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# The Rise of Counter-culture Movements Against Modernity: Nature as a New Field of Class Struggle

*Klaus Eder*

## Introduction

We are experiencing today a flowering of counter-culture movements ranging from psycho-culture to deep ecology (Jerome, 1974; Luke, 1988). Attacks on modern culture based on its rationalism have always been a commonplace. But something has changed. The protest has gained a political dimension that disturbs the institutional reproduction of modern societies. For it attacks the model of social development particular to advanced western industrial societies.<sup>1</sup> It seems to lead to a central conflict in the modern world much more pervasive than that of the nineteenth century. It is the conflict about what type of development modern societies should engage in. The new counter-culture movements are trying to stall and even reverse what they regard as the self-defeating process of modernization (Yinger, 1982).

One manifestation of the self-defeating process of modernization is the increasing environmental crisis. This crisis has begun to mobilize counter-culture movements all over the world. Increasingly it seems that the less counter-culture movements against modernity are mobilized the more the negative consequences of modernization will be felt. But these movements also change the cultural definition of the relation of men to nature. For these movements define the relation of men to nature as one of *exploitation*.

The following analysis of the confrontation between counter-culture movements and advanced modern societies in environmental crisis will focus on Europe (without reference to the American, Russian and Third World arenas). To understand the conditions and implications of this phenomenon we can start with three propositions:

- (1) The exploitation of nature is, like the exploitation of the

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workforce, part of a global process of modernization and rationalization — of which capitalist development is only one aspect. No country escapes the dynamic of this process. A general rule of differentiation holds, however, that the more dependent the country, the more nature is exploited, or the other way around: the less dependent the country, the more the problem of exploitation of nature is thematized.

(2) The ongoing differentiation and intensification of the exploitation of nature is changing the class structure of advanced modern societies. The dominance of the working class in determining cultural directions is being usurped. This process fosters the making of a new social class.

(3) The emerging new class structure replaces the model of industrialism constitutive for capitalist and socialist societies and gives counter-culture movements a central role in determining the direction of further 'modernization'. A new type of society is emerging in which class conflict will be centered around the problem of the exploitation of nature.

QED. To support these propositions we will first demonstrate how the rationalist tradition in modern culture, including the Marxian critique of modern society, is insensitive to the relation of men to nature and then locate the counter-culture movements within what we can call the 'purity perspective' with respect to nature. We will then examine a historical reconstruction of counter-culture traditions that shows how these movements and their carriers are intimately tied to the 'problem of nature'. This background will allow us to describe the emergence of new counter-culture movements as indicators of a new class struggle and a new class structure concerned with the exploitation of nature. Finally some theoretical and methodological consequences of these changes for a renewal of critical theory will be discussed.

## **A Cultural Critique of Modernism**

### *Marx's Concept of Nature*

A look at Marx is justified on the ground that Marx's theory of history explicitly takes the relationship with nature into account to explain what triggers progress in modern societies (Cohen, 1978: 96ff.). This explanation assumes two contradictions as mechanisms of progress: that between the relations of production and the forces of production and that among social classes. How these contradictions relate to each other and to social development is one of the most difficult

problems in the interpretation of Marx's theoretical thinking (Godelier, 1978; Habermas, 1979; Elster, 1982, 1985). I do not want to go into this in detail (Eder, 1990a). I would rather concentrate on the problems of conceptualizing the forces of production within the first and basic contradiction and their implication for the theory of class conflict.

This 'productive' side of the contradiction is interesting because it takes into account the relation of men to nature as it impacts the progress of mankind. Marx gives the productive forces the role of a pacemaker. He sees the way a society relates to its natural environment as decisive for its development. The key to Marx's understanding of nature and its cultural use is in this conception that the natural environment is something to be besieged by men. Marx — at least in the later stages of his thinking (Schmidt, 1971: 210f.) — sees the natural environment as a mere object of human activity.

The conception of a relation to nature has been 'naturalized' by Marx. This point is made by Sahlins (1976) in his critique of Marx's conception of culture and nature. Nature is not, Sahlins argues, a mere object to be appropriated. Nature is socially constituted and culturally defined. There is no natural environment. Rather society creates nature as a cultural environment (Moscovici, 1968, 1972). Criticizing Marx because of his naturalism concerning nature we arrive at the conclusion that relating to nature is culturally variable and that the relation taken by Marx as the natural one is just a special case to be explained by his cultural milieu. Today it has become apparent that modern society can no longer integrate this particular culturally defined environment into its own reproduction. It has produced a form of nature whose effects it can no longer control. The cultural model of nature defended by Marx has led us directly into what we call now the environmental crisis.

Marx could not foresee the effects of the specifically modern form of a relation to nature and the effects of releasing the forces of production. He saw only that the relations of production were factors blocking the progress built into the forces of production. To dissolve these social relations of production class struggle was necessary. The relationship with nature embodied in the forces of production will not be affected by this class struggle. For the direction of the development of the forces of production is 'naturally' defined given the premise that the increasing domination over nature is contributing to progress of mankind. Changing the social relations of production through class struggle thus would only lead to optimizing the

domination of nature. The class struggle as conceived by Marx enables men to increase the domination of nature. This might explain why Marx sees no reason to see the relationship with nature as an object or field of class struggle.

In the meantime we have perceived the domination of nature as inextricable from the exploitation of nature. The forces of production incorporating an exploitative relationship with nature have generated a new basis for class conflict in modern society. In addition to the field of the social relations of production the field of the social relations with nature has become an arena of class conflict in modern society. A new class conflict is emerging that mobilizes a type of movement different from that typical for nineteenth-century class conflicts over wages. This new class conflict integrates counter-culture movements into the class struggle. For these counter-culture movements happen to be carriers of cultural traditions that thematize the social relations of nature. In so far as social relations with nature are becoming the central problem of the reproduction of modern society these counter-culture traditions are becoming the determinants of the cultural model that is at stake in the new type of class conflict. Thematizing nature as a field of class struggle forces us to overcome the cultural restrictions typical for Marx's view of modern society. We have to rebuild our theoretical conceptions to reflect the cultural logic of the relation of men to nature in modern society.

Marx provides no framework for the cultural traditions within which modern society organizes its relationship with nature. Instead of analysing cultural traditions he relies on the Hegelian belief in the 'objective spirit'. But this objective spirit turns out to be a very subjective one, the spirit of the dominant European cultural tradition. Marx thus ends up producing euphemisms for the outgrowth of a specific type of Enlightenment optimism prevalent in the beginning of modern society. Practically speaking, he endorses the belief in progress by science and the belief in *homo faber* shaping his natural (and social!) environment at will.

Thus the type of thought constitutive for modern social criticism turns out to be uncritical in a decisive respect. It is significant to note that the theory most critical of modern society shares with the competing systems of social and political thought — the liberal and conservative — the basic assumptions that nature is subject to man and that nature has to be conquered by man in order to further the progress of mankind.

*Alternatives to Modernism*

Disputing Marx is the reality of two competing cultural traditions in European history that thematize the relation to nature. Their basic antagonism can be traced back to traditions prior to the beginning of modernity in Europe. The cultural roots of the modern counter-culture can be found in the Greek and Jewish cultural heritage that constitute via the Christianization of Europe its cultural history (Eder, 1989). This double tradition continued even though traditional society faltered and modern society emerged. Marx adheres to the first tradition. The tradition he represents is an integral part of the process of rationalizing social and political thought tied to the modernization of society. The other tradition is embodied in the history of the counter-culture movements that have accompanied modernization since its beginning. Marx's theoretical perspective on the cultural tradition he lives in relativizes his contribution to the understanding of modern society: it appears to be a culturally very specific one. But his type of thinking has dominated modern intellectual thought — from conservative to radical. Marx is only the most interesting figure in this tradition because he bases his most devastating critique of modern society, his analysis of capital, on a very specific reading of the cultural context from within which he argues.

To transcend this particularistic restriction, sociological thinking needs to distance itself more radically from its own traditions. It has to radicalize its emancipation from social and political thought and constitute itself as a science able to analyse and criticize this cultural tradition instead of simply adhering to it. Only such a radicalism will help us to escape restricting the critical role which is the only legitimization of sociological analysis.

To bring other cultural traditions back than the dominant ones into the social analysis and explanation of modern societies requires an even more radical critique. The self-ascribed rationalism of modern culture was criticized by Marx as being insensitive to social differences, an argument that stimulates a 'social critique of practical reason'.<sup>2</sup> Today we can further extend this critique with a 'cultural critique of practical reason' (Eder, 1988). This cultural critique identifies not only the different usages of practical reason among social classes, as Bourdieu (1984) proposes, thus continuing the Marxian argument, but differentiates among meanings of practical reason that result from different cultural traditions within modern culture. Such a 'cultural critique' of the dominant rationalism of modern culture, of 'modernism', thematizes the problem of nature in a new way. This will enable

us to view nature as a field of cultural struggles and lead us to a theoretical explanation of the objective meaning of the so-called environmental crisis.

Going beyond Marx means that sociological analysis has to relinquish the predominant modes of social and political thought dominating modern culture. We have to develop an adequate sociological critique of the intellectual rationalizations shaping modern culture, its 'modernism'. To do so we can no longer rely simply on the intellectual history as the reference history for an understanding of the modern cultural world. We have to examine the non-rational foundations of rationality and see how the intellectual history itself develops from this source.

Thus, from a sociological point of view, we have to establish this intellectual history (i.e. 'modernism') as an *object* of analysis. We have to *objectify* this history. Reconstructing it will show us what kind of symbolism lies beneath the claims of rationality in modern culture. The rationalizing factors that are built into the intellectual history of modernity will become clearer. We will above all be able to undermine the naturalistic assumptions within this intellectual history and to relate them to the underlying symbolic structure defining the relation of men to nature.

To approach such non-rational foundations of rationality we can start with the fact that no modern intellectual system of thought escapes the problem of defining some basic set of principles or values. These systems of thought differ to the extent they make use of such 'anthropological' assumptions. We could state the following 'law of rationality': the less there are anthropological assumptions the more advanced the formal structure of social and political thought. But taking the point of view of a historical sociologist the decisive problem lies with the problem of identifying the basic assumptions on which these intellectual systems are built. Relating such assumptions to basic cultural premises to a basic symbolic code (Geertz, 1966, 1973; Douglas, 1975), we will be able to objectify this rationalist tradition. We will be able to grasp modernism as a specific cultural tradition within modern society.

The basic assumptions defining the symbolic code of 'modernism' can be described in two respects: first, as an attempt to distance it from all previous cultural traditions and second, as an attempt to constitute society beyond nature. Modernism's characteristics are thus negative attitudes toward the *cultural tradition* from which it comes and toward *nature* within which it lives. This is the basic



premise of modernism: to locate itself outside nature and culture as the context of thinking and action. Modernism negates the impact of culture and nature upon its own form of thinking. And in terms of social and political thought this negation leads to ethnocentrism (in the worst case) or to anthropocentrism (in the best case).

The last critique thematizes the basic anthropological assumptions of the rationalism of systems of thought in modern society. We find the symbolic universe underlying modern rational philosophical systems within such anthropological assumptions. The premise of such systems of thought is a general anthropocentrism: the model of human action and interaction is the standard of comparison for the model of the interaction between men and nature. Thus the symbolic code of a relationship that subordinates nature to man is built.

Analysing the relation of men to nature leads us to ask how, for example, modern philosophical systems give to the relationship with nature a coherent and consistent justification. We could, for example, use the Kantian moral ethic, reading it as applying exclusively to men. Men are thought of as acting according to the a priori principles of practical reason. Nature is then clearly inferior to men. But this hierarchy is not a logically necessary outcome of rational reflection. It is an outcome of a cultural tradition that has turned on its head the subordination of men to super-nature. Anthropocentrism is as much a cultural institution as theocentrism traditionally was. Modernism rests on a symbolic code that is ultimately hierarchical, based on models of higher and lower levels of consciousness, of higher and lower stages of development, of higher and lower rights of being.

### *Alternatives to 'Modernism'*

This modernism has however lost its monopolistic position in advanced modern societies. Modern culture offers us at least three alternatives, *postmodernism*, *primitivism* and *traditionalism* (Friedman, 1988). Modernism as discussed above is the form contained in intellectual systems. The other three offer 'non-modernist' approaches that differ from 'modernism' in so far that they give up the idea of a society disembedded from its cultural tradition and from nature. These four ideal types of cultural tradition can be schematized as combinations of a positive or negative view on nature and culture:

		culture	
nature		+	-
	+	postmodernism	primitivism
	-	traditionalism	modernism

Modernism is only one of the four possibilities. Modernism applies a practical reason that gives a negative symbolic value to both culture and nature. Postmodernism on the other hand generates a practical reason within a symbolic world that puts positive emphasis upon nature and culture. Primitivism and traditionalism radicalize the one or the other symbolic value. Even if the latter are fashionable they are excluded from further discussion as symbolic contexts that only aggravate the problems modern society runs into. Neither a return to nature nor a return to the old virtues will help. Thus we are left with 'postmodernism' as the only viable alternative to 'modernism'.<sup>3</sup>

The difference between the remaining two can be used to systematically analyse dominant and counter-culture traditions in modern culture. The perspective taken allows us to see the two sides of modernity (Schäfer, 1985) without a priori assumptions concerning their rationality or irrationality. I see modernism and postmodernism as nothing but the intellectual surfaces of the deeper cultural streams, of two ways of relating to our cultural traditions and of two ways of relating to nature. Both are, as we will see, closely related. On a structural level we can say that we have to go behind these competing systems of thought to different constructions of the culture-nature relationship, to different ideas of the dividing line between nature and culture. And this dividing line is, as cultural anthropologists can tell us, the basis of civilization and its development.

Sociological analysis has to name the illusion of being outside of and apart from any cultural and natural context. And it has to be sensitive to countercurrents, for alternatives to the dominating modes of thought. This does not mean that it has to side with these countercurrents or alternatives. On the contrary, it has to 'objectify' with respect to both sides of modern culture.

## **Modern Counter-culture Traditions**

### *The Other Image of Nature In Early Modern Europe*

We do not have to look to a distant past or to faraway societies to find social forces that can be seen as carriers of a social relation to nature other than that characteristic for modern European societies.

European cultural history also contains currents of thought and action committed to a more sensitive relation to nature. But these currents have so far remained undercurrents, not taken very seriously either by the dominating social forces and social movements in modern society or by its theorists — and Marx is only one of the more important ones.

In the following we will see how a double cultural tradition has developed in the course of European history. The increase in knowledge that allowed for the rationalization and ultimately instrumentalization of our relation to nature also produced a parallel sensitivity to the nature being objectified. Historical research undertaken by Thomas (1983) summarizes the alternatives of the relation of men to nature in modern society in the following four dichotomies (1983: 242ff.): *town* and *country*, *cultivation* and *wilderness*, *conquest* and *conservation*, and *meat* or *mercy*.

At least after the experience of the great urban epidemics, the country became sentimentally the locus of a better life, a life closer to nature. The wilderness was where the old virtues of men, their natural forces, were still useful, even necessary. Conservation principles developed as an attempt to save the natural world from the destructive effects of civilization. And an attitude developed toward beasts as being not prey or food but fellow creatures, i.e. mercy. These ideas lay at the base of all the cultural movements that have emerged since the eighteenth century. They idealize the country life, seek a better life in the wilderness, call for the conservation of nature and a right to life for threatened creatures, and plead for an end to killing animals simply for the sake of human consumption.

Thus we cannot accept the idea of a sharp division between an early 'medieval' and a later 'modern' stage in European history, where the early stage is characterized as when poetry and concrete imagery governed the relations between man and nature and the later period as one when abstract understanding and rational/scientific treatment of nature triumphed. There are crosscurrents in this history and we must give due respect to its complexities. We propose however to reduce the complexity to two ideal crosscurrents: to a culture that sees nature as something to be dominated by men and to a counter-culture embodying a natural piety toward nature. These two crosscurrents disagree over whether absolute human superiority over nature is universally shared or not.

It has been long-established Christian doctrine that people can justifiably do what they will with the animals and plants put into

the world for their use and delectation. But there have always been some practices that split this doctrine. One of them has been hunting. Thomas More thought hunting the most abject form of butchery whereas others thought it to be a ritual form of struggle with nature allowing man (male man) to find himself within the universe. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a new refinement of sentiment toward the natural world, at least in the middle classes, could be felt throughout European countries (Harwood, 1928; Salt, 1886, 1980). Thus even before the romantic movement there were trends that made nature venerable. And all this happened before Bentham found in mere sentience the basis of all morality that included each being capable of sentiments (thus moving men away from his metaphysical pedestal!).

In this sense we can trace a line from the Greek Cynics, Sceptics and Epicureans who denied that mankind was the centre of the universe down to modern counter-culture movements (Sloterdijk, 1983; Niehues-Pröbsting, 1988). But this line of philosophical reasoning ended in a naturalism that did not offer a moral foundation of non-instrumental attitude to the natural world. To look for a moral foundation — as Bentham thought — in utilitarian philosophy is a difficult course to accept. For this would imply using utilitarian philosophy to ground a non-utilitarian attitude towards the natural world (Singer, 1976, 1979). It would mean enlisting the devil to attack himself. A possible solution might lie in some kind of principled rejection of anthropocentrism (Spinoza could be an example) or a Kantian practical reason that mediates between man and nature rather than makes him the master of the universe (Böhme and Böhme, 1983).

Historically, the intellectual representation of these counter-movements within 'Romanticism' has become historically decisive (Weiss, 1986). It has been the first intellectual endeavour that did have long-standing effects upon the intellectual rationalization of man's relation to the natural world within European cultural history. For it produced the first intellectual rationalization of counter-culture traditions.

### *The Romantic Model*

The early modern development of sentiments toward nature can, as Thomas (1983) has argued, be seen as the beginning of a non-utilitarian attitude to nature. But this 'development' is probably nothing more than a more public manifestation of attitudes prevalent throughout early modern history (and before). Increasing

communication is certainly responsible for this unveiling. It has led to the thematization of those things outside official culture such as animal liberation and the encouragement of a gentle relation to nature that first culminated in the Romantic movement.

The model of an alternative relationship with nature can be reconstructed from what has been called the Romantic movement. The Romantic movement extended the universality of moral rules beyond the human sphere to the beasts, to the plants, to nature as such. Nature was thought of as representing life and required therefore the application of moral principles. The universalism of the Enlightenment was thus radicalized to apply not only to human beings but to all life. Nature was enshrined as the real world beyond the artificial world of society and politics. The Romantic movement was primarily an intellectual and artistic movement (Timm, 1978; Weiss, 1986). It manifested itself in philosophy, literature and music. The Romantic idea of nature is therefore still primarily an intellectual/cognitive one. It is contained in ideas about a natural cosmos beyond what we can rationally grasp. Nature becomes the basis of a modernized religion for intellectuals and artists. It is also therefore opposed to modern science which reduces nature to an object of theoretical reason.

Underneath the intellectual surface was a broad stream of a more popular thought. In terms of their effect on everyday life, two types of cultural movements were the most important ones: the communal movements and the vegetarian movements (Krabbe, 1974; Frecot, 1976; Sprondel, 1986). Nineteenth-century experiments in country communal living were created to foster a closer relationship with nature. They mobilized people into leaving the cities. The concern with health dominated their relation to nature and practising horticulture gave them 'healthy', non-animal food. The movements for animal rights and the vegetarian movements promoted a genuinely social relationship with nature. The dialogue with nature the Romantics were dreaming of was practised and put into practice in these movements.

The embodiment of the Romantic moral can be found at the turn of the nineteenth century in the agrarian romanticism and in the agrarian communes which flowered in for example Germany between 1890–1933 and again after 1970 (Eder, 1988: 256ff.). The most famous early agrarian commune became the vegetarian horticultural colony 'Eden' that called for a new community of genuine pure life as opposed to the life in the cities (Linse, 1983b: 37ff.). This colony is part of

what has been called bourgeois fugitive movements that have to be understood within the context of the fin-de-siècle-feeling of the late nineteenth century (Hepp, 1987). After the First World War at the same time as and after the November revolution, this movement expanded rapidly (Linse, 1983a). We find communist communes, women's communes, populist and anarco-religious communes, evangelical and Quaker communes, and Jewish communes, all seeking a 'third way' between capitalism and communism (Linse, 1983b: 89ff.). The life reform movement, the heading under which these movements were later subsumed, was seen as the carrier toward another society. The communes of the second half of the twentieth century have continued this tradition (Abrams and McCulloch, 1976; Case and Taylor, 1979; Hollstein, 1981; Eder, 1988).<sup>4</sup>

The discussion of the Romantic movements and their derivatives shows that nature has since the beginning of modernity been the latent field of social and cultural struggles. Two factors have changed this latency. The ecological crisis has made nature the arena of public disputes. And, an increasing reflexivity in dealing with cultural traditions has led us to thematize competing notions of relating to nature. Both have made nature a manifest and increasingly central field of social struggles in modern society (Schimank, 1983). And there are reasons to see it as becoming the field of a new type of class struggle replacing the old one focused on the just distribution of goods in society. Such an emerging new class struggle would centre on another idea: on the idea of a more 'pure' nature, of an unpolluted environment (Eder, 1988).

To substantiate such an assumption we have to develop a more stringent theoretical account of the two cultural traditions that modern culture carries. The dominant tradition is tied to what I will call the 'justice perspective', the counter-culture tradition to the 'purity perspective'. Taking the first perspective as a point of departure we cannot grasp what the second tradition thematizes: the symbolic (non-rational) foundations of any claim of social rationality. Therefore the second perspective is the more fundamental one. Taking this perspective we will arrive at the symbolic level beneath the level of intellectual rationalizations that allows us to compare and to confront both traditions. Thus the ground for our last hypothesis is laid: that the symbolic order is where the new class conflict in advanced modern societies is located.

**Purity as the Key to Counter-culture Traditions***The Two Sides of Modern Culture*

It is not easy to find a common denominator for all the cultural movements that thematize a different relationship with nature. The differences are striking. A list of them includes, as we have seen, movements for animal rights, vegetarian movements, communitarian movements and movements for a more healthy and natural form of life. My sense of the common denominator is of a relationship to nature that gives it a symbolic meaning other than that institutionalized by society. Counter-culture traditions carry with them an alternative cultural code of relating to nature. This alternative code embodies a symbolic form of the relationship of men with nature, a sensibility toward nature as embodied in the Romantic model.

It is a relationship with nature opposed to the institutionalized, dominant relationship defined by the idea that man should conquer nature. Having experienced the negative consequences of this attitude toward nature, this dominant cultural code has started to be critical of itself. It has become commonplace to speak of men's 'exploitation of nature'. This self-critical description has not changed the symbolic form underlying the relation to nature. It has put into question the negative consequences of this symbolic form and tried to re-establish an equilibrium with nature that allows leaving the dominant symbolic form of relating to nature unchanged.

Both cultural codes are part of one culture; they can be seen as the two sides of one coin (Schäfer, 1985). Let's simply arrange these two sides as a series of opposing pairs. The dimensions referred to in these pairings are the cognitive, the affective and the normative. To give this scheme a substantive base I will use some of the categories used to describe nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernity. Such a binary analysis of modern culture can be represented in the following pairings:

<b>cognitive</b>	rationalism	romanticism
	science	religion
<b>normative</b>	possessivism	communalism
	participation	self-determination
<b>affective</b>	disenchantment	re-enchantment
	civilization	naturalism

These pairings confront the dominant culture and the counter-



culture on the level of their different rationalities. They explain the two ways the relationship with nature has been conceived. Nature is either treated as an object to be used or as a person to interact with. The first meaning is unambiguous. Within the dominant rationality nature has no chance to defend itself. Even supposing a utilitarian ethic to defend nature, it restricts itself using the principle of minimizing suffering to living beings. The second meaning is less clear-cut. For although the ability of both parties to act is a requirement for any interaction, nature cannot act. This problem can be solved by acting on behalf of, as a proxy for nature. Taking the perspective of beaten and exploited nature men act as if they interact and even communicate with nature.

The dominant culture from conservative to radical, based on the idea of an instrumental relationship with nature and backed up by an ideology of domination, characterizes most of modern thought. The second tradition has however gained new importance in present-day societies. For the ecological crisis has provoked a relation to nature that draws on the 'other' cultural tradition on which modern society is built. This cultural dissent separates not only intellectual traditions; it separates moral worlds. These moral differences between the two cultures lead us to the very roots underlying their real antagonism.

### *Justice versus Purity*

To give a theoretical account of the moral basis of the two cultural traditions that are implicit in modern culture, I will distinguish between the *justice perspective* and the *purity perspective*. These perspectives refer to two competing *moral* conceptions of the world. Taking the first perspective as our point of departure we will show that it cannot grasp what the second tradition thematizes: a moral perspective upon nature going beyond its being a means for human well-being. I will claim that the purity perspective contains the justice perspective as a special case of looking at nature. Therefore the second perspective introduces aspects of man's relationship with nature systematically excluded in the justice perspective.

Within the justice perspective the *instrumentalist tradition* of the relation of man to nature has dominated modern culture. An alternative relationship with nature was sacrificed and surrendered to this 'morality'. It has become equivalent to self-destruction. For it only aggravates the crisis the relationship between man and nature is now undergoing. The most important type of morality has been



the utilitarian justification of the relationship between man and nature, an idea that links Bentham to modern environmental economists and has spread — paradoxically — with our greater awareness of the environmental crisis. This utilitarian model of morality can be understood — as Weber (1956) did — as a manifestation of ‘material’ or ‘substantive’ rationality.<sup>5</sup> This means applying criteria of justice to our relation with nature. The formulation of an ‘exploitation of nature’ derives from this ‘justice perspective’.

But the justice perspective does not take into account the real and basic difference between the dominant culture and the counter-culture. For the justice that would like to see an end to the exploitation of nature is a type of justice that only minimizes this exploitation in order to be able to continue this exploitation. There is nothing in nature to support a ‘just’ treatment by which to interrupt this logic. The justice perspective runs into the problem of pinpointing the beginning of exploitation. Can there be exploitation when men can no longer exploit nature? And is exploitation more than the damage the exploiter suffers by exhausting his own resources? Exploitation evidently is a woolly concept. Injustice to nature is an insufficient motivation for people to question the basic premises of their relation to nature. It mobilizes only animal liberators who see equal treatment of all beings as the fundamental premise of human moral action, a premise characteristic of the utilitarian ethics of animal liberation (Singer, 1976). But the liberation of animals will not challenge the basic symbolic structure within which we organize our relation with nature. It will only alleviate some of the consequences implied by this deep-seated symbolic usage. It will help to minimize the suffering of beasts used for experimental purposes. But it will not change the relationship of men to beasts. It will not remove men from their moral pedestal.

Therefore the problem of nature, as conceived within counter-culture traditions, has to be handled as a problem beyond the scope of justice. It has to do with decency, with sentience, with attitudes that cannot be grasped adequately via the notion of justice. We have to look for another model of ‘morality’ to describe man’s relationship with nature. This other model can best be described as the *purity model* (Douglas, 1966, 1975). The ‘purity perspective’ is more than an alternative to the ‘justice perspective.’ Because it thematizes another moral foundation of man’s relationship with nature. The ‘purity perspective’ codes the difference between nature and culture in a way

that allows for an alternative moral definition of that difference. This is evident when we look at some symbolic values attributed to the notion of purity: *health*, *body* and *soul*. The complementary concept is impurity; its analytical dimensions can be described as: *pollution*, *force* and *discipline*. The notions of purity and impurity refer to a level of culture, where its moral foundations are at stake. The complementary values thematize the symbolic basis of culture. This value system is seen as the key to understanding the relation of men to nature not only in pre-modern but also in modern societies.

The purity perspective shows us that behind the cognitive aspect of moral consciousness, as embodied in the idea of justice, is a strong affective element that shapes the meaning of justice. This level of analysis removes us from the cognitivist discourse and its sociological description as part of a rationalization process. We can start to reconstruct cultural traditions regulating the relation of man to nature on a more elementary symbolic level. Moving our focus from justice to purity gives us a better understanding of the differences underlying the emerging modern European spirit of environmentalism.

But there is still more to such a change toward the purity perspective. For it offers us a new cognitive perspective upon the basic antagonisms in modern society. To the extent that the symbolic infrastructure of our culture is put into question by the problematization of our relationship with nature, conflicts on the level of the symbolic order emerge in advanced modern societies. By identifying different cultural codes based on competing symbolic orders within modern society we can go beyond Marx's notion of the dynamic of modern society. He ultimately reproduced the instrumentalist tradition that has dominated the relation of men to nature in modern culture. An alternative relationship with nature was sacrificed and surrendered to the idea of 'rationality'. It was then Weber who saw this rationality as inescapable though burdensome.<sup>6</sup> Such a rigid and heroic adherence to the rationality inherent in modernity is no longer warranted. On the contrary, it has become equivalent to self-destruction. For it only aggravates the crisis the relationship between men and nature is now undergoing. Therefore we have to leave Marx and Weber behind us.

Such an analysis not only broadens our theoretical notion of the cultural 'code' underlying European culture. It also forces us to see the carriers of counter-cultural traditions as more than movements of protest against modernity and modernization (Eisenstadt, 1981). I claim that the two competing models relating man to nature have

become the field of a new emerging type of historical struggle over two types of modernity in advanced modern societies. We will try to show that the competing models of modernization, the competing modes of developing the forces of production, have become the object of a new type of class struggle in advanced modern societies.

## **Society, Nature and Culture**

### *Nature as the New Field of Class Struggle*

But will this struggle change our relation to nature and, if so, how? To answer such questions we have to look at the social forces now trying to redefine the relation of modern society to nature. Nature has become a field of collective action within which new social groups are engaged. The groups have never belonged either to the dominated nor the dominating class. They belong to the 'middle class' (a concept which is more a black box than a substantially defined category).<sup>7</sup>

The groups comprising an emerging 'new middle class' in advanced modern societies differ from their historical precursors: they appear as carriers of a new type of society — doubly opposed to the class structure of industrial society — opposed to its dominant classes and opposed to its dominated classes. The new middle class is the potential carrier of counter-culture traditions. But this new class is still tied to a specific class habitus: the petit-bourgeois. The petit-bourgeois habitus is part of a middle-class-based cultural tradition that has been expanded and developed since the second half of the nineteenth century. A historical reconstruction of the development of this mentality shows that it is in fact a distorted form of counter-culture traditions. Counter-culture traditions, the thesis runs, have so far been embodied in a distorted form in the middle class. The middle class is a class 'in the making', substituting the old petit-bourgeois outlook for a new 'ecological' consciousness (Eder, 1989).

The new middle-class groups are not only potential carriers of counter-culture protest. They are also a potentially new social class. This is due to the expansion of middle-class groups into the service sector which is apparently becoming the key sector of the emerging post-industrial society. The petty shopkeepers and artisans defining the middle class of the nineteenth century have been complemented in this century by white-collar workers and, since the 1960s, by service-sector workers (the new middle-class groups). These groups are the potential carriers of movements that mobilize counter-culture traditions against the dominant culture. The petit-bourgeois mentality

that carries with it counter-culture traditions in a distorted form thus gains a new significance to the extent that the new middle class is shaping an emerging new class structure.

The ecological crisis contributes to the further socio-cultural crystallization of this new class because it is this class that it impacts most directly. The relationship with nature has always had a central significance for the petit-bourgeois life style. Its leisure patterns, walking, climbing, excursions into the countryside, all forms of tourism, make this clear. The ecological crisis thus threatens the life world of the middle-class group more than that of other social groups. They are emotionally tied not only to a just world but to a world good to live in and they react much more intensely to the effects of exploiting the natural environment (pollution). The increasing menace to the natural base of this life-world contributes to the increasing 'alienation' of the new middle class. Some dimensions of this alienation are:

- organizing individual action against systemic processes to protect the life-world from pollution (a necessarily frustrating and thus self-defeating strategy);

- relying on psychological treatment in order to cope psychically and physically in this menacing environment.

We can conclude then that the new middle classes are the potential carriers of a new relationship with nature. They are subjectively prone to a non-utilitarian relation to nature and objectively tied to the problem of nature. Middle-class groups will therefore play a major role in the new field of class struggle now opening up. The struggle may transform a hitherto hidden cultural undercurrent into a cultural model orienting a new type of historical action. Thus nature will become the new arena. The way the natural world is symbolized will become the new cultural model organizing class action in the emerging middle-class society.

### *Counter-culture Movements and the New Class Struggle*

The ecological crisis has not only changed the field of class struggle. It has also changed its logic. The idea that *social* movements are the carriers of progress has vanished, along with the idea of that progress itself. Instead, *social movements* are being openly confronted by *cultural movements* (Raschke, 1985: 110ff.) that have since the beginning of modern society been their antagonists. The problem of nature has engendered a division between mobilized classes of actors as carriers of modern development: between the social

movements constitutive for the dominant modernity and the cultural movements claiming 'another modernity'. Social movements have defined and still define the dominant visions of modernity: individual rights and material well-being. Counter-culture movements have claimed and claim something beyond such visions: a society that, to be sure, secures individual rights and material well-being but within nature, not beyond it and in harmony with nature, not in spite of it.

The history of *social* movements continues today. They, for example, have taken up the problem of nature. The ecological movement is concerned with a more rational relation to nature. But its concern is utilitarian. Its message is to optimize the relation to nature, to establish a cybernetic state of nature in society. This vision is opposed to that of the *cultural* movements who are interested not in rationalizing the relationship to nature, but in giving it a new meaning: to establish a social relation with nature. This makes the cultural movements counter-culture movements.

Counter-culture movements have existed since the beginning of modernity. The social movements that created civil society have always been accompanied by sectarian groups looking for a more spiritual form of life in civil society. Examples are the 'fugitive' movements (*bürgerliche Fluchtbewegungen*) widespread in nineteenth century Germany and aesthetic movements distancing themselves from the normal forms of bourgeois life (Linse, 1983a, b; Sprondel, 1986; Weiss, 1986; Hepp, 1987), both counter-movements to the bourgeois movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The labour movement has similarly had its collateral groups. Typical examples are communitarian movements trying to establish utopias of social equality and solidarity beyond mere socialism (Schäfer, 1985). Cultural movements are also inextricably tied to the present-day ecological movement (Galtung, 1986; Luhmann, 1986). In Germany such collateral groups call themselves, thereby marking the distinction from the 'realists', an 'alternative movement', a term that should be understood in two ways: as an alternative to society and as an alternative to the dominant social movement trying to define the 'historicity' (Touraine, 1981) of this society.

Identifying cultural movements as carriers of a social relation with nature not only adds another type of movement to the social movements generating modern societies. For these cultural movements are potentially opposed to the social movements they have accompanied in the course of modernizing society. This potential opposition between social and cultural movements is transformed into a real

opposition as soon as the central conflict built into modern society is no longer to be found in the relationship of social movements to modernizing elites but in the struggle between social movements and cultural counter-movements claiming competing visions of modernity. This difference between visions of modernity is not new. It has been going on since the beginning of modern society. But it has become, for the first time in modern history, more than a difference. It has become as real social conflict and struggle and thus a historical force.

This new conflict puts into question modern society's central and self-given attribute. It questions the old idea of progress through the conquest of nature, through technological development. The idea of technological progress achieved by conquering nature is constitutive for the social struggles of the bourgeois movements and the labour movement and also for the present-day ecological movement. These movements differ only in their ideas of the path technological progress should take. Depending upon some calculations on the future of nature some urge slowing it down and others urge for accelerating it. But they all plead for a more 'rational' path of modernization. The ecological movements are simply trying to do a better job than the old social movements, the bourgeois movement and the labour movement.

The cultural movements, on the other hand, do something very different. They see the relationship toward nature as a moral, not an instrumental relationship. They focus not on technological development in the realm of nature but on a moral development in the realm of nature. They treat nature in a moral way. And this puts the dominant relationship with nature directly into question. The major contribution of these movements that continue historical counter-culture traditions in modern society is an alternative to the idea of technological progress. It consists in the idea of a moral progress in our relation to nature.

My working hypothesis therefore is: in a deviation from the pattern of previous cultural movements in modern society, present-day cultural movements have the potential to realize the vision of another modernity. Through the development of modern society, cultural movements that are trying to revise the relationship to nature have been put into the centre of its dynamic. The ecological crisis of advanced modern society establishes these counter-movements in the role of a new historical actor. This new role is to carry a relationship toward nature that opposes the dominating vision of nature in modern society. The new scenario for a new role has just begun.



Contemporary ecological movements have only acted as the midwife for this new historical actor.

### Some Consequences for Post-Marxist Social Theory

#### *The Changing Role of the Concept of Modernity*

What conclusions, theoretical as well as methodological, can be drawn from the emergence of a new field of class struggle, a new type of class conflict, a new idea of progress in advanced modern societies?

The first conclusion affects the theory of modernization. This theory is dead. The classical discussions about modernity share, despite far-reaching dissent on concrete issues, a consensus concerning one principle: that it is equality that separates modern society from traditional society (Dumont, 1977). Used to rationalize and legitimate the model of equality, justice has become the key idea of modernity. Modernization is conceptualized as a process leading toward more equality in the different spheres of social life. Seen politically, equality is the basic premise of a system whose elements are specified as equal rights. Seen economically, it shapes a system whose elements are specified as wage labour. Both equal rights and the wage-labour relations have been institutionalized. The idea of equal rights is bound to citizenship as the social form constituting the modern political system (Marshall, 1950). The idea of equal economic opportunity is bound to wage labour as the social form constituting the modern economic system. Modernization can be seen as a process of institutionalizing equality in the political and economic sphere which thereby increasingly realizes justice.

But these key issues of modernization theory are increasingly being replaced by other issues. The discourse on modernization is confronted with the phenomenon of religious movements pushing modernization in non-Western societies, with the antimodernist attacks on the signposts of modern political and social thinking. These issues are, I think, secondary compared with the new key issue, the *problem of nature*. This problem feeds the new crisis advanced industrial societies are facing, the so-called ecological crisis. And I claim that it challenges some of our core assumptions of modernity.

The discourse on modernization has been affected first by the ecological crisis of advanced modern societies. The reproduction of society in nature, the social way of dealing with nature, turns out to be of central concern in the reproduction of modernity. This forces us to change the locus of discussion. In the classical approach to

modernization it was problems of controlling the political and economic reproduction of modern social systems. Now we need to deal with problems of ecological reproduction. The forces of production, the idea of a self-propelling *technological progress*, has become a theoretical problem in theorizing about modernization. The second arena of impact is the cultural implications of the ecological crisis. For the problem of nature is not only a technical problem, not only a problem of adapting the system of modern society to its natural environment. It is also a cultural problem that challenges the moral basis of modern society. The idea of *moral progress* made possible by the culture of modernity, an idea previously touted as one of the convincing strengths of modernity, begins to look empty; for the outcome of this moral progress can be seen to threaten the basis of life as such. Thus our theoretical notion of the morality specific for a modern ethic is at stake.

The ecological crisis that characterizes all modern societies, the advanced industrial societies as well as the industrializing societies, the capitalist as well as the socialist societies, renders us open to an alternate version of modernity, one that does not wage war with nature but makes peace with it. The current crisis requires more than a critique of the ethnocentrism of modernization theory. The critique has already been made and it is devastating. It shows that modern society is nothing but another — and ultimately the most disgusting — attack on human sociality. The assault on ethnocentrism contained in the idea of modernity has been radicalized and disputes over the claim of progress credited to the culture of modernity. Thus we probably have to rebuild above all the *moral* foundations of modernization theory in order to grasp the changes going on in these societies. The recourse to old theories will be the more futile the more these changes gain ground. We need a new theory of *moral progress*.

### *The Changing Role of Social Critique*

A methodological conclusion can also be drawn from this discussion in so far as our theoretical reformulation of the theory of rationalization in modern society entails a new model of social critique. This new model is quite different from that characteristic for the enlightened philosopher who knew what is good for society. For we are not formulating a political theory about the right way to organize a society. This old model of critique, the so-called practical philosophy of the eighteenth century, need not be revived. Nor need the nineteenth-century model of critique as exemplified by the



Marxian programme of immanent critique. This programme postulates objective historical trends (or laws) out of which normative conclusions concerning oppositional action can be drawn. This model still presupposes an intellectual elite that determines and proclaims what right action is backing up its position with some objectivistic theory of historical laws.

Neither type of critique is adequate any more. You can *neither* presuppose a consensus on philosophical constructions of what the good city is *nor* a consensus on the objective laws of society. Both possibilities have been nullified by the de facto development of modern society itself: the emerging form of collective self-organization is incompatible with these forms of critique. A new type of critique is called for. Social theory has lost its claim to objective validity. It is only one possible way of interpreting the social world. It is only one attempt to decipher the objective meaning of a historical situation. But as such it is part of the collective learning processes it reconstructs historically. Social theory as critical theory is an intervention into the interpretations of those trying to shape the course and direction of collective learning processes. Such a conception of critique is of a 'therapeutic' nature. And this means that professional socio-scientific analysis has the task of dissolving all rationalizations that pervade social action.

As sociologists we know that we are not the ideological masters of social and cultural movements that Marx and his contemporaries thought themselves to be. We are only specialists in interpretations — and we have to push new interpretations beyond those to which we have become accustomed, beyond what I have called 'modernism'. We can fulfil the critical task only by deconstructing the illusions of the rationality, or its substitutes, ascribed to a society or to a social class or to a social group. This is the only way sociological analysis can intervene into the processes making up another modernity, a society that is able to question not only its social relations of production and the institutions endorsing them but also its relation with nature. Only then will the idea of a post-industrial or a post-modern society really make sense.

## Notes

1. This challenge appeared first outside modernized societies, in those countries that tried to emulate the cultural model of modernization. The religious movements in the non-Western world are an example. But this challenge has invaded modernized

societies giving protest against modernity a global dimension. The counter-culture movements treated so far as an exotic phenomenon in the modern world have become the key in determining the fate of the modern world. For some of the more important discussions and research in this area see Musgrave (1974), Abrams and McCulloch (1976) and Case and Taylor (1979). For a treatment of these counter-cultures as part of the evolution of religious culture see Wilson (1967), Glock and Bellah (1976), Bellah et al. (1985). An empirical study of counter-culture in developmental terms is to be found in Wuthnow (1976).

2. This social critique is not yet really developed. For it involves tracing how social and political thought as well as counter-culture thought are the product of social processes. To relate such thinking to class positions is only the beginning. We can also look at the social processes that constitute such systems (and antisystems) of thought. Theories of a social production of thinking and learning are the most promising developments in actual theoretical discussions. Nevertheless we cannot stop at such a critique. We have to proceed to a cultural critique and all the difficult methodological problems it entails. See all the works of Bourdieu and Habermas as two complementary and competing solutions. For further developments starting from a Habermasian position see Miller (1986) and Eder (1985).

3. The term 'postmodernism' has been used in such different ways that its use has to be defended and specified. Postmodernism is normally seen as a negative mode of thinking, opposed to the dominating rationalism. But this is an insufficient description. I think that the value of postmodernism is as a way to reappropriate cultural traditions that are based on grounding a different relation of nature to society. With increasing ecological damage and the increasing problem of meaning in modern life postmodernism fulfils an important social function which explains its present-day conjuncture. Cultures now engaged in or about to begin modernization and/or industrialization are looking for ways to achieve this rather than the way pioneered by European culture. But Europeans are not confined to importing this global phenomenon from the outside. For we can develop this globalizing view within our own national cultures. For all modern cultures contain the possibilities for that which is realized elsewhere. What I am pleading for is the 'globalizing view from within'. For an excellent discussion of postmodernism see Featherstone (1988, 1989).

4. Fascism instrumentalized this tradition. It succeeded in mobilizing the bloody by the unbloody tradition and integrating and destroying it within and by the bloody tradition. This explains phenomena like the SS in the concentration camps caring for dogs and little gardens or SS-doctors playing Schubert string quartets. The bloody tradition thus proved again to be the stronger one.

5. It was Weber who saw this morality — for other reasons than I do — as inescapable though burdensome. But his solution, a rigid and heroic adherence to a non-moralistic type of rationality, namely formal rationality, morality is no longer warranted. On the contrary, there are alternatives on the level of morality. Thus I also argue against Luhmann's argument of an 'overmoralization' of politics blocking modern society's capacity to self-organization.

6. For the most important account of the modern discussion of rationality see Habermas (1981). Important are his reconstructions of Weber's concept of rationality and its relation to the critique of rationality in classical Critical Theory, i.e. in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) and in Horkheimer's *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (1967).

7. The term 'middle class' is a historical as well as a systematic category. Historically,

it refers to the emergence and increase of a class of 'workers' who either own some means of production or control to some extent the means of reproduction beyond the sphere of work. Here the work of Bourdieu is of major relevance (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985). Systematically, this class location has been called by Wright a contradictory one (Wright, 1985, 1986). This is the result of the traditional perspective on the class structure of modern societies. When taking middle-class groups as the reference point for an emerging new class structure, then the principles of social classification have to be changed. To identify new principles of social classification we have to construct new antagonistic social relations. Such antagonisms are, the hypothesis runs, to be found in nature as a new field of class conflict. See for an extensive discussion of the theoretical problems and possibilities of such an approach Eder (1989).

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