

Workshop "Discontinuities of Modernity? International Conference on Reflexive Modernization", München April 3/4, 2001

Karl Ulrich Mayer

Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung, Berlin

Discontinuities in Working Lives - How to (Mis-) Understand the Consequences of Global and Non-Global Changes.

Also a Comment on Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Bonß and Christoph Lau, The Theory of Reflexive Modernization: Problematic, Hypotheses and Research (2001)

“... par malheur, il est plus facile et plus court
de se consulter soi que la nature.”
Denis Diderot, De l'interpretation de la nature, 1753

“Bloß net ignorieren!”
Helmut Qualtinger

1. Let me state at the outset how I see my role in this conference. For many years I have been a critical observer of the contributions of Ulrich Beck and his associates to diagnose and to conceptualise what they see as dramatic changes in the principles of organization of advanced societies and their impacts on individual lives - highlighted not least by the catch phrases of individualization, globalisation and reflexive modernization. These contributions have made a dominant, if not hegemonic, impact not only on the agenda and cognitive apparatus of the social sciences at least in this country, but also and probably even more so on the way West German society (and politics) perceives itself. Such an astonishing and (for academic enterprises) rare impact has a lot to do with the pervasiveness and persistency in which this program was represented by its protagonists both within academia and within the media. Admirable as it is, however, this is not sufficient cause for its widespread acceptance. It must also be due to the fact that there is a well-fitting selective affinity between the life experiences of the respective audiences and the categorical frames offered. There is and certainly was a receptive effect, which Rainer M. Lepsius tends to characterize with the German phrase “Und Millionen sehen klar, wo vorher alles dunkel war.”

The cognitive frames set by reflexive modernization theory have, to a considerable extent,

shaped both the problem agenda and the analytic tools, which form the starting point of many studies. It is, for instance, not at all unusual that in diploma theses and dissertations in sociology, one finds statements like "Because of the process of individualization, there are higher divorce rates, discontinuous employment and less stable voting behaviour." Thus it is often suggested that such everyday phenomena are not only taken to be real, but that they are more or less direct outcomes of far-reaching macroprocesses, while in fact the concepts for these macroprocesses are at best more abstract generalizations for a class of empirical indicators. Fairly loose associative meanings are in this way turned into powerful and mysterious forces. What is actually a more or less structured outcome of a multitude of actors and actions on the microlevel of individuals and households and the mesolevel of collective actors appears as consequences of powerful macroprocesses, if not of a logic of history: modernization and reflexive modernization.

Whilst within sociology there is still sometimes a critical debate as to the possible truth content and reality of the postulated outcomes on the microlevel, in neighbouring disciplines and the media they are frequently (mis)taken as reliable and adequate descriptions. Thus, for instance, it is quite normal that political scientists and, even more so party political strategists, believe in the postulated decoupling between socio-economic interest groups and political behaviour and so base their further political analysis on such stylised facts. What one can then see here is not only a very successful dissemination of a master story, but also real consequences as predicted by the Thomas Theorem.

2. Over the years I have developed a set of prejudices and aversions to this programme, which have increasingly prompted me - as far as this is at all possible as a conventional reader of social science publications and newspapers - to disregard it rather than to scrutinize it in detail. Like many other of my colleagues, I have been frustrated both by the broad and changing associative range of meanings attached to its major concepts and by our inability to extricate any clear set of empirical implications, which could be put to test by empirical data. Both strategies usually ended up like the proverbial attempt to nail a pancake to the wall. Where such attempts of empirical testing have been made, they have at best been mixed. Often enough they have proven not to have been very successful - which, however, is usually contested or neglected by Ulrich Beck and his associates (see, for instance, Müller 1998). At any rate, such successive failures have not led to a re-evaluation of the overall strategy, but rather to an attempt to self-immunize by excluding nothing, not even its own internal

contradictions. I have come to the conclusion that it would be useless and misguided to take up Ulrich Beck's conjectures at all, since - however intelligent, elegant and plausible they might appear at first sight - they prove in the end to be more foggy than illuminating as theoretical propositions and neither testable, nor falsifiable as empirical propositions. Moreover, since Ulrich Beck has never accepted conceptual clarity, logical stringency or empirical testability as criteria for judging his work - to the contrary, he defended programmatically the non-applicability of such criteria - why should it be of interest as a programme of research or of paradigmatic theory building? Moreover it seems as though over the years, in parallel to broadening its overall thematic scope, reflexive modernization theory has tended to become more loose rather than more specific and more empirically based.

3. Quite frankly it was, therefore, somewhat of a surprise to me when the DFG decided to support a Sonderforschungsbereich devoted to theory building and empirical grounding of the reflexive modernization programme. Reading the proposal, my pessimistic expectations were born out. Most of the projects appear to be scholastic exercises with foregone conclusions. The general propositions are usually taken as being matters of fact only to be illustrated by bits and pieces of qualitative research. This can be fascinating and productive as case studies in unravelling material for potential causal mechanisms and logic of action, but given this methodological strategy it can obviously not call the conjectures of the programme into serious question. In general, this looked to me more like a strategy of intellectual empire building than like a strategy to unravel the issues at hand with something approaching an open mind.

4. Therefore, when Ulrich Beck asked me to participate in this conference my first reaction was that I would be quite out of place here, as I find too little common ground between the programme's grand ambitions to grapple large scale "meta changes" and their micro-consequences and my own kind of empiricism to contribute anything useful. On his friendly insistence, however, I agreed after all. He assured me of, what in German is called, "Freies Geleit" (safe conduct), i.e. that - without violating the rules of hospitality - I could openly say here what we usually only discuss in each other's absence. In this way we could at least test in open argument the relative merits of each other's position. Of course, however, it might easily end up in a confirmation of the total intellectual disjuncture of our respective sociological enterprises. I would not be surprised if that actually turns out to be the case. To preach evolutionary theory to true believers will hardly make a dent.

5. Allow me to make a final point of introduction. Let us suppose that the programme of reflexive modernization should be seen not so much as a conventional research agenda, but as one of the most important, if not the most important, current "Zeitdiagnose". Seen in this light the sociological observer should take it very seriously as an expression of something other than a reliable description of social reality, which by necessity goes way beyond the modest pretences of normal science. Together with my colleagues Lepsius and Friedrichs, I have devoted a whole book to examining the question of whether Zeitdiagnosen are methodologically possible and legitimate and how well they actually fared in their prognostic value (Friedrichs/Lepsius/Mayer 1998). Our general conclusion was that they are methodologically indefensible and of little foresight value. But that they are also unavoidable, since a strong need exists for general orientations as to how societies are organized and in which directions they are changing. Such Zeitdiagnosen are then indispensable as a kind of heuristics not only for the general public, but also for the social scientist. The interesting questions to be raised then are not at all whether they capture ongoing changes more or less adequately, but rather how one can explain their plausibility and popularity and whose interests they serve consciously or unconsciously. In other words, they should be treated not as scientific aberrations, but as ideologies. Rather than describing how things are, they are unwitting instruments in the purposive change of mentalities. A more benevolent view would be to view them as scenario building - a kind of futurology. Here the criteria of evaluation would be different. One criterion would be how successful the scenario is at focussing attention on a range of newly emergent phenomena and processes. Another criterion would be whether the scenario predicts changes in the right direction.

6. Reflexive Modernization Theory (RMT) appears to me very much like an acute case of the fairy tale of the emperor's new clothes. However, I readily grant that this might be least the case in the area of work and employment. I now come to my more specific topic at hand "Discontinuities in Working Lives". Working lives seem to me to be an especially fruitful testing ground for reflexive modernization theory, as this should work in its favour more than in other areas - like the role of knowledge or the significance of the nation state. This is at least the case for three reasons. Firstly, the assumption of massive changes in the relative stability of working lives is not only a cornerstone of reflexive modernization theory's construction of the new society after the meta change; it also enjoys a very widespread, if not almost total, consensus among social scientists, journalistic commentators and politicians right up to the chancellery (including the chairperson of the new services union ver.di, who used

“individualization” as the term explaining such changes). It obviously has great intuitive appeal. Secondly, working lives are more available for empirical analysis and it might be much easier to find some degree of consensus on the relevant indicators and propositions to be examined. Thirdly, in this area we might also more easily agree upon how the theoretical and research tasks should be specified. I readily grant that reflexive modernization theory makes statements about the nature of work and employment – “a new kind of labor” (Beck et. al. 2001: 2) - which go beyond the issue of job and occupational stability, such as the legal conditions of the work contract or the degree of flexibility required in given work tasks and jobs. I would still assert, however, that assumptions about a decline in the stability of employment, occupation and in the relationship to an employer are taken to be essential.

7. I shall proceed in the following steps. My first step will be to outline what we would like to know about discontinuities in working lives, especially in regard to macroprocesses, outcomes on the microlevel as well as to the assumed causal mechanisms linking the two. In my second step, I will portray and summarize how I see the position and contribution of reflexive modernization theory and analysis on the outcomes on the microlevel. Thirdly, I will provide a critical review and argue why I find reflexive modernization theory in this area heuristically plausible. Having said that, however, the empirical evidence turns out to be less than clear-cut, unidirectional and at any rate modest in effect size and the issue of causal mechanisms and institutional contexts remains an open issue.

Let me add a cautionary remark here. The prerequisites for testing global structural change empirically are extraordinary - time series of longitudinal microanalytic data at least for the full post war period up to the present. Even to demonstrate the working logic of a given structure requires yearly time points stretching across 10 - 20 years. This becomes even more demanding, if we consider working lives, which should be observable ideally from the end of schooling to retirement across a wide range of birth cohorts. Ideally what one would require are aggregate and cohort-specific time series for the whole period of the post WWII era. Thus whatever one does, one can hardly do more than accumulate evidence not for a rigorous test, but for degrees of plausibility. In this sense we are, of course, very much in the same boat.

8. What would we like to know in order to assess a thesis of dramatic changes in the continuity of working lives? First of all, we would need a set of empirical indicators to map the changes in working lives, such as

- the likelihood that young people can find employment or training after leaving school;
- the likelihood that after vocational and professional training people find employment at all and in the area and on the qualificational level of their chosen occupations;
- the likelihood of returning to education and training and the extent of multiple training spells;
- the degree of employment continuity and the length of working lives;
- the extent of job stability, e.g. as shown by the median length of jobs with a given firm;
- the relationship between voluntary resignations and involuntary lay-offs;
- the extent of occupational stability and the number of changes between occupations;
- the extent of marginal employment;
- the extent of part-time work;
- the proportion of temporary work contracts;
- the number of unemployment episodes and the duration of unemployment;
- the proportion of marginal self-employment;
- the number of people in work contracts without social security entitlements;
- the number and proportion of people hired by work-leasing firms;
- the amount of involuntary early retirement;
- data on the subjective orientations persons have in relation to their work, their occupation and their firms.

9. If I have understood correctly, it is a major contention of reflexive modernization theory that changes in working lives are not due to partial and incremental processes on the micro/mesolevel, but to pervasive ruptures operating on the macrolevel, i.e. on the totality not just of given nation-states, but even across them. What are these macro meta changes? How could one conceptualise them? I presume that we could find more consensus on the major constituents of such a picture of change than on the thesis of radical and total rupture and of the entirely new logic of what is called "second modernity".

Firstly, it is assumed that the major socio-economic changes of advanced present-day societies are of essentially the same kind. Secondly, that the intensification of international market competition and the accompanying loss of national regulatory power is the underlying cause and mechanism of recent changes. Global social change, then, relates to the belief that globalisation creates a set of similar pressures and challenges, which allow or force similar responses. Some countries will be faster, some will be slower, but they will all move along the same road. Moreover these forces and trends will make advanced societies even more similar

to one another.

Among these current social changes common to all advanced societies, the following are frequently taken to be most salient:

- increasing exposure to international market competition in trade, manufacturing, finance capital and services;
- a restructuring of occupational and organizational structures horizontally between sectors and firms and vertically between skill levels (upgrading/skill shortage);
- the spread of both information technology and mass media culture;
- an increasing participation of women in education, training, employment and careers;
- a weakening of union power and employers union coordination;
- a deregulation of labour markets partly induced or made possible by increasing international labour migration;
- a decreasing ability of national governments to carry through effective macroeconomic regulation beyond the control of money flow;
- a decreasing ability of national governments to influence collective bargaining;
- a decreasing ability of national governments to maintain a sufficient tax base for public investment and redistribution;
- pressures to reduce public spending for welfare programmes despite increasing financial burdens due to the aging of populations.

Moreover, Beck and his associates share, along with quite a few other social scientists - myself not necessarily included -, the idea that, on the one hand, it is possible to identify fairly clearly pervasive discontinuities on all levels of societies and thus distinct historical regime types and that there is a fairly tight coupling of a number of social institutions and behaviours within any given regime type. They also share, along with other social scientists, the problem inherent in such schemas, namely the problem of dating the transitions between periods and the problem of the instantaneous co-temporality of new and traditional elements.

I will give you one example of such a schema of historical discontinuity, which is relevant to our topic, as it records one attempt to relate societal discontinuity as period changes and discontinuities in working lives (Mayer 2001).

Life Course Regimes	Traditional - ca. 1900	Industrial - ca. 1900 to ca. 1955	Fordist/Welfare State - ca. 1955 to ca. 1973	Post-Fordist/ Post-Industrial - ca. 1973 -
Unit	Family Farm/Firm	Wage Earner	Male Breadwinner, Nuclear Family	Individual
Temporal Organization	Unstable, Unpredictable Discontinuity	Life Cycle of Poverty, Discontinuity	Standardized, Stabilized, Continuity, Progression	De-standardized Discontinuity
Distribution	Estate Hierarchy	Class Hierarchy	Middle Class Integration; Status Distinctions	Classless Differentiation
Education	Minimal Elementary	Medium Compulsory	Expansion of Secondary and Tertiary Education and of Vocational Training	Prolonged, Interrupted, Lifelong Learning
Work	Personal Dependency; Family Division of Labour	Wage Relationship; Firm Paternalism, Unemployment	Full Lifelong Employment; Upward Mobility; Income Progression	Delayed Entry, High Between Firm/Between Occupation Mobility; Flat Income Trajectories, Unemployment
Family	Partial and Delayed Marriage; Instability due to Death; Property Centred; High Fertility; Early Death	Delayed Universal; Fertility Decline	Early Universal Marriage, Early Childbearing, Medium Fertility	Delayed and Partial Marriage, Pluralized Family Forms, Low Fertility, High Divorce Rate, Sequential Promiscuity
Women	Family Workers	Low-Skilled Supplementary Wage Earners	Housewives	Career Employment
Retirement/Old Age	With Physical Disability, Old Age Dependency, Early Death	Regulatory or by Disability, Low Pensions	Regulatory: Medium Pensions	Early Retirement; Decreasing Pensions; Increasing Longevity, Increasing Chronic Illness
Social Policy Risks	Debt, Poverty, Morbidity	Poverty, Unemployment Disability; Large Families	Women? s Old Age Poverty	Low Skills; Unemployment; Single Mothers, Early Adult Marginality
Institutional Configuration	Rural Economy, High Fertility/ High Mortality	Capitalist Economy; High Labour Supply, Weak Unions	Mass Production/ Consumption; Strong Unions; Macro- Economic Regulation, Welfare State Expansion	Educational Expansion; Women? s Movement, Value Changes, Weak Unions, Globalisation, Demographic Aging

Source: Mayer 2001

Whereas the historical sequence looks plausible at first, upon a closer look it is beset with almost insurmountable difficulties. How long was the Fordist golden age (or what reflexive modernization theory calls the first modernity) in West Germany? How do the lengths of the various periods relate to working lives? Even if one would assume the correctness of the schema and the major breaking points, the difficulty that persons can be subject to different

regimes during the working life still exists. Why take the “short period” of the golden age as a point of reference and not the immediate post World War II period? Such difficulties become even more severe, if we allow for institutionally-based differences between countries? Are they path dependent or assumed to converge? (Mayer 2001)

10. Let us suppose that one would be able to agree on a set of social facts and empirical indicators describing flexibility and discontinuity in working lives (and we could actually measure them) and that there would be a clear idea on macroprocesses and macrochanges, we would still need a set of ideas and hypotheses as to whether and how these two are linked. From total determination and modest or moderate effects to total independence, obviously everything is imaginable. Who are the actors and which are the institutions taken to be responsible for turning macro-conditions into individual working conditions? What are the transformation rules, which transpose a traditional work force of the old economy of the prereflexive phase into the new economy of reflexive modernization?

11. Let me now turn to examine the major claims of the members of the reflexive modernization research group with regard to microlevel outcomes. The members of this research centre - among them Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Bonß and Gerhard Mutz - have published an impressive number of articles on the ongoing changes of employment structures during the transition to a post-full employment regime of pluralized activities. To make my task manageable, I will mainly refer to two texts, which I take to be quite representative (Bonß 1999; Beck 1999). With regard to empirical propositions on the discontinuity of working lives, we find the following claims:

- Employment becomes discontinuous, fragmented and precarious.
- Continuous full-time employment is increasingly replaced by part-time work, marginal employment and other forms of non-standard employment. A third of the dependent labour force finds itself in such work situations; a rapid increase is expected.
- Increasingly unlimited contracts are replaced by short-term contracts.
- There is a rapid rise in exclusive marginal employment.
- In order to earn a livelihood under such conditions more persons have to join the labour force. In addition to which, individualization leads more women to seek employment as a basis of an independent life.
- Precarious self-employment increases rapidly.
- Working time and working place become fuzzy.
- Working conditions in Europe and the US will come to resemble those of the Third

World countries: Brazil will be everywhere – “If the development dynamics last, then in fifteen years time, every second person in Europe and the USA will work like a Brazilian” (Beck 1999: 469). Temporary contracts will spread not only among the marginally employed, but also among the highly qualified.

- Precarious employment, which was typical for women, becomes more widespread among men, especially young men. Formal qualifications lose their structuring power for careers.
- Occupations lose their orientation power for workers and employers.

12. The evidence provided for these changes and trends is almost exclusively based on a set of aggregate figures from the microcensus on the distribution of the total labour force. Here the declining percentages seem to indicate changes away from proportions in full time, unlimited work contracts and at first certainly look like a very compelling case. Also, limited work contracts are on the increase, mostly for the unqualified, but also for university graduates (Schreyer 2000). While I find the thesis of more flexible and discontinuous working lives quite plausible, however, this empirical evidence presented from the microcensus data turns out, upon closer examination, to be not so conclusive at all. First of all to assess change, one has to hold something constant - like age, gender or sector. It is always relatively hazardous and arbitrary to infer any transparent story from numbers of the overall labour force. Changes in the age and gender composition could easily lead to an illusion of change. Moreover, it is equally hazardous to infer any trend or system changes from readings for single years in different relation to the business cycle.

Irrespective of their magnitude, not even all of the postulated changes (contract work, temporary contracts, telework, etc.) are in the right direction. For instance, the proportion of temporary full-time work has actually declined from 1985 to 1998 for West Germany from 9% to 8% of the total labour force (Hoffmann/Walwei 2000, IAB-Kurzbericht Nr. 16).

The observed changes, which are then lumped together in a summary index of non-normal working contracts, are almost exclusively carried by two trends. One is the trend of increasing part-time work and one is the trend of increasing (exclusive) marginal employment. Increasing part-time work is due almost entirely to the increase in the employment of women, however. In other words, there is almost no substitution of conventional work contracts at all, but rather an extension of the labour force whereby the female newcomers seek or are offered temporary

work. I think it is also quite misleading to call this part of temporary work marginal or precarious. The overwhelming majority of it is on unlimited contracts and, as is known from studies not based on the microcensus, the mean duration, i.e. the degree of continuity, of this female part-time work is actually longer than for full time work (Bergemann/Mertens 2000).

That part-time work for men in West Germany has doubled from a mere 1.5% in 1985 to 5.5% (4.7% including the new Laender) (Hoffmann/Walwei 1998; Hoffmann/Walwei 2000) is remarkable, but hardly an indicator of a metachange to a new work society. Furthermore, it is contrary to theoretical expectation that the proportion of persons with limited work contracts actually remained stable with about 10% in West Germany, despite labour legislation, which allowed and encouraged 18 months viz. 2 year limited contracts without any justification. For me then, the only interesting and remarkable evidence in these microcensus numbers is the rapid rise in marginal employment jobs (630-Mark Stellen), which, due to the new legislation, can now be more easily counted than before. Since marginal employment appearing in labour force statistics is only one part of marginal labour and since legal and statistical definitions have changed over time, changes are difficult to assess. I find it entirely plausible that e.g. the outsourcing of services, such as cleaning, has led to what might be called the Dussmann phenomenon, i.e. the emergence of large service firms based almost entirely on 630 Mark jobs. The bulk of marginal jobs, however, is still in three sectors: private services, retail trade and food services (Buch 1999: 156-162). Whilst it is plausible to assume substitution processes from normal work contracts to marginal work in retail trade and food services, I would guess that observed changes in private services are much more subject to legal stipulations and accounting procedures on the borderline to shadow work. At any rate, these kind of changes, even if they are of a considerable magnitude, obviously do not justify the announcement of a totally new era with regard to the nature of paid work in society. In fact, it could leave the rest of the employment conditions fairly unchanged, because it might primarily reflect the very rigidity of the German employment system with regard to hiring and firing regulations. Marginal employment contracts are on the rise not because labour becomes generally more flexible and discontinuous, but rather because, from the point of view of the employer, it is too inflexible and too continuous.

In sum then, I come to the conclusion that at least so far reflexive modernization researchers have not produced convincing evidence for what to my mind are, on the one hand, plausible assumptions about the relative continuity of working lives and, on the other hand, quite

exaggerated claims for system and meta changes in this regard. So far one would be just as justified to construct a counter story of rigidity and stagnation.

13. In this context it should be of particular interest as to whether there are findings from other data sources along with other more adequate research designs for detecting change.

Obviously aggregate cross-sectional data is particularly ill-suited for capturing flexibilities and discontinuities in working lives. It is not incidence but prevalence that we are after. We also know only too well from poverty and unemployment studies that quantitative information about the stock of the poor or the unemployed tells us very little about their duration and continuity.

As far as I can tell from the relevant research literature, the evidence is mixed. Important information comes from studies on job stability based on the GSOEP data. Between 1984 and 1997, median elapsed tenure time with a given firm decreased from 10.7 years in 1984 to 9.3 years in 1997 for all West German men. For all women, elapsed tenure time was rather stable and oscillated in this time period between 6 and 7 years. The greatest decrease for men can be observed for the middle age group between the ages of 26 and 45, whilst for older men, job stability actually increased over this period. If we look for job stability for given categories of working time, we find no clear trends, for instance with regard to greater job instability of full-time workers in comparison to part-time or marginal workers or vice versa. With regard to sector, we do find a considerable decrease in job stability for men in services. I might note in passing that women in the UK and in the US were actually able to accrue higher median tenure over a comparable period. I should also note that one can find major effects of the business cycle on job stability. The decrease in job stability of men is primarily due to shorter firm tenures terminated by involuntary lay offs, whereas the duration in jobs until voluntary resignations has actually tended to be quite stable. It is also interesting that labour market measures, like maternity leave and early retirement, contributed to decreasing job durations. (Bergemann/Mertens 2000). If we look at first jobs (with more reliable data than that of the GSOEP) we see no trend between the cohorts born between 1955 and 1971, .i.e. between the eighties and the nineties, with regard to job stability. This also applies to occupational stability. If we exclude all first jobs of duration less than two years, we see - if anything - an increase in job stability, but a decrease in occupational stability (Hillmert 2001a, b).

We also now have good empirical material from cohort studies with regard to the transition between schooling, training and work and with regard to the likelihood of finding stable

employment in the occupations trained for at our disposal (Konietzka 1998, 1999a, b; Seibert 2000; Hillmert 2001a, b). What one can observe are first of all marked variations according to the business cycle, for instance with regard to the likelihood and duration of unemployment between vocational training and occupational entry. The magnitude of changes due to business cycles is clearly much larger than any trends. One can also observe a clear trend in the increase in multiple training episodes. Quite contrary to the expectations of reflexive modernization theory, however, we also find great stability over more than two decades, for instance in regard to the extent of the match between vocational and professional training and the early occupational years up to about the age of 30 (Konietzka 1999a). The likelihood that academic graduates find an adequate occupational position has actually improved throughout the last decades in comparison to those with vocational training. We find no indications that there is a decoupling between formal qualifications and occupational entry or early occupational career. (Hillmert 2001b). There are indications of increasing variance, however, especially among highly qualified women (Mayer/Konietzka 1998).

If we summarize this kind of empirical evidence we see many changes, for instance, with regard to prolonged and more chequered transition processes between schooling and labour market integration, although we see no system ruptures and only some moderate trends. The magnitude of changes within countries is larger between business cycles than between periods and both are much smaller than differences between countries.

14. Obviously - at least with regard to the discontinuities in working lives - the interpretative schema offered by reflexive modernization theory does not fit at all. The phenomena, which it pretends to explain, do not exist. As a research strategy, however, it would make a lot of sense, first to make sure that an explanandum actually exists before one invests huge efforts in constructing a large-scale explanatory schema. Reflexive modernization theory is hunting a chimera.

If we recognise such a large gap between what is claimed to be real and what can be demonstrated to hold empirically, then, of course, the question arises as to what the latent message of reflexive modernization theory, with regard to working conditions and working lives, actually is. The message is a normative one. People should be more flexible, more ready to accept marginal employment, more motivated to become self-employed and *Arbeitskraftunternehmer*. If this is the message, then why camouflage it with pretences of

empirical analysis and factual statements? The answer was provided by Beck and Bonß in their work on the uses of social scientific knowledge. Normative campaigns nowadays have to dress up as scientific reality descriptions in order to be acceptable and legitimate. But why not enter the normative debate on work standards and work ethics directly, which - to my mind – is quite a reasonable one? Meinhard Miegel is much more open on this point and does not in any way hide his normative and political objectives (see Miegel 2001).

15. Such a critique of reflexive modernization is well-justified, but is in itself, of course, unsatisfactory. The dismantling of reflexive modernization theory is a necessary step in the construction of more convincing and productive interpretative and heuristic schemata. Let me just sketch a few potential elements of such a framework. First of all we need to distinguish between long-term general and fairly robust processes, the short-term business cycle and adjustment effects, medium-term global trends, on the one hand, and institutionally-based country variations, on the other. They are all there, but it makes a lot of sense to first determine the relative magnitude of these different aspects, before one puts all one's money and efforts into a single one.

More specifically and for the German case of working conditions and working lives, I would first concentrate on the issue of insider/outsider labour markets. Reflexive modernization theory has an important point in emphasizing - for Germany - the degree of exclusion from work. It underrates the institutional specificity (and, therefore, changeability), however, and fails to understand its repercussions on the relative stability of the working lives of the insiders. In this context it also important to note that, apart from the part-time work of women, the outsiders are mainly concentrated in the workforce above the ages of 50 - 55 and experience transition unemployment to various sorts of old age pensions. The institutional and distributional configuration of the education-training-labour market entry and early careers linkage has proven to be remarkably resistant to change in the sense of decoupling - partly the opposite seems to be the case. This comes at a high price, however, which consists in a growing mismatch particularly between the industrial vocations the majority of men are trained for and their medium-term employment opportunities. They fill the ranks of the unqualified and push the unqualified out of the labour market.

With regard to work contracts and firm tenure, I would expect some effects of organizational restructuring, outsourcing, the concentration on "Kernbelegschaften" and so on, but would not

expect that this amounts to much. Declining worker supply and skill shortages and not least the strong role of labour law put fairly strict limits on the extent to which not only de jure more deregulated labour markets, but also de facto more flexible ones can be realized. As for macroprocesses, I would pay still more attention to the effects of the dynamics of educational expansion and women's participation, i.e. individualization - than on the trickle down effects of globalisation in terms of either increasing competitive pressures or labour export. As for the effects of information technology on working conditions and working lives, here I am probably most in line with reflexive modernization theory. The resulting structural changes in the size distributions of firms can be expected to have a large impact on discontinuities in working lives, since size of firm is the best predictor of median tenure.

Literature

Beck, Ulrich (1999): Die Zukunft der Arbeit oder Die Politische Ökonomie der Unsicherheit. Berliner Journal für Soziologie, 4: 467-478.

Beck, Ulrich, Wolfgang Bonß and Christoph Lau (2001): The Theory of Reflexive Modernization: Problematic, Hypotheses and Research Program. Ms

Bergemann, Annette and Antje Mertens (2000): Causes of Declining Job Stability in West Germany. Ms.

Bonß, Wolfgang (1999): Jenseits der Vollbeschäftigungsgesellschaft. Zur Evolution der Arbeit in globalisierten Gesellschaften. In: Gert Schmidt (Hrsg.), Kein Ende der Arbeitsgesellschaft. Arbeit, Gesellschaft und Subjekt im Globalisierungsprozeß. Berlin: edition sigma, S. 145-176

Buch, Holger (1999): Ungeschützte Beschäftigungsverhältnisse. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Friedrichs, Jürgen, M. Rainer Lepsius and Karl Ulrich Mayer (Hrsg.) (1998): Die Diagnosefähigkeit der Soziologie (Sonderheft 38/1998 der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie). Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag

Hillmert, Steffen (2001a): Ausbildung und Übergang in den Arbeitsmarkt. Lebensverläufe in Großbritannien und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Kohortenvergleich. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag (im Erscheinen).

Hillmert, Steffen (2001b): Stabilität und Wandel des 'deutschen Modells' - Lebensverläufe im Übergang zwischen Schule und Beruf. In: M. Wingens und R. Sackmann (Hrsg.), Bildung und Beruf. Ausbildung und berufsstruktureller Wandel in der Wissensgesellschaft. Weinheim und München: Juventa (im Erscheinen).

Hoffmann, Edelraud und Ulrich Walwei (1998): Normalarbeitsverhältnis: ein Auslaufmodell? Überlegungen zu einem Erklärungsmodell für den Wandel der Beschäftigungsformen. In: Mitteilungen aus der Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung Nr. 3

Hoffmann, Edelraud und Ulrich Walwei (2000): Ländervergleich Dänemark – Deutschland. Erosion oder Renaissance der Normalarbeit? IAB-Kurzbericht Nr. 16, 6.12.2000

Konietzka, Dirk (1998): "Langfristige Wandlungstendenzen im Übergang von der Schule in den Beruf". Soziale Welt, 49 (2): 107-134

Konietzka, Dirk (1999a): Ausbildung und Beruf. Die Geburtsjahrgänge 1919-1961 auf dem Weg von der Schule in das Erwerbsleben. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Konietzka, Dirk (1999b): "Beruf und Ausbildung im Generationenvergleich". Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, 40: 289-320

Mayer, Karl Ulrich and Dirk Konietzka (1998): "Formation professionnelle et débuts de carrière: crise ou stabilité du modèle allemand". Revue française de sociologie, XXXIX-2 : 269-304

Mayer, Karl Ulrich (2001): The Paradox of Global Social Change and National Path Dependencies: Life Course Patterns in Advanced Societies. In: Alison E. Woodward and Martin Kohli (eds.), Inclusions and Exclusions in European Societies. Routledge: London, pp. 89-110 (forthcoming)

Miegel, Meinhard (2001): Arbeitslosigkeit in Deutschland - Folgen unzureichender Anpassung an sich ändernde wirtschaftliche und gesellschaftliche Bedingungen. Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Institut für Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.

Müller, Walter (1998): Erwartete und unerwartete Folgen der Bildungsexpansion. In: Jürgen Friedrichs, M. Rainer Lepsius und Karl Ulrich Mayer (Hrsg.), Die Diagnosefähigkeit der Soziologie (Sonderheft 38/1998 der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie). Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, S. 81-112

Schreyer, Franziska (2000): "Unsichere" Beschäftigung trifft vor allem die Niedrigqualifizierten. IAB-Kurzbericht Nr.15, 31.10.2000

Seibert, Holger (2000): Berufsausbildung und Arbeitsmarktchancen. Eine empirische Analyse des Berufseinstiegsprozesses in Westdeutschland zwischen 1975 und 1995. Magisterarbeit. Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät, Fachbereich Soziologie, Universität Rostock.

Solga, Heike und Dirk Konietzka (2000): "Das Berufsprinzip des deutschen Arbeitsmarktes: Ein geschlechtsneutraler Allokationsmechanismus?". Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie, 26 (1): 111-147.