local, specialist excellence that modern ways of doing things made possible has the separating practices as its only – though commendably solid – foundation. The central frame of both modern intellect and modern practice is opposition – more precisely, dichotomy. Intellectual visions that turn out tree-like images of progressive bifurcation reflect and inform the administrative practice of splitting and separation: with each successive bifurcation, the distance between offshoots of the original stem grows, with no horizontal links to make up for the isolation.

Dichotomy is an exercise in power and at the same time its disguise. Though no dichotomy would hold without the power to set apart and cast aside, it creates an illusion of symmetry. The sham symmetry of results conceals the asymmetry of power that is its cause. Dichotomy represents its members as equal and interchangeable. Yet its very existence testifies to the presence of a differentiating power. It is the power-assisted differentiation that makes the difference. It is said that only the difference between units of the opposition, not the units themselves, is meaningful. Thus meaningfulness, it seems, is gestated in the practices of power capable of making difference – of separating and keeping apart.

In dichotomies crucial for the practice and the vision of social order the differentiating power hides as a rule behind one of the members of the opposition. The second member is but *the other* of the first, the opposite (degraded, suppressed, exiled) side of the first and its creation. Thus abnormality is the other of the norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, barbarity the other of civilization, animal the other of the human, woman the other of man, stranger the other of the native, enemy the other of friend, ‘them’ the other of ‘us’, insanity the other of reason, foreigner the other of the state subject, lay public the other of the expert. Both sides depend on each other,

but the dependence is not symmetrical. The second side depends on the first for its contrived and enforced isolation. The first depends on the second for its self-assertion.

Geometry is the archetype of modern mind. The grid is its ruling trope (and thus, so be it, Mondrian is the most *representative* among its visual artists). Taxonomy, classification, inventory, catalogue and statistics are paramount strategies of modern practice. Modern mastery is the power to divide, classify and allocate – in thought, in practice, in the practice of thought and in the thought of practice. Paradoxically, it is for this reason that ambivalence is the main affliction of modernity and the most worrying of its concerns. Geometry shows what the world would be like were it geometrical. But the world is not geometrical. It cannot be squeezed into geometrically inspired grids.

Thus the production of waste (and, consequently, concern with waste disposal) is as modern as classification and order-designing. Weeds are the waste of gardening, mean streets the waste of town-planning, dissidence the waste of ideological unity, heresy the waste of orthodoxy, stranger-hood the waste of nation-state building. They are waste, as they defy classification and explode the tidiness of the grid. They are the disallowed mixture of categories that must not mix. They earned their death-sentence by resisting separation. The fact that they would not sit across the barricade had not the barricade been built in the first place would not be considered by the modern court as a valid defence. The court is there to preserve the neatness of the barricades that have been built.

If modernity is about the production of order then ambivalence is *the waste of modernity.* Both order and ambivalence are alike products of modern practice; and neither has anything except modern practice – continuous, vigilant practice – to sustain it. Both share in typically modern contingency, foundationlessness of being. Ambivalence is arguably the modern era’s most genuine

worry and concern, since unlike other enemies, defeated and enslaved, it grows in strength with every success of modern powers. It is its own failure that the tidying-up activity construes as ambivalence.

The following essays will focus first on various aspects of the modern struggle against ambivalence that in its course, and by force of its inner logic, turns into the main source of the phenomenon it meant to extinguish. Further essays will trace modernity's gradual coming to terms with difference and will consider what living at peace with ambivalence may look like.

The book starts with sketching the stage for the modern war against ambivalence, identified with chaos and lack of control, and hereby frightening and marked for extinction. Chapter 1 surveys the elements of the *modern project* — legislative ambitions of philosophical reason, gardening ambitions of the state, ordering ambitions of applied sciences – which construed under-determination/ambivalence/contingency as a threat and made its elimination into one of the main *foci imaginarii* of social order.

Chapters 2 and 3 consider the logical and practical aspects of the 'order-building' (classification and segregation) as productive of the notoriously ambivalent category of *strangers.* The question is asked – and answered – why the efforts to dissolve the ambivalent category result in yet more ambivalence and prove in the end to be counterproductive. Also, responses of those cast in the position of ambivalence are surveyed and evaluated. The question is asked – and answered – why none of the conceivable strategies stands a chance of success, and why the strangers' only realistic project is that of embracing their ambivalent standing, with all its pragmatic and philosophical consequences.

Chapters 4 and 5 present a case study of the modern fight against ambivalence and this fight's unanticipated, yet unavoidable cultural repercussions. Chapter 4 focuses on the assimilatory pressures exerted upon European, and particularly German, Jews, on the inner traps of the assimilatory offer, and the rational, yet doomed responses of its addressees. Chapter 5 follows some (and, as it transpired later, the most seminal) cultural consequences of the assimilation project – bent on exterminating ambivalence yet spawning ever more of it: particularly the discovery of under-determination/ambivalence/contingency as a *lasting human condition;* indeed, as this condition's most important feature. Propositions of Kafka, Simmel, Freud, Derrida (and some less known, yet crucial thinkers like Shestov or Jabès) are re-analysed in this context. And the road is traced leading from irreparably ambivalent social setting to the self-constitution of critical modern consciousness and, ultimately, the phenomenon called the 'postmodern culture'.

Chapter 6 explores the contemporary plight of ambivalence: its *privatization.* With the modern state retreating from its gardening ambitions, and philosophical reason opting for the interpretative rather than legislating mode – the network of expertise, aided and mediated by the consumer market, takes over as the setting in which individuals must face the problem of ambivalence alone, in the course of their private self-constructive efforts, search for certainty documented in social approval. The cultural and ethical consequences of the present setting are followed through – which leads into chapter 7, which attempts to draw conclusions from the historical defeat of the great modern campaign against ambivalence; in particular, this chapter considers the practical consequences of living 'without foundations', under conditions of *admitted* contingency; following the lead given by Agnes Heller, it ponders the chance of transforming

contingency as the fate into a consciously embraced destiny; and the related prospects of the postmodern condition generating tribal strife or human solidarity. The intention of the chapter is not to engage in the enterprise of social prognosis, doubtful as it must be inside a notoriously contingent habitat – but to set an agenda for the discussion of political and moral problematics of the postmodern age.

Any reader of the book will certainly note that its central problem is firmly rooted in the propositions first articulated by Adorno and Horkheimer in their critique of Enlightenment (and, through it, of modern civilization). They were first to spell out loudly and clearly that 'Enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical ... Nothing at all may remain outside because the mere idea of outsidedness is the very source of fear'; that what modern men 'want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men. That is the only aim. Ruthlessly, in despite of itself, the Enlightenment has extinguished any trace of its own self-consciousness. The only kind of thinking that is sufficiently heard to shatter myths is ultimately self-destructive'.[10] This book attempts to wrap historical and sociological flesh around the 'dialectics of Enlightenment' skeleton. But it also goes beyond Adorno's and Horkheimer's propositions. It suggests that the Enlightenment, after all, has spectacularly failed in its drive to 'extinguish any trace of its own self-consciousness' (Adorno's and Horkheimer's own work is, to be sure, one of the many vivid proofs of that failure), and that myth-shattering thinking (which the Enlightenment could not but reinforce instead of marginalizing) proved to be not so much *self*-destructive, as destructive of the modern project's blind arrogance, high-handedness and legislative dreams.

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[1] Making one's own dating choice seems to be unavoidable if only to ward off an intrinsically barren discussion, diverting us from the substantive propositions (the current datings range as wide as the assumptions of the French historians –

contributors to the *Culture et idéologie de l'état moderne* volume published in 1985 by the École Française de Rome – that the modern state was born at the end of the thirteenth century and fizzled out toward the end of the seventeenth, to some literary critics confinement of the term 'modernity' to cultural trends that begin with the twentieth century and end at its middle).

The definitional discord is made particularly difficult to disentangle by the fact of historical coexistence of what Matei Calinescu called 'two distinct and bitterly conflicting modernities'. More sharply than most other authors, Calinescu portrays the 'irreversible' split between 'modernity as a stage in the history of Western Civilization – a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism – and modernity as an aesthetic concept'. The latter (better to be called *modernism* to avoid the all too frequent confusion) militated against everything the first stood for: 'what defines cultural modernity is its outright rejection of bourgeois modernity, its consuming negative passion' (*Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (Blodmington: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 4, 42); this is in blatant opposition to the previous, mostly laudatory and enthusiastic portrayal of the attitude and achievement of modernity, as for instance in Baudelaire: 'Everything that is beautiful and noble is the result of reason and thought. Crime, for which the human animal acquires a taste in his mother's womb, is of natural origin. Virtue, on the contrary, is artificial and supernatural.' (*Baudelaire as a Literary Critic: Selected Essays,* trans. Lois Boe Hylsop and Francis E. Hylsop (Pittsburgh: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), p. 298.)

I wish to make it clear from the start that I call 'modernity' a historical period that began in Western Europe with a series of profound social-structural and intellectual transformations of the seventeenth century and achieved its maturity: (1) as a cultural project – with the growth of Enlightenment; (2) as a socially accomplished form of life – with the growth of industrial (capitalist, and later also communist) society. Hence *modernity,* as I use the term, is in no way identical with *modernism.* The latter is an intellectual (philosophical, literary, artistic) trend that – though traceable back to many individual intellectual events of the previous era – reached its full swing by the beginning of the current century, and which in retrospect can be seen (by analogy with the Enlightenment) as a 'project' of *postmodernity* or a prodromal stage of the postmodern condition. In modernism, modernity turned its gaze upon itself and attempted to attain the clear-sightedness and self-awareness which would eventually disclose its impossibility, thus paving the way to the postmodern reassessment.

[2] Stephen L. Collins, *From Divine Cosmos to Soverign State: An Intellectual History of Consciousness and the Idea of Order in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 4, 6, 7, 28, 29, 32.

[3] An example: 'The individual experienced neither isolation nor alienation' (Collins, *From Divine Cosmos,* p. 21). This is, as a matter of fact, our – modern - construction of the pre-modern individual. It would be perhaps more prudent to say that the individual of the pre-modern world did not experience *the absence of the experience* of isolation or alienation. He did not experience belonging,