

Care or Control of the Self?
Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault,
and the Subject in the 21st Century

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Edited by

Andrea D. Bührmann and Stefanie Ernst

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P U B L I S H I N G

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No present book on the change of the *Sociology of the Subject in 21st Century* can boast of not having drawn on previous works on the subject.

In July 2008 these questions were discussed at a conference named “self-regulation or self-care - the sociology of the subject in the 21st century” The conference took place in Hamburg and was sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Elias-Foundation. We planned different forums in which different subjects were to be discussed. Most of these contributions are published in our anthology. Additionally, we asked other authors to contribute an essay.

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—Andrea D. Bührmann and Stefanie Ernst

INTRODUCTION

ANDREA D. BÜHRMANN AND STEFANIE ERNST

The beginning of the 21st century is characterized by fundamental societal changes: in addition to changing demographics and the globalization of economic flows, the transformation of an industrial-Fordistic society to a non-industrial service society is significant. For more than twenty years, these large-scale trends and their inherent chances and risks have been the topic of vivid discussions in all the social sciences. Keywords are ‘risk-society’, ‘post-industrial society’, ‘knowledge-society’ and ‘information-society’.

The implications of these developments are also reflected in the challenge to the traditional, hegemonic and rational understanding of subjectivity. Against the background of these great social changes, several factors indicate that the forms of self-regulation or self-governance are also being transformed. A one-sided consideration of the *homo economicus* and its varieties would underestimate, for example, certain non-rational forms of self-perception and self-reflection, as well as non-rational practices of self-management and subjectivation. This debate suggests that social sciences cannot do without a clear definition of human nature and its essential traits.

German post-war sociologists such as Arnold Gehlen, Theodor W. Adorno, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, were the focus of intensive discussions at the recent 33rd Congress of the German Sociological Society. As a result, it could well be possible that human nature will receive a new widespread academic interest.

Several contributors again and again stressed the social relevance of nature, and the auditorium wrestled with the definition of what ‘nature’ could mean.

Not yet clarified is the question of what these transformations mean to individuals. Indeed, it has been postulated that individuals will be forced

to create their own biography and develop their own identity. Others claim that a completely new form of subjectivation is developing.

Contemporary research on the transformation of the so-called ‘modern subject’ has been dominated by two hypotheses: First, the notion of an increasing aesthetization of the subject, in the sense of a sensitizing of sensory perception, has been a popular topic of research. Second, the idea of a progressive economization of the subject has been widely discussed. The outcome of that research has been to identify the emergence of an enterprising self.¹ This enterprising self involves the individual’s perception of self and others as entrepreneurs, and orienting their action, thinking and feeling in terms of entrepreneurial calculations. However, as yet it has not been sufficiently clarified whether and to what extent current subjectivation processes are determined by aesthetization and/or economization processes. Similarly, other fundamental questions remain unresolved: Where do the concepts of subjectivation, that is, of the modern subject come from, and how precisely are they constructed? Why and on the basis of which social conflicts do historically determined forms of subjectivation change? And finally, what consequences or unintended consequences do such changes imply?²

For that reason it seems to be the great task of the 21st century to define the role of the individual in a fundamentally changing society. The aim of this anthology therefore is to discuss the question, to what extent the relationship to oneself (its regulation with respect to its governance) and the relationship towards others in (post-)modern societies are being transformed. The perspective of Norbert Elias’ process sociology as well as Michel Foucault’s post-structural theory seem especially promising, as they appear to have been the first researchers consistently and convincingly analysing the ‘nature’ of the individual by reflecting upon its long-term historical process of transformation. Both have different visions but similar concerns. Both authors deal with structures of control that exist within society and within the individual.

¹ This problem was first discussed by Frederic Jameson (1984).

² Andrea D. Bührmann deals with these questions and suggests that they could be answered by dispositif analysis.

State of the Art

Whereas Elias was focussing on the interdependencies between the development of society and the individual, Foucault analysed the societal practices of the individual and developed the idea of the 'desiring-subject'. Because of this Elias (1987, 1991, 1999) can be seen as a representative of the socio- and psychogenetic changes of the interwoven subject, whereas Foucault (1982, 1983, 1991) stands for the practices of self-formation and its changes. But neither Elias nor Foucault - in contrast to Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (1947) - operates with an ideal of subjectivity (Bühmann 2005). Therefore, during the forthcoming discussion these contrasting sociological frames should be examined with regard to their theoretical potentials of explanation as well as with regard to recent empirical findings.

As two of the most noted sociologists, Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault early on offered concepts for the debate on the position of the individual in society, with the aim of clarifying the interwoven socio- and psychogenetic development of modern societies. Within the individual the social interdependency of complex formations of power is mirrored.

In describing the mechanisms of self-control (*Selbstkontrollapparatur*) (Elias 1999) or the techniques of normalisation (Foucault 1976), both authors dealt with the hidden structures of social rationalization, but without specifying or using an explicit definition of the subject.

The latest objection against Foucault is that he underestimated long-term and especially macro-sociological processes. Moreover, he was not able to develop a theoretically convincing and empirically stable proposal concerning the production of the individual, about practices of resistance or the establishment of discourses. At the same time Jürgen Habermas (1986) argued that Foucault was destroying the subject completely by constructing it as a pure effect of practices of discourses. Notwithstanding these criticisms it is still most popular in the sociological debate.

By contrast, Elias's explicitly long-term oriented figurational theory has been accused of neglecting the genesis of knowledge in the *Civilizing Process* and in addition, of lacking a definition of the subject, i.e. 'the individual' (Dunning et al. 1999). Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen in 1986 criticized the figurational definition of the individual for being both bourgeois and liberal, as well as masculine. Moreover, Elias's and

Foucault's behaviouristic concepts of human internal and external nature reduce the actionability to a simple model of stimulus and reaction (Moldaschl 2002). But in Elias's terms the individual can only be understood by its socially interwoven relationships. Its real 'nature' is the 'second nature'. By contrast, Foucault's self-caring subject from a figurational perspective appears to be a typical late modern construction of the *homo clausus*.

Issues of power are inseparably interlinked with the connection between external constraints and self-restraints. Elias and Foucault also in this context developed different concepts. The increasing subjectivation of work already mentioned apparently demands a mobilization of individual resources. Arguing with a simple and repressive definition of power, this phenomenon could only be interpreted as a self-disciplinary action or self-adjustment.

Therefore, a productive definition of power (derived from Max Weber) allows a new perspective on actionability. With these ideas in mind, individual chances can be assigned to these recent social transformations of external constraints. Moreover, it would not be possible to lead the debate about subjectivation without reference to the acting subjects.

Elias as well as Foucault drew from Sigmund Freud's work on the constitution of the self. But they did it in different ways. Both were interested in consciousness and unconsciousness from a long-term perspective of power and knowledge. Likewise, both works deal with the connection between, on the one hand, human drives or passions, especially those linked to sex and violence, and on the other hand, the structures of control that exist within society and the personality (Smith 2001: 143). But both come to different interpretations.

Content of the Book

We think that these brief thoughts prove that there is reason enough to bring these different but similar sociologists Elias and Foucault together. In view of recent social changes we find it worthwhile to discuss their theoretical and empirical potential. Questions should be asked about whether a new 'reflexive lifestyle' or a 'self-regulating form of subjectivity' has come to exist bearing a new social character. On the other side, we want to discuss whether a completely new form of subjectivation has occurred or whether the tendency of self-care creates a new relationship to

oneself. Moreover, we want to delve into the question of whether the old search for identity and self-realisation has become obsolete and a powerful pitfall. Furthermore, we want to arrive at an adequate definition of the subject, accurately describing the processes of social transformation.

The different foci of our anthology will concentrate on the following questions:

1. Work: What are the chances and risks of this increasing subjectivation? Individualization and increasing constraints of self-regulation are keywords in this section.
2. Body: Here we want to focus on the body as a representation of the social, as a symbol and indicator of status and subjectivation.
3. Desire: What are the alternatives to the normalising of identity politics, especially focusing on sexual-identity politics?

These questions will be discussed with reference to Elias's studies on the process of civilisation and Foucault's research on the transformation of modern forms of subjectivation.

In the first section some fundamental questions will be discussed.

Andrea D. Bührmann explores possible future perspective of social science research on the subject and subjectivation. Bührmann does this in four steps. She begins by sketching out the problematizations of the subject since the European Enlightenment. Here the term problematization is not meant to be understood as analyzing behaviour or ideas, nor societies and their ideologies. In fact, the emphasis is placed on the problematizations through which (human) beings present themselves and the attendant practices from which these problematizations are formed. This sketch forms a backdrop against which the problematization of the subject in sociology is reconstructed. In so doing, an argument is developed on the potential of social science-oriented dispositif analysis to contribute to research on subjectivation. From a genealogical perspective, one can consider the emerging of historically-concrete kinds of subjectivation and the consequences, intended or unintended, implied by such formation events. From an archaeological perspective, the focus is on the emergence of certain concepts of the subject or subjectivation. These problems also raise issues concerning the role of sociology, in its capacity as specialized discourse. In particular, it has to be asked whether sociology helped to establish or actually established the hegemony or the

marginalization of certain forms or kinds of subjectivation. The fourth step includes a brief conclusion and sets out some perspectives for future research on subjectivation. First of all subjectivation has to be understood as a process by which individuals become subjects. Therefore the research focus has to be changed from the manner in which subjects behave the motives behind their actions and the nature of the subject, to the technologies of subjectivation. Moreover, researchers need to address the contingent and historically variable modes of subjectivation. And they must investigate the possibilities for new kinds of subjectivation which may emerge in the future, thereby opening a broad new field of sociological research.

Sam Binkley surveys the two contrasting accounts of the process of intensification and internalization provided by Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias. For both Elias and Foucault, a heightened awareness of the passage of time provides the linkage between broader societal processes of modernization and the subjective transformations of the nascent modern subject. Binkley suggests that the institutional forms described by Foucault allow for only a partial account of this process. But “deployment” or “swarming” of durational time implies a reflective awareness of the process itself. These reflective practices play into the process described by Elias: the coordination of social conducts and the development of an abstract and universal consciousness of time that is specifically dissociated from any specific or concrete event, which occurs when the background categories for durational temporality are incorporated and fused with the everyday conducts of individuals in social and personal life. This incorporation of new temporal frames takes place against the backdrop of a wider trajectory, wherein the preparatory socialization of individuals into functional temporal practices points to institutional life as the impending commitment to which all conducts will ultimately have to answer. For Binkley the emergence of institutions and the dissemination of imposed durational time occur co-extensively with a wider process of civilization, the integration and the abstraction of temporal markers and an increasing differentiation of social tasks. These temporal frames would only be possible for individuals capable of dissociating temporal markers from specific events and of conceiving of time in general — a development which originates in social networks operating outside the realm of institutional life itself.

In ‘American individualism and its consequences for the world (including the credit crunch)’, *Stephen Menell* analyzes from a figurational point of

view the long-term development of the word 'individualism' as a basis for western images of the self. His view on American ideology of individualism embraces its military, economic and cultural consequences for the world. As a first step he discusses the ambivalent meaning of selfishness and individualism, which is rooted in an epistemological concept of the self as *homo clausus*. This has an important effect on the way American see themselves and their role in the world.

Stefanie Ernst then writes about 'The Self, the Market and Changes in Working Life: a Process Sociological Contribution to an Enduring Debate'. She debates the driving forces of the transformation of control, self control and subjectivation in order to question the underlying thesis about the self entrepreneur, i.e. entrepoyee as an expression of a so-called 'neoliberal regime' demanding a complete internalization of market efforts. After her brief reconstruction of Elias's and Foucault's similar but also different concepts of the self/ the individual, she analyzes the self images of freelancers and people working in outpatient nursing care. This theoretical and empirical perspective leads to a new interpretation of current fundamental changes besides traditional explanations which proceed - intended or unintended - the image of the 'homo clausus'.

The second section deals with the question: What are the chances and risks of increasing subjectivation in the working life? We are used to viewing entrepreneurs as people who exhibit exceptional initiative and a willingness to take risks, and who achieve considerable economic success by being innovative in markets.

In his contribution *Hans J. Pongratz* develops a different conception of entrepreneurship. He introduces a broader definition of the concept, diagnosing the generalization and 'profanation' of entrepreneurial action, and fundamentally altering the social significance of entrepreneurship.

According to Pongratz, a 'society of entrepreneurs' refers to a society in which potentially every member feels the need to act as an entrepreneur. So, entrepreneurial risk-taking becomes a basic condition for maintaining one's economic existence. Pongratz suggests the term 'entrepreneur as a market position'. From this perspective anyone becomes an entrepreneur when they produce (or have others produce), markets goods and services for the purpose of economic gain.

Magdalena Freudenschuss discusses the recent occurrence of the 'Precarious Subject' and asks how far this challenges future life and power relations in a transnational political sense. With an analysis of discursive constructions in German and Austrian public discourse, she outlines the range of agency of the respective subjects and the arrangements between individual and society. She argues that the 'Precarious Self' contradicts the 'Entrepreneurial Self'.

In contrast, in her paper about 'Manager or Entrepreneur?' *Inga Truschkat* questions whether the assumption of diminishing social constraints in favour of increasing individualisation is true, in view of the hegemonic discourse of the 'Entrepreneurial or the 'Competent Subject'. By reconstructing the dispositif of competence in literature and interviews, she asks whether strategies of habitualization and self-regulation are really outmoded and whether they have an overall effect.

The third section focuses on the body as a representation of the social, and as a symbol and indicator of status and subjectivation.

The starting point of *Boris Traue's* paper about 'The Cybernetic Self and its Discontents' is the observable "spreading of practices of self-care" in everyday life. The debate about this phenomenon is ambivalent, e.g. moving between narcissism, radicalized individualism and repression. As this contradiction remains unresolved the author discusses the role of media, its materiality and the technological conditions of subjectivation, giving structure to the circulation of discourses and identities.

Gabriele Klein's starting point is the 'admirable body of work' that Reckwitz presented recently about the 'hybrid subject'; this is followed by a brief debate of Elias' and Foucault's differing approaches, especially on the embodiments of power. She develops her argument by saying that a connection can be drawn between the "violence of the state" and the sociology of the body in a cultural-theoretical or a micro-sociologically perspective. In addition she concentrates on the strategies of a politicization of life through a "disenfranchised" and "juridificated" subject, which is "socially implemented through and in the body".

Mona Motakef argues in her contribution that in a discussion of organ donations, individuals are addressed as disposable subjects. She suggests that due to their shortage organs are no longer given away as generous gifts, rather, they are club goods or even trading goods and have become a

source of risk and a calculable resource for others. In this perspective human bodies are seen not only as improvable in regard to their labour power. The entrepreneurial calculation invades the body: Even the interior of the subject is subject to the entrepreneurial maxim as organic substrate. Motakef makes it clear that the question of whether or not an individual reacts and becomes a disposable subject cannot be separated from other subjectifying practices. The act of donating an organ, which is regarded as an act of free will, becomes a form of self control. Consequently, the concept of autonomous decisions in organ donation is doubtful.

And finally the forth section asks: What are the alternatives to the normalising of identity politics, with a special focus on sexual identity politics?

Volker Woltersdorff investigates the relation between neoliberalism and new regimes of sexuality. He asks what kind of sexual politics the new neoliberal regime of the entrepreneurial self allows. This is a very important question because currently sexuality can be seen as being subject to an economic logic and becoming absorbed in the consistent economisation of all areas of life. In his contribution Woltersdorff elaborates on the dialectics between emancipation and co-optation that, in his view, govern sexual politics under neoliberalism. Woltersdorff is convinced that neoliberalism is best understood as a hegemonic reaction to countercultural critique and the crisis of Fordism, as Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005) argue in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Therefore, Woltersdorff takes a closer look at sexuality as it appears within the spheres of production and reproduction. Following Renate Lorenz and Judith Butler he suggests that the meaning of ‘precariousness’ may be a way to combine a perspective on sexuality with a perspective on economy and labour that highlights the complex ways in which individuals are positioned within a framework of power. For him the transformation of neoliberalism not only affects working conditions but also identities. That means that the deregulation of the labour force goes hand in hand with sexual deregulation. As a result, Woltersdorff views S/M practice as a sort of applied critique of the dominant order because the members of his group discussions deploy a picture of sexual practice that is radically ambivalent and immanent in the contradictions of everyday life.

Whether we are dealing with media coverage, the legal realm or academic debates, sexuality seems to have entered the hegemonic mainstream as a

topic in the last 40 years. In contrast to a 'persuasive everything goes euphoria' *Elisabeth Tuidier* suggests that the public and media presence of sexuality since 1968, has shifted but not dissolved the boundary between the norm and abnormality, because those who cannot or do not want to fulfil the norm again remain excluded. Following Foucault and Elias, Tuidier addresses these changes in the sexual field and further problematises these developments from a so-called queer-feminist perspective. Finally, Tuidier postulates that Foucault's analyses of power and his concept of governmentality are more adaptable to queer-feminist debates than Elias' figurational theory: This is because Foucault gives no reason to believe that there is a gender or sexuality that is *outside* the realm of power.

Many activists criticised the essentialization and homogenization of the category women. Furthermore, there was a debate resulting from a desire for new forms of political agency far from normalised identity politics, a debate which also focused on the theoretical level of women and gender research. This debate was originally brought up at the end of the 1980s in Michel Foucault's "History of Sexuality" (1990), which has become a key work in the research of women and gender. For *Eva Tolasch* the themes of resistance and political agency remain rather vague in Foucault's writings. In order to develop these themes she discusses Judith Butler's post-structural concept of agency in connection with the post-sovereign subject. In doing so Tolasch is guided by the terms "control of the self" and "care of the self". It is central for her that the analysis approaches self-forming and the forming of others from within a historical framework. Hence, political agency, in contrast to agency in general, means resistance through change strategies of the binary-hierarchic order of sexes, which connect on the level of subjectivity as well as on the level of social institutions. In order to expose this, Tolasch analyses Butler's post-structuralistic understanding of gender and agency to demonstrate the limited scope that is shown by the example of intersex-activism in Germany and to demonstrate the need for a social-scientific founding.

This is a very interesting example because intersexuality activists in Germany demonstrate how individual actions make resistance and criticism possible, and how limitations in institutionalized forms, such as laws, limit the 'ability to agency'. Tolasch discusses the position of Frigga Haug, who views gender on a macroscopic level as social usher and, in connection with ethno-methodological-social-constructivist approaches, integrates the interactive generation of gender at a microscopic level. In conclusion she interweaves at a theoretical level socio-scientific-post-

structuralistic approaches, with the socio-scientific terms “doing gender” and ideology on one side, and the post-structuralistic terms “performativity” and discourse on the other side.

Perspectives

With this book the editors begin the process of founding a research network. The aim of this international trans-disciplinary network is to focus on ‘Individuals from a Sociological Perspective’. The main issues are the ‘transformation and subjectivation in working life’, the ‘changes in traditional family life towards plural life styles’, and the ‘erosion of the welfare state and its movement towards a workfare state’.

Our starting point and main thesis is the breakdown of three interwoven basis principles in Western societies, i.e. the erosion of the basic interdependent triad of family, work and state.

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FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

‘THE DEATH OF THE SUBJECT’ AND ITS SOCIOLOGICAL REBIRTH AS SUBJECTIVATION

ANDREA D. BÜHRMANN

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem to be posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area—European culture since the seventeenth century—it becomes abundantly clear that man is a recent invention. Man is an invention, the recent date of whom is laid bare by the archaeology of our thinking. And perhaps he is nearing his end (Foucault 2001: 421).

These statements are from Michel Foucault’s book *The Order of Things*, which first appeared in 1966. In particular, the last sentence of the book — in which Foucault states that “man would be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (1966), if the fundamental dispositions of knowledge were to be transformed — caused much controversy in the scholarly community and led to an explosion of new discourses. The reason for this was the confrontation with the ‘death of the subject’. Many were concerned by the assumption Foucault intended to deny the existence of the subject in and of itself. They believed, however, that one must hold fast to the subject, considering it to be the ultimate and indispensable criterion or measuring stick for critically examining societal relations.¹ Others embraced the ‘death of the subject’, since, with the grand meta-narratives now finally at an end, the subject as a modern, seemingly autonomous, subject could itself be de-centered and as a result, also, historicized and contextualized. (Taylor 1989; Zima 2000)

Despite the widespread controversy surrounding the death of the subject, there has been little effort to conciliate the different views arising in various specialized academic discourses. First attempts to treat the most important theoretical perspectives for re-conceptualizing and de-centering

¹ For instance, Habermas (1986).

the subject in (but not limited to) the social sciences have already been made. (Rose 1996; Baumann 1997; Sennett 1998; Grundmann and Beer 2003; Keupp and Joachim Hohl 2006; Reckwitz 2006, 2008). This essay seeks to move beyond existing work and to inquire into the future perspectives for social science research on the subject and subjectivation.

This will be done in four steps. The first step will start by sketching out the problematization of the subject since the European Enlightenment. Here, problematization is not understood as a matter of analyzing behaviours or ideas, nor societies and their ideologies. Instead, the focus is on the problematizations through which (human) beings present themselves and the attendant practices² on the basis of which these problematizations are formed. This sketch forms a backdrop against which the problematization of the subject in sociology will be reconstructed. In a third step, an argument will be developed on the potential for social science-oriented dispositif analysis to contribute to research on subjectivation. In that context, the term subjectivation will be understood as a process by which individuals become subjects.³ The fourth step will include a brief conclusion and set out some perspectives for future research on subjectivation.

The starting point: a brief account of the problematization of the subject in scientific and specialized discourses

The concept subject is an ambiguous and much interpreted signifier. It is derived from the Latin word *subjectum*. Its meaning oscillates between two poles: at the one end, it means something fundamental or underlying in the sense of a basis for knowledge and at the other end, something subjugated in the sense of a manipulated, objectified unit (Foucault (1966 [2001]); Zima 2000: XI).

In the natural sciences, at the beginning of the Enlightenment, scientists were primarily interested in the subject in the sense of subjugation. The subject here is understood as a natural being that is pre-determined to a

² Although no specific definition of the term 'practice' exists, most practice theorists consider practices to be embodied actions (Schatzki 2001). Foucault (1981: 702) defines them as 'forms of action and thought'.

³ Subjectivation is defined as the process of becoming a subject (also Rose 1996; Butler 1997).

large extent by reason of genetics and/or lineage.⁴ By contrast, the philosophical interest in the subject ever since Rene Descartes (Taylor 1989) has focused mainly on what is fundamental or underlying. The subject questions everything but himself, because he does not question the author of the doubt, the ego of thinking. That perspective takes its bearings from the abstract transcendental subject in the sense of Immanuel Kant's idea of 'I think' and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's concept of 'subjective *Geist*'.

Young Hegelians, such as Friedrich Vischer, Max Stirner and Karl Marx had two points of criticism concerning this understanding of the subject:

- First, they argued that the subject is constituted by feeling, thinking and acting within concrete, empirical relations.
- Second, in their view, the subject is structured by societal influences, since the subject is constantly in dialectical contact with other collections of subjects such as groups, institutions or movements.

In view of these criticisms, in the sixth of his *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx (1845) states: "But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations" (Zima 2000: 1).

This critique was adopted later in the study of culture. In doing so, the problematization of the subject was transformed for the first time. This is evident because the meanings ascribed to the subject were no longer of a subject understood as an either/or but rather as a both/and: it came to be viewed as a hybrid. It is generally assumed here that persons come into the world as incomplete beings lacking reason, and that these beings are defined solely by the fact that they are subject to and subjugated by natural passions. But these natural beings can become rational, that is, cultural beings, if they are educated in a particular way, thereby becoming themselves and taking on an identity. Identity thus appears as a kind of authentic core belonging to the subject, which is formed step by step in the

⁴ A radicalization of this perspective is under discussion in neurobiology. It is questioned whether human beings possess anything of the kind of a free will. As a consequence, it must be conceded, that, in a biological sense, human beings are almost wholly determined by neuronal networks (Singer 2003).

course of socialization and is then established and stabilized if the formation of the identity has been successful.⁵

Individuals can, thus, at least potentially, become consistent, mature, autonomous and (more or less) authentically perceiving subjects. An individual can subjectivize and become an “individualized subject” (Zima 2000: 9).

Most of the concepts of the self found in cultural studies adhere to this procedural structuration of the modern subject. But the hybrid gestalt of the subject remains a topic of debate. At the core of this debate is what one should designate as ahistorical, general and thus naturally given, and what is culturally changeable. On the one hand, the subject is considered as determined by its connection to empiricism and its heterogeneity of experiences. On the other hand, in accordance with philosophical tradition, the subject is seen as the determinant of the individual and society.

The problematization of the individualized individual in sociology

What does this debate imply for sociology? How do sociologists, understanding themselves as researchers of cultural studies, problematise the subject? In this regard, two different phases can be reconstructed in relation to the hegemonic discourse of sociology.

The first phase begins with the founding of sociology as a scientific discipline and ends at the beginning of the 1980s. In this phase, the subject is, for the most part, bracketed out of the scope of sociological inquiry. This serves to delimit the discipline, especially from psychology and philosophy. This follows from the fact that while psychology is concerned with the subject which feels and experiences, philosophy focuses on the thinking, self-reflective subject. Keeping in mind this attempt to delimit the sociological field, two theoretical perspectives emerged, namely, systems theory and action theory.

These theoretical perspectives also have their own respective views on the individualized subject. For Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of

⁵ George Herbert Mead (1934) described these processes. But his deliberations were not understood as implying that not only subjectivation is a societal process but also the object of that process is societally formed, too, and not naturally given.

systems theory, the meaning of the subject as an individual capable of action is reduced to a merely residual category.⁶

This individual is regarded primarily as one subjected to and confronted by societal expectations. The task of sociology, according to Durkheim (1893), is thus to explain the social in terms of the social. From this perspective, the individualized subject is primarily understood as the recipient of social expectations. Another sociologist in this tradition, Talcott Parsons, applies the concept of role-play. He writes in *The social system* (1951) that not the specific actions of the individual, but rather the expectations of others with whom the individual is confronted are central. In fact, the different roles that could be played by individuals are not interpreted as features in their own right but as constitutive elements of different social systems. From this perspective, Parsons is not interested in the practice of actions.

The intersection of the individual with society is thus found, in Ralf Dahrendorf's (1964 [1968]) clear formulation, at the point where a person is understood as 'homo sociologicus', that is to say, the bearer of socially prescribed roles.⁷ Niklas Luhmann (1984 [1995]: 255) takes this position a step further. He views the subject or the subjective as a mere environment of social systems and thus excludes it from the primary area of sociological inquiry. He employs the concept of excluded individuality, which deems the individualized subject as "overdetermined".

In contrast to Durkheim, Max Weber is mainly concerned with emphasizing the dimension of individual action. Thus, as the founder of action theory, he defines sociology as "a science concerning itself with interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences" (Weber 1922 [1971]: 19). Weber wants to understand the meaning of actions and the motives of the actors. Like Durkheim, Weber is clear to delimit sociology from psychology and philosophy, but unlike Durkheim, Weber is interested in discerning the motives underlying individual actions. Thus, the subject as

⁶ For Durkheim (1893), societal reproduction depends on the internalisation of social norms and values by individuals. On that basis, a relatively flawless division of labour in society is possible.

⁷ At this point Dahrendorf refers to Goffman's idea of an actor, in terms of a 'simultaneous multiplicity of selves', (Goffman 1961: 132) which, in turn, goes back to Georg Simmel's conception of the self as the intersection of different social circles.

an individualized subject, in a certain sense, remains underdetermined. For Weber, having regard to the ideal type of purposive rational action, action follows individually established autonomous decisions.

In keeping with Weber, different schools of theory have attempted to interpret the motives of actors and the meaning of individual action. The rational choice approach thus views the subject as a fundamentally rationally acting subject, since the latter exhibits a maximization of utility (e.g., cost-effective behavior) on the basis of certain preferences.⁸ In this perspective the human being is thus primarily seen as a “disengaged agent” (see Taylor: 1995) often described as ‘homo economicus’.

The sociological position taken by Alfred Schütz (1932 [1967]), on the other hand, considers agents as engaged in the life-world. Referring to a ‘mundane ego’ not a ‘transcendental subject’ he assumes that social action is calculating and, in that sense, it is rational action only to a minor extent. Social action, understood in this way, is viewed in the context of the everyday life-world and is regarded, above all, as spontaneous, intuitive and self-evident. Grounded in this perspective, the tradition of the interpretative approach focuses on subjective meanings or meaning attributed to the individual by the individual. At the same time, ethnomethodological approaches, such as constructivism, focus research on the routines of everyday life and the interactive construction of realities. Lastly, research following the Weberian perspective exists also in relation to the ascetic, Protestant ‘career person’ with the aim of understanding the everyday life conduct of individuals.

The second phase of the problematization of the subject in the hegemonic discourse of sociology starts in the 1980s. From this time on, there has been an increasing tendency to include the problematization of the subject. Jürgen Habermas (1992) thus makes clear in his attempt to consider systems and action theory together that the constitution of the subject is also a social process. In doing so, he bases his arguments on the work of George Herbert Mead. Mead (1934) demonstrates that subjectivity or what he refers to as the self, is not simply present from birth onwards, but rather is the result of interactive processes. (Joas 1985)⁹ In that account, Mead is

⁸ For instance, Coleman (1990).

⁹ In fact, Habermas takes up a position David Hume uttered once before. Hume wrote in *A treatise of human nature* (1962: 308), “the identity which we ascribe to the mind of man is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetable and animal bodies”.

addressing the abstract transcendental subject featured in the philosophical criticism of the Young Hegelians. His position is that this subject is constituted in a dialectical relation with others, that is, the subject is socially constituted.

In their concepts of habitus, Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu then take up the second point of criticism developed by the Young Hegelians, namely, that this subject continues to be structured by societal influences even after it is constituted. Contrary to the role-play concept, in which the individual and society oppose one another, the habitus concept assumes interactive effects between society and individuals. In his figuration sociology, Elias designates the 'social habitus' primarily as a social personality structure (Mennell 1992: 79). Bourdieu extends this concept in his *theory of power and practice* to encompass the whole of the individual, including the bodily demeanour.

Bourdieu's practice theory refers to individuals as actors and as results of social actions. Thus, he distances himself both from subjectivistic theories of intentional consciousness and objectivistic theories of the unconscious mind. In short, individuals are neither *homini oeconomici* nor *homini sociologici*. Society and individuals produce each other and, therefore, they are not independent units but engaged agents. Individuals neither act like machines, performing simply in the manner they are expected to act, nor as individuals with free will. From this perspective, the subject is no longer the explanandum but it becomes the explanans. Habitus thus encompasses not only the habits of thinking, feeling and action but also covers lifestyle, language, dress and taste. The habitus is considered "durable and transposable systems of schemata of perception, appreciation and action" arising from "the institution [or embodiment] of the social in the body" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127). Thus, habitus is, from a certain perspective, 'objectively' determined by societal structures. At the same time, habitus also allows for subjectively-motivated individual action strategies within a space of societal possibilities. On this view, habitus is to be understood as a solidified life story, in which social positions become incorporated dispositions. Although habitus is determined by class and gender affiliation and, in addition, specific social spheres such as the economic, in practice, it offers space for the creation of an individual lifestyle and environment.

These approaches have thus become a useful tool for biographical research, amongst other things as a framework for objective hermeneutics,

but also providing deep hermeneutic approaches allowing one to distinguish different habitus types and their deeply-rooted structures in modern societies.¹⁰ Sociological socialization research accordingly focuses both on subjectivation processes on the basis of interactions with the specific, material and social environment and on the social bonds between individuals, constituted in the course of socialization relations.

At the same time, in keeping with Elias, it has been pointed out in several contexts that the habitus type is subject to historical transformation. Starting in the mid-1930s, Elias (1939 [2001]) began focusing on a possible transformation of subjective personality structures as a consequence of social processes and diagnosed the emergence of an ever more rigid self-control apparatus, which ultimately renders the human being as *homo clausus*. Critical Theory also inquires, having recourse to Sigmund Freud, into the consequences for individuals of societal rationalization processes. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947). In addition, David Riesman (1949 [1961]) also diagnosed a transformation of personality determined externally. This writing hardly found its way, however, into the framework of the hegemonic sociological discourse.

This began to change in the early 1980s as a result of two developments. First, the subjected individual was not longer seen as an underlying subject with a rational core or as parentheses of an underlying and subjected subject. This has been discussed for instance by Kenneth Gergen (1991) and Douglas Kellner (1992) who identify fragmentation processes in relation to the subjectivation of modern subjects. Similarly, subjectivation processes are decoded as ‘biographical illusions’ (Bourdieu 2002).¹¹ Second, as mentioned earlier in relation to the controversy surrounding the assertion by Foucault and others on the death of the subject, a decentering of the subject¹² has been demanded in order to take reflect the historicization and contextualization of its subjectivation.¹³

¹⁰ These approaches are labelled, for example, ‘psychoanalytic’ or ‘genetic’ structuralisms.

¹¹ Literature includes many figures which draw attention to these processes: Musil’s ‘man without qualities’, Kafka’s bureaucratic sacrifice, Benjamin’s flaneur, Simmel’s stranger, Rushdie’s bastard, or Bauman’s vagabonds, travellers and cosmopolites. They are representatives for the erosion of what is known as the subject and illustrate the deep experiences of alienation.

¹² For a summary of the discussion on the ‘decentering of the subject’ see Giddens (1987: 73).

¹³ For instance, Bührmann (2004, 2005); Reckwitz (2006, 2008).

This brief reconstruction of the problematization of the subject in the hegemonic discourse of sociology should help underline the fact that initially the subject was treated as an individualized subject. Researchers assumed the existence of an individualized subject and, accordingly, the (expected) actions of this subject were researched. This changed starting in the 1980s. The individualized subject is no longer accepted as a basic starting point for research. Instead, focus has shifted to subjectivation processes as viewed by the individualized subject and away from the subject being viewed as external to or excluded from scientific categories. From this perspective, the subject and the processes connected with its formation and transformation have become the focus of sociological research.

Contemporary research efforts have been dominated by two hypotheses originally formulated by Frederic Jameson (1991). First, the notion of an increasing aesthetization of the subject, in the sense of a sensitizing of the sensuous perception.¹⁴ Second, there is an assumption of a progressive economization of the subject.¹⁵ The results of that research identify the emergence of an enterprising self. This involves individuals perceiving themselves and others as entrepreneurs, and orienting their actions, thoughts and feelings in terms of entrepreneurial calculations.

The emergence of the enterprising self has attracted considerable research attention. Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello (1999) seek to discover whether programs of labour organization are influenced by concepts originally invented by aesthetic countercultures. Lev Manovich (2001) and Sherry Turkle (1995) address the question whether working with personal computers fosters the formation of a more aesthetic sense. Ulrich Bröckling (2007) produces a phenomenology of the enterprising self as a type of subject formation. Alain Ehrenberg (1991) and Günther Voß and Kerstin Rieder (2006) consider whether the enterprising self is connected to other types of subjectivation such as an active consumer or successful athlete. And, finally, Andreas Reckwitz (2006, 2008) has attempted to classify the discourse on the hybrid subject. However, none of that research sufficiently clarifies whether and to what extent the current subjectivation processes are determined by aesthetization and/or economization processes. In addition, the following fundamental questions remain unanswered:

¹⁴ For instance, Schulze (1992); Maffesoli (1990); Featherstone (1991).

¹⁵ For instance, Bröckling (2007), du Gay (1995); Miller and Rose (1995).