

1

Introduction: the Problem of Justification

Society is not a thing; it is the name of an idea.

(Howard S. Becker)¹

The threat of culture to itself

The regulation of lifestyles, indeed of life itself, is a burning political and moral issue in contemporary advanced societies. Science and technology have opened unforeseen possibilities for human culture to manipulate, even create natural phenomena. Nature is striking back. The global environment is not in control, but neither are less global concerns. Obesity, addictions, preventable health problems and many other risks depend on cultural practices, yet they lend themselves with great difficulty to conscious efforts of control. Gene technology, brain research, diagnostic techniques and advanced medical technologies are offering improved possibilities to make rational decisions on life and lifestyles, but the consequences of these possibilities are unpredictable and morally complicated. Culture has become a threat, not only to nature external to it, but also to itself.

This threat is the object of many attempts at cultural regulation – by cultural means. The growing ability to make choices weighs down on us as an immense moral responsibility for their consequences. Rational regulation of life practices is everywhere a possibility, and in these matters ‘can’ tends to translate into ‘must’; if we *can* lead a healthier life, which is environmentally sound, then we *should* do so to minimize treatment costs and to maximize the happiness of people around us, and after us, if not of ourselves. Human life has acquired an unforeseen moral loading. Any life is now irrevocably a matter of will: no one can have it or lose it without someone willing. Even in the face of inevitable death, questions arise. How long to treat? At what cost? What if someone had acted differently earlier? There is no absolute health, and the degree of health depends on social definitions of normality. When Jean Baudrillard (1976) said that we have succeeded in ‘naturalizing’ death, he meant that life and death have ceased to be *supernatural*, beyond human control. Medical technology is now able to postpone death, to cure illness and to prevent diseases to an extent that

The Saturated Society

is beyond our economic and social resources. Choices have to be made; we need principles and practices to help us make decisions on what kinds of life are morally binding and what are not. Technical progress is translated into moral problems, moral problems into judicial problems, judicial problems finally into exercise of power.

Societies are trying to act on themselves, but their achievements are not very impressive. Everywhere today, governments, prevention workers, health promoters, nutritionists, health economists, scientists and sociologists are persuading people to adjust their life practices to the requirements of health, the environment, and safety. A major obstacle stands in their way, however. The regulation of choices requires a moral authority that seems to be missing, and the locus where that authority would have been a few decades ago, the nation-state, seems ever less capable of exercising it today. In industrializing societies, previously, freedom of choice over one's life-course was, for the large majority of people, a distant ideal for the future. Many people hoped that it could be realized by the parliamentary state. Lifestyle movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as temperance, the youth movement, women's liberation and nationalism, pursued legislative reforms to improve citizens' possibilities to make choices and take responsibility for their lives.

The idea of 'society'

At that time, about one hundred years ago, the principles that guided lifestyle regulation by the state were closely connected to the modern idea of society, as laid down in the works of the classical fathers of sociology: Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Thorstein Veblen and others. 'Society' was something less visible than the state, but not just a collection of isolated individuals either, even though modern industrial society obviously would cause a gradual breakdown of their traditional bondage. Society was a thing in the making. Lifestyle regulation was part of this process. The three projects of this process were progress, the nation, and the ideal of universal individualism. These were the moral yardsticks by which social policy was assessed and justified. In such a society the future was present in the incompleteness of the here and now. Politics of lifestyle could be judged and contested in the name of the common good constituted by these yardsticks, which were used to measure levels and distribution of the accomplishments of modernity in the population.

The idea of society, as developed by the sociological classics, centred on the problem of how to solve the problems and conflicts that arise from divisions in the population, above all according to their class position. The answer was scientific politics to promote the common good. In the social world today, where technological possibilities are greater than the moral capacity of people to choose between them, and where nevertheless the value of agency assigns the responsibility to individuals, the 'common good', has disappeared. The new problem of social co-ordination poses itself in a

different way: how does a society that has reached a point of saturation of its modern aspirations deal with the consequences of incompatible lifestyle choices? Homogenization and standardization can no longer be the answer, and the authority of the nation–state is no longer sufficient to administer the choices.

The thesis propounded by this book is that in advanced consumer capitalism, the classical sociological concept of society has become problematic, and the morality that it involved has become difficult to apply. The difficulty results not from the failure of the modern ideals of progress, the nation and the individual, but from their full maturity. It is difficult to see what progress could mean any more; what the nation is in the global world, and in what way universal individualism can be maintained or advanced in mass society. They must be replaced by other principles of justification, and consequently the policies of lifestyle regulation must be matched to these principles. Central among them is the value placed on agency, brought about by the experience of autonomy and intimacy. This value and these experiences are not the outcomes of abstract cultural change, beyond modernity or within it, but expressions of the concrete social circumstances in which people live their everyday lives.

In advanced consumer capitalism, most people have seen their choices multiply. This is most obvious in consumption, but is not limited to the purchase and use of objects and services. Moral questions arise and are resolved every day on what we should eat and drink and wear, on how we should spend our time, how children should be raised, and so on. Similar questions also arise and are resolved on whether people should be allowed to die or be born, often in very delicate situations where the ‘quality of life’ concerned is in doubt. The dying person may be suffering, or an unborn child may be at high risk of serious birth defects. Somebody must decide.

Choice and the social bond

Even though the notion of the common good has lost its appeal, people must still be persuaded to avoid preventable problems and to prioritize safe and healthy alternatives. The regulation of lifestyles has not turned into an affair of isolated individuals. On the contrary, the extended possibilities of managing illness, treating and preventing diseases and avoiding environmental harm put our lifestyle choices in a new collective context. This is not only because the technologically produced risks are so great; the dilemma is caused by the fact that risks are well known and can be managed, albeit not by individuals, families or informal communities. We depend on the views of experts in most cases: no ordinary individual can determine the risks of even the most regular daily practices. Only experts can tell what kinds of risks are involved in eating ordinary food, and even the most commonly recognized risks such as those related to smoking, are known only through systematic research. We have upsetting images of the suffering caused to animals by industrial farming, and of the environmental

The Saturated Society

damage caused by mass tourism, but only experts can tell whether these images are justified, and the experts differ in their views. Nevertheless, we widely share the understanding that decisions on risks should not be made by experts alone but by the individuals concerned; they should at least give their informed consent to the decisions made by others.

It is exactly this ideal of self-determination and respect of individual life that is today almost impossible to apply in the delicate issues concerning life and its regulation. Individual choice is almost never without consequences for other individuals. Our pleasures incur costs to others: health costs, costs in the form of both immediate and less immediate environmental destruction, and moral costs in seeing innocent others such as children – born or unborn – suffer from the actions of adults. Lifestyle has become a social bond in a new way. It is no longer only a chosen style that indicates and expresses adherence to a group such as social class, and thereby to a position in the social structure. It is a bond that connects individuals in very complex, extensive and intermediated networks of consequences. Yet the state, the local community, neighbours, educators, or even social workers, do not have indisputable moral authority to interfere, and if they do, they have no unchallenged ethical or political rules to follow in doing so. The problem of justification is the issue.

The problem of justification

The problem of justification, to use the expression by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (1991), exists in all types of societies, and it is also an integral part of the modern idea of society developed by the sociological classics. Peter Wagner (2001a: 40–53; 2006: 31–2) has pointed out that as the sociological concept of society emerged, the problem of justification acquired a new political dimension. The old concept of the political society of the pre-nineteenth century was replaced by the priority of the social. The state was no longer seen to be the centre of social integration, emblemized by the sovereign ruler. The social – instead of the political – basis of co-operation proposed by the sociological point of view constituted itself at the moment when the notion of the individual, liberated from political and traditional ties, became ‘the principal articulation of the social world’ (Wagner, 2006). In this way, the political bond becomes an enigma: if members of society do not need political rule to be bonded to each other, what would be the role of the state in modern society?

This question arises if it is assumed that modernity emerged ready-made from the Reformation and the scientific, industrial and democratic American and French Revolutions. It was a founding assumption of sociology that the sum of those transformations was a rupture with earlier modes of social organization by which societies were put on an entirely new footing. The modern society was put firmly in place (Wagner, 2001a: 160). My answer to the question is that in reality, nothing that is usually taken for

granted as characteristic of modern society – post-traditionalism, secularization, differentiation, personal biographies, citizenship, parliamentary democracy – concerned more than a small minority of the population in Western countries until after the Second World War. If we include the welfare state in the concept of the nation, as I think is necessary, it was only in its early beginnings in the inter-war period. The universal individual became universally accepted, even as an ideal, only gradually in the course of the twentieth century, and this ideal was applied in very incomplete ways even in the last decades of that period. The ‘political’ in modern society was a struggle over this incompleteness, attached to the notion of progress in material, technological and cultural terms. This struggle itself *was* the principle of justification, and its transformation now is the outcome of its saturation.

Justification is not only a matter of legitimacy of social reality, with its power differences, inequalities and injustices, in the sense Max Weber used the term. It is also the basis for theoretical understandings of how co-ordination and order are possible in different types of circumstances. As I shall elaborate shortly, it is useful to make a distinction between two types of consciousness, mundane and academic, but it is never possible to understand them in isolation of each other. Justification does not mean consensus or compliance; it makes no sense to oppose conflict theories to theories of integration, because no social formation is ever in a state of complete harmony and stability, and even when conflicts and differences reign, some common ground usually underlies them to make participants understand what the conflicts are about. Justification here means exactly this possibility of mutual communication, even in a situation where interests are not shared and where values attached to interests are different.

Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (1991) have developed a model for the analysis of justification, which is a useful starting point for the study of the transformation that is the topic of this book. They use the concept of *the cité*, which literally means city, but could also be translated as regime, to distinguish different orders of justification. To simplify a little, the model includes elementary principles to define: (1) what the principles of *the social bond* are that connect people as members of society and of subgroups (the principles of belonging and differentiation); (2) what the meaning of *dignity* and the order of *greatness* (*grandeur*) in each regime of justification are; and (3) how *the common good* can be recognized. Different regimes of justification can be distinguished according to the value of greatness such as closeness to the divine world, domestic hierarchies of domination and subordination, esteem by others or capacity to act as a participant in market exchange. The criteria of the common good and the principles of the social bond are adapted to such regimes.

As to the first element, the social bond, it is commonly agreed that in modern industrial societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the nation was the framework of belonging to a society. In contrast, the principles of differentiation that define the internal structure of modern society have been one of the most important disputes in social theory.

The Saturated Society

Lifestyle is an element of the social bond, but how it is related to 'objective' class structure has been and still is a question of debate. Secondly, the common good has been defined in terms of progress in these principles of greatness since the late eighteenth century. Thirdly, dignity and greatness undoubtedly have been associated with freedom and well-being of the individual, but these involve two sides that may contradict (and they do especially in saturated society): autonomy and intimacy. These three elements of justification constitute the body of my analysis, and here I present the starting points of each.

The social bond

Advanced Western capitalism is based on industrial development, science and technology, the division of labour and the institution of the market. Since Marx, it has been taken for granted that structural modernization is a self-perpetuating process propelled by the capitalist relations of production. This view has not only marginalized the concept of lifestyle in theories of modern society, it has also trivialized the related concept of agency in social theory for many decades.

Most sociologists, not only those of a Marxist persuasion, until the last part of the twentieth century thought that the concept of lifestyle implied, from the outset, an inadmissible voluntarism. This disqualifies lifestyle as an object of structural study of society. Style involves incommensurable values, ideals and moral and aesthetic judgements. According to this view, social structure is based on class divisions and the inequalities they entail. Classes are related to work, employment relations and the market rather than style, however that is determined. Through the class situation, the production system *causally* determines the interests, a sense of belonging, and the ideology of each group. These organize society's members into class action. It would, from this point of view, be more correct to speak of *a way of life*, as determined by its objective conditions, rather than of a style, which refers to choice.

The latter part of the twentieth century marked a sea change in social thought in this respect. The idea of 'society' as a mechanism beyond human will was challenged or declared defunct by many sociologists. For example, Alain Touraine (1973: 35) stressed that it is not enough to place society in history. Sociologists must place historicity – the principle of auto-production – right at the heart of the concept of society. Societies produce and not only reproduce themselves through the actions of conscious and intentional agents.

Human agency, meaning, choice and therefore the taste and lifestyle of ordinary people became central issues in social theorizing. Anthony Giddens stressed in his *Central Problems in Social Theory* in 1979, that people have complex knowledge about the society in which they live, without anybody telling them. Institutions, customs, moral principles, even law and other written rules are known to participants, and they use this knowledge to act consciously. Giddens supposed that the master trend in twentieth-century social

thought was towards recognition of the role of agency in the social process. He was certainly right as regards the last third of the twentieth century, as is evident from some of the most influential sociological books of the time,² but it should be remembered that the spirit of capitalism, the social constitution of ideas and the mentality of the moderns were already central themes in the works of the sociological classics, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel, as well as of many others at the turn of the nineteenth century. The new prominence of meaningful action in social theory was a return to the original problematic of modern social sciences after a rather short detour into false positivism.

When societies are seen as auto-productive systems of meaningful social action, the question arises, first, how do groups and individuals in societies recognize common aims, interests and the will to pursue them together (the principle of differentiation)? Within each of the two theoretical positions, structural determination of class and the social bond as action, there is a tendency to gravitate towards the other (Archer, 1988). Pierre Bourdieu's work illustrates this ambivalence. In his sociology, groups are not causally determined by 'structural factors'. For him, it is the ambivalent concept of the *habitus* in which subjective action turns into objective reality. My thesis is that theoretical ambivalences such as Bourdieu's reflect the real ambivalences of people living in contemporary consumer capitalism, where the meaning of dignity and the order of greatness are attached to the value of agency.

The common good

The second question concerns the justification of inequalities and hierarchies (the principle of the common good). In traditional societies, this is not a problem, but when the modern wage labour society gives rise to the idea of free social mobility and universal individualism, deviations from these ideals cannot be tolerated without a reason. A theory that explains why inequalities can be maintained in modern societies also explains why such societies hold together. Such a theory must be able to show that the individuals who compose the society are 'capable of seeing themselves as equal in some respect more fundamental than all the respects in which they are unequal' (Macpherson, 1977: 274). This book will take up this problem in the light of Adam Smith's social theory, which laid the foundations of modern sociology. It is well known that Smith's answer was progress, but this answer has often been misunderstood as utilitarianism: since everyone stands to benefit from it, we must accept the division of labour and the inequalities that it entails. Smith's real answer was anti-utilitarian and based on what later became a wicked concept for sociology: human nature.³ The natural propensity of humans to see themselves as if through the eyes of others makes progress a possible and necessary principle of the common good in modern society. We evaluate others according to our moral sentiments, but understand that they, too, evaluate us. When these evaluations are in agreement, relationships of mutual esteem are established. Undisturbed, human potentiality for respectful

The Saturated Society

interaction makes society evolve towards a system of co-operation, which does not need what in earlier social theory had been called the 'political society', i.e. the state, as the centre of social integration. Smith's theory was the first major achievement in modern social thought towards the priority of the social over the individual and over political institutions: towards a *self-policing society*. Its relevance today is obvious when we think of the contemporary predicament of prevention. We must ask, has the self-policing society developed to a point where the very idea of the common good has become problematic and the ethical grounds of regulating lifestyles have lost their binding force?

Dignity and greatness

The principles of dignity and greatness that are specific to modern society, as Adam Smith foresaw it, are based on esteem by and for others, whenever there is confidence that the esteem is justified. The prerequisite for esteem is individuality, which I will in the following discuss in two parts: autonomy and intimacy. Post-, trans- or late modern consciousness tends to take them so much for granted that their real and very recent history is ignored.⁴ Without an historical perspective, we cannot understand either why we act as clients and contract partners of society today, or why in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the state had moral authority, which today would be unthinkable. The idea of citizens as autonomous contract-making individuals has not emerged from capitalism of its own accord. It has been the subject of struggles over lifestyle and over distribution of freedoms for two and a half centuries of capitalist development. The struggle for autonomy represented the rationalist orientation in the spirit of ascendant capitalism. The other side of the capitalist subjectivity in the making has been the struggle for intimacy. Individuality involves not only autonomy in the management of one's own biography; it also requires that people have a sense of the self as a distinct and authentic person, separate as body and soul from others, in other words, individuality must be swathed in a sphere of intimacy around the person. The two sides of subjectivity, autonomy and intimacy, have developed in relative harmony until recent times, but today the most burning issue of justification is how to accommodate these two values when intimacy requires the right to authentic and different, whereas autonomy presupposes that everybody is treated in a similar way as a subject of rights and duties.

Saturation

Two major misconceptions block the way to an understanding of how the new consumer capitalism has turned upside down the principles of justification inherited from earlier phases of modernization. The first is an explanation from outside: the dominance of the market over the public interest. This is a widely held view especially in the Nordic countries and in Great Britain, with their strong traditions in the planned economy and the welfare state.

Neo-liberalism, it has repeatedly been argued there, has become dominant in conjunction with the global economy. Global markets and international media networks have inexorably urged nation-states to 'deregulate' the economy, including consumers' choices. The state seems therefore to be unable to represent the public interest in lifestyle issues.

This explanation misunderstands the regime of justification as known during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and ignores its effects on the regime of justification which we are entering. The market itself is undergoing a change from a standardized and homogenized regime of measurable input to a much more flexible regime of measurable output. It is therefore pertinent to understand how the regime of justification has transformed itself internally, also in areas that have only superficial resemblance to the alleged 'marketization' of politics.

The second misconception is the myth of ready-made individualism. In lifestyle politics that interpretation confuses the new forms of collective action as alternatives to rather than outcomes of the modern regime of justification. I shall show examples of this in later chapters. The forms in which the state now delegates moral authority to citizens and groups result from long and ardent struggles for autonomy and intimacy, not from a nostalgia for community. This book will argue that the contemporary predicament regarding lifestyle regulation is not the result of external forces nor an alternative to individualism gone too far, but the consistent outcome of modernization itself. The transformation of the modern ideals of progress, individualism and the nation should be seen as a process of their qualitative *saturation* rather than either a rupture operated by external forces or as a continuous change.

The idea of saturation comes from Pitirim Sorokin, the Russian émigré sociologist who founded the famous Harvard Department of Sociology (Sztompka, 1993: 151). Sorokin himself hardly used the word, but the metaphor is well justified by his idea of the immanent causation of social change:

Through this incessant generation of consequences attending each of its changes, a system perceptibly determines the character and course of its future career. The whole series of changes it undergoes throughout its existence is to a large extent *an unfolding of its inherent potentialities*. From an acorn can spring only an oak. (Sorokin, 1974: 696–7, italics in original)

External factors can only accelerate or retard immanent change, they can facilitate or hinder the realization of its potentialities; they may suppress, distort or overdevelop its characteristics and mutilate or destroy its secondary traits. They might even crush the system, but not change its inherent structure. To the extent that the system is able to develop on its own, without interference from outside factors, it is free. But as in physics, there are limits to the processes of internal change beyond which the regularities of normal conditions no longer hold. Thus, water can only be heated to about 100°C; beyond that point it evaporates and is transformed into a gas;

The Saturated Society

a solution of salt and water can only be enriched as a liquid up to a point beyond which the salt returns to its crystal state, etc.

The principle of immanent causation is essential to an understanding of social change because of the peculiar role of ideas and values involved in the process.⁵ Societies are processes of action, and in order to act, in other words, in order to be historical subjects, agents need collective ideals and images of the good life, the good society and the good state. Such ideals do not come from nowhere – they are always products of earlier ideals and actions, and are directed by them. In that process, some of the ideals get saturated: they reach the point where ideals are no longer just dreams but realities, and the images of the good life, the good society and the good state may turn upside down and seem unrecognizable in comparison to the originals.

The saturation argument presented in this book is that the justification of modern industrial societies has centred on three ideals: material and technological progress, the nation–state, and universal individualism. These ideals have now become problematic, not because they failed but because they have succeeded beyond the point of saturation. They still serve as the basis of both justification and criticism, but the form and content of these justifications and criticisms have changed often beyond recognition, and at least their meaning has become ambiguous and disputable.

Critical awareness of the present

Societies are processes of social action; therefore, they depend on cognition. However, institutions or individuals could not survive if they had to think about themselves actively all the time. We would be swamped by an overload of ideas and calculations even in the simplest task of finding food, preparing it for a meal, and eating it, not to mention the complexities of making all this a *social* practice. Cognitive scientists today agree that we are not actively aware even of those acts that we actively plan and execute with our bodies; and we certainly do not know what happens in us when we feel, think and make moral decisions (Dennett, 2004).

Social reality is constructed of very complex ideas and values, which remain in a state of latency most of the time. We are unaware of them, not because they are unconscious or beyond human grasp; on the contrary, we know them so well that we take the social reality for granted – *il va de soi* was one of the favourite expressions of Pierre Bourdieu. Such ideas operate as justifications, as unchallenged elements, self-evident truths that materialize in the regularities of human practices. At the collective level, they form institutions and groups, at the individual level, they organize our positions as parts of the social structure. Thorstein Veblen ([1919] 2002: 1–11) called them ‘imponderables’ – we do not incessantly deliberate upon them lest our routines become perturbed and our normal life becomes impractical. They become part of us as individuals and as members of social groups, and they become constitutive elements of the objective social reality in which we live.⁶

The imponderable elements of cognition, taken-for-granted things, are articles of make-believe that have become axiomatic by force of settled habit. They serve as justifications of action but also as the basis of criticisms of present reality. Justification and criticism are not contradictory. On the contrary, together they form a common axis of argumentation employed in different directions, criticism pointing out dearth and failure, justification pointing out the values and beliefs against which actions are to be judged. In other words, they constitute the *critical awareness of the present* in each social situation.

For example, the rationalist conception and the romantic conception of the individual constituted the critical awareness of the present throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both the political right and the political left used them as values in their critique and justification. Sometimes these concepts have been used in concert to defend what is right and proper in human intercourse; at other times, as will be shown in the context of the consumer society, they have been in conflict.

Progress, the typically modern time orientation, has in a similar way been a shared value but used as an argument for contradicting intentions. As Alain Touraine (1978) has remarked, in the aggravated debate on capitalism in the 1970s, the pro-capitalist right argued that capitalism is the best way to secure universalism and to safeguard the democratic nation-state, while the anti-capitalist left accused it of failing on these very same accounts, causing inefficiency, waste, inequality and lack of transparency in power.

At some point the imponderables of society become problematic, however. Enough social development may have taken place to meet the ideals striven for. The point beyond which more is no longer more may have been reached; the pursuit of the ideals grounded in the critical awareness of the present may bring into being outcomes that are the reverse of those intended. At such points, the forms of critical awareness of the present embedded in everyday identities, practices and institutions are no longer sufficient. They will need to be critically reviewed, re-evaluated and revised.

Modern sociology was one form of such critical reassessment when it was formulated in the late nineteenth century. The doctrines inherited from the French and American Revolutions were found wanting: neither the free market nor the state was considered sufficient to meet the ideals of growing prosperity, international peace and social harmony. The concept of 'society' was more fundamental than the market or the state, and indispensable for constituting the social formation based on the industrial division of labour, secularization and anonymity of metropolitan life. The 'social' question was born (Donzelot, 1984; Wagner, 2001a: 7–24).

Religious doctrine, political ideology, philosophical discourse as well as literary and artistic expression may be the platforms where conscious articulations of the social experience perform their act of reform and revision. They too, however, are expert discourses and therefore I call them *consciousness of the pulpit*, in contrast to *mundane consciousness*, or consciousness of everyday life (Giddens, 1979: 248–53). The difference is not to be exaggerated.

The Saturated Society

Consciousness of the pulpit is not always the more systematic or rational of the two. The distinction is nevertheless important, because the mundane consciousness often takes figurative or imaginary forms, which only systematic research can reveal to be forms of social thought. For this reason also, I prefer sometimes to speak of *social images of reality* instead of social consciousness.⁷ To *see* the connection between forms of mundane awareness and the consciousness of the pulpit is the main task of sociology, often necessary to make understandable not only what we see and hear around us in everyday life, but also what we read and hear from the pulpit.

As Luc Boltanski has observed, capitalism has a particularly pronounced need for justification, both in its theory and in its everyday practice, because it is an absurd system in two ways. It offers no motivation for wage earners – especially during the painful nineteenth century of working-class misery – whose efforts and suffering do not benefit them to make possible an easier and more comfortable life outside of work.⁸ Why work so hard, why work at all for that matter, if it is so unlikely that one will get to enjoy the fruits of one's own labour? For capitalists, on the other hand, accumulation serves as little purpose. For them, too, growth means struggle for the sake of mere survival; and success involves an ever greater responsibility for the patrimony. As Adam Smith stressed, the purpose of the 'toil and bustle of this world' must be sought not in material results, but in the satisfaction spawned by the social relationships engendered in the acts of production and consumption themselves. Max Weber's thesis of the *Protestant Ethic* ([1920] 2002) is a well-known example of how the motivation to participate comes from *outside of participation itself*; it must constitute an *ethos*, an ethical and an aesthetic experience of everyday life as well as a religious attitude.

The structure of the book

The chapters of this book describe the imponderables that have constituted the critical awareness of the present, and how they have unfolded from the collective unconscious to the centre stage of our critical awareness of the present in the predicament of lifestyle regulation in contemporary consumer capitalism. The next four chapters will present the elements of the model of justification, starting from a discussion of lifestyle as the social bond in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will present the conception of progress as the common good in the light of Adam Smith's work. Chapter 4 on autonomy and Chapter 5 on intimacy will discuss the principles of dignity and the order of greatness in capitalism.

The following three chapters will present how the elements of justification have appeared in debates on the consumer society, on the welfare state and in preventive social policy. Finally, the last two chapters take stock of the political consequences of saturation and of its implications for social theory.

Before starting the journey, a brief note on the practical nature of this kind of sociological exercise is in order.

A sociological intervention

The predicament of lifestyle regulation raises confusion, anxiety, even despair. Reactions vary from selfish cynicism to vacuous optimism or virtuous prudence. Reconciliation between these positions seems impossible on rational grounds, and even debate is often difficult.

Social science can produce no more conclusive solutions to these dilemmas than any other form of expertise. The task of social science in a situation like this is not only to provide information, even less to serve as a class master, teaching people how to live properly, but in the words of C. Wright Mills (1959: 5), 'to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening in individuals' own lives'. To see the predicament of lifestyle regulation as the outcome of the huge social change in a very short stretch of modernity – the lifetime of the older generations still among us – is in itself important. In my view, the even more pertinent task of social science is to map the intersection between history and the present in the domain of ideas. What is going on in the world depends on human beings who are guided by ideals and images of reality. In pursuing them they often produce outcomes that nobody wants. This is a law all too well known to any social scientist, but they too often overlook that at each moment in history, people's aspirations are transformations of earlier ideas and depend on them. The current predicament of lifestyle regulation has its roots in the aspirations and ideals of earlier generations, who in the process of industrialization have made consumer capitalism possible.

This book was not written to pronounce judgements on what progress is, what the virtues and faults of individualism are, or what should be done about the nation in the saturated society. The task of general sociology is to analyse the contemporary critical awareness of the present, to understand images of society that are often curiously obscure at the same time as they are also taken for granted or act as a source of enthusiasm.

Notes

1 This is a comment that Howard S. Becker made in the concluding panel at the European Sociological Association conference in Murcia, Spain, in 2003.

2 His own book had the subtitle *Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Many others have stressed the importance of social action, such as Alain Touraine's *The Self-Production of Society* ([1973] 1977) or *The Return of the Actor* ([1984] 1988), Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction, or the Social Critique of Taste* ([1979] 1984) or *The Logic of Practice* ([1980] 1990), or Margaret Archer's *Culture and Agency* (1988).

3 In an otherwise excellent summary of Smith's general social theory, Boltanski and Thévenot (1991: 60–82) narrow down its domain to the market economy. It is clear even from their own presentation that Smith's intentions were much wider. It is a different matter that the development of the market implied for Smith progress and civilization, albeit also a certain kind of repression.

4 Peter Wagner (2001b: 4–7; 118–24) makes a similar distinction between 'autonomy' and 'mastery' in his critique of modernism. Modernist social science, according to him, takes as its starting point that people have wills and their actions are guided by them, and that they believe

The Saturated Society

the world to be intelligible by human reason, and therefore in principle to be controllable by rational means. Modernist social science interprets the modernization process as the progressive application of these convictions, thus conflating 'the imaginary signification of modernity with the reality of life in Western societies'. As a tool for epistemological critique of modernist social science and political theory, the distinction works well. As a tool for diagnosing the problem of justification, it is less satisfactory. It puts romanticism as a practical ideology outside of modernism. In my conceptualization, autonomy contains both the assumptions of will *and* reason. Intimacy refers to the sense of separateness and the sense of authenticity, both emphasized already in Smith's nascent theory of the social. Wagner's presentation is very complex and difficult, which results from its lack of distinction between what I call mundane consciousness and the consciousness of the (sociological and philosophical) pulpits. His treatise is focused on the latter but makes occasional digressions on the former.

5 Pitirim Sorokin was also one of the first advocates of the idea that elements of culture – including law, philosophy, scientific knowledge, art, music and literature – form congruities or wholes, which move and change in similar directions although not exactly simultaneously. Since they are not in one-to-one correspondence with each other in different areas of culture he called them 'congeries' rather than totalities. (Sorokin, [1947] 1974: 151–3, 703) A similar idea of congruence between different cultural forms became dominant in the course of the 'cultural turn' in the 1980s in many sociological orientations.

6 Only the fact that once we have learned a way to act in certain circumstances and habitually reinforce the pattern gives us the possibility to exercise free will. Erkki Kilpinen (2009) has pointed out that although most of human action is habitual and therefore not actively conscious most of the time, it is not mindless routine. On the contrary, we must hide away our conscious thoughts in the cabinet of the habit *because* they are so complex, learned rather than inborn, consciously built rather than hard-wired by nature, lest they overcrowd our cognitive pathways and block any action. Kilpinen prefers to speak of *reflexive habitualities* instead of simply habits of the mind. As they are not deleted and forgotten, just dormant and inactive, they can also be re-activated when the need arises.

7 I call them *images* rather than representations, discourses, explanations or accounts, because, like those who have used similar terminology e.g. Durand's (1960) *imaginary*, Greimas' *figurative* (Greimas and Courtès, 1979: 146–9), or Maffesoli's *imaginal* (1996), I wish to emphasize that in interpreting actions and interactions everyday language employs figures that are not only those of causality, functionality or other forms of the reduced abstract language of science. Images typically involve visual, spatial, temporal and narrative elements, and tend to personify the actions. For example, in lifestyle questions we tend to think of 'us' (in the city, in Finland, as outcomes of our educational process or acquired age) as against 'them' (in the suburbs, in other countries, lacking education or mature adulthood).

8 On the contrary, the rising industry subjected them 'to time, to toil, to weariness, and to the last resort, the death itself.' (Foucault, [1966] 2001: 244). It should be remembered that, for example, paid vacation – free time to allow industrial workers to enjoy the products of their work was first legislated in France as late as in 1936 (Castel, 1995: 340–1), the same year when the International Labour Organization adopted the resolution on the right to paid vacation (Anttila, 2005: 255). In France, the 10-hour day for women and children was legislated in 1900, the 8-hour day in mining was introduced in 1905, and a weekly day of rest was established in 1906 (Nourrisson, 1990: 266).