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THE SPECIFIC WAY OF INDIVIDUALIZATION IN GERMANY: A CULTURE-THEORETICAL COMPARISON TO THE USA[1]

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the sociological reflections of individualization processes in Germany and the USA. In this comparison it appears that German sociology identifies a "dialectical individualization" whereas sociology in the US ascertains a "social individualization". It is elaborated that the actual cause for this difference (which is important for, but mostly ignored in the public-political discourse) is on the one hand the relative cultural inheritance, and on the other hand the developments of post World-War II. Thus, the example of individualization shows that sociological theory has to be more sensitive towards cultural idiosyncrasies and towards specific historical steps in development.

In sociological investigations country-specific peculiarities are generalized far too often. In this case, for instance, we speak of *the* western culture or of *the* modern trend, although the countries referred to have obviously developed cultural identities, political and legal systems, economic systems or joint connections of their own. For the still too little developed international sociology the danger arises to generalize local observations too much and often falsely. With this contribution, I would like to show that the consideration of country-specific cultural developments on the one hand leads to a better understanding of certain developments and on the other hand provides protection against exaggerated generalizations of local sociological insights (same direction as Fukuyma [1999]).

I would like to prove this according to the example of the so-called "individualization thesis" (Beck 1992; Beck/Beck Gernsheim 2002; Beck/Sopp 1997; Kron 2000; 2001; Schroer 2000a; 2000b), which apparently is a special term used in the German sociological discourse, although sociology in other countries also mostly seems interested to a great extent in the relationship of the individual and society. We can almost say, sociology as a science owes its birth to the spirit of the individuality of social actors (Nassehi 2000).

On the basis of a comparison of social-historical developments of the cultural identities of Germany to the US, I would like to explain why, particularly in Germany the individualization thesis found such a promulgation and, as a contrast, not in the US. Firstly, the central arguments of the individualization thesis of the German sociological discourse are described (1). I will explain on which cultural basis such discourse could be established. Subsequently, I will show why the US have always paid special attention to the relationship of the individual and society, but why due to their special cultural foundation this relationship has been reflected sociologically differently than in Germany (2). The proceeding is thereby evolutionary, i.e. I will look at those

developing steps in examples, from which I assume that they had a crucial influence on the attitudes towards the relationship of the individual and society.

WHAT DOES INDIVIDUALIZATION MEAN?

Individualization is in general the sociological description of changes in relation of the individual and society and at the same time the attempt to explain these changes. Unfortunately though, it has not been clearly clarified from the sociological beginnings until today which dimensions of modern individualization processes are important (Kippele 1998). I therefore suggest, for heuristic purposes to describe the term of individualization on the basis of three dimensions in which, according to my opinion, the largest sociological common sense concerning modern individualization is to be found:

(1)   *Culture*: Individualization in the cultural dimension is usually associated with a "pluralization" of values and/or an increasing *non-commitment of moral conceptions*. Values and moral opinions are incumbent on individual inter-pretation. In individualization, a complementary interpretation sees an increasing *alignment to the value of individualism*. Each individual becomes a point of reference of the appreciation of the good life (Hasteadt 1998).

(2)   *Structure*: Individualization in the structural dimension is always a main topic of sociology, which is addressed particularly in the context of explanations to the *social differentiation* (Schimank 1996). On the one hand, under the dictum of liberty, the qualitative "*disembedding*" of the individual from familiar, economic, political, or other institutional obligations is mentioned here. On the other hand, rather quantitative characteristics as multiplied, extended, interlaced, and/or spatio-temporally flexible interaction relations are pointed out.

(3)   *Individual Autonomy*: Individualization means the *extension of the individual action area*, in this dimension particularly both, according to the increase of courses of action and by the increase of chances to notice these possibilities individually and to decide over the action choice yourself. According to this, there often is an acceptance of an internal-psychological differentiation, which is predominantly understood as a consciousness of the own ego. This rather psychological perspective also entails the association of intensified *self-control and self-responsibility*.

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In a first step, I would now like to discuss the German individualization discourse along these three dimensions. It concerns thereby of a recapturing representation of central arguments, i.e. the authors mentioned here *exemplary* stand with their theses for *figures*, which are single aspects of — in some cases completely different and contradicting — theories. Hereby, the knowledge-sociological question why the individualization theorem is (nearly) an exclusive affair of the German sociological discourse is important.

The German Individualization Discourse

Nowhere else was the individualization phenomenon discussed so intensively as in Germany, particularly since Ulrich Beck's diagnosis of the risk-society, first published in 1986. Ever since the individualization term may not be missed in any reflection of the contemporary society, which raises the claim to be complete.

One figure referring to the cultural dimension above all points out *the change and the continuity of values*. So the talk of "change of values" is not only popular in the public in Germany, but also widespread in the entire scientific community. As a pioneer, Niklas Luhmann (1978; 1990; 1997a) has to be mentioned here, who does not doubt the fact that many moral communications circulate in present society, and/or that values in the name of most different demands are to serve as a legitimate basis. But Luhmann, however, refers to the fact that the dynamics of the evolution of social systems in modern society do not depend on values. Social order in the context of functional differentiation is — in differentiation to Talcott Parsons — also possible *without* a basis of common values, for surviving simply evolution is enough (Luhmann 1995).

Other authors are less radical, if they state the fact that there are still values, which must be interpreted and implemented more individually now. So the project of modernity carried by values is still unfinished, but one can nevertheless state a secularization of their legitimacy bases (Habermas 1985). Society is aligned to a certain opinion of the good life (as a value), that has discharged a most individualistic adventure-rationality in its practical conversion, which sets free the total-collective value alignment (Schulze 1992). This does not exclude a collective orientation completely, but makes it necessary at the point when the individual does not come to terms with itself any longer, and therefore wants to use socially practiced forms of ego-identity. In this way, there is still a fundamental cultural orientation of present society at the ideals of the enlightenment (Beck 1992; Gross 1994; Münch 1995), whereby the basic dynamics are particularly pointed out by the tension between ideal and reality, which involves a *dialectic of self-disproving pretensions*: "Modernity, such firework of demands of generalization and universalism, has always been limited and practiced by its opposite. In other words: Modernization [...] and counter-modernization – exclusion and absorption of the principles of the modern – are firstly of the same origin [...]. Here modernization is not only seen as a multi-layered process with tendencies and structures moving in opposite directions, but sharper: as an unclosed, not-closeable dialectic of modernization and counter-modernization." (Beck 1996, pp. 60/61, translated by TK) The increase of action options (liberty), the increase of the participation in action options (equality) and the minimum participation in existing action options (fraternity) are built-in into this dialectic. The consequence is an increasing imperative, which could be restrained only if it could be regarded as an option and thus as an alternative apart from other alternatives. Then modernity could cut off the program of difference reduction between reality and possibility (Gross 1994).

Despite a continuity of values, contemporary transformations of these value bases are thus also seen in the sense of an individualization in the cultural dimension: While values maintain their *general validity*, the *factual specification* is left increasingly to the individuals. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim in this way describe e.g. the changes in intimate systems, that transform the historical exceptional case of the appreciation of the institution

"marriage" in the 1950s and 1960s into a "normal chaos of love" (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 1995), but that still follows the "form-instruction" of love (Fuchs 1999).

Here, one can see how the increasing imperative "disobliges" all certainties, collateral and traditions and also all values embodied in the principles of modernity. Everything becomes contingent in the light of the possible, whose borders (e.g. technical) are hardly visible. In the long run only the "*God of More*" will be rendered homage and all other values will be set aside. Here, dialectic dynamics are much recognized as the fundamental modern ideas also always producing unintended side effects and which contradict the actual goals (Münch 1991, 1995). Thus, modernity is already a society at risk in its fundamentals.

With most German authors, you can say that this dialectic perspective continues also in the structural dimension, in which the figure of disembedding and integration is particularly pointed out. System-theoretically you could interpret individualization in such a way here that individuality is won not *in* social systems, but *outside* of these. Not the affiliation to subsystems marks the indivisibility of the actors, but the non-affiliation: State, law, economics, science, medicine, even art, religion and education only in each case partially access aspects of the individuality; the area of inclusion is in the long run only interested in a part (divisible) of the individual. Whereas in the area of exclusion, only the individual in each case, i.e. the indivisible field of the personal self description emerges increasingly (Nassehi 1997). On the other hand, this "exclusion-individuality" however affiliates to society at least in two different respects: First of all, the individuals in principle are included as persons in modern society into all social systems, i.e. one assumes a universe "all-inclusion": Everyone can and should participate in all communication systems – education, economy, law, politics, media system, and so forth. As a consequence of the functional differentiation of society, individuals are no more definable by social positions, but they should gain access to all subsystems, i.e. , modern society requires a simultaneous affiliation to different subsystems. Secondly, individuality is often generated over demands and careers and thus over the linkage to part-systemic organizational structures, according to the form of modern society (Luhmann 1994).

Accordingly, one speaks of the dissolution of traditional structures and the integration into new structures. These new structures are certain milieus, which are formed among other things over the dynamics of the adventure market: milieus provide individuals with their experience of dissolving traditional structures, orientation and certainty that adventures are at hand. This structural formation is also called "disobligation" of existing structures when at the same time enabling-structures emerge; or "erosion of common structures" due to the penetration of solidarity-strange resources. On the one hand, this "colonialization of the environment" (Habermas) is understood exclusively as infiltrating the community by the system-logic of the market; on the other hand one sees this development again rather dialectic as mutual penetration: traditional community structures are beginning to move, but at the same time institutional complexes assigned to other system logics are penetrated by the solidly mobilization. Altogether, we can speak of the "paradox of the individualism" (Münch 1991): The individual becomes more freely and dependent at the same time.

In a way, this trend of dialectic points of view with the accentuation of the figure of "*risky chances*" finds a continuation also in the dimension of individual autonomy. Luhmann sees the action area of the individuals substantially extended by disembarrassment from the close borders of pre-modern conditions; the use of symbolically generalized communication media e.g.

takes place without consideration of specific person characteristics. But on the other side the action area is limited by the possibility of "exclusion-catenation" (Schimank 2000): Those who cannot assert on inclusion into a social subsystem any longer, suddenly also experience problems to adopt to and fit in other systems. With the increase of action options and decision, autonomy always bears the risks of taking the wrong decision and therefore come along with self-inflicted restrictions. The uncertainties in taking decisions which come along with the increasing freedom of choice are compensated in the long run by routines, what can indeed lead to a subjectively sinking intensity of the feeling of an "own life."

Thus, the most important arguments of the German individualization discourse are described. Hereby, the almost constant dialectic viewpoint is remarkable. Therefore, we could also speak of a *dialectic individualization process*.[2]

Looking at the evaluation of this individualization process described by the German authors, we can see that first of all the *integration of society* is a measure. This is particularly evident if we look at the solutions or/and advices presented by the German authors, how to deal with diagnosed individualization. If the solution aims at a *change* of given conditions, we can assume that the author altogether makes a negative evaluation of present individualization processes. On the other hand: Why should one want to change something if the general impression is a positive one? Regarding this background to this categorization of the evaluations in relation to the descriptions, it is noticeable, particularly for the German authors that the dialectic description tends to result in a *coupling with positive evaluations*. According to Luhmann's view, it is better to leave the necessary problem solution competences to the social evolution and not to try to intervene in social processes by steering (Luhmann 1997b). In short, everything can stay as it is; one enjoys the advantages of the functional differentiation of society, which at the same time works as self-corrective of the difficulties produced by itself. The authors advise a kind of cultivation, the "Laissez-faire": We can get the appropriate attitude and "learn to play with the nothing" (Schulze), learn to accept differences (Gross) and deal with contradictions (Münch). Somewhat more active, Beck, above all others, encourages the use of changed conditions, e.g. in the form of "sub-politics" or life politics.

In the center of the following considerations, the question is: How could it come to such an individualization discourse, which is shaped by a dialectic description and a positive evaluation, particularly and exclusively in Germany? I assume here two different causes: The cultural inheritance of the meaning of individualism in Germany and the historical development post World War II.

The Cultural Inheritance of Individualism in Germany

Modern culture has generated a certain understanding in Germany, what is to be understood by individualism (Münch 1986; 2001). In general, liberty in Germany always means an *inner liberty of the individual*, whose *concretion results in the social* (e.g. the concretion of political liberty by constitutional legality). The origins of this conception are ascribed to Martin Luther and Immanuel Kant. With Luther, the liberty of the Christian is a liberty of the soul independent of all things outside. The transformation of this internal into outer liberty means in exact words: obedience to the word of God. This terminology of liberty is taken up and secularized by Kant. Kant views liberty as liberty of the "sensuousness" (*Sinnlichkeit*) of

humans, humans are free as sanity beings. So Kant connects moral acting to the idea of the subject, by presupposing liberty, understood as absence of the regulation by outside causes, for moral acting. All actions deriving from respect for the moral law of the categorical imperative are thus expressions of the autonomy of the acting subject, which gives itself the law of acting independently of any experience. Autonomy here means: The subject imposes on itself laws, which it obeys. The relevant condition for moral acting is thereby the free determination of the own will, free of outer influences and motivated only by subjective obligation. The description of the generalization of the subjective obligation is achieved through the categorical imperative. In this way Kant produces the connection of the free subjective will to an over-individual standardization.

It is obvious that Kant opened a dualism with the moral determination of the will directly by its general validity. The individual is not regarded as valuable in itself, but derives its value from an instance extending over it in an idealistic manner. On the one hand, the determination of the moral law coincides with the directive of the liberty and the autonomy of the will, but on the other hand, at this point liberty at the same time experiences its supreme restriction. It is exactly in this conception in which Kant sees the peculiar of his theory: "one looked at humans being bound by their obligation to laws, however it did not occur that their were not only subject to their own and yet general legislation" (Kant 1956, p. 65, translated by TK). Actually, the most personal demand of moral legislation in Kant's moral philosophy is weakened by regarding self legislation: Here the subject gains distance from itself by reason and regards its own maxims according to the point of view of a generalized other — the human generality — so that in the long run each individual drive to setting values is switched off. The bare moral law determines the will. The internal liberty and orientation towards the law are thus connected inseparably with one another. This conception is the cultural inheritance of the individualism in Germany.

Test the West: The Americanization of the Federal Republic

We have to look at the changes after World War II as a background to this view, which always looked for the liberty of the individual in an over-individual law. Firstly, Germany also experienced what it means to lose individual freedom in a universality — in this case the "German community" ("*Volksgemeinschaft*") with the advent of "national socialism" (*National-sozialismus*). It is nothing less than the collapse of the German view on individualism, which was suggested here, because after all, individual liberty was endangered simply by the integration into this community. With this experience, a change of opinion did not necessarily have to accompany this after World War II: the own suffering often blocked the readiness for refurbishment and moral renewal. There was simply no time to realize the pain over the loss of the close community. Too much one had to meet new living conditions pointing into alternative directions: There is e.g. the "Re-Education" of the German, now open culture by the Allies, which above all was to cause the detachment of the ethics of the "national socialism", but which has also customized the German culture towards American individualism. Paradoxically, the "purification process" introduced by the Allies was also successful, because the "Nazis" were so successful with their educational program before: the opponent Germany, once socialized to compliance, diligence, obedience and opportunism was a grateful receiver for educational defaults, clear instructions and thus for cultural transfers. The US became — with the ulterior

motives of the containment of the Soviet Union by a strong Western European center (Hanrieder 1986) and Germany as confederate (Schumacher 2001) — the "friendly enemy," who behaved fair and constructive in the light of the humanitarian disaster caused by the Germans. This made it easy for the Germans to get into — primarily mass-cultural (Trommler 1986) — innovations transported by the Allies, e.g. on the experiences with a popular culture (e.g. Swing, Jazz) beyond authoritarian twisting.

The prevention of the over-individual authority of Hitler in sum was caught by the turn to the over-individual authority — America. New luck can be found — not only under the protection, but also through an occupation power: The inheritance of Kant continues. And the "Americanization" of the Germans begins.[3] The contrast to the Soviet zone of occupation (Faulenbach 1998; Jarausch/Siegrist 1997) showed quite clearly what one has already won at individual liberties with the loss of the community during the "Nazis" despite the occupation by the Western powers, because the anticommunist prejudices learned under the "Nazi" regime were at first confirmed by the bad experiences of the post-war period with the Soviets (plunderings, rapes, reparations, disassemblies). This affective basic pattern — here the good ones, there the bad ones — won intensity (and thus west orientation altogether) with the massive blockade of Berlin by the Soviet Union and the supply of citizens of Berlin's population with the help of the Anglo-American air-bridge. However, this event is only one descriptive example of the connection of economical assistance and political-cultural symbolism, that can be considered as the basic tenor of the European Recovery Programs ("*Marshall-Plan*") (Hardach 2001; Schildt 2000). Of special importance for the cultural change in Germany were primarily — so my thesis — those changes, which could be seen in everyday life. There, first of all, the "economic miracle" ("*Wirtschaftswunder*") is noticeable for each individual during the 1950s (Schildt/Sywottek 1989). Due to this, the crucial push was performed, which gave the American influence mass popularity. The economic progress was connected with a goods-aesthetical gloss, symbolized e.g. by covergirls, who produced individual needs, which could be satisfied again in the consumption.

Altogether one can recognize a turn above all of the younger population towards American individualism. Also, in this case, the generation transition is one of those important mechanisms that carried the Americanization particularly in the dimension of "deep lying mentality patterns" (Schildt 2000, p. 7; see Maase 1996; 1997). As a seismograph for the beginning development one can take the example of e.g. the so called "yobs", which were interested (in the mostly culture-critical observer perspective) *collectively* in US-American products from jeans to Hollywood films with James Dean up to the new musical style Rock 'n' Roll of Bill Haley or Elvis Presley (Poiger 1997). By this, they express their individualistic-emancipated orientation as a contrast program to the ruled civil order, combined with civilian laxness and demonstrative vulgarity in clothes, handling style and sexuality. The adoption to the value conception of individualism takes place as a break with the normative idea of the community (Doering-Manteuffel 1995, p. 26).

Here not least also the US-American soldiers stationed in Germany were standards, who symbolized with their easy going body attitude, sportsmanship, and lax gesturing the opposite to the German soldier. "Here the two fundamental culture patterns collided in banal everyday life and the penetration of the German side began: the change and mood of the civilian habit." (Doering-Manteuffel 1995, p. 20. translated by TK) This indirect control was promoted by the

American side consciously in the sense of a "propaganda through Entertainment." In this way the "Americanization from bottom up" (Maase 1996) could work.

But all liberties are always risky, too. And so Germany did not only implement the main features of Western modernization by means of Americanization, but also the paradoxes as consequences thereof. To cope with ambivalences was for most Germans, who were socialized in the national socialism straight to ambivalence destruction (Bauman 1992), still an unusual thing. So it cannot be of any surprise that the new liberties are always also accompanied by anxiety about maintaining the same and therefore come with new uncertainties. One now roughly agrees with the new direction, because with regards to economic growth, also the view that class conflicts (and thus the Marxist core of socialist theory, the class warfare thought) is transported and can be brought up durably not by redistribution of the given, but by enlargement of what can be distributed. And this "enlargement of the cake" which can be distributed at first, seems ensured over western orientation. But beyond this abstract opinion, there are everyday fears applied to the recovered liberty. Thus, the state became again the address for the fears and the demand to save the conditions for the liberties. Internal liberty in the protection of the state — here again Kant's inheritance gleams.

This strange mixture from clinging onto and re-orienting can also be seen accordingly in everyday life behavior of the Germans, e.g. on the basis of popular music (Larkey 2001). The fact that one did not become completely detached from past times, even under the pressure of the alluring offers could be seen within the new mass-cultural forms by the combination of the new aesthetics imported by America with traditional ideals like cleanliness and perfection. This need e.g. was corresponded by actresses (such as Doris Day), who embodied the White American middle-class in an almost over-perfect way. Even *the* American cult figure — Elvis Presley — who garnished his music with "vulgar" stylistic idiom (Elvis' pelvis-swinging as a sexual stage act), work (the sweating singer), entertainment and commercialization, thus everything that raged against established cultural forms, was subjected to a "cleaning" (also of "black" influences), what accommodated the conservative forces in Germany. One result was his enlistment into the army, knowingly on German ground: In November 1958, the German youth magazine "Bravo" stated in its headline: "Does Elvis become a German? The smart salute proves it: he already is one" (Maase 1997, p. 219, translated by TK). And if this was not enough for those still seeing too much *Entartetes* (degenerated) in the so called "negro music," he or she turned towards (or at least accepted) the German substitutes like Conny Froebess or Peter Kraus. Doering-Manteuffel (1995, p. 18) here speaks of an "amalgamation of German tradition and American influence" with the consequence that the "Americanization from bottom up" could become the "entrance drug into the political and military west connection of the Federal Republic" (Maase 1996, p. 312, translated by TK).

Liberties are not only experienced, but are often also used e.g. to protest against the new social conditions, which from the perspective of some activists had not sufficiently abandoned the former authoritarian structures and had resulted in a new establishment. America also had a role-model function here e.g. regarding principles of the civilian disobedience as protest forms (Kraushaar 1999), which found use against America, when criticism at the imperialistic attitude of the US became loud in the context of the Vietnam War. The students riots of the 1960's, fed mentally and supported by left wing intellectuals, are likewise expressions of this protest against each form of liberty restriction. The anti-Americanism was in such a way seen as an

individualistic justified defense attitude which did not always find a consequent transformation on the behavioral level: "on the side they were a component of a trans-national network of the young generation, they receive the American youth culture, were modeled on the western-American forms of individualism, criticized their parents because of their smugness, copied the Free-Speech-Movement, the Go- and Sit-In and cultivated nevertheless at the same time those habits which were riddled with anti-American culture criticism which was not much different from the habits of their fathers and mothers." (Bussemer 2000, p. 43, translated by TK) One went with America against America (Gassert 2001). Two forms of Anti-Americanism can be differentiated, a political and a cultural form (Sontheimer 1986): The latter sees in the American values and their transformation into practice a form of cultural expression that outclasses the European standards. As already represented, this opinion found no large spreading in the German population. In opposite to the openly expressed criticism at America, one can assume that after World War II in nearly all social fields such as economics, science, culture, and politics as well as in the population, the elite had an obvious interest in a convergence to the standards set by the Americans.

The political form of Anti-Americanism was more influential because not the abstract ideals but the concrete political decisions of the US were criticized, so as described with regards to the Vietnam War. But this protest against a concrete decision is not a form of a pure Anti-Americanism as the tension between fascination of American mass culture and agitation against an establishment, united with the American youth which also fights against it, remained. It is symptomatic that the musical protest against the Vietnam War in the Federal Republic hardly found expression in the German-language — Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Frank Zappa or Country Joe supplied the popular songs for the young people (Schildt 2000). On the one hand we can ask, because of the openly expressed refusal of America, to what extent anti-individualistic thought patterns of the national socialism had a lasting effect; on the other hand non-democratic perspectives were challenged at the same time further on and the individual was pushed more into the center which in political terms was expressed in the slogan "Dare more democracy!" (*Mehr Demokratie wagen!*) by Willy Brandt — who was to become the first social-democratic Federal Chancellor in 1969 and who was able to commit many representative critical leftists with it.

The protest movement of 1968 changed the course of such assimilations to the establishment gradually into a post-materially aligned cult of self-realization. The more the political Anti-Americanism lost impact and American individualism opened Kant's inheritance, the less interesting became politics as a field of discussion. Thus, if political acting and the individual were in the beginnings in the effort for more individual liberties still on the same side, the distrust to the national steering ability of society increased with increasing confidence into the new liberty. At the beginning of the 1970s one speaks of a "crisis of legitimating" (*Legitimationskrise*), while the word of "impossibility to govern" (*Unregierbarkeit*) is spread at the same time. The problems were all too obvious. Above all, the oil crisis and the report of the "Club of Rome" at the beginning of that decade made everyone aware of the border of the national influence. In the 1980s on the one hand the steering pessimism continues, which was expressed as a resistance to each "interpretation dressage" and as "zero zest for action" — mentality. "Disenchantment with politics" diffuses in the 1990s. At the same time some people remark that they can achieve something politically under the given conditions. The social

movements engaging for environmental, female and peace acts are pioneers of sub-political measures in these times.

Summarized: This "tour de force" through German postwar history was intended to clarify that one must understand the "Americanization" described here as a process, in that American symbols penetrated the social-cultural system of Germany. These symbols can be acquired or also be rejected (Greiner 1999). Americanization and Self-Americanization (Maase 1997) go hand in hand. New elements are brought with the conventional one (also with anti-Americanisms) into an emergent unit whose most important field is common practice.

A New Germany

In sum, Germany was in this way almost forced to the transformation of its cultural inheritance of individualism, although it not yet completely adapted to American conditions and perhaps will never do so: "It is crucial that it came to a mixture of native and imported elements. In some mixtures, the American elements penetrate more strongly than in others" (Frei 1996, p. 799, translated by TK).

The Kantian inheritance of German individualism could not be completely replaced, but also, not continued without breakings. Even if American individualism perhaps did not become totally accepted in Germany, like the American conception of rationalization (Ritzer 2000): Eventually the turn towards individualism had to be noticeable to the scholars, too. But whilst a large part of them worked out for a long time the "Nazis", e.g. with the "historian-clash" ("*Historikerstreit*") in the late 1980s, the younger generation of the sociologists discovered the new trend. And it does not surprise now, too, that this associated "culture-break" resulted in hefty discussions nearly only in German sociology: If established cultural views break down gradually and reveal new liberties then this has to produce a strong resonances in the social system as they were not caused in other countries due to other cultural initial conditions. Actually, also the result of the individualization discourse could be suggested early, because it was to be foreseen that the release of the individual "among Kant and America" would take place: the individualization of modern society is identified as a dialectic procedure which concerns both, the emergence and the process and the consequences of individualization. So individualization is e.g. not conceivable without standardization or "collectivization" (Kron 2001; Ritzer/Murphy 2002).

This dialectic description also bears consequences for the solutions suggested by the German authors for the coping with the tension which results for the individual from the dialectic situation: the *individualized ambivalence coping*. Individualized ambivalence coping here means on the one hand this rather individual-passive attitude to all things of life: one must learn to bear contradictions; to accept differences and to learn to play with that nothing. On the other hand, the individual potentials can be transformed into active acting, like Ulrich Beck above all with his conception of "sub-politics" stresses, which disposes the equating of state and politics, if beyond political institutions an "unexpected renaissance of a political subjectivity" (Beck 1997) is formed. To what extent this may succeed in the concrete individual case, particularly since systemic-structural momentums and self-referential tendencies are not so simple to affect or controllable "from bottom up" is another thing. In sum however, the individual is solely responsible for handling the dialectical conditions and for the realization of the own life.

As a background of this description of the social-historical development of the cultural identity of Germany, I would now like to show with the example of the US as a contrast, why it did not come to a similar individualization discourse there.

AMERICA

In the US as well, there is a cultural foundation of the understanding about the relationship of the individual and society (Münch 1986b; 2001). This understanding was likewise based on an idea of liberty that is constitutive for America both, for the integration inward and for the representation outward. However, an individualization discourse as in Germany has not been taking place in the US because the cultural tradition is directly continued there. There is no such culture change as in Germany, even if the American-cultural continuity must be fought for until today.

The Cultural Inheritance of Individualism in America

The cultural conception of the relationship of individual and society in the US can be understood as a result of the American revolution, carried above all by Protestant sects, which had immigrated from Europe, but were distinguished from the European churches after different secularization processes of the strict moral codes amongst other things by voluntary engagement of its members, by the detaching of the state, by non-hierarchical internal structure, and by the inclusion of ethical principles of self-responsibility as well as achievement orientation. The conception of liberty, developed in such a way, is in contrast to Germany no philosophically developed idea, but rather a basic idea aligned at practice. Liberty means: to be able to take luck into one's own hand, to be subjected to no external restrictions in concrete situations, to be free in action selection and to vary the acting after situational conditions (Münch 1986b).

The liberty of the market with its freedom of contract and property in this case stands as an ideal-typical liberty form, combined with the freedom of association as well as with the protection of the individual against national arbitrariness. In contrast to the idealistic liberty conception of Germany, liberty conception in American thinking goes a less abstract, but practically aligned way. Everyone in America should be able to make its luck as a Self-Made-Man, even "from dishwasher to millionaire". Equality is considered as an important value, however more in the sense of the precondition for individuality, therefore understood as equal chances and not as equality of the conditions or results. Liberty thus, has a clear priority as value before equality. Fuchs (2000) describes this form of the American Ethos in summary as "competitive individualism" which gains its specifics by the interconnection of liberty and equality with the achievement and work ethics in order to guarantee successes in the competition between the individuals on different markets. Accordingly, the individual has to care about itself, the state to a large extent stays out of social welfare, healthcare, education etc. Further, the state should not take off responsibility of the individuals. Regarding this normative postulation one can understand the establishment of the political system in America by the community as an expression of a selective implementation of cultural values in the social-structural dimension, with which intentionally in the American condition a minimum state was tried to be constituted.

Particularly the separation between President and Congress, the two Houses of Congress, the strong federal structure and the large influence of the courts weaken the power of the state. Collective decision power, in addition is predominantly shifted onto the community. The community in this case is, in the terminology of Georg Simmel, referred to that comprehensive circle closest to the individual which enters the plan of political decisions, if liberties of the individuals to one other are impaired and the individuals are not able to find a solution.

Individualism and Social Orientation

The individuals therefore do not bank on social institutions but are left to their own responsibility, which implies an independent reflection of the correctness of moral standards. Selfishness and moral acting in the American perspective thus do not become a contrast but are understood as mutually supplementing sides. In this way, as already stated by Tocqueville (2000), Americans, trained from the pragmatic "theory of the well-understood interest", ride out egoism. Here lies the core of the American understanding of individuality: in the interaction of self-interest and social sharing. Self-realization as reference beyond society can thus hardly be formulated since this would be classified as immoral egoism. The American individual realizes itself it in his social framework of everyday life, in the community.

Individuals who conjointly undertake valuable action, receive support and social appreciation by the community in return. The American individualism is a moral individualism. The linkages to the environment of the community and the individual contributions of the actors for it work in an identical manner. Return services without contributing own achievements, e.g. by the excessive expansion of social-national benefits, are felt as immoral. In the context of this form of the individualism, which is realized *in* society and not outside of or against it, a Kantian obligation ethics would only cause distrust.

Modification, But No Change: The Cultural Development in America

Even if the American value system has updated itself in the historical development of the country continuously, however there were no re-organizations which would be similar to the cultural change in Germany described as above (Murswieck 1998). An important date in this context is the 29th of October 1929, when due to a speculation boom on the US stock-market, carried by an extraordinary optimism towards the own industry, the stock-market experienced the largest collapse of history (Junker 1998). In a spiral of the depression, the "stock-market-crash" affected Europe, whose crisis struck back again America. Apart from structural consequences, such as mass unemployment, price purge, etc., the striking social inequalities above all, as an obvious contrast to the conception of equal opportunities as a basis for the possibility of individual liberty changed the American opinions.

The consequence at first was a softening of the extremely individualistic and anti-national attitude as well as a spreading crisis consciousness in the American population — the discrediting of the civilization progress thinking — that made free the way for President Roosevelt's message, it is the obligation of the government to intervene adjusting in the economy. He could implement a set of measures, e.g. the reform of the banking sector, production and price adjustments in the agricultural sector, introduction of unemployment

insurance and retirement schemes etc. However, this national "interventionism" on the basis of reflection on the dangers and threats of human existence — the "New Deal" — could not assert itself, because above all in May 1935, the highest Court of Justice declared the legislations to be unconstitutional for large parts, and because the economy did not want to submit itself to political pressure, which was regarded as excessively. In fact, Roosevelt gave new hope to the disconcerted nation with its measures, but after all successes were modest. The "Big Depression" is an example for the fact that the American value system proves as rather flexible and is able to react fluidly to serious events. But it is also clear that this must always take place in the context of this value system, as otherwise resistance becomes too large. This is the one side of the American cultural way: *Watch out that the own cultural way will not be left in the crisis*.

The other side consists of this: *Watch out that the own cultural way will not be left even in success*. For this, completely opposite to Germany, World War II above all and its consequences until today are located. There were, already before the 1920's critics of modern America, who saw the modernization as a depreciation and tried to stop the "desintegrating" influences (e.g. with the prohibition). But wartime economy was the gate to the way out of the economic crisis and a precondition for the fact that the "Great American Success Story" could be continued. All changes after the end of World War II: technical innovations, production increase, a new role of women or grown self-confidence of the Afro-Americans must be read in the light of the development of the American culture towards individualism.

There were modifications (e.g. the state could further retreat from its role as an economical actor), but no fundamental change took place in particular. In sum, the continuous economic prosperity after World War II led to a revitalization of the fundamental value conceptions in the sense of the preference of free market relations and reservations in relation to social-national policy. Between 1947 and 1970 the "American welfare society" developed in such a way on the basis of a general conformism. But during this time, culture-critical, sociological-time-diagnostic voices already become loud, as for instance those of C. Whright Mills or David Riesmann, who interpret conformism as alienation and loss of individual self-determination. Towards the same direction a counterculture was already formed in contrast to conformism, encouraged at end of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s by the confidence crisis of the political system during the office of Richard Nixon. This counterculture is directed against the "American Way of Life" and its material values, acuminated in a view of American society as a military industrial controlled system, which has to be encountered with objection. This crisis conjuration of the counterculture finds their inheritance in the crisis of the understanding of reality, in the American post-modernity (Milich 2001). Reality in a post-modern perspective is always already designed linguistically and represents an artificial order that does not refer to a final truth, so that in reality, everything is principally equally valid, whereby in post-modern opinion the fear of loss of the cultural way leads to a constant, yet in the long run "unrealizable search for meaning." The early spreading of the innumerable television channels in the US, contrary to Germany, can be seen as a most excellent example of a diversification process of the post-modern medium, in which the interrelation of the search for meaning and excrescence of signals is pressed ahead in such a way for that only destroying excessive time remains a function.

With this concern of keeping the identity of the individuals in the light of social adjustment obligations, one recognizes the typically American effort during the continuation of

the own cultural way: Everything is to be done, in order to make as much as possible scope of action possible for each individual, but neither society may decay into egoists (*danger of disintegration*), nor may the enabling of the over-individual-national of action itself become an obligation (*danger of the alienation*). However, more importantly than the critical post-modern opinions (again limited by a "post-modern realism" in the 1980's) therefore is that the American culture of the 1980's and 1990's was marked by multiculturalism. Seemingly directed against a central dominant culture, different groups raise a claim on equal cultural representation and acknowledgment. Therewith, they actually continue the cultural way of America and help to dissolve the contradiction with regards to liberty and equality in American society.

In summary, the cultural process of the US leads with many oscillations — but clear tendency of development — from the puritanical refusal to the authority of a central church up to the present individualism. The oscillations are produced by historical successes and setbacks, sometimes by the warning of the alienation of the individual, then again by the reminder of the social responsibility of the individual. In total, American culture paradoxically always demands the development of the full subjectivity of each individual beyond conventions in social life. We may call this *social individualization*.

Forgotten Values?

Since in America there is neither a penetration of new cultural ideas from the outside in combination with social-structural changes which opened new possibilities for the individuals, nor an abstract conception of liberty which could be interpreted more pragmatically like in Germany, a discussion about individualization could not arise. For individualization in the US one could perhaps constitute the attitude change in the 1980s in relation to the 1930s and 1940s, in which the US presented itself to some aspects as racial, anti-catholic, anti-semite, xenophobic and hostile towards women. But this "individualization" in this case would mean, as pointed out, the continuation and expansion of the path already taken and not a change like in Germany.

Therefore the US tries to involve more humans into the cultural ideal of individualism, while in Germany another way is actually taken which leads away from the ideal of the internal liberty in combination with an orientation at the over-individual law. Individualization in Germany refers to a *change* — understood as analysis of and detachment from cultural inheritance — of the value of individualism. In the US, however, individualization means *durability* — understood as progressing and expanding the cultural inheritance against different difficulties — of the value of individualism.[4]

In contrast to the German individualization discussion, in the US, in the sense of the oscillation mentioned above, the problem of the consequences of the social-structurally successful implementation of the individualism moved completely into the center. It occurred there, what Talcott Parsons (1971) saw as a necessary evolutionary process of change in highly differentiated modern societies: if the net of the socially structured situations becomes more complex, the value patterns must be fixed on a higher generalization level to secure social stability. By value generalization, the authorization of new action patterns becomes secured. If this value generalization succeeds, it can however happen that the value, subject to the acting distances itself from everyday acting in such a way that the mere eligibility is forgotten. In Emile Durkheim's words, the "*cult* of the individual" becomes a "cult of the *individual.*" Exactly this is

the core of the diagnosis of the well-known study of Bellah et al. (1987), who found a spreading speechlessness about those values, justifying the "sacredness of the individual." The decisions in life of humans appeal to values or priorities, which are not embedded into a further system of purposes or convictions and/or are at least not formulated as such. Good is only what someone feels as worthwhile, and if the own preferences change, so does the nature of the good. A language is missing, in which the really important connections, which define life, can be expressed.

As a consequence of this process, the danger is that too many liberties change to egoism and destroy that order, on which they are based (exemplarily Etzioni 1988). Since individuals are never self-sufficient, their autonomy may not go so far for that all moral bindings are abrogated. But the development of American individualism between the 1960s and 1990s heads towards this direction, proven at symptoms such as pretentiousness, refusal of responsibility, redefinition of "acceptable criminality," rise in conflicts, shrinking numbers of voters, alienation, increasing number of persons needing help in different forms, declining numbers of family households, increase of the divorce rate, loss of standards in the children's programs, shrinking sexual morals, etc.

How to cope with these consequences of value generalization? The communitarians suggest to lower the social-structural differentiation and to bind the individuals again more to their community and the associated more concrete values. Another possibility is to show the citizens the necessity to remember again those values to which they owe their freedom of action. These suggestions, typical for America, became of immediate interest through the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11 in 2001. It is exactly the vulnerability waking the memory of the American Spirit, which carries the "American Way of Life" (Mathiopoulos 2001). But in which way America and other democratic cultures exactly will master this "cultural litmus test" (Beck 2001) remains unknown.

SUMMARY

To summarize, it should have become clear from this culture-theoretical perspective why the individualization theorem could get a firm footing in Germany with such popularity and not in the US. How the cultural way of the Germans will continue after the reunification, must remain open here. Although there is good reason to assume that it likewise comes to a generalization of the value individualism in everyday life as a consequence of the individualization processes at present (Kron 2001), there is no compelling reason for an undisturbed continuation and/or formation of the Americanization regarding the individualism in Germany. Possible are, for example, both a Germany that in future will develop towards Europe, the more the European Union is able to develop a common identity, and a dissociation from the model of American individuality samples and the increasing re-instatement of the state as overall address for desires and requirements in the sense of an "nostalgia of the East" (called "*Ostalgie*" by Faulenbach 1998, pp. 21/22).

The reconstruction of the emergence of the individualization discussion clearly shows, how large the misunderstanding is, if—like so often—the conception of American individualism, that, like shown, stresses much more the individual liberty in relation to society than German

individualism, is transferred simply to German conditions. Often, as a result, individualization is thus interpreted as egoism. Investigations which do so and concentrate, for example on the social-structural changes and social inequalities, are blind about the "specific cultural German way of individualization."

NOTES

1. I'm very grateful that Torsten Stephan has edited the paper so assiduously. Thank you very much!
2. Because the view of individualization by the German authors point out an *internal contrariness* that is put in the core, I speak here of dialectic and not only of amphiboly, the use of individualization in different meanings. This dialectic can also be ambivalent, i.e. state positive and negative evaluations.
3. I do not deal here with the question whether it would not be more meaningful to differentiate the overloaded term of the Americanization (also semantic) more sharply, e.g. after the ranges within American influences had special effects in Germany. Schildt (2000, p. 4) e.g. suggests to differentiate social and cultural influences as Americanization from the transfer of political, in particular American ideas, which are to be marked as Westernization. With such suggestions, a lack of theoretical basis becomes obvious that could find such distinctions of ideas and culture. Besides the view of American influencing Germany under the term of Americanization does not mean at the same time to exclude influences from Germany on America, e.g. in form of feedbacks and cycles. See also Gassert (2000), who criticizes the increasing reductionism of the term "Americanization." In sum, I use the term "Americanization" exclusively in the available text as an "illustrative metaphor" in terms of Maase (1997, p. 220).
4. In fact, in America just like in Germany one speaks of an individualization e.g. in the framework from discussions to the change of family structures, but this must be understood as an argument with the individualistic progress far into the intimate systems. The difference between the US and Germany becomes e.g. institutionally as much clear as that there has never been a federal family department or a uniform family policy in the US. Instead, there are rather problem-related promotion programmes, particularly for mothers and children. One could state a number of further institutional indicators, in which this different cultural basis becomes clear, e.g. the smaller burden of the American economy by politico-legal interventions, which becomes clear in a comparison of the rate of labour cost carried by the state in 1995, with 7.42 German Marks in the US and 20.44 German Marks in Germany (Murswieck 1998). Or the fact that in the US, civilian-social actors have a substantially larger weight in the public discourse than national actors, which is exactly the opposite in Germany (Gerhard/Rucht 2000).

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