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From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity

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'Identity continues to be the problem it was throughout modernity', says Douglas Kellner, and adds that 'far from identity disappearing in contemporary society, it is rather reconstructed and redefined' – though just a few paragraphs later he casts doubts on the feasibility of the selfsame 'reconstruction and redefinition', pointing out that 'identity today becomes a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self' and that 'when one radically shifts identity at will, one might lose control.'¹ Kellner's ambivalence reflects the present ambivalence of the issue itself. One hears today of identity and its problems more often than ever before in modern times. And yet one wonders whether the current obsession is not just another case of the general rule of things being noticed only *ex post facto*; when they vanish, go bust or fall out of joint.

I propose that while it is true that identity 'continues to be the problem', this is *not* 'the problem it was throughout modernity'. Indeed, if the *modern* 'problem of identity' was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* 'problem of identity' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open. In the case of identity, as in other cases, the catchword of modernity was creation; the catchword of postmodernity is recycling. Or one may say that if the 'media which was the message' of modernity was the photographic paper (think of the relentlessly swelling family albums, tracing page by page the slow accretion of irreversible and non-erasable identity-yielding events), the ultimately postmodern medium is the videotape (eminently erasable and re-usable, calculated not to hold anything for ever, admitting today's events solely on condition of effacing yesterday's ones, oozing the message of universal 'until-further-noticeness' of everything deemed worthy of recording). The main identity-bound anxiety of modern times was the worry about durability; it is the concern with commitment-avoidance today. Modernity built in steel and concrete; postmodernity, in bio-degradable plastic.

Identity as such is a modern invention. To say that modernity led to the 'disembedding' of identity, or that it rendered the identity 'unencumbered', is to assert a pleonasm, since at no time did identity 'become' a

problem; it was a 'problem' from its birth – was *born as a problem* (that is, as something one needs do something about – as a task), could exist only as a problem; it was a problem, and thus ready to be born, precisely because of that experience of under-determination and free-floatingness which came to be articulated *ex post facto* as 'disembeddedness'. Identity would not have congealed into a visible and graspable entity in any other but the 'disembedded' or 'unencumbered' form.

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. 'Identity' is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty. Hence 'identity', though ostensibly a noun, behaves like a verb, albeit a strange one to be sure: it appears only in the future tense. Though all too often hypostatized as an attribute of a material entity, identity has the ontological status of a project and a postulate. To say 'postulated identity' is to say one word too many, as neither there is nor can there be any other identity but a postulated one. Identity is a critical projection of what is demanded and/or sought upon what is; or, more exactly still, an oblique assertion of the inadequacy or incompleteness of the latter.

Identity entered modern mind and practice dressed from the start as an individual task. It was up to the individual to find escape from uncertainty. Not for the first and not for the last time, socially created problems were to be resolved by individual efforts, and collective maladies healed by private medicine. Not that the individuals were left to their own initiative and that their acumen was trusted; quite the contrary – putting the individual responsibility for self-formation on the agenda spawned the host of trainers, coaches, teachers, counsellors and guides all claiming to hold superior knowledge of what identities could be acquired and held. The concepts of identity-building and of culture (that is, of the idea of the individual incompetence, of the need of collective breeding and of the importance of skilful and knowledgeable breeders) were and could only be born together. The 'disembedded' identity simultaneously ushered in the individual's freedom of choice and the individual's dependency on expert guidance.

Modern life as pilgrimage

The figure of the pilgrim was not a modern invention; it is as old as Christianity. But modernity gave it a new prominence and a seminally novel twist.

When Rome lay in ruins – humbled, humiliated and sacked and pillaged by Alaric's nomads – St Augustine jotted down the following observation: '[I]t is recorded of Cain that he built a city, while Abel, as

though he were a merely a pilgrim on earth, built none.' 'True city of the saints is in heaven'; here on earth, says St Augustine, Christians wander 'as on pilgrimage through time looking for the Kingdom of eternity'.²

For pilgrims through time, the truth is elsewhere; the true place is always some distance, some time away. Wherever the pilgrim may be now, it is not where he ought to be, and not where he dreams of being. The distance between the true world and this world here and now is made of the mismatch between what is to be achieved and what has been. The glory and gravity of the future destination debases the present and makes light of it. For the pilgrim, what purpose may the city serve? For the pilgrim, only streets make sense, not the houses – houses tempt one to rest and relax, to forget about the destination. Even the streets, though, may prove to be obstacles rather than help, traps rather than thoroughfares. They may misguide, divert from the straight path, lead astray. 'Judeo-Christian culture,' writes Richard Sennett, 'is, at its very roots, about experiences of spiritual dislocation and homelessness. . . . Our faith began at odds with place.'³

'We are pilgrims through time' was, under the pen of St Augustine not an exhortation, but a statement of fact. We are pilgrims whatever we do, and there is little we can do about it even if we wished. Earthly life is but a brief overture to the eternal persistence of the soul. Only few would wish, and have the ability, to compose that overture themselves, in tune with the music of heavenly spheres – to make their fate into a consciously embraced destiny. These few would need to escape the distractions of the town. The desert is the habitat they must choose. The desert of the Christian hermit was set at a distance from the hurly-burly of family life, away from the town and the village, from the mundane, from the *polis*. The desert meant putting a distance between oneself and one's duties and obligations, the warmth and the agony of being with others, being looked at by others, being framed and moulded by their scrutiny, demands and expectations. Here, in mundane quotidianity, one's hands were tied, and so were one's thoughts. Here, horizon was tightly packed with huts, barns, copses, groves and church towers. Here, wherever one moved, one was *in a place*, and being in place meant staying put, doing what the place needed to be done. The desert, on the contrary, was a land not yet sliced into places, and for that reason it was the land of self-creation. The desert, said Edmond Jabès, 'is a space where one step gives way to the next, which undoes it, and the horizon means hope for a tomorrow which speaks.' 'You do not go to the desert to find identity, but to lose it, to lose your personality, to become anonymous. . . . And then something extraordinary happens: you hear silence speak.'⁴ The desert is the archetype and the greenhouse of the raw, bare, primal and bottom-line freedom that is but the absence of bounds. What made the mediaeval hermits feel so close to God in the desert was the feeling of being themselves god-like: unbound by habit and convention, by the needs of their own bodies and other people's souls, by their past deeds and

present actions. In the words of the present-day theorists, one would say that the hermits were the first to live through the experience of 'disembedded', 'unencumbered' selves. They were god-like, because whatever they did they did *ab nihilo*. Their pilgrimage to God was an exercise in self-construction (this is why the Church, wishing to be the sole connecting line to God, resented the hermits from the start – and soon went out of its way to force them into monastic orders, under the close supervision of rules and routine).

The Protestants, as Weber told us, accomplished a feat unthinkable for the lonely hermits of yore: they became *inner-worldly pilgrims*. They invented the way of embarking on pilgrimage without leaving home and of leaving home without becoming homeless. This they could do, however, only because the desert stretched and reached deep into their towns right up to their doorsteps. They did not venture into the desert; it was the world of their daily life which was turning more and more 'like the desert'. Like the desert, the world turned placeless; the familiar features had been obliterated, but the new ones which were meant to replace them were given the kind of permanence once thought as unique to the sand dunes. In the new post-Reformation city of modernity, the desert began on the other side of the door.

The Protestant, that pattern-setter (or is he but an allegory?) for the modern man, so Sennett tells us, was 'tempted by wilderness, by a place of emptiness which made no seductive demands of its own upon him'. In this he was not different from the hermit. The difference was that instead of travelling to the desert, the Protestant worked hard to make desert come to him – to remake the world in the likeness of the desert. 'Impersonality, coldness and *emptiness* are essential words in the Protestant language of environment; they express the desire to see the outside as null, lacking value.'⁵ This is the kind of language in which one speaks of the desert: of nothingness waiting to become something, if only for a while; of meaninglessness waiting to be given meaning, if only a passing one; of the space without contours, ready to accept any contour offered, if only until other contours are offered; of a space not scarred with past furrows, yet fertile with expectations of sharp blades; of virgin land yet to be ploughed and tilled; of the land of the perpetual beginning; of the place-no-place whose name and identity is not-yet. In such a land, the trails are blazed by the destination of the pilgrim, and there are few other tracks to reckon with.

In such a land, commonly called modern society, pilgrimage is no longer a choice of the mode of life; less still is it a heroic or saintly choice. Living one's life as pilgrimage is no longer the kind of ethical wisdom revealed to, or initiated by, the chosen and the righteous. Pilgrimage is what one does of necessity, to avoid being lost in a desert; to invest the walking with a purpose while wandering the land with no destination. Being a pilgrim, one can do more than walk – one can walk *to*. One can look back at the footprints left in the sand and see them as a road. One can

reflect on the road past and see it as a *progress towards*, an advance, a coming *closer to*; one can make a distinction between 'behind' and 'ahead', and plot the 'road ahead' as a succession of footprints yet to pockmark the land without features. Destination, the set purpose of life's pilgrimage, gives form to the formless, makes a whole out of the fragmentary, lends continuity to the episodic.

The desert-like world commands life to be lived as pilgrimage. But because life is a pilgrimage, the world at the doorsteps is desert-like, featureless, as its meaning is yet to be brought into it through the wandering which would transform it into the track leading to the finishing line where the meaning resides. This 'bringing in' of meaning has been called 'identity-building'. The pilgrim and the desert-like world he walks acquire their meanings *together*, and *through each other*. Both processes can and must go on because there is a distance between the goal (the meaning of the world and the identity of the pilgrim, always not-yet-reached, always in the future) and the present moment (the station of the wandering and the identity of the wanderer).

Both meaning and identity can exist only as *projects*, and it is the distance which enables projects to be. The 'distance' is what we call, in the 'objective' language of space, the experience which in 'subjective', psychological terms we speak about as dissatisfaction with, and denigration of, the here and now. The 'distance' and 'dissatisfaction' have the same referent, and both make sense within the life lived as pilgrimage.

It is the difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is *demanded* and that which is actually *achieved* that provides the driving factor which will permit of no halting at any position attained, but, in the poet's words 'Presses ever forward unsubdued' (Faust),⁶ observed Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel⁶ offers an extended commentary on that seminal observation, tracing the beginning of self-development, identity-building etc. to the primary condition of delayed gratification, of the never-to-be-bridged distance between the ego-ideal and the realities of the present.

'Distance' translates as 'delay' . . . Passage through space is a function of time, distances are measured by the time needed to cancel them. 'Here' is the waiting, 'there' is the gratification. How far is it from here to there, from the waiting to gratification, from the void to meaning, from the project to identity? Ten years, twenty? As long as it takes to live one's vocation through? Time one can use to measure distances must be of the sort the rulers are – straight, in one piece, with equidistant markings, made of tough and solid material. And such was, indeed, the time of modern living-towards-projects. Like life itself, it was directional, continuous, and unbendable. It 'marched on' and 'passed by'. Both life and time were made to the measure of pilgrimage.

For the pilgrim, for the modern man, this meant in practical terms that he could-should-had-to select his point of arrival fairly early in life with confidence, certain that the straight line of life-time ahead will not bend,

twist or warp, come to a halt or turn backwards. Delay of gratification, much as the momentary frustration it begot, was an energizing factor and the source of identity-building zeal in so far as it was coupled with the trust in the linearity and cumulativity of time. The foremost strategy of life as pilgrimage, of life as identity-building, was 'saving for the future', but saving for the future made sense as strategy only in so far as one could be sure that the future would reward the savings with interest and the bonus once accrued will not be withdrawn, that the savings will not be devalued before the bonus-distribution date or declared invalid currency; that what is seen today as capital will be seen the same way tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Pilgrims had a stake in solidity of the world they walked; in a kind of world in which one can tell life as a continuous story, a 'sense-making' story, such a story as makes each event the effect of the event before and the cause of the event after, each age a station on the road pointing towards fulfilment. The world of pilgrims – of identity-builders – must be orderly, determined, predictable, ensured; but above all, it must be a kind of world in which footprints are engraved for good, so that the trace and the record of past travels are kept and preserved. A world in which travelling may be indeed a pilgrimage. A world hospitable to the pilgrims.

The world inhospitable to pilgrims

The world is not hospitable to the pilgrims any more. The pilgrims lost their battle by winning it. They strove to make the world solid by making it pliable, so that identity could be *built at will*, but built *systematically*, floor by floor and brick by brick. They proceeded by turning the space in which identity was to be built into a desert. They found out that the desert, though comfortingly featureless for those who seek to make their mark, does not hold features well. The easier it is to emboss a footprint, the easier it is to efface it. A gust of wind will do. And deserts are windy places.

It soon transpired that the real problem is not how to build identity, but how to preserve it; whatever you may build in the sand is unlikely to be a castle. In a desert-like world it takes no great effort to blaze a trail – the difficulty is how to recognize it as a trail after a while. How to distinguish a forward march from going in circles, from eternal return? It becomes virtually impossible to patch the trodden stretches of sand into an itinerary – let alone into a plan for a lifelong journey.

The meaning of identity, points out Christopher Lasch, 'refers both to persons and to things. Both have lost their solidity in modern society, their definiteness and continuity.' The world constructed of durable objects has been replaced 'with disposable products designed for immediate obsolescence'. In such a world, 'identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume'.⁷ The horror of the new situation is

that all diligent work of construction may prove to be in vain; its allurements is the fact of not being bound by past trials, being never irrevocably defeated, always 'keeping the options open'. The horror and the allurements alike make life-as-pilgrimage hardly feasible as a strategy and unlikely to be chosen as one. Not by many, anyway. And not with great chance of success.

In the life-game of the postmodern consumers the rules of the game keep changing in the course of playing. The sensible strategy is therefore to keep each game short – so that a sensibly played game of life calls for the splitting of one big all-embracing game with huge stakes into a series of brief and narrow games with small ones. 'Determination to live one day at a time', 'depicting daily life as a succession of minor emergencies'⁶ become the guiding principles of all rational conduct.

To keep the game short means to beware long-term commitments. To refuse to be 'fixed' one way or the other. Not to get tied to the place. Not to wed one's life to one vocation only. Not to swear consistency and loyalty to anything and anybody. Not to *control* the future, but to *refuse to mortgage* it: to take care that the consequences of the game do not outlive the game itself, and to renounce responsibility for such as do. To forbid the past to bear on the present. In short, to cut the present off at both ends, to sever the present from history, to abolish time in any other form but a flat collection or an arbitrary sequence of present moments; a *continuous present*.

Once disassembled and no more a vector, time no longer structures the space. On the ground, there is no more 'forward' and 'backward'; it is just the ability not to stand still that counts. *Fitness* – the capacity to move swiftly where the action is and be ready to take in experiences as they come – takes precedence over *health*, that idea of the standard of normalcy and of keeping that standard stable and unscathed. All delay, including 'delay of gratification', loses its meaning: there is no arrow-like time left to measure it.

And so the snag is no longer how to discover, invent, construct, assemble (even buy) an identity, but how to prevent it from sticking. Well constructed and durable identity turns from an asset into a liability. The hub of postmodern life strategy is not identity building, but avoidance of fixation.

What possible purpose could the strategy of pilgrim-style 'progress' serve in this world of ours? In this world, not only have jobs-for-life disappeared, but trades and professions which have acquired the confusing habit of appearing from nowhere and vanishing without notice can hardly be lived as Weberian 'vocations' – and to rub salt into the wound, the demand for the skills needed to practise such professions seldom lasts as long as the time needed to acquire them. Jobs are no longer protected, and most certainly no better than the stability of places where they are practised; whenever the word 'rationalization' is pronounced, one knows for sure that the disappearance of further jobs and

places is in the pipeline. The stability and trustworthiness of the network of human relations fares little better. Ours is the age of Anthony Giddens's 'pure relationship' which 'is entered for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person' and so 'it can be terminated, more or less at will, by either partner at any particular point'; of 'confluent love' which 'jars with the "for-ever", "one-and-only" qualities of the romantic love complex' so that 'romance can no longer be equated with permanence'; of 'plastic sexuality', that is sexual enjoyment 'severed from its age-old integration with reproduction, kinship and the generations.'⁹ One can hardly 'hook on' an identity to relationships which themselves are irreparably 'unhooked'; and one is solemnly advised not to try – as the strong commitment, the deep attachment (let alone loyalty, that tribute to the by now obsolete idea that attachment has consequences that bind, while commitment means obligations) may wound and scar when the time to detach the self from the partner arrives, as it almost certainly will. The game of life is fast and leaves no time to pause and think and draw elaborate designs. But again, adding impotence to bafflement, the rules of the game keep changing long before the game is finished. In this 'cosmic casino' of ours (as George Steiner put it), values to be cherished and actively pursued, rewards to be fought for and stratagems to be deployed to get them, are all calculated 'for maximal impact and instant obsolescence'. For *maximal impact*, since in a world over-saturated with information attention turns into the scarcest of resources and only a shocking message, and one more shocking than the last, stands a chance of catching it (until the next shock); and *instant obsolescence*, as the site of attention needs to be cleared as soon as it is filled, to make room for new messages knocking at the gate.

The overall result is the *fragmentation* of time into *episodes*, each one cut from its past and from its future, each one self-enclosed and self-contained. Time is no longer a river, but a collection of ponds and pools.

No consistent and cohesive life strategy emerges from the experience which can be gathered in such a world – none remotely reminiscent of the sense of purpose and the rugged determination of the pilgrimage. Nothing emerges from that experience but certain, mostly negative, rules of the thumb: do not plan your trips too long – the shorter the trip, the greater the chance of completing it; do not get emotionally attached to people you meet at the stopover – the less you care about them, the less it will cost you to move on; do not commit yourself too strongly to people, places, causes – you cannot know how long they will last or how long you will count them worthy of your commitment; do not think of your current resources as of capital – savings lose value fast, and the once-vaunted 'cultural capital' tends to turn in no time into cultural *liability*. Above all, do not delay gratification, if you can help it. Whatever you are after, try to get it *now*, you cannot know whether the gratification you seek today will be still be gratifying tomorrow.

I propose that in the same way as the pilgrim was the most fitting

metaphor for the modern life strategy preoccupied with the daunting task of identity-building, the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player offer jointly the metaphor for the postmodern strategy moved by the horror of being bound and fixed. None of the listed types/styles are postmodern inventions – they were known well before the advent of postmodern times. And yet in the same way that the modern conditions reshaped the figure of pilgrim they inherited from Christianity, the postmodern context gives new quality to the types known to its predecessors – and it does it in two crucial respects. First: the styles once practised by marginal people in marginal time-stretches and marginal places, are now practised by the majority in the prime time of their lives and in places central to their life-world; they have become now, fully and truly, lifestyles. Second: for some, if not for all – the types are not a matter of choice, not either/or – postmodern life is too messy and incoherent to be grasped by any one cohesive model. Each type conveys but a part of the story which never integrates into a totality (its ‘totality’ is *nothing* but the sum of its parts). In the postmodern chorus, all four types sing – sometimes in harmony, though much more often with cacophony as the result.

The pilgrim’s successors

The stroller

Charles Baudelaire baptized Constantin Guy ‘the painter of modern life’ because Guy painted city streets scenes the way they were seen by the stroller (*flâneur*). Commenting on Baudelaire’s observation, Walter Benjamin made *flâneur* into a household name of cultural analysis and the central symbolic figure of the modern city. All strands of modern life seemed to meet and tie together in the pastime and the experience of the stroller: going for a stroll as one goes to a theatre, finding oneself among strangers and being a stranger to them (*in* the crowd but *not* of the crowd), taking in those strangers as ‘surfaces’ – so that ‘what one sees’ exhausts ‘what they are’ – and above all seeing and knowing of them episodically; psychically, strolling means rehearsing human reality as a series of episodes, that is as events without past and with no consequences. It also means rehearsing meetings as mis-meetings, as encounters without impact: the fleeting fragments of other persons’ lives the stroller spun off into stories at will – it was his perception that made them into actors, let alone the plot of the drama they play. The stroller was the past master of simulation – he imagined himself a scriptwriter and a director pulling the strings of other people’s lives without damaging or distorting their fate. The stroller practised the ‘as if’ life and the ‘as if’ engagement with other people’s life; he put paid to the opposition between ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’; he was the creator without penalties attached to creation, the

master who need not fear the consequences of his deeds, the bold one never facing the bills of courage. The stroller had all the pleasures of modern life without the torments attached.

Life-as-strolling was a far cry from the life-as-pilgrimage. What the pilgrim did in all seriousness, the stroller mocked playfully; in the process, he got rid of the costs and the effects alike. The stroller fitted ill the modern scene, but then he hid in its wings. He was the man of leisure and he hid his strolling in time of leisure. The stroller and the strolling waited at the periphery for their hour to arrive. And it did arrive – or rather it was brought by the postmodern avatar of the heroic producer into playful consumer. Now the strolling, once the activity practised by marginal people on the margins of ‘real life’, came to be life itself, and the question of ‘reality’ need not be dealt with any more.

‘Malls’ in its original meaning refers to the tracts for strolling. Now most of the malls are *shopping* malls, tracts to stroll while you shop and to shop in while you stroll. The merchandisers sniffed out the attraction and seductive power of strollers’ habits and set about moulding them into life. Parisian arcades have been promoted retrospectively to the bridgeheads of the times to come: the postmodern islands in the modern sea. Shopping malls make the world (or the carefully walled-off, electronically monitored and closely guarded part of it) safe for life-as-strolling. Or, rather, shopping malls are the worlds made by the bespoke designers to the measure of the stroller. The sites of mis-meetings, of encounters guaranteed to be episodic, of the present prised off from the past and the future, of surfaces glossing over surfaces. In these worlds, every stroller may imagine himself to be a director, though all strollers are the objects of direction. That direction is, as their own used to be, unobtrusive and invisible (though, unlike theirs, seldom inconsequential), so that baits feel like desires, pressures like intentions, seduction like decision-making; in the shopping malls, in life as shopping-to-stroll and strolling-to-shop, dependence dissolves in freedom, and freedom seeks dependence.

The malls initiated the postmodern promotion of the stroller, but also prepared the ground for further elevation (or is it purification?) of the stroller’s life-model. The latter has been achieved in the *telecity* (Henning Bech’s felicitous term), the city-as-the-stroller’s-haunt, distilled to its pure essence, now entering the ultimate shelter of the totally private, secure, locked and burglar-proof world of the lonely nomad, where the physical presence of strangers does not conceal or interfere with their psychical out-of-reachedness. In its *telecity* version, the streets and the shopping malls have been cleansed of all that which from the stroller’s point of view was sport-spoiling, an impurity, redundancy or waste – so that what has been retained can shine and be enjoyed in all its unspilled purity. In Bech’s words, ‘the screen mediated world of the *telecity* exists only by way of surfaces; and, tendentially, everything can and must be turned into an object for the gaze. . . . [T]here is, by way of “readings” of the

surface signs, opportunity for a much more intense and changing empathy in and out of identities, because of the possibilities of uninterfered and continual watching. . . . Television is totally non-committal.¹⁰ The ultimate freedom is screen directed, lived in the company of surfaces, and called zapping.

The vagabond

The vagabond was the bane of early modernity, the bugbear that spurred the rulers and the philosophers into an ordering and legislating frenzy.¹¹ The vagabond was *masterless*, and being masterless (out of control, out of frame, on the loose) was one condition modernity could not bear and thus spent the rest of its history fighting. The Elizabethan legislators were obsessed with the need to rule the vagrants out of the roads and back to the parishes 'where they belonged' (but which they left precisely because they *did not* belong any more). The vagabonds were the advanced troops or guerrilla units of the post-traditional chaos (construed by the rulers, in the usual fashion of using a mirror to paint the image of the Other, as *anarchy*), and they had to go if order (that is, space managed and monitored) was to prevail. It was the free-roaming vagabonds who made the search for new, state-managed, societal-level order imperative and urgent.

What made vagabonds so terrifying was their apparent freedom to move and so to escape the net of heretofore locally based control. Worse than that still, the movements of the vagabond are unpredictable; unlike the pilgrim the vagabond has no set destination. You do not know where he will move to next, because he himself does not know nor care much. Vagabondage has no advance itinerary – its trajectory is patched together bit by bit, one bit a time. Each place is for the vagabond a stop-over, but he never knows how long he will stay in any of them; this will depend on the generosity and patience of the residents, but also on news of other places arousing new hopes (the vagabond is pushed from behind by hopes frustrated, and pulled forward by hopes untested). The vagabond decides where to turn when he comes to the crossroads; he chooses the next stay by reading the names on the road signs. It is easy to control the pilgrim, so utterly predictable thanks to his self-determination. To control the wayward and erratic vagabond is a daunting task (though this proved to be one of the few tasks modern ingenuity did resolve).

Wherever the vagabond goes, he is a stranger; he can never be 'the native', the 'settled one', one with 'roots in the soil' (too fresh is the memory of his arrival – that is, of his being elsewhere before). Entertaining a dream of going native can only end in mutual recrimination and bitterness. It is better, therefore, not to grow too accustomed to the place. And, after all, other places beckon, not tested yet, perhaps more

hospitable, certainly able to offer new chances. Cherishing one's out-of-placeness is a sensible strategy. It gives all decisions the 'until-further-notice' flavour. It allows one to keep the options open. It prevents mortgaging the future. If natives cease to amuse, one can always try to find the more amusing ones.

The early modern vagabond wandered through the settled places; he was a vagabond because in no place could he be settled as the other people had been. The settled were many, the vagabonds few. Post-modernity reversed the ratio. Now there are few 'settled' places left. The 'forever settled' residents wake up to find the places (places in the land, places in society and places in life), to which they 'belong', no longer existing or no longer accommodating; neat streets turn mean, factories vanish together with jobs, skills no longer find buyers, knowledge turns into ignorance, professional experience becomes liability, secure networks of relations fall apart and foul the place with putrid waste. Now the vagabond is a vagabond not because of the reluctance or difficulty of settling down, but because of the scarcity of settled places. Now the odds are that the people he meets in his travels are other vagabonds – vagabonds today or vagabonds tomorrow. The world is catching up with the vagabond, and catching up fast. The world is re-tailoring itself to the measure of the vagabond.

The tourist

Like the vagabond, the tourist used once to inhabit the margins of 'properly social' action (though the vagabond was marginal *man*, while tourism was marginal *activity*), and has now moved to its centre (in both senses). Like the vagabond, the tourist is on the move. Like the vagabond, he is everywhere he goes *in*, but nowhere *of* the place he is in. But there are also differences, and they are seminal.

First, the balance between 'push' and 'pull' factors in the case of the tourist shifts toward the 'pull' end. The tourist moves *on purpose* (or so he thinks). His movements are first of all 'in order to', and only secondarily (if at all) 'because of'. The purpose is new experience; the tourist is a conscious and systematic seeker of experience, of a new and different experience, of the experience of difference and novelty – as the joys of the familiar wear off and cease to allure. The tourists want to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element (a pleasant feeling, a tickling and rejuvenating feeling, like letting oneself be buffeted by sea waves) – on condition, though, that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish. They choose the elements to jump into according to how strange, but also how innocuous, they are; you recognize the favourite tourist haunts by their blatant, ostentatious (if painstakingly groomed) oddity, but also by the profusion of safety cushions and well marked escape routes. In the tourist's world, the strange is tame, domesticated, and no longer frightens; shocks come in a

package deal with safety. This makes the world seem infinitely gentle, obedient to the tourist's wishes and whims, ready to oblige; but also a do-it-yourself world, pleasingly pliable, kneaded by the tourist's desire, made and remade with one purpose in mind: to excite, please and amuse. There is no other purpose to justify the presence of that world and the tourist's presence in it. The tourist's world is fully and exclusively structured by *aesthetic* criteria (ever more numerous writers who note the 'aestheticization' of the postmodern world to the detriment of its other, also moral, dimensions, describe – even if unaware of it – the world as seen by the tourist; the 'aestheticized' world is the world inhabited by tourists). Unlike in the life of the vagabond, tough and harsh realities resistant to aesthetic sculpting do not interfere here. One may say that what the tourist buys, what he pays for, what he demands to be delivered (or goes to court if delivery is delayed) is precisely the right not to be bothered, freedom from any but aesthetic spacing.

Second, unlike the vagabond who has little choice but to reconcile himself to the state of homelessness, the tourist has a home; or should have, at any rate. Having a home is a part of the safety package: for the pleasure to be unclouded and truly engrossing, there must be somewhere a homely and cosy, indubitably 'owned' place to go to when the present adventure is over, or if the voyage proves not as adventurous as expected. 'The home' is the place to take off the armour and to unpack – the place where nothing needs to be proved and defended as everything is just there, obvious and familiar. It is the placidity of home that sends the tourist to seek new adventures, but it is the selfsame placidity which renders the search of adventures an uncloudedly pleasurable pastime: whatever has happened to my face here, in the tourist land, or whichever mask I put on it, my 'real face' is in safe keeping, immune, stain-resistant, unsullied. . . . The problem is, though, that as life itself turns into an extended tourist escapade, as tourist conduct becomes the mode of life and the tourist stance grows into the character, it is less and less clear which one of the visiting places is the home. The opposition 'here I am but visiting, there is my home' stays clear-cut as before, but it is not easy to point out where the 'there' is. 'There' is increasingly stripped of all material features; the 'home' it contains is not even *imaginary* (each mental image would be too specific, too constraining), but *postulated*; what is postulated is *having* a home, not a particular building, street, landscape or company of people. Jonathan Matthew Schwartz advises us 'to distinguish the *homesick* searching from the nostalgic yearning'; the latter is, at least ostensibly, past oriented, while the home in homesickness is as a rule 'in the future perfect tenses. . . . It is an urge to feel at home, to recognize one's surroundings and belong there.'¹² Homesickness means a dream of *belonging*; to be, for once, *of* the place, not merely *in*. And yet if the present is notoriously the destination of all future tense, the future tense of 'homesickness' is an exception. The value of home for the homesick lies precisely in its tendency to stay in the future tense for ever.

It cannot move to the present without being stripped of its charm and allure; when tourism becomes the mode of life, when the experiences ingested thus far whet the appetite for further excitement, when the threshold of excitement climbs relentlessly upwards and each new shock must be more shocking than the last one – the possibility of the home-dream ever coming true is as horrifying as the possibility of it never becoming real. Homesickness, as it were, is not the sole tourist's sentiment: the other is the fear of *home-boundedness*, of being tied to a place and barred from exit. 'Home' lingers at the horizon of the tourist life as an uncanny mix of shelter and prison. The tourist's favourite slogan is 'I need more space'. And the space is the last thing one would find at home.

The player

In play, there is neither inevitability nor accident (there is no accident in a world that knows no necessity or determination); nothing is fully predictable and controllable, but nothing is totally immutable and irrevocable either. The world of play is soft yet elusive; in it, the thing that matters most is how well one plays one's hand. Of course, there is such a thing as a 'stroke of luck' – when cards are stacked in one's favour or wind helps the ball into the net. But the 'stroke of luck' (or misfortune, as it were) does not lend the world the toughness it conspicuously lacks; it only signals the limits of how far playing one's cards right may go in making things certain, but shares in the no-necessity no-accident status of the player's calculations.

In play, the world itself is a player, and luck and misfortune are but the moves of the world-as-player. In the confrontation between the player and the world there are neither laws nor lawlessness, neither order nor chaos. There are just the moves – more or less clever, shrewd or tricky, insightful or misguided. The point is to guess the moves of the adversary and anticipate them, prevent or pre-empt – to stay 'one ahead'. The rules the player may follow can be no more than rules of thumb; heuristic, not algorithmic instructions. The player's world is the world of *risks*, of intuition, of precaution-taking.

Time in the world-as-play divides into a succession of games. Each game is made of conventions of its own; each is a separate 'province of meaning' – a little universe of its own, self-enclosed and self-contained. Each demands that disbelief be suspended – though in each game a different disbelief is to be suspended. Those who refuse to obey the conventions do not rebel against the game; they only opt out and cease to be players. But the 'game goes on', and whatever the quitters say and do after that does not influence it a bit. The walls of the game are impenetrable, the voices outside reach the inside only as a muted, inarticulate noise.

Each game has its beginning and its end. The worry of the player is that each game should indeed start from the beginning, from 'square one', as

if no games were played before and none of the players has amassed wins or losses which would make mockery of the 'zero point' and transform what was to be a beginning into a continuation. For this reason, however, one must make sure that the game also has a clear, uncontested ending. It should not 'spill over' into the time after: as far as later games are concerned, no game played before must handicap, privilege or otherwise determine the players – *be of consequence*. Whoever does not like the outcome must 'cut their losses' and start from scratch – and be able to do just that.

To make sure that no game leaves lasting consequences, the player must remember (and so must his/her partners and adversaries), that 'this is *but a game*'. An important, though difficult to accept reminder, is the purpose of the game is to win and so the game allows no room for pity, compassion, commiseration or cooperation. The game is like war, yet that war which is a game must leave no mental scars and no nursed grudges: 'we are grown up people, let us part as friends' demands the player opting out of the game of marriage, in the name of the gamesmanship of future, however merciless, games. War that is a game absolves the conscience for its lack of scruples. The mark of postmodern adulthood is the willingness to embrace the game wholeheartedly, as children do.

What chance of morality? What chance of polity?

Each of the four types sketched above contains a solid dose of ambivalence of its own; in addition, they also differ from each other in a number of respects, and so blending them into one cohesive lifestyle is not an easy matter. No wonder there is quite a generous pinch of schizophrenia in each postmodern personality – which goes some way towards accounting for the notorious restlessness, fickleness and irresoluteness of practised life strategies.

There are, though, certain features which the four types share. The most seminal among them are their effects on popular moral and political attitudes, and indirectly on the status of morality and politics in a postmodern context.

Elsewhere I suggested that modernity was prominent for the tendency to shift moral responsibilities away from the moral self either towards socially constructed and managed supra-individual agencies, or through floating responsibility inside a bureaucratic 'rule of nobody'.¹³ The overall result was, on the one hand, the tendency to substitute ethics, that is a law-like code of rules and conventions, for moral sentiments, intuitions and urges of autonomous selves; and, on the other, the tendency towards 'adiaphorization', that is exemption of a considerable part of human action from moral judgement and, indeed, moral significance. These processes are by no means a thing of the past – but it seems that their impact is somewhat less decisive than in the times of 'classic' modernity. I

suggest that the context in which moral attitudes are forged (or not) is today that of life-politics, rather than social and system structures; that, in other words, the postmodern life strategies, rather than the bureaucratic mode of management of social processes and coordinating action, are the most consequential among the factors shaping the moral situation of postmodern men and women.

All four intertwining and interpenetrating postmodern life strategies have in common that they tend to render human relations fragmentary (remember the 'purity' of relations reduced to single function and service) and discontinuous; they are all up in arms against 'strings attached' and long-lasting consequences, and militate against the construction of lasting networks of mutual duties and obligations. They all favour and promote a distance between the individual and the Other and cast the Other primarily as the object of aesthetic, not moral, evaluation; as a matter of taste, not responsibility. In the effect, they cast individual autonomy in opposition to moral (as well as all the other) responsibilities and remove huge areas of human interaction, even the most intimate among them, from moral judgement (a process remarkably similar in its consequences to bureaucratically promoted adiaphorization). Following the moral impulse means assuming responsibility for the other, which in turn leads to an engagement with the fate of the other and commitment to her/his welfare. The disengagement and commitment-avoidance favoured by all four postmodern strategies has a backlash effect in the shape of the suppression of the moral impulse as well as disavowal and denigration of moral sentiments.

What has been said above may well seem jarringly at odds with the cult of interpersonal intimacy, also a prominent feature of postmodern consciousness. There is no contradiction here, though. The cult is no more than a psychological (illusory and anxiety-generating) compensation for the loneliness that inevitably envelops the aesthetically oriented subjects of desire; and it is, moreover, self-defeating, as the consequence-proof interpersonality reduced to 'pure relationships' can generate little intimacy and sustains no trustworthy bridges over the sandpit of estrangement. As Christopher Lasch noted a decade and a half ago, 'the culture of personal relations . . . conceals a thoroughgoing disenchantment with personal relations, just as the cult of sensuality implies a repudiation of sensuality in all but its most primitive forms'. Our society 'has made deep and lasting friendships, love affairs and marriages increasingly difficult to achieve'.¹⁴

Political disablement of postmodern men and women arises from the same source as the moral one. Aesthetic spacing, preferred by and dominant in all listed postmodern strategies, differs from other kinds of social spacing (like moral or cognitive) in that it does not choose as its points of reference and orientation the traits and qualities possessed by or ascribed to the objects of spacing, but the attributes of the spacing subject (like interest, excitement, satisfaction or pleasure). As Jean-François

Lyotard recently observed, 'the objects and the contents have become indifferent. The only question is whether they are "interesting"'.¹⁵ The world turns into the pool of potentially interesting objects, and the task is to squeeze out of them as much interest as they may yield. The task and its successful accomplishment stand and fall, however, by the effort and ingenuity of the interest-seeker. There is little or nothing that can be done by, and about, the objects themselves.¹⁶ Focusing on the interest-seeking subject blurs the contours of the world in which the interest is to be sought. Met (mis-met?) only perfunctorily, in passing, surface deep, the objects do not come into vision as entities in their own right, such as may need more vigour, improvement, or a different shape altogether; we do not ruminate on the way to rectify commodities displayed on the supermarket shelves – if we find them unsatisfactory, we pass them by, with our trust in the supermarket system unscathed, in the hope that products answering our interests will be found on the next shelf or in the next shop. Emancipation, says Lyotard, 'is no more situated as an alternative to reality, as an ideal set to conquer and force itself upon reality from outside'; in consequence, the militant practice has been replaced by a defensive one, one that is easily assimilated by the 'system' since it is now assumed that the latter contains all the bits and pieces from which the 'emancipated self' will be eventually assembled.¹⁷ The 'system' has done all it possibly can. The rest is up to those who 'play it'.

Exaggerating the picture, but only slightly, one may say that in popular perception the duty of the postmodern citizen (much like the duty of the inmates of Rabelais's Abbey of Têlème) is to lead an enjoyable life. To treat subjects as citizens, the state is obliged to supply the facilities deemed necessary for such life, and not to give occasion for doubt that performance of the duty is feasible. This does not necessarily mean that the life of so reduced citizens must be unmitigated bliss. Discontent does arise, sometimes so acute as to prompt action reaching beyond the ordinary preoccupation with self-care. This happens time and again, even regularly, whenever the limits of individual pursuit of 'the interesting' are brought into relief; whenever factors evidently beyond individual control (like for instance planning decisions about a new bypass, motorway, residential developments likely to attract 'outsiders', closing a hospital, 'rationalizing' a school or a college) interfere with the interest-content of the environment. And yet the momentary explosions of solidary action which may result do not alter the essential traits of postmodern relationships: their fragmentariness and discontinuity, narrowness of focus and purpose, shallowness of contact. Joint engagements come and go, and in each case, indeed, the emergent 'totality' is no more than 'the sum of its parts'. Besides, the diffuse grudges and grievances, as a rule spawning one-issue campaigns, do not add up, condense or show a propensity for reinforcing each other. On the contrary – vying with each other for the scarce resource of public attention, they divide as much as they unite. One may say that the bones

of contention do not fit together to form a skeleton around which a non-fragmentary and continuous, shared engagement could be wrapped.

Stuart Hall has pithily summarized the resulting condition and the prospects it may or may not hold: 'We don't have alternative means by which adults can benefit from the ways in which people have released themselves from the bonds of traditionalist forms of living and thinking, and still exert responsibilities for others in a free and open way. We have no notion of democratic citizenship in this sense.'¹⁸ Or perhaps we may have – imagine – such a notion; what we cannot imagine, having no time left for exercising imagination, is a network of relationships that would accommodate and sustain such a notion. It is, in the end, the old truth all over again: each society sets limits to the life strategies that can be imagined, and certainly to those which can be practised. But the kind of society we live in limits such strategy(ies) as may critically and militantly question its principles and thus open the way to new strategies, at present excluded because of their non-viability. . . .

Dedicated to Judith Adler

Notes

- 1 Douglas Kellner 'Popular culture and constructing postmodern identities', in Scott Lasch and Jonathan Friedman (eds), *Modernity and Identity*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.
- 2 St Augustine *The City of God*, trans. Gerald S. Walsh et al., Image, New York, 1958.
- 3 Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, Faber and Faber, London, 1993, p. 6.
- 4 Edmond Jabès *The Books of Questions*, Vol. II, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1991, p. 342; *The Book of Margins*, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1993, p. xvi. Jabès quotes the words of Gabriel Bounoure: 'The desert, by its exclusion of housing, opens an infinite elsewhere to man's essential wandering. Here, no here makes sense' (*The Book of Margins*, p. 16).
- 5 Sennett, *Conscience of the Eye*, pp. 44, 46.
- 6 Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *The Ego-Ideal: A Psychoanalytic Essay on the Malady of the Ideal*, trans. Paul Barrows, Free Association Books, London, 1985.
- 7 Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*, Pan Books, London, 1985, pp. 32, 34, 38.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 62.
- 9 Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, pp. 58, 137, 61, 52, 27.
- 10 Henning Bech, 'Living together in the (post)modern world'. Paper presented at the session on Changing Family Structure and the New Forms of Living Together, European Conference of Sociology, Vienna, 22–28 August 1992.
- 11 Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: on Modernity, Postmodernity and Intellectuals*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1987, Chapter 3.
- 12 Jonathan Matthew Schwartz, *In Defense of Homosexuality: Nine Essays on Identity and Locality*, Akademisk Forlag, Copenhagen, 1989, pp. 15, 32.
- 13 Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993, Chapter 7: *Postmodern Ethics*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1993.

14 Christopher Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, Warner Books, New York, 1979, pp. 102, 69.

15 Jean-François Lyotard, *Moralités postmodernes*, Galilée, Paris, 1993, pp. 32–3.

16 Says Lasch: 'Having no hope of improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement: getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to "relate", overcoming the "fear of pleasure"' (*Culture of Narcissism*, p. 29). Let us add that the diffuse, unfocused feeling that not all is well with the programme tends to be articulated as an issue of therapy aimed at the hapless or inept self-improver – but is channelled away from the programme itself; if anything, the programme emerges from the test with reinforced authority.

17 Lyotard, *Moralités postmodernes*, pp. 66–8.

18 Stuart Hall, 'Thatcherism today', *New Statesman and Society*, 26 November 1993, p. 16.

3

Enabling Identity? Biology, Choice and the New Reproductive Technologies

Marilyn Strathern

Whether primacy is given to social ties or biological ones, it seems that the late twentieth century affords new possibilities for people who wish to be certain about how and why they are related. This is true both of legal redress (what the courts are prepared to countenance) and of technological intervention in the reproductive process. As possibilities, these instruments and techniques exist in a cultural environment of empowerment or enablement. If, then, one were to ask what might be new and what might be old in such pursuits of identity, one would have to consider what is being enabled. One would also have to consider the value put on 'enablement' itself. This chapter sketches some of the cultural paradoxes that the idea stimulates, and some of the resultant contradictions that seem to lie in what people are able to make of identity through kinship.

It was with an evident sense of novelty that in 1992, first a girl and then a boy were reported in the British press to have divorced their parents.¹ They were both exercising the power, under the 1989 Children Act, to take legal action on their own account, and did so from a desire to move away from their mother and to reside with their grandparent(s). A claim going through the Florida courts a couple of months earlier had attracted similar publicity. Whereas in the British cases the severance of the child's tie with the parent lay in the assertion of legal autonomy and rejection of the parental home, the Florida twelve-year-old, in the words of the *New York Times*,² asked the court 'to end the parental rights of his biological mother'. It was not just a question of where the boy should live but who would be recognized as a parent (he wanted his foster parents to adopt him). The case was widely interpreted as an example of a child wanting to 'choose' his or her parents.

One might conclude from the way the issues were being presented that desire is thus realized in the exercise of choice. This would make sense of the analogy with marriage and its undoing, 'divorce'.

Yet the analogy is an odd one. Divorce is the undoing of a choice, as the contract is usually construed, whereas the boy was contesting rights